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The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis

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93 *Mere Christianity*, 21.
94 *Mere Christianity*, 135–6.
95 Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist." In *Light on C.S. Lewis*, edited by Jocelyn Gibb, 23–43. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965. Quote at 37. Although Farrer has *The Problem of Pain* (1940) in mind, it is clear that the same approach is found elsewhere in Lewis's apologetic writings.
96 I here follow Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," 250.
97 See "Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot"; *Selected Literary Essays*, 207; *Surprised by Joy*, 193–4.
98 *Surprised by Joy*, 193: "I do not think the resemblance between the Christian and the merely imaginative experience is accidental."
99 For the debate about such virtues, see Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Lewis scholarship has much to gain by reflecting on whether Lewis's apologetic approach discloses him to be a "virtuously reliable person" (Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 244–5).

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Reason, Experience, and Imagination: Lewis's Apologetic Method

By the end of the Second World War, C. S. Lewis was firmly established as Britain's best-known and most winsome Christian apologist. While his *Problem of Pain* (1940) was widely praised for both its style and substance, Lewis's reputation within Great Britain as an apologist rested largely on his "wartime broadcasts" for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Lewis was invited to deliver these talks on the basis of the clarity of his discussion of religious questions in *The Problem of Pain*. Subsequent microphone tests made it clear that his rich, assured speaking voice would be ideal for the medium of radio.[1] Lewis's four series of "Broadcast Talks" formed the basis of what is widely regarded as his most important apologetic work – *Mere Christianity* (1952), which is regularly cited as one of the most influential religious books of the twentieth century.[2]

Apologetics is best thought of as a principled attempt to defend and commend the Christian faith, both meeting objections that might be raised against it, and attempting to explore and explain its potential attraction to those who have yet to discover it.[3] Apologetics has been part of the church's ministry throughout Christian history,[4] and includes such masterpieces as Justin Martyr's defense of Christianity against its Platonist critics in the second century,[5] Thomas Aquinas's affirmation of the rationality of the Christian faith in the thirteenth century,[6] and Blaise Pascal's defense of the reasonableness of belief in God in the seventeenth century.[7]

Lewis's public apologetic ministry began in 1940, with the publication of his first explicitly apologetic book, *The Problem of Pain*. Under Lewis's leadership, the Oxford University Socratic Club – which met for the first

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time in January 1942 – became the focus of the intellectual defense and commendation of the Christian faith at one of England's leading universities.[8] The later publication of *Mere Christianity* (1952) solidified still further his reputation as one of the finest apologists of his age.

If we could speak of Lewis having a "Golden Age" as a public apologist, it would be between the years 1940 and 1955. Lewis's apologetic zenith is bracketed by the publication of the *Problem of Pain* at one end, and of *Surprised by Joy* on the other. During this period, Lewis produced his best-known apologetic books, along with a remarkable output of lectures and addresses on apologetic themes.

Yet Lewis's move to the University of Cambridge in January 1955 seems to have marked a change in his attitude to apologetics. Lewis was formally appointed to a newly established chair of Medieval and Renaissance English in May 1954, although he delayed moving to Cambridge until early the following year. There are good reasons for supposing that Lewis saw his move from Oxford as marking the end of his explicit apologetic role. Apologetics was what Lewis did at Oxford; at Cambridge, things would be different.

Surprised by Joy – which can in several respects be regarded as an apologetic writing – was completed after a long period of gestation in March 1955, and published in September of that year. In that same month, the American evangelical leader Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) invited Lewis to write some apologetic pieces for an American audience. Lewis politely declined. While he had been engaged in the past on "frontal attacks" on unbelief, he was now "quite sure those days are over."[9]

It is interesting to note that Lewis's popular writings dating from his Cambridge period – such as *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958) and *The Four Loves* (1960) – are about *exploring an assumed faith*, rather than *defending a challenged faith*. As the opening pages of *Reflections on the Psalms* suggest, Lewis's focus shifted from persuading those outside the church of the truth of the Christian faith to exploring and appreciating the depths of the Christian faith for the benefit of those who believed, or were close to believing.[10]

> This is not what is called an "apologetic" work. I am nowhere trying to convince unbelievers that Christianity is true. I address those who already believe it, or those who are ready, while reading, to "suspend their disbelief." A man can't always be defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.

This is not to say that Lewis ceased to regard the rational and imaginative affirmation of faith as significant. It is not difficult to find reflections on

these themes in some of his essays of his Cambridge period; nevertheless, such essays were generally not high-profile public engagements with apologetic issues.[11] Lewis seems to have shifted his focus from the public defense of the Christian faith to exploration of its spiritual and imaginative dimensions.

This change in focus helps us understand Lewis's continuing appeal to a substantial Christian readership. Not only does Lewis offer his readers apologetic approaches which both reassure them concerning the credibility of their faith and enable them to engage the concerns of others; he provides them with explorations of the spiritual richness and imaginative depths of their faith, potentially allowing them to gain an enhanced level of understanding and appreciation.

Yet our concern in this essay is specifically with Lewis's apologetic method. Lewis's approach to apologetics is best considered not so much as a coherent system, but as a series of loosely coordinated and shifting strategies. Over a period of years, Lewis came to develop a connected series of approaches to apologetics, often in response to specific requests or needs. In what follows, we shall examine some of the core themes of Lewis's approach in more detail.

Language: The Translation of Faith

Lewis's remarkable ability to engage a wider audience appears to have been partly innate, and partly acquired. Although his letters of the 1920s often show him to have a deft ability to express himself succinctly and memorably, this took some time to find its way into his published writings. *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) makes considerable demands of its readers, its flashes of brilliance being inadequate to sustain most of its readers' commitment. Lewis was clearly aware of this, and worked on his style, aiming to make it more accessible and interesting.

In deliberating choosing to develop his role as a popular apologist, Lewis found himself facing the question of theological translation. How could he express academic theological notions in plain language? How could an academic such as himself talk to ordinary people without talking down to them?[12] How could he avoid creating an alienating impression of condescension? How could he use ordinary English as a medium for often quite complex theological ideas, such as the rationality of the incarnation? How could he reach into the rich Christian past without suggesting faith was outdated? To use T. S. Eliot's words from "Little Gidding," Lewis was obliged to find words that were "exact without vulgarity," yet "precise but not pedantic."[13]

It seems clear that Lewis gradually learned how to adapt his style and vocabulary to meet the needs and concerns of an audience he had never encountered before. This was stimulated to no small extent by his experience in speaking to aircrews at Royal Air Force bases in England during the Second World War, which obliged him to restate his ideas in much more accessible ways. Lewis summarized what he learned from these experiences in a post-war lecture of 1945 entitled "Christian Apologetics." The two points that Lewis emphasized were the empirical necessity of discovering how ordinary people speak *through observation and encounter*, followed by reflection on how religious ideas might best be translated into language that was within their experience and comfort zones.[14]

> We must learn the language of our audience. And let me say at the outset that it is no use at all laying down *a priori* what the "plain man" does or does not understand. You have to find out by experience.

Lewis's discussion and debate with hard-nosed, no-nonsense, tough-talking aircrew doubtless helped him realize that his academic style did not connect with them. Lewis was clear what needed to be done about it.[15]

> You must translate every bit of your Theology into the vernacular. This is very troublesome, and it means that you can say very little in half an hour, but it is essential. It is also of the greatest service to your own thought. I have come to the conviction that if you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood one's own meaning.

Lewis's notion of "translation," however, cannot be reduced to that of a transaction between two languages – the academic or technical, and the everyday or popular. Long before the more general realization of this point in the 1980s,[16] Lewis appreciated that words are culturally embedded, having developed meanings which echo their cultural contexts. What is required is a "cultural translation,"[17] which attempts to express ideas from one language, embedded in its social context, to another language, embedded in a different social context. Translation is a cultural, not simply a linguistic, matter. As Lewis discovered, it was one thing to talk about Christianity to Oxford undergraduates, and quite another to talk about it to aircraft mechanics.

Yet Lewis's genius lay only partly in his acquired capacity to translate theological idioms into the cultural vernacular; it lay also in his intrinsic ability to transpose such idioms into other literary genres – above all, images and narratives. Where *Mere Christianity* is a rational exploration

of the themes of the Christian faith, the "Chronicles of Narnia" are its imaginative counterpart.[18] Lewis did not content himself with translating words into other words; he proved adept at interweaving and transposing words, images, and narratives.

Few have shown Lewis's capacity to tell a story that illustrates and embodies Christian ideas, allowing us to "feel" what it is like to believe and trust them. Austin Farrer perhaps captured Lewis's achievement best when he spoke of his "imaginative realizations of doctrine."[19] Lewis's explorations of eschatology, so intriguingly re-presented in *The Last Battle*,[20] are perhaps one of the finest examples of his apologetic transpositions of Christian beliefs.

Lewis's approach to apologetics is multi-layered, expressing itself in different ways. *Miracles* offers an essentially rational apologetic; *Mere Christianity* mingles reasoned argument with a much more subjective appeal to the longings of the human heart; while the "Chronicles of Narnia" set out to captivate the imagination of its readers. It is therefore important to try to disentangle and appreciate the characteristics of these three quite different apologetic gateways deployed by Lewis: reason, longing, and the imagination. Having mastered the art of popular communication, Lewis now had to consider what approaches he might adopt to defend the Christian faith against its critics, and commend it to skeptics.

The rational approach is the perhaps the easiest to grasp. We therefore begin by considering Lewis's defense and commendation of the reasonableness of faith.

The Appeal to Reason

Lewis developed argumentative approaches to apologetics during the 1940s and early 1950s, offering accessible accounts of various traditional theistic arguments, such as the "argument from morality." His fundamental theme in *Miracles* and *Mere Christianity* is that the Christian faith makes more sense of things than its religious or secular alternatives. Lewis, however, was quite clear that reason was unable to *prove* the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. Especially in *Mere Christianity*, his concern was to explore what could be worked out about God "on our own steam," instead of "taking anything from the Bible or the Churches."[21]

It is important to pause here, and note that Lewis assumes no biblical or ecclesiastical knowledge on the part of his audience. His concern is not to enable the churched to reconnect with their faith, but with the unchurched, who need to have their eyes opened to the rational and imaginative potential of faith. Lewis's approach is to show how intelligent

reflection on the experiences of life strongly *suggests* – but does not *prove* – that there is a God.

Why was this important? If reason cannot prove the basic themes of faith, what point is there in appealing to it? The Oxford theologian and New Testament scholar Austin Farrer (1904–68) argued that Lewis's demonstration of the reasonableness of faith was of fundamental importance in helping to secure its cultural acceptance.[22]

> Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.

Farrer rightly recognized that Lewis's affirmation of the reasonableness of faith maintained the cultural plausibility of Christian life and thought – an integral aspect of any approach to apologetics.

To demonstrate the reasonableness of faith does not mean proving every article of Christian belief. Rather, it means showing that there are good grounds for believing that these beliefs are trustworthy and reliable. For Lewis, the Christian faith makes sense of what we observe and experience, even if it cannot offer unassailable and incorrigible proof of its truths. In the years immediately preceding his conversion in 1930, Lewis became increasingly aware of the imaginative and existential deficiencies of most Enlightenment notions of rationality – "a glib and shallow rationalism"[23] – which in effect imprison humanity within a cold logical cage, and deny the imagination and emotions any role in reasoning. In 1926, while moving away from his "New Look" (31–54), Lewis informed his Oxford friend Cecil Harwood that he was increasingly convinced that reason was "utterly inadequate to the richness and spirituality of real things."[24]

We find this point echoed and developed throughout Lewis's later writings. Lewis's criticism of pure reason does not reflect a descent into irrationality, but reflects an increased awareness of the austerity and bleakness of a rationalist outlook.[25] In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis was severely critical of the "shallow rationalism" that he espoused as a young man: "Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless."[26] A deeper understanding of rationality was required, if his deepest intuitions were to be accommodated within a coherent worldview. Lewis's "reconciliation" of imagination and reason, which appears to have taken place in the late 1920s, allowed him to maintain a "reasonable" approach to faith, while at the same time doing justice to its emotional and imaginative dimensions. One of the most important outcomes of Lewis's apologetic method

has been to secure cultural traction for Christianity after the slow death of modernity, in that its richer concept of reason allows it to resonate with some core themes of postmodern culture.

Lewis's remarks on the "glib and shallow rationalism" he once himself espoused fits in well with more recent discussions of human reason, which often draw a distinction between "thick" and "thin" notions of rationality.[27] "Thin" accounts of human reason treat it as ahistorical and culturally disembodied, in effect reducing reason to the austere domains of logic and mathematics. "Thick" accounts of rationality are alert to the "bounded" nature of human reasoning, which is partly shaped by socially constructed cultural norms on the one hand, and significantly influenced by history, imagination, and story on the other.[28] Inevitably, this means that decisions about what counts as "rational" are shaped by historical, cultural, and imaginative factors which often make the criterion of "rationality" difficult to apply – as, for example, in political and economic theory.[29] Yet it remains culturally significant to affirm that human beings act in a reasonable manner, including in their reflections about belief in God.

There is another point to consider here. During the 1930s, Lewis became aware that reasoned argument on its own lacked existential force; it required rhetorical embellishment to secure both acceptance and transformation. In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis argued that the "proper use" of rhetoric that shapes the human emotions was both[30]

> . . . lawful and necessary because, as Aristotle points out, intellect of itself "moves nothing": the transition from thinking to doing, in nearly all men at nearly all moments, needs to be assisted by appropriate states of feeling.

The deployment of rhetoric is necessary to shape – and, above all, to *change* – a person's "vision of concrete reality."[31]

Lewis's use of reason is sometimes characterized as deductive, proving the existence of God from first principles. This is not strictly correct, as we noted when considering his celebrated "argument from desire" (105–28). Lewis's argument here, as elsewhere, is fundamentally *inductive*, aiming to show how the Christian faith can "fit in" our experiences of life. Lewis himself was drawn to Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* because of the scope of its intellectual and imaginative vision. This principle is perhaps most clearly stated in his celebrated declaration: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."[32] Lewis tends to treat Christianity as a "big picture," whose ability to embrace or position our observations of the external world and our internal experience of longings is itself to be seen as an indication of its truth.

This is clearly seen from his famous popular statement of the "argument from morality" in the opening pages of *Mere Christianity*.[33] Lewis here invites us to reflect on two people having an argument. Any attempt to determine who is right and who is wrong depends on acknowledging some norm or standard which stands over and above both parties to the dispute, and which both implicitly recognize as binding and authoritative. Lewis suggests that everyone has some sense of there being something "higher" than us – an objective norm to which people appeal, and which they expect others to observe; a "real law which we did not invent, and which we know we ought to obey."[34]

Lewis is not arguing here that such reflections on the foundations of a viable morality *prove* that there is a God; he is rather pointing out how such reflections both subvert non-theistic accounts of morality, while at the same time emphasizing how Christianity is able to accommodate these issues in an intellectually and aesthetically satisfying manner.[35] Right and wrong are treated as "clues to the meaning of the universe." They "arouse our suspicions."[36] Clues, taken by themselves, prove nothing; their importance lies rather in their cumulative and contextual force. In other words, the greater the number of clues that can be satisfactorily accommodated by a given view of reality, the more reliable that view of reality.

Although Lewis does not use this language, his approach is very similar to the notion of "inference to the best explanation," now widely regarded as the dominant philosophy of the natural sciences.[37] What "big picture" makes the most sense of observation (120–2)? What metanarrative offers the best map of reality, positioning observations in the most comprehensive and plausible manner? This is far removed from a "glib and shallow rationalism" which holds that the great truths about the purpose and value of human existence can be solved by unaided human reason.[38] For Lewis, the kind of "sense-making" offered by the Christian vision of reality is about discerning a resonance between its theory and the way the world seems to be. Its theoretical spectacles seem to bring reality into sharp focus,[39] just as a false theory prevents us from seeing what is really there.[40]

As we noted earlier (83–104), Lewis sees God as an intellectual sun that lights up the landscape of reality, allowing us to see things *as they really are*. Such imagery, which can be traced back to Plato and Augustine of Hippo, suggests that the ability of a worldview or metanarrative to illuminate reality is an important measure of its reliability, and an indicator of its truth.

Mere Christianity presents Christianity as an eminently reasonable account of life, using accessible language and imagery that secured its

wide acceptance within western culture. Indeed, the work is widely cited as one of the most influential Christian books of the twentieth century. Yet it is not a work of "rational" apologetics, deriving its appeal from a modernist worldview that privileges rational demonstration over and against existential adequacy. Even its core notion of reason is shaped by imaginative concerns,[41] reflecting Lewis's realization of the inadequacy of the cold rationalism he once embraced himself.

This naturally leads us to consider how Lewis integrates reason and feelings in his apologetic method.

The Appeal to Human Longing

At several points in his works, Lewis develops an "argument from desire" that builds on earlier approaches (such as those of Augustine and Aquinas), while at the same time giving it a distinct literary identity and focus. We considered this argument in more detail in an earlier essay, to which the reader is referred for a fuller discussion (105–28). Here, we shall simply outline the general trajectory of Lewis's argument, and note how it fits into Lewis's apologetic method as a whole.

The essential point to appreciate is that Lewis's approach to apologetics allows the integration of an appeal to human longing – for example, based on the beauty of the world, or memories of one's childhood – within a thick "rational" approach to the Christian faith. Lewis's argument is that the Christian "map" of reality adequately accommodates such longings, offering an explanation of their origins, accounting for their significance, and indicating how they may be fulfilled.

An early statement of this approach is found in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), in which Lewis reflects on the significance of human yearning and a desire for justice. These, he suggests, are signposts of transcendence, disclosing the true situation of humanity. Human desire is initially understood as a yearning for something tangible within the world. However, when we realize that nothing within the world is able to satisfy this desire, we begin to consider other explanations and proposed goals for this sense of yearning. This exploration of conceptual possibilities gradually leads to the conclusion that desire cannot be anchored to, or fulfilled by, anything transient or finite. Its true significance lies in pointing to its transcendent origins and goal, which is "never fully given" in this world.[42]

Although Lewis developed this approach more thoroughly in his University Sermon "The Weight of Glory," preached at Oxford in June 1941, it is best known in the form in which it is stated in *Mere Christianity*. We

all, Lewis suggests, long for something of ultimate significance, only to find our hopes dashed and frustrated when we actually achieve or attain it. "There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality."[43] So how is this common human experience to be interpreted? What is the best explanation of this sense of yearning?

Lewis suggests that there are three possible ways of dealing with this sense of longing, and proceeds to argue that only one is ultimately persuasive, intellectually or existentially. Human frustration at failing to identify or secure the ultimate goal of our longings might come about because we are looking in the wrong places. Or we might conclude that further searching will only result in repeated disappointment, so that there is no point in bothering to try and find something better than the world. Yet there is, Lewis argues, a third approach – to recognize that these earthly longings are "only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage" of our true homeland.[44] "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[45]

So how does such an argument fit into his overall apologetic approach? Lewis does not argue that this deep human sense of "yearning" proves anything. It is, to use his own language, a "clue" – something which required to be explained by being set within an explanatory context. Lewis argues that the explanatory framework offered by the Christian faith makes sense of this experience. It is able to "fit it in." Once more, Lewis's approach turns out to be inductive, rather than deductive. It is about intuiting the best explanation, not securing logical proof. Yet for Lewis, it is simply impossible to secure such a "proof" in relation to the great questions of life, which simply transcend reason's capacity to grasp the full depth of a complex picture.

Lewis was also alert to the evidential power of beauty, and was able to draw on a rich vein of Christian reflection on the theological and apologetic significance of aesthetic experience.[46] Both Lewis's sermon "The Weight of Glory" and *Till We Have Faces* explore the nature of beauty, and the question of its ultimate signification.[47] For Lewis, there is a fundamental resonance between the beauty of the created order and human aesthetic sensitivities, which transcends the limits of reason.

This is one of the reasons why Lewis appealed to the imagination – not to retreat into irrationality, but to escape the austerity of a purely rational view of reality, which could only offer a partial and inadequate account of things. In view of the importance of this aspect of Lewis's approach to apologetics, we shall consider it further.

The Appeal to the Human Imagination

One of the reasons why Lewis abandoned his earlier "glib and shallow rationalism" was his growing awareness of its existential deficiencies. Access to what was logically true did not resolve the greater questions of life, which focused on identity, meaning, and value. Lewis's youthful experiences of "joy" played an important role in exposing the limitations of a "thin" rationalist account of reality. Each such experience, he later recalled, "left the common world momentarily a desert."[48]

The real apologetic issue was about the meaning of life, not the propositional truth of creedal statements. The statement "I believe in God," if interpreted purely rationally, is "in a sense alien to religion, crippling, omitting nearly all that really matters."[49] Lewis was emphatic that only a fraction of human experience could be communicated using "Scientific language" or "precise and literal language."[50] Conveying the quality of religious experience to someone who has yet to discover it requires an appeal to the imagination. "The very essence of our life as conscious beings, all day and every day, consists of something which cannot be communicated except by hints, similes, metaphors, and the use of emotions (themselves not very important) which are pointers to it."[51]

For Lewis, it was necessary to make a clear distinction (without implying a separation) between human reason and imagination: reason was the "organ of truth," but imagination was the "organ of meaning."[52] Lewis, it must be emphasized, was not retreating into an invented imaginary world, seeing the imagination as the creator of false consolations. The "imaginary," Lewis insists, is to be distinguished from the "imaginative."[53] The former fabricates reality in an attempt to escape from the crushing burdens of life; the latter is a gateway to other and better worlds. Lewis first articulated this insight on the apologetic role of the imagination in *The Pilgrim's Regress*: "For this end I made your senses, and for this end your imagination, that you might see My face and live."[54]

So how does Lewis appeal to the imagination in apologetics? Austin Farrer had little doubt about the distinctive feature of Lewis's apologetic approach, especially in *The Problem of Pain*: "We think we are listening to an argument; in fact, we are presented with a vision, and it is the vision that carries conviction."[55] Lewis projected "the force of Christian ideas, morally, imaginatively, and rationally," enabling the imaginative power of the Christian myth – using this term in its proper, technical sense (55–81) – to be seen at its best. Above all, this "myth" allows the fundamental interconnectedness of all things to be grasped, and hence appreciated.

Where some apologists offer a defense of individual Christian ideas – such as the existence of God, the incarnation, or the Trinity – and then argue for the truth of the Christian faith *as a whole*, Lewis inverts this procedure. The fundamental appeal of the Christian faith is imaginative, and is grasped through an apprehension of the panorama of reality that it offers. Where some look at snapshots, defended by reason, then paste them together to yield the "big picture," Lewis argues that Christianity sets out a bold and brilliant illumination of the intellectual landscape, grasped through the imagination, which leads to reflection on its individual components.[56]

For Lewis, the internal unity and coherence of the "big picture" of reality offered by Christian faith is better apprehended by an imaginative leap than by rational dissection. Reason allows the individual components of that vision to be identified and correlated; the imagination, however, is the means by which its coherence and depth is grasped and valued. (There are obvious echoes here of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's notion of the primary imagination as the faculty by which human beings shape their experience of the world into meaningful perception.[57])

The imaginative "vision" that Lewis offers, which allows us to see things as interconnected rather than disjointed, is best expressed through narratives and images, rather than in the formal statements of the creeds. Unsurprisingly, such an approach to apologetics is seen at its best in Lewis's novels, such as the "Science Fiction" trilogy, and the seven volumes of the "Chronicles of Narnia." Lewis here uses a compelling narrative to "steal past" the "watchful dragons" of a childhood familiarity with religious imagery and his rationalist suspicion of religious ideas.[58] Lewis here allowed his "supposals" to be given imaginative depth. Suppose God became incarnate in a place like Narnia?[59] What would it be like?

Yet such theological explorations are arguably secondary to Lewis's apologetic intentions. Lewis is primarily concerned to enable his readers' "imaginative embrace"[60] of the deeper meaning of the Christian faith. This demanded its expression in a mythical form – in other words, in the form of a special kind of narrative. Lewis's apologetic method involves remythologizing the Christian faith, allowing it to "steal past" the "watchful dragons" of a hypervigilant rationalism or disdain for religious sentimentalism.[61]

Lewis's use of the imagination in apologetics is complex, and goes beyond a general attempt to construct a reworked "myth," capable of captivating the imagination of an age. Lewis regularly uses counterintuitive imaginative strategies to subvert some of the more familiar modern criticisms of core religious beliefs – such as rationalist criticism of the Christian faith as a folk legend, or the view of the German Hegelian

philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), who asserted that God was simply an imaginary enlargement or "projection" of human desires.[62] As we noted earlier (73), Lewis's apologetic method involved the outnarration of secularism, by providing a "grand narrative" that provided a more plausible, engaging, and enticing account of what we see around us and experience within us.

Lewis's later approach to many apologetic questions often takes the form of an imaginative transposition – a suggestion that we try seeing them in a new way, using an unfamiliar perspective to see old issues in a fresh and revealing light. For example, in reassuring his readers of the ultimate rationality of the idea of the Trinity, Lewis provides them with a new way of seeing the concept. He does not use logical argument, but rather asserts iconic similarity. Why do so many people have difficulty in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity? In his 1943 essay "The Poison of Subjectivism," Lewis suggests that the problem arises because we are "Flatlanders," two-dimensional people trying to visualize three-dimensional objects.[63]

> Flatlanders attempting to imagine a cube, would either imagine the six squares coinciding, and thus destroy their distinctness, or else imagine them set out side by side, and thus destroy the unity. Our difficulties about the Trinity are of much the same kind.

What Lewis is offering his readers here is not a theological defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, but a new way of looking at it that enables us to appreciate that our difficulties arise from a failure to see it properly. There is, he suggests, a parallel between one situation and another – a situation that we all know, or can easily imagine, and one that Lewis believes that we need to grasp. "Try seeing it this way." We are not given fresh evidence for a belief, but a visual framework that enables us to appreciate its intrinsic reasonableness – an angle of gaze which allows us to see things in a new way, or realize that our previous difficulties arose from seeing things from a limited and limiting perspective.

Lewis also used such an approach to subvert the logic of a classic argument against religious belief, which emerged in the 1830s – namely, that God is merely a projection of human longing and experience. This position is especially associated with Feuerbach, who argued that the human idea of "God" is fundamentally a projection of human needs and aspirations onto an imaginary transcendental plane. God is copied from our experience in this world, in a process by which we "project" or "objectify" our human feelings, and by doing so, create God in our own image. A series of "projectionist" theories of religion, including those of Sigmund

Freud and Karl Marx, have their intellectual roots in this analysis of the notion of God.

This critique of religious belief can be challenged at many points, most notably its logical coherence.[64] Lewis, however, chose to engage it at the *imaginative* level, reframing the argument in a way that allowed it to be seen in a new light, which subverted its plausibility. In *The Silver Chair*, two children (Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole) find themselves trapped with a Narnian prince in an underground kingdom. They have no direct knowledge of the world above the ground, save their memories. They are confronted with a witch, one of whose chief aims is to convince the children that there is no outside world. It is a delusion, an invention based on what they see around them. When the witch hears them speak of the "sun," she pounces, seeing an opportunity for a Feuerbachian critique of their beliefs.[65]

> "What is this *sun* you speak of? Do you mean anything by the word?"... asked the Witch...
>
> "Please it, your grace," said the Prince, very coldly and politely. "You see that lamp. It is round and yellow and gives light to the whole room; and hangeth moreover from the roof. Now that thing which we call the sun is like the lamp, only far greater and brighter. It giveth light to the whole Overworld and hangeth in the sky."
>
> "Hangeth from what, my Lord?", asked the Witch; and then, while they were all still thinking how to answer her, she added, with another of her soft, silver laughs: "You see? When you try to think out clearly what this *sun* must be, you cannot tell me. You can only tell me that it is like the lamp. Your *sun* is a dream; and there is nothing in that dream that was not copied from the lamp. The lamp is the real thing; the *sun* is but a tale, a children's story."

By setting Feuerbach's argument in a narrative context, Lewis relies on his readers seeing its vulnerability. Once more, Lewis *shows*; he does not *argue*. The "thin" rationality of the witch's argument is countered by a "thick" rationality which is suffused with a prior experience of the overworld and its sun. The narrative transposes what seems to be a sophisticated argument into a demonstration of ignorance of a greater vision of reality. The flaw in the argument is exposed, not through relentless philosophical demolition of the Hegelian notion of "objectification," but through a simple and subtle appeal to the world of common experience. We see the objection in a new light; and when seen in this light, its apparent persuasiveness crumbles. An imagined world provides a laboratory in which such criticisms of faith can be seen in another context – and their seemingly incontrovertible rationality deconstructed.[66]

Conclusion

Lewis's apologetic method weaves together a thread of approaches. The critical reader is often left wondering whether these are best seen as separate arrows in a quiver, rather than as different aspects of a coherent overall strategy. Are these approaches coherently integrated, or merely conveniently colligated? Perhaps the best answer is that they represent a coherent whole in Lewis's mind, held together within a grander personal view of things not always shared by his readers.

Lewis's apologetic palette has a rich range of vibrant colors not often found elsewhere, especially those locked into the rigidities of certain "schools of apologetics." As a result, Lewis has been embraced by both modernist and post-modernist apologists; by those commending the rational defense of faith, and those advocating its imaginative exploration; by those focusing on argument, and those preferring narrative; by those who privilege rationality, and those who long for imaginative stimulation. Lewis is able to engage apologetic issues at multiple levels, transcending the limits and dullness of traditional rational defenses of the Christian faith. Rarely has an apologist secured – and retained – such a wide and varied readership.

Notes

1 For a useful account of these talks, see Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis at the BBC*. London: HarperCollins, 2003.

2 Mark A. Noll, "C. S. Lewis's 'Mere Christianity' (the Book and the Ideal) at the Start of the Twenty-First Century." *Seven: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 19 (2002): 31–44.

3 For an introduction, see Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

4 The best study is Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*. 2nd edn. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005. For Dulles's assessment of Lewis, see *A History of Apologetics*, 318–19.

5 Ragner Holte, "*Logos Spermatikos*: Christianity and Ancient Philosophy According to St. Justin's Apologies." *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958): 109–68; Mark J. Edwards, "Justin's *Logos* and the Word of God." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 261–80.

6 Especially in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, which seems to anticipate a Jewish and Muslim readership at points: Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

7 James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009, 161–95.
8 McGrath, *C. S. Lewis – A Life*, 250–2.
9 Letter to Carl F. H. Henry, September 28, 1955; *Letters*, vol. 3, 651.
10 *Reflections on the Psalms*, 7.
11 For example, consider the 1960 paper "The Language of Religion," which explicitly explores apologetic issues during the course of its analysis: *Essay Collection*, 255–66, especially 261–3.
12 This specific issue is addressed by G. K. Chesterton, especially in his early study of the poet Robert Browning: G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1903.
13 T. S. Eliot, Quartet No. 4, *Little Gidding* (1942), part 5.
14 "Christian Apologetics"; in *Essay Collection*, 153.
15 "Christian Apologetics"; in *Essay Collection*, 155.
16 For the emergence of this awareness at that time, see Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Translation, History, and Culture*. London: Pinter Publishers, 1990.
17 Talal Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 141–84. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.
18 Gilbert Meilander, "Theology in Stories: C. S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience." *Word and World* 1, no. 3 (1981): 222–30; Ralph C. Wood, "The Baptized Imagination: C. S. Lewis's Fictional Apologetics." *Christian Century* 112, no. 25 (1995): 812–15.
19 Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist." In *Light on C. S. Lewis*, edited by Jocelyn Gibb, 23–43. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965. Quote at 31.
20 Sean Connolly, *Inklings of Heaven: C. S. Lewis and Eschatology*. Leominster: Gracewing, 2007, 87–91.
21 *Mere Christianity*, 29.
22 Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," 26. For comment on this assessment of Lewis, see John T. Stahl, "Austin Farrer on C. S. Lewis as 'The Christian Apologist.'" *Christian Scholars' Review* 4 (1975): 231–7.
23 *Surprised by Joy*, 197.
24 Letter to Cecil Harwood, October 28, 1926; *Letters*, vol. 1, 670.
25 See the analysis in David C. Downing, *Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
26 *Surprised by Joy*, 197.
27 For this distinction, see Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2–26; Jon Elster, *Explaining Technical Change: A Case Study in the Philosophy of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 69–88.
28 For the political implications of such notions, see Albert S. Yee, "Thick Rationality and the Missing 'Brute Fact': The Limits of Rationalist Incorporations of Norms and Ideas." *Journal of Politics* 59, no. 4 (1997): 1001–39.

29 See the points made in Donald P. Green, and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
30 *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 52. Lewis clearly has Aristotle in mind here: see Nicomachean Ethics, VI.ii.5.
31 *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 53. See further Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C. S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009.
32 "Is Theology Poetry?" In *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection*. London: Collins, 2000, 1–21; quote at 21.
33 *Mere Christianity*, 3–32.
34 *Mere Christianity*, 21.
35 A point emphasized in David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 9–11.
36 *Mere Christianity*, 25.
37 The best recent study is Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge, 2004.
38 For a popular apologetic application of this approach, echoing Lewis's approach, see Alister E. McGrath, *Surprised by Meaning: Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.
39 For the image of "theoretical spectacles," see N. R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, 23.
40 See the analysis in Ian Shaw and Amanda Compton, "Theory, Like Mist on Spectacles, Obscures Vision." *Evaluation* 9, no. 2 (2003): 192–204.
41 See the discussion in Michael Ward, "The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best: C. S. Lewis on Imagination and Reason in Apologetics." In *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy, and the Catholic Tradition*, edited by Andrew Davison, 59–78. London: SCM Press, 2011.
42 *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 10.
43 *Mere Christianity*, 135.
44 *Mere Christianity*, 135–6.
45 *Mere Christianity*, 136–7.
46 See, for example, Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999; Anne-Marie Miller Blaise, "'Sweetnesse Readie Penn'd': Herbert's Theology of Beauty." *George Herbert Journal* 27 (2003): 1–21; Marianne Djuth, "Veiled and Unveiled Beauty: The Role of the Imagination in Augustine's Esthetics." *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 77–91.
47 Carla A. Arnell, "On Beauty, Justice and the Sublime in C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*." *Christianity and Literature* 52 (2002): 23–34.
48 *Surprised by Joy*, 209.
49 "The Language of Religion"; *Essay Collection*, 262.
50 "The Language of Religion"; *Essay Collection*, 263.
51 "The Language of Religion"; *Essay Collection*, 265.
52 "Bluspels and Flalansferes"; *Selected Literary Essays*, 265.

53 Letter to Eliza Butler, September 25, 1940; *Letters*, vol. 2, 445.
54 *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 171.
55 Farrer, *"The Christian Apologist,"* 37.
56 This is reflected in Lewis's high view of myths, which are apprehended through an "imaginative embrace"; "Myth Became Fact"; *Essay Collection*, 141.
57 See further J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition*. 2nd edn. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.
58 "Sometimes Fairy Stories may say best what's to be said"; *Essay Collection*, 527–8.
59 Letter to Mrs. Hook, December 29, 1959; *Letters*, vol. 3, 1004–5.
60 For the phrase, see "Myth Became Fact"; *Essay Collection*, 141.
61 "Sometimes Fairy Stories may say best what's to be said"; *Essay Collection*, 528.
62 For a good account of this position, see Heinrich Fries, "Ludwig Feuerbach." In *Religionskritik von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Karl-Heinz Weger, 78–93. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1979. Feuerbach himself used the German term *Vergegenständlichung*, which George Eliot (1819–80) translated as "projection." This English term has since come to be used extensively in Feuerbach reception, often with misleading outcomes: see the points made by Thilo Holzmüller, "Projektion – ein fragwürdiger Begriff in der Feuerbach-Rezeption?" *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 28 (1986): 77–100.
63 "The Poison of Subjectivism"; *Essay Collection*, 664. This image is developed further in *Mere Christianity*, 162.
64 See, for example, Hans Küng, *Existiert Gott? Antwort auf die Gottesfrage der Neuzeit*. Munich: Piper, 2001.
65 *The Silver Chair*, 141–2.
66 There are obvious parallels with the literary device of "defamiliarization" – seeing something familiar in a unfamiliar context or light, thus forcing its re-examination and re-assessment. See Lawrence Crawford, "Viktor Shklovskij: *Différance* in Defamiliarization." *Comparative Literature* 36 (1984): 209–19; Carlo Ginzburg, "Making Things Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device." *Representations* 56 (1996): 8–28.