Merely Mere Christianity

A Commentary on C.S. Lewis’ Mere Christianity by Nathan Hohipuha

Introduction

What I am trying to do with this essay is offer a rebuttal to C.S. Lewis’ “Mere Christianity” which is an unashamed endorsement of Christianity. Mere Christianity is an attempt by an intelligent, articulate thinker who sticks very close to the Bible in endorsing a sexist, truly God-fearing religion with a very angry and unforgiving God at its head. For this I applaud Mr Lewis in not sugar coating or deceiving himself (too much) by distorting the original message in ways that appeal to his own desires.

As an interesting note, Mere Christianity was not written as a book per say; it was actually a compilation of several wartime broadcasts Lewis was asked to give on the Christian faith during the second world war. Curiously enough, he even uses the war several times as an analogy for Christianity. He rejects the (what he calls) ‘soft soap’ way of thinking about God in favour of a strict, terrifying Ruler who demands nothing less than total conformity to His ways. In Lewis’ own words, “Most of us have got over the pre-war wishful thinking about international politics. It is time we did the same about religion.” It’s funny how we (humans) often draw parallels between our ideals and events happening around as at any particular time. Doesn’t it beg the question of objectivity though?

Anyway, Mere Christianity starts out with some reasoned arguments for the existence of God which are interesting to consider and will involve a rather lengthy discussion on morals. Unfortunately not long after expounding these ideas, Lewis turns from an intellectual discussion on why we should believe in God, to accepting the Christian God as terribly real and proceeding to look at points relating mainly to Christians and how they should live. Much of this is perhaps of less importance to us as when the foundation is based in fiction any conclusions drawn from it will also be fictional. However, I discovered that this section actually ended up comprising almost half of the essay and a lot of the material, although founded on false ideas, actually stimulates an interesting discussion.

Now, as a final caveat I should like to point out that Lewis is a very skilled writer who writes with a disarming charm and persuasiveness that I fear I do not possess. I ask you, the reader, to take this into account and not allow yourself to be swayed by the eloquence of the former but rather consider the salient points offered in both accounts.

With this brief introduction to the essay, let us proceed to investigate Mr Lewis’ thoughts about Christianity.

Part 1

Christianity: The Evidence

Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

Lewis’ first claim is that there is some special Law of Human Nature which all people at all times and in all places feel obliged to adhere to but one which at the same time they are unable to keep. This Law of Human Nature is a basic moral code that all humans are born with and don’t need to be taught. He claims that while morals have differed from culture to culture and time to time, they have never differed by any significant measure. His examples include the fact that there has never been a culture where a person could be proud of cowardice or double crossing all those who were kindest to him.

His aim with this point is to create a supreme, overarching principle that is beyond humanity and therefore must have been aroused by some higher power.

I think it a fair observation that basic moral guidelines do not differ much from culture to culture when interpreted in this way. It is true that murder has always been wrong and even the people who commit it will try to defend their action by appealing to some greater good (even if it is only imaginary or mistaken). *I had to in order to achieve my goals* or *he/she deserved it*. Seldom do people not bother trying to justify murder or indeed any other breach of what we could imagine to be basic morality. The mere justification itself indicates that even the perpetrator knew they violated the rule but points to (or tries to point to) the fact that there were extenuating circumstances which should acquit them from guilt. So far, so good. We have some kind of awareness or instinct leading us towards morally sound behaviour. The question is where does this come from? Is Lewis right in concluding that it must come from some ‘higher’ entity or awareness?

Rather than confronting the issue head on, I want to tackle this through an objection that Lewis investigates. From this entry point we will find ourselves well-placed to reach some solid conclusions. The objection I want to look at is the argument that this Moral Law is just our herd instinct. Lewis accepts the existence of a herd instinct and even accepts that it works in humans. He accedes to the fact that we are often prompted by instincts and doesn’t doubt that the strong desire that is aroused in us to do the right thing (e.g. help someone in need) is due to the herd instinct. However he feels that the herd instinct by itself is insufficient.

He claims that if we see a man in danger we will feel two desires. One is the herd instinct to help, the other is a desire to keep yourself out of danger, the self-preservation instinct. Often the self-preservation instinct is the stronger of the two and so if there were only these two instincts in our minds then the stronger should win out and we would never help someone in danger. However, he claims, there is a third influence available, the Moral Law, which doesn’t act *like an* instinct but acts *on* our instincts, telling us that we *ought* to help him. It recommends us to follow the herd instinct (even though it may be the weaker of the two) so strongly that the desire is elevated into an *ought to*. In addition, Lewis thinks that since it has this recommending role, it can’t possibly be the instinct itself. How could the instinct recommend itself to us? The important point against this objection is that the herd instinct just supplies us with a first impulse or desire but the Moral Law turns that desire into an obligation. Sounds good, right? Sounds logical. Unfortunately, it just isn’t right.

First of all we need to look at this thing Lewis calls the ‘herd instinct’. The term, ‘herd instinct’ describes how individuals in a group can act together without planned direction. This is not really what Lewis means here. What he is seeking is more like a ‘social instinct’ referring to the way that humans, as social animals, tend to act towards each other. It seems to me that this social instinct is a natural outgrowth of intelligent animals living together in a society. We understand each others’ needs (to a certain extent) and feel a certain amount of empathy for other members who we intuitively understand are not so different from us. In as much as we value our family because of the close bond we share, so we also understand and value our ‘extended family’, the other men and women in our society with whom we live (although obviously not as closely as our nuclear family). For the rest of this discussion when I use the term, ‘herd instinct’ I will be referring to this definition of it, which is what I believe Lewis means.

So, Lewis’ argument is that the herd instinct makes us want to save the man while the self preservation instinct makes us want to stay out of danger. What makes the difference is this mysterious third force, the Moral Law which strongly recommends that we save the man, strengthening the desire (of the herd instinct) to a duty, an ‘ought to’ in Lewis’ jargon. Is it as clear cut as this though?

What if the man was drowning and I couldn’t swim? Surely, I wouldn’t feel that I ought to dive in anyway and try to save him. I feel a desire to save him but I hardly feel that I ought to. That would barely amount to more than suicide and we all know what God thinks of that. So, perhaps what he means is that I see the man drowning but I also spy a rope on the bank. In this case, maybe I feel a desire to throw the rope out (thanks to the ‘social instinct’) but then there is no real danger to me so my self-preservation instinct hasn’t been activated to oppose it and therefore the Moral Law is redundant.

Ah, but even though I feel a desire to help the man, it is one that I could easily ignore if I chose to. Perhaps I am late for a job interview and this is an issue for me. In addition to the desire to help the man, might I also feel that I *ought* to help him? As I sit here considering this dilemma, I find that I am quite certain I would feel obligated to help him whatever the cost to me and my job interview. Why?

Well, it could be a Moral Law implanted in all of us from birth by an all-powerful God, but before we go looking for a ghost in the machine we need to consider other more logical alternatives. If you think about this with a clear head (as I spent several days doing) I think you would come to the same conclusion that I did. I feel that I ought to help the man by throwing out the rope, whatever the cost to my plans, because nothing can really be compared to a man (or woman’s) life, except perhaps, another man or woman’s life. Whatever I have to do obviously pales in comparison to a person’s life. I would give up a hundred job interviews before I would even think about passing by the rope on the bank and causing the man to drown.

This is nothing more than basic utilitarianism, an appeal to the greater good. Critics might argue that in real life people are seldom (if ever) influenced by utilitarian ethics, to which I would wholeheartedly agree. But put aside the technical description and put yourself in the situation. The theory is abstract and therefore seldom of practical use when it comes to human behaviour but, let’s get to the practical side of the issue. A man is drowning, you see a rope. For a little effort and a little time you could save his life. I am confident that you would also feel strongly motivated to throw the rope out and I’m confident that if you thought about it, you wouldn’t do it because God is hinting that it’s the *right* thing to do, but because it’s just so damned easy. At such small cost to you a man’s life could be saved. I don’t need God to tell me I ought to make the save in this case. My own intelligence and intuitive understanding of the value of a person’s life is more than enough.

But, there’s one more case to consider in this genre. Suppose a woman (why does it always have to be a man?) has been caught in a rip. She is quite far from the shore and you are the only other person on the beach. Even though you can swim well, it will be dangerous for you to attempt the rescue and there is no guarantee that you will either save her or be able to preserve your own life.

Of course, people sometimes do rush in despite considerable risk to themselves in order to help out a fellow human in danger. But did they feel that they ought to? Did they feel a *duty* or *obligation* to do so? I doubt it, and I believe that if you think about it you will be of the same mind. You would certainly be a harsh critic if you demanded that they had an obligation to risk their life to save the life of someone else.

(Allow me to indulge in this tangential theme for just a second. It is not directly related to the Moral Law vs the herd instinct issue, but it is nevertheless interesting. So then, if not to satisfy this elusive but insistent Moral Law, why do some people take great risks for others? I believe they act this way solely because of this so-called, herd instinct. And how much of an instinct it is. Like all instincts it transcends desire and wants, becoming something that causes us to operate without thought. There is absolutely no appeal to an *ought to* or an *obligation,* or any conflict with a self-preservation instinct that needs a Moral Law to tip the scales;just an instinctual reflex to help someone in need.

 After the act, I don’t think anyone would hear the story on the news and say, “Humph, big deal. It’s what she should have done!” Let’s reflect on what people often say after they have risked their lives to save someone else’s. So often the question asked is, “Weren’t you scared?” and the answer given is, “Well, I didn’t think about it. There wasn’t time to be scared, I just acted.” And so she did. She acted on instinct. There was no conflict with a self-preservation instinct, no feeling that she ‘ought to’ save the man, just action, just instinct, pure and simple.)

We were just looking at a situation where my herd instinct acts to automatically arouse in me a desire to help but, thanks to my self-preservation instinct, I also perceive that there is a considerable risk to my own life. To get to a moral law, the question is, is an ‘ought’ aroused here? After pondering this for a while, I suddenly realised that there isn’t. I might feel a great deal of anguish at the fact that I can’t help but I don’t think I should feel guilty for not attempting the rescue (note I use the word ‘should’ here, I probably would still feel some guilt afterwards and that would be quite natural I think, we are humans after all, but I strongly believe that guilt would be undeserved in a moral sense).

Would it be noble to risk my life to save someone else? Of course. Would it be brave? Definitely. Do we get a warm feeling inside ourselves when we hear of such a story? Absolutely. But can be reasonably demand of people that they risk themselves to save someone else? No. Let’s be clear on one thing. The reason we respect and admire these people as heroes and heroines is because their tremendously selfless act goes well above what is required by normal, moral decency. If it didn’t, if it was just pure and simple ethics, we wouldn’t hold them in such high regard. After all, they’d just be doing what any normal, morally conscious person would do. What’s so special about that?

But we do hold them in high regard. We are enormously impressed by them and their actions. Because deep down, we intuitively know that they went above and beyond the call of duty, above and beyond the call of ethics, above what we could demand of them and beyond what we would expect of them.

If you are still not convinced on this point imagine that it wasn’t you, but your best friend who saw the woman being pulled out to sea. As he or she recounts this terrible story to you, would you nod your head and say, “Oh no” and “That’s terrible” while thinking, “You should have plunged in to save her. You coward!”? I doubt it. Would you condemn him or her for shirking their duty, or would you console them by reassuring them by saying that they shouldn’t blame themselves.

In addition, it isn’t only humans who feel this instinct to save other humans but there are numerous accounts of animals risking their lives to save both animals and people. I hardly think animals are sensitive to a ‘Moral Law’ from God (no Christians I know, think God’s benevolence extends to animals, after all, only people were created in God’s image, right?) or are capable of feeling that they ‘ought to’ help someone in distress. Lucky for some of us, they don’t have to. In some cases where animals are part of a close family (animal or human), the herd instinct seems to act on them just as strongly. And if we think about it, why should it not?

Lewis’ description of saving a man in danger fails to provide a source for his Divinely inspired ‘Moral Law’ in relation to this herd instinct, but I don’t want to rest just yet. Let’s abandon the whole idea of a herd instinct or social instinct and skip right to the heart of the matter. Now that the can of worms has been opened, let’s see this thing through to the end. I think we can find an even more decisive explanation for this sense of morality that seems to span across cultures and races. I propose we investigate the ethics of truth-telling.

Let’s imagine that I break a vase belonging to my parents while they were out. Now, my mother returns and, seeing the broken vase immediately asks me if I broke it. I clearly have two options, I can either lie and say I didn’t or I can tell the truth and face the music. In this case there are no pesky instincts confusing the issue. I think it’s pretty simple. No part of me actually wants to tell the truth, because I am certain that there will be consequences, and yet I think I would still certainly feel morally obligated to be honest.

We can test this by imagining a child’s reaction to being reprimanded for telling a lie compared to a reprimand for telling the truth. I think that even the youngest of children would understand the cause of the issue in the former but they would be confused if the latter were to happen. Certainly when children are called out on a lie they often look guilty and I think it’s reasonable to assume that they know they are in the wrong.

So, there is a moral force leading us to tell the truth. What is this? Have we finally found our Moral Law? Not surprisingly, I don’t think we need to venture out into fantasy to explain this just yet. I believe that I feel I ought to tell the truth for two reasons; first, I understand some basic human rights and second (and more importantly), I have the ability to sympathise and empathise with others.

Let’s look first at these basic human rights. Regarding my example, the rights we are concerned with are ownership and property rights. With this I am basically just referring to an understanding that my parents owned that vase and my breaking it was violating their simple right to enjoy their possessions. “Hold on,” you might complain, “I don’t give a flying fig newton about rights.” But I would beg to differ. Before we are even old enough to think logically, we have an acute awareness and very personal understanding of these concepts of possession and ownership. Just try taking away a toy that a baby is playing with. The tears and (very) vocal complaints that follow will leave you in no doubt as to the truth of this claim. Now, it may be true that if a baby is playing with a set of keys that belong to someone else it won’t recognise that crucial fact, but we still have the very clear demonstration of a being that understands, “It’s mine! I’m using it! Don’t interfere with me!” That understanding is primitive and not rooted in reason and fairness, but rather, at an even more basic, deeply innate level prior to logic. This fact only makes the understanding (primitive and uninformed by logic, though it may be) of what I call property and ownership rights, even more natural to our most basic and essential nature. Later, logic will inform the child that it can only exert such a claim over objects that actually belong to it and will refine his or her understanding, eventually recognising and encompassing other people’s rights. But for our purpose it is enough to know that these rights are something we have a very deep awareness of, even though they are initially only selfishly motivated and certainly only a primitive version of the understanding they will mature into.

Let’s apply these principles back to our example where I’ve broken my parents’ vase. Now I know, certainly on a subconscious level even if not at a conscious level, that I have violated my parents’ right to have and use their possessions as they see fit.[[1]](#footnote-2) This is a strong indication to me that I have erred and am in moral overdraft, so to speak, but it is possibly not enough to make me want to confess. For that we need the second point I mentioned above.

The second (more important) reason I feel an urge to tell the truth is my ability to sympathise and especially, my ability to empathise with others. As a reasonably advanced, social being (there are many critics who would question that but in the sphere in which I am using it here it is more than valid)[[2]](#footnote-3) I am quite sensitive to the feelings of others. I can quite easily ‘put myself in another’s shoes’. This puts me in the privileged position of being able to understand, quite personally and intimately, how my actions affect other people. It may be here that our familiar friend, that old herd instinct may come into play once more.

As social animals (part of a herd) with quite advanced cognitive abilities we naturally translate other people’s experiences onto ourselves in order to better understand what they are thinking or feeling. How many times have you said or thought, “If he did that to me...” or “That would make me feel...” when hearing a friend’s story? It is something so natural to us that we do it without realising we are doing it and even without knowing what it is we are doing. It is our primary means of interaction with the outside world and in a very real sense, is the only way we *can* know anything outside ourselves.

Following on quite naturally from this we are made aware of what has come to be known as the Golden Rule, ‘treat others the way you would have them treat you’.[[3]](#footnote-4) It is at this point that I am given a unique and often enlightening guide as to what my behaviour ought to be and suddenly the ‘higher road’, as it has come to be known, enters my awareness. This ‘guide’ as I have called it may be no more than a subtle, almost subconscious tingling but it is definitely there and it is there thanks to our innate understanding of the golden rule. All of a sudden, in a process that may be partially or completely subconscious, I get a strange, possibly unwanted, insight that I should confess to my mistake. For some reason I can’t put my finger on, it seems to be the right thing to do, even though I don’t even understand why I feel that way. My terminology here may be a little misleading; the *ought to’s* and *right thing’s* that I keep using tend to suggest Someone’s preference in the matter. It isn’t like that at all. It is much more like our conscience simply reminding us of how we would like to be treated in the same situation. There is no actual directive towards any ‘right thing’, just a reminder that all humans are the same and you like to be treated in *this* way, therefore, doesn’t it make sense that you should also treat others in the same way?

That sounds good you might think, but you might also think, “Yes, that’s all well and good but an individual’s decisions are seldom influenced by this Golden Rule. Most people are selfish creatures and act primarily according to what benefits them.” I might even be inclined to agree with you, but it doesn’t matter. The issue is not whether we act on the rule but whether we notice it or not. Lewis is pointing to an urge, a sense that we ‘ought to’ act in some morally superior way. He is insisting that the only way we can have this urge is if God implanted within us all a “Moral Law” which calls us to it when we find ourselves in ethical dilemmas. I am showing you that there is no need to resort to Divine Intervention for this innate morality. It is within us, available to each of us by virtue of our intellect and our social awareness.

This same concept, the empathetic Golden Rule, can be applied to explain the negative moral directives, the ‘ought *not* to’ side of morality. Consider a situation in which I find a wallet with several hundred dollars and the address of the owner inside. Moral dilemma: do I return the wallet and the money or keep the money? (Whether I return the wallet or not after keeping the money is irrelevant).

Obviously I want to keep the money but something inside me tells me that I should return it, with the money intact. What is this moral conscience? It is universal; in no culture would stealing the money be rewarded or praised, so in some sense it is an innate knowledge. Fortunately, we don’t need to turn to a mythical God to explain this either. My humanity coupled with my ability to think abstractly reminds me of how the owner of the wallet must feel and I immediately, intuitively place myself in his/her position. Knowing what I would desire to have happen should our places be reversed I feel a strong push from my conscience.

In addition to this, or perhaps just in a more detailed, precise manner, I also understand those same basic property rights which I am so keenly aware of regarding my own possessions. This coupled with my very human ability to relate other’s situations to myself in a very personal way strengthens the ‘conscience within’ which guides me in my actions.

The Golden Rule can be applied in any and all situations and offers a very natural explanation for why humans are naturally urged to do the ‘right thing’ and why this ‘right thing’ is so standard across all cultures. There is however one more situation I wish to consider before moving on because Lewis mentions it specifically in his book; that of cowardice. This observation was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the second world war was being waged at the time Lewis was asked to deliver these wartime broadcasts, but it serves our purposes nicely in helping us achieve completion with our moral inquiries.

Lewis points out that cowardice has never been admired in any of history’s cultures and I must admit there is something shameful about turning tail. Why do we feel shame if we act cowardly?

I think it hearkens back indirectly to the Golden Rule. We intuitively understand the concept that people ‘should be’ treated the way we ourselves would like to be treated, but not everyone chooses to live by that creed. At such times the defence of those whose ‘Golden Rule rights’ are being violated becomes necessary. In the same way that we intuitively feel an urge to uphold the Golden Rule, we also feel an urge to ensure that it is being upheld by others as well. This urge I believe, we identify as courage, a term we reserve only for heroes or heroines, never criminals; only for those who we perceive as applying the Golden Rule in their dealings with others.

Before we move on let’s quickly sum up what we’ve discovered here. There is an innate principle guiding us in our behaviour. It’s a principle which subtly informs us of the ‘correct’, the ‘morally sound’ direction but does so, so unobtrusively that without careful thought we are unable to discern the source. Hence, some people have jumped to the conclusion that God implanted us all with the blueprints of His wish.

Through our rational, logical consideration we have discovered another possibility. Combining our humanity and our advanced intellectual capabilities we have discovered that through the Golden Rule, which we understand as a completely natural way of interpreting both events that happen to us and those that happen to other people, our minds automatically direct us in a specific way. This way, we have come to call ‘morality’.[[4]](#footnote-5)

*The above section was completed a couple of weeks before I began writing this but I think it fits in well as a closing thought regarding this Moral Law thing of Lewis’. Lewis’ conclusion is a typical one from someone whose worldview has been tainted with Christianity. He considers humans to be weak, useless, impoverished creatures drowning in our own sin, completely incapable of anything even remotely resembling decency on our own, without God. I hate this negative attitude about humanity. In the days and weeks after I formulated my detailed theory concerning how we derive our most basic morals I began to wonder why he and all Christians before and after him have felt the need to look beyond ourselves to some greater Being for our morals. Why can’t the process simply end with us? We do have moral standards; that much is clear, but I reject the insidious notion that humans are so weak and pathetic we cannot even be considered the source of them. Is it so unthinkable that we humans developed our own sense of morals using our own intelligence, our own rationality, our own sense of equity and fairness and our own emotions? I do believe the Golden Rule identifies why we have come to hold the morals that we do, morals based on equity and fairness, but I also feel that it is important to stress the simple fact, I need not look further than myself to find the source. The Golden Rule helps shape and define what these values will be and the more I think about it the more I feel that it is completely natural for us to not just feel these moral urges but to create them in accordance with our humanity. As an intelligent human being, blessed with and intimately aware of my humanity, how could I do otherwise? Humans are amazing animals and our intelligence gives us the ability to not just respond to our instincts like lesser animals, but also to have a hand in shaping them. There is a Creator at work here but we need look no further than ourselves to find him or her.[[5]](#footnote-6)*

*As for the question of why our basic morals agree across cultures and time, I think in light of the simple fact that we are all human, how could it be any different? In what human culture would a random act of murder be acceptable? In what age would humans consider cowardice a virtue? Our humanity blesses us with the same innate instincts and understandings (including an appreciation of the Golden Rule) as our brothers and sisters across the borders and our cousins across the oceans.*

*I also realised another key point around the same time. Our morals aren’t the only things that have been shared by vastly different cultures. On every landmass on the planet there are tales of sea or lake monsters inhabiting various bodies of water, must be concede they are real too? Many cultures also have myths surrounding dragons. Were dragons once real? Or perhaps God planted that idea in our spirits along with His Moral Law. Isn’t it much more likely that it is our humanness which makes us similar and leads us to similar thoughts and myths? It’s certainly simpler than proposing a magical figure beyond time and space, Himself nothing more than a myth sprouting from every culture and directly attributable to our humanity.*

In Lewis, postulating that God is responsible for our morality, we see a pattern that repeats itself in religious conclusions all the time. The believer jumps to a conclusion that sees God or Buddha or Jesus or Allah or the Universe as the answer. That approach may have worked centuries ago when people were somewhat simpler and science was much less progressed, but in this day and age even the average human with an average education has the mental capacity and background learning to see explanations for most things that don’t involve resorting to a mysterious entity above and beyond humanity. Thank God for that!

Okay, so we’ve abandoned this Moral Law and replaced it with a more sensible conscience that doesn’t require a mythical creature beyond space and time. Unfortunately, C.S. Lewis doesn’t know that we’ve dispatched of his Moral Law and so he continues blissfully unaware. His next step takes us from the general, *something more than human,* to the more specific ideas that make up the Christian folklore we all know and love. Let’s see where he leads us...

He drifts a little here consolidating various points that are either largely irrelevant to us or ones which we will pick up a little later. Where we will rejoin him is where he describes two possible world views. (He actually mentions a third in passing which I will examine in a little more detail in this end note[[6]](#endnote-2)) The materialist view, which asserts that space and matter have just always existed and that matter has by random chance produced creatures like ourselves and the religious view which believes in an intelligent presence behind the universe. Lewis feels that one of these views must be right but he also feels that science is unable to help us determine which it is. No matter how far advanced our science becomes, he believes that questions such as, “Why is there a universe?” or “Does it have any meaning?” would still remain unanswered. Essentially, science, he tells us, only measures and describes the external universe but has no access to anything internal, anything ‘behind the things science observes’. This may be quite true but fortunately Lewis has an alternative for us. Humans.

There is one thing in the universe that we don’t have to just rely on external descriptions and measurements of. Us. We do not just observe ourselves, we *are* ourselves, we know and have access to everything inside. We see ourselves in all our glory; we see the thing behind the thing that science observes. This is where his Moral Law surges back to the forefront. According to Lewis, this Moral Law, which we didn’t invent, stands over us pointing out what we should be doing. Fortunately, because we have this backstage pass behind the curtains to the Wizard of Oz, as it were, we are able to *feel* this Moral Law exerting its gentle push. The equivalent of which we cannot see in anything else in the universe, even if something comparable exists, because all we have access to is the things external behaviour. The existence of this Moral Law inside us is evidence for a Something or Someone beyond our universe, Someone who left His mark inside, where only we could find it, in the form of an influence trying to get us to behave in a certain way.

So the one thing we can see deeper than the surface of, ourselves, gives us evidence of Something greater. In light of this, he rejects the materialist view but still cautions us that we are far from God and even further from the God of Christianity. Like a detective, he examines the two things we know of this Being. One is the universe He has created.[[7]](#footnote-7) This suggests to us that He is a great artist (since the universe is beautiful) and also that He is merciless and no friend to us (since the universe is a dangerous place, remarkably inhospitable to humans). The second piece of evidence we have is more valuable than the first because it’s so-called ‘inside information’ and is, of course, the Moral Law. This tells us that this Somebody is interested in right conduct and high morals and insists that they be applied rigorously irrespective to our personal desires, as in those cases where our instincts tell us to do something in conflict with the Moral Law.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section Lewis feels that we all know what we ‘ought to’ do and yet none of us do it. This is the beginning of Christianity. Man (and of course, woman even more so!), the sinner. I think it is fair enough to say that none of us, no matter how diligently we try to act, are ever perfect in the sense of continuously upholding these Moral Laws. We probably wouldn’t be human if we were able to, would we? However, as Lewis says, he is interested in finding the truth of the situation, not making excuses for it. By the way, there are, Lewis feels, consequences to this moral fallibility, and we will encounter those just a little later.

For now, let’s just quickly sum up. Surprisingly enough the whole thing thus far can be summed up in a single sentence; courtesy of the Moral Law, we have determined that an Entity exists beyond humanity and this Entity demands honest, fair, morally scrupulous actions. Done.

Of course, you may have noticed that everything Lewis has claimed after ‘proving’ his Moral Law, depends completely and totally on the Moral Law. Without it, the entire structure collapses under its own weight. This illustrates a very important point in philosophical and religious thinking; a small error early on can send us on a wild tangent that diverges further and further from reality at every stage eventually ending up concluding with a complete fabrication. Great care must be taken, especially when an entire edifice is to be constructed on top of a single keystone, as in this case. Tackle the Moral Law and Lewis’ entire theory is blown out of the water in one fell swoop.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Having said that there is no need to comment further on Lewis’ clearly false conclusions, however there is one more comment I would like to add concerning this Moral Law. It involves a principle called Occam’s Razor which basically says that, “entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily.” In other words, the simplest explanation which accounts for all circumstances should be preferred over all others. Now, religious explanations almost always fail Occam’s Razor because they inevitably posit at least one entity above and beyond us and our universe to explain things which are often explainable independent of it.

Lewis’ hasty leap to the conclusion that this innate sense of morality comes from an entity outside ourselves (who we have no other reliable evidence for and, at least for the purposes of this essay Lewis himself doesn’t bring into the discussion) is a perfect example of such specious reasoning and flagrant violations of Occam’s Razor. As I have shown, it is at least equally plausible that this sense of morality comes from within ourselves as that it comes from without. Coupling this with Occam’s Razor and discarding equal theories that posit more entities, we find Lewis’ claim is naturally dropped.

Another word of caution is that God never directly reveals himself to us (at least, not anymore. Most Christians believe He stopped doing that with Jesus) and so the only ‘evidence’ that points to Him is indirect and circumstantial. We must always be wary of explanations that end with, “...because God did it.” Even if there is no other simpler explanation available the explanation, “God did it” should be recognised for what it really is – the lack of an explanation As always, common sense and logic are your best defence against such specious reasoning. Carry them with you at all times, as a soldier would his gun, and never be afraid to use them to put down these affronts to our intelligence.

God

Lewis now turns to the question of what this God is like. At this juncture he describes a couple of views; the Pantheistic and the Christian, The Pantheist does not see a strong distinction between good and bad so she sees God in everything.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Christian on the other hand is very sensitive to good and bad and so believes that God created everything but exists apart from it. What’s more, Christians believe that God insists on putting things right again and will do so at a later date. But then, if a good God made the world, why has it all gone to custard? (This particular question we won’t address until a little but later, circa page 12)

Lewis reasons that he could not have come up with the notion of a cruel and unjust world unless he has some conception of a kind and just one. So then, in trying to deny the existence of God – saying, in other words that the whole of reality was senseless – he is forced to concede that at least one part of that reality – his conception of kindness and justice – made sense. He concludes this section by saying that if the universe had no meaning, we should have never discovered that it had no meaning in the same way that if there was no light, there would be no creatures with eyes and so we should never know it was dark.

I have some problems with this. First of all, I think Lewis is playing with words a little bit when he decides that his concept of justice makes sense in a world which is supposed to be senseless. In order to understand what’s happening here we need to clearly define the terns Lewis is using. He’s obviously trying to set up a contradiction of terms here to achieve a reductio ad absurdum (reduction to the absurd) argument, the important terms of which are ‘sense’ and ‘senseless’.

These two terms need to be opposites for the argument to work (if they aren’t then there’s no contradiction) and that is the way they are certainly presented. Lewis chose to use the suffix “-less” to emphasise this point and add weight to the argument. The problem is that Lewis has ‘fudged’ his wording to create a contradiction and it’s relatively simple to prove this.

Taking his thought that his concept of justice is “full of sense” can only mean one thing, i.e. it makes sense; it is a logical thought which possesses the qualities of coherence and reasonableness. I agree with that. It certainly is a sensible concept. Now, with this as our starting point, we are forced to conclude that Lewis is also trying to say that the concept of a world (a “reality”, to quote Lewis) without God does not possess coherence or reasonableness. Ironically enough, this statement just doesn’t make sense. The whole of reality is senseless? If you think about this statement for a second you’ll be as confused as I was when I first took the time to think about it carefully. It’s a subtle trap and maybe Lewis is not deliberately trying to mislead us into it, maybe he genuinely tripped himself with his own cleverness.

At this point you may be a little confused. You may know something doesn’t sound right but you may not know why. If that is the case let me nudge you in the right direction. ‘Having sense’ or ‘being senseless’ are not terms we ever ascribe to physical things. It’s always used in the abstract because, by definition, it can only ever describe abstract things like thoughts, plans or ideas. Reality is senseless? What, the planets are senseless? My hands are senseless? You and I are senseless? It doesn’t even make sense to say it in the opposite; the planets are sensible? You and I however, *can* be sensible or without sense but only in the thoughts that we have or the actions we enact or the words we speak; in other words only in the abstract.

When Lewis was arguing that there is no God and reality was therefore senseless, what he really meant was that there is no special, pre-ordained purpose to life. It’s all a random, pure chance phenomenon and shouldn’t be interpreted as a particularly meaningful event (in the sense that it has been orchestrated by some higher power with a grand purpose). Unfortunately, this is not a senseless reality. It’s a meaningless one and a purposeless one definitely (if you’re looking for some greater spiritual/religious purpose beyond the material), but not a senseless one and you don’t need to be a linguist to understand that.

The second problem I want to address actually comes in several parts. First, he claims that our universe is cruel and unjust and then wonders how can anyone immersed in such an environment be aware of its cruelty and injustice? Expanding on this theme, he then goes on to say that if the whole universe has no meaning (notice that he switched from his favourite word, ‘senseless’ to expound this second idea more clearly) we should never have found this out and finally, to reinforce this point he offers us the analogy that if there were no light in the universe there would be no creatures with eyes and we would never know it was dark. Accordingly he concludes by saying that atheism (no God therefore no goodness therefore no meaning to life) is too simple to be true and dismisses it.

Let’s start at the beginning. According to Lewis, the universe is a bad and unfair place (cruel and unjust are the words he uses but I think they may be a bit strong) but in order to have this notion of bad and unfair, we must have experienced good and fair. Lewis asks, “What was I comparing this universe to when I called it unjust?” Essentially the argument goes, in a world without goodness there can be no conception of badness.

Now, the basic argument I agree with but the way Lewis uses it I do not. There are many problems with the world, that is for sure and the universe is certainly a hostile place for human beings but do we live in a universe without any goodness? I don’t think so. Terrible things happen to some people but wonderful things also happen. There is hate and anger and bitterness in the world but it is not without love and joy and happiness. If I had nothing to compare the badness to, perhaps then I would be unable to see it and call it badness, but there are an abundance of good things that happen here as well which allow, and even invite, comparison. A fish doesn’t feel wet in water because there is no dryness to compare it too. No matter how cynical one becomes surely no one could contend that life is totally without goodness to compare the bad to?

The next phase Lewis seems to think follows the same format as the ‘world without goodness’ argument but I disagree and so I will deal with it as a separate thought. If the universe has no meaning how could we discover that it has no meaning?

At first glance, it may sound the same but unlike his first argument I disagree with everything about this one. No matter how I think about this one I can’t see what Lewis was thinking when he put pen to paper. He seems to be saying that in a meaningless life, (obviously in a spiritual/religious sense)[[10]](#footnote-10) creatures shouldn’t be unable to contemplate their existence. Now, no matter how I think about it there is nothing in the former that precludes the latter. There is nothing contradictory about saying that life evolved through random, natural processes and eventually produced life forms sufficiently mentally advanced to be capable of thinking about their existence. We must conclude that this is nothing but a disguised version of the argument that goes; we exist, so therefore God (a Creator) must also exist. There are several problems with this argument but they are slightly tangential to this essay and I will not go into them here. The bottom line is that creatures without a spiritual/religious purpose need not necessarily be forever blinded from becoming aware of that purposelessness.

From this, let us now move onto his final analogy which Lewis hoped would help seal the deal on his earlier points. We should never know justice in a cruel world in the same way that in a universe without light, the creatures that inhabit it would never know darkness since they have no eyes. I would like to make the point that Lewis’ analogy is completely true but also completely irrelevant. In his analogy, these creatures would never know it was dark and the word, ‘dark’ would cease to have meaning primarily because of a physical limitation, namely they have no eyes. Without light, animate creatures would never evolve light sensitive structures (eyes) and therefore obviously be completely and forever unaware that it was dark. So, why does this make it irrelevant to the points which precede it?

In the first case Lewis is relying on the fact that the universe has no goodness in the same way that his analogy has no light, but I explained that there is plenty of goodness in the universe for us to work with.

In the second case he’s talking about something not dependant on the existence (or absence) of any physical senses. The only thing we need to be able to either contemplate our existence is our brain and whether or not there is a religious/spiritual meaning to life, we would still have brains. If his argument went something like, if there was no meaning to life and therefore no brains to contemplate it, we would never know about its meaninglessness, he could at least claim his analogy was apt. Unfortunately, if he did that everyone would think he was mad because it’s a stupid argument.

Our conclusion? The conclusion Lewis is trying to get to is based on an argument which is false and the analogy he reinforces it with is completely inappropriate. Our universe is a far cry from being devoid of any goodness to compare to the badness and even if there is no God and therefore, no spiritual/religious meaning to life (there may be other ways for life to hold meaning but I purposely haven’t gone into those here because we don’t need to); i.e. the atheist perspective is true, things could still be as they are today with intelligent human beings alive and able to ponder such difficult questions.

At this stage a quick review of what Lewis has covered may be in order. Let’s look at his conclusions thus far:

1. There is a Moral Law which we didn’t make but which is present in all human beings and affects us deeply.
2. Next, thanks to the Moral Law, he dismisses the Materialist view that there is nothing beyond the physical and reasons that Something greater than humans exists. This Something must like goodness as that is where His Moral Law directs us.
3. Lewis then looks at this good and bad thing more closely and determines (apparently thanks to his Moral Law again) that Pantheism, or the view that God is beyond good and bad and so exists in everything, is false and with some suspect logic involving meaninglessness and sense, so we are now left with Monotheism.

But we still haven’t addressed this question of all the badness in the world and the existence of these creatures who (paradoxically to Lewis) know it’s bad. That will be our next major point – let’s rejoin the commentary...

So, Lewis now believes he has hammered another nail into atheism’s coffin but he still hasn’t reached the Christianity we all know and love. So far, we have a good God but we are still missing the harsher side of the religion, as Lewis calls them, (which I find incredibly funny) the “difficult and terrible doctrines” of hell, sin, the devil and the redemption.

As evidence that these doctrines must be real he tells us that people who suggest a lovely, simple, ‘God is in Heaven and all is wonderful’ philosophy are dreaming. Reality isn’t simple and so he feels that a real conception of religion shouldn’t be simple either. In fact, he even goes on to say that reality is not just complicated but also odd. It isn’t neat or what you would expect. And interestingly enough, Christianity is both complicated and unusual. He actually points to these traits as being one of the reasons he believes Christianity. As far as arguments go, this is one of those ones I want to make some kind of excuse for Mr Lewis on, because it really is a shocker. He is essentially saying that Christianity is both complicated and unusual, therefore it could be true. I can think of about a million things complicated and unusual which are certainly not true. Okay. Enough said. Maybe he was tired when he was writing this passage.

So, the problem isn’t simple and the answer isn’t going to be simple either. Lead on Mr Lewis...

The problem is that the universe contains a lot of badness and is apparently meaningless and yet has creatures who know that it is bad and meaningless. Lewis narrows the answer down to two alternatives. The first is the Christian view that this is a good universe that a good God created but which has somehow gone wrong. The second view is Dualism, which says that there are two equal and independent powers at war, one good, the other bad, but (and this is central to the argument) both of them think they are good and the other one is bad.

Of course, Lewis sees a problem with dualism. Dualism portrays a picture of two powers, both with equal rights to the throne as it were, but then asks in what sense are we saying that one is good and one is bad? If we mean ‘good’ as just something that we prefer at a given moment then Lewis feels that ‘good’ doesn’t deserve to be called, ‘good’. ‘Goodness’ is something that you ‘ought to’ (there’s that phrase again) prefer at each and every given moment, irrespective of what we simply like or might want to do. And lo and behold, remember he claims that both of these powers think they are good, (remember I told you in the last paragraph that this is a central point) only one of them can be good in this Moral Law sense, so one of them suddenly becomes right or correct in thinking they are good and one of them becomes wrong.

Now if we see that one of these powers is right and the other wrong then there must be a third thing in the universe, a standard, a rule of good which we are comparing them to. This standard or the Being who made it must exist above them and so is the real God. So good or bad just turns out to reflect the relationship that each of these powers has to the one God. The good power has more in common and shares more of its essence with God than the bad power.

Lewis also has another trick up his sleeve for this point which goes like this. If dualism is true then this evil power must like badness for the sake of badness but this, Lewis tells us is impossible. Nobody does bad things because they are bad but people can do good things just because they are good. Doing bad things is always a pursuit for a good thing. The badness of the act comes in doing it in the wrong way, by the wrong method or too much. Someone who acts cruel is always doing it for some good thing, because it gives him/her pleasure, because he/she derives some usefulness from the act, etc. In this, badness is nothing unto itself, it is only spoiled goodness. The bad Being is therefore not independent from the good Being at all as he is unable to supply himself with these good things to desire or the good impulses to pervert. He must be getting both from the Good Power. To drill the point home even further he claims that to be bad the bad Being must exist and have intelligence and will but these things are in themselves good and so they must come from the Good Power.

Two reasons why dualism is false.

Interestingly enough, Christianity is quite close to dualism but differs in just the ways that the above reasons prove dualism false. There is a Good Power (God) and a bad power (Satan) but they are anything but equal. God created Satan and he used to be good but he then became corrupted and started this great war, this rebellion against his father.

Okay, first of all, I don’t believe either dualism or Christianity are correct but let’s see if Lewis’ reasoning that dualism is false makes sense.

His first claim is that goodness is of the Moral Law kind and so only one of these powers can actually be right in believing itself to be good. But, to be right in this regard there must be a third, higher standard that we are comparing them to, God or His Moral Law.

This argument rests on two assumptions. The first is that both powers claim they are good. This is important because Lewis needs to show that one of them is wrong and one is right and this leads us to the third standard against which we can compare these powers. This assumption, I believe, is not based on anything solid at all. I can imagine a bad power who knows that what he is bad but simply doesn’t care. He likes sex before marriage, drinking all night, swearing, eating too much (sometimes), etc. I like all of these things too and I know plenty of other people who like them much more than me. It’s no great stretch of the imagination to imagine a power who likes these things as well and knows they are ‘bad’ but still likes them anyway. There is nothing that would make me feel this being has to feel he is being good. In my experience it is more often humans that deceive themselves in this way. I wouldn’t expect a higher power to be prey to things like self delusion the way a human is.

The second assumption is that good has to mean this Moral Law goodness and is a reflection of some kind of special morality spelled out by a fair-minded Creator in a code of conduct for the universe. Lewis has already tried to prove that this is the case but I have already argued against that concept and don’t need to go into it again. If you feel you need a reminder of it please turn to pages one to seven for a quick refresher.

Lewis’ second argument against dualism appeals to the notion that for the bad power to be independent it has to be doing bad things for bad reasons. I.e. every component of its actions must be completely bad, no goodness allowed at all. Unfortunately, (fortunately for Lewis) this is impossible. He thinks that nobody can do bad things just for the sake of doing bad things; people always do bad things for a good purpose, because they like the result, because it makes them happy, because it helps them to do something else easier, etc.

This is an interesting point and the trick in Lewis’ story lies in his definition of good. In defining ‘happiness’ or ‘utility’ as good, he secures the victory of his argument. But is it reasonable to label these things as good? I don’t think it is. Good and bad relate to morality. Is happiness a question of morality? Is usefulness a question of morality? Of course not. The fact that I feel happy when I accomplish an act (whether it is a noble or sinful act) reflects my character (in the sense of identifying what kind of thing makes me happy, seeing little children laugh or pulling wings off butterflies) but the happiness itself is nothing to do with morality and therefore nothing to do with good or bad. It’s just an emotion.

Lewis however, takes this even one step further and claims that for the bad power to be bad he must exist and have intelligence and will. Existence, intelligence and will are all good things to Lewis and therefore he finds a dependence on the Good Power before even considering any goals or the processes. This is defunct reasoning. By what definition is he concluding that existence is good? Clearly he’s not claiming it through his earlier moral sense of good. Does he mean that it’s good because without it we wouldn’t be here? That’s hardly the inescapable, universal conclusion completely independent of petty human desires and thoughts that he’s trying to reach. In fact, it falls closer to his earlier derogatory comments about how if good was just something we merely preferred then it would hardly be worth calling good at all.

Lewis’ mistake is in having already defined God and working backwards from this. If God is everything good and nothing bad, then all of the qualities that He possesses must be good ones.[[11]](#footnote-11) This captures such things as existence, intelligence, will, love, happiness, etc. By granting God these qualities before formulating an argument and believing that everything God possesses must be good, by definition, he in effect fixes the game and secures his argument, which is now hardly even worth calling an argument. It’s tantamount to saying God is the only power therefore God is the only power. There is actually a subtle form of circular reasoning going on here. First, he grants to God all of the essential qualities for any existence (*even* existence!), then finds these qualities in other entities and then proclaims that those other entities must (therefore) get them from God. I love that, ‘therefore’. The way Lewis writes it is like it’s a valid conclusion when he is really just putting a logical fast-one on his readers.

The simple truth is that qualities such as intelligence, will and existence (just to mention a few) are in fact, neutral and by sneaking them into the ‘good’ camp, with absolutely no justification, Lewis is cheating us out of a fair argument. Emotions too are inadmissible on the same grounds. How can happiness be said to be good and sadness bad in a grand-scale theory. Sure, we prefer to be happy over being sad but that doesn’t make it good in a universal, greater-than-pathetic-human-preferences way. Emotions can never be granted a more important position than just being what we would like to feel at a given moment (exactly what Lewis is trying to avoid in his definition of good).

Good and bad can only ever relate to morals and we must be careful of invoking them with regards to emotions and states of being. Is it immoral to be angry or sad? Never! It may be inappropriate or detrimental or bad for your emotional health but it will never be immoral and as such will never be good or bad the same way it is clearly bad and immoral to randomly kill someone without reason.

By the same token, is it bad or immoral to not have existence or intelligence or will? This is even more clearly false. Qualities such as these fall outside the boundaries of morality and as such cannot be called good in any true sense of the word, which is what Lewis is trying to keep us within. They are definitely good in the sense that we want them and in fact need them to be who we are, but there is nothing intrinsically good about them the way Lewis insists on using the term.

On a side note, I notice that Lewis is maintaining the illusion of trying to work from the ground up (from a bias-free neutrality) to prove God’s existence but is doing so with a deep-seated, hidden, pre-conceived bias towards God already buried deep in his mind. In this case he associates these traits (intelligence, will, etc) with God so intimately he cannot separate the two and therefore he cannot truly start from ground zero. If he were really starting from an objective place, he would see that neutral things like existence and will do not *necessarily* fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the good power (in fact, they cannot be ‘owned’ by either power). He would also see that to say otherwise would be just as foolish as to say that the bad power has existence, intelligence and will and therefore these traits are bad. The good power is getting these traits from him and is therefore dependent on him. Sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? In fact the reason it sounds so ridiculous is because, it doesn’t make any sense at all. Existence can’t be bad or good, it just is. What you use that existence for, now that’s the realm of morals...

So, Lewis now identifies that this bad power is less than the good power which fortunately fits into the Christian framework of a good God who created everything and had the misfortune of having one of His own creations turn on Him.

He now turns to the question of how, if this single, all powerful God exists, evil can also flourish on His earth. This age old question is better known as the problem of evil. Lewis sticks to the notion that God gave us freewill and in this freewill we have the chance to be good or bad, saintly or sinful. Those of us who choose the evil path will create evil. He gives an example of a mother telling her children to keep their room clean on their own, without any prompting from her. It is her will that the room be kept clean but in giving the children the responsibility (as they must learn to hold) to clean it, she has given them the freewill to obey or ignore her wishes.

To quash any disagreements with this idea he turns an interesting trick by telling us that it is impossible to disagree with God (and by God what he really means here is his (C.S. Lewis) answer to the problem of evil) because He is the source of our reasoning power.

He then tells us that the sin of Satan was in wanting to be like God and it was this he taught to us. His legacy for the human race was to make us think that we could be happy without God, which is (obviously) impossible. Lewis describes the situation in this way; God made us in the same way a man invents an engine. A car only runs on petrol and humans only run on God. He is the fuel our spirits run on.

First up, I have never liked the free will argument. It is a horribly simplistic one that fails to account for any real life examples. Remember the situation here, we have been given a ‘free’ choice between God, forever in Heaven, and the Devil and an eternity of torture and pain and suffering. Now, is that a free choice? Lewis’ analogy of a mother asking her children to tidy their rooms is hardly an appropriate one. If you ignore this request, the worst that will happen is probably a minor punishment and being forced to perform the neglected action. If we neglect God’s command we’re looking at an eternity of torment in hell. First of all, let’s be realistic, there is nothing we can imagine in our lives that even comes close to this situation, but I’m confident we can find a more appropriate analogy that will demonstrate the idiocy of calling this choice between heaven and hell a free one.

Let’s say I have a daughter and she wants to start smoking. I, being a good parent and taking my lead from the best parent of all, God, decide to give her free will in this situation. I buy a packet of cigarettes and give them to her and I tell her it is up to her whether she smokes them or not. Now, to make the analogy more closely aligned with religion, I don’t personally tell her she has the choice (God never told me about His wonderful free will experiment), a friend of mine, whom my daughter has never met carries my message to her. She also tells her what will happen if she chooses to smoke even one cigarette... I will kick the door down and shoot her in the head.

Now, irrespective of whether or not my daughter smokes the cigarettes do you honestly believe that I have given her a genuine free choice? A true free choice cannot, *must not*, involve any punishment for choosing one of the alternatives or it’s no longer a genuine choice, it’s becoming forced.

What if my daughter refuses to believe my friend? She just can’t believe that I, her loving father, would ever shoot her, for any reason, let alone just for smoking a cigarette. If she then smoked a cigarette and I carried out my threat would you think that I had acted like a good parent? What if she does believe my threat but smokes the cigarettes anyway? Does that change anything? In no way imaginable is this morally or even humanly pardonable, let alone being Divine! And let’s remember, my punishment was just death, a relatively painless and instantaneous termination of my daughter’s life. This doesn’t even come close to God’s punishment for us.

The diehard Christians out there still claim, it isn’t God who punishes us but the Devil. That’s total nonsense! God made the rules, He gave us freewill, and He stands by and does nothing while the Devil carries us away. A simple amendment to my analogy equalises things; imagine it isn’t me who does the shooting, but another friend of mine. Now, the analogy is perfect. I make the rules, I gave my daughter freewill but I don’t carry out the punishment, although I am able to intervene if I wanted to, just like God must be able to if He is stronger than the Devil and there isn’t a Christian out there who believes that Satan is as strong or stronger than God.

The next thing Lewis does is attempt to discourage questions by claiming that God obviously knew what would happen if He gave freewill to us but thought it “worth the risk.” We might disagree with him (and if you were even fractionally sensible you would, considering the terrible things that happen to people, good and bad people, every second of every day) but Lewis tells us that we can’t disagree with Him because He gave us the tools with which we are trying to argue, our reason.

This argument is so full of nonsense I don’t even know where to begin. Even if I did believe that God created us all and gave us all our reasoning abilities why would that preclude me from using them against Him and His decisions? Unless God gave us faulty reasoning abilities then that reason, by its very definition, would allow objective, scientific questioning. True reason is not biased towards any person or any idea. If it is, then it’s not reason.

Finally Lewis tries to convince us that without God we can never be happy. His analogy of the car is particularly disappointing in its irrelevance. God created humans and we run on Him, humans created cars and they run on us. Now that’s an analogy! Unfortunately, it’s also gibberish. Lewis’ claim here that God is our fuel is not justified in any manner whatsoever. The best he comes up with is to say that, humanity has been searching for happiness outside of God for thousands of years and keeps failing. Civilisations rise but inevitability collapse, apparently because we don’t believe in God. Lewis never mentions the fact that during the Middle Ages, Europe was terrorised by a theocracy, complete with witch-burnings, inquisitions, and the death penalty for heresy, nor does he consider any of the hundred other reasons why civilisations collapse. Since other commentators do a much better job investigating those causes than I could, I will leave you to investigate those, more sensible ideas, on your own.

In the next section Lewis introduces Jesus Christ and claims that Jesus was in fact God. He rejects the notion that Jesus was a great moral teacher but couldn’t have been God by saying that if a mere man came along and said the things that Jesus said, would either be a lunatic, the devil or the Son of God.

I cannot show you how inane Lewis’ argument is for this any better than the man himself can. This is what he says, “... it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

I would take issue with Lewis’ argument only there isn’t one. At any rate, I think that this argument clearly falls well short of anything even remotely resembling sense. Lewis is entitled to believe Jesus is the son of God, I am, not attempting to rob anyone of their beliefs, but I object to him couching those beliefs in pseudo-logic.

Why was it obvious that Jesus wasn’t a lunatic? From his entire life, we have nothing more than partial, unreliable accounts from no more than a few people, who probably never even met the man (according to many non-religious scholars). Can we conclude from this that he wasn’t crazy?

Is it obvious that the man who started a religion which would, several hundred years after his death, be responsible for forcing people, often under torture, to renounce their beliefs, for impeding the advance of science because it disagreed with ‘scripture,’ for destroying all temples and any sacred sites pertaining to, ‘evil’, pagan practices, for eliminating all previous knowledge by razing libraries, including the great Library of Alexandria, and would be directly responsible for the murders of God knows how many thousands of people over the course of history, was not a fiend? If I was going to speak frankly I would say that is exactly what I would expect the Devil to do.

Perhaps Jesus was a conman. Perhaps he spoke well for the times and was able to manipulate people in ways that cult leaders of our age convince their followers that they are sons of God, or even God themselves! This is not the first time in history that someone has claimed to be God. There are probably no fewer than several hundred people on the planet at the time I’m writing this who have scores of people convinced of their divinity. And over half of these leaders probably believe it themselves!

Was Jesus even real? Unfortunately the only evidence we have is locked in four chapters of a book that wasn’t even written as a book, by four different authors who probably never met Jesus and whose accounts of the exact same incidents all differ! Is this reliable? How is it possible that God came to Earth in physical form and that is the only trace of him, second hand, conflicting accounts in a book, itself full of contradictions? Is that the best God could do? Are we expected to believe that God came down to us and appeared to only a handful of people in an isolated part of the world? What about Asia? The Americas? Europe? Were they left to fend for themselves?

Lewis has jumped the gun by *having* to accept that Jesus was and is God. Okay, so after this hugely improbably and unlikely ‘conclusion’, where are we to be taken next?

The next leg on our journey is to look at exactly what Jesus came to Earth to do? Why did God become manifest on Earth. Well, obviously to teach, but that was only a small part of it Lewis feels. The much greater reason was to die on the cross. Then Lewis has to dodge the sticky question of why a loving God would demand such a payment, such a penalty from anyone, much less His only son? The way he wriggles around this is a fascinating look at how human intelligence is capable of being used for self-deception, and of the way we can convince ourselves of almost anything if we really want to.

First, he says that it was not a punishment, in the police-court sense but, in Lewis’ own words, the more general sense of “footing the bill” the way someone might help out a friend who gotten himself into trouble.

Next, he addresses the kind of trouble this ‘man’ has gotten himself into. To Lewis, this heinous crime is in the man behaving as if he belongs to himself. This man is not just an imperfect creature but a “rebel who must lay down his arms.” This process of surrender is called, repentance. This repentance is difficult, so difficult that only a truly good person could do it but the catch is that a good person wouldn’t need to do it. At the extreme, only a perfect person could repent perfectly, but a perfect person wouldn’t need to repent.

So, Lewis reasons that we need God’s help to surrender this terrible sinning nature of ours, but that act is something which God cannot do. God can only give to us things of his nature, but surrender and death (the death of this evil part of us) are nothing to do with God, so God cannot help.

And this is where Jesus comes along. Jesus is God made man, Divinity in the flesh, and as such is able to suffer, to surrender, to die, things which God in His true nature could never do. What’s more, this man/God is perfect and so he can carry out this act of repentance perfectly, which we can share in, thereby gaining absolution.

As a final kick in the crotch, Lewis insists that repentance is not something God demands of you before He takes you back, but is simply a description of what going back to God is like.

When I read this story I was struck by how contrived it sounded. It sounds just like what it is, a set of pseudo-reasoning, logic designed for the sole purpose of justifying something that is on its own, completely ludicrous and without a sensible leg to stand on. But, I appreciate that you may not share my view and so we should look a little closer.

First, Lewis relies on showing that humans have committed a terrible sin. Just what is this sin? Thinking that we belong to ourselves. If you had not already been indoctrinated with the Christian notion that humans are useless, weak sinning machines, then this notion would sound completely ridiculous. It requires that you believe you belong to someone else, God. Do you insist that your children belong to you? Would you take offence if they said they belong to themselves? Surely, it is every parent’s job to get their children to a point where they do belong to themselves, and I think we would all agree that parents who do not feel this way, have failed in their jobs as parents. Yet, we accept it in God. What kind of petty, insecure God is this, more jealous and possessive than a typical human parent?

Then he says that in order to absolve ourselves of this terrible sin we must repent but this act of repentance is so difficult that it cannot be achieved by a normal person, and he even goes so far as to say that perfect repentance requires a perfect person. On what authority is he proclaiming this? Does it even make sense? He is basically saying that even people who want to apologise and give themselves to God, cannot. He presupposes that this magical act of forgiveness he calls repentance, requires something that no human has, and this is pure human invention, pure rubbish.

So, God became human to repent perfectly (to Himself) on our behalf. Does this make sense? Even if it’s true that God became human, how does His perfect repentance transfer to me. I don’t even know what else to say because the whole thing just doesn’t make any logical sense at all.

And finally, Lewis knows that he needs to address the issue of why God needs this repentance in the first place. He does this in a terrible act of imagination and invention by claiming that God doesn’t demand it of us, it just describes the process of going back to God. This is an absolute insult to every thinking person’s intelligence. Does he really expect me to believe that God has no control over this? Surely God invented it! I mean, the last time I checked, He invented everything! If He didn’t invent it, who did? Since God must have made the process the way it is then God is definitely demanding it before He can find it in His heart to forgive you.

To say that repentance merely describes a process is a blatant cop out. God is so angry at us that only blood can satisfy Him. The cold, hard fact of the matter is that Christians believe God created humans, spurned them for their sin and then offered them a way back into His good graces through the suffering and death of His son/Him. Another simple analogy serves to show the sheer stupidity of this claim. Imagine your child grows up and offends you in some way (let’s keep it as close to the Bible as we can), say, by trying to be like you. What would you demand from your child as repentance? Would you not stop until there was bloodshed to satisfy this outstanding ‘debt’? Would you require a death? Of course you wouldn’t. Only a maniac would act in such a way and yet this is exactly how Christians are saying God acted. When the mind wants to believe something, nothing will stand in its way...

Naturally, Lewis fails to expand further on his concept of God becoming human. Exactly what does this notion even mean? It has always been a sticky point for Christians, this whole Holy Trinity concept. Of course, it came about because they needed to explain and protect certain dogma, such as ensuring that Christ could never be relegated to a mere man and some ‘Holy Ghost’ references in the Bible. Unfortunately, its invention just makes the religion sound even more ridiculous, Jesus was a man but also God, but God was also in Heaven, undiminished in any way and there’s this Holy Spirit aspect of God floating around somewhere as well. More evidence of the lengths we will go to in order to protect our greatest hopes and allay our darkest fears.

Lewis also raises two questions at this time, which I would like to look at briefly. First, he wonders about the fairness of a regime where only people who have heard of Jesus can be saved. What of the hundreds of thousands of people in the world who will die before even having had the chance to surrender to Jesus? Disappointingly, he answers the question by saying we don’t know God’s plan.

The other question he asks is why God is sneaking about in disguise trying to undermine the Devil? A good question. His answer? God is trying to give us a chance to join His side freely before He lands, in force. After all, how sincere is a confession of allegiance given to the victor when the war is clearly decided? But doesn’t God already know who will be on His side? What kind of a God is this who doesn’t even know something as simple as the future? Can He not look into my heart and know whether I will surrender to Him? The more we listen to Christian doctrine, the less all-powerful and all-knowing this God becomes.

It is worth noting that at the end of this chapter in his book Lewis affirms that this story is just what he believes but insists that it is only one possibility among several. He maintains that the how and why don’t matter; only the facts that it exists and it works do. With this he is essentially saying that even if you can’t understand the reasons you should still believe. It is a hidden mandate to ignore your (God-given) common sense and reasoning abilities.

He even compares it to someone eating food. The man who eats his meal doesn’t need to know how food nourishes his body in order to benefit from it. While this is certainly true, it is another weak analogy. We can be completely certain that the food does nourish us because we are alive to think about it, but there is not one single, solitary scrap of evidence which suggests that repentance works. In fact, there is considerable evidence that it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever. If it were true and repentance brings you into God’s ‘good books’ then why do devout Christians still suffer and die drawn out and painful deaths while sinners run around healthy and happy in their sinning until they die painlessly of natural causes?

Do not fall prey to this proclamation to abandon reason and logic just when you need it most, which all religions in all places and at all times advocate. They will turn you to the Tower of Babel incident as their precedent and ‘proof’ that knowledge is dangerous. Even original sin is traceable to a thirst for knowledge, from an apple, no less. People empty of knowledge and unwilling to use their reasoning faculties to acquire any, make for helpless lapdogs, easy to lead, and this is exactly what churches need if their blatant lies are to stand any chance of being accepted.

Lewis goes on to talk about the spreading of a new kind of life called ‘Christ-life’. This is, in Lewis’ words, “the next step in evolution”. The way this Christ-life is spread is through baptism, belief and the Holy Communion. The reason he gives for believing in these things is because Jesus said so. At this point, Lewis appears to feel that he has built up enough of a foundation that he need not question anything anymore. After proving God exists and Jesus was who he said he was, the rest of Lewis’ assertions and claims tend to be taken on faith rather than proved but that won’t stop us from seeing exactly what he thinks of the Christian way of life.

Part 2

What Christians Believe

Morality

Lewis revisits morality in his next chapter and opens by saying that moral rules are the directions for running the human machine. This is a hugely loaded statement. First, it assumes that we were made by a Being with a specific purpose, the purpose being somehow related to morality. Second, it implies that obeying the moral rules is the ‘correct’ way of living. I would like to challenge both.

The evidence that we have been created by a God is seriously lacking. It is so lacking that I feel quite justified in saying that it is impossible to prove. There is absolutely nothing (except a gap in our understanding, which is, interestingly enough, literally nothing) which points to this conclusion. Despite two thousand years of almost constant talking, no one has ever delivered proof that God exists. Isn’t it strange that someone as *big* and as central to everything as God is, could remain so completely hidden from us, His own children?

It isn’t just that there is an absence of evidence for God but there is also the curious fact that as science progresses it has been steadily eroding what was previously considered to be God’s territory.

God once told us that the earth was about six thousand years old. Science proved that the earth is much older than that. (Although there are of course a great many ignorant creationists out there who choose to disbelief this for no reason other than it conflicts with the Bible, itself a document full of fallacies, improbabilities and contradictions).

God told us man was special. Science showed that we are incredibly insignificant mites living on an incredibly insignificant planet in an incredibly insignificant galaxy. Furthermore, it proved that the earth was not the centre of the universe, then showed that our solar system wasn’t the centre, and finally showed that even our galaxy wasn’t in the centre!

God talks of creation. Science revealed evolution, completely unquestionable in its truth. Anyone who knows anything about the cold virus understands mutations and the notion of the survival of the fittest. The only people who disbelieve evolution are those who have an axe to grind, not those who are searching for the truth.

Now, to the notion of the moral rules being the “correct” way to live. As I showed earlier, our moral code is created by us and is founded on the principle of the Golden Rule, something that is intuitively understood by every human being on earth, thanks to our humanity. So we have this morality. Must we obey it? Well, I think it’s clear that in the absence of any great enforcer there is no strict need to obey it, at least not in the sense that we will be punished if we fail to. Can we find *anything* that dictates this moral code as the correct way of living? Surprisingly enough, I think not.

In the first case, if breaking this moral code was somehow ‘wrong’ then we should find that all those who do end up breaking their machine somehow, should be punished in some way or, if not punished, at least worse off in some way than those who preserve their machine. They should get sicker, suffer more, even die more frequently; while those who keep to the rules should be rewarded, be healthier, wealthier, happier and live longer, more fulfilling lives. Now, we know from experience that this is just not the way things work. Good Christians get sick, have accidents and die just as easily as ‘bad’, non-Christians. If we are to believe in God, we are forced into the depressing notion that He doesn’t favour either of these two teams and really doesn’t care whether you act morally or not.[[12]](#footnote-12)

It is at this point that we must be wary of people (Christians, but especially new agers) claiming things like, “What goes around comes around” or even more esoterically, “The Universe always balances itself.” People who make such claims seldom actually witness anything bad happening to the immoral person who acted poorly, but on the off chance that they do see something, they find themselves (or at least, they would if they were capable of thinking objectively) blinded by tunnel vision and leap to unreasonable conclusions. Consider the good Christian who is screwed over at work by a bad non-Christian. They wait and watch quietly, confident that God will right the wrong. Meanwhile, the good Christian’s aunt is diagnosed with cancer, her husband loses his job and her daughter’s grades start slipping at school. But, finally seven months after the transgression, the bad, non-Christian is sacked. “Ah ah, I knew God would look after me,’ she thinks. Meanwhile, the bad, non-Christian (unbeknownst to our good Christian) goes on to find a new job that pays more and offers him more job satisfaction.

Now obviously this is an exaggeration and you might be reading it thinking, “No one thinks like that,’ but you would be surprised. No one *knowingly* thinks like that, but the human mind is not known for its objectivity and I have no hesitation in saying no human being, past, present or future, thinks objectively even 50% of the time. Objectivity is for computers and robots, not for humans.

If you take some time to think about the situation, I think you will discover (as I did) that there is absolutely no reason for us to follow the dictates of the Golden Rule morality. There are no benefits for us if we do and no costs to us if we don’t. And that does kind of make sense. It follows the real world we see around us. Some people obey this moral code, others ignore it, while still others pick and choose what they will follow from it. Yet, all people, the saint and the sinner both, experience similar ups and downs. A theory that completely agrees with reality must be favoured over one (no matter how much we want to believe it) that doesn’t. Period.

Next, Lewis classifies morality into three broad groups, harmony between individuals, harmony within the individuals themselves and harmony between individuals and their overall purpose in life.

This is an interesting subject area to me, although I don’t want to go too deeply into ethics here. (That will hopefully take place in a later book). However, I will leave you with some brief thoughts on Lewis’ framework which you can ponder on your own.

Firstly, harmony between individuals. How can anyone argue against that? Really, it’s just the forum where the Golden Rule comes into play. The trick is to watch for people claiming that it’s not just a fair play or kindness issue, but somehow a stronger mandate that can be attributed to some higher power. As I think we’ve looked at in quite a bit of detail, humans are more than capable of deciding upon a set of morals for themselves.

Secondly, harmony within the individual. This starts getting a little delicate. Again, if we are just talking about a general guideline for people to live happy, healthy lives then there isn’t much to complain about. But if we start talking about a set of rules that we are required to follow, not just for our happiness but in response to something beyond mere human desires and wishes then we are venturing onto a slippery slope. Let me give you an example.

Lewis hints at the idea that we are not free to do with our bodies as we please because our bodies are not actually our own property. He doesn’t dwell on the theme nor does he expand on it at all, but it’s quite clear where it leads. Our bodies are God’s property and as such, we have little to no say in the care of them. At this point we are getting further and further away from facts and are crossing into the land of fantasy once more. Like I said, I won’t comment much more on this here but if you are so inclined to, I would recommend you starting off your inquiry with an honest question (although one that all religious people hate – some have even gone so far as to call it a sin), “What evidence is there for this theory?”

Finally, harmony with our overall purpose in life. This question is immediately on unsteady ground because its successful implementation requires an answer to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Now, I’m not suggesting that this question is unassailable and therefore destined to forever remain a moot point, but I am saying that if you are going to start talking about a purpose or meaning to life, you had better bring more to the table than the Bible and a set of outdated, misguided myths to rest your conclusions on. As with all cases, but especially with a topic as important as this, you need to ensure a sensible, logical train of thought and keep any subjectivity completely out of the equation. Not an easy task for humans which are little more than a collection of subjective opinions and thoughts. You will never ask yourself a more important question than this, so don’t you want to be more certain of the answer than, “I feel it in my heart”?

After this, Lewis states that from here on in, he will assume that the Christian point of view is the correct one. The format of the book changes considerably here and rather than investigating claims that prove Christianity’s worth, he now looks at how Christians should live given the “truth” of their doctrine.

Accordingly, my narrative will also change style. I will no longer be following in Lewis’ footsteps, so to speak, outlining his every point and offering my own thoughts on them. Instead I will point out those of his guidelines for Christians that strike me as unusual or incorrect and then offer my two cents worth before leaving you determine for yourself which you choose to believe. Again, my aim in writing this is to prove to you that Christianity is a belief that follows on from a flawed premise and only gets further from the truth the deeper into the rabbit hole you go. We have already looked at the premise or the foundation, that Lewis at least, uses to justify Christianity, now let us look at where that premise leads...

Social Morality

* page 84, a Christian society involves obedience. Specifically, obedience from everyone to “properly appointed magistrates”, from children to parents and from wives to husbands.
* Page 84-85, everyone likes bits and pieces of the whole Christian way, but no one likes the whole of it. He sees this as an indication that Christianity is in fact, the total plan for humanity.

We know that Christianity is all about rules and obedience. The whole of Christianity is based on a system of reward and punishment for following the rules. Those who do it well go to Heaven, those who don’t end up in Hell. But when Lewis states that obedience should extend to wives to husbands, I think (I hope) he has stood on a few toes here. This is a curious section. I am torn between praise and criticism for Lewis. As I have said before, Lewis deserves praise because he is sticking to the word of the Bible as faithfully as he can. The Bible is very clear, from the beginning of the old to the end of the new testaments, that women are inferior to men. The sexist theme is an explicit one in the text. However, as we all know today, men and women are equal, certainly not the same, but certainly equal in their claims to basic rights and freedoms. To even suggest that one gender should defer to the other is purely and simply unfair and unjust. To suggest that it is the way God intended His Universe to operate is sheer lunacy. Surely, in this day and age there cannot possibly be any argument about that. I can’t help but wonder if Lewis would have been so quick to accept that tenet if the Bible had been composed by women from texts written by women, and so carried the opposite mandate; husbands should obey their wives.

Most Christians completely gloss over Christianity’s sexist roots and this leads us nicely into the second point. Lewis feels that since people have all deviated from God’s plan in different ways, everyone likes some parts of Christianity and rejects others. He says that this is exactly the way we should expect it to be if Christianity were the truth. This is an outrageous claim.

You may remember earlier when Lewis was trying to convince us that Christianity (and in particular the “difficult and terrible doctrines” of hell, sin, the devil and the redemption) was the correct path, he told us that Christianity was just what we should expect from the truth. Reality is both complicated and unusual and, lo and behold, Christianity was also complicated and unusual. It was neither neat nor what we would expect and that was supposed to be some kind of proof that it was correct.

This argument is exactly the same. People like some parts of Christianity and dislike others therefore it must be right. Yup, either that or some of it is right and some of it is wrong, or possibly the whole thing is rubbish! There just isn’t enough information to form any kind of conclusion. It’s laughable really.

I do want to comment on his observation that few Christians accept the whole of Christine doctrine though. Only, I would like to amend his comment by suggesting that not one single Christian accepts it; not because none of them are sincere enough, but because it’s impossible.

The fault lies in the doctrine itself and what it demands in terms of belief from its adherents. Think about it. Christians are required to believe in a God who loves them all, but who in the Bible showed an exclusive interest in only one race, the Israelites and then only the male members. They must believe in a loving God who will nevertheless sentence them to hell for all eternity if they fail to meet His requirements. They are asked to believe in a magnificent, Almighty God who created the Universe and yet is a jealous, vengeful, wrathful being. They are told to love God and fear Him at the same time. They are warned to turn their backs on science, rejecting sound evidence in favour of cultural myths that keep their religion alive. They are told to believe in the Bible for it is God’s word, when the Bible itself is full of contradictions. In short, they are forced to sacrifice their individual power and freedom, their natural inquisitiveness, their reason and their sense, the very things which make them human; all so that they may believe in a fiction which falls apart the very second one honestly investigates it.

Even the most devout Christians can’t reconcile these contradictions and they certainly can’t like both sides of their God/religion and as such, at the most basic level of faith, they are required to read the Bible with one eye closed, listen to the news with just one ear and think about life with only half a brain.

If you think I am exaggerating, ask a Christian what they think about the fact that there are two creation stories in Genesis, or that woman was made solely to keep man company and they as a gender are treated like nothing more than child-bearing chattels throughout the Bible, or why it is written, “Let *us* make man in *our* image and likeness”? Chances are that they won’t even know about these problems and even after you’ve highlighted their ignorance of the belief system that they base their whole life upon, they probably won’t investigate it further. Why? Because they know that the sensible answer to these problems would involve them disregarding most if not all of the religion that they have come to depend on so much.

Note that we aren’t talking about choosing to follow some of the doctrines we like and choosing to reject the ones we don’t (although that happens in probably more than 85% of cases). We are talking about it being *impossible* to like and follow some of them because they go against our natural understandings. How could I even respect (much less love) the vengeful God of the Old Testament? How can I treat women the way they are treated in the Bible? How could I make the animal sacrifices that were such an indispensible part of the religion (according to God’s direct instructions) at that time? I can’t and so if I wish to become a Christian I have to abandon these lines of inquiry which only lead to the realisation that this religion, like all those that came both before and after, is nothing more than myth.

Morality and Psychonalysis

* page 91, Christians are told not to judge.

This little quote has always been intriguing to me. We all know that it was Jesus who said it, but we also know that it doesn’t refer to the fact that judging itself is bad; only the act of judging someone when you yourself are imperfect. Jesus condemns judging when it comes from other humans, but endorses it when it comes from God. On the one hand this kind of makes sense, would you like a criminal to be the presiding judge in a courtroom? Of course not, but you wouldn’t like the judges seat to be empty either. We want a fair, honest judge with plenty of integrity. That is what God is supposed to represent, in the courtroom of life. But does that square with my thoughts about what God is supposed to be?

Let’s briefly review. God created the Universe and represents the limits of everything good, so He is therefore greater than it and greater than the things which inhabit it. Now, the notion of this magnificent Creator sitting in a grand throne somewhere judging these unbelievably tiny and insignificant humans, deciding who is deserving of Heaven and who ‘qualifies’ only for Hell, seems a little petty.

Now, many Christians would resent such a description. They might prefer to think of the situation like this; all of the choices you make throughout your life contribute to the person you become at your death. If you followed God’s instructions then you become closer to, more in harmony with Him, but if you don’t you drift away from Him and become a Hellish being. “God doesn’t choose you,” they say, “You choose God.” But it all comes down to the same thing; a point we have already discussed. God made the players, He made the playing field, He made the rules of the game and He even intervenes in the game when He sees fit to. This setup avoids the direct judgement day picture we see above but doesn’t avoid the fact that God made the rules about how people are to be judged (the criteria) and what happens after the judgement (the consequence), even if the whole process is ‘automated’, God is still completely responsible. Who was ultimately responsible for the murders of the Jews in Germany? The lowly soldier who pulled the trigger or released the poison gas, or Hitler? If you could remove one of these people from the equation, who would it have been? The one who makes the rules must ultimately bear the burden.

So we are expected to believe that the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Creator of the Universe is interested enough to focus on a single planet in a single star system, in a single galaxy in a single galaxy cluster out of the whole Universe, and judge the lowly, insignificant humans who reside on that planet with the goal of welcoming those who pass, into Heaven and being angry enough with those miniscule ants who fail, to sentence them to Hell. I just can’t believe it. How could the Creator of the Universe be so petty as to punish me (for that’s what it is, no matter how you try to sugar coat it or shift the responsibility) with an eternity in Hell for not following His rules? In the grand scheme of the Universe does it really matter if I masturbate every day, or attend the wrong Church, or follow a different religion, or even if I have no religion at all?! I can’t believe God could be so petty, and if He is, He’s certainly not the kind of Being I could ever admire or respect and that *does* preclude loving Him.

Sexual Morality

* pg 95, outside of marriage, abstinence is the only way. This philosophy is so against our natural instincts that Lewis feels either Christianity is wrong or our instincts are wrong. First, Lewis analyses the sex instinct in terms of its purpose and this purpose, he feels, is procreation. He compares this to eating, the purpose of which is to repair the body. He argues that if a man indulges and eats whenever he wants, he will not eat much more than the biological purpose of eating would normally allow. But if a healthy, young man indulged his sexual appetite whenever he wants, and if each act resulted in a child, his promiscuity would result in hundreds of children, well in excess of its function.

Next, he compares a striptease (with a woman) to a striptease with a piece of meat. He says that if we saw a group enjoying such a striptease, we would conclude that something has gone wrong with the appetite for food in the people amongst that group. The parallel is that something has gone wrong in the sexual appetite of the people in the first example.

Lewis’ third example is another food analogy. He claims that not many people want to eat things which are not food or do other things with food instead of eating it. I assume he is here talking about things like prostitution, masturbation, pornography, same sex relations; pretty much anything that involves sex outside of a marriage, without a child being the end result. He observes that modern people have brought sex out into the open claiming that keeping it repressed and hidden, as in the Victorian era, was unhealthy and a problem that could be fixed by relaxing the reins. Well, he doesn’t think relaxing the reins has helped the situation at all. Again he compares the sex obsession to an obsession with food saying that we should be ashamed of it.

* pg 100, Lewis raises the question of what a normal sex instinct is and suggests that all of us must temper our desires at times. Against those people who argue that our natural instinct to have sex can’t be wrong and shouldn’t be suppressed, he argues that to be happy, we cannot completely surrender to our desires.

Now, to Lewis’ credit he does stress that there is nothing inherently wrong or bad about sex. This is certainly not the message that Christianity has been preaching all these years. I don’t feel too far off the mark in saying that Christians have tended to look upon sex as a dirty, lowly, sinful act (which interestingly enough they are forced to reconcile with; a) the fact that it is the way in which God has ordained that children should be conceived and b) the fact that it is immensely pleasurable). Clearly, Lewis rejects this interpretation of sex. Good for him.

He also insists that Christianity approves of the body and pleasure and holds that matter is good. Good one, Mr Lewis. Unfortunately, to me this is just another one of those contradictions that abound in Christianity. Sure, most Christians would probably agree, in principle, that their body is good, but that surface sentiment coexists with an insidious one underneath which says that God and Heaven are good, and the mortal, material world is bad and full of ‘evil’ and temptation. Christians usually perceive this mortal life as nothing more than a test or training ground (full of sin and lust and earthly pleasures – all of which lead us further from God) where we can prove ourselves to God and gain entry to Heaven at the end by ‘graduating.’[[13]](#footnote-13) When Eve ate the apple she sentenced us all to a terrible mortal existence filled with pain and suffering and sin. And this, *every* Christian believes. Lewis himself takes every opportunity to denigrate the mortal human experience, stressing our inherent weakness, our sinful nature, and our hopelessness (without God to hold us up, of course). So, on the surface they happily agree with you that our body is good and matter is wonderful (after all, God made it), but underneath that exterior they harbour a secret hatred for this sinful matter and the weak bodies which so easily fall ill or are led into temptation. Curious, huh?

So onto Lewis’ points. First, he defines the biological purpose of sex as reproduction. Compared to over-indulgences in the appetite for food (which aren’t too far in excess of the biological purpose i.e. repairing the body) over-indulgences in the sexual appetite can result in hundreds of children very quickly; clearly in excess of the purpose. In light of this, when deciding which is wrong, the Christian approach or the instinct, he feels it is the instinct which has clearly gone awry.

There are three points to this argument. The first is the biological purpose of sex. The second is the sexual appetite. The third is the analogy to food. All of these taken together lead to the conclusion that our sexual instinct has been distorted and is wrong. Let’s examine these points in more detail.

He is undoubtedly correct in the first. The biological purpose of sex is procreation. There can’t be much doubt, or argument, about that.

The second is the sexual appetite. Let’s look at a ‘normal’ sex drive. Pre-puberty there is really nothing that could be called sexual interest, in fact, the opposite is probably true. Although at this age there are definitely signs of attraction between boys and girls, (every teacher has seen that attraction manifested through teasing and hair-pulling, etc) there is zero interest in sex. The problem starts at puberty. Throughout this period, if a typical male was able to indulge his sexual appetite as frequently as he wanted, he would probably have sex several times (or more) a week. When does this urge cease? It seems that, on average, the sex drive tends to decrease in relation to age, but there’s no denying that it stays unreasonably high for a couple of decades at least. Lewis is claiming that this is wrong; he is saying our sexual impulses have become distorted somehow. The evidence he points to is precisely what we saw above in a ‘normal’ male sex drive, the fact that such a desire to procreate goes wildly beyond the function of sex, namely the successful birth of a child.

Surprisingly enough, I am actually inclined to agree with this assessment. It is clearly, far and away, well out of proportion to the biological aim of sex and given the fact that it is an instinct, this is strange. Instincts usually operate below the conscious level and as such determine behaviour in a way that is consistent with nature and her aims.

Exactly why our sex instinct is an (almost) full-time obsession is a little beyond the scope of this discussion just yet but I have a feeling it will come up later... For immediate purposes, it will suffice to recognise that the sex drive of humans (especially, but not limited to, men) is unusually strong.

The third point compares over-indulgences in sex to over-indulgences in food. Lewis finds that the latter doesn’t lead to gross differences in comparison to its function. In all fairness to Lewis, perhaps in his day, obesity was not the problem that it is today. He wouldn’t have seen people eating family packs from KFC on their own and then washing it down with a litre tub of ice cream. He wouldn’t have seen a man being lifted from his house by a crane because he was too fat to fit through the doorway. What does this mean for us in this discussion? Actually not a lot. The reason Lewis included it in his argument was to serve as a comparison to a healthy/normal appetite. The fact that it has shown itself to be the same neither strengthens nor weakens his argument. All it tells us is that our appetite for food has become distorted in ways similar to the way our sex instinct is distorted in relation to its function.

So far, I haven’t disputed anything Lewis has said. Do I agree with him? Not quite. Don’t forget there is one more part to the argument; the conclusion. Remember, this argument was designed to show that the human instinct for sex has gone astray and therefore the Christian one, no sex outside of marriage, is right. I have two problems with this conclusion.

The first is I don’t believe that the instinct is necessarily ‘wrong’. I agree that it is in excess when compared to its function but not that this implies wrongness. In the universe, an unimaginably tiny percentage contains matter. The distance to the nearest star from here is about 76 light years. That’s 76 light years of nothing. Whatever the purpose of the Universe is (I’m not sure there is one, but if you believe God made it then there must be a purpose), what could possible justify that much empty space? Is that ludicrous excess wrong?

If the sexual instinct was wrong, by whose standards would we be basing that? Mine, Lewis’, God’s? That’s a trick question, by the way. One of those three may never have existed. The ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of an act depends on several things and involves a very lengthy discussion that really is beyond the scope of this essay. I will leave you with this thought though. Wrongness (or badness) can only come from a single, isolated perspective but when that same act is viewed from a different perspective maybe it actually becomes right (or good)... or maybe it just makes no difference either way.

The other problem I have is that even if we declare that our sexual appetite has “gone wrong” in Lewis’ words, there is still absolutely no reason to assume that the Christian alternative is the “right one” or even any *closer* to the “right one”. He starts off by corralling us into a pen with only two gates; the ‘current situation’ gate and the Christian one. In reality, there are many options open to us if we decide that we don’t like the current situation with regards to our sexuality. It’s like saying if you don’t want the orange then you must have the apple, despite the fact that there is a mango, a peach, a strawberry and a banana also in front of you.

It is interesting that Lewis doesn’t actually offer one single argument *for* the Christian way here, he merely argues *against* the current way.

Lewis’ second point is quite a cheeky analogy to food. When you read it for the first time you might be suddenly shocked with it and find yourself in agreement but hopefully as you read it you found yourself incredulous that he would compare a woman stripping to the slow revealing of a piece of meat.

The best way to examine this might be to first look at what Lewis is trying to achieve here. He feels that a striptease is wrong and represents a deviant sexual instinct. To show that it is wrong, he compares the same act (a striptease) to a different kind of instinct, the instinct to eat.

A striptease is exciting and pleasurable to the viewers (especially men who are well-known to respond more to visual stimulation than women) because it is sexy. As far as I know humans are the only species of animal that hide their bodies. This has led to a kind of intimacy shared only at times of high sexual arousal or even a ‘taboo’ surrounding nudity. As a species we have linked nudity to sex and as a result, nudity is sexual to us. You might argue that the sexual instinct has thus been warped by this covering of the flesh (Lewis is not arguing this point though) but in reality all that’s happened is another aspect to the sexual platter has been created. Presumably other species are not aroused by nudity in the opposite sex because they’re always naked. For humans however, in addition to actual sex, one gender (particularly males) tends to be aroused by the nakedness of the other gender. In light of this, is it surprising that men like to see woman remove their clothes? It provides sexual stimulation. Is it right? I’m not sure. However that’s not what we are trying to ascertain here. We are merely commenting on Lewis’ analogy which is supposed to prove that it’s wrong. I want to keep focused here, because it would be easy to drift off into a much larger discussion than a commentary warrants. So, now that we’ve established that a striptease is understandable when interpreted sexually, let’s look at the analogy.

Does it make sense in any way, shape or form to crowd around a platter and watch someone lift the lid on a strip of bacon? Would you do it? I certainly wouldn’t. Why? Well, because it just doesn’t satisfy any desire I have, food, sex, anything. In fact, the ‘food striptease’ is a completely different experience from the sexual striptease and should never, ever, ever be used in any rational discussion. Lewis is saying that we don’t get excited by watching a ‘food striptease’ (i.e. there’s something wrong about it, a point of view I can fully understand) therefore we shouldn’t get excited by watching a sexual striptease (i.e. there’s something wrong about this too, even though it obviously provides some sexual satisfaction). That’s ludicrous. It’s using chalk to prove something about cheese.

I could put it this way. If I was a vegetarian I might argue that you can go to a restaurant anywhere in the world and pay for a slab of cow or pig to be presented in front of you. Suppose you went to a country where people paid for a slab of human baby to be put on the table for dinner. You would probably be repulsed by this and assume something has gone seriously wrong with the appetite for food in this country. And, of course, wouldn’t someone who grew up in a different world think there is something equally queer about the food instinct among us? Now, is eating meat wrong? Maybe, maybe not, but this argument doesn’t help us determine the answer to that question in the slightest. The argument is completely invalid. I am basically saying we don’t eat human meat therefore we shouldn’t eat the meat of other species either. Compare this statement to the one I made earlier in summary of Lewis’ argument. They are identical in form and equally ridiculous. My analogy is actually one step better than Lewis’ because, at least, I am comparing examples within the same instinct family; food. He is leaping boundaries from the sexual impulse to the food instinct. Is it right to watch a woman strip? Maybe, maybe not, but Lewis’ argument doesn’t help us decide the point up at all.

Lewis’ third point on this topic again focuses on food and claims that people seldom use food in ways not related with eating it, nor do they try to eat things that are not food. In other words he claims that perversions of the food appetite are rare but perversions of the sexual appetite are numerous.

I truly feel that it is quite unfair to compare food to sex in this way (as it has been throughout this entire section). We don’t eat stones because they aren’t food, true, but more importantly, I believe, because we *can’t* eat them. Our bodies weren’t designed to eat stones. We are restricted by nature as to how we can indulge our food appetite.

The sexual appetite, on the other hand, is not limited by nature in such a prohibitive manner. A man can have sex with his wife, of course, and derive sexual pleasure from the act, but he can also have sex with a prostitute and derive equal or even more sexual pleasure from that act. Not just that, he can also have sex with another man and derive perhaps more pleasure still. I am neither condemning nor condoning these actions, I’m just saying they are physically possible and all lead to satisfaction of the sexual appetite. By analogy however, eating a stone doesn’t give many people any kind of satisfaction whatsoever and therefore there is no desire to do it.

Because of this, the analogy is an unfair one. If Lewis wishes to condemn these, ‘sexual perversions’ then he needs to find another way to do it.

Lewis also mentions another concern he has. He observes that people have been recommending abandoning the old Victorian attitude of keeping sexual matters quiet and ‘in the closet’ so to speak, in favour of a more open and candid forum for the subject. In Lewis’ opinion, this open policy has failed. Sex has become a planetary obsession and, as a result something we should be ashamed of (the attitude, not the sex). To reinforce this point, he makes another wild analogy about looking at pictures of food and dribbling over them. I won’t spend any more time unravelling these endless food analogies.

It is true that sex can become an obsession, but anything that causes pleasure can be elevated into an addiction or obsession. Gambling, drinking, (even Lewis’ beloved eating) can escalate into problems. Is it any surprise that the activity which causes (arguably) the most intense pleasurable sensation (although possibly the shortest-lived one) of them all and one that can be so easily and freely accessed should also come to dominate our thinking? I think not. Is it a problem? Maybe.

This leads on nicely into Lewis’ last point about not giving our desires free rein and the ‘natural’ set of principles that would see our sexual appetite returned to some order. I do agree with Lewis that some restraint is required in all areas of our lives for happiness. If humans were to satisfy their desires when and as they felt them, I can’t imagine much happiness would ensue for anyone, including the party acting on the desires. An example would be someone who ate ice cream whenever they felt like it. Their ‘natural’ desire is prompting them to eat but clearly this will result in a lot of misery and health issues later on. Even satisfying the sexual desire in this fashion would not lead to happiness. All inclinations must be curbed at times or we become little better than primitive animals stumbling around looking for pleasure and avoiding pain.

Now, in looking for some principles which we can employ to keep the sexual desire in check Lewis advocates those of Christian authorship. Naturally, I strongly disagree with this. I have two main reasons for doing so.

First, Christian rules tend to be overly strict. In this case, I imagine Lewis would have recommended a moderate amount of sex (I’m not sure where he would have drawn the line between moderate and excessive, he would somehow have to tie this in with the ‘biological purpose’ of sex so it’s hard to see how he could condone sex without an attempt to have a child) within marital (man-woman) confines.

There is absolutely no reason for specifying such a narrow range for sexual pleasure. In fact, the harsher ‘biological purpose’ argument relegates the pleasure aspect of sex to merely a side effect of having a baby and means that people who never marry, for instance, may never experience sex, which Lewis has condoned as a perfectly fine act in itself. How can that be right? What about masturbation? Presumably, this would also be condemned. If not carried to extremes, how can this form of self-pleasure reasonably be prohibited in any sane society? This kind of attitude would be the same as enforcing a strict and bland (no deviations from the standard breakfast, lunch, dinner plan – that would be equivalent to allowing sex outside of marriage) nutritionally optimal diet upon someone. It’s easy to see the benefits but who would want to live in a world without the pleasure of a little chocolate every now and then or a slice of pizza when you feel like it. Even more depressing is the notion of no changes from the basic plan (husband and wife, missionary position in order to have a baby). Goodbye personal freedom. Finally God gets the sin-free, but also will-free, automatons he should have just made in the first place.

The second problem I have with adopting the Christian guidelines in this and every other issue is that they always recommend one coverall rule which applies to everybody. It just doesn’t make sense to treat everyone the same. We are all individuals and what is right for one person may not necessarily be right for another. If we take the healthy (and so maybe therefore, natural) diet above it would be like not imposing that diet on everyone, irrespective of their tastes. Imagine someone hates oranges but loves apples. Well, according to the hard and fast rules everyone eats oranges (or no one has sex for any purpose other than making babies).

Of course, we can appreciate why Christianity has evolved this way. If there is scope to interpret and adjust for individual preferences then no one can exercise absolute control over the organisation. It’s the same reason that our legal system is famously ‘blind’; there can’t be any biases in it and, because it has to apply to the whole of society, it must not recognise any individual. This is, of course, why the legal system has become so complicated that only lawyers and judges can understand it and also the reason it is imperfect and will always be so. The law tries to set itself up as completely independent from subjectivity and hence blanket rules apply to everyone. Innocent people are protected from rights violations, even from police, and so police need to get warrants to search a house. Ironically, those same laws which exist to protect the innocent also apply to the guilty and if an illegal search is conducted, even if evidence is found, it can be ruled as inadmissible. No subjectivity, no flexibility. It won’t work otherwise. Prosecutors and defenders alike feel their hands, at times, tied by the law because there must be rules and systems in place to ensure fairness and equality; how many times have guilty people gone free because of various technicalities that are inevitable in such an imperfect system? Is it feasible that God’s plan would be based on such a fundamentally flawed process? I sincerely hope not.

We need our society’s law to protect us but what use would a God have for such structures in His realm? The law is the best method for the creation and protection of our rights, but when it comes to our ‘spiritual’ lives, I think we can do better than that. We no longer need to be held back by a cold, uncaring, unthinking process. There just has to be a better way to live our lives.

Christian Marriage

* pg 105, marriage is for life. Lewis backs this up by claiming that the feeling of ‘being in love’ doesn’t last forever but instead must lessen and evolve into a different kind of emotion but that love can be just as fulfilling, if not more so, than the feeling of falling in love.
* Pg 110, movies and books give us the wrong ideas about love. They teach us that love is this magical force that lasts forever, with the lucky protagonists living ‘happily ever after’.
* Pg 112, the Christian ideal of marriage shouldn’t be forced onto everyone. Lewis recommends the separation of marriage into those overseen by the State and those overseen by the Church.
* Pg 112, as part of the marriage vows, women should promise to obey their husbands. Lewis argues that one partner must be the head or there can be no way to settle a disagreement. He then argues that the head should be the man by saying, first of all, that women dislike it when she sees a man ruled by a woman in other households and is not “even very flattered in anyone mentions the fact of her own ‘headship’”, and secondly by arguing that women are fiercely protective and heavily biased towards their own family (the children in particular) and are incapable of dealing with other people (outside the family) fairly.

Okay, there’s a bit of inflammatory stuff there but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Surprisingly, I tend to agree with a lot of Lewis’ statements above. He is right that love is nothing like it is often portrayed in the movies. Love is certainly a powerful emotion but it is just an emotion and like all emotions, it doesn’t last forever, at least (or perhaps, especially) not in that ecstatic, ‘being in love’ feeling that is well-known to everyone who’s ever been in love. It is, in fact, so well-known that it has its own name, the ‘honeymoon period.’ This period differs a little from case to case, (as you would expect considering that people are not all identical) but tends to last about three to six months. After this period, that intense, ‘You’re my everything”, “I miss you so much” feeling eases off to a more steady love. It can still be called, ‘love’ I think, just not that super exciting almost maddening (‘crazy in love’ or ‘lovesick’) feeling. This, to me, seems quite natural. I mean, who could live on that crazy rollercoaster ride which is falling in love? It’s quite euphoric and if you ask anyone who knows someone in this state, I guarantee they won’t say, “Yes, he’s balanced and functioning well.”

I also agree with Lewis’ suggestion that people shouldn’t be forced into the Christian ideal of marriage. Only the most narrow-minded, self-absorbed person could argue with that. It makes so much sense that there’s not even any point defending it.

I’m not so sure about Lewis’ idea that marriage is for life. I do agree that it is a serious promise and a commitment which shouldn’t be entered into lightly (I mean if you’re going to get married and start a family there has to be some kind of permanence about it) but no contract should be absolutely prohibited from dissolution. Again, I can understand the motivation for such a blanket, no divorce policy. Marriage and the love that gives it its foundation require work. Anyone who doubts that has never tried to make a relationship work. If you expect that love will keep itself alight and hold a marriage up on its own, you will be sorely disappointed. Unfortunately most people don’t know this and they are disappointed when that love fades. Thinking they’ve just fallen ‘out of love’ they find themselves attracted to other people and we all know how that story ends. Lewis is trying to prevent this kind of divorce (which will not be fixed by the partners finding new ones) by force. This is very Christian of him. Indeed, it is the way his God also works. Unfortunately, it is not a good way.

He is also trying to secure a solid family environment for any children that may find themselves born into the picture. Again, he’s trying to make people responsible by forcing it on them when they might otherwise avoid it if the option to do so was available.

The problem with these blanket prohibitions are the same as those we saw with the powerful but blind legal system we talked about earlier, which sometimes finds itself handcuffed by its own inflexibility. In some cases, two people without children may just grow apart. Now, whether this was avoidable or not, the fact is two people are now in a marriage they don’t want to be a part of. Perhaps they could be reasonably happy and content if they were forced to remain together but why would God want to force them to?

That was a fairly amicable, soft situation but what if a couple found themselves genuinely disliking each other? Perhaps they didn’t know each other as well as they thought (because of course, they weren’t allowed to live together to *really* get familiar with each other before marriage) and now they wish to try again with new partners. What’ wrong with that?

Even children don’t complicate matters much more. Sometimes keeping the familial unit together benefits the children and *always* a divorce is hardest on the kids, but what’s worse; to have one of your parents living away from you or to witness your parents’ defunct relationship (which even they are pretending is fine, for the kids) for twenty odd years and grow up thinking that’s the way relationships are supposed to be? One can still lead to a healthy, well-adapted adult; the other almost guarantees an encore performance.

Blanket prohibitions are the best we can do for our legal system which informs our interactions with each other, but must they extend into our private lives as well and limit our choices there? More important, is that the best that God can do? Does He really need a set of guidelines for a happy life which are modelled on our imperfect legal ones?

Now, the one you’ve all been waiting for; women should obey their husbands. As I’ve said before, you’ve got to hand it to Lewis because he follows the Bible through thick and thin. He doesn’t go through and pick and choose what he wants to believe. That’s a commitment that not many people demonstrate these days. Because, believe it or not the Bible is very clear on which sex is to be the dominant one. There is never, ever, even a hint that woman could ever be equal to man, and that message is consistently delivered from the beginning of the Old Testament where women was created from man because he was lonely, right through to the end of the New Testament when Peter advises wives to be submissive to their husbands and husbands to be understanding of their “weaker vessel” wives. So, it’s in the Bible... but is it right?

I think you’d be a very strange person if you still believed that women were the “weaker vessels” so how does Lewis justify this outrageous sexist attitude of his? Well first, he feels that a marriage needs a head because in the event of a hung jury there must be someone whose vote counts for more or the stalemate can never be broken. Is this reasonable? Has Lewis never heard of compromise? Why do Christians have to resolve everything with deference to a higher party? That’s easy. It’s because that’s what they think their God’s system is like; a hierarchical, vertical structure that tolerates no independence or freedom of thought.

As for the second part of his claim; that women are too protective of their families and don’t even want to be the head, well... what can I say about that? Those are just ridiculous stereotypes that possibly applied in Lewis’ time, only because men had been keeping women down for centuries refusing them such basic rights as education, which basically rendered them helpless. Even Christians don’t maintain those stupid beliefs anymore, which is ridiculous in itself because it’s a part of their religion. The catch is you can’t be a real Christian, proclaiming the Bible is God’s word and therefore infallible, without also accepting such sexist trite as that I quoted above and if you accept it then you’re just sexist. Neither are tenable positions for the people Christians say they are.

Forgiveness

* Pg 118, it’s perfectly right for a Christian soldier to kill an enemy. Lewis goes on to say that the famous commandment, “Thou shalt not murder” has been incorrectly translated as, “Thou shalt not kill”. This is important because Lewis feels that murder and killing are different. He also thinks that pacifists are “entirely mistaken” and calls the knight, “the Christian in arms for the defence of a good cause”, one of the great Christian ideas.

This is a very delicate subject and requires careful thought before issuing any bold claims. Lewis, of course, is forced into agreeing with the idea of war as a valid act because war forms such an integral part of God’s plan and killing is how He enforces His rule. If you don’t believe that, you need to read the Old Testament again. However, I actually tend to agree with Lewis on this issue. Murder is different from killing just be definition. Murder implies intent and in many ways, a very personal kind of act. Killing is a much broader definition and really says no more than, the end of a life brought about by another person. As such, all murder is killing, but the reverse isn’t true.

I won’t go as far as Lewis by claiming that pacifism is mistaken. I don’t think it’s right for me to judge another person’s method of defence or protest. Someone may be prepared to fight fire with fire while someone else might refuse to. In my opinion, both options are valid and it’s up to the individual to choose how they will respond to threats.

The last part of that description is a little bit trickier though. We have to be very careful how we interpret that line, “for the defence of a good cause”. Really there is only one cause that qualifies as defensible. It isn’t in order to suppress all other belief systems that differ from mine (i.e. the various Inquisitions), nor is it to get land (even a “Promised Land”); it goes back to that moral discussion we had right at the beginning of this essay. The only valid reason for taking arms in your (or someone else’s) defence is if Golden Rule rights are bring violated. This is the only prescription that totally avoids any abuse of power. To say, “a good cause”, just isn’t quite good enough. That’s obviously far too subjective and wide open to abuse. How many “holy wars” have been initiated in history where the people believe they are doing God’s (or Allah’s or Jehovah’s or Vishnu’s) work? What’s more; in every war, don’t both parties feel they are in the right? The only objective way to think about it is to find out who is violating Golden Rule rights.

The Great Sin

* Pg 125, “The real test of being in the presence of God is, that you either forget about yourself altogether or se yourself as a small, dirty object.”

In this section Lewis informs us that the great sin to which he refers in the title is, pride. All the other sins lead to enmity but pride is the only one that is pure enmity in itself. It is not about being rich, but being rich*er*, not about being smart, but being smart*er*. This element of comparison is what makes pride so dangerous. Because it wants nothing in itself, it only wants to be more or better than someone else.

This seems fair enough to me, but I believe Christianity takes this whole thing too far. As my quote suggests, when I’m in the presence of God I should feel like a small, dirty object. Are you kidding me! I believe there is a difference between being proud and being conceited or over-proud. I don’t think pride in itself is a bad thing. Christians see the scale in a slightly different way. This might sound like semantics at first but if I draw a quick diagram you’ll see that it’s not (Note: the italicised word shows the optimal position):

Christian View:

*Humility* Pride

My View:

Humility *Pride* Hubris

Christians see humility and pride as being the opposite ends of the scale; one good, humility, and one bad, pride. I think humility is just as undesirable as hubris (excessive pride) and pride itself, falling in the middle represents the optimal state.

It could be argued that the Christian definition of humility is the same as my definition of pride and I’ve just extended my scale further to the left, creating a new low point for the opposite of hubris, but I don’t think this is true. Christianity is such a servile religion, with its adherents almost grovelling before their God. They see taking pride in your actions or being proud of who you are as a... well, as a great sin. In this framework, Christian humility is nothing like my version of pride. In Lewis’ own words, “The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, ‘I have pleased him; all is well,’ to thinking, ‘What a fine person I must be to have done it.’” I absolutely loathe this pathetic kind of thinking, but it perfectly reflects the Christian mind.

That quote highlights two key points for me; one, Christians only understand actions performed in order to please some higher power (the strict hierarchical structure topping out with God) and they see having any sort of personal satisfaction in one’s accomplishments or state, as a terrible evil. For me, I feel that actions performed to please other people are quite empty. The only person worth pleasing in your life is you, not your parents, not your partner, not your children, no one. If you do something because someone else wants you to, it won’t bring you any real satisfaction. Sure you may feel proud because that person approves of you, but how weak is that? If you have to get other people’s approval (even God’s) to feel worthwhile then your life will sadly be only a mere shadow of what it could be.

But Christians aren’t content with just that, they must completely guard against even the possibility that any of its believers could escape their clutches and they do this by deigning that one must not take pride in one’s own accomplishments. For if you are able to take pride in yourself, you may start to realise that you have no need of a God who is a million miles from you, who you talk to but who never answers you, a God who might as well not even exist for all the use He is. Somehow, and you’ve really got to give it up to the Christians for selling this incredibly disempowering idea to the masses, the founding fathers of Christianity convinced people that all the good things they did were because of God and all the bad things they did were because of their own terrible, sinful nature. They set God up to take the credit for all the good and accept none of the responsibility for any of the bad. Perfect... but ridiculous. For all anyone knows, we may only get one shot at life; do you really want to waste it by not taking joy and pride in the things you do? I hope not, but if you do... well... I’m sure there’s a church nearby...

Hope

* Pg 134, “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither”. Lewis justifies this by comparing it to health. He says that if you aim for health, you will become a hypochondriac. He feels that you will only get health when you aim for other things, like food, games, fresh air, fun.
* Pg 135, Lewis tells us that Christian hope is the answer to a natural longing we all feel inside ourselves, a longing for something more than we can find on earth. No matter how hard we try to satisfy this longing, by marrying a beautiful woman, travelling to exotic locations, etc... we remain unfulfilled. He thinks there are three possible reactions to this. First, is the fool’s way which involves blaming external events for his/her unhappiness and always thinking there was something better out there that you missed. The second is the disillusioned sensible man approach, which says that, as children, our hopes are high, but as we grow up and mature we should stop chasing the rainbow and settle for what we have; not expecting too much. The third is the Christian way which holds that creatures aren’t born with desires that are unable to be satisfied. Hence, if we desire Heaven, then Heaven must be real.

Now, I have never heard that proverb about aiming at Heaven, but I think Lewis may have been referring to the saying that goes something like, “Shoot for the stars and hit the moon”. We all know what that saying is telling us; ‘aim high’. This makes sense right? It’s simply saying don’t let the fear of failure or rejection hold you back.

Unfortunately, I find Lewis’ analogy to health woefully inaccurate and quite irrelevant. He thinks that if you aim for health you won’t achieve it, you will only become paranoid. He says you have to aim for other things in order to hit that target. I say, if you aim for health, there is absolutely no reason to fall short of the mark. In addition, by aiming for health, you will naturally do all those things that Lewis mentions (get fresh air, have fun, eat good food, etc) because they are what create good health. This is a totally different situation from the, ‘shoot for the stars’ one. The latter is a call to be bold and brave in your aspirations while the former recommends analysing what it takes to achieve your goal and making sure you do them. Minor technicality but this is what I am trying to do, clear up any misleading and false points from the book.

Next, I do agree that life can be a disillusioning place and there is a tendency for people to chase after happiness by chasing ‘things’, money, women (men), cars, jobs, houses, etc. I also agree that these things never bring lasting happiness. They never satisfy that urge in us which is always yearning to be fulfilled. To me, this is obvious because if it was true that money and material possessions bring happiness then we would see all rich people married to beautiful/handsome spouses being totally happy and balanced. That is almost never the case. More often than not, these people are more dysfunctional than those with substantially less. How do we know? Just have a look at the tabloids and see which famous person went to the Betty Ford clinic last week or which one went to jail or who got divorced from whom, for the third time.

Lewis’ categories for analysing this situation are interesting. I can agree with the fool’s category. This person is never satisfied and worse still, never capable of becoming satisfied because he is essentially chasing shadows. The disillusioned, sensible man is also a fairly appropriate category. To me, this describes a man or woman unafraid to accept the facts as he or she finds them. They are disillusioned but they aren’t so weak that they need to create a fantasy to console themselves and hide in, like the ostrich burying its head in the sand at the first sign of trouble. While the picture that Lewis paints for the person in this category is that of someone who has given up or missed out on a wonderful opportunity, I think this category describes someone who courageously looks reality in the face and resolves to make the most of what he or she finds there. It is an honest category and that makes it a noble one. The final category, designated the Christian way is what I prefer to call the Coward’s way. This is the path for you, if you are not just frightened (to death) of death, fear is a natural part of life, but *so* frightened that you would rather go along with an outrageous fable that promised to fulfil your every greatest wish (only after death, of course, it could never be before because then it could be proven to be false). This is the lowest path because these people, in an ironic juxtaposition to Lewis’ thoughts, are actually the only ones who have given up in the search for happiness. They have literally stopped searching. They have seen the darkness in the confusion that lies ahead and opted to bury their head in the sand and just pretend that everything will be perfect for them if they stay right where they are. This category of people deserve our pity most of all, for they are the ones who have lost the will to go on; life has truly beaten them. They have given up on life and are now looking for their happiness in death, where I fear it will elude them once more.

Time and Beyond Time

* Pg 167, “Almost certainly God is not in time.” Lewis makes this bold claim and backs it up by talking about how the creator of a character in a story is outside of the time sequence for his character. In particular, if the character “laid down her work” and then, “next moment came a knock at the door!” For the character, these two events are separated by perhaps one second but for the author, perhaps he put the novel away after the work was done and didn’t pick it up for three days. For the author, the time delay was three days while for the character it was instant.

The issue of time is a thorny one. The problem for Christians is that if they concede that god lives within time then He cannot be unchanging and immutable (which of course He isn’t. He never claims to be these things; it is human beings who have created the timeless God), and that starts conjuring up ideas of change and impermanence and imperfection and if you like, the notion of a force that even God must bow before; time. So again, we have a situation where Christians are starting their inquiry with the end in mind and trying to prove it from logical deductions, which are usually not logical and aren’t deductive since the conclusion is already set down. This is the exact opposite of any genuine search for the truth, which will take facts as they are observed or calculated *in reality* and then try to understand and make sense of them.

Naturally, God cannot be subject to time (by definition). How do Christians try to explain this away? Well, Lewis starts by postulating the author analogy. This is quaint but, as Lewis himself points out is flawed because the character’s time series is avoided only by the author disappearing into another one. Lewis points out this flaw but never addresses it. He merely compares time to a straight arrow drawn on a page and God as the whole page itself. This is also flawed in a deeper sense because the page cannot do anything. Now, you might argue that this is no ordinary paper, but rather special paper which is able to not just serve as the canvas upon which time and events are depicted, but is also able to create them. This paper is what we call, God. That’s well and good but it hasn’t dealt with the deeper issue here and that is that in order for the paper to create anything, there *must* be time in which to do it. That is the heart of the issue and one I am afraid Christians will never be able to reason away. God cannot create something without there being time in which to create it. No matter which way you slice it, if God is to be an active participant in our lives then there must be time in which He can act. One way of defining time is the rate of change. If God were to truly live outside of time then He can never change, he can’t move, speak, think, act... nothing. All of those things require time in which to take place.

Finally, Lewis uses this “God is outside of time” idea to dodge another problem with Christianity. All Christians believe that God knows what you and I will do tomorrow, but if this is true, then how can I have freewill? Lewis claims that God doesn’t foresee what you will do tomorrow, but rather has access to all time frames (yesterday-today-tomorrow) now. He is not predicting the future, just looking at a wider present, one which happens to include my future.

At first take, I accepted this reasoning, but when I tried to explain it I realised that there was no practical way to avoid the simple fact that my complete life has already been lived. If someone, anyone, is able to see my future then, in a very real sense, it has already happened. Maybe I haven’t experienced it yet, but that doesn’t change the fact that it’s already over. It’s like watching a movie. Someone who’s already seen it can tell me what will happen resulting in the fact that I know the future outcome, but for the characters in the movie they still have no idea what will happen and continue to act on regardless. Now, perhaps I didn’t author the ‘future’ but in knowing what will happen, I guarantee one thing; it *has* happened in someone’s reality (my friends). This means that the characters (me and you) are destined to merely fulfil our roles under the illusion of choice. If there was no determinism, then no one (not even God) could ever know what I will do tomorrow.

This argument also falls flat on the previous issue raised. If God *knows* what will happen tomorrow then there must be time for Him to know. Without any conception of time, no one could ever know anything. Knowing implies thinking, which is a process requiring activity and all activity must take place over time. You could argue that God doesn’t think, in which case God is hardly the Christian Deity who is supposed to oversee and take a very interested, personal role in our lives. In this sense, He is little more than a canvas upon which we create our drama. He is space-time, if you will.

Final Thoughts

It is at this point that I would like to wrap things up. Lewis’ book doesn’t end here but the remaining points are, I feel, starting to become ancillary to the stated aim of this essay. I wanted to analyse Lewis’ arguments for the existence of God (which we did in Part 1) and then I wanted to look at some of the more interesting points of Christianity which Lewis addresses and which might be of some use to you when it comes to deciding how you will live your life.

In looking at these points we have truly walked the gauntlet, from looking at morals and God to marriage and sex and everything in between. Some points we just touched on but others we leaped whole-heartedly into.

The bottom line goes something like this: I don’t believe that Lewis has given any solid evidence to prove that God exists. His single thrust centred on the notion that there was a Moral Law which existed above and independent from man. While this is certainly a novel approach and a refreshing one, it was ultimately flawed. I did not find that humans must appeal to a higher power for their sense of morality; not being afflicted with the notion of original sin helped a lot in this. Lewis’ subsequent ‘deductions’ which culminated in the Christian God were equally flawed and were ultimately unconvincing.

The second half of the essay which looked at various beliefs Christians have was less antagonising. Often through this section, I found myself in agreement with Lewis although admittedly, it was always on points that maintained more of a religious neutrality. As soon as rules and doctrine began to rear their heads, Lewis and I tended to butt ours.

I have tried to faithfully analyse Lewis’ arguments and present sound, logical responses. I am an atheist, but I have tried to keep my opinions from the logic and honestly seek the truth. You may agree with some of my ideas, you probably take issue with many of them. This is as it should be. In the end, I hope that some of these discussions have ventured into unfamiliar territory for you and challenged the philosopher in you to apply your own reasoning to the problems and find new solutions that make you comfortable. At the end of the day, it is your life and no one on the planet can tell you what you ought to do with it.

Read, think, decide, then re-think and if necessary re-decide. There are no absolutes and there are no guarantees. In my opinion, if you cement your thinking in favour of one option, then you become outdated very quickly. The great thinker is not the one who never changes his/her mind, for that one has stopped thinking. Rather it’s the one who is constantly scrutinising everything that comes his/her way, constantly assessing and re-assessing past opinions to ensure a better fit with new facts or new perspectives. This is the person who is truly alive, for that’s what living means. Remember, the only things that don’t change are already dead.

1. These ownership and property rights are only ‘surface principles’ which I believe arise due to an even more fundamental principle, which encompasses all the others... but I am getting ahead of myself. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. When I say we are ‘advanced beings’ I am of course referring to our intellect (more specifically our ability to contemplate complex, abstract concepts) and our social and communal awareness (which is necessarily highly developed, as our lifestyles involve regular inter-personal relations with other people). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This principle is often attributed to Jesus Christ but in fact it is a part of most major religions and was present in the philosophies of several ancient cultures. Its prevalence throughout the world and history is hardly surprising considering how we all intuitively and naturally understand it and I believe it wouldn’t have mattered if no one had ever put it into words for we all instinctively understand it anyway. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. As an interesting point worth mentioning, especially for those people who believe in the Bible, and one which seriously hurts Lewis’ Moral Law given to us by God theory, we actually have documented proof (and since this is the Bible, I do use that term loosely) that God never gave us any such thing. We stole it from Him. According to Genesis, Adam and Eve knew nothing of good and evil until they ate from the Tree of Knowledge, against God’s will. God never wanted us to have this knowledge of morality but we took it anyway. Interesting, huh? [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The fact that we create this moral code according to our humanity, doesn’t make it less meaningful, less powerful or less *real* in any way. In fact it should be even more meaningful to us because it is now something we can truly own. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The third view is what Lewis calls a Life Force philosophy. His argument against this is that it explains the evolution of life as a striving or purposiveness of this Life Force. Now if a proponent of this view asserts that the Life Force has a mind, then we are left back at God, but if he/she says it doesn’t have a mind then how can it be said to strive? I don’t really care much for this view either, which we would probably call ‘new age’ these days but I love the way Lewis’ criticises it by claiming that it seeks the emotional comfort of believing in something like God without the less pleasant consequences. As he puts it, “All the thrills of religion and none of the cost.” I find it amusing that such a prominent and well-respected Christian as C.S. Lewis can’t even accept a truly all loving God and fails to see anything suspicious in the concept of a God who is less of everything (less loving, forgiving, kind, nurturing) than one we could imagine. A God like this hardly even deserves praise, let alone worship. But like I said earlier, despite the mockery he makes of God, at least Lewis sticks to the word of the Bible which is anything but kind, loving and forgiving. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
7. It is interesting to me that Lewis never bothers to prove this point. He just assumes that the universe must have been created by Someone. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Forgive me for indulging in Lewis’ conceptions for a page or so, after already have proven them flawed. I felt it important to show Lewis’ thinking in its entirety. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Given Lewis’ acceptance of a Moral Law given to us by God, I guess this option is completely ruled out. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I assume that Lewis is talking about life’s meaning in the spiritual sense of a God having given a purpose to each and every human being. A broader discussion of the meaning of life with or without a God is interesting but well beyond the scope of what I intend to cover here. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. We are now clearly leaving the Moral Law sense of good Lewis has been pushing throughout his whole book thus far. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The oft-cited claim by Christians is that you aren’t rewarded or punished until you die. Such an argument is a very poor one, for who could ever prove it? People who believe this are basing it on nothing more than the word of another living human being who heard it from another living human being who heard it from another… and so on. (If you are interested, nowhere in the Bible does God ever mention Heaven. That particular myth would have to wait for humans to call it into existence.) This is just another example of a belief with absolutely no evidence to support it and certainly no way of ever getting any; in short, it is a myth. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Obviously, that sounds foolish but Christians will cloak that belief in ways which make it sound less like an infantile, myth but which don’t actually change the essential nature of the idea in any way. We looked at one such way in the previous page where Christians attempt to shift the blame off God for the fact that bad people go to Hell when they die. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)