

PhD thesis

An invitation to thought: ambiguity in the apologetic of C. S. Lewis
Cokenour, T.

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**AN INVITATION TO THOUGHT: AMBIGUITY IN
THE APOLOGETIC OF C. S. LEWIS**

**A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

by

Terry Scott Cokenour

Middlesex University

Supervised at London School of Theology

May 2023

ABSTRACT

*An Invitation to Thought:
Ambiguity in the Apologetic of C.S. Lewis*

Terry Scott Cokenour
London School of Theology

Ph.D. in Theology
May 2023

This thesis examines the role of ambiguity within the apologetic of C.S. Lewis. Though the nature and value of ambiguity remain contested across scholarship, there is agreement that ambiguity has some role to play in creating understanding. That role is almost entirely unexplored within Christian apologetics and Lewis studies. Through an exposition of examples from selected primary works, I will argue that the ambiguity evidenced in Lewis, while at times errant, is often employed with great strategic value, carrying the reader further along Lewis's desired apologetic path.

Chapter one provides an introduction to the thesis. Chapter two provides a systematic literature review for works related to ambiguity, Lewis, and his use of clarity versus ambiguity. A taxonomy of Lewis's works and the methodology and criteria for primary sources are established. Chapter three examines Lewis's apologetic approach, including his theological self-awareness, reasons and motives for his use of strategic ambiguity, and distinctives within his methodology.

Chapter four presents the critical examination of ambiguity from the selected primary apologetic sources: *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Miracles*. The examination is expository with findings organized by the date of publication for each primary source.

The Conclusions chapter, in addition to presenting research outcomes and relationship to current scholarship, addresses objections and presents recommendations for further research.

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Kedves Budapesti gyülekezetemnek, az ottani embereknek, akik nyitottak voltak és türelmesen elviselték, hogy tanításaim során kipróbáljam az ötleteimet, függetlenül attól, hogy ennek tudatában voltak vagy sem. S mindenekeelőtt, hála Istennek.

To my sweet wife Christina and my wonderful daughters who bore more of this burden than I intended, and for whom this key is meant to open locked doors.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AGO — *A Grief Observed*
AMR — *All My Road Before Me*
AOL — *The Allegory of Love*
AOM — *The Abolition of Man*
CLI — *Collected Letters: Volume I*
CLII — *Collected Letters: Volume II*
CLIII — *Collected Letters: Volume III*
CR — *Christian Reflections*
D — *Dymer*
DI — *The Discarded Image*
EC — *Essay Collection*
EIC — *An Experiment in Criticism*
EL — *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*
FL — *The Four Loves*
GD — *The Great Divorce*
GID — *God in the Dock*
LB — *The Last Battle*
LTM — *Letters to Malcolm*
LWW — *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
M — *Miracles*
MC — *Mere Christianity*
OS — *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*
OSP — *Out of the Silent Planet*
P — *Poems*
Per — *Perelandra*
PH — *The Personal Heresy*
POP — *The Problem of Pain*
PPL — *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*
PR — *The Pilgrim's Regress*
R — *Rehabilitations and Other Essays*
SBJ — *Surprised by Joy*
SIB — *Spirits in Bondage*
SIW — *Studies in Words*
SL — *The Screwtape Letters*
SLE — *Selected Literary Essays*
SMRL — *Studies in Medieval Renaissance Literature*
TAFP — *They Asked for a Paper*
TWHF — *Till We Have Faces*
WLN — *The World's Last Night*
WOG — *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*
All Bible references are from the *New International Version*.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The relationship of Christian apologetics to theology is symbiotic. The discipline of making a defence for what Christians hold to be true is both theologically informed and informs theology.¹ The artist is standing on the canvas. The earliest Christian writings are markedly apologetic, responding and adjusting to challenges both from inside and outside the faith.² These intense apologetic struggles greatly informed the rich theological reflection that occurred once the persecution that marked the first three hundred years abated. Across time and location, this bi-directional dynamic between theology and apologetics has persisted. As Christianity spreads into new cultures, it challenges many beliefs and practices, and in places where Christianity has long existed there is with every generation a new set of challenges to the faith that require apologetic interaction. This was certainly true of the 20th century, over which no Christian apologetic figure looms larger than that of Clive Staples Lewis.

Yet, the prominence of C.S. Lewis as an apologist comes with two significant ironies. First, and most notorious, is the ubiquitously recognized irony that he was not a theologian, but rather a literary scholar.³ Second, that Christians who disagree on doctrine, practice, or both—to such a degree that in some cases they will no longer associate with one another—will equally readily associate with Lewis, even to the extent of considering him one of their own.⁴ Of the former, despite Lewis's

¹ The locus of Christian theology is generally held to be in the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, preserved in the Scriptures, in the tradition of the Church, and in nature. Apologetics, in this sense, is for theology not a primary source but a refining dynamic. As theology comes to life, doctrines are shaped and sharpened or conversely dulled and abandoned through apologetic interaction.

² Cf. Justin Martyr's apologies, Roberts, Alexander, et al. *Ante-Nicene fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 139-193; Irenaeus of Lyon. *Against All Heresies*, Ibid. 309-567; Origen, and Henry Chadwick. *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Tertullian's apology, Tertullian, et al. *Apologetical works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius, John Behr, and C. S. Lewis. *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

³ Following formal training in Classics and English at Oxford University, Lewis held a post there for 29 years (Magdalen College, 1925-1954) and finished his career at Cambridge University as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English, a newly created position he was invited to fill.

⁴ Peter Kreeft's 1998 address at Boston college recalled a conference where 'Father Fessio proposed [tongue in cheek] to 'dozens of high-octane Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Evangelicals' that they 'issue a joint statement of theological agreement among all the historic, orthodox branches of Christendom saying that what united us was Scripture, the Apostles' Creed, the first six ecumenical councils and the collected works of C.S. Lewis. The proposal was universally cheered.' Peter Kreeft. 'The Achievement of C.S. Lewis: A Millennial Assessment' in

professional expertise laying outside of theology, his position and influence as a Christian apologist is widely recognized. Even during his lifetime his critics attested to the impact he was having: ‘the personal values of several million Britons and Americans stand in imminent danger of the befuddlement at which Mr. Lewis is so transparently adroit’⁵ and ‘As one reads Lewis, one feels that one is being talked to, not lectured at; he writes simply and well and nobody should have any difficulty in understanding what he is trying to say.’⁶ At the turn of the century, *Mere Christianity* topped Christianity Today’s poll of more than one hundred contributors for a list of ‘Books of the Century’ described as ‘classics that have shaped contemporary religious thought’. It was number twenty-six on National Review’s ‘100 Best Non-Fiction Books of the Century’ and *The Abolition of Man* was number seven.⁷ Interest in Lewis’s corpus of work⁸ continues to grow globally, and his influence is not only at the popular level but within the academy as well. Prominent theologian Tom Wright made it only three minutes into his inaugural Gifford lecture, ‘The Fallen Shrine’, before quoting Lewis.⁹ Philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig credited Lewis as the inspiration to both his own apologetic approach and to his embrace of the

Pearce, Joseph. *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003) xiv; Anscombe noted, ‘Many Catholic readers will respect Mr. C.S. Lewis in advance as a near-Catholic apologist.’, Anscombe, G.E.M. ‘Some Remarks on C.S. Lewis’ Reflection on the Psalms’; reprinted *Journal of Inklings Studies*, Vol 9, Issue 2. Cf. Poe, Harry Lee & Rebecca Whitten Poe, eds. *C.S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends, and Colleagues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006) 120; For Orthodox agreement with Lewis, see Kallistos Ware ‘God of the Fathers’ in Mills, David, ed. *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) 53-69.

⁵ Alistair Cooke, ‘Mr. Anthony at Oxford’ in *New Republic*, April 24, 1944, quoted in Walsh, Chad. *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Sceptics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1949) 26; Pittenger, Norman W. *Rethinking the Christian Message* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1956) 69-70; Cf. Cunningham, Richard B. *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1967) 15.

⁶ Pittenger, Norman W. ‘Apologist versus Apologist: A critique of C.S. Lewis as “defender of the faith”’ in *The Christian Century*, October 1, 1958; reprinted *Mythlore*, 27 (Vol. 3, No. 3., January 1972) 3.

⁷ Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/april24/5.92.html>, accessed May 31, 2021. <https://www.nationalreview.com/1999/05/non-fiction-100>, accessed July 16, 2021; Ordway considers Lewis ‘The most influential and popular apologist of the twentieth century.’, Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017) 5; According to Walter Hooper, Pope John Paul II was a great admirer of Lewis. (Walter Hooper, ‘C.S. Lewis and C.S. Lewises’ in MacDonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie. *The Riddle of Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 43.

⁸ He published across areas of poetry, essay, autobiography, literary criticism, fiction, novel, science fiction, and Christian apologetics. Beyond this he maintained rigorous letter correspondence throughout his entire life, of which over 3,000 are extant, and wrote frequent editorials and articles, of which discoveries still being made.

⁹ His 2018 Gifford Lectures were later published as Wright, N. T. *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019). The original lectures were under the heading of *Discerning the Dawn*, of which Wright opened with Lewis’s summary apologetic statement, ‘I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, by it I see everything else.’; ‘Is Theology Poetry?’, *The Socratic Digest*, vol. 3 (1945); reprinted WOG 92.

importance of the published word.¹⁰ Lewis studies¹¹ is a burgeoning field with varied contributions from theologians, philosophers, apologists, scientists, and historians—both advocates and critics.¹² Owen Barfield eventually gave up attempting to read ‘all, or even most’ of what was written about Lewis.¹³ Lewis’s fame, as with most well-known figures, has inspired a swath of popular works about him that are largely devotee in nature. As Peter Kreeft notes, ‘the more popular the author, the duller the books about him.’¹⁴ Similarly, Edwards finds that much written about Lewis is ‘more hagiography than serious analysis’.¹⁵ Nonetheless, academic work and doctoral dissertations on Lewis began to occur during his lifetime and continue to the present

¹⁰ Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 27.

¹¹ Broadly, this includes work on Lewis principally and often his wider circle of literary and professional, and personal colleagues. Principally (in alphabetical order) Owen Barfield, Nevill Coghill, Hugo Dyson, Austin Farrer, Roger Lancelyn Green, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, but expands to include a whole host of characters who interacted with The Inklings, The Socratic Club, or otherwise had some degree of significant personal or professional interaction with, or influence upon Lewis. Cf. Owen Barfield’s fourfold classification as Lewis’s apologetics, fiction (including poetry), literary criticism and scholarship, and his life and personality. Schakel, Peter and Charles A. Huttar, eds. *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991) 299.

¹² Among others (alphabetically): John Beversluis, Corbin Scott Carnell, Bruce L. Edwards, Paul Fiddes, Walter Hooper, Clyde S. Kilby, Don King, Peter Kreeft, Alister McGrath, Doris Stephen Medcalf, T. Myers, Alvin Plantinga, Jerry Root, Peter J. Schakel, J.T. Sellars, Michael Ward, Kallistos Ware, Rowan Williams, Judith Wolfe, and Gregory Wolfe.

¹³ Schakel, Peter and Charles A. Huttar, eds. *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991) 299.

¹⁴ Howard, Thomas. *C.S. Lewis: A Man of Letters: A Reading of His Fiction* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) 9. Top ranked universities continue to approve research related to Lewis (Ward, Michael. ‘The Son and Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.’ PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005)), provide institutional publishing on his life and work (MacSwain, Robert and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)), and there are centers for scholarly study which emphasize Lewis (Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, Lanier Theological Library in Houston).

¹⁵ Edwards, Bruce. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis’s Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 1; See Beversluis’s comments on the ‘hero-worship’ of Lewis and corresponding ‘hagiography’ resulting in a ‘market saturated with adulatory but almost completely uncritical books about Lewis’: Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) xii-xiii; According to Hooper and Green, Wilson suggests that Lewis himself is partly to blame, in that ‘he allowed the cult to build up’, even aiding it through his diligence to reply to all who sought to correspond with him. Green, Roger Lancelyn and Walter Hooper. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) xii. Anything beyond unintentional contribution likely suggests too much in this regard, given early evidence that he did not desire fame of that kind. He never intended his life to be examined closely (Letter of 7 Feb 1917, CLI 274) and though he sought special editions of the works he enjoyed (Letter of 1 Feb 1916, CLI 161) he did not bother to even hold a first edition of his own works later in life (Letter of 19 Jan 1953, CLIII 282). Furthermore, an avoidance of self-exposition was part of his *modus operandi* (Sayer. *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*, 205). Even Beversluis remarks, ‘On my reading, the man who emerges from Lewis’s books would not have been flattered by all this attention. In fact, I cannot help thinking that he would have found it rather embarrassing.’, Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) xiii.

day.¹⁶ He is beloved across the entire spectrum of Christianity. Whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, theologically liberal to conservative, there are Christians for whom Lewis's apologetic writings, and Lewis himself (or the person he is perceived to have been),¹⁷ are deeply meaningful. This wide appeal was true even during his lifetime. In an April 1944 interview, when asked about theological division among Christians, Lewis replied that because of his apologetic approach, 'The result is that letters of agreement reach me from what are ordinarily regarded as the most different kinds of Christians; for instance, I get letters from Jesuits, monks, nuns, and also from Quakers and Welsh Dissenters, and so on.'¹⁸

The irony of Lewis's influence as a non-theologian apologist, combined with his incredibly wide and lasting appeal, raises questions of interest to academic theology and to the discipline of apologetics. How is it that such a man produced works with such phenomenal results? Might key elements of his apologetic arguments or methodology be identified and examined to better understand that phenomenon? In researching Lewis's apologetic arguments, the presence of ambiguity seemed, at first, merely a curious reoccurrence. But further examination revealed that ambiguity is a dynamic of significant importance in Lewis's apologetic and one that has a great deal to do with the aforementioned ironies. Though apologetic ambiguity may be a genesis of error, it can be an effective argumentative tool when employed strategically. Ambiguity can be a servant of clarity by mitigating lesser issues and thus keeping a reader on the apologetic journey toward the primary destination. This dynamic is underexplored in apologetics generally and Lewis specifically. At present there is no monograph on the role of ambiguity in Lewis. Given the importance of apologetics to theology, and Lewis's importance to apologetics, research into the ambiguity in the apologetic of C.S. Lewis is warranted. This thesis will argue that the ambiguity in Lewis's apologetic is often strategic, effective, and a critical element to his broad and lasting appeal. In doing so, this opens a new avenue of scholarship for Lewis studies and for the wider disciplines of apologetics and theology.

¹⁶ Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) ix; Ward, Michael. 'The Son and Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005).

¹⁷ This is not a suggestion that an accurate understanding of Lewis is impossible, or even difficult. Rather, it is to assert that for the non-critical reader of Lewis, it is easy to have a Lewis of one's own making that may have little to do with the historical Lewis.

¹⁸ 'Answers to Questions on Christianity' pamphlet by *Electrical and Musical Industries Christian Fellowship* (Hayes, Middlesex: 1944); reprinted GID 60.

CHAPTER TWO

Ambiguity, Sources, and Structure

*To be incommunicable by Scientific language is, so far as I can judge,
the normal state of experience.¹⁹*

The concept of ambiguity is, ironically, ambiguous. At its most basic level it is when words have more than one meaning.²⁰ Yet, phrases, sentences, and larger lines of reasoning may also allow for multiple meanings depending upon how signs, symbols, and overall rhetoric are employed. Entire concepts and narrative style can create ambiguities across larger texts. Ambiguity is relentlessly frustrating to all who work with language because it can appear in and through all these means and is often not objectively identifiable in the same way as other rhetorical devices. Thus, a caution is here warranted—this research ventures into a strange space. In one sense, this work attempts to make ambiguity clear: specifically, ambiguity within the apologetic of C.S. Lewis. As will be shown, ambiguity as a concept is every bit as ambiguous as ambiguity in action. The oasis is ever just out of reach.

1. Literature Review

i) Summary

An examination of the scholarship on ambiguity reveals two truths. First, it is agreed that ambiguity exists and has some effect upon meaning. The primary debate follows from this: whether or not ambiguity can be beneficial. Lesser debates revolve around distinctions as to what qualifies as ambiguity. Second, there is no universally accepted definition.²¹ Ambiguity as a subject matter is naturally most prominent within the disciplines of philosophy and literary criticism given their strong focus upon logical precision and clarity of language. But its presence and elusiveness are cross-disciplinary and broadly speaking this has been the status for over a century.²² The response to ambiguity has seen a shift over the last seventy years: beginning with a

¹⁹ 'The Language of Religion', CR 167.

²⁰ Blackburn, Simon. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 16.

²¹ Cf. Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) 1.

²² Cf. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, seventh edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945) 134. Writing in the early 1920's, they lament long-standing disagreement on definitions evidenced in professional discussions among the Symposium of the Aristotelian Society on Mental Activity and the American Philosophical Association.

staunch rejection, moving to a tentative pragmatic allowance, and finally to a broader acceptance. Among Lewis's early contemporary literary critics ambiguity was strictly opposed (Ogden and Richards, 1923; King and Ketley, 1939) with the important exception of Empson's examination in types (Empson, 1930). Later philosophers and literary critics adopted a tentative acceptance of ambiguity as a pragmatic means to greater clarity. In principle, ambiguity was still viewed negatively and technical precision in communication remained the dominant paradigm (Burke, 1961; Grice, 1967). A shift away from that paradigm began to develop which included awareness of the potential for ambiguity to be used beneficially in negotiations (Chaim and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Following this development, communication theorists evidenced that ambiguity can be used strategically for uniting diverse groups around a central aim, in part by diminishing secondary areas of disagreement (Putnam and Jones, 1982; Eisenberg, 1984; Leitch and Davenport, 2007). Ambiguity as a rhetorical device to advance understanding is seen in innovative works such as the role of ambiguity as a shared dynamic between scientific and artistic reasoning (Caglioti, 1992) and ambiguity's usefulness in the architecture of abstract 'fuzzy' logic for machine learning (Kosko, 1993). Yet, the trajectory of increasing cross-disciplinary acceptance of ambiguity's argumentative value has not occurred in apologetics or theology to the same degree.²³ In those disciplines, the older paradigm of clarity and precision remains dominant. Ambiguity is typically seen as a communicative error and a detriment to meaning, which accords with the ongoing influence of the analytic philosophical approach within apologetics (Plantinga, 2000; Moreland and Craig, 2017; Groothuis, 2022). There are, however, some apologists advocating more creative ways of communicating about the Christian faith that indirectly offer some quarter to ambiguity. The role of imagination in relating Christian truths (Davison, 2012; Ordway, 2017), the postmodern attempt to shift away from modern philosophical foundations for apologetics (Penner, 2013), and the embrace of the paradoxical within the Christian message (Gabelman, 2016) each incorporate a measure of ambiguity, though ambiguity itself is not the focus of those works and remains underexplored.

In summary, the key debate as to whether ambiguity can have any argumentative benefit has, over the last seventy years, shifted from a staunch rejection to a tentative

²³ Cf. Ossa-Richardson finds that for theologians, ambiguity is at best only loosely equated to the embrace of pluralism. Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 2.

pragmatic allowance, and finally to a broader acceptance. Apologetics and theology have been exceptions to this cross-disciplinary trend, and within those areas, ambiguity as a primary subject matter remains virtually untouched. It is either considered something to avoid or subsumed into creative approaches for communicating or defending the Christian faith. Philosophy and literary criticism have largely, though not universally, fueled attempts at granular definitions for ambiguity in an effort to remove its presence while other disciplines have rejected the need for a technical definition and instead use contextual analysis to evaluate ambiguity's role. Recent decades have seen important contributions from scholars in communication theory, physics, and engineering whose findings demonstrate that ambiguity not only has strategic value but is a rhetorical device in its own right. We now consider major contributions to these trends.

ii) Trends in Scholarship

For works on ambiguity relevant to this research, a fitting starting point is Sir William Empson's 1930 volume, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which remains a landmark on the subject. Its continued prominence is evidenced in Anthony Ossa-Richardson's 2019 expansive monograph, *A History of Ambiguity*, where Empson's *Seven Types* is a fulcrum of the work, including arranging the voluminous fifty pages of bibliography by publication dates pre- and post-*Seven Types*. Empson's foundational work, while illustrative of ambiguity in grammar, referent, meaning, and contradiction, does not offer a definition. In the preface to the second edition published sixteen years later he re-affirmed his original position that 'I would use the term "ambiguity" to mean anything I liked'.²⁴ Similar to Empson, in *A Grammar of Motives*, influential literary critic and rhetorician Kenneth Burke does not present a fixed definition for ambiguity. He suggests a 'comic' genesis for ambiguity in the ontology of humanity as creature within creation and examines ambiguity within various contexts.²⁵ For Burke, ambiguity is not inherently beneficial, but does have a pragmatic use. There is value in aiming for 'terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise'²⁶ because the corresponding resolution furthers clarity of meaning: 'it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformations [of understanding] take place'.²⁷

²⁴ Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, second ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) viii.

²⁵ Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) xviii.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. xvii-xix. He further explores this in relation to observed ambiguity exploited in possible conflicting definitions (54-55).

Likewise in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, he finds that ambiguity is beneficial only in so far as it engenders clarity through resolution. He explores the relationship of words in communicating theology,²⁸ including the supernatural as ineffable,²⁹ but ambiguity as a term never receives a clear definition. Ambiguous language used for the Trinity, particularly the relation of Father and Son,³⁰ and concepts of order and disorder in the Genesis account³¹ are treated contextually but no definition is applied. One finds that in the absence of an accepted definition, ambiguity is once again understood through examination of the contexts in which it appears. Though Burke's overall view of ambiguity is negative, he is, like Empson, more flexible than predecessors such as Ogden and Richards or King and Ketley, contemporaries of Lewis whose logical positivism demanded absolute opposition to ambiguity. Similar to Burke, philosopher of language Paul Grice advocated the avoidance of ambiguity³² yet stood against the prevailing notion of the time that within ordinary language ambiguity is 'unfit for conceptual analysis'.³³ For Grice, it was precisely the broader scope provided by conceptual analysis that enabled identification, and to the degree possible, resolution of ambiguity. With Empson and Burke he examined ambiguity based upon its identifiable operation within a given context and did not work from a predetermined definition. He saw within the 'conversational game'³⁴ intentional ambiguities, with or without obvious interpretive differences, and unintentional ambiguities within a generalized conversational implicature. These operate within Grice's *Cooperative Principle*, an effort between speaker and hearer where 'each participant recognizes, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction.'³⁵ This aspect of the *Cooperative Principle*—that there is an implied agreement to undertake a shared journey toward greater understanding of a given subject matter—foreshadowed later discoveries that ambiguity can be an effective rhetorical device.

The view that emerges from Empson, Burke, Grice, Ossa-Richardson and others is one where ambiguity is a communicative reality that resists definition, being best

²⁸ Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 32-33.

³¹ *Ibid.* 180-182.

³² Grice, Paul. *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 27.

³³ *Ibid.* 176-177.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 35-40.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 26. The concept is used throughout the work.

understood through the examination of contexts where it appears. The elusiveness of a universally acceptable definition of ambiguity is reflected even in a standard reference volume where it is defined merely as: ‘having more than one meaning’.³⁶ Philosopher Kent Bach, who begins with the same definition, tries to restrict ambiguity to purely linguistic expressions but ultimately allows that his categories cannot be exhaustive due to the natural flexibility of communication: ‘people are said to be ambiguous on occasion in how they use language’.³⁷ Attempts to restrict ambiguity or apply a technical definition that is objectively identifiable in the same way as other rhetorical devices inevitably devolves into disagreements about an array of grammatical, lexical, and syntactic analyses that belies the frustrating *ambiguity* of ambiguity. The degree of examination levied may be raised to ever increasing heights of sophistication. Philosophical and linguistic precision may be ratcheted up to such extremes so as to render *anything* ambiguous. What one critic finds too exacting another critic may consider inadequately nuanced. This is a difficulty Lewis himself recognized within strains of literary criticism: ‘a text is “but a cheverel glove” to a determined critic, — since everything can be a symbol, or an irony, or an ambiguity — we shall easily find what we want.’³⁸ It is this very tendency that led Ossa-Richardson, at the end of his tour-de-force on ambiguity, to declare it futile to even pursue a definition:

‘I am not sure a definition is in fact possible: all definitions only raise further questions. “A word or phrase can be interpreted in more than one way.” What, then, does “can” mean? I *can* interpret any sentence to mean anything I want.’³⁹

Ambiguity cannot be defined in a uniformly acceptable way and the breadth of attempts to finally pin it down have failed: ‘[The history of ambiguity] is the history of a mind that has found too many past answers and will not choose between them.’⁴⁰ Despite the risk of being subjective or arbitrary, Empson’s assertion that ‘I would use the term “ambiguity” to mean anything I liked’ shows more wisdom than the myriad of attempts within philosophy and linguistics to rigidly define it. The wisest approach is *a posteriori*: examining ambiguity’s argumentative benefit through consideration of the context where it is used.

³⁶ Blackburn, Simon. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 16.

³⁷ Bach, Kent. ‘Ambiguity’, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis, 1998) doi:10.4324/9780415249126-U001-1.

³⁸ EIC 85. Also, the ‘Stylemonger’ whose obsessive narrow literary focus makes him ‘antiliterary’, one who will ‘criticise the lens after looking *at* it instead of *through* it’; Ibid. 35-36.

³⁹ Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 402.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 403.

The key shift toward embracing ambiguity as having a positive argumentative role began within philosophy and was advanced by scholars in communication theory and physics. The renaissance of rhetoric that began to emerge in the late 1960's and bloomed in the 1980's included a liberation of ambiguity not only as an acceptable dynamic of rhetoric, but as a rhetorical device on its own. Philosophers Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's 1969 volume, *The New Rhetoric*, recognized the value of ambiguity to attain a sense of unity between parties with ideological differences, including differences that may not be fully articulated: 'ambiguous notions do make possible the crystallization of a global effort of goodwill'.⁴¹ Ambiguity was a key element in providing the interpretive space needed for otherwise non-aligned parties to find common ground: 'This agreement was possible only by the use of ambiguous notions understood and interpreted by each in accordance with his own values.'⁴² They found that engagement of ambiguity is necessary for 'any theory of meaning'.⁴³ Their findings were a harbinger, indicating divergent positions could better maintain engagement with a primary subject matter precisely because ambiguity helped traverse areas of secondary disagreement. Furthermore, each side was better able to maintain something of their distinctives in the process. This realization, however, was not wholesale. Other philosophers at that time, such as Burke and Grice, did not allow the same measure of potential for positive usage. Nonetheless, realizations of the potential benefits of ambiguity only continued. The 1978 volume, *On Metaphor*, the record of the symposium 'Metaphor: The Conceptual Leap', was in large part a celebration of the changing perspectives on rhetoric and recognized ambiguity in relation to metaphor. Meditation upon metaphors can lead to new ideas arrived at through the ambiguities that occur once the strict literal referents are no longer the *telos*.⁴⁴ Yet, a sense of the old reticence toward ambiguity can still be found. One is reminded that metaphor is not simply another kind of ambiguity⁴⁵ and furthermore cautioned that

⁴¹ Perelman, Chaïm, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 134.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ 'Discussion in *Philosophy of Science* of an article by M. Black led A. Benjamin to the conclusion that vague ideas are an integral part of science and that any theory of meaning which denies their existence is not a theory of science.': Ibid 130.

⁴⁴ Harries, Kartsen. 'Metaphor and Transcendence' in Sacks, Sheldon, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 77-79.

⁴⁵ Donaldson, David. 'What Metaphors Mean' in Sacks, Sheldon, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 32-33.

metaphor may devolve into ambiguity alone when the literal referent is lost.⁴⁶ Despite such cautions, acceptance of ambiguity was increasing and advancements in establishing its positive argumentative value continued.

Eric Eisenberg's 1984 research into organizational communication found that ambiguity could be employed strategically, aligning disparate groups with great success:

...disagreement and idiosyncrasy are not necessarily minimized, but managed. Particularly in turbulent environments, ambiguous communication is not a kind of fudging, but rather a rational method used by communicators to orient toward multiple goals.⁴⁷

Ambiguity was beneficial in bringing together conflicting positions: 'allowing divergent objectives to coexist and ideologically diverse groups to, if not work together, then at least work in parallel'.⁴⁸ The differences in view were not insignificant, including 'ideologies that were more or less incommensurable'.⁴⁹ He found that the omission of contextual clues to allow for multiple interpretations was preferable.⁵⁰ This was not viewed as deceptive or negative, though potential ethical dangers certainly exist.⁵¹ Rather, it is a means to traverse differences in ideology and culture in order to arrive at a shared understanding. Epistemologically, he works from a relativist position on communication wherein context is the primary arbiter of meaning and thus ambiguity is not a special problem. Eisenberg shared Burke's perspective on using the 'resources of ambiguity'⁵² to attain greater clarity through

⁴⁶ Goodman, Nelson. 'Afterthoughts' in *On Metaphor*, 176-177.

⁴⁷ Eisenberg, Eric M. 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication.', *Communication Monographs*, 51:3, (1984) 240.

⁴⁸ Leitch, S & S. Davenport. 'Strategic ambiguity as a discourse practice: the role of keywords in the discourse on sustainable biotechnology', *Discourse Studies*, 9:1 (2007) 48.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 44.

⁵⁰ Eisenberg, Eric M. 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication.', *Communication Monographs*, 51:3, (1984) 232.

⁵¹ Outcomes of ambiguity, even attempted strategic ambiguity, are uncertain. In this way ambiguity presents an unpredictable communicative quality like that of argument itself (See 'The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club', *Socratic Digest*, vol. I (1942-1943) 8-10; reprinted GID 126-128: 128. A picture of this is seen in Weston's rationale of Ransom's abduction. In the scientist's understanding, they were on the cusp of something potentially 'never been done in the history of man, perhaps never in the history of the universe.' For the scientist, that ambiguous potentiality brought to mind grand outcomes: 'infinity, and therefore perhaps eternity, is being put into the hands of the human race.' But Ransom recognized that the ambiguity may just as well yield disastrous results, 'I suppose all that stuff about infinity and eternity means that you think you are justified in doing anything—absolutely anything—here.' OSP 27.

⁵² Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) xix; Eisenberg, Eric M. 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication.', *Communication Monographs*, 51:3, (1984) 288.

context. The outcomes were significant enough for Eisenberg to declare that clarity is both ‘non-normative and not a sensible standard’ to measure the effectiveness of a given attempt at communication.⁵³ Similar results were shown by Putnam and Jones, demonstrating ambiguity used effectively in bartering contexts: ‘tentative, indirect language led to reciprocal concessions, whereas more firm commitments led to conflict escalation.’⁵⁴ In 2007, Leitch and Davenport tested a governmental discourse practice using combined elements from Empson and Eisenberg.⁵⁵ They found that ambiguity was not ‘simply a problem to be clarified or tolerated’, but rather ‘played a vital role’ in achieving coherence across texts with an inclusive voice.⁵⁶ Ambiguity as a strategic element of communication was essential to a paradigm shift away from precision-based models driven by clarity.

Around the same period, ambiguity’s beneficial role for meaning gained treatment in physics and engineering. In *The Dynamics of Ambiguity*, physicist Giuseppe Caglioti presented parallels in the processes of perception in science and art via the role of ambiguity in both. He sought a ‘unifying factor’ that could help explain inherent emotional and rational elements in the process of perception.⁵⁷ He finds this dynamic of ambiguity as far back as Heraclitus’s proclamation that ‘everything flows’ (*πάντα ρεῖ*): ‘everything flows, in fact, but the fact the everything flows does not change.’⁵⁸ As he works through structural and artistic examples, ambiguity emerges as a central and shared element:

But at the point where science and art converge, where truth meets beauty and beauty meets truth, the language becomes analytic and synthetic, precise and vague, rational and instinctive, esoteric and exoteric at the same time. In a word, it becomes ambiguous.⁵⁹

It is so prevalent in the process of perception that it becomes nearly essential: ‘ambiguity is elevated to the role of a permanent cultural value.’⁶⁰ Similar high praise for ambiguity is found in Bart Kosko’s revolutionary work, *Fuzzy Thinking*.⁶¹ In that

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 240.

⁵⁵ Leitch, S & S. Davenport. ‘Strategic ambiguity as a discourse practice: the role of keywords in the discourse on sustainable biotechnology’, *Discourse Studies*, 9:1 (2007).

⁵⁶ Ibid. 59.

⁵⁷ *Dynamics of Ambiguity* 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 137.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 136-137.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 137.

⁶¹ Kosko, Bart. *Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic* (New York: Hyperion, 1993).

volume he introduced the world to the use of fuzzy logic which ‘sanctions contradictions, endorses ambiguity, and demands that we get comfortable with our uncertainties.’⁶² Ambiguity replaces the language of probability and moves past boundaries tied to that form of black and white thinking: ‘The fuzzy view sees an ambiguity or vagueness between a thing and nonthing’.⁶³ In fuzzy thinking, the aims of clarity and precision are replaced with relative factors of degree for what can be known. In this way, processes that would have been halted for failing to be one hundred percent *a thing* are able to continue based on fuzzy aggregates. Thus, all information can aid progress. The restrictive black or white, binary 1 or 0, is not necessary to take the next step. A range of possibilities may be held in tension with one another and move forward based upon their relations. Though Kosko’s application is concerned with machine learning and AI, it parallels the findings of Eisenberg, Putnam and Jones, and Perelman. These are innovative approaches to perception, machine learning and AI that all have ambiguity at their core. But these, like the findings of communication theorists and the openness of the rhetoricians, have not gained equal footing in apologetics or theology.

Significant figures such as Plantinga, Craig, Moreland, and Groothius oppose ambiguity, naturally so, as it falls afoul of the analytic philosophical methodology their approach is based upon. Craig considers the alternative approach ‘much too woolly and wild to be of significant help in the formulation and defense of coherent Christian doctrine, and the theologian’s reliance upon it has been to the detriment of their theology’.⁶⁴ In *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, co-authored with Moreland,⁶⁵ ambiguity is either a negative outcome or by-product of insufficiently critical philosophical methodology. It is similarly so in Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief*, where terms and phrases like ‘religious experience’ and ‘our natural condition’ should be abandoned because of the ambiguity attending them.⁶⁶ In *Christian Apologetics*, Groothius commends the Apostle Paul for lacking apologetic

⁶² Ibid. Cover text.

⁶³ Ibid. 46.

⁶⁴ Craig, William Lane. ‘On Philosophical Systematic Theology’ April 22, 2021. Lecture at Talbot School of Theology, <https://youtu.be/GJn8wpD3IWs>, 4:12: His description was in reference to what he views as the detrimental effects of continental philosophy in philosophical systematic theology. His assertion being the superiority of analytic philosophy for its logical precision.

⁶⁵ Moreland, J.P. and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008).

⁶⁶ Plantinga. *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205; Cf. His comment on category ambiguity related to sin. He finds the case not only in Pascal and Augustine, but in St Paul; 233-236.

ambiguity,⁶⁷ condemns Nietzsche's attack on God for acting ambiguously,⁶⁸ yet acknowledges that, for the original audience at least, many of Christ's self-descriptions were ambiguous. Along with Craig, Moreland, and Plantinga, Groothius provides forceful arguments that are presented through precise articulation of objective truths and ambiguity receives only ancillary mention. The precision-based approach is, of course, not universal within apologetics. Whereas Moreland and Craig find ontological and epistemological ambiguities in postmodernism,⁶⁹ Penner's postmodern *The End of Apologetics* considers the entire enterprise of modern apologetics foundationally flawed because it is built on the conviction that Enlightenment rationality is absolute. He thus challenges the epistemological basis for Craig, Groothius, Moreland, and Plantinga. Modern apologetics is itself a fatally flawed endeavor that must be jettisoned in favor of a new *via media* that travels somewhere between Aristotle and Nietzsche.⁷⁰ Ambiguity again is not specifically addressed, but Penner's approach does afford ambiguity a role in communicating the Christian faith that would be unacceptable to others. It may be used to create a 'negative space' that allows the audience greater freedom to think beyond the 'social and rational expectations' that accompany arguments put forward as propositionally objective.⁷¹ Truth itself is wrapped in theoretical ambiguity that can only be traversed through faith lived out.⁷² This opens a role for ambiguity that is inherent to his opaque method which is largely shaped by what he opposes. But it is not necessary to swing the pendulum that far to find openness to approaches that are more welcoming to ambiguity. Ordway's *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination* has one of the clearest embraces of ambiguity: 'In the right context, multiple *correct* meanings can operate simultaneously...The greatest authors are able to use these multiple meanings to resonate with each other.'⁷³ Similarly, Davison's edited volume, *Imaginative Apologetics*, advocates all reason as inherently imaginative and whether the apologetic be narrative, argument, or confession the apologist is not making one of many

⁶⁷ Groothius, Douglas. *Christian Apologetics*, second ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2022) 197.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 437.

⁶⁹ Moreland, J.P. and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008) 133-134.

⁷⁰ Penner, Myron Bradley. *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013) 28; 190.

⁷¹ Ibid. 107-108.

⁷² Ibid. 130-138.

⁷³ Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017) 37.

arguments from within a broader system of reason but is rather proposing a new way of understanding everything.⁷⁴ ‘Non-ultimate premises’ can undergird more open discussions of how Christianity makes sense of the world we experience.⁷⁵ This span of apologetic approach, from analytic to imaginative, can be seen in one event. On the fiftieth anniversary of C.S. Lewis’s death, he was honored by being memorialized at Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey. The panel discussion of that event included, among others, theologian and apologist Judith Wolfe and philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig. Craig celebrated Lewis’s support of reason and clarity, even crediting Lewis as an inspiration for his own approach to apologetics. Wolfe’s observation however, better encompassed Lewis’s entire approach:

‘And I think this approach to apologetics, of not starting from pre-packaged abstract, nicely-arranged rational arguments but rather from attentiveness to the full-range of what makes us human and seeing what view of the world can accommodate that, is something that we should emulate as apologists and, indeed, as Christians more generally.’⁷⁶

Where Craig, understandably, extols the clarity and precision of Lewis’s use of reason, Wolfe’s assessment recognized that in Lewis we have an apologetic methodology that does not fit neatly into a strict precision-based approach and furthermore offers a broader conceptual engagement of the entire human experience. This aligns with what Ordway, Davison, and to some degree Gabelman and Penner argue: inviting the imagination to consider additional possibilities and alternatives, and that approach is the most fertile soil in which useful ambiguity may grow.

The cross-disciplinary findings present significant implications for apologetics and the examination of Lewis’s arguments. Though not uniformly interchangeable, there are homologous elements between apologetics and the worlds of organizational communication and even bartering cultures. Christian apologetics in action is giving a reasoned explanation for the truths of that faith. In so doing, there is a kind of negotiation taking place, a give-and-take of ideas. This is not to suggest that the Christian apologist views their beliefs on the same level as a businessperson trying to close a sale or someone bartering crops. But what is similar are the elements of

⁷⁴ Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) xxv. Cf. Milbank’s use of Browning, xix.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Hughes, John. ‘Proofs and Arguments’ 9.

⁷⁶ Wolfe, Judith. ‘Panel Discussion’ in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 31.

working for shared understanding and the need to traverse disparate and conflicting beliefs between diverse groups. Good strategic ambiguity helps both parties travel past barriers created by less flexible convictions on non-essential elements, aspects of an argument where pressing into greater detail would trigger a response of resistance or even rejection. Thus, ambiguity has to a large degree been liberated as part of the larger re-evaluation of rhetorical language.⁷⁷ The majority view of the twentieth century, which sought mechanical precision in language, still acknowledged ambiguity to be present as an element of a rhetorical device,⁷⁸ albeit having been viewed negatively. Later research has now demonstrated the positive use of ambiguity.

Yet, ambiguity generally, and apologetic ambiguity specifically, remains absent from the treatments of Lewis's works and person. Ward observes that among theologians it is those with a penchant for imaginative literature, such as Fiddes and Ware, who have been most invested in Lewis's work.⁷⁹ Vidler's observation that, 'As a Christian apologist, Lewis was primarily an imaginative writer'⁸⁰ is illustrative of why the overwhelming share of Lewis studies focus upon his literary and creative elements, even those that deal with his apologetics.⁸¹ Walsh addresses more of Lewis's influences and person, and Cunningham's survey of Lewis's apologetic context and

⁷⁷ This shift is part of a much larger renaissance of rhetoric. Cf. Cohen, Ted. 'Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy' in Sacks, Sheldon, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 1-7.

⁷⁸ The majority of rhetorical devices are objectively identifiable through analysis of the grammatical and literary elements that comprise them, but the ambiguous elements within them are more subjective. The same may be said of lexical or structural ambiguity. Ambiguity introduced through simple polysemic words turns out to be more difficult they seem. The word 'cold' situated in the sentence 'That woman is cold' introduces objectively identifiable ambiguity; the word has more than one meaning. The woman may be cold in the sense of being uncomfortable because of the temperature, or she may be cold in the sense of having an unfriendly disposition. But even simple lexical ambiguity of this kind quickly becomes unwieldy. If 'cold' refers to her personality and not the temperature, that narrows the ambiguity but does not resolve it. There immediately enters into the discussion the challenge of discerning from among the many varied senses in which she may be 'cold'; unfriendly, standoffish, caustic, cruel, and so on. Thus, even lexical ambiguity, while objectively identifiable, is not always able to be brought to a fully restricted, univocal meaning. Cf. '...it is a characteristic not just of literature but of language itself that the words do not have precise semantic boundaries.', Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and then Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017) 37.

⁷⁹ Ward, Michael. 'The Son and Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis' PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 3.

⁸⁰ Alec Vidler in Kilby, Clyde S. *The Christian World of C.S. & Lewis* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1965) 4, quoted in 'The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD Thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 4.

⁸¹ See Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997); Cf. Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best.' In Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic) 59-78.

practice likewise draws from his literary and creative foundations, but leaves ambiguity unaddressed.⁸² Root's monograph on Lewis's apologetic for evil includes significant treatment of Lewis's literary criticism and rhetoric without consideration of Lewis's apologetic ambiguity.⁸³ Schakel and Huttar along with Myers, Edwards, and Beebe all analyze his influences and storytelling but ambiguity is not addressed.⁸⁴ Similarly so with Holmer's early monograph, which remains one of the better treatments of Lewis, offering a brief yet robust exploration of the ethos of Lewis's literature, relationship to classical thought, and theology.⁸⁵ While these are each excellent in their specific areas, they do not recognize the presence and operative value of ambiguity in Lewis's works generally, or his apologetic arguments specifically. McGrath, Guite, Schakel, and Logan work on Lewis's distinctives of imagination and reason, which is at the center of Lewis's thought and writing and rich with ambiguity, but do not touch upon it.⁸⁶ Other important distinctives in Lewis such as his views on Myth and fact, perspectives of enjoyment and contemplation, and his idiosyncratic *Joy*, each have immense ambiguities that are unaddressed.⁸⁷ This thesis, then, opens a new stream of exploration: the presence and operation of ambiguity within Lewis's apologetic.

iii) Ambiguity in Lewis's Context

Lewis lived through periods of significant change in both rhetoric and language: the rise and fall of logical positivism, modernity's pluralistic embrace, and the dawn of

⁸² Walsh, Chad. *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1949); Cunningham, Richard B. and William Griffin. *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

⁸³ Root, Jerry. *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

⁸⁴ See Schakel, Peter J. & Charles A. Huttar. *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991); Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994); Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis's Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986); Beebe, Steven A. *C.S. Lewis and the Craft of Communication*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2020).

⁸⁵ Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); More recently, Bryson has explored Lewis's relationship to the classic Platonic tradition. Bryson, James. 'It's all in Plato': Platonism, Cambridge Platonism, and C.S. Lewis' in *Journal of Inklings Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 2021) 1-34.

⁸⁶ See Schakel, Peter J. *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); Logan, Stephen. 'C.S. Lewis and the Limits of Reason' in White, Roger, Judith Wolfe and Brendan N. Wolfe, eds. *C.S. Lewis and His Circle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 24-52; McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 139-143.

⁸⁷ Cf. Medcalf, Stephen. 'The Coincidence of Myth and Fact.' in Wadsworth, Michael ed. *Ways of Reading the Bible*, (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981) 55-78; MacDonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie. *The Riddle of Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

postmodernism. Having surveyed the broader landscape of ambiguity we now look at the understanding of ambiguity according to literary critics that were Lewis's early contemporaries: C.K. Ogden, I.A Richards, Alec King and Martin Ketley, and William Empson. This will show that Lewis's use of ambiguity was particular for his time, prefiguring the later formal discoveries of strategic ambiguity. In 1923 Ogden and Richards published *The Meaning of Meaning*.⁸⁸ It was in large part an attempt to rigidly restrict language, including diminishing what the authors viewed as the negative effects of ambiguous language. Owen Barfield, whose own approach to meaning greatly influenced Lewis and comes through in Lewis's writing, opposed Ogden & Richards's view.⁸⁹ The ideas put forth in *The Meaning of Meaning* later became the basis for King and Ketley's *The Control of Language*,⁹⁰ the infamous 'green book'⁹¹ which Lewis used to launch his argument in *The Abolition of Man*.⁹²

Ogden & Richards did not attempt a definition of ambiguity, rather addressing it in examples of dual meaning,⁹³ sign and symbol,⁹⁴ and reference and referent.⁹⁵ In that work, ambiguity is always viewed negatively, to the extent that the character of the one who employs it is called into question with accusations of intentional misleading.⁹⁶ Lively pejoratives such as 'Utraquistic subterfuge' are used to describe this nefarious linguistic behavior. The originator is further accused of unintentional self-deception due to not sufficiently vetting their language.⁹⁷ It is argued that symbolic language

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Barfield's *Poetic Diction* presents an expansion and synthesis of meaning in contrast to the exclusionary approach attempted by Ogden & Richards. Lewis noted that Barfield challenged Ogden and Richards on the grounds that they were, in fact, being as metaphorical as those whom they opposed: 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare' in SLE 251; Cf. Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) 4, 8. And 'Whereas Barfield seeks the enlargement of language, Ogden and Richards seek to control it and narrow its scope': Ibid. 302; Michael Ward notes that Richards may be acknowledged as Lewis's primary opponent. Ogden, and Ayer who was a colleague of Lewis at Oxford, do not receive equal mention in the work. Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis's The Abolition of Man* (Parkridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 7-8; In 1939, the same year *The Control of Language* was published, Lewis's essay 'Bluspels and Flalansferes' (SLE 251-65) was published, in which he follows Barfield's argument against the view presented in Ogden and Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*.

⁹⁰ King, Alec & Martin Ketley. *The Control of Language* (London: Green and Co., 1939) xviii.

⁹¹ CSL references 'the green book' in the opening chapter and throughout the work. AOM 1.

⁹² The work was used by Lewis as foil for his opposition to the subjectivist argument. Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis's Abolition of Man* (Park Ridge, Illinois: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 12.

⁹³ Ogden, C.K. and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 91.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 84.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 185.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 134.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 195.

should have mechanical accuracy⁹⁸ because ‘freely-used’ terms too easily engender confusion through non-singular meanings.⁹⁹ For Ogden & Richards, ambiguity was a careless emotional play, one that ought to be replaced with ‘alternative symbology’.¹⁰⁰ Their rigorous segregation of language later carries through in *The Control of Language*, where King and Ketley categorize ambiguity as being essential to poetic expression but antithetical to prose. As such, the authors lament that the impossibility of fully bifurcating poetry from prose effectively guarantees the ongoing presence of ambiguity, which they viewed as an obstacle to understanding.¹⁰¹

This antipathy toward imprecise language, and thereby opposition to the perceived workings of ambiguity, blossomed in the British empiricism of the early to mid 1900’s.¹⁰² But there are roots that may be traced to the late 17th century works of Hobbes and Locke.¹⁰³ In *Leviathan*, Hobbes delineates a misguidedness and self-deception that comes from ‘abuses’ of language that allow for imprecise meanings.¹⁰⁴ In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke states that when dealing with truth, the only acceptable use for rhetoric of any kind is that which is strictly for ‘order and clearness’ and all other attempts are ‘perfect cheats’ that only ‘mislead the judgment’.¹⁰⁵ For Locke, linguistic devices that allow ambiguity have no potential proper use other than amusement: playing games with language. When it comes to communicating truth, ‘if we would speak of things as they are’, then precision is the highest aim and ambiguities are to be avoided.¹⁰⁶ These sentiments are present in Ogden and Richards, whose logical positivism declared *meaning* to be the ‘arch-

⁹⁸ Ibid. 102.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 247.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 151.

¹⁰¹ King, Alec & Martin Ketley. *The Control of Language* (London: Green and Co., 1939) 266-267.

¹⁰² This antipathy was not restricted to British thought. The French theologian and orator Bernard Lamy stated in 1675, ‘A discourse...is great when it is extraordinarily clear, without a single equivocal word or doubtful sense or ambiguous expression; when it is so well-turned that the reader’s mind is led straight to the end by the shortest route, without any encumbrance of superfluous words.’, Lamy, Bernard. ‘De l’art de parler’, quoted in Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 27.

¹⁰³ Cf. Sacks, Sheldon, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 1-3; Locke argued for a paradigm of clarity in communication where reason operates against wit, similitude, allusion, or metaphor and thus the latter impede understanding (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XI, 156); Smith, Lyle H. Jr. ‘C.S. Lewis and the Making of Metaphor.’ *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis*. Schakel, Peter J. and Charles A. Huttar, eds. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991) 12.

¹⁰⁴ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) Book I, Chapter IV, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Locke, John. *An Essay in Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) Book III, Chapter X, 490-491.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 490.

ambiguity'.¹⁰⁷ Yet, for all the severity of these views, even Ogden & Richards recognized that there is no ultimate bulwark against ambiguity. The best that can be done to mitigate it is to restrict the context of its use.¹⁰⁸ Whether speech is scientific or artistic, symbolic or evocative, ambiguity always threatens to appear.¹⁰⁹ What becomes clear in this landscape is that to some undefined degree ambiguity is unavoidable and it has an effect upon meaning. In the middle of the same period, Sir William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was published, a work considered foundational to the rise of New Criticism.¹¹⁰ Yet unlike I.A. Richards, who had been his supervisor,¹¹¹ Empson acknowledged that ambiguity is not necessarily indicative of uncritical thought,¹¹² and that it may be useful for a broad grasp of meaning.¹¹³ Even I.A. Richards ultimately recognized the significance of Empson's appreciation of ambiguity, a view that prefigured the renaissance of rhetoric by decades:

Where the old Rhetoric treated ambiguity as a fault in language, and hoped to confine or eliminate it, the new Rhetoric sees it as an inevitable consequence of the powers of language and as the indispensable means of most of our most important utterances—especially in Poetry and Religion.¹¹⁴

Thus, in Lewis's day, when the rise of logical positivism and the pressures of the New Criticism sought to expel metaphorical language and restrict rhetoric, there was still some recognition that ambiguity is frequently operative and does have a role in meaning. The predominantly negative view of ambiguity in Lewis's context,¹¹⁵ where precision and clarity are held up as the highest values in communication, was supplanted by later research across disciplines demonstrating that ambiguity has a

¹⁰⁷ Ogden, C.K. and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, seventh edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945) 104.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 145.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 238.

¹¹⁰ An immediate success in England when first published in 1930, the 1931 publication in America had abysmal results, selling only eight copies that year. Childs, Donald J. 'An Old Anxiety about Influence' in *The Birth of New Criticism: Conflict and Conciliation in the Early Work of William Empson, I.A. Richards, Robert Graves, and Laura Riding* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013) 34-55.

¹¹¹ I.A. Richards was Empson's teacher and credited with great influence upon Empson's work. Cf. Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, viii. Ogden and Richards first published *The Meaning of Meaning* in 1923. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was first published in 1930.

¹¹² Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) xi.

¹¹³ Ibid. xi.

¹¹⁴ The comment was made in 1936. Richards, I.A. 'The Philosophy of Rhetoric', quoted in Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 5.

¹¹⁵ Leitch, S & S. Davenport. 'Strategic ambiguity as a discourse practice: the role of keywords in the discourse on sustainable biotechnology', *Discourse Studies*, 9:1 (2007) 43-61.

varying degree of positive use.¹¹⁶ What this shows about Lewis is his apologetic ambiguity was particular for his time. This brings us to C.S. Lewis himself. We will now consider what Lewis had to say regarding ambiguity and clarity, and consider those who have commented on his practice in relation to both.

iv) Clarity Versus Ambiguity

It would be anachronistic to attempt to show Lewis dealing with ambiguity according to its twenty-first century understanding. He lived through the zenith and demise of logical positivism and at the end of his life the formal advancement of strategic ambiguity was still in its infancy. However, that does not mean that nothing was said on the matter. Lewis's use of ambiguity and clarity received attention from critics and admirers. A key instance is his response to Dr Norman W. Pittenger, a process theologian who took exceptional offense at Lewis both as an apologist and theologian.¹¹⁷ Pittenger attacked Lewis in his 1956 book *Rethinking the Christian Message*,¹¹⁸ but it was his 1958 article 'Apologist versus Apologist' in the October issue of *The Christian Century* that prompted Lewis to respond in the same publication the following month.¹¹⁹ Pittenger challenged Lewis on a range of issues, but his primary targets were Lewis's ecclesiology in *Broadcast Talks* (errors in ecclesiological terminology; 'literal', 'physical' in reference to the metaphor of Christ's body) and most seriously regarding Lewis's Christology in *Miracles*. He accused Lewis, all at once, of Docetism, Gnosticism, Apollinarianism, and Eutychianism. Though Pittenger claimed to have read Lewis widely, he gave no explanation of where he found these heterodoxies in Lewis's arguments. Other accusations included a fideism to church doctrine, failing to deal with distinctions in biblical Greek terms, ignorance or avoidance of the current scholarship of that day on the gospels (that Lewis still

¹¹⁶ Cf. Eisenberg, Eric M. 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication.', *Communication Monographs*, 51:3, (1984) 227-242; Leitch, S & S. Davenport. 'Strategic ambiguity as a discourse practice: the role of keywords in the discourse on sustainable biotechnology', *Discourse Studies*, 9:1 (2007) 43-61.; Linda L. Putnam, Tricia S. Jones, 'The Role of Communication in Bargaining', *Human Communication Research*, 8:3 (March 1982) 262-280.

¹¹⁷ At Pittenger's memorial, Richard A. Norris Jr. noted that the 'shooting off of epigrammatic one-liners at his theological foes' was Pittenger's style, and that 'most of whom seem to have been named C.S. Lewis'. Quoted in Brazier, P.H. 'The Pittenger-Lewis Debate: Fundamentals of an Ontological Christology' in *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Edinburgh University Press: Winter 2009) 15.

¹¹⁸ Pittenger, Norman W. *Rethinking the Christian Message* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, 1956). He considered Lewis's methods indiscriminate, 'disingenuous' (70) and 'confusing essentials with non-essentials' (131).

¹¹⁹ 'Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger', *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 177-183.

accepted Jesus's words in John as original and saw Jesus advocating a divine or messianic self-conception in the synoptics), and of hermeneutics in general (specifically not sharing Pittenger's process theology). Lewis conceded Pittenger's challenge of the use of 'literal' in reference to the church as Christ's body, an error that was corrected in subsequent printings of *Mere Christianity*.¹²⁰ Beyond that he gave slight room for the accusation of Apollinarianism in *The Problem of Pain* but qualified it against his own further explanations in the French edition as well as in *Mere Christianity*. It was Lewis, however, who elevated the issue of ambiguity in their dispute.

Lewis interestingly pointed out that Pittenger's formulation that Christ 'may be called "God-Man"'¹²¹ is ambiguous and if suggestive of anything beyond the ontology of Christ, it must be rejected. Furthermore, Pittenger had wrongly restated Lewis's definition of miracle as being a "violation" of the laws of nature'¹²² rather than the original, 'an interference with Nature by a Supernatural power'.¹²³ This error set Pittenger's arguments on the wrong trajectory from the outset. Lewis exposed Pittenger for failing to take his own advice to deal carefully and accurately with terms. He had also seemingly failed to consider Lewis's stated purpose in defining a miracle as he did. Lewis had footnoted his definition, making it explicit that he was approaching the issue differently from professional theologians and his language was intentionally chosen for common person:

This definition is not that which would be given by many theologians. I am adopting it not because I think it an improvement upon theirs but precisely because, being crude and 'popular', it enables me most easily to treat those questions which the 'common reader' probably has in mind when he takes up a book on Miracles.¹²⁴

The same misunderstanding of Lewis's approach belies Pittenger's error regarding Lewis's lack of clarity on original language distinctions in New Testament renderings

¹²⁰ 'Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger', *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 177.

¹²¹ Pittenger, Norman W. 'Apologist versus Apologist: A critique of C.S. Lewis as "defender of the faith"' in *The Christian Century*, October 1, 1958; reprinted *Mythlore*, 27 (Vol. 3, No. 3., January 1972) 5.

¹²² *Ibid.* 4.

¹²³ M 10.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

of ‘miracle’ (*semeia, terata, dunamis*). For Lewis, it was a ridiculous criticism because his aim was not theological precision but reasonableness:

But why should I? I was writing for people who wanted to know whether the things could have happened rather than what they should be called; whether we could without absurdity believe that Christ rose from the emptied tomb.¹²⁵

He takes Pittenger to task on his own terms. If it is clarity Pittenger wants, then why, Lewis argues, has he left his own view of the fourth gospel so ambiguous? Lewis draws out just a few of the possible meanings of Pittenger’s argument that John ‘does not here reproduce the actual words of Jesus but rather the interpretation of his significance which the early Christians found to be true (and rightly found, we believe)’.¹²⁶ Is it that the early Christians were mistaken about the content, or were right about the significance then but would not be so now, or that the significance was correct but the interpretation of it was not? In other words, it was Lewis who chose to be colloquial and conceptual and Pittenger who chose precision and clarity, but it was Pittenger who fell on his own sword in that regard. Lewis aimed at being a *translator*, ‘turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand.’¹²⁷ Thus, one can expect from Lewis language that will be, when compared with the language of theology, untechnical or unscientific. Pittenger, however, did not share Lewis’s approach yet nonetheless was errantly ambiguous about a central point such as how to understand the fourth gospel. In Lewis’s words, ‘a style more guarded, more *nuancé*, finelier shaded, more rich in fruitful ambiguities—in fact, a style more like Dr Pittenger’s own—would have been worse than useless.’¹²⁸ At first glance this may seem a clear rejection of ambiguity by Lewis. However, he was not making a wholesale statement about ambiguity in his rebuke, but rather addressing the particular lack of clarity Pittenger’s style produced around a central issue. Lewis points out that if he had argued that way in *Miracles* the result would have been counter to his aim: ‘It would only have failed to enlighten the common reader’s understanding.’¹²⁹ At least in part, Lewis wanted to avoid giving his reader a sense of duplicity, of sitting on the

¹²⁵ ‘Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger’, *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 179.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 184.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

fence. Thus, the ambiguity that Lewis rejects here is that which fails to bring his primary aim into focus. But strategic ambiguity does exactly the opposite. It works to obscure secondary issues, helping keep the primary issue in the fore. Lewis's comment on ambiguity here was a rebuff of Pittenger's language specifically as a kind of bad ambiguity because it compromised the clarity of a central element.

A further distinction with ambiguity can be drawn from 'The Language of Religion', written after the fall of 1954.¹³⁰ Lewis distinguishes between two directions toward which ordinary language for religion may develop: the scientific or the poetic. The scientific modification presents quantitative, testable information. But it is qualitative information that is needed to create real understanding. If one has no frame of reference, the clarity and precision of the scientific expression of ordinary language remains useless beyond its mere testability. Lewis gives the example that for one who lived their entire life in the tropics, a thermometer reading during a hard frost tells them nothing of the experience. They know the data but have no meaningful understanding. The poetic modification of ordinary language, however, gives qualitative information and real expression of what is meant even though it cannot be scientifically verified. Rather than merely describing something, Poetic language articulates its effects. This is the bridge to new understanding: 'the most remarkable of the powers of Poetic language' is how it brings one to sense something of the 'quality of experiences which we have not had, or perhaps can never have'.¹³¹ Ambiguity is implicit in this kind of language because it functions as an invitation to ponder possibilities and consider alternative understandings. That is one of the primary contexts where good ambiguity occurs. Familiar elements may be used creatively 'so that they become pointers to something outside our experience—as two or more roads on a map show us where a town that is off the map must lie.'¹³² For Lewis, this was 'a real medium of information'¹³³ even though it cannot match the precision of scientific language: 'It is verifiable or falsifiable only to a limited degree and with a certain fringe of vagueness.'¹³⁴ For this reason, the reader must be willing to give some measure of trust to the one speaking: 'Such information as Poetic language has to give

¹³⁰ First published in *Christian Reflections* (1967) and missing two pages (CR xiii), the article quotes from the 1954 October issue of *The Listener*. Lewis may have written this article shortly thereafter.

¹³¹ 'The Language of Religion', CR 133.

¹³² Ibid. 133.

¹³³ Ibid. 134.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 135.

can be received only if you are ready to meet it half-way... You must begin by trusting [the author]. Only by doing so will you find out whether he is trustworthy or not'.¹³⁵ This raises the idea of Lewis as a guide and correlates with Edwards's contractual language about the reader,¹³⁶ Grice's Cooperative Principle, and is further considered in chapter three where the importance of reader relationship is examined. But what can be inferred here is a growing distinction between good and bad ambiguity in Lewis. He valued clarity in communication, but even more so the Poetic direction for ordinary language which is where good ambiguity can occur. Apologetics requires attempting univocal language to get at what is ultimately excluded from the argument, God himself. One's primary aim is to be made as clear as possible and that requires abstract language. But Lewis finds that this results in 'omitting nearly all that really matters'.¹³⁷ He sees a critical role for *imagining*, allowing mental images of possible meanings to run through the mind. These mental images are tools that ideally lead toward understanding. The images are not to be dwelled upon too deeply or the 'real imagining' fails.¹³⁸ Beyond the obvious influence of Bevan's seminal work *Symbolism and Belief*,¹³⁹ this parallels Caglioti's 'dynamic instability'¹⁴⁰ where good ambiguity turns bad because the differences between ambiguous images that normally run contiguously in the mind driving toward understanding cause a breakdown in the process due to being too focused upon. Again, there is a bad kind of ambiguity that Lewis wanted to avoid, particularly as it related to his primary aim. But the poetic expression of religious language and the process of imagining together open new possibilities of understanding which implicitly includes a good kind of ambiguity.

In his 1945 article, 'Christian Apologetics', Lewis includes a litany of terms and their relative colloquial meanings along with his own recommendations for how they might be translated into everyday speech. He understood that religious words used by Christians, including those so common as 'church', 'spiritual', and even 'Christian' itself,¹⁴¹ are by no means technical and demonstrates a strong sense of the various

¹³⁵ Ibid. 135.

¹³⁶ Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis's Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 83.

¹³⁷ 'The Language of Religion', CR 136.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 138-139.

¹³⁹ Bevan, Edwyn. *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

¹⁴⁰ Caglioti, Guiseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992) 70.

¹⁴¹ 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 97-98.

meanings from which one may choose to create understanding. He viewed this ability to translate Christian meaning into popular understanding as ‘the test of having really understood one’s own meaning.’¹⁴² Thus, while he stringently advocated keeping to the ‘faith preached by the Apostles, attested to by the Martyrs, embodied in the Creeds, expounded by the Fathers’,¹⁴³ he did not restrict himself to their language. He chose his words, phrases, structure, and argumentation carefully from among the varied meanings developed across time and the varied ways that an idea may be understood in his day. He was keenly aware of the significance that even the slightest variation in terms may have upon broader understanding. In the 1960 *Studies in Words*, he testifies to the literary journey that produced in him the instinct, a ‘second nature’, to recognize and investigate even the smallest possible ambiguity: ‘the slightest semantic discomfort in one’s reading rouses one, like a terrier, to the game.’¹⁴⁴ Part of that journey is owed to the influence of his early instructor, William Kirkpatrick: ‘Born a little later, he would have been a Logical Positivist.’¹⁴⁵ Barfield felt that had it not been Kirkpatrick, Lewis would have picked up this influence from someone else.¹⁴⁶ That may be, but Kirkpatrick left an indelible mark upon Lewis: ‘No doubt I snorted and bridled a little at some of my tossings; but, taking it all in all, I loved the treatment. After being knocked down sufficiently often I began to know a few guards and blows, and to put on intellectual muscle. In the end, unless I flatter myself, I became a not contemptible sparring partner. It was a great day when the man who had so long been engaged in exposing my vagueness at last cautioned me against the dangers of excessive subtlety.’¹⁴⁷ Lewis became keenly aware of and adept at the spectrum of expression from ambiguity to clarity. It is a skill that comes out in his use of *distinguo*. In *Studies in Words* he guides the reader on a journey through the breadth and depth of semantic nuance which develops across time, like so many branches of a tree across many seasons. The overlaid and complex growth imbues words with a variety of possible meanings.¹⁴⁸ This presents a skilled reader with many interpretive options: ‘highly individualized shades of feeling, subtle associations, ambiguities—every

¹⁴² Ibid. 98.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 90.

¹⁴⁴ SIW 1-2.

¹⁴⁵ SBJ 130.

¹⁴⁶ Barfield, Owen. ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ in *Kodon* (Wheaton College, IL: Winter 1978) 19.

¹⁴⁷ SBJ 132.

¹⁴⁸ SIW 61. Cf. ‘wit’ (Ibid. 98-100); multiple senses of ‘conscience’ being cleverly drawn upon by MacDonald: ‘...a bad conscience—being in reality a conscience doing its duty so well that it makes the whole house uncomfortable.’ (Ibid. 199); nuances around ‘age’ and ‘kingdom’ in Matt. 12:32, Mark 1:15, Matt. 16:19 enmeshed with ‘world’ (Ibid. 234-237).

manner of semantic gymnastics—which he can attribute to his author.’ It is the less adept reader who ‘misunderstands—triumphantly, brilliantly.’¹⁴⁹ Interacting with a later work of Empson,¹⁵⁰ Lewis argues that it is context that provides the safeguards for ambiguity, keeping understanding from being lost in a myriad of possible meanings. The danger with ambiguity is thus not ontological but operational. Ambiguity is not inherently bad, but it should be adequately governed contextually.¹⁵¹ The careful sense of ambiguity that Lewis displays in *Studies in Words* is seen elsewhere, such as in the preface to the revised edition of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* where he explicates the excessive senses for ‘romantic’,¹⁵² or in his 1942 lecture, ‘Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?’ where he draws out the varied distinctions of Hamlet’s ‘ghost’.¹⁵³ His *Preface to Paradise Lost* is particularly interesting where he identifies the ambiguity of certain English lines emanating from Milton’s Latin. Lewis’s verdict is that it is good ambiguity, helping Milton’s intended sense by allowing a useful engagement of the imagination through consideration of possible meanings.¹⁵⁴ He notes: ‘This melting down of the ordinary units of speech, this plunge back into something more like the indivisible, flowing quality of immediate experience, Milton also achieves.’¹⁵⁵ The ambiguity not only benefits Milton’s immediate point, but also helps move the reader into a fuller experience of the spirit of the work.

Glimpses of Lewis’s differentiation between good and bad ambiguity are also seen in his fiction. In *Till We Have Faces*, which Lewis considered his greatest work,¹⁵⁶ we find clarity and ambiguity in declarations from the Fox and the Priest relating to how the gods can be known. The Fox attempts to come to Orual’s defense at trial by confessing he had taught her to reject the goddess Ungit. His instruction had not been a pursuit of truth, but rather indoctrination, teaching ‘as men teach a parrot’.¹⁵⁷ Real knowledge and experience of the gods, which the Fox himself to some degree lacked, were replaced with axiomatic declarations: ‘I made her think that a prattle of maxims would do, all thin and clear as water. For of course water’s good; it didn’t cost much,

¹⁴⁹ SIW 5.

¹⁵⁰ Empson, William. *Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952).

¹⁵¹ SIW 11.

¹⁵² PR 9-11.

¹⁵³ ‘Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. XXVIII (1942); reprinted in SLE 97.

¹⁵⁴ PPL 45-46.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 46.

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Anne Scott on 26 August 1960, CLIII 1181.

¹⁵⁷ TWHF 295.

not where I grew up. So I fed her on words.’¹⁵⁸ What misled Orual, through the clever Fox’s ‘glibness’, is the repetition of concise claims, reductionist and trite. It is a bad clarity, clear but also thin, failing to enter into real understanding of the gods and equally so real experience. This same juxtaposition of clearness and thickness is also used in ‘Christian Apologetics’. There Lewis describes ‘thick’ religions as full of sacrifice, sacrament, and mystery, while ‘clear’ religions are philosophical and universalizing.¹⁵⁹ Of the clear, Lewis references Stoicism, which undergirds the Greek philosophy of the Fox. And whereas the clear and thin maxims of the Fox misrepresented Ungit, Lewis has the Priest of Ungit in his early accusations arguing that the wisdom to be gained from experience of the gods is ‘thick and dark like blood’, that ‘Holy places are dark places’.¹⁶⁰ The Priest, for all his experience with them, attests that the gods cannot be spoken of with the clarity that the Greeks desire: ‘[the gods] dazzle our eyes and flow in and out of one another like eddies on a river, and nothing that is said clearly can be said truly about them.’¹⁶¹ The clear religion may be precise, but thick religion accounts for real experience of the gods. The ambiguity that attends that experience allows the Priest to turn the Fox’s charge of contradiction regarding the Accursed into an affirmation of the ability for conflicting realities to co-exist.¹⁶² Though the Priest is villainous, through him Lewis voices the view that the principal experience of the divine escapes the abstractions of clear, precise description. If we take the Priest and the Fox in relation to the thick and clear religion in ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lewis advocates real religion as a marriage of the two and we may, *ex post facto*, say that he sees himself as a Fox in need of a Priest: ‘it takes a twentieth-century academic prig like me and tells me to go fasting to a Mystery, to drink the blood of the Lord. The savage convert has to be Clear. I have to be Thick. That is how one knows one has come to the real religion.’¹⁶³ The clarity of the Fox’s religion is scientific and theological. The ambiguity of the Priest’s religion is experiential, relational, and brings real knowledge. But each is incomplete. The truth of the gods cannot be contained in mere clarity and the experience of the principle moves through

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 295.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 102-103.

¹⁶⁰ TWHF 50.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 50.

¹⁶² ‘Why should the Accursed not be both the best and the worst?’: TWHF 50.

¹⁶³ ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 103.

ambiguities. For Lewis, clarity and ambiguity are symbiotic—each capable of error and each beneficial in coming to the gods.

A more satirical expression is found in the ambiguous nature of N.I.C.E. in the final volume of the Ransom trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*. Through Mark Studdock's attempts to gain clarity about his role within the organization (and his insecure pursuit of membership to a privileged inner circle) one feels the ever-shifting ground under the protagonist's feet. N.I.C.E. will not definitively commit to anything and every attempt to establish clarity is met with an admonishment to accept the ambiguity of as part of the process. In his frustration, Mark decides to demand clarity from the Deputy Director (DD), or else leave. Following a short rebuff, he is intercepted by Fairy Hardcastle who attempts to persuade him of the value of his unknown opportunity and the foolishness of rejecting it. Assuring Mark of an even more ambiguous future position, he replies: "Only I thought I'd just have a talk with him first, to make everything clear." "Making things clear is the one thing the DD can't stand," replied Miss Hardcastle. "That's not how he runs the place. And mind you, he knows what he's about. It works, Sonny. You've no idea yet how well it works."¹⁶⁴ The response to Mark's request for clarity on the future role is another admonishment to embrace the sheer ambiguity of it all and simply focus on duty: "...you expect to have the whole plan of campaign told you before you do it. It doesn't make sense. That's not the way to get on here. The great thing is to do what you're told. If you turn out to be any good you'll soon understand what's going on. But you've got to begin by doing the work."¹⁶⁵ When he discovers that his weak ultimatum and vacillation has resulted in a widening belief that he is in fact leaving, he frantically tries to recover in a way reflective of the organization: 'He decided that he must write a very careful and rather elusive letter.'¹⁶⁶ The entire back-and forth is illustrative of the ambiguity that always surrounded N.I.C.E. At the outset Mark wanted clarity but bumbled into expressing adoration: 'The elasticity of your organization is one of the things that attracts me',¹⁶⁷ only to end the conversation in utter uncertainty about the outcome. This idea of 'elasticity' is satirically thrown back at him by the Deputy Director after Mark's ultimatum had failed: 'elasticity as the keynote of the Institute',¹⁶⁸ as well as by Fairy

¹⁶⁴ THS 105.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 107.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 117.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 52.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 132.

Hardcastle after his humiliation: ‘Elasticity, Sonny, elasticity’.¹⁶⁹ To Mark’s comment that after all this he still did not know what he was supposed to be doing, the Fairy simply affirmed that reality: ‘You never will. Your line is to do what you’re told and above all not to bother the old man’.¹⁷⁰ And when the Fairy and Deputy Director end up at odds, she throws it aside as the ‘elasticity stunt’.¹⁷¹ What Lewis displays is a play upon the notion of keeping the purpose out of view, eclipsed by undefined possible meanings and applications. It satirically advances the aims of a nefarious group, used against the naïve who are simply desiring to belong. As with Lewis’s critique of Pittenger, this sort of bad ambiguity is one that compromises understanding the primary issue. It is tempting to say that the ambiguity of N.I.C.E. does help them mitigate contentious secondary issues, but that is only by failing to give any clarity about the primary aim. The primary goal was to keep the subject uninformed, which is not what Lewis aims for in his usage of ambiguity. For Lewis, good ambiguity is that which aids progress toward the telos of an argument and bad ambiguity is that which does not. The differentiation between these two is determined by its operative value based upon the context in which it takes place.

That Lewis allowed for good and bad ambiguity does not stand in opposition to his high value of clarity and precision. Both things can be, and are, true. Philosopher John Beversluis finds that Lewis’s assumptive conclusions produce ambiguity because they force the reader to ask themselves what it is that Lewis is supposedly discovering when he says things like ‘we are forced to believe’, ‘we shall have to admit’ etc.: ‘It is a problem that plagues many of Lewis’s arguments and infects his apologetic writings with a fundamental ambiguity’.¹⁷² But on this point and others Beversluis seems to want to hold Lewis to an analytic approach and thus finds him in error of a kind of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 133.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 133.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 182.

¹⁷² Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 52. The first edition is also used in this thesis: Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). While the second edition is significantly updated and Beversluis considers it ‘superior...in every way’ (Ibid.11), some important thoughts from the first edition were lost. For this reason, the research interacts with both editions. Hooper considered Beversluis as creating ‘the most dangerous of all the false Lewises’ on account of his inaccurate representation of Lewis as losing his faith based upon *A Grief Observed* (Hooper, Walter. ‘C.S. Lewis and C.S. Lewises’ in MacDonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie. *The Riddle of Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 47). Though based on an article by Beversluis, the sentiment is in the first edition as well. He heeded the criticism of his tone, and the revised edition offers a somewhat more balanced view of Lewis as a person.; Cf. Baggett, David, Gary R. Habermas and Jerry L. Walls, eds. *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth Goodness and Beauty* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

clarity that Lewis wasn't attempting. The questions that trouble Beversluis as a professional philosopher are very unlikely to have been shared by Lewis's audience. George Watson, a former student of Lewis, recalls that what he first learned from Lewis was the importance of well-ordered thought: 'that even ideas can be tidied up to look like a salad rather than a stew. He hated mishmash. "The very seas would lose their shores" was a quotation from Ovid he was fond of, and he was much given to dividing ideas and keeping them apart.'¹⁷³ Later, as a colleague of Lewis at Cambridge, Watson recalled reading a handwritten manuscript of Lewis's where he found a very ordered outline on one page and notes on the other. It was indicative of the methodical, structured lectures Lewis gave. The quote from Ovid attributed to Lewis is fascinating and difficult to place. It may be adapted by Watson, Lewis's own translation, or even an embellishment. The most likely origin is from Book I, 400-401: 'Now seas and Earth were in confusion lost; A world of waters, and without a coast'.¹⁷⁴ In Lewis's usage it is indicative of an argument lacking clarity and struggling to reach its logical conclusion, which aligns with what Lewis viewed as bad ambiguity. Watson's point was that Lewis advocated for well-reasoned, carefully thought-out arguments: "Distinguo" was a favorite word of warning, accompanied by a raised forefinger.¹⁷⁵ This habit was a corrective measure, calling for articulation of possible meanings and is better understood by consideration of how he applied it to others and to himself.¹⁷⁶ In his 1948 article, 'Notes on the Way',¹⁷⁷ Lewis stated his concerns about the Church of England considering adding female priests. His view on the issue is not what matters here, but rather his use of *distinguo*. He opens by using a scene from *Pride and Prejudice* where Caroline Bingley states that, at a ball, conversation rather than dancing would be much more rational. To which her brother Charles replies, 'but it

¹⁷³ Watson, George. 'The Art of Disagreement: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)' in *The Hudson Review* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1995); reprinted Poe, Harry Lee & Rebecca Whitten Poe, eds. *C.S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends, and Colleagues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006) 78.

¹⁷⁴ Ovid. Vol. I (London: A.J. Valpy, M.A., 1833) 15. Two other potential sources are both found in Book VIII; the labyrinth is compared to waves of the sea, ever returning upon themselves and thus unsure of their direction. The second is in Book IX, where sailing into unknown winds, one is shipwrecked in a storm where no shores can be found. Both are also indicative of an argument lacking clarity.

¹⁷⁵ Watson, George. 'The Art of Disagreement: C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)', *The Hudson Review*. 48:2 (1995) 78.

¹⁷⁶ CLII 462. In a 1941 January 18 letter replying to criticisms from Oxford colleague Canon Oliver Chase Quick, Lewis admitted to being caught with a less than precise account of the Incarnation. He states his usual argument and notes '*Distinguo*' for himself, specifying the varying senses that could in view.

¹⁷⁷ 'Priestesses in the Church?', published as 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide*, vol. XXIX (14 August 1948) 830-831; reprinted GID 234-239.

would not be near so much like a Ball’, leaving Caroline silenced. Lewis argues that it would have been better if Jane Austen provided Charles a *distinguo*. For while conversation may exercise reason alone, it is not unreasonable to use other powers: ‘It is rational not to reason, or not to limit oneself to reason, in the wrong place; and the more rational a man is the better he knows this.’¹⁷⁸ In Lewis’s advocacy for distinction of meaning there is a time when mere reason is not what is called for and other powers should be employed. The cry of *distinguo* is neither a cry against ambiguity nor strictly a cry for reason and clarity. It is a cry for precisely what the term means—distinction. The particular clarity sought after by *distinguo* is a clarity of identifying possible meanings, not necessarily the removal of alternatives, but the recognition that alternatives exist. Watson recalls: ‘Lewis thought ideas should have space around them to breathe; he was instinctively suspicious of easy reconciliations.’¹⁷⁹ Easy reconciliations are the Fox’s maxims. For ideas to have space around them means a broader use of the imagination to consider from among various possible meanings: in other words, engaging with ambiguity.

An important volume in this area is Gary Tandy’s 2009 *The Rhetoric of Certitude*.¹⁸⁰ He sees certitude as part of an essential unity across Lewis’s corpus owing to a consistent style and worldview.¹⁸¹ Ambiguity is not Tandy’s focus, but it is important to consider how good and bad ambiguity according to Lewis relate to the certitude that Tandy emphasizes. It is true that Lewis’s Christian worldview permeates his post-conversion writings and does help form a consistent style whether the work be sophisticated or simple.¹⁸² Farrer’s observation of Lewis’s style is apropos: ‘His writings certainly express a solid confidence; but it is a confidence that he can detect the fallacy of current objections to belief, and appreciate the superiority of orthodox tenets over rival positions; that he has some ability, besides, to make others see what he so clearly sees himself.’¹⁸³ The air of certitude in much of Lewis’s writing is evident, but in no way does it require a rejection of all ambiguity or even preclude its

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 234-235.

¹⁷⁹ Watson, George. ‘The Art of Disagreement: C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)’, *The Hudson Review*. 48:2 (1995) 78.

¹⁸⁰ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009).

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 122.

¹⁸² Ibid. x. Tandy specifically references the historical skill in *Allegory of Love*, sophistication of *The Discarded Image*, and devotional sense of *The Four Loves*.

¹⁸³ Gibb, Jocelyn ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 25.

use. Indeed, Beversluis finds such certainty to be the cause of ambiguity.¹⁸⁴ It is a rhetorical certitude driven largely by Lewis's vision of the world. The certainty is not observed merely in semantic clarity or diction (e.g., *all, none, always, certain, true, real*),¹⁸⁵ but from Lewis's overall style, a 'common tenor or idiom'.¹⁸⁶ But to speak of Lewis's style one must include all the varied ways he presents ideas, both with clarity and ambiguity. Bad ambiguity, such as that in Pittenger's attack, runs afoul of the certainty Tandy draws out, as would the postmodern subjective epistemology of Penner or Gabelman. With Wain, Tandy finds that Lewis's self-conception as an intellectual dinosaur, 'deliberately adopting the role of a survival',¹⁸⁷ fueled his aversion to the subjectivism of modern thought and influenced his desire for certitude. Lewis tended to feel he was part of a small group against the larger outer world, as expressed in the 1948 lecture *Kipling's World*.¹⁸⁸ But Lewis himself traced this disposition to his early childhood. Beginning with he and his brother Warnie banding together at home and then the schoolboys at Wynyard banding together against the older, larger, abusive Oldie, Lewis developed a vision of the world 'in which "we two" (and in a sense "we happy few") stand together against something stronger and larger.'¹⁸⁹ One might say Lewis was perennially engaged in an intellectual St. Crispin's Day. Tandy correctly appraises Lewis's opposition to the moral anachronism and relativism of modern thought as shown in the 1943 article 'The Poison of Subjectivism'.¹⁹⁰ However, ambiguity related to subjectivist convictions and outcomes is categorically different from that of strategic ambiguity. The subjectivist must deny the faculty of reason necessary to form their view, severing the branch upon which they stand and leading to obscure notions about ultimate things.¹⁹¹ The issue is one of epistemology not rhetoric. Good and bad ambiguity still exists within Lewis's rhetoric of certitude even as he rejects a subjectivist epistemology. It is similarly so with Tandy's assessment of *The Abolition of Man*, where the Tao is the only system of

¹⁸⁴ 'It is a problem that plagues many of Lewis's arguments and infects his apologetic with a fundamental ambiguity. Too often readers must pause to ask themselves *exactly* what Lewis claims to have established and in exactly what sense he has done so.' Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 52.

¹⁸⁵ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 88.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 87.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁸⁹ SBJ 30.

¹⁹⁰ 'The Poison of Subjectivism', *Religion in Life*, vol. XII (Summer 1943); reprinted CR 72-81.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 73.

value and therefore ‘modern man’s attempt at a new system is futile’.¹⁹² Lewis’s certitude stands against modern subjectivism as an approach to knowledge, not against every form of ambiguity within rhetoric. Modern thought has instances of bad ambiguity, as do pre- and post-modern thought. Ambiguity in a generic sense is not inherently a problem, but rather bad ambiguity specifically, the kind that hinders progress toward the primary aim. Lewis clearly opposed reasoning that had abandoned logic and become unhinged, ‘working in a vacuum’.¹⁹³ But the juxtaposition in view is universal truth versus subjectivism, not reason versus ambiguity, a distinction Tandy fails to appreciate.

He applies a category of certitude characterized by a ‘take it or leave it’ attitude¹⁹⁴ which he supports with a bevy of commentators. But while Lewis clearly does convey such an attitude at times, his style is far more diverse. Where Holmer sees in Lewis a moral certitude, he also sees Lewis inviting the reader to consider new ways of thinking about and understanding Christianity.¹⁹⁵ Where Bloom dreads Lewis’s ‘Christian cudgel’, he also praises Lewis’s advocacy of engaging the imagination through the varied meanings words may convey, as Spenser had done.¹⁹⁶ In fact, Lewis goes much farther in that regard in his 1961 review of *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser*,¹⁹⁷ addressing both bad and good ambiguity. Literary critics of his day wrongly held that ‘the Principle of Ambiguity is always assumed; all possible meanings of any one word are supposed to be in some measure operative.’¹⁹⁸ Lewis argued that the poets of Spenser’s day were unaware of such a view and graciously embraced whatever additional meanings their readers would have attributed to their writing. The works were imbued with ambiguities providing ample opportunity for any manner of responses. Lewis felt that the closest comparison for this dynamic was the Italian mythological painters, in whose works:

¹⁹² Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 6.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 7; Cf. ‘Bulversism’, *The Socratic Digest*, No. 2 (June 1944) 16-20; reprinted GID 271-277; ‘Meditation in a Toolshed’, *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17 July 1945, 4; reprinted GID 214.

¹⁹⁴ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 84-85.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 85; Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 93: ‘articulates Christianity in terms that are for many unfamiliar, mostly because they do not grow out of the obvious religious and social terrain.’

¹⁹⁶ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 86.

¹⁹⁷ Ellrodt, Robert. *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Genève: Librairie E. Droz, 1960).

¹⁹⁸ ‘Neoplatonism in Spenser’s Poetry’ in SMRL 160.

Symbols that are on different levels or come from very different sources are not logically harmonized with great care; they are plastically harmonized in the pictorial design or narrative flow.¹⁹⁹

Lewis criticized the temptation he observed in Ellrodt and others to ‘put Spenser to an Either-Or’.²⁰⁰ He considered it an error—reductionistic and unappreciative of the latitude Lewis believed Spenser and others of that time would have embraced: ‘The inconsistencies we discover in Spenser are perhaps sometimes offences against a sort of consistency he hardly attempted.’²⁰¹ This is not simply Lewis desiring to vindicate Arthur and Gloriana from modern sensibilities. It demonstrates that Lewis had an appreciation for the authorial intent and operation of good ambiguity in a given work. Similar to Craig seemingly fitting Lewis’s apologetics too uniformly into a rationalist box, Tandy fits Lewis’s nonfiction prose too uniformly into the category of certitude. He does acknowledge that Lewis’s style, beyond being merely ornamental, is also a means for persuasion,²⁰² but does not do justice to Lewis’s willingness to put before his reader ideas and situations that are genuinely ambiguous.

Tandy does not speak against ambiguity specifically but the comments on Lewis he marshals to support his assertion make it seem that Lewis would be opposed to any ambiguity. As Stewart flatly asserts: ‘If you think confusion or ambiguity are virtues, Lewis is not your man.’²⁰³ However, ambiguity is not uniform and may operate in exceptionally beneficial ways. Empson, Burke, Grice, Ossa-Richardson, Eisenberg, and Lewis himself all argue that context is the rubric for understanding ambiguity and each instance must be examined on its own merits, or lack thereof. Ambiguity is an immensely flexible rhetorical device and any attempt to unilaterally reject it only belies the ignorance of those making the assertion. It is admitted that ambiguity may indeed be detrimental to an argument. But current thought needs no reminder of history’s caustic appraisal of ambiguity. What is needed is a far bolder foray into ambiguity as a strategic rhetorical device, traversing lesser disagreements in service of the primary goal. Such ambiguity is categorically different from the subjective bad ambiguity of modernity that Lewis so clearly opposed. Good ambiguity operates in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. It is a curious criticism on Lewis’s part for in his apologetics Lewis often uses a dichotomy to push his reader to an either-or point of decision.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 87.

²⁰³ Ibid. 86.

service of Lewis's aim by guiding the reader past secondary issues and therefore, with great irony, advances clarity.

What emerges is a Lewis who is both concrete and ambiguous. The most poignant observation, and near reconciliation, of these two Lewises comes from his dear friend, intellectual co-journeyer and combatant, Owen Barfield. In his 1976 article, 'Some Reflections on the Great Divorce',²⁰⁴ he argues for this very dichotomy, that there were in fact two Lewises: 'the atomically rational Lewis and the mythopoeic Lewis'.²⁰⁵ He could 'atomically' argue about ethics and Christianity without turning them into something else — avoiding and exposing the error into which psychology, philosophy, and theology had wandered.²⁰⁶ His thinking was 'eminently atomic', 'ruthlessly cause-and-effect', and stood against the 'mushy milieu' that characterized discussions of the non-material where 'anybody can always have everything both ways'.²⁰⁷ He battled the uncertain structures of materialism with blocks of 'iron logic'. Through 'authentically analytic' logic he exposes the 'absurdity and peril' of deriving psychology and ethics from physiology in *The Abolition of Man* and offers the alternative in the inverted apologetic of *The Screwtape Letters*, giving a subtle, 'penetrating', and 'atomic' psychology that is rather derived from ethics. In all this Barfield draws attention to an atomic Lewis who leads his reader to understand that every binary choice is also representative the whole of one's trajectory toward heaven or hell. In *The Great Divorce*²⁰⁸ the heavenly declaration is: 'this moment contains all moments'.²⁰⁹ And it is in *The Great Divorce* where Barfield finds the atomic Lewis most nearly united to the Lewis who had 'a firm intuition of the substantial reality of myth'.²¹⁰ It is the mythopoeic Lewis who invites the reader to find, or perhaps return to, the world of myth.²¹¹ In contrast to the concreteness and certitude of the atomic Lewis, the mythopoeic Lewis works in a way that Barfield finds ambiguous: 'Whatever else it is, it is the opposite of atomic and the reverse of solid.'²¹² This Lewis is not relentlessly

²⁰⁴ Barfield, Owen. 'Some Reflections on The Great Divorce of C.S. Lewis' in *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*, Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 2, 1976, 7-8.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 7.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid. 8.

²¹² Ibid.

arguing from cause-and-effect, but rather one who presents a world ‘where everything flows’, full of movements and possibilities. The mythopoeic Lewis communicates from his own mythopathic reception that undergirds and precedes knowledge, which reflects his own experience of God.²¹³

Barfield treated the two Lewises again in his 1977 lecture at Wheaton College, ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’.²¹⁴ There they are described as ‘the combatively logical Lewis’ and ‘the gentle imaginative Lewis’.²¹⁵ He observed such a hard division that he felt one could barely hear the same voice when moving between Lewis’s genres and that in apologetic works such as *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles* the ‘irradiating presence’ of the second Lewis is ‘hardly felt’.²¹⁶ It is the first Lewis who dominates in the apologetic works. But Barfield questions himself on this point. Is the divide truly as sharp as he sees it? Is it true that the second Lewis has no quarter in the apologetic writings? He does recognize something of the second Lewis appearing in *Letters to Malcolm* and more importantly in the 1949 lecture ‘Transposition’.²¹⁷ But it is Barfield’s comments on Lewis’s relationship to imagination, and imagination’s relationship to truth that open the door for what this thesis argues as Lewis’s good ambiguity. Lewis ‘had within him this loving impulse to protect and insulate imagination, so that it could continue to live its own pure and chaste life; to insulate it therefore from having anything whatever to do with *fact*’.²¹⁸ In ‘Is Theology Poetry’ Lewis asked: ‘May it not be that there is something in belief which is hostile to perfect imaginative enjoyment?’²¹⁹ His love for imagination permeates his works and is part of what fueled the ‘mythopoeic Lewis’ Barfield observed in works like the Narnia septet, *Till We Have Faces*, and *The Discarded Image*. But Lewis not only loved and protected imagination he also communicated in ways that are not ‘the logical nexus of one idea to another’ but a resemblance between shapes and patterns which themselves are apt to change. This exactly prefigures Kosko’s *Fuzzy Thinking* with its relation of

²¹³ Cf. ‘Myth Became Fact’, *World Dominion*, Vol. XXII (September-October 1944) 267-70; reprinted GID 67.

²¹⁴ Barfield, Owen. ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ in *Kodon* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, Winter 1978) 17-26.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* 18-19. Barfield sees them most in harmony where Lewis is a literary scholar and critic, suggesting that this may be a *third* Lewis.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* 20.

²¹⁷ ‘Transposition’, Sermon for Mansfield College, Oxford on the Feast of Pentecost (28 May 1944); WOG 60.

²¹⁸ Barfield, Owen. ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ in *Kodon* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, Winter 1978) 22-23.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.* 23. Cf; ‘Is Theology Poetry’, *The Socratic Digest*, vol. 3 (1945); reprinted WOG 77.

spheres as opposed to precise measurements. The syntax of imaginative statements: ‘is one of metamorphosis rather than of sequence and aggregation’.²²⁰ With this in mind, we now return briefly to ‘Transposition’ which Barfield references in ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ as a theory of imagination, all without reference to *imagination*. In that sermon Lewis suggests there will be ambiguities to navigate when something greater, more complex, richer is being communicated to something lesser, simpler, poorer:

If the richer system is to be represented to the poorer at all, this can only be by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning. The transposition of the richer into the poorer must, so to speak, be algebraical, not arithmetical. If you are to translate from a language which has a large vocabulary into a language that has a small vocabulary, then you must be allowed to use several words in more than one sense.²²¹

The Transposition may be symbolic, or it may be real experience, being ‘actually drawn into the higher and become part of it’.²²² Thus, there is a sense where this thesis stands against both Tandy and, more boldly, Barfield on this point regarding Lewis’s apologetic writings. The Lewis who never tired of exposing ‘the appallingly muddled thinking on which [reductionism, subjectivism, and relativism] rest’²²³ is the same Lewis who loved and protected both the imagination itself, and its operation. It is the same Lewis who conveys shapes of Christian belief that ambiguously flow toward his understanding of the Christian faith.

2. Primary Sources

i) Taxonomy

C.S. Lewis was a prolific author whose published works span more than four decades across wide array of genres including literary criticism, poetry, autobiography, science fiction and fantasy novels, philosophy, theology, and Christian apologetics in both non-fiction and fiction forms. In his own words, it is ‘a very mixed bag’.²²⁴ While

²²⁰ Barfield, Owen. ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ in *Kodon* (Wheaton College, IL: Winter 1978) 23.

²²¹ ‘Transposition’, Sermon for Mansfield College, Oxford on the Feast of Pentecost (28 May 1944); WOG 60.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Barfield, Owen. ‘Lewis, Truth, and Imagination’ in *Kodon* (Wheaton College, IL: Winter 1978) 18.

²²⁴ Letter to the Milton Society of America, 25 October 1954, CLIII 516-517.

many of Lewis's works can be classified in multiples genres,²²⁵ The following introductory taxonomy presents his major published volumes in broadly accepted categories.

Lewis's early professional aspiration was to be a poet and his first published works were in that genre. At twenty-one he published *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics* (1919, under the pseudonym Clive Hamilton) and seven years later, *Dymer* (1926). He failed to succeed as a poet during his lifetime.²²⁶ After his conversion to Christianity in 1930²²⁷ he began to publish regularly across other genres, though never abandoning his love for poetry.

Professionally, his scholarly works of literary criticism include *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936), *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (1942), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama* (1954, lectures given 1944), *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), and *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964, written 1962). Additionally, he published *The Personal Heresy* with E.M.W. Tillyard, debating author versus subject in understanding imaginative works (1939), *The Arthurian Torso* with works of Charles Williams (1948), and *Studies in Words* (1960, from a series of Cambridge lectures).

Lewis published three autobiographies. The first was the allegorical, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933).²²⁸ The other two autobiographies were to come much later, *Surprised by Joy* (1955, his exposition of 'joy' in relation to his journey from atheism to Christianity) and *A Grief Observed* (1961, his journey through the loss of his wife, originally published under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk).

²²⁵ For example, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, which is at once autobiographical, fiction, allegory, and apologetic. *The Abolition of Man* seems to defy categorization altogether, being philosophical but not merely philosophy, apologetic but not specifically Christian, and so forth. The *Chronicles of Narnia* are another prime example. They are fiction, yet also apologetic, theological, philosophical, and in one of Lewis's own senses, a *supposal* (See letter to Mrs. Hook on 29 Dec 1958. Lewis presents Narnia as a product of supposals around ideas such as what Christ might look like if Narnia were real, how might his incarnation, dying, and rising again happen in that world). CLIII 1004-1005.

²²⁶ See letter to Arthur Greeves, 18 Aug 1930 and corresponding document of 6 March 1926. CLI 924-931; Appreciation of Lewis's poetry has posthumously increased, and he was memorialized at Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey in 2013 on the 50th anniversary of his death.

²²⁷ Cf. McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 141-142.

²²⁸ Hooper notes that sixteen of Lewis's most loved poems were included: Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 173.

Lewis's 'theologised science-fiction'²²⁹ Ransom Trilogy spanned seven years beginning with *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), followed by *Perelandra* (1943), and finally *That Hideous Strength* (1945). *The Dark Tower* (1977) is associated with these works, but Lewis did not finish the manuscript and possibly abandoned it. It was clearly an attempt at a sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*, opening with the same time-travel theme and continued the same conversation upon which *Out of the Silent Planet* closed. While it does provide further insight into the Ransom Trilogy and Lewis's working in this genre, it is not a volume he completed or published. Five years after completing the Ransom Trilogy, Lewis began publishing what became his most famous works, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He published all seven volumes in the span of six-years: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1956). Finally, among his science fiction, fantasy, and mythopoeic novels there is Lewis's personal favourite, his retelling of the tale of Cupid and Psyche in *Till We Have Faces* (1956).

Lewis's Christian apologetic, philosophical, and theological writings were produced alongside his science fiction and fantasy. During the same period that he published the Ransom Trilogy, three of his most important Christian apologetic works were produced: *The Problem of Pain* (1940, non-fiction), *The Screwtape Letters* (1942, fiction), and his landmark four series of broadcast radio talks from 1941 to 1944. The first two series of talks (1941 and 1942) were published as *Broadcast Talks* in July of 1942. Their success led to two additional series of talks published as *Christian Behaviour* (1943) and *Beyond Personality* (1944). These were later compiled and published as *Mere Christianity* (1952). One year after *Broadcast Talks*, Lewis published *The Abolition of Man* (1943), his philosophical apologetic for universal morality, and three years later *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (1947), an apologetic for the supernatural as found in both Old and New Testaments. In the late years of his life, he produced the theological works *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958) and *The Four Loves* (1960),²³⁰ and the fictional apologetic, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

²²⁹ Letter to the Milton Society of America, 25 October 1954, CLIII 516.

²³⁰ *The Four Loves* is among Lewis's genre-defying works. Originally a series of radio talks for the Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia, they were canceled due to Lewis's frankness about sex in relation to *eros*, later broadcast elsewhere and sold on cassette. Lewis used his manuscripts to publish the printed volume: (Hooper. *Companion and Guide*, 87-90). Cf. Lepojärvi, Jason. 'Brilliance

(1964, completed April 1963). Lewis also published compilations during his lifetime that include pieces covering the same breadth of topics as his books. Some works began to be republished, a trend that continued posthumously and adds confusion to his total body of work. Those Lewis published include *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (1939), *Transposition and Other Addresses* (1949, released in America as *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*), *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (1960), and *They Asked for a Paper* (1962).

C.S. Lewis died on November 22, 1963, and posthumous collections and books began to be published almost immediately. Even during Lewis's lifetime his corpus became somewhat complex with various editions renamed or republished, as with his broadcast talks, for example. The content published after his death is equally diverse, some pieces have been republished in more than one collection or edition, and some American editions were given different titles from their British counterparts. The works published include literary criticism: *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1966) and *Selected Literary Essays* (1969); poetry: *Poems* (1964), *Narrative Poems* (1969), and later *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis* (1984); essay collections with a wide array of subject matters that include apologetic, theological, literary criticism, social commentary, and philosophical pieces: *The Screwtape Letters with Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (1965, again in 1982 with a new preface), *Christian Reflections* (1967), *God in the Dock* (1970, released in Britain as *Undeceptions*, 1971), *Fern Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity* (1975), *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (1977), an expanded edition of *The Weight of Glory* (1980), *Of This and Other Worlds* (1982), *First and Second Things* (1985), *Present Concerns* (1986), *Timeless at Heart* (1987), and the expansive *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* (2000). The taxonomy presented here focuses upon Lewis's major works. Beyond these are his thousands of letters²³¹ published and

and Blindspots: New Light on C.S. Lewis's The Four Loves.' in *The Heythrop Journal* 63, No. 6 (n.d.): 1109–23. Whereas the talks open with the first 'love', the book has two introductory chapters before Lewis's criticism on the first 'love'. Also, in the book he used *charity* instead of *agape*. Such changes, Lepojärvi observes, are not anecdotal and part of a corrective to popular Christian understanding of *agape* as well as aiding Lewis's much broader view of love. The process of how the book came to be is an important part of why *The Four Loves* does not fit neatly into a single genre. The original lectures were intended for a Christian audience and that remains in the published version as discussions of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit permeate the entire book.

²³¹ Most significantly *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, edited by Walter Hooper, published in three volumes (London: Harper Collins, 2000; 2004; 2007). Others include *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (1966, by Warren Lewis); *Letters to an American Lady* (1967); *They Stand Together* (letters with Arthur Greeves,

republished in multiple volumes. In truth, Lewis published more after his death than most authors do in life. Given the size and diversity of his corpus, it was immediately clear that examination of Lewis's apologetic ambiguity would require a focused lens. We now consider the methodology and criteria for choosing the primary source material for this research.

ii) Methodology and Criteria

In selecting the primary sources for this research there were several dangers that needed to be avoided. First, the vastness of Lewis's body of work, much of which includes apologetic elements even when not primarily religious,²³² could easily become unfocused, unwieldy, or both. Second, ambiguity as a subject matter threatened to drive the research entirely into literary critique rather than apologetics and theology. Third, the variety of works in which he presents or defends Christian claims, combined with the pervasiveness of his Christian worldview, makes drawing a clear demarcation line for which works qualify as apologetic more difficult. To mitigate these risks, it was necessary to limit the scope. Because the primary sources are where exposition of apologetic ambiguity will originate, key methodological decisions had to be made, particularly regarding the use of Lewis's fiction, fictional apologetics, and posthumous works or collections. Two sets of criteria were applied. First, to work from the clearest and most authoritative instances of Lewis's apologetic ambiguity, primary sources were restricted to prose, non-fiction, apologetic volumes published or edited for publication by Lewis. From this, remaining possible works were *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and potentially *The Abolition of Man* and *The Four Loves*. Additional concerns needed to be addressed regarding to what degree the latter two are apologetic. The second set of criteria were: Authority, Accuracy, and Audience. Authority is defined by Lewis authoring and publishing the work or preparing it for publication prior to his death. Because of the originality of what this thesis is arguing, it was important to restrict the primary sources to those which Lewis himself prepared for publication. Works compiled, edited, and published posthumously are excluded as primary sources because they were not publicly released by Lewis. All the previously listed potential sources met this criterion. Accuracy refers to the

1979); *Letters to Children* (1985); Latin letters to Don Giovanni (1989). Lewis's own words to Greeves are ironic: 'If any person did read our letters, he would be an ill-bred cad & therefore we shouldn't mind what he saw in it.': Letter to Arthur Greeves, 7 February 1917 (CLI 274).

²³² 'Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to *tous exo*': 'Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger', *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 181.

character of the source as being clearly Christian apologetic. It is here where both *The Abolition of Man* and *The Four Loves* were excluded as primary sources. The former is apologetic in the sense of a philosophical defence of universal morality, but it is not a *Christian*, or even a theistic apologetic. Yet, as one of Lewis's most important works it receives interaction where it aligns with examples from primary sources, as with other secondary sources. *The Four Loves* is Christian but not apologetic. It is difficult to categorize, but best fits as either theology or literary criticism rather than apologetic. As McGrath notes, it 'explores an assumed faith, rather than defending a challenged faith.'²³³ Audience, the final criterion, considers Lewis's intended reader. This criterion recognizes the relevance of Lewis's audience for an exposition of ambiguity in his apologetic. As will be shown in chapter three, Lewis's convictions about the audience for whom he wrote informed his apologetic approach. *The Problem of Pain* was part of the popular level, 'The Christian Challenge Series',²³⁴ addressing an intellectual problem without being academic in style.²³⁵ In *Mere Christianity* he had in mind his 'unbelieving neighbours' and maintained in print the conversational language that comprised the original radio addresses.²³⁶ In *Miracles*, while his style is intentionally 'familiar' and 'popular' for the sake of the 'common reader',²³⁷ it is a more tightly reasoned Christian philosophical apologetic that is closer on the spectrum to *The Abolition of Man* than a work like *Mere Christianity*. Unlike the casual radio addresses that birthed *Mere Christianity*, Lewis intended *Miracles* for print from the outset and his argumentation is echoed in philosophers to the present day.²³⁸

From these criteria the selected primary works are *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Miracles*. It must be stated that this research does not strictly limit itself to those works. Arguments that Lewis employs in the primary works find similar expression in other places of his corpus. Thus, where relevant, forays are made into Lewis's broader writing, including posthumous works, for illustrative or informative purposes. It is in this sense that works such as *Letters to Malcolm*, and *The Abolition of*

²³³ He wrote to Carl F. H. Henry of his apologetic works that he was 'quite sure those days are over: Letter to Carl F. H. Henry on 28 Sept 1955, CLIII 651.

²³⁴ Letter to Dom Bede Griffiths on 16 Apr 1940, CLII 392.

²³⁵ It was 'not a work of erudition': POP vii-viii.

²³⁶ MC vii-viii.

²³⁷ M 10.

²³⁸ Both Williams and Craig noted the similarities between the arguments of Lewis and Plantinga. Peter Williams noted Goetz's article, 'The Argument from Reason' in *Philosophia Christi* 15.1 (2013): (Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams. *C.S. Lewis at Poets' Corner*, 31). Craig added that while similar, Plantinga has given the arguments a more meticulous and rigorous treatment (Ibid. 32).

Man are engaged. The former, although fictional, includes fascinating instances of Lewis touching on denominational issues, departing from his usual discipline of speaking only about what is common to all Christians. The latter, while Lewis admitted it was not a defence of Christianity,²³⁹ it is an apologetic, but one for universal moral good.²⁴⁰ Lewis presents a forceful philosophical apologetic for a traditional morality in *The Abolition of Man*, one that Christianity agrees with but is not particularly Christian. Christians who go looking for Lewis the Christian Apologist believe they find him there, but overread the text. What is particularly relevant from that work for apologetic ambiguity and receives treatment is Lewis's broad and ambiguous, *Tao*. Additionally, some posthumous collections such as *God in the Dock*, *Selected Literary Essays*, and *Essay Collection*, among others, contain extremely relevant pieces for this research.²⁴¹ Thus, where relevant and insightful, such pieces receive interaction.

3. A Functional Understanding of Ambiguity

The understanding of ambiguity for this research must be flexible enough to identify simple ambiguity, such as polysemy, yet also able recognize broader instances where ambiguity emerges through the arc of an argument. It must reiterated here: the purpose of this thesis is not to advance ambiguity theory. This research is an exposition of ambiguity in the apologetic of C.S. Lewis, making evident an important and entirely overlooked aspect of Lewis and apologetics. The author agrees with Ossa-Richardson that attempts at a definition for ambiguity ultimately fail.²⁴² Also with Ossa-Richardson, Empson, Grice, Burke, Lewis, and others, it is agreed that ambiguity is best understood contextually.²⁴³ An awareness of ambiguity may arise, in Lewis's

²³⁹ 'In order to avoid misunderstanding, I may add that though I myself am a Theist, and indeed a Christian, I am not here attempting any indirect argument for Theism.': AOM 32.

²⁴⁰ Walsh also recognizes AOM as a difficult match with Lewis's Christian apologetic works and generally hard to align with any fixed category of Lewis's corpus: Walsh, Chad. *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1949) 36.

²⁴¹ *Essay Collection* is largest volume but excludes particularly important pieces such as 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare'; The 48 essays within GID range from February 1941 to December of 1963 (published shortly after Lewis's death in November 1963), spanning most of Lewis's Christian years. The letters (GID, Part IV) date from 1939 to 1961.

²⁴² Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 403.

²⁴³ Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Second ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) viii; Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 14; Bach, Kent. 'Ambiguity', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis, 1998) doi:10.4324/9780415249126-U001-1; See 'Trends in Scholarship', Chapter 1, ii.

words, at ‘the slightest semantic discomfort’.²⁴⁴ This may be due to objectively identifiable ambiguity such as polysemy and lexical ambiguity (e.g., ‘good’, ‘happy’, ‘love’).²⁴⁵ A word, phrase, or statement that is open to more than one meaning can merit contextual analysis to determine the operative value of the ambiguity at work. But it is not merely discomfort due to narrow lexical ambiguity that clues a reader to the presence of ambiguity in an argument. Broader conceptual and narrative ambiguities are discovered through examination of the unfolding larger argument. These tend to leave peripheral ideas related to the issue ambiguous.²⁴⁶ In many cases these broader kinds of ambiguity are the most strategic and valuable to Lewis’s apologetic because items left ambiguously on the margin are precisely those which would create unnecessary conflict. Ambiguity of this kind is not objectively identifiable in the same way as, for example, equivocal terms. In such instances the only way it can be understood is by examining its function in context. The diversity of ambiguity in Lewis’s apologetic and the variety of his apologetic arguments together require that an exposition be done through contextual analysis rather than application of an *a priori* definition. Empson, whose work remains a landmark in ambiguity and used the term without a fixed definition,²⁴⁷ sensed something of this broader working of ambiguity, and far before the later researchers discovered its strategic usefulness: ‘We call it ambiguous, I think, when we recognize there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading.’²⁴⁸ Ambiguity is something one can sense, become aware of—something that, whether intentional or not, provides room for alternative ways of understanding the issue at-hand and allowing them to co-exist. Yet, the possible alternative views do not necessarily exceed the boundaries of the discussion, they need not lead into a completely wrong understanding. Ambiguity can enlarge the space around what is being considered, offering more room for the imagination and allowing disparate

²⁴⁴ SIW 1-2.

²⁴⁵ POP 10, 16, 34; See Chapter Four, 1; 2; See ‘systematic polysemy’ in Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 275.

²⁴⁶ MC 137; Ossa-Richardson finds historical responses to ambiguity (Aristotle, Bacon, Locke, Quintilian, and Campbell) falling into three categories: a word that signifies more than one thing (logic), a statement being susceptible to more than one construction (rhetoric), and a text being susceptible to more than one interpretation (hermeneutics): Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 29.

²⁴⁷ ‘I used the term “ambiguity” to mean anything I liked’: Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, second ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) viii.

²⁴⁸ Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) x.

views to co-exist.²⁴⁹ The ‘big picture’ toward which the reader’s imagination grasps is ‘more easily perceived than understood.’²⁵⁰ The factors of ambiguity’s resistance to definition, broad scope of operation, scholarship’s inability to arrive at a consensus understanding, and the variety of Lewis’s arguments all contribute to the conclusion that examination of the operative value of ambiguity is more of an art than a science. As this research is expository, the approach is *a posteriori*, examining apologetic issues raised by Lewis himself rather than applying a predetermined set. Lewis’s own writings determine the issues considered and the research discovers and critiques ambiguity within that scope. This approach allows recognition of the breadth of ways in which ambiguity appears and operates within the apologetic of C.S. Lewis.

4. Structure

Following the prior introduction to ambiguity, primary sources, and functional understanding for exposition, chapter three examines Lewis’s theological self-awareness and his views on apologetics and the audiences for whom he wrote. Next, reasons and motives for he would have been interested in apologetic ambiguity are explored. The important distinctives in Lewis of the ‘organs’ of imagination and reason, and perspectives of contemplation and enjoyment, are considered alongside their relationship to his apologetic rhetorical method. Finally, there is an exploration of the dynamic of reader-relationship that develops through interaction with Lewis’s apologetics. Having laid the foundation, chapter four presents the exposition of apologetic ambiguity originating from the primary sources, including ambiguity related to the Incarnation, the doctrine that was most significant for Lewis. Instances are presented according to the primary source, ordered by publication date: Apologetic Ambiguity in *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Miracles*. Chapter five presents conclusions, the relationship of this thesis to wider scholarship, addresses objections, and offers recommendations for further research within Lewis studies and the wider fields of apologetics and theology. With an appreciation of the rather strange space into which this research is headed, it is now time to consider Lewis’s theological self-awareness, reasons and motives for using apologetic ambiguity, and distinctives in his thought that comprise his apologetic rhetorical method.

²⁴⁹ Ambiguity is certainly not restricted to correlated meaning: It may very well lead the reader into wrong understanding, and errors of that kind within Lewis’s apologetic are also examined in this thesis.

²⁵⁰ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 91.

CHAPTER THREE

Lewis's Apologetic Approach

*When the author was really dancing among eggs,
he will seem to have been strolling across a lawn.*²⁵¹

This chapter examines aspects of Lewis's approach to apologetics that are relevant to a study of his ambiguity. First examined are his theological self-awareness and his audience. Though not being a formal theologian, Lewis possessed a high degree of self-awareness regarding the boundaries of his knowledge in theological matters. He was also intentional and strategic about arguing at the popular level of his day. These aspects were key to his vision of what the role of an apologist should be, including the theological scope within which an apologist should restrict and form their arguments. Together, these two elements introduce both motive and means for Lewis to use strategic apologetic ambiguity and this section is followed by a survey of reasons and motives for why apologetic ambiguity would have been attractive and useful to Lewis. Among these are his humility, academic background and professional environment, familial and cultural influences, and ecumenical and ecclesiastical motives. Then, we will look at how Lewis viewed apologetics and examine his distinctive pairings of reason and imagination, contemplation and enjoyment, and how they relate to his apologetic rhetorical method. Finally, the chapter will close with a look at the dynamic of reader relationship and its relationship to Lewis's broad appeal and lasting impact.

1. Theological Self-Awareness and Audience

The primary works selected for this research were largely written not for academicians, but the European modernist mindset of Lewis's day, as he observed it in the public at-large. It was a mindset that, because of the horrors of both world wars and shock of the undeniably blatant evil that occurred in WWII, was doubting the existence of God in general and Christianity in particular, in ways that were new and unsettling for western society.²⁵² That Lewis shaped his arguments for the common person

²⁵¹ C.S. Lewis in his preface to Farrer, Austin. *A Faith of Our Own* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960) 7.

²⁵² 'Never perhaps, has an English generation suffered so much as the one born in the closing years of the nineteenth century—a century which, in the unparalleled speed of its material achievements, had lost the spiritual resilience which alone can rescue the race of man from its tendency to self-destruction.', Vera Brittain, quoted in Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) x.

introduces yet another great irony. For, in addressing the everyday person, what we have in Lewis's apologetic are the theological arguments of a non-theologian offered to other non-theologians.²⁵³ With an author-audience combination of this kind one would expect to find all manner of errant ambiguity: terms inadequately defined, concepts misrepresented, failure to accurately situate arguments in their theological contexts, misuse of biblical texts, and so on. Some of these errors were discovered and are included in the exposition. Yet, often the ambiguity is beneficial, instances where it appears not as unconscious oversight or error, but rather operates as a strategic part of Lewis's apologetic rhetorical method. The question of intentionality on Lewis's part is addressed in the following section on Reasons and Motives. But, at a minimum, his theological self-awareness, intentionality in his colloquial apologetic approach, suggest that Lewis was conscious and intentional in his usage of ambiguity.

Austin Farrer,²⁵⁴ writing about Lewis's self-awareness regarding theological understanding, observed:

He laid no claim to either the learning which would have made him a theologian or to the grace which would have made him a spiritual guide. His writings certainly express a solid confidence; but it is a confidence that he can detect the fallacy of current objections to belief, and appreciate the superiority of orthodox tenets over rival positions; that he has some ability, besides, to make others see what he so clearly sees himself.²⁵⁵

Lewis was forthright in admitting his position as a layman and never claimed to be a theologian.²⁵⁶ In a paper on apologetics delivered in 1945²⁵⁷ he wrote:

Some of you are priests and some are leaders of youth organizations. I have little right to address either. It is for priests to teach me, not for me

²⁵³ 'Answers to Questions on Christianity' pamphlet by *Electrical and Musical Industries Christian Fellowship* (Hayes, Middlesex: 1944); reprinted GID 60.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Wolfe, Judith. 'Austin Farrer and C.S. Lewis' in Bockmuehl, Markus, Stephen Platten and Nevsky Everett, eds. *Austin Farrer: Oxford Warden, Scholar, Preacher* (SCM Press: London, 2020); Cf. Lewis's preface to Farrer's *A Faith of Our Own*, Farrer, Austin. *A Faith of Our Own* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960) 7-10. The relationship of Farrer and Lewis was complex, but there was a deep mutual admiration. Lewis admired Farrer's facility in communicating Christian theology. Farrer, both a philosophical theologian and spiritual guide, admired Lewis's facility communicating apologetically.

²⁵⁵ Gibb, Jocelyn ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 25.

²⁵⁶ MC VIII-VIX; 'Answers to Questions on Christianity' pamphlet by *Electrical and Musical Industries Christian Fellowship* (Hayes, Middlesex: 1944); reprinted GID 60; POP XII.

²⁵⁷ This was five years before the arrival of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and Lewis was already considered a strong voice for Christianity, experiencing considerable notoriety from his radio talks and publications of SL and MC.

to teach them. I have never helped to organize youth, and while I was young myself I successfully avoided being organized.²⁵⁸

He refused payment for speaking on theological matters because it was a subject in which he was ‘an amateur’.²⁵⁹ In his apologetic writing he readily confessed that, ‘If any real theologian reads these pages he will very easily see that they are the work of a layman and an amateur’, and ‘any theologian will see easily enough what, and how little, I have read’.²⁶⁰ It was only by invitation that he ever entered the public square as a Christian apologist. Left to himself, Lewis might very well have never been in the role.²⁶¹ It was not only in the early stages that Lewis was aware of his theological shortcomings. At 48 years of age, following a reflection upon the Incarnation in relation to extrapolated analogous categories of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’²⁶² for *glossolalia*, Lewis felt it necessary to offer a disclaimer:

I walk in *mirabilibus supra me* and submit all to the verdict of real theologians.²⁶³

In his final sermon he was still referring to himself as a layman, which, while being partly an acknowledgement of his holding no official position within the Church of England, was also descriptive of his relationship to academic theology.²⁶⁴ Within four years of his death, he still did not consider himself well versed in theology, confessing that his understanding was, in a sense, an accidental amalgamation of Christian truth embedded into works he pursued for purposes of literary enjoyment and not theology.²⁶⁵ This lack of expertise may be the genesis of a variety of apologetic errors, including those related to ambiguity. However, his self-awareness must factor into

²⁵⁸ ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 93.

²⁵⁹ Letter from C.S. Lewis, 28 April 1944 (in the Lewis Collection, Wheaton College), quoted in Keefe, Carolyn, ed. *C. S. Lewis: Speaker & Teacher* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971) 23.

Though an amateur, his writing still communicated a sense of authority, ‘People have to summon up all their courage to raise a question against such an authoritative voice.’: Harries, Richard. *C.S. Lewis: The Man and His God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1987) 14.

²⁶⁰ POP xii.

²⁶¹ See Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* (Parkridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 5.

²⁶² ‘Transposition’ in TAFP 5-7. Lewis delivered the talk in 1946. He works from this analogy throughout the sermon.

²⁶³ ‘Transposition’ in TAFP 180. Cf. Latin Vulgate of Psalm 130:1b: ‘*mei neque ambulavi in magnis neque in mirabilibus supra me*’ (Psalm 131, ‘I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me’).

²⁶⁴ ‘A Slip of the Tongue’, Lewis’s final sermon, Cambridge (19 January 1956); published in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Fount/Collins, 1965); reprinted WOG 126.

²⁶⁵ CLIII 978. 13 October 1958 to Corbin Scott Carnell, whose PhD in 1960 dealt with Lewis’s view of *Sehnsucht*, later published as *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), and went on to become an English professor at the University of Florida.

how the ambiguity in his apologetic is understood. Many ambiguities in his arguments operate beneficially, especially the sort that help conflicting views travel together past conflicts on lesser, attendant issues. This possibility becomes more intriguing when dealing with someone who was a literary scholar of the highest order, which Lewis was.

Lewis had a strong conviction that the content of Christian apologetic argumentation should focus only upon central Christian beliefs and that the delivery should be translated into colloquial language. Adherence to centrally held beliefs was the only advice Lewis could offer to one of his dear Catholic friends on the idea of how to reunite the Church:

I am inclined to think that the immediate task is vigorous cooperation on the basis of what even now is common—combined, of course, with full admission of the differences. An *experienced* unity on some things might then prove the prelude to a confessional unity on all things.²⁶⁶

He had a motive to avoid contentious peripheral issues of theology and the means to keep the discussion upon his desired course via his education and rhetorical skill. He was intentional and strategic about popular-level apologetics, putting things in the common tongue. In a sense, just as God had become common through Incarnation, the Bible had become common through translation, so too Lewis's language for apologetics must become common: 'The Incarnation is in that sense an irreverent doctrine: Christianity, in that sense, an incurably irreverent religion.'²⁶⁷ His combination of a vast education in classics and rhetoric, studies in philosophy, a professional career as a literary scholar, and an incredibly active engagement in public debate about the Christian faith, together suggest that while errors of ambiguity are present some instances in his apologetic may in fact be more than mere accident or unscholarly error:

Our business [as apologists] is to present that which is timeless (the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow) in the particular language of our own day.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Letter 8 May 1939 to Dom Bede Griffiths, CLII 256.

²⁶⁷ 'Modern Translations of the Bible', Preface to *Letters to Young Churches: A Translation of the New Testament Epistles*, Phillips, J.B., (Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1947) vii-x; reprinted GID 230.

²⁶⁸ 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 93.

He advocated the necessity of communicating theological arguments in common terms, viewing it as essential for oneself and for any successful effort to create understanding in others:

To conclude—you must translate every bit of your Theology into the vernacular. This is very troublesome and it means you can say very little in half an hour, but it is essential. It is also of the greatest service to your own thought. I have come to the conviction that if you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood one's own meaning.²⁶⁹

Lewis found that this discipline of translation benefitted his argumentation through greater brevity of speech and further clarity as to the limits of his own understanding on theological matters.²⁷⁰ This effort was not a dumbing down of apologetic issues but rather something only attainable from a thoroughgoing, serious understanding. Failure to successfully translate theological concepts into everyday language revealed:

You haven't really thought it out; not to the end; not to 'the absolute ruddy end'.²⁷¹

The exercise of this conviction was to be done in concert with his vision about the limits of the theological scope in which an apologist should attempt to engage. Soldiers are assigned a station and it is their duty to defend it. It is mercenaries who travel freely through the theatre of war. The apologist, from Lewis's point of view, is not free to engage any or all arguments:

We are to defend Christianity itself—the faith preached by the Apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied [*sic*] in the Creeds, expounded by the Fathers. This must be clearly distinguished from the whole of what any one of us may think about God and Man. Each of us has his individual emphasis: each holds, in addition to the Faith, many opinions which seem to him to be consistent with it and true and important. And so

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 98.

²⁷⁰ 'Before We Can Communicate' in *Breakthrough*, No. 8 (October 1961) 2; reprinted GID 256. Cf. Lewis's reasoning for defining a miracle as 'an interference with Nature by a Supernatural power': 'This definition is not that which would be given by many theologians. I am adopting it not because I think it an improvement upon theirs but precisely because, being crude and "popular", it enables me most easily to treat those questions which the "common reader" probably has in mind when he takes up a book on Miracles.', M 10.

²⁷¹ 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 98. Cf. 'a phantasm called "my religion"': LTM 12.

perhaps they are. But as apologists it is not our business to defend them. We are defending Christianity; not ‘my religion’.²⁷²

To conduct apologetics this way requires a considerable degree of biblical, theological, and historical knowledge. Additionally, one must be able to employ ample self-awareness and linguistic adeptness. Lewis considered these abilities to be essential for an apologist. He adds to that understanding an advocacy of the primacy of historical Christianity as seen in the continuity from Apostolic declaration through the first centuries of the Church. This theological scope is set against what is merely ‘my religion’, with historic Christianity always holding priority, operating as the demarcation line for what should be considered. He makes explicit what is implicit in such understanding—the ability to differentiate and adjudicate between what belongs to the historic Christian faith and what are one’s own derivative beliefs. To Lewis, essential for an apologist, and thus for good apologetics, was the discipline of guiding arguments toward the crux of Christianity and avoiding lesser, or secondary, doctrines or opinions:

...I am not trying to convert anyone to my own position. Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times. I had more than one reason for thinking this. In the first place, the questions which divide Christians from one another often involve points of high Theology or even of ecclesiastical history, which ought never to be treated except by real experts. I should have been out of my depth in such waters: more in need of help myself than able to help others. And secondly, I think we must admit that the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold.²⁷³

Yet, his advocacy that the apologist should practice restricting themselves to central beliefs expressed in common speech did not mean he was opposed to intellectual engagement. He recognized the benefits of scholarly training. Regarding engaging the

²⁷² ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 90. Cf. Athanasius, John Behr, and C. S. Lewis. *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011) 12. Lewis sensed that ‘measured against the ages “mere Christianity” turns out to be no insipid interdenominational transparency, but something positive, self-consistent, and inexhaustible.’ He describes those literary works wherein he recognized an ‘all too familiar smell, that almost unvarying something’, ‘honeyed and floral’, ‘grave and homely’, ‘grim but manful’, ‘a mild, frightening, Paradisial flavour’. The theological scope Lewis advocated was not merely for doctrinal safeguarding, but because those issues which reside at the centre of Christianity formed a consistent, alluring element in his own journey to the faith.

²⁷³ MC xiii.

issues of one's own context, an important aspect common to all apologetic endeavour, he observed:

A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cat-aract [*sic*] of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.²⁷⁴

The apologist's intellect should not be restricted. Rather, from a robust understanding, the apologist should develop the skill to restrict themselves both in category and language, limiting their efforts to central Christian beliefs expressed in widely used terminology. Lewis, in addition to his natural abilities, developed these skills through consistent and lengthy engagement with non-Christians and Christians alike across decades of letter correspondence, editorials, articles, radio addresses, sermons, speeches, and monographs. As the president of the Oxford Socratic Club from its founding in January 1942 until his departure for Cambridge in 1955, Lewis had considerable practical experience in public discourse about Christianity. The aim of the Socratic was to provide an open forum for the pursuit of truth around religion in general and Christianity in particular.²⁷⁵ Lewis was an active member and a formidable opponent. Farrer recalls the assurance he felt knowing that whichever way the contest might turn, Lewis was always able to carry the day.²⁷⁶ The Socratic provided Lewis an avenue to apply the apologetic skills he advocated, including restricting one's arguments to beliefs commonly held. In his preface to the inaugural edition of the Socratic Digest he articulates how the Incarnation, of all the central beliefs, was foremost in his theology and the foundation for why public engagement around Christianity is necessary:

Others may have quite a different objection to our proceedings. They may protest that intellectual discussion can neither build Christianity nor destroy it. They may feel that religion is too sacred to be thus bandied to and fro in public debate, too sacred to be talked of—almost, perhaps, too sacred for anything to be done with it at all. Clearly, the Christian members of the Socratic think differently. They know that intellectual

²⁷⁴ 'Learning in War-Time', Sermon at Evensong, Cambridge (22 October 1939); reprinted WOG 42.

²⁷⁵ Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 618; Socratic Club founder Stella Aldwinckle recalled, 'we wanted to get to the truth of things, and to follow the argument in good faith and good temper wherever it went.', White, Roger, Judith Wolfe and Brendan N. Wolfe, eds. *C.S. and His Circle: Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 193.

²⁷⁶ Austin Farrer recalls of participating in the Socratic Club, 'Whatever ineptitudes I might commit, he would maintain the cause; and nobody could put Lewis down.', Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 27.

assent is not faith, but they do not believe that religion is only ‘what a man does with his solitude’. Or, if it is, then they care nothing for ‘religion’ and all for Christianity. Christianity is not merely what a man does with his solitude. It is not even what God does with His solitude. It tells of God descending into the coarse publicity of history and there enacting what can—and must—be talked about.²⁷⁷

In addition to the apologetic role of reason, which receives fuller treatment in what follows, Lewis is here saying that the difference between religion—in some pejorative sense of the word—and Christianity hinges upon the Incarnation.²⁷⁸ It compelled public debate of the faith because the historical event itself, in Lewis’s phraseology, is a kind of Divine engagement in public discourse, God’s historical embodiment as God’s voice in the debate, ‘the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14a).

Lewis was very cognizant of the role of an apologist and what they are ultimately able to accomplish, what can be achieved in the minds and lives of their audience. He believed that the great merit of his own apologetic work was not so much the dissolution of opposition but rather to help form and establish a more willing environment: ‘an intellectual (and imaginative) climate favourable to Christianity’.²⁷⁹ He disagreed with those who felt such an endeavour was of no use. Employing a military metaphor, he argued that one does not disprove the validity of a particular combat unit ‘by showing that they cannot themselves win battles’.²⁸⁰ An apologist of his kind may establish in the minds of their audience a perspective more conducive to what ultimately becomes faith in Christ. The ‘favourable conditions’ under which consideration of Christianity occurs are evidenced in that the audience’s ‘reason and imagination are not on the wrong side’.²⁸¹ To pursue apologetics in this way does not require a preliminary defeat of opposing positions. It is setting the stage, not clearing

²⁷⁷ ‘The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club’, *The Socratic Digest*, No. 1 (1942-1943) 3-5; reprinted GID 128.

²⁷⁸ It was the center of his theology, ‘The primary language of Christianity is a lived language, the real, historical, visible, tangible, language of an actual person being born, dying and living again in a new, ineffably transformed way.’: Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best.’ In Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic) 64.

²⁷⁹ ‘The Decline of Religion’, *The Cherwell*, vol. XXVI (29 November 1946) 8-10; reprinted GID 221.

²⁸⁰ Perhaps in reference to his detractors, he further states, ‘however proper this reminder would be if they attempted to claim the honour due to fighting men.’, *Ibid*.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*.

it.²⁸² Thus, Lewis's self-conception as an apologist was not that he himself was effectual in arguing one *into* Christianity, but rather orienting one *toward* Christianity. He saw his brand of apologetics as a kind of mental gardening, tending to the weeds and overgrowth such that one can easily see and follow the intended path. It is fitting, then, that he says of this approach, 'Those who help to produce and spread such a climate are therefore doing useful work: and yet no such great matter after all. Their share is a modest one; and it is always possible that nothing—nothing whatever—may come of it.'²⁸³ This forms a very disciplined and modest approach. He writes of a 'far higher' sort who may yet appear, 'the *Preacher* in the full sense'. But of those like himself, he says:

The propagandist, the apologist, only represents John Baptist: the Preacher represents the Lord Himself. He will be sent—or else he will not. But unless he comes we mere Christian intellectuals will not effect very much. That does not mean we should down tools.'²⁸⁴

Perhaps there is something here of what eventually becomes dutiful Lewis as the 'dinosaur',²⁸⁵ operating out where no one has been in some time, in ways no one really uses anymore, only in effort to prepare a way and then step aside. For John arrived in the manner of the prophets of old, out in the wilderness doing what no one had been doing (Mark 1:4-8), and once Christ came, his end was, in a sense, ignominy (Mark 6:21-29). John was of course quite revered as well (Mark 11:32; Luke 7:24-30), but that does not seem to be the part of John's life Lewis has in mind. Whatever the intention behind his comparison, he considered his apologetic task to be cultivating a favourable intellectual and imaginative climate in the minds of his audience.

Lewis gives no indication of an attempt to be innovative as an apologist. That is not to say there is nothing innovative about Lewis's apologetics, but that a new or novel method was not his aim. There is no parallel to Kierkegaard's existentialism, Tillich's

²⁸² Cf. Burke's stage-set analogy: 'the stage-set contains the action *ambiguously* (as regards the norms of action)—and in the course of the play's development this ambiguity is converted into a corresponding *articulacy*.'; Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) 7.

²⁸³ 'The Decline of Religion', *The Cherwell*, vol. XXVI (29 November 1946) 8-10; reprinted GID 221.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 221-22.

²⁸⁵ 'De Descriptione Temporum', *An Inaugural Lecture by the Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955); reprinted TAFP 25.

‘method of correlation’, or Bultmann’s ‘demythologizing’.²⁸⁶ Cunningham observes Lewis’s method as an amalgamation of his great skill set, diverse background, and something ‘inseparable from its literary vehicles’.²⁸⁷ Perhaps most accurate is McGrath’s assessment that ‘Lewis’s approach to apologetics is best considered not so much a coherent system, but as a series of loosely coordinated and shifting strategies.’²⁸⁸ The degree to which Lewis’s use of ambiguity was unconscious or conscious may be impossible to definitively discern except in rare instances.²⁸⁹ He was eminently concerned with what one says, not the one saying it, not only of others but of himself as well. But his self-awareness and vision for both apologists and apologetics provide motive and means for his ambiguity being strategic.

2. Reasons and Motives

i) Humility

The question of Lewis’s cognizance of his apologetic ambiguity is intriguing. And while for this thesis it is not necessary to prove that Lewis’s usage was a conscious act, there are strong reasons and motives worth surveying for why apologetic ambiguity would have been of interest to him. The first of these has to do with the consistent humility he displayed in response to both the world of theology and the reality that he was not a trained theologian. Time and again, when asked to represent Christianity publicly Lewis gives some qualifying (or perhaps *disqualifying*) statement of himself. At the open of *The Problem of Pain*, he makes sure his reader knows that he is ‘a layman and an amateur’, only qualified to address the intellectual problem, that the ‘far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience’ was to be left to the professionals,²⁹⁰ and ‘any theologian will see easily enough what, and how little, I have read’.²⁹¹ In *Mere Christianity*, he begins by confessing that matters beyond beliefs common to all Christians at all times should be left to ‘real experts’.²⁹² In *Miracles* he makes apparent

²⁸⁶ Cunningham, Richard B. and William Griffin. *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008) 21. Cf. McGrath’s ‘remythologizing’ in both Bultmann and Lewis: McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 69.

²⁸⁷ Cunningham, Richard B. and William Griffin. *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008) 21.

²⁸⁸ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 131.

²⁸⁹ See Lewis’s use of ambiguity between Ransom and Oyarsa. Letter of 9 August 1939, CLII 262.

²⁹⁰ POP vii-viii.

²⁹¹ POP xii.

²⁹² MC viii.

his own position as a non-theologian by repeated reference to what ‘the theologians’ will say on various matters.²⁹³ Even late in his life, when asked to join the Commission to Revise the Psalter in 1958, with most of his career already behind him and his credibility for articulating and defending the Christian faith well established, Lewis still replied to the Archbishop’s invitation in a self-deprecating way: ‘I cannot refuse to serve on this Commission if I am wanted. I wish I were better qualified, but there is no use in multiplying words about that.’²⁹⁴ At sixty years of age he still viewed himself as ‘not sufficiently well read’ in theology.²⁹⁵ Farrer felt that Lewis was an apologist ‘from temper, from conviction, and from modesty’.²⁹⁶ His line in ‘Transposition’ is again relevant: ‘I walk in *mirabilibus supra me*’. It is most likely Psalm 130:1b in the Vulgate: ‘*neque ambulavi in magnis, neque in mirabilibus supra me*’ (‘I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me’). The psalmist speaks of humility and self-control, of one who has humbled and calmed their inner person such that they are content like a small child with its mother and waiting upon God. It is this humility when facing the mysteries of theology that led Lewis to ‘submit all to the verdict of real theologians.’²⁹⁷ It is not that Lewis held all formally trained theologians on a pedestal. There are criticisms of some the modern theologians he did read.²⁹⁸ But Lewis maintained an awe for the grandeur of what theology attempts to communicate and his awareness his own untrained theological position produced in him a humble disposition that could certainly be better expressed through apologetic ambiguity. It would allow Lewis to speak confidently while still honouring the mysterious without having to digress into minutia and abstractions that were neither his expertise nor aim. It would allow him to communicate creatively, presenting ideas and images before the imagination without entering areas of theology where Lewis believed himself inadequate or the subject matter better observed at a distance.

ii) Academic and Professional Reasons

Whereas Lewis’s lack of expertise in one area presents part of a reasonable motive for the use of apologetic ambiguity, so does his expertise in other areas, only for a different reason. He was a literary scholar of the highest calibre, built upon a lifetime

²⁹³ Of creation (M 66), redemption (M 68),

²⁹⁴ Letter to Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, 14 Nov 1958: CLIII 989.

²⁹⁵ Letter to Corbin Scott Carnell, 13 October 1958: CLIII 978.

²⁹⁶ Gibb, Jocelyn. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 24.

²⁹⁷ ‘Transposition’ in TAFP 180.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Letter to Corbin Scott Carnell, 13 October 1958: CLIII 978.

of broad reading that began in his earliest years. From the ‘endless books’ of Little Lea,²⁹⁹ to Smugy’s enlightening poetry and instruction in classics,³⁰⁰ and the intense and structured education under Kirkpatrick,³⁰¹ the wide spectrum of his education fuelled a voracious appetite for reading that continued throughout his lifetime. Even Lewis’s ‘wasted’ time at Belsen³⁰² included expanding reading interests. The immense bibliography that runs throughout Lewis’s works and letters attests to one who had ‘the clean sea breeze of the centuries’³⁰³ blowing through his mind. One cannot read Lewis without being brought into contact with the vast literary world he inhabited. The depth of his learning, exceptional recollection,³⁰⁴ and synthesis of his expertise are aspects of Lewis that led Tolkien to observe, ‘You’ll never get to the bottom of him.’³⁰⁵ One has only to consider the depths of semantic variation explored in *Studies in Words* or his astute awareness of the complexities of ideas and the effects of language employed to communicate them in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. In the latter he argues that to overcome complex language that could otherwise be a hurdle, the reader’s imagination must be kept in motion, able to respond to Milton in the same way a rudder steers a moving vessel. When successful, the effect upon the reader is moving: ‘like the voice of a bard chanting in the hall’.³⁰⁶ Milton achieved this in an exemplary way through ‘the simplicity of the broad imaginative effects...and the perfect rightness of their sequence’.³⁰⁷ The reader can ‘play at’ what is complex while primarily being receptive to the ‘underlying simplicity’. The result is avoidance of being caught upon a disjointed part or break in the rhythm of ideas. There is a ‘general feeling...that something highly concatenated is before you’, and ‘that you are following a great unflagging voice’.³⁰⁸ This feeling of unity and consistent voice in a particular direction maintains the momentum of a reader’s intellect and imagination, momentum that the author uses to steer the reader. What Lewis observes of Milton in this instance is

²⁹⁹ SBJ 8.

³⁰⁰ SBJ 106-108.

³⁰¹ SBJ 135-157.

³⁰² Referred to as Belsen by Lewis: ‘Intellectually, the time I spent at Oldie’s was almost entirely wasted; if the school had not died, and if I had been left there two years more, it would probably have sealed my fate as a scholar for good.’: SBJ 32. That a youthful eroticism partly fueled Lewis’s reading at that time does not negate the intellectual broadening that accompanied his expanding reading.

³⁰³ ‘On the Reading of Old Books’ in EC 440; reprinted Preface to *On the Incarnation*: Athanasius, John Behr, and C. S. Lewis. *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, N.Y: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 9-15.

³⁰⁴ George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) xix.

³⁰⁵ Tolkien’s comment was to George Sayer as Sayer was leaving his initial meeting with Lewis, who was to be his tutor: Sayer. *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*, xx.

³⁰⁶ PPL 43.

³⁰⁷ PPL 44.

³⁰⁸ PPL 44.

indicative of a motive he himself would have had to use apologetic ambiguity. Lewis's vast learning made him aware of the complexities of language and how ideas are conveyed. Apologetic issues engender conflict, not only through the primary issue in view, but also through raising secondary issues of contention or by over-simplifying the complex. It would be to Lewis's benefit to employ degrees of apologetic ambiguity to bear his reader 'upborne with indefatigable wings',³⁰⁹ conveying his meaning in a more effective way than over-simplification while simultaneously keeping them from faltering upon the breaks in thought from lesser issues. Additionally, Lewis operated in professional academic environments that valued intellectual openness. Even John Betjeman, who envisioned himself a long-time nemesis of Lewis³¹⁰, in his May Day poem for reading at Magdalen College wherein he fittingly celebrates the new season and old, unmodernized Oxford, recalled: 'Oh! earnest ethical search, For the wide high-table *λογος* of St. C.S. Lewis's Church.'³¹¹ It is a satirical gloss but still speaks truthfully to Lewis's fondness for open, intellectual dialogue. Both Oxford and Cambridge, at that time, were universities wherein an appreciation of nuance and a certain intellectual receptivity were valued, which are both facets of ambiguity within Lewis's apologetic.

iii) Familial and Cultural Reasons

Beyond reasons related to his academic background, there are also factors more personal that suggest apologetic ambiguity would have been attractive to Lewis. When ambiguity is employed successfully, it can have a unifying effect, allowing diverse views to travel in parallel by tolerating disagreements on non-critical points. It can help carry a reader between opposing peaks, upon a smoother, more central path. Aspects of Lewis's personal life align with these dynamics. Born in 1898 to a Protestant family in Belfast, young Lewis grew up amidst the tensions of sectarian Ulster life. His family, however, did not embody the sectarianism of the surrounding

³⁰⁹ PPL 43.

³¹⁰ Cf. letter to CSL on 13 Dec 1939. He seemingly attempted to remedy his animosity for Lewis, yet even then cannot avoid a bitter and wounded tone. He also tells Lewis in the letter, 'I did not get an opportunity of speaking to you at that dreary Swanwick affair.', referring to the Swanwick Student Christian Movement camp. Yet, in his letter on 31 July 1935 he comments about that event, 'Lewis I saw, who was most effusive, but I managed to avoid him.': Betjeman, John. *Letters, Vol. I, 1926-1951*, Candida Lycett Green, ed. (London: Methuen, 1994) 250-253.

³¹¹ Betjeman, John. *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 2001) 96. After an unceremonious exit from Oxford, he continued to despise Lewis. Cf. Letter of 1 Jan 1935, 'I must get him psycho-analysed out of me.': Betjeman, John. *Letters, Vol. I, 1926-1951*, Candida Lycett Green, ed. (London: Methuen, 1994) 147.

culture, even employing a maid who was Catholic.³¹² Amid the tumult and abuse during his two years at Wynyard School,³¹³ he was also taken to church twice on Sundays. The experience of this ‘high “Anglo-Catholic”’ service brought out an indoctrinated reaction (‘was I not an Ulster Protestant, and were not these unfamiliar rituals an essential part of the hated English atmosphere?’) but there was also an inner tolerance: ‘Unconsciously, I suspect, the candles and incense, the vestments and the hymns sung on our knees, may have had a considerable, and opposite, effect on me’.³¹⁴ Lewis developed an aversion to unnecessary divisions in that regard. As a young man of twenty-four he wrote of his indignance at a relative who supported Ulster governmental policy prohibiting Midnight Mass.³¹⁵ The external tensions of Northern Ireland were one influence, but there were also tensions internal to the home. His reflections upon the character of his paternal and maternal forebears gives a fascinating picture of a child exposed to two worlds, with two very different ways of thinking and communicating. On one side Lewis experienced the uncertainty of his father’s fluctuating personality, and on the other side the stability and concreteness of his mother.³¹⁶ His father’s volatility produced in Clive a distrustful and adversarial stance toward emotional expression in one’s personal affairs. They were ‘something uncomfortable and embarrassing and even dangerous.’³¹⁷ Albert Lewis’s influence upon his son was made more acute because it daily stood in contrast to Lewis’s mother who, for her son, embodied a Hamiltonian stability, predictability, and clarity. We must here address Sayer’s disagreement with Lewis about the Hamiltons. In his biography, Sayer recalls Lewis’s maternal grandfather, Thomas Hamilton, being extremely emotional and while vicar of St. Mark’s Belfast often weeping embarrassingly in the pulpit.³¹⁸ Sayer’s negative view of Thomas Hamilton is expanded to the entire Hamilton line, leading him to challenge Lewis’s assessment: ‘[Thomas Hamilton] does not seem at all to fit the description of the Hamiltons in Clive’s autobiographical *Surprised by Joy*’ and ‘Nor is this comment true of Clive’s

³¹² McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 8.

³¹³ The years were 1908 to 1910.

³¹⁴ SBJ 31.

³¹⁵ Letter of 26 Dec 1922, ‘The latter [Cousin Mary], despite my real respect for her, made me indignant by supporting the Ulster government’s prohibition of Midnight Mass and describing Cardinal Logue’s very moderate letter as an incitement to rebellion.’: AMR 159-160.

³¹⁶ SBJ 2.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) 27.

mother or of any other members of the family.³¹⁹ Sayer's claim is a bold one. Is it possible that Lewis so exceedingly misunderstood his own family? Or did he intentionally mischaracterize them? Lewis admitted overstating some elements of his past in *Surprised by Joy*, for example his time at Malvern.³²⁰ Sayer's comments and Lewis's admission are unsettling. As McGrath observes, 'Sayer's recollection leaves readers of *Surprised by Joy* wondering about both the extent and motivation of Lewis's reconstruction of his past.'³²¹ Yet, Sayer assumes too much. It does not follow that Thomas Hamilton's tendencies in the pulpit were characteristic of his entire life, let alone of the entire Hamilton family. There is a certain kind of emotional and spiritual uniqueness which accompanies the exposition of Holy Writ. A pulpit can be a very strange place to stand. While not universally true, and often not beneficial, many preachers are a different person for an hour or so on Sunday morning. Sayer's assessment may well be overgeneralization. The real issue is not Thomas, but Flora Hamilton. Sayer writes of her frequent worrying about finances and the health of the boys.³²² Yet he also acknowledges the financial strain and high child mortality rates of that time.³²³ Despite Albert Lewis's successful law practice and perhaps an over-diagnosed respiratory issue for Clive,³²⁴ Flora's concerns were perfectly reasonable. She was, after all, their mother. Sayer gives us a picture of Flora Hamilton before marriage as one who did not have a romantic love for Albert Lewis, despite his passion and commitment for her. In considering her longstanding unwillingness to marry Albert, Sayer observes, 'It says much for her high principles and for the coolness of her disposition that for years she refused to marry a man she did not love deeply.'³²⁵ When Albert accused her of mercenary intentions in their friendship, she revealed that she had often cried herself to sleep and did not 'deserve to be thought of as heartless.' Sayer calls this, 'the most emotional sentence to be found in what we have of her correspondence.'³²⁶ This hardly coalesces with the overly passionate character he saw in Thomas Hamilton and attributed to the entire family. It is, of course, possible that Lewis overstated the Hamiltonian way. After all, he only experienced his mother on

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ SBJ 113; Cf. Sayer. *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*, 82-86.

³²¹ McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 26.

³²² Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) 42, 52.

³²³ Ibid. 39.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid. 30.

³²⁶ Ibid.

this earth through age nine. He greatly favoured her over his father, and when combined with the abiding wound³²⁷ and a longing for all that was good, safe, and stable, taken from him in her death, it would be understandable if Lewis's recollection of her was more favourable than the reality. However, with what is known of his mother, it is much more reasonable to accept Lewis's assessment of the Hamiltons as accurate of his own experience of them. Furthermore, on this point it is not necessary to prove Lewis's view over Sayer's, though it seems likely Lewis was right. We need only recognize that Lewis's view is an accurate representation of how Flora influenced him. If the reality was different, the effect upon Lewis remains: in his mother and father Lewis had concreteness and ambiguity personified.

There is a distaste for unnecessary divisiveness in Lewis that grows out of his familial and cultural background. *Mere Christianity* stands as a monolithic example of this, demonstrating it at every turn. His opening sentiment about the church is an excellent summary:

It is at her centre, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests there is a something, or a Someone, who is against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice.³²⁸

In pursuit of that centre Lewis regularly spoke of moderation, temperance, and a willingness to set aside secondary matters: 'If we cannot lay down our tastes, along with other carnal baggage, at the church door, surely we should at least bring them in to be humbled and, if necessary, modified, not to be indulged?'³²⁹ Unwanted divisiveness may be handled in a variety of ways, and even in this one example Lewis suggests the options of putting the issue aside ('lay down'), engaging the issue openly ('to be humbled'), and having a willingness to enact change ('modified'). Apologetic ambiguity can be a means to avoid raising up divisive issues, diffusing indoctrinated responses through alternative presentations. When a point of tension is engaged, ambiguity can be used to present it in a more tolerant way, giving room for alternative understandings, at least for a time, so that a preferred direction can be maintained. In this way, apologetic ambiguity would be an attractive tool for Lewis to employ

³²⁷ 'there is still too much of "Mammy's little lost boy" about me.' Letter to Phyllis Elinor Sandeman, 31 December 1953, CLIII 398.

³²⁸ MC xii.

³²⁹ Letter to the editor of *Church Times*, August 1951: CLIII 132.

alongside his formidable arsenal of other rhetorical devices and literary style. Beyond helping to avoid unnecessary divisiveness, apologetic ambiguity would also have been a fitting vehicle for Lewis's *Englishness*. He was, of course, Irish by birth, and though his first experience of England yielded 'a hatred for England which took many years to heal',³³⁰ he went on to spend the rest of his life in English schools and universities. Lewis identified as a native Irishman and with his mother's Welsh ancestry³³¹ and never lost his love for the country of his birth. It was where he vacationed, and his honeymoon was there. What he loved of both worlds might be found a definition he once gave for heaven: 'Oxford lifted and placed in the middle of the County Down.'³³² For decades his cultural environment was English and certain characteristics of that culture, characteristics much more like his mother than father, are the sort that could be conveyed apologetically through a strategic use of ambiguity. Beyond an advocacy of moderation, there is often in Lewis an appreciation of understatement and irony. One might only consider his use of the crucifixion of Christ as a counter-example to the psychological concept of being well adjusted: 'You can't really be well "adjusted" to your world if it says you "have a devil" and end by nailing you up naked to a stake of wood'³³³ or looking at a future when the real, central person will be seen plainly, 'There will be surprises.'³³⁴ And there are the metanarrative ironies in works like *Miracles*, where a central argument is that reason itself is miraculous, and *The Abolition of Man* where to go on seeing through ultimately results in seeing nothing at all. Ambiguity can assist such English (and perhaps Hamiltonian) traits within apologetics through suggestion instead of demand, illustration instead of prescription.

iv) Ecumenical and Ecclesiastical Motives

One of the more significant motives for Lewis's use of apologetic ambiguity was his desire to conduct apologetics in an ecumenical spirit. With few exceptions³³⁵ Lewis endeavoured to keep his apologetic argumentation to what was central to Christians of all confessions. He strove to address only what was ancient and orthodox.³³⁶ *Mere Christianity* is the best example of this in Lewis. Recognizing that even disputes are

³³⁰ SBJ 23.

³³¹ Letter to Eliza Marian Butler on 25 Sept 1940, CLII 445; Sayer. *Jack: A Life*, 21.

³³² Bleakley, David. *C.S. Lewis at Home in Ireland* (Bangor: Strandtown Press, 1998) 53.

³³³ TFL 81.

³³⁴ MC 92.

³³⁵ Cf. LTM or the chapter on Hell in POP.

³³⁶ POP x.

disputed, that is, divisions arise about what is important and worthy of discussion, Lewis sent manuscripts of the second book to Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic clergy. One of his overarching aims in the work was to help bring differing Christians together, or at least to show why such a reunion is worthwhile.³³⁷ His ecumenical test group agreed on the inclusion of primary issues such as faith or the Atonement, but there were still disagreements on how much, or how little, should be said.³³⁸ He was accepting of these, allowing them to continue to exist in the text having been satisfied that on larger points all were generally in agreement. The stated motive of keeping to what has been ‘common to nearly all Christians at all times’³³⁹ carries with the corresponding motive of avoiding what has not. The former is primary, the latter secondary. We see this expressed in his preface to the French edition of *The Problem of Pain*:

In the meantime, it will be apparent that the man who is most faithful in living the Christian life in his own church is spiritually the closest to the faithful believers in other confessions: because the geography of the spiritual world is very different from that of the physical world. In the latter, countries touch each other at their borders, in the former, at their centre. It is the lukewarm and indifferent in each country who are furthest from all other countries.³⁴⁰

Apologetic ambiguity is a tool that could allow Lewis to obscure or bypass secondary issues, along with their corresponding disagreements. His attempts at this were not always understood or appreciated. This is partly why Pittenger, who was not Lewis’s intended audience, accused of him of substituting ‘smart superficiality for careful thought, reasonable restatement and credible theology’.³⁴¹ Lewis’s desire to communicate ecumenically was not isolated from his ecclesiastical affiliation.

He was part of the Church of England and faithful to his Anglicanism he employed the *via media* in many of his apologetic arguments. One the most beneficial aspects of apologetic ambiguity is its ability to accommodate disparate views, helping establish or maintain unity in place of conflict, and allowing unity to continue until a point of

³³⁷ MC xi.

³³⁸ MC xi.

³³⁹ MC xiii.

³⁴⁰ Translated by Eliane Tixier and Victoria Hobson: Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 297.

³⁴¹ Pittenger, Norman W. ‘Apologet versus Apologist: A critique of C.S. Lewis as “defender of the faith”’ in *The Christian Century*, October 1, 1958; reprinted *Mythlore*, 27 (Vol. 3, No. 3., January 1972) 6.

conflict is unavoidable. There is, of course, a larger sense in which Lewis's entire approach to apologetics is a 'middle way' by virtue of his overarching emphasis upon issues central to all confessing Christians. But in the ecology of Lewis's thought one observes a recurring dynamic wherein he proposes a *via media* as the way forward between two otherwise unaligned ideas. For example, in his argument from desire Lewis constructs a kind of bridge between heaven and earth through the experience of his idiosyncratic Joy. It is that Joy which paves the middle way as he holds these two ends of the spectrum in continuity, establishing a healthy relational tension. In *Letters to Malcolm*, human consciousness is the bridge for humanity's volitional interdependence and interrelatedness with God:

'Here is the actual meeting of God's activity and man's... There is no question of God "up there" or "out there"; rather, the present operation of God "in here," as the ground of my own being, and God "in there" as the ground of the matter that surrounds me, and God embracing and uniting both in the daily miracle of finite consciousness'.³⁴²

This dynamic is also in the grieving widower of *A Grief Observed*, albeit more abstractly. He remembers how the self and the other, two beings so distinct yet sharing so much, were held together in the unity of marriage, 'The most precious gift that marriage gave me was this constant impact of something very close and intimate yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant—in a word, real.'³⁴³ The middle way was forged in marital unity, and it was there that meaning was found. More broadly in Lewis's thought there are at least three major areas where Lewis does this. First is the aforementioned middle way of heaven and earth through Joy.³⁴⁴ Second, the middle way of intellect and desire through reason, principally in *The Abolition of Man*. Third, the middle way of God and man through Christ the true Myth. Near the end of Lewis's chapter on Heaven in *The Problem of Pain*, which truly is much more of a chapter about Joy, he follows a long string of grand metaphors and imaginative, ambiguous language with the statement: 'For union exists only between distincts; and, perhaps, from this point of view, we catch a momentary glimpse of the meaning of all things.'³⁴⁵ It is in the bridging of two distinct things by a third middle way that one may

³⁴² LTM 79-80.

³⁴³ AGO 18.

³⁴⁴ This expressed in many ways in Lewis's corpus, but more directly in *Mere Christianity*, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, and *Surprised by Joy*. Cf. Peter J. Kreeft, 'C.S. Lewis's Argument from Desire' in MacDonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie. *The Riddle of Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 252-255.

³⁴⁵ POP 138.

apprehend meaning, even ‘of all things’, albeit incompletely. The union takes place on the *via media*. In instances like these and many others, we can see not only Lewis’s Anglicanism broadly, but the influence of Richard Hooker specifically. In Hooker’s apologetic for aspects of the Elizabethan Settlement one sees much of Lewis’s tolerance and ecumenism. Lewis’s context was, of course, vastly different from Hooker and the tensions under which the latter wrote makes his advocacy of a middle way all the more remarkable. Hooker spoke graciously of the salvation of Roman Catholics and cautioned moderation and tolerance to his fellow Protestants: ‘Beware lest we make too many ways of denying Christ.’ A cardinal or pope could be saved by ‘a merciful God ready to make the best of that little which we hold well.’³⁴⁶ Lewis observed a humility in Hooker expressed through prudence and an ‘almost agonized charity’.³⁴⁷ In those books in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* that Lewis deemed authentic, he saw a ‘work of prudence, or art, of moral virtue’. There is an ‘obedience to “decorum”’.³⁴⁸ Hooker focused upon matters he considered important to the universal, visible church over against ‘a religion’ — language that Lewis himself echoes in *Mere Christianity* and elsewhere.³⁴⁹ Lewis held that Hooker (along with Cardinal William Allen) rose ‘above the usual controversial methods of the time, he neither carps nor snarls and trusts more to a steady exposition of what he believes to the truth than to a fussy decoration of errors.’³⁵⁰ For Lewis, Hooker’s *Polity* exemplified Anglicanism because it illuminated the resultant ‘large tent’. He agreed with Hooker that all kinds of knowledge, good arts and sciences are from the Father of Lights and ‘as so many sparkles resembling the bright fountain from which they rise’.³⁵¹ Lewis expresses this in *Surprised by Joy*: ‘I think that all things, in their way, reflect heavenly truth, the imagination not the least.’³⁵² There was no prescriptive Anglicanism: ‘What we are committed to believing is what can be proved from Scripture. On that subject there is room for endless progress.’³⁵³ The inclusive and moderate manner was observed early in Lewis’s works. An early review of *Perelandra* captures both the Englishness and Anglicanism of Lewis. It noted that because of his

³⁴⁶ EL 451.

³⁴⁷ EL 451.

³⁴⁸ EL 453.

³⁴⁹ EL 454; MC ix; ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 90.

³⁵⁰ EL 438.

³⁵¹ EL 460.

³⁵² SBJ 161.

³⁵³ Letter to H. Lyman Stebbins on 8 May 1945: CLII 645.

courteousness, the more a reader disagreed with him the more interested they become and ‘He has been able to accept a good deal from which many of us, rightly or wrongly, shrink.’³⁵⁴ Together, aspects of Lewis’s character, familial and cultural background, academic career, ecumenical spirit and Anglicanism all present ample motivation for why ambiguity in his apologetic would have been attractive, not for ambiguity’s sake, but as a means for these varied aspects of his person to be expressed.

3. Distinctives and Method

In the short essay ‘The Language of Religion’³⁵⁵ Lewis recognizes the need for univocal terms given the disparate understandings between the Christian apologist and the non-believer. Such language, standard to traditional apologetics, is requisitely abstract in that it must communicate about God on sceptical grounds because it cannot expect or demand that a non-Christian agree to argument grounded in faith.³⁵⁶ This, for Lewis, is necessary but undesirable because it creates a dynamic of having to prove God without being able to engage Him directly, and it is precisely the actual, primary events and experience wherein Lewis finds the real merits and proofs.³⁵⁷ Thus, the language of abstraction is the way to precision, but imaginative language speaks of reality. Neither approach excludes ambiguity and even attempted univocal terms cannot arrive at fully restricted meaning. In commenting on a general style of writing, he does caution against a kind of error of ambiguity:

The way for a person to develop a style is (a) to know exactly what he wants to say, and (b) to be sure he is saying exactly that. The reader, we must remember, does not start by knowing what we mean. If our words are ambiguous, our meaning will escape him. I sometimes think that writing is like driving sheep down a road. If there is any gate open to the left or the right the readers will most certainly go into it.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Bacon, Leonard. Review of Perelandra in *The Saturday Review of Literature* quoted in Martell, Clare Lorinne. *C.S. Lewis: Teacher as Apologist* (Thesis: Boston College) 1949.

³⁵⁵ CR 129-141.

³⁵⁶ ‘We have to try to prove *that* God is in circumstances where we are denied every means of conveying *who* God is.’, CR 136.

³⁵⁷ Lewis elsewhere juxtaposes this as ‘the logic of speculative thought’ vs ‘the logic of personal relations’: ‘Obstinacy in Belief’ in WLN, 30. Ward illustrates this as having to argue in court for what is known best by experiential faith, comparing it to Mozart or Beethoven being required to prove their music by mathematical theorem unaided by sound or sight. Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best.’ in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic) 70.

³⁵⁸ ‘Cross Examination’ interview by Sherwood E. Wirt of Billy Graham Association, 7 May 1963; reprinted GID 263.

The transcript of the 1963 interview the above quote is taken from, the same year Lewis died, does not explain what he meant by ‘words’. It may have been the singular sense as in *terms*, the plural sense referring to the general use of language, or both. At a minimum he was referring to terms, for terms must be assembled to form language. But his precise referent is unclear. What is clear is that for Lewis there was a kind of ambiguity to be avoided that is attributable to poor scholarship, poor linguistic skill, or both.³⁵⁹ This warning from Lewis does not speak to potential strategic ambiguity, the sort that may keep the sheep from ever seeing ‘open gates’ in the first place. The ambiguity to which Lewis is referring is one that puts at risk the apologist’s goal of guiding his reader to the intended destination, just as a shepherd guides his sheep to good pastures.³⁶⁰ It is reasonable to allow the possibility that when ambiguity is present in Lewis’s apologetic arguments, that ambiguity may relate to the road upon which he desired to drive the reader. Ambiguity can certainly errantly leave an open gate in an argument where a reader’s attention may be lost. But in the service of someone like Lewis who possessed exceptional rhetorical skill, combined with his theological self-awareness, intentionality in his mode of argument, and a lifetime of thinking about thinking,³⁶¹ ambiguity may be used to divert the reader’s attention away from those undesirable gates in order to maintain focus toward the intended destination. Given Lewis’s emphasis on restricting arguments to claims central to Christianity, ambiguity well-employed may help keep the reader on Lewis’s desired path, traversing disparate views related to secondary issues.

³⁵⁹ Cf. ‘Before We Can Communicate’ in *Breakthrough*, No. 8 (October 1961) 2; reprinted GID 245. Lewis recalls a conversation with a working man about a ‘personal’ devil wherein both became completely confused. The solution came through the realization that they were operating under different assumptions and definitions for ‘personal’. The ambiguity of the term—being open to more than one interpretation—was cause for the error.

³⁶⁰ That he framed his concern in the image of a shepherd is intriguing. Sheep are notoriously simple-minded animals, and perhaps he had such a view of readers—that they were to be treated like sheep who cannot be expected to stay on the path but must continuously be corralled. Yet, as a Christian, Lewis may have had biblical shepherding imagery in mind, imagery which spans the entire biblical story (Num 27:17; Ps 23:1; Isa 40:11; Mic 5:4; Matt 9:6; John 10:11; 1 Pet 2:25; Rev 7:17). If used in that sense, then Lewis viewed himself in the role of a caring guide and protector, responsible for leading the reader out of danger and into a good place (Ps 23:1-2; Mt 12:11).

³⁶¹ By age 18 Lewis had already been analysing, categorizing, and assembling his thought life in the context of communication within relationship. To Arthur Greeves, in response to Greeves’s request to date their letters, Lewis replied ‘I classify them not by time but *by the stage in our thoughts* [emphasis added] at which they were written.’, CLI 213-214; Significant events for Lewis were intellectual ones, moments in time etched in his memory because of how this thought life had changed, such as recalling early debate, ‘I can even remember from those days what must have been the first metaphysical argument I ever took part in. We debated whether the future was like a line you can’t see or like a line that is not yet drawn. I have forgotten which side I took though I know that I took it with great zeal.’, SBJ 30; ‘I fancy that most of those who think at all have done a great deal of thinking in the first fourteen years.’, SBJ 60.

He was known for exercising control over an argument, doing his best to ensure the defence took place on his terms. Close friends considered him ‘formidable’³⁶² and able to ‘adjust his mind ahead, rapidly and incisively, just as a fencer instinctively puts his feet in the right place’.³⁶³ His long-time publisher, Jocelyn Gibb, wrote:

Lewis always took very good care that he performed or contest on ground of his own choosing. Of course behind it all he had the advantage of a scholarly mind (nurtured on the classics), a remarkable memory and above all an unshakable, deep sense of truth.³⁶⁴

This is not to paint Lewis as an apologist in a magnanimous light, but only to evidence that he was strategic and intentional in his approach to apologetics. George Watson recalled: ‘[Lewis] might be described as politely merciless...His fondness for the put-down could be alarming.’³⁶⁵ Similarly, Jocelyn Gibb observed: ‘...in argument he could sometimes throw you in the dust rather sharply.’³⁶⁶ He observed his own outlook as part of a righteous minority who for virtue’s sake, as on Crispin’s Day, must stand against the prevailing majority.³⁶⁷ However one evaluates Lewis’s temperament, it is clear that his apologetic approach was characterized by a focus upon the central issues of the Christian faith, avoiding what he deemed to be secondary theological concerns, and methodologically employing common language.

This approach, combined with Lewis’s exceptional skill and self-awareness, would allow him to obfuscate or bypass secondary issues altogether as part of keeping his primary issue in focus.³⁶⁸ He would be able to adjust academic or theological precision

³⁶² Gibb, Jocelyn. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 66.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* vii.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Watson, George. ‘The Art of Disagreement: C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)’ in *The Hudson Review*. 48:2 (1995) 232.

³⁶⁶ Gibb, Jocelyn. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) xi. Farrer is quoted that Lewis was an apologist ‘from temper, from conviction, and from modesty’, *Ibid.* 24; Cf. Harries represents a rather stark assessment, ‘The honest thief, the tender murder. I don’t think Lewis would have denied the possibility of such people. But his calling as a combative Christian apologist, and his chosen weapon of myth and allegory, hardly allowed for the public recognition of such ambiguities. In his world black needed to be black and white white.’, Harries, Richard. *C.S. Lewis: The Man and His God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1987) 42.

³⁶⁷ As a boy schooled in a system designed to create compliant young men, Lewis emerged with an inner disposition of rebellion: ‘To this day the vision of the world which comes most naturally to me is one in which ‘we two’ or ‘we few’ (and in a sense ‘we happy few’) stand together against something stronger and larger.’, SBJ 30.

³⁶⁸ Cf. ‘Lewis’s stories facilitate an imaginative appreciation of this theological vision of hierarchy, while circumventing the need for a direct confrontation between this vision and particular political

while remaining colloquially accessible. Such an approach would allow him to avoid the sort of offending hurdles which easily accompany more precise theological articulation. At the same time, errors also arise from ambiguity in his arguments—some of which are significant. Lewis, as with every person, was complex, and that complexity shows out across his apologetic work. Farrer notes that ‘his procedures were not all equally apologetic’ and the less strictly apologetic possibly the more effective.³⁶⁹ Tom Wright rightly observed: ‘For some of the time he is a professional pretending to be an amateur; for much of the time, he’s a gifted amateur putting some of the professionals to shame; sometimes he’s an amateur straightforwardly getting things wrong.’³⁷⁰ Though errant at times, Lewis’s use of ambiguity does leave room for differences, not only in areas of finer theological nuance, but even for large categorical interpretive differences normative to varying systems of theology and their corresponding distinctives. This usage of ambiguity helps to pull the reader out from established positions and introduce them to a different, imaginative way of thinking about the particular question in view.³⁷¹ We now turn to examine Lewis’s distinctives of imagination and reason, contemplation and enjoyment, and the operation of ambiguity within them.

i) The Organs of Reason and Imagination

One of the most distinctive aspects of Lewis’s thought is his view of the ‘organs’ of imagination and reason.³⁷² The terms are somewhat idiosyncratically defined by Lewis and then used in a technical fashion. How he understood their workings and interrelation was part of the foundation of his hermeneutic, pervasive in his apologetic

structures or scientific models.’ Though Wolfe is addressing the topic of Power, her assessment is apropos for his arguments in general. Wolfe, Judith. ‘On Power’ in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 182.

³⁶⁹ Farrer, Austin. ‘The Christian Apologist’ in Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 25.

³⁷⁰ Wright, N.T. ‘Simply Lewis: Reflections on a Master Apologist After 60 years’ in *Touchstone Magazine* 20, no. 2 (March 2007) 28-33.

³⁷¹ Cf. Barfield on the *re*-creator of meaning, ‘Unless he has enough imagination, and enough power of detachment from the established meaning or thought-forms of his own civilization, to enable to him to grasp the meanings of the fundamental terms—unless, in fact, he has the power not only of thinking, but of *unthinking*—he will simply re-interpret everything they say in terms of subsequent thought.’, Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010) 129.

³⁷² Cf. Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best.’ In Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 59-78; Thorson, Stephen. *Joy and Poetic Imagination*, 11-30; Schakel, Peter J. *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual Life of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 129-142.

works, poetically mirrored in his conversion, and intrinsically imbued with ambiguity. His clearest statement of them is found in his 1939 essay, 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare'. In that essay he explores how metaphors whose original intent has been lost are related to current meaning. Out of that exploration he provides the following statement:

For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.³⁷³

Imagination is the gateway to all understanding and the diviner of meaning. It is imagination that suggests to us, in a mysterious or even mystical way, that a thing may carry some meaning. Imagination then may deliver it to the purview of reason which operates upon it to determine what corresponds to reality. The imagination's operation in perceiving meaning becomes the vehicle by which concepts are delivered to one's reason for validation or rejection as true. Reason is the safeguard, the guardrail protecting against unfettered imagination.³⁷⁴ As Ward notes, it distinguishes between 'things that mean falsely and things that mean truly, between erroneous meaning and correct meaning.'³⁷⁵ Though the operation of reason is conscious, in Lewis's economy of meaning³⁷⁶ the sub-rational or lower workings of imagination are primary.³⁷⁷ Before anything can be known as true or false, it must mean.³⁷⁸ One must pass through the land of imagination before every crossing the borders of truth. This is why Lewis can declare that meaning is the 'antecedent condition of both truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but falsehood.'³⁷⁹ The juxtaposition of meaning with error as opposed to falsehood is better understood through another distinction in Lewis, *imaginary* versus *imaginative*.³⁸⁰ The imaginary is false, in the same sense as make-believe. One journeys with the imaginary only by a kind of pretending, choosing to suspend admission of the obvious falsehood. The more blatantly imaginary they are,

³⁷³ 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare' in R 133-158; reprinted SLE 251-65.

³⁷⁴ Cf. In *The Discarded Image*, 'Yet nearly all moralists before the eighteenth century regarded Reason as the organ of morality. The moral conflict was depicted as one between Passion and Reason, not Passion and 'conscience', or 'duty', or 'goodness': DI 158.

³⁷⁵ Ward, Michael. 'The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD Thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 13.

³⁷⁶ Ward argues for the reasonableness of Farrer's influence upon Lewis and parallels between them. Ibid. 8-12.

³⁷⁷ Cf. 'This lower life of the imagination': SBJ 161.

³⁷⁸ Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best' in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets' Corner* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 62.

³⁷⁹ 'Bluspels and Flalansferes', R 157.

³⁸⁰ Letter to Eliza Marian Butler on 25 Sept 1940: CLII 445-449.

the ‘nearer to admitting their falsity’.³⁸¹ The imaginary may suggest things unreal and unknowable and thereby introduce a danger where one confuses the realization of the unknown with actually knowing. Where the *imaginary* is negative, portraying falsehood, the *imaginative* is positive, drawing the reader into the spiritual world it inhabits, it ‘communicates more Reality to us’.³⁸² The organ of imagination reaches out toward a thing that may be anchored to a corresponding reality, engaging the narrative so that the reason may then evaluate its merits.³⁸³ A successful discovery of meaning by the imagination should result in ‘a complete, unimpaired, healthy, fruitful, psycho-physical relationship’.³⁸⁴ This is only achieved by the corresponding function of reason.

In the later Lewis, imagination and reason are resolved, symbiotic and significantly heuristic.³⁸⁵ But for many years the relationship of imagination and reason was source of great inner discord. During his time studying under William Kirkpatrick, ‘grim old Cronos’,³⁸⁶ the division become sharper: ‘The only two kinds of talk I wanted were the almost purely imaginative and the almost purely rational.’³⁸⁷ The tension between the mechanistic pursuit of the purely rational and the alluring draw of the imaginative created a sharp dichotomy in Lewis that, at the time, seemed irreconcilable:

The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow “rationalism”. Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.³⁸⁸

Spirits in Bondage, the collection of poems that Lewis was preparing to publish during this time, reflects this inner tension and is delivered through a caustic worldview where: ‘nature is wholly diabolical & malevolent and that God, if he exists, is outside

³⁸¹ Ibid. 445.

³⁸² Letter to Eliza Marian Butler on 25 September 1940, CLII 444-446; Cf. McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 263.

³⁸³ McGrath, Alister. ‘Telling the Truth through Rational Argument’ in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 8.

³⁸⁴ Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best’, Ibid. 62.

³⁸⁵ McGrath, Alister. ‘Telling the Truth through Rational Argument’, Ibid. 11. He asserts that Lewis’s entire apologetic approach is bound up in the offering of images that show rather than prove the reasonableness of Christianity.

³⁸⁶ SBJ 142.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. 131.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. 164.

of and in opposition to the cosmic arrangements.³⁸⁹ Malcolm Guite,³⁹⁰ in examining a poem that Walter Hooper titled ‘Reason’, draws out Lewis’s expression of the divide between what he could prove philosophically and what he apprehended via the imagination.³⁹¹ Guite dates the poem as early as 1925, thus it offers a glimpse into Lewis’s mind on this issue five years prior to moving to Theism.³⁹² What would later become the ‘organ of meaning’ and ‘the natural organ of truth’ are personified in the poem as Athene (reason) and Demeter (imagination). They are wrapped in a metaphor where Lewis’s soul is the Athenian acropolis. They are ‘maid and mother’³⁹³ and each must be given their due: ‘Tempt not Athene’ and ‘Wound not’ Demeter. Demeter possesses her characteristic ‘mother-right’ and she (imagination) labors through ‘fertile pains’. She is ‘warm, dark, obscure and infinite’. The poem prefigures language Lewis used thirty years later in *Till We Have Faces*, where the Priest says that Holy Wisdom is ‘thick and dark like blood’, giving ‘life and strength’ not mere ‘knowledge and words’.³⁹⁴ Lewis speaks of imagination’s ‘dim exploring touch’ and though not yet fully formed, the imaginative reach is there: unclear, adventurous, and intended to bring forth life. But Athene and Demeter were not yet in harmony. Young Lewis yearned to see them unified, to have their respective powers and presence coalesce and bring him finally onto harmonious shores where imagination and reason end in a kind of faith:

Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
 Who will make in me a concord of the depth and height?
 Who make imagination’s dim exploring touch
 Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
 Then I could truly say and not deceive,
 Then wholly say that I BELIEVE.³⁹⁵

The reconciliation of imagination and reason that eluded Lewis would eventually come, and it would be in his conversion to Christianity.

³⁸⁹ Letter to Arthur Greeves on 12 Sep 1918, CLI 397.

³⁹⁰ Guite, Malcolm. ‘Telling the Truth Through Imaginative Fiction: C.S. Lewis on the Reconciliation of Athene and Demeter’ in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 15-24; McGrath suggests the poem may find explanation in Lewis’s complicated relationship to maternal figures: McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 74.

³⁹¹ P 81.

³⁹² Guite suggests it is furthermore indicative of the post-war West and post-Enlightenment culture: Guite, Malcolm. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner*, 16.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ TWHF 50.

³⁹⁵ P 81.

An important precursor to Lewis's conversion was his reading of George MacDonald's *Phantastes* as a teenager. He recalls that it transformed his relationship to his idiosyncratic Joy, an elusive longing for a longing, a rapturous sense of a wholly other place, existence, or beauty that is lost with its contemplation. *Phantastes* helped the moments of Joy be less fleeting and brought his reason and imagination nearer to one another:³⁹⁶ 'In the depth of my disgraces, in the then invincible ignorance of my intellect, all this was given me without asking, even without consent. That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took a little longer.'³⁹⁷ The 'organ of meaning' was fittingly first unto the breach, to be followed by the 'natural organ of truth'. It is helpful here to see these 'organs' within Ward's description of the three-tier experiential hierarchy for Lewis's Christianity: 'the sub-rational (imagination), the rational (reason) and the supra-rational (divine grace)'.³⁹⁸ This is reflected in Lewis's conversion which finally brings imagination and reason together. The key event was a late-night conversation Lewis had with Tolkien and Hume Dyson. His 18 October 1931 letter to Arthur Greeves³⁹⁹ explains how Lewis had been struggling with doctrinal implications of the Redemption. Rational uncertainty about how the doctrine related present-day had Lewis at an impasse. Conversely, he was 'mysteriously moved' by pagan myths of dying and rising gods (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) and had no problem accepting them as 'profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in prose "what it meant"'.⁴⁰⁰ Tolkien and Dyson helped Lewis realize his inconsistent hermeneutic, suggesting that Lewis embrace the gospels in much the same way as pagan myths, except that in Christ he now had a true myth. Lewis had been approaching Christianity via reason apart from imagination, but with pagan myths had allowed his imagination to have its 'dim exploring touch'. By allowing his imagination to take its proper place Lewis moved, not beyond doctrine, but through it back to the that which the doctrine was about. As Ward states, Lewis moved 'from an analytic to a religious perspective'

³⁹⁶ Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best' in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 63.

³⁹⁷ SBJ 174-175.

³⁹⁸ Ward, Michael. 'The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 6.

³⁹⁹ CLI 975-978.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid 976.

in the most literal sense; from ‘loosening up’ to ‘tying back up’, *re-ligamenting*.⁴⁰¹ The result was an embrace of Christianity as the true Myth that is to be approached in the same way as pagan myths and raises up out of paganism all that is true:

We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome. If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be mythopathic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.⁴⁰²

It is an imaginative reach, sub-rationally grasping at what has peaked imagination’s wonder. It is the imagination that allows one to sense connections and relations that, once verified by reason, make sense of our world, one another, and ourselves. Ambiguity is inherent to the imagination. Meaning pre-exists determinations of truth or falsehood. Reason is the natural organ for making those determinations. But awareness of potential meaning must first take place. As McGrath states, ‘Lewis’s *explicit* appeal to reason involves an *implicit* appeal to the imagination.’⁴⁰³ A significant part of the reason why, as Ward suggests, ‘apologetic language benefits from being vivid, sensory and chosen with poetic, not just abstractly rational, intent’⁴⁰⁴ is because ambiguous outcomes are engaged by the imagination, and the suggestive language is closer to the imagination’s native tongue. Ambiguity is a strategic element of that language, opening up new possibilities before the imagination.

The healthy operation of either imagination or reason is dependent upon the other. It is an ‘disorganized consciousness’ that remains at imagination and never transfers to reason.⁴⁰⁵ It yields ‘no logical thought, no morals...no mental hierarchy’.⁴⁰⁶ For Lewis, nothing can be known apart from an act of the imagination, and that sub-rational act,

⁴⁰¹ Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best’ in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 65

⁴⁰² ‘Myth Became Fact’, *World Dominion*, Vol. XXII (September-October 1944) 267-70; reprinted *GID* 67.

⁴⁰³ McGrath, Alister. ‘Telling the Truth through Rational Argument’ in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 13.

⁴⁰⁴ Ward, Michael. ‘The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best’ in *Imaginative Apologetics*, 71.

⁴⁰⁵ PPL 132; An inverse of this, reason separated from the full psycho-physical union is expressed in *The Great Divorce*: ‘You think that, because hitherto you have experienced truth only with the abstract intellect. I will bring you where you can taste it like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom. Your thirst shall be quenched.’, *GD* 37.

⁴⁰⁶ PPL 131.

when operating in a healthy way, should lead to the rational act of reason's examination.⁴⁰⁷ Reason is thus not a starting point or self-feeding faculty. It operates upon what it is given, and to attempt otherwise tempts a paralysis like Lewis experienced, beckoning 'the gnawing, peasant reason'.⁴⁰⁸ The point at which these connect, the way this handover takes place, is related to another distinctive in Lewis to which we now turn: the perspectives of contemplation and enjoyment.

ii) The Perspectives of Contemplation and Enjoyment

The essential distinction in Lewis's view of contemplation and enjoyment is that one cannot simultaneously contemplate the experience of 'enjoyment' (e.g., mental activity: 'love, hate, fear, hope, or desire' etc.⁴⁰⁹) while also enjoying the object. Regardless of the duration or repetition of each, they are 'distinct and incompatible'.⁴¹⁰ While a thing is being enjoyed, the object of enjoyment remains in focus. To contemplate the enjoyment itself turns conscious focus upon the experience and away from the original object. In this way it is impossible for enjoyment and contemplation to occur at once. This understanding matured during Lewis's extended philosophical exchange with Owen Barfield that lasted roughly from 1924 to 1931. Dubbed 'The Great War',⁴¹¹ it dealt with aspects of imagination, reason, the nature of truth and was immensely instructive for both. Lionel Adey's 1978 monograph⁴¹² dealing with character and extent of the 'incessant disputation' was followed thirty-seven years later by two volumes published in 2015: Norbert Feinendegen and Arend Smilde's *The "Great War" of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis* and Stephen Thorson's *Joy and Poetic Imagination*.⁴¹³ Feinendegen and Smilde offer an updated academic evaluation of the philosophical issues involved and Thorson tells the story of the entire affair, providing a fuller understanding of the surrounding events as well as of Lewis, Barfield, and the Inklings. This debate, which took place almost entirely during Lewis's pre-Christian

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Austin Farrer, 'A man cannot apprehend anything without an act of imaginative creation.': Farrer, Austin. *Glass of Vision*, 114.

⁴⁰⁸ 'The Philosopher' in SIB 28.

⁴⁰⁹ Thorson, Stephen. *Joy and Poetic Imagination: Understanding C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis' Conversion and Writings* (Hamden, CT: Winged Lion, 2015) 37; SBJ 211.

⁴¹⁰ SBJ 211.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* 201.

⁴¹² Adey, Lionel. *C.S. Lewis' "Great War" with Owen Barfield* (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1978), republished by Ink Books 2002.

⁴¹³ Feinendegen, Norbert and Arend Smilde, eds. *The "Great War" of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis: Philosophical Writings 1927-1930* (Oxford: Oxford C.S. Lewis Society, 2015); Thorson, Stephen. *Joy and Poetic Imagination: Understanding C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis' Conversion and Writings* (Hamden, CT: Winged Lion, 2015).

years, occurred alongside the development of his views on enjoyment and contemplation and permanently adjusted his thinking.⁴¹⁴ What sparked the development of these perspectives was Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*, which Lewis first read at the beginning of the 'Great War' and was immediately captivated by the 'truthful antithesis of enjoyment and contemplation'.⁴¹⁵ In *Surprised by Joy* he recalled: 'I accepted this distinction at once and have ever since regarded it as an indispensable tool of thought.'⁴¹⁶ The perspectives of 'enjoyment' and 'contemplation' became a fixture in Lewis's writing.⁴¹⁷ It led him to radically reinterpret his quest for Joy, realizing he had been vanquishing enjoyment by attempts to simultaneously contemplate it: 'This discovery flashed a new light back on my whole life. I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy, all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, "This is it," had been a futile attempt to contemplate the enjoyed.'⁴¹⁸

More than a decade after his conversion to Christianity he wrote directly of the relation of contemplation and enjoyment in a 1945 essay curiously, albeit plainly, titled, 'Meditation in a Toolshed'.⁴¹⁹ Lewis had stood inside a tool shed that was utterly dark except for what little light passed through a space above the misaligned door. Sunlight poured through that 'irregular cranny' creating a sculpted beam of light amidst the blackness. He interacted with that ray of light in two ways, each demonstrative of the perspectives of contemplation and enjoyment. For the first perspective he examined the light at short distance, still inside the tool shed, but from within the darkness: 'I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.'⁴²⁰ From this perspective everything around was shrouded in darkness, even more dark because of the contrasting light. What he did see was that beam of light and particles and dust passing through it. For

⁴¹⁴ He recalled it as 'one of the turning points of my life': SBJ 201.

⁴¹⁵ AMR 301.

⁴¹⁶ SBJ 211.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Ward's list demonstrating Lewis's broad use of the 'Alexander technique': Ward, Michael. 'The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD Thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 39, footnote 66; Lewis's embrace of Alexander was not wholesale. In a letter to Ruth Pitter on 4 January 1947, regarding Alexander's view of Deity as 'whatever Nature is going to do next', he wrote, 'It's all nonsense: except for Chapter I (or Introduction, I forget which) where you could, I know, master the distinction between "enjoyment" and "contemplation" and so acquire a valuable tool of thought. I shouldn't have said "all nonsense." Alexander was a very great man: I only meant to disagree with him!', CLII 754.

⁴¹⁸ SBJ 212.

⁴¹⁹ 'Meditation in a Toolshed', *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17 July 1945, 4; reprinted GID 212-215.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. 212.

the second perspective, he stepped into the light, gazing into it towards its source. He found that all the darkness, the toolshed itself, and even the perception of the beam vanished. In their place was all that could be found through that gap above the misaligned door: 'green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.⁴²¹ In this way he juxtaposed 'looking at and looking along.' He then supplies a series of metaphors to make the distinction more acute (sexual impulse, mathematics, ritual dance, a child's sorrow).

Lewis argues that both *looking along* and *looking at* are necessary. Without looking *along* there would be nothing to look *at*. He considered that to be the problem with much modern thought. There are many things that one can look *at* without actually having 'been inside', looking *along* ('religion, love, morality, honour, and the like').⁴²² Furthermore, to step outside and look *at* is actually only to step inside another experience. If a second person were inside the tool shed and observed Lewis doing what he thought was *looking at*, this additional person's vantage point, being a step removed, could consider themselves *looking at* Lewis and Lewis observing the light as a kind of *looking along*. In this way one can try to step outside an experience, but ultimately only steps inside a different one. The only way for this entire endeavour to have any meaning is if the 'inside' experience, the *looking along*, is equally valid to *looking at*. Thus, Lewis declares, 'One must look both *along* and *at* everything.'⁴²³ When specific instances are under examination it may well be proven that one or the other is more true, but it cannot be so *a priori*. The result is that 'We just have to find out.'⁴²⁴ The apologetic importance of these can be found in Lewis's declaration: 'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.'⁴²⁵ In other words, when it came to his Christian faith, Lewis found that *both* contemplation and enjoyment showed it to be true. He found that Christianity's explanatory power was compelling, both from the outside and

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid. 214.

⁴²³ Ibid. 215; Cf. 'We cannot see light, though by light we can see things. Statements about God are extrapolations from the knowledge of other things which the divine illumination enables us to know.', McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 95.

⁴²⁴ 'Meditation in a Toolshed', *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17 July 1945, 4; reprinted GID 215; Cf. 'it is like trying to see what a thing looks like when you are looking at it.': PPL 132.

⁴²⁵ 'Is Theology Poetry?' in *The Socratic Digest*, Vol. 3 (1945): reprinted WOG 92.

inside. It harkens back to Judith Wolfe's assessment of Lewis's apologetic: 'not starting from pre-packaged abstract, nicely-arranged rational arguments but rather from attentiveness to the full-range of what makes us human and seeing what view of the world can accommodate that'.⁴²⁶ Such an approach is aided by expressing both Christian enjoyment and Christian contemplation, and apologetic ambiguity can be an ally in helping the reader to consider what worldview makes the best sense of the picture(s) presented. The presentation of those pictures is what we now turn to as we consider how these organs and perspectives, alongside aspects of Lewis's approach help shape his apologetic rhetorical method.

iii) Relationship to Lewis's Apologetic Rhetorical Method

The Lewisian organs of imagination and reason, and the perspectives of enjoyment and contemplation find their expression alongside an array of rhetorical devices in Lewis's apologetic. In addition to his translation of theological ideas into colloquial language he used a variety of means to connect with the range of human experience among his readers. All of this facilitates the accessibility of his apologetic. As Ward observed, 'As an apologetic strategy, it only makes sense to meet people where they are'⁴²⁷ and that was essential to Lewis's method. Even in a more carefully reasoned philosophical apologetic such as *Miracles*, he attested: 'I was writing *ad populum* not *ad clerum*. This is relevant to my manner as well as my matter.'⁴²⁸ Important in that short confession is what it reveals about Lewis's apologetic rhetorical methodology. Conscious and intentional choices shaped both his content and delivery. The way in which he expresses himself is as important as what he says. Beversluis declared that if you divorce what Lewis says from how he says it, you lose his arguments.⁴²⁹ He often began by suggesting a relatable situation out of which he could illustrate new perspectives. Ward points out the instances of despairing in *The Problem of Pain*,

⁴²⁶ Wolfe, Judith. 'Panel Discussion' in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets' Corner* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 31.

⁴²⁷ Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best' in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 68.

⁴²⁸ 'Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger', *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 183.

⁴²⁹ '...it is impossible to understand his enormous impact on his readers if you extricate his arguments from their contexts and formulate them analytically. It is possible to do that, but in the process you divorce *what he says from how he says it*.' Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 20.

quarreling in *Mere Christianity*, and doubting in *Miracles*.⁴³⁰ Each of these instances exemplify how Lewis had a habit of starting his reader off with something understood and familiar, and then guiding them into what was unknown, unrealized, or unobserved by them. All know pain and are understandably averse to it. But not many consider that reasons beyond physical comfort not only necessitate certain pains, but even make them a kind of good. Everyone knows something of the Right and Wrong, but what is normally not considered is the universal external source and standard for morality that accompanies it. Each person trusts their own reason but do not consider the need for a super-natural basis for why that would be true.

When Lewis argues from analogy, often in abundance, it was not simply his vast learning and personality. It was part of his apologetic rhetorical methodology and consciously chosen, including the attending ambiguities. Assembly of Lewis's analogies from the primary works alone could fill volumes, to say nothing of his entire corpus. He often used combinations of brief analogies. Barfield, writing of Lewis, asserted that 'it is characteristic of images that they interpenetrate one another'⁴³¹ and by multiplying analogies Lewis also multiplies the ways he appeals to the reader's imagination. Rather than creating confusion through too many options, this increases clarity through the multiplicity of images allowing more light to shine upon his ideas, like opening so many windows in a house. His frequent arguing from analogy both expands and refines the idea in view. As Ordway observes: 'In the right context, multiple *correct* meanings can operate simultaneously...The greatest authors are able to use these multiple meanings to resonate with each other.'⁴³² Like a guide on the apologetic journey, Lewis uses analogies to bring his reader closer to the destination, often by leading their imagination up to some new vista from which the entire mental landscape becomes both enlarged and clearer. In *The Problem of Pain*, the experience of the numinous is like that of tiger or ghost in the next room.⁴³³ Aspects of human will are a 'well-managed horse' or 'ship racing down a stream'.⁴³⁴ Willful evil is like a

⁴³⁰ Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best' in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 72.

⁴³¹ Barfield, Owen. 'Lewis, Truth, and Imagination' in *Kodon* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, Winter 1978) 23.

⁴³² Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and then Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017) 37.

⁴³³ POP 5.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 86.

schoolboy eating, an infant sleeping, or a jolly, ruddy-cheeked man without a care in the world.⁴³⁵ This multiplying of analogies and metaphors was characteristic of those Elizabethan era authors of whom Lewis was so expertly familiar. He describes this technique in his essay, 'Variation in Shakespeare and Others'.⁴³⁶ Comparing Shakespeare and Milton, Lewis found that the latter uses imagery to proceed in an ordered, linear fashion toward his object. But the former makes many attempts from various angles: 'darts image after image at you.'⁴³⁷ Variation may present images with completely different ideas, or multiple expressions of the same idea. The earlier reference of willful evil being like a schoolboy eating, infant sleeping, and a jolly man without a care are an example of the Shakespearean kind. They are disconnected analogies of a conscienceless man. They interpenetrate and resonate with one another, but they are also independent.

This technique of variation again puts many pictures before Lewis's reader and, particularly in the Shakespearean mode, leaves much open to the imagination, ambiguous. It helps Lewis focus on what was central and leave the periphery malleable, accommodating to varying perspectives. In *Mere Christianity* he explains the relation of the first second persons of the Trinity through the analogy of two books eternally resting upon a table, one upon the other.⁴³⁸ His central point he is to uphold the doctrinal assertion of the Son as eternally begotten from the Father. He amends the idea by contemplating the analogy itself. The reader's *act* of imagining the books, and the image itself, occur simultaneously. Yet, one brings forth (begets) the other and they cannot exist apart from one another. The challenges related to questions about sequence are removed and a picture of eternal begetting is offered. He then multiplies the analogies (light from a lamp, heat from a fire, thoughts from a mind).⁴³⁹ He does not seek to address the wider ontological questions of the Godhead, but to only emphasize this central point because it is a foundation for where he aims to take the reader later in his argument: the idea of human participation in that divine life. Returning to the numinous in *The Problem of Pain*, the issue that Lewis needed to

⁴³⁵ Ibid. 109.

⁴³⁶ Cf. 'I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners.': 'De Descriptione Temporum' in TAFP 24; 'Variation in Shakespeare and Others' in R 161-180.

⁴³⁷ 'Variation in Shakespeare and Others' in R 162.

⁴³⁸ MC 172.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 173.

initially establish in his argument was the universal nature of the experience.⁴⁴⁰ But he leaves the margins very porous. Experience of the numinous is ubiquitous, something that moves upon a person, urging them toward or away from a given action. He only needs agreement on this central experience, and the language he uses to describe it is leaves the borders so undefined that readers with vastly different conceptions of what exactly Lewis meant could equally agree that they have had this experience. In *Mere Christianity*, when dealing with doctrine, Lewis tended to emphasize the primary event or original object and remove or ignore the wider boundaries. In this instance it is not by analogy but direct statement. Doctrinal expressions of Christ as the Son of God, becoming Sons of God, and being saved from sins are all met by Lewis with a parenthetical ‘whatever that means.’⁴⁴¹ And later: ‘You can express this all sort of ways...They are all true. If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does.’ Lest there be any confusion that Lewis is not concerned with tying up all the peripheral loose ends, he adds: ‘And whatever you do, do not start quarrelling with other people because they use a different formula from yours.’⁴⁴² He holds to what is central and does not express much concern about the margins. The outer ranges are ambiguous just as it had happened in his own conversion. Here in *Mere Christianity* he is asking how the life of Christ could be effective in one’s life today: ‘What, then, is the difference which He has made in the whole human mass?’⁴⁴³ This echoes his October 1931 letter to Arthur Greeves: ‘My puzzle was the doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ “saved” or “opened salvation to” the world.’⁴⁴⁴ Just as Tolkien and Dyson helped Lewis’s imagination to accept the central truth of the Christian Myth (‘it really happened’) and like the pagan myths that Lewis loved, finally allow it to be ‘profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp’,⁴⁴⁵ Lewis likewise tended to be concerned with the centre of the matter and typically did not pursue the peripheral questions.

Imaginative language is so essential to Lewis’s apologetic that McGrath sees it as unable to be removed his arguments without them becoming deformed or distorted.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁰ POP 8.

⁴⁴¹ MC 156.

⁴⁴² Ibid. 182.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. 181.

⁴⁴⁴ CLI 976.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. 977.

⁴⁴⁶ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 71.

Wolfe finds that his use of images was ‘not merely rhetorical or heuristic, but essential.’⁴⁴⁷ There is a kind of ‘counter-narration’⁴⁴⁸ intended to engage the reader’s imagination and lead them to reconsider theological themes.⁴⁴⁹ Lewis used imaginative language to get the reader out of established positions and paradigms. Communicating the Christian faith, the true Myth, this way can pierce ‘the veil of familiarity’.⁴⁵⁰ Rhetorical techniques of analogy, variation, allowing argumentative boundaries to remain ambiguous, or leading the journey from the known to unknown all assist this process and play a part in introducing ambiguity into an argument. Lewis desired to create within his reader’s mind ‘an intellectual (and imaginative) climate favourable to Christianity’.⁴⁵¹ That intellectual climate depends upon the imaginative reach. Lewis felt that writers who were too literal, spoke too plainly, had ‘no mystical tomfoolery’ would be ‘among the least significant of writers.’⁴⁵² While the various elements that constitute his apologetic rhetorical method are not inherently ambiguous, they are more likely yield ambiguity than other approaches. This is apparent when one considers *Mere Christianity* alongside other comparable apologetic works such as John Stott’s *Basic Christianity*, N.T. Wright’s *Simply Christian*, or Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God*. Where Stott and Wright often work from biblical exposition, Lewis uses analogy and metaphor. Where Keller dissects contemporary objections to Christianity, Lewis focuses on illuminating central historical events and doctrines. Beyond these, the sheer volume of imaginative language in Lewis eclipses what is found in the other works. To use Lewis’s own language, ambiguity is not observed when *looking at* his method, but when *looking along* it.

Altogether, these organs and perspectives in Lewis, along with his argument from analogy and the technique of variation, advocating a clear central position while leaving the periphery generally undefined, starting from something familiar and known and guiding the reader into the unknown, are part of Lewis’s apologetic rhetorical method. They are how Lewis presents and shapes his arguments, relevant to both his

⁴⁴⁷ Speaking of both CSL and Owen Barfield: Wolfe, Judith. ‘Austin Farrer and C.S. Lewis’, Bockmuehl, M. and S. Platten & N Everett, eds. *Austin Farrer: Oxford Warden, Scholar, Preacher* (London: SCM Press, 2020) 7.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 73.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 73, 55-82; Cf. Medcalf, Stephen. ‘The Coincidence of Myth and Fact’ in Wadsworth, Michael ed. *Ways of Reading the Bible* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981) 54-76.

⁴⁵⁰ ‘Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings’; combination of ‘The Gods Return to Earth’ in *Time and Tide* (14 August 1954) and ‘The Dethronement of Power’ in *Time and Tide* (22 October 1955); reprinted OS 90.

⁴⁵¹ ‘The Decline of Religion’, *The Cherwell*, Vol. XXVI (29 November 1946) 8-10; reprinted GID 221.

⁴⁵² ‘Bluspels and Flansferes’, R 156.

delivery and subject: ‘my manner and my matter.’⁴⁵³ These habits, tendencies, and techniques are part of how Lewis conducts himself in apologetic discourse, guiding and shaping what their content will be. Lewis invites his reader to reconsider their views, and themselves, in light of the vision of Christianity for both.⁴⁵⁴ His good friend Austin Farrer surmises it well: ‘We think we are listening to an argument, in fact we are presented with a vision; and it is the vision that carries conviction.’⁴⁵⁵

4. Reader Relationship

A fascinating dynamic that is worth a brief exploration is the influence of ambiguity upon a reader’s perceived relationship with Lewis and how that relationship assists his argumentation. This occurs within the enlarged argumentative and contemplative space that is in part created by ambiguity. As disparate views travel together over time, a sense of relationship can be formed. In the context of this research, this is observed between Lewis and his reader. This perceived reader relationship with the author—whether or not the relationship itself is real or fiction—can also influence a reader’s relationship to the arguments themselves. Cohen observed this in regard to metaphor, in which ambiguity is operative:

There is a unique way in which the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor are drawn closer to one another. Three aspects are involved: (1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer extends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgment of a community. All three are involved in any communication, but in ordinary literal discourse their involvement is so pervasive and routine that they go unmarked.⁴⁵⁶

Cohen goes on to describe what he considers necessary elements; recognizing a metaphor is in use and attempting to determine the author’s meaning.⁴⁵⁷ While he is

⁴⁵³ ‘Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger’, *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 183.

⁴⁵⁴ McGrath sees Lewis’s apologetic extending a ‘visual invitation’ to see things from Lewis’s perspective. Rationality of a particular Christian belief or doctrine ‘needs to be shown, not proved—and it is shown by allowing us to see it in the right way.’: McGrath, Alister. ‘Telling the Truth through Rational Argument’ in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 6.

⁴⁵⁵ Farrer, Austin. ‘The Christian Apologist’ in *Light on C.S. Lewis*, Jocelyn Gibb ed. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 37.

⁴⁵⁶ Cohen, T. “Metaphor and the cultivation of intimacy” in S. Sacks, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978) 6.

⁴⁵⁷ Similarly in Lewis, ‘What truth we can attain in such a situation depends rigidly on three conditions. First, that the imagery should be originally well chosen; secondly, that we should apprehend the exact imagery; and thirdly that we should know that the metaphor is a metaphor.’, ‘Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare’, SLE 254.

specifically addressing metaphor, the analysis is relevant for ambiguity generally. All figurative language, including metaphor, imports a degree of ambiguity. The process of contextual analysis and discovering the intended meaning takes the reader into a whole world of assumptions and guesses about the argument, author, and themselves. Interaction with these ideas fosters a sense of relationship, ‘constitutes the acknowledgment of a community’.⁴⁵⁸ Paul Grice’s work on conversational implicature and his Cooperative Principle⁴⁵⁹ speaks to this dynamic:

...what is implicated is what is required that one assume a speaker to think in order to preserve the assumption that he is observing the Cooperative Principle (and perhaps some other conversational maxims as well), if not at the level of what is said, at least at the level of what is implicated.⁴⁶⁰

This process assumes a rational basis for communication wherein the reader is able to relate to the author’s message based upon certain assumptions that are necessary for a successful relationship of speaker and audience around a given subject. Where greater theological specificity would illuminate doctrinal divisions thereby increasing the likelihood of losing the confidence of his reader, strategic ambiguity affords the reader greater ability to continue along with Lewis on his apologetic journey. There is a kind of give-and-take going on between author and reader. Especially in those cases where abstract or poetic language is used, Lewis recognized that the meaning ‘can be received only if you are ready to meet it half-way’.⁴⁶¹ This fosters a sense of familiarity or even camaraderie with Lewis. By traversing non-essential points of contention with ambiguity, Lewis makes a clearer path for the reader to *think along with him* which further nourishes the imagined relationship.⁴⁶² Literary scholar James Como observes this dynamic, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

C. S. Lewis is one of those writers who takes hold of a person’s intellect and imagination, and rearranges the furniture...The inner landscape changes. With some readers, that experience leads to a kind of proprietary attitude, a feeling that ‘he’s mine’.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ Cohen, T. ‘Metaphor and the cultivation of intimacy’ in S. Sacks, ed. *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978) 6.

⁴⁵⁹ Grice, Paul. *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 26.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 86.

⁴⁶¹ CR 135.

⁴⁶² Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis’s Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 83.

⁴⁶³ MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 2-3.

Beyond the community articulated by Cohen and sense of ownership expressed by Como, we find that Edwards frames this relationship between Lewis and his readers in contractual language, wherein there is a mutually accepted journey being undertaken:

Reading for Lewis is a contract between the reader and author whereby the reader agrees, as long as he is able, to play the role the author has invited him to play.⁴⁶⁴

In Lewis's words, 'You must begin by trusting [the author]. Only by doing so will you find out whether he trustworthy or not'.⁴⁶⁵ In the scope of Lewis's apologetics, this results in the reader accepting Lewis, thinking alongside him as a trustworthy guide as he leads an apologetic journey. That journey both supports, and is supported by, having a sense, however fictional, of relationship with Lewis.⁴⁶⁶ This idea will be returned to in concert with examination of Lewis's arguments, but it is pertinent to acknowledge that, at least in part, Lewis's broad appeal may partly be fueled by this perceived relationship, which owes a debt to ambiguity.

⁴⁶⁴ Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis's Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 83.

⁴⁶⁵ CR 135.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. 'His theological works were written in an easy conversational tone, so that readers came away from them feeling that they knew him as a friend.', Myers, *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) x.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exposition of Apologetic Ambiguity

*God is approached more nearly in that which is indefinite than in that which is definite and distinct.*⁴⁶⁷

The three primary texts, *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Miracles*, each evidenced apologetic ambiguity operating in a variety of ways. The instances of ambiguity in this chapter were chosen because they provide a substantive representation of Lewis's apologetic and clearly demonstrate his use of ambiguity. Given Lewis's unrelenting appeal to his reader's imagination and the subjective nature of ambiguity, to attempt a comprehensive list of instances is likely impossible and would be of little merit. It would neither be agreed upon nor effective for the more focused purpose of examining the operative value within an argument. The instances are examined in context according to the functional understanding of ambiguity from chapter two. This avoids *a priori* definitions that fail to accommodate the diversity of ways that Lewis uses ambiguity. The exposition identifies and examines apologetic ambiguity based upon Lewis's usage and does not advocate a particular Christian confession, theological system, or doctrinal position. The instances are grouped by primary source and ordered by date of publication: *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and finally *Miracles*. Lewis's wider corpus is also engaged alongside the primary texts, where illustrative or insightful.

1. Apologetic Ambiguity in *The Problem of Pain*

This was Lewis's major attempt to answer the intellectual problem of evil.⁴⁶⁸ His title is an interesting one, for the classic form of the challenge is the problem of evil, of which pain is but one symptom. In choosing pain, Lewis avoids the ethereal world of theological and philosophical dispute about evil, instead addressing pain which is known to all people in varying degree. Pain is visceral. The images that jump to mind at the mention of pain are individual, but the experience is universal. Argumentatively,

⁴⁶⁷ Robertson, F.W. 'Jacob's Wrestling' quoted in Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923) 220.

⁴⁶⁸ Of the distinction between the intellectual and emotional problems regarding evil, POP addresses primarily the intellectual question. AGO may be said to present something of the emotional response, to the degree of regarding death as an evil.

one might say that evil is conceptual whereas pain is personal. The work was published in 1940, during the middle of World War II, when the reality of evil had once again put painful flesh onto the metaphysical bone of this perennial apologetic challenge.⁴⁶⁹

i) Numinous Awe

In his apologetic for the universal experience of numinous awe,⁴⁷⁰ the terms Lewis used give such a wide berth for subjective meaning that readers of varying and even conflicting views could find themselves in agreement with him. Rather than evoking confusion, the ambiguity serves his argument by helping to carry the reader forward, avoiding pitfalls of more nuanced theological questions by which readers may lose focus due to disagreements on non-essential point. It is a great irony: ambiguity helping to maintain focus and direction. In one sense, the ambiguity makes translucent those distractions that would otherwise threaten to pull a reader's attention away from Lewis's leading, and thus the reader keeps going, staying with him on the argumentative journey. This is the case with Lewis's apologetic for numinous awe, and the ambiguity operative within it has to do with terms key to his argument.

To appreciate Lewis's ambiguity in this example, some consideration of its development is helpful. His argument for a universal experience of spiritual awe was built upon the foundation laid by Rudolf Otto⁴⁷¹ and later advanced by Edwyn Bevan⁴⁷². In his seminal work, *The Idea of the Holy*,⁴⁷³ Otto argued for the non-rational aspect of apprehending truth, moving from Schleiermacher's view of religious experience and the 'feeling of dependence'.⁴⁷⁴ In relation to this, Otto employed the term *numinous*⁴⁷⁵ in reference to a sense of other-worldly ominousness that

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Vera Brittain regarding the 'loss of spiritual resilience' in Lewis's time. Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) x.

⁴⁷⁰ Here 'numinous awe', 'spiritual awe', and 'awe' are used interchangeably.

⁴⁷¹ POP 5. Even as late as October 1958 Lewis considered himself 'deeply influenced' by *Das Heilige*, CLIII 980.

⁴⁷² Bevan, Edwyn. *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

⁴⁷³ Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 6-7. 'It was the feeling of awe which man felt in the presence of an unknown something charged with dread mystery, *mysterium tremendum*.' Bevan, Edwyn. *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) 77.

accompanies humankind's awareness of the spiritual.⁴⁷⁶ Bevan expanded on Otto's work in his Gifford lectures of 1933 and 1934 which were later published in the volume *Symbolism and Belief*.⁴⁷⁷ That work was a significant influence upon Lewis⁴⁷⁸, partly due to Bevan's robust exploration of the nature of language used in relation to God.⁴⁷⁹ Lewis referred to the experience articulated by Otto and Bevan as the *numinous* and *awe*:

There seem, in fact, to be only two views we can hold about awe. Either it is a mere twist in the human mind, corresponding to nothing objective and serving no biological function, yet showing no tendency to disappear from that mind at its fullest development in poet, philosopher, or saint: or else it is a direct experience of the really supernatural, to which the name Revelation might properly be given.⁴⁸⁰

Lewis argues that this experience is ubiquitous, atemporal, and not an evolutionary development.⁴⁸¹ He nuances Bevan's argument, that the idea of the numinous has been present since the earliest identifiable periods, to include the written records. The crux of his point is that the experience of the numinous is observable in human history from the earliest records down to the present day and this is the case regardless of any advancement humankind has experienced, whether in art (poet), reason (philosopher), or holiness (saint). Thus, human development over time is not a tenable explanation for this phenomenon.

His resolution is to present a binary choice as the only explanation; it is either human defect or a supernatural intervention. Lewis places all of humanity into one of two categories: ancient man or the most developed versions of 'poet, philosopher, or

⁴⁷⁶ Against Otto, Lewis argued that it cannot be known if the universal experience was always *awe* and not mere dread, given similarities of linguistic expression. Lewis gives a passing example that ancient humans may have felt about their gods 'just as they felt toward tigers', POP 5; Cf. Carnell, Corbin Scott. *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 16. This may be a reference to 18th century poet William Blake's work, *The Tyger*, which expresses dread toward the creature, 'Tyger Tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night; What immortal hand or eye, Could frame thy fearful symmetry?'. The poem does include, however, language of awe as well. Carnell also sees Lewis sharing Barfield's understanding of primitive man in unified understanding of the 'phenomenal and noumenal', maintaining a 'psychophysical parallelism', Ibid. 73.

⁴⁷⁷ First edition in 1938.

⁴⁷⁸ Lewis recommended the work 'for theology proper' in a letter of 26 March 1940, CLII 375; again on 19 August 1942 along with *The Idea of the Holy*, Ibid. 529, and 16 January 1959, CLIII 1012.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger', *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 181. Lewis credits Bevan's *Symbolism and Belief* for aiding with language for God's transcendence and immanence.

⁴⁸⁰ POP 10.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. 8.

saint’.⁴⁸² By setting numinous awe in this light, he indirectly puts the reader to the choice of identifying the category to which they belong. It is reasonable to assume the average reader would, of the available options, associate themselves with something in the latter, but the choice is ultimately inconsequential because the numinous haunts both indiscriminately. Lewis appeals not to common knowledge or understanding, but to a common experience ambiguously defined. Apologetically, it calls for the reader to make two decisions. First, to decide if they, too, have had a similar experience and thus requisitely considering their own past in light of Lewis’s explanation. Second, to discern the nature of that experience according to Lewis’s binary options; either they have experienced some imperfection common to humanity—an abnormality which is of no metaphysical benefit and corresponds to nothing in reality—or they have in some way personally interacted with the supernatural, the *numinous*.

The ambiguous experience to which Lewis appeals, though subjective, is suggested to have a considerable degree of commonality for, or at least similarly expressed by, humankind throughout history. He describes the experience of awe or numinous awe using terms and language that inherently invite subjective meaning and emotional response. It is a ‘special kind of fear’ not unlike ‘dread’, the sort one experiences if told ‘there is a mighty spirit in the room’, it is ‘uncanny’.⁴⁸³ These terms provide direction without definition.⁴⁸⁴ The apologetic value of leaving this open to interpretation through figurative language can be demonstrated by considering an alternative approach. What might a reader’s response be had Lewis put forth his Christian position outright, saying something like ‘This sense of the spiritually-other which we have called *numinous awe*, is the biblical God Himself presiding over all things and reaching out to each and every person. When you feel this way, it is this God with whom you are dealing.’ The author makes no pretence that this would be Lewis’s language. Clearly, it would not be for he did not choose it when he had the opportunity. The point is that, in addition to being *a priori*, making a defence in that way is tacitly confrontational: it draws a line in the sand and makes everyone adversaries. One is either with you or against you. Conversely, the ambiguity in Lewis’s defence allows for such a degree of subjectivity as regards what qualifies as an

⁴⁸² Ibid. 10.

⁴⁸³ POP 6.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. ‘Univocal passage from word to the idea it represents was seen by the theoreticians of the past as a phenomenon resulting from the good use of language’: Perelman Chaïm, et al. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 130.

experience of the numinous, that far more readers will agree that such experiences exist and consider themselves as having had one, even if they disagree with one another or with Christianity.⁴⁸⁵

For those who consider themselves as having experienced something akin to what Lewis described, one must quantify it—if using Lewis’s categories—as either meaninglessness or an experience of the supernatural. While alternatives to Lewis’s options may be posited as they relate to human attempts to give language to the unknown,⁴⁸⁶ the importance and function of ambiguity is not lost in the binary restriction. Notwithstanding what may be a slight nod toward Deism at most—by stating that the experience may be called ‘Revelation’—Lewis is at this point in his defence only speaking to elements he considers common to all ‘developed religion’.⁴⁸⁷ In Lewis’s own understanding it was the Incarnation which existed as that religious element unique to Christianity, making sense of not only the numinous, but also of the awareness of moral law, and recognition that the numinous is the power and arbiter of the moral law.⁴⁸⁸ But here Lewis leaves the true source of this meaningful and apparently common experience unnamed, ambiguous. Thus, even as he restricts the reader’s options for a source, there remains immense room as to what that answer may be, particularly should the reader decide it is supernatural. He is attempting to force acknowledgment that a thing exists—experience of numinous awe—but makes no movement toward the source or identity of that thing.

By maintaining this ambiguity Lewis can pass by questions on the nature of divine being and action, the answers to which would immediately separate his readers in to varying theological camps, both within and beyond Christianity. It is ambiguity that obscures difficulties and helps to keep only those things in focus which lead further down the path of Lewis’s defence. He employs ambiguous terms and open-ended descriptions in the articulation of an experience which, on account of that ambiguity, almost anyone could then imagine themselves as having had. This gives room for a

⁴⁸⁵ ‘The necessity for univocal language, which dominates scientific thought, has made clarity of concepts an ideal which one feels bound to try and achieve, forgetting that this very clarity may stand in the way of other functions of language.’, Perelman, Chaïm, et al. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 133.

⁴⁸⁶ Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) 11.

⁴⁸⁷ POP 5.

⁴⁸⁸ Hooper, Walter. ‘Theological Parallels’ in *Past Watchful Dragons* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1971) 94.

wide array of experiences—including those incompatible with one another—to all be attributable to the same thing he had described.

ii) **Good, Almighty, Happy**

In the prior instance with *numinous awe*, Lewis employed ambiguity in a constructive way, helping to build his argument. We now consider an example that is deconstructive, in that Lewis begins his defence by identifying terms imbued with ambiguity and then mounts a challenge to those terms. He pressed into what he observed as latent ambiguity to subvert the entire direction of the challenge posed by the problem of evil. The argument made by Lewis, in which ambiguity is essential, becomes the foundation for his entire apologetic in *The Problem of Pain*. He uses the opening chapter of his work to reframe the challenge that evil poses to Christianity.⁴⁸⁹ He does so by focusing the reader's attention upon what he considered to be the primary weakness of the challenge; ambiguous key terms. For Lewis, the question itself was flawed due to semantic ambiguity. Unproven assumptions about the terms *good*, *happy*, and *almighty* are smuggled into the argument:

If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both. This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form. The possibility of answering it depends on showing that the terms 'good' and 'almighty' and perhaps also the term 'happy', are equivocal: for it must be admitted from the outset that if the popular meanings attached to these words are the best, or the only possible, meanings, then the argument is unanswerable.⁴⁹⁰

Lewis's formulation of the problem, apart from his nuanced substitution of terms (*pain* for *evil*) is accurate to the historical understanding and remains valid today.⁴⁹¹ How can evil exist (unhappy creatures) if there is an omnipotent and morally good God? If such a God exists, he/she/it is either not good enough, not powerful enough, or both. Hume's representation of Epicurus's approach⁴⁹² remains a fair assessment of the

⁴⁸⁹ It is important to note that evil is a theological challenge for any worldview, but particularly so for all three of the great monotheistic faiths; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; for each advocates the omnipotence and moral goodness of God.

⁴⁹⁰ POP 16.

⁴⁹¹ Note the juxtaposition by Lewis of happiness and evil, or unhappiness as the reality of evil. Rather than juxtaposing the existence of a good God and evil, he presents a good God alongside unhappy creatures.

⁴⁹² Hume, David, and Nelson Pike. *Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1970) 88.

challenge; the reality of evil alongside either of the other two premises forces the third to be false. Key to Lewis's defence is his insistence that the terms 'good', 'almighty', and even 'happy' must be equivocal. Ambiguity is inherent to equivocality in that what is in view is open to more than one interpretation. Equivocality may be used to arrive at a new or novel understanding, such as reconciling disparate concepts or bringing together contentious meanings for purposes of humor or exploration.⁴⁹³ But equivocality may also include ambiguity that does not aid understanding⁴⁹⁴ and that is the type that Lewis identifies in the argument. In this example, Lewis predicates his defense on the necessity of the terms in question being equivocal. This approach puts the central points of contention in the challenge on trial; they must be ambiguous if this formulation is to have any usefulness. For, if they are technical according to the 'popular meanings' then it is 'unanswerable'.⁴⁹⁵

By identifying the semantic ambiguity and then calling those terms into question, he alters the argumentative roles. Rather than Lewis being responsible to answer the challenge of how evil can exist in a universe where God is said to be omnipotent and morally good, it is now the challenge itself on trial and an answer is required for what is meant by the question. Apologetically, Lewis has called into doubt the validity of the challenge by questioning its presuppositions regarding the character and action of God, and the nature of human and divine love.⁴⁹⁶ It is significant that Lewis casted doubt upon the 'popular meanings' of those terms. Given he wrote for the average individual in the populace, in an indirect way he is suggesting to the reader that their own understanding of the problem may be suspect.

⁴⁹³ Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) 54, 125.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. 'dynamic instability' in Caglioti, Giuseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity*, 96. Caglioti describes a tension in the mind between incompatible ideas that is only eventually resolved when one conceptualization is chosen over the other. This instability may equally lead to incorrect outcomes.

⁴⁹⁵ There is another layer of ambiguity within this move by Lewis in that he does not make clear which of two possible grounds he has in mind as the cause for this impossibility of response. The first is that the popular meanings, if the 'best, or only possible', are nonetheless lost in a sea of broad, subjective cultural understanding. The second is that the popular meanings tend to the anaemic perspective Lewis later references, that is, preferring a sort of 'indifferent' kindness to the 'more stern and splendid' complexity that committed divine love would entail (POP 32). The author believes the second is more likely in light of the entire work.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. Burke's reference to an editor of Descartes who observed a similar approach in the philosopher's method, 'rather than attacking [an old dogma] head on, he aimed at "sapping its foundations". And he got rid of traditional principles "not so much by direct attack as by substituting for them new proofs and grounds of reasoning"'. Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) 55.

The argumentative roles are significantly altered, but not reversed. His question of *the question* reframes the issue in such a way so that he can now take the reader's hand and lead them on the road he prefers. It is not that Lewis becomes the plaintiff and the reader the defendant. Rather, the challenge itself is pushed out to a sort of third space, with the reader unconsciously *thinking alongside*⁴⁹⁷ Lewis rather than being attacked by him. It is a cunning rhetorical step, taking the reader in an unexpected direction so that Lewis is now the guide on an apologetic journey rather than being the defendant answering a charge.⁴⁹⁸ In this we observe that Lewis understood some strategic value of ambiguity, at least in so far as his demonstrated ability to recognize and exploit it in the opposing argument.⁴⁹⁹ The irony is that in this portion of Lewis's apologetic he is, in fact, pushing for greater clarity and precision. Yet, the entire basis for doing so is the opening provided by ambiguity. This initial step is the foundation from which Lewis builds the rest of his argument. Thus, in a very real sense, ambiguity is the genesis of Lewis's entire apologetic for the problem of evil.

iii) Divine Love

In this instance Lewis seizes upon his interlocutor's concept of love, suggesting it carries a hidden deficiency and thereby again argues through the deconstructive-reconstructive process. By exploring that deficiency Lewis is then able to enlarge the parameters of divine love so that it may even subsume pain, reshaping the entire dilemma of why pain exists in the economy of a moral, good, and omnipotent God. An understanding of love is concomitant to any Christian apologetic discussion of evil, for

⁴⁹⁷ Consider Lewis's invitation to think alongside him regarding heaven, 'There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else. *You may have noticed that the books you really love are bound together by a secret thread.*' [emphasis added] (POP 133). There is a 'want of an experience', a 'something' which points one toward Heaven, or rhetorically implies that it is Heaven pointing us toward itself. The genesis of the experience could be attributed to aspects of other philosophies: reincarnation, nirvana, New Age and New Thought movements, etc. He allows enough ambiguity to give room for even the disagreeing reader to continue journeying with him, rather than stopping to contend. It suggests a reconsideration of one's own experience in light of Lewis's suggestion. It is an invitation to think again about something known, and suggestive of greater meaning than was first thought.

⁴⁹⁸ Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis's Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 83.

⁴⁹⁹ The need for decision on the part of the reader is an important element here. See Perelman, 'The values accepted by the audience, the speaker's prestige, and the very language he uses, all these elements are in constant interaction when one wishes to gain the adherence of minds. Formal logic has eliminated all these problems from its demonstrative technique, thanks to a set of conventions that are well founded in a field of purely theoretical knowledge. But to be unaware of the influence exerted on language and thought by the need to decide and act is to keep oneself in darkness and disregard fundamental aspects of human thought.' Perelman, Chaïm, et al. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 132-133.

evil is inherently an opposition or negation of good.⁵⁰⁰ Lewis observed in the term love, and in an expression like ‘God is love’ ideas filled with imprecise meaning; a love that revolves around the uncritical feelings and experiences; fanciful, naïve. Unlike his approach to pain, he does not directly address the equivocal nature of the word *love* nor speak to the ‘popular meaning’ of the term. Yet, he does assume the reader has not considered carefully what a broader sense of love in general, and divine love in particular, would entail. Lewis uses ambiguity in the term as an opportunity to suggest that divine love is not only a plausible explanation for why pain exists, but even for why pain is necessary.⁵⁰¹ He uses the analogy of an artist:

Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would, doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and recommenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumbnail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.⁵⁰²

The analogy Lewis employs has God as Creator expressing his divine love by shaping one into a divinely appointed kind of being. This shaping means undergoing an ‘arduous’ process of being repeatedly ‘rubbed’ and ‘scraped’; the obvious implication is that it is painful. Lewis’s argument relies on several key theological themes; God as artist and maker, humankind as God’s work of art, and divine love operating in ways perceived contrary by those who experience it. The force of Lewis’s argument emerges from the third theme, which is predicated upon the prior two. As is typical for Lewis, he does not cite biblical texts, yet his philosophical theology here runs strongly parallel to the corresponding biblical metaphors. Given that Lewis is arguing for a Christian understanding of divine love, a brief consideration of those biblical metaphors is

⁵⁰⁰ The author recognizes the variety of claims set forth by moral and epistemological skeptics, and moral nihilists, questioning or even denying the existence of evil. While the formulations have a large degree of variance and nuance, they are not engaged here due to space constraints and because the author holds that they collectively inherit a foundational flaw which runs afoul of logical consistency; either by taking a position of knowledge in order to claim the unknowability of anything, or a moral position in order to pronounce the immorality of moral distinctions such as good and evil.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. ‘all that is necessary, in order to change the meaning of a notion, is to put it in a new context and particularly to integrate it in new lines of argument’, Perelman, Chaïm, et al. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 135.

⁵⁰² POP 34.

warranted. The first theme is developed in the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and adopted by the Apostle Paul, who also expounds on the second theme. In these we see the tension between divine love and what is required for its reception. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to God as a potter and humankind as clay in his hands. In Isaiah it is the prophet thus describing God's relationship with, and jealous love for, humankind:

Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand. (Isa 64:8)

and in Jeremiah it is God's self-description using the same metaphor:

He said, 'Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.'
(Jer 18:6)

Both enjoin the poetic relationship of God and humankind as potter and clay, a metaphor informed by their immediate biblical context. The quote from Isaiah is situated in a passage that viscerally bemoans the iniquity of God's people and with equal fervour extols the righteousness of God in both his anger and benevolent action toward them. The context in Jeremiah is a dire warning to God's people of pending disaster should they refuse to turn from evil ways. In both cases there is a tension between the divine love of God and what it will take for God's people to experience it, given their ongoing evil ways. In other words, the hurdle for humanity to experience divine love is humanity's own condition and action. The question that hangs over these texts is one that haunts much of the biblical story: How can these things come to pass? The passages are both foreboding and hopeful, emotions equally present in Lewis's artist analogy. The Apostle Paul picks up this theme in his letter to the Romans, maintaining the sense expressed by the prophets:

Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? (Rom 9:20b-21)

Lewis's analogy of God as the artist and humankind as the art parallels these biblical metaphors of God's character, position, and action toward humankind.⁵⁰³ The force of

⁵⁰³ For Lewis, Medcalf notes, 'The influence and importance of the relationship of myth and fact to the understanding and communication of truth shaped how Lewis viewed the Bible.', Medcalf, Stephen. 'The Coincidence of Myth and Fact' in Wadsworth, Michael ed. *Ways of Reading the Bible* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981) 61-76.

those metaphors reaches its zenith in Lewis's argument that divine love acts in this way despite humankind's desire for a qualitatively different sort of love. The forms of artist and art, while poetic, requisitely carry with them the terribly difficult functions of artist and art:

Love is more sensitive than hatred itself to every blemish in the beloved; his 'feeling is more soft and sensible than are the tender horns of cockled snails.' Of all powers he forgives most, but he condones least: he is pleased with little, but demands all.⁵⁰⁴

Lewis presents love as extreme in both action and tenderness, and the two as inextricably linked. It is love's fragile tenderness that compels it to intolerance of imperfection in the beloved and commitment to its good. His use of Berowne's monologue from *Love's Labour's Lost* is telling, for the chosen line is nested in the extolling of love's power to mystically enhance one's faculties after jealous suspicion has passed. The 'soft and sensible' is not separate from the 'suspicious head of theft':

It adds a precious seeing to the eye.
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind.
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious head of theft is stopped.⁵⁰⁵

The result, when taken back into Lewis's metaphor of artist and art, is that the art will undergo relentless working and re-working until the sensibilities and purposes of the artist are satisfied. The process is painful, and Lewis saw in the ambiguity surrounding divine love that this kind of necessary pain had been unidentified. Therefore, when divine love is received, with all its painful artistic work, it is perceived as contrary:⁵⁰⁶

He [God] has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ POP 39.

⁵⁰⁵ Shakespeare, William, Wilbur L. Cross, and Tucker Brooke. *The Yale Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005) 109: 4.3.346-350.

⁵⁰⁶ Lewis's experience was that many people, including himself, naturally conceived of a God who already approves of humankind in its present condition, one who delights in our happiness and thus whatever makes us happy must delight God. But he found that the logical and metaphysical conflicts inherent in such a view rendered it impossible, and thereby called for him to reconsider his view: 'I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.' (POP 32). Though he believed this view of God 'lurks at the back of many minds' (Ibid. 30) he avoids accusation which would rhetorically force everyone into that category. Instead, he puts himself in the place of the offender, that he finds himself liking such an idea. Lewis applied to himself the conclusion at which he desired his reader to arrive.

⁵⁰⁷ POP 33.

You asked for a loving God: you have one.⁵⁰⁸

For Lewis, divine love readily embraces its object while simultaneously demanding perfection from it, not as prerequisite but as *telos*.⁵⁰⁹ God's love is relentless, and humanity, for lack of a fuller understanding of this due to the ambiguity of the concept, would often rather have mere kindness.⁵¹⁰ In this way divine love becomes something 'tragic' to us, an 'intolerable compliment'. Lewis did not need to articulate *pain* directly, it is implied in the ambiguous terms within his rhetoric. God the artist gives 'endless trouble' to humankind, his art. We are repeatedly 'rubbed', 'scraped', and 'recommenced'. Lewis exploits the ambiguity in the popular concept of divine love and instead offers his multi-layered understanding, as if to rid his reader of a naïveté he himself once shared.⁵¹¹ Divine love is far more than humanity has considered, and the discovery of that reality is unsettling.

This was more than just a clever apologetic turn for Lewis, it was expressive of his own experience. The sentiment appears in *Perelandra*, published three years later, as Lewis encounters the ruler of Malacandra:

I felt sure that the creature was what we call "good," but I wasn't sure whether I liked "goodness" so much as I had supposed. This is a very terrible experience. As long as what you are afraid of is something evil, you may still hope that the good may come to your rescue. But suppose you struggle through to the good and find that is also dreadful? How if food itself turns out to be the very thing you can't eat, and home the very place you can't live, and your very comforter the person who makes you uncomfortable? Then, indeed, there is no rescue possible: the last card has been played.⁵¹²

His awareness of this dynamic was not only later in life. As a young man, Lewis had a dreadful view of who God may be and what he represented. His antipathy to that understanding is expressed in his early poetry:

The fierce, cold eyes of Godhead gleam
Revolving hate and misery
And wars and famines yet to be.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁰⁹ This too has roots in God's self-disclosure (Lev 11:44-45; 1 Pe 1:16).

⁵¹⁰ POP 28-29.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Per 17.

⁵¹³ SIB XXII, 46. Published when Lewis was 21 years old and still an atheist.

Not only so of God himself, but for Lewis the heavenly host was perceived as a confrontational throng of spirits putting Lewis to an uninvited choice:

Many a face and form of those
Thin, elemental people dear...
Crying in their melody,
“Leap in! Leap in and take thy fill
Of all the cosmic good and ill,
Be as the living ones that know,
Enormous joy, enormous woe...”⁵¹⁴

Lewis, who could not venture such a leap, envisioned a heavenly displeasure:

So all these mocked me as I stood
Striving to wake because I feared the flood.⁵¹⁵

He also articulated his former dread later in life, imaginatively in *Till We Have Faces*.

There Maia finds that there is no quarter from the gods:

Now mark yet again the cruelty of the gods. There is no escape from them into sleep or madness, for they can pursue you into them with dreams. Indeed you are then most at their mercy. The nearest thing we have to a defence against them (but there is no real defence) is to be very wide awake and sober and hard at work, to hear no music, never to look at earth or sky, and (above all) to love no one.⁵¹⁶

And in closing, she reflects:

I ended my first book with the words no answer. I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words.⁵¹⁷

The ambiguity that Lewis observed in relation to divine love runs parallel to that which was in his own sentiments earlier in life. Lewis applied his apologetic to enlarge the parameters of divine love so that it may subsume those kinds of pain requisite for its perfecting work upon its object. He thus converts, in his estimation, the God of ‘revolving hate and misery’ into an artistic God whose divine love applied to humanity must allow for certain kinds of pain.⁵¹⁸ Retelling the Christian story in this way

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ TWHF 80-81. The emotive and imaginative doors can never be closed.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. 308. Published 1956.

⁵¹⁸ Similarly in SL as the necessity for ‘creating a dangerous world’ where morality is drawn into the fore and, as in classical thought, ‘courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at

conjoins the poetic and analytic. Caglioti observes this way of communicating as engendering ambiguity, ‘But at the point where science and art converge, where truth meets beauty and beauty meets truth, the language becomes analytic and synthetic, precise and vague, rational and instinctive, esoteric and exoteric at the same time. In a word, it becomes ambiguous.’⁵¹⁹ The force of Lewis’s method was not derived from rigid logical theorem, but from his ability to present Christianity in imaginative ways both engaging of the intellect and emotion. Farrer considered this central to Lewis’s value as an apologist:

It was [his] feeling intellect, [his] intellectual imagination which made the strength of his religious writings. Some of those unsympathetic to his convictions saw him as an advocate who bluffed a public eager to be deceived, by the presentation of uncertain arguments as cogent demonstrations. Certainly he was a debater, and thought it fair to make the most of the case: and there were those who were reassured by seeing that the case could be made. But his real power was not proof, it was depiction. There lived in his writings a Christian universe which could be both thought and felt, in which he was at home, and in which he made his reader at home.⁵²⁰

Despite this, the ambiguity does open potential lines of questioning that may lead a reader away from Lewis’s preferred direction. Farrer raised some of these questions regarding *The Problem of Pain*.⁵²¹ However, given Lewis’s intended audience, Farrer concluded ‘The readers Lewis has in mind’ would not be interested or aware of more substantive and nuanced questions. Moreover, by agreement with Lewis’s premise of a necessity for the possibility of pain, they will be open to Lewis’s outcomes, ‘ready to consider how God will govern such a world, and what divine purpose will be served by the way in which our pains affect us.’⁵²² Such was the dynamic, in Farrer’s estimation, that he summarized it by saying, ‘We think we are listening to an argument, in fact we are presented with a vision; and it is the vision that carries conviction.’⁵²³ The opening

the testing point’ even as ‘Pilate was merciful till it became risky.’, SL 161-162. Yet, it is Screwtape speaking and as Lewis cautions, ‘Not everything Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle.’, SL ix. Cf. Appendix for a treatment of Lewis’s inspiration for SL.

⁵¹⁹ Caglioti, Giuseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity* (Berlin New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992) 135-137.

⁵²⁰ Farrer, Austin. ‘In his Image’ in Como, James T. ed. *Remembering C.S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) 384-385; Cf. ‘The use of images, to both men, is not merely rhetorical or heuristic, but essential.’, Wolfe, Judith. ‘Austin Farrer and C.S. Lewis’, Bockmuehl, M. and S. Platten & N Everett, eds. *Austin Farrer: Oxford Warden, Scholar, Preacher* (London: SCM Press, 2020) 7.

⁵²¹ Farrer, Austin. ‘The Christian Apologist’ in Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 36.

⁵²² Ibid. 36.

⁵²³ Ibid. 37.

for Lewis was in ambiguous terms and the force of his argumentative is the appeals to the imagination, the vision, in which ambiguities create room for shared meaning.

IV)The Divine Scheme

In addressing the role of volitional evil, Lewis suggests a Divine scheme in which even such evil at its more abhorrent form operates within a given role. In doing so, he indirectly presents an economy wherein the reader must associate themselves with one of two options, neither escaping the overarching Divine scheme. The force of this argumentation is in the ambiguity of what this scheme entails and how the reader should relate themselves to it. As Holmer notes, the strength of Lewis's method 'is not always in the lines but, rather, between them'.⁵²⁴ Lewis posited a four-stage economy within which to understand pain. There is a 'simple good' humankind receives from God, a 'simple evil' derived from rebellious action against God, God's ability to 'exploit' that evil toward redemptive ends, and finally a 'complex good' that comes to humankind through 'accepted suffering and repentance'.⁵²⁵ As regards that simple good and complex good, Lewis argues that in certain circumstances a person is 'entitled' to hurt or even kill their fellow human, using examples of surgeons, magistrates, and soldiers. In this argument, he turns aside to close off the idea that occasion-specific hurt justly administered and this 'complex good' attained through suffering may somehow be nefariously conjoined as evidence of an exception to the 'Divine scheme'.⁵²⁶ The interrelation of creature-Creation is divinely arranged:

But creatures are not thus separate from their Creator, nor can He misunderstand them. The place for which He designs them in His scheme of things is the place they are made for. When they reach it their nature is fulfilled and their happiness attained: a broken bone in the universe has been set, the anguish is over.⁵²⁷

In Lewis, it is not pain as a virtue, but a kind of virtue that accommodates, or employs, pain. There is a sense of the ends justifying the means. He uses the hyperbolic example of Christopher Marlowe's protagonist in *Tamburlaine the Great* to illustrate that ultimately nothing can negate or escape the economy of God's overarching design. It is

⁵²⁴ Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) ix.

⁵²⁵ POP 110.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. 112. Notwithstanding theological distinctives related to the sovereignty of God, which are significant, Lewis was speaking to the metanarrative of God's plan for creation. Cf. Isa 46:8-10.

⁵²⁷ POP 45-46.

an irreducibly complex character who, in his villainy, reveled to such a degree in grotesque cruelty—which he considered good for those upon whom he levied it—that he proclaimed himself ‘the scourge of God’.⁵²⁸ But in Lewis’s view, even evil of such a degree does not place one outside the divine scheme, but only casts them into the ‘post of Satan’ within it:

To turn this into a general charter for afflicting humanity...is not indeed to break the Divine scheme but to volunteer for the post of Satan within that scheme. If you do his work, you must be prepared for his wages.⁵²⁹

On this point Lewis offers no qualification, moving instead to comments on asceticism. The reader is left to ponder the implications, which are considerable. The immediate and obvious inference is that no one may escape the Divine scheme. For, in Christian theology and tradition, what can be more opposed to God than Satan? Stated more generally, what is more opposed to good than evil? For Lewis, even Satan is an element within the Divine economy, unable to operate beyond its limits. This passing comment gives the reader opportunity by inference to consider not *if* they are part of God’s Divine scheme, but *what part they are playing*. As with ‘ought’, Lewis has restricted the options to a dichotomy while leaving the implications open to interpretation.⁵³⁰ His clear declaration is that if one chooses the role of Satan, one should expect an outcome similar to that of Satan’s. There is an implicit question regarding what ‘wages’ one has been earning. It is likely that very few people, if any, would count themselves on the side of Tamburlaine. At the same time, surely some readers would also have not viewed themselves in Lewis’s shoes, being on the side of the Christian God or considering themselves inescapably within ‘His scheme’.⁵³¹ Lewis has removed the middle ground entirely—precisely the ground upon which many readers may consider themselves standing—whether they had pondered the matter before or not. By using a comment about the inability of bold-faced evil to escape its place in the Divine scheme, Lewis gives cautious room for the reader to consider that for the Christian, God and Satan, good and evil, are not abstract but personal, with the biblical God over all; and to discover that they have not been

⁵²⁸ Marlowe, Christopher, Frank Romney, and Robert Lindsey, eds. *The Complete Plays* (London, Penguin Books, 2003) 130.

⁵²⁹ POP 112.

⁵³⁰ Beversluis criticized this approach, not to the degree of setting up false dichotomies, but restricting scenarios to two options where more exist, ‘One of Lewis’s most serious weaknesses as an apologist is his fondness for the false dilemma’: Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 43.

⁵³¹ POP 46.

contemplating a side to choose; they have been on a side all along. This tension is expressed in *Mere Christianity*:

For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realised [*sic*] it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last for ever. We must take it or leave it.⁵³²

Though this clearly has biblical underpinnings regarding final judgement, Lewis only addresses the shocking implications of what it will mean to finally be face to face with God and that the result of one's choice, there revealed, is something to be considered now and not then. For Lewis, the choice is only now and cannot be then.

Lewis's tone here, terse if not ungracious, is worth noting. While ambiguity may be a means for carrying the reader forward, and in so doing place the argument as a goal toward which Lewis becomes guide rather than adversary, one with whom the reader may think alongside, this presents as more of an affront. Though Tamburlaine is a foil, saying 'to volunteer for the post of Satan' is nonetheless caustic. Only a few paragraphs earlier Lewis wrote 'For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act'.⁵³³ It may an example of the abruptness he was known to exercise on occasion.⁵³⁴ While it is an abrasive comment, there is reason to believe it was not purely inimical. Lewis modified his earlier comment of carrying out God's purpose irregardless of one's action; 'but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or John' (Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11).⁵³⁵ Even here Lewis is preparing the dichotomy; one is either in the camp of Judas who betrayed Jesus to his death, or of John who was 'the beloved disciple' (Matt 10:4; 26, John 13:23; 21:7; 21:20.). What is particularly useful is the amendment of one's inescapable role in the plan of God. He does not here take up the gauntlet regarding the theological spectrum related to freedom of the will, but he does advocate for human participation in the Divine

⁵³² MC 65.

⁵³³ POP 111.

⁵³⁴ As Gibb notes, 'in argument he could sometimes throw you in the dirt rather sharply.': Gibb, Jocelyn. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) xi.

⁵³⁵ POP 111.

scheme and that therefore one's choices should be taken seriously. The implication of ambiguous dire outcomes hangs heavy. The role of this powerful dichotomy in Lewis's thought, and the place of his fellow human beings within it, bears out in many places across his writings. Consider this excerpt from a sermon given by Lewis in 1941:

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.⁵³⁶

An immortal horror or everlasting splendour—for Lewis, one of those two ends awaited every person.⁵³⁷ Such a conviction does show the fitness of titling the sermon, 'The Weight of Glory'. One need not be a Christian at all, let alone a Christian of Lewis's sort, to sense the *gravitas* that one would inescapably bear by holding such a belief with conviction, and that conviction and weight fuelled apologetic instances such as those considered above in relation to the Divine scheme.⁵³⁸ It should be recognized, as Beversluis has done, that Lewis's force is at times more rhetoric than argument. Regarding the final portion of the sermon, Beversluis extols Lewis's rhetorical prowess, but states that 'it does not contain an argument'.⁵³⁹ His advice is to 'savor' Lewis's rhetoric and then 'see through it and beyond it'.⁵⁴⁰ He suggests that the non-rhetorical equivalent would be, 'In closing, permit me to remind you that your daily conduct can affect people adversely.' While Lewis's use of rhetoric can be heavy, Beversluis's summation is reductionist. Burke's 'Logology'⁵⁴¹ has bearing here, as Lewis did not attempt to prove anything theologically, but employed usable analogies to shine light upon theological principles.⁵⁴² The sermon does touch on

⁵³⁶ 'The Weight of Glory', a sermon at Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford 8 June 1941, published in *Theology*, Vol. 43 (November 1941): reprinted WOG 19.

⁵³⁷ SL, MC, AOM, M, and all but four essays from GID were published after this sermon ('Evil and God', 'Dangers of National Repentance', 'Two Ways with the Self', and 'Meditation on the Third Commandment'). Therefore, this was a conviction present in Lewis for nearly all the primary works considered in this thesis. POP was published a year earlier in 1941.

⁵³⁸ A sense of this seriousness about the *other* is present in *The Great Divorce*, wherein Dick the bright spirit says, 'I have nothing to do with any generality. Not with any man but you and me.': GD 34; Also, autobiographically of how God relates to each person, 'he cares only for temples building and not at all for temples built', SBJ 161.

⁵³⁹ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 21.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 1-28, 268.

⁵⁴² Ibid. 7.

theological points related to eternity, the afterlife, universal human value, pride, temptation, heaven, and hell, and stands against the negative connotation assigned by Beversluis. The efficacy of Lewis's arguments is a separate question, but dense rhetoric alone is not an inherent failure to advance an argument, particularly in a sermon as compared to a university seminar or professional lecture. Beversluis points out a lack of scholarship in Lewis,⁵⁴³ but it is another instance where Lewis is being held to a standard he did not attempt. The failure to deal with Lewis's language in its context overlooks scholarship that has been translated into common language, which includes ambiguities that would be error in approaches more analytically inclined.

V) Divine Goodness

At the close of his chapter on Divine Goodness, Lewis moves onto a curious point regarding the existence of need or want in God. It seems to be an attempt to close a gate into which he was concerned readers may wander but introduces errant ambiguity in his argument. He may have intended to traverse secondary issues, but the result is likely to raise new questions. He first presents a summation of divine goodness in relation to love and the object loved:

God's love, far from being caused by goodness in the object, causes all the goodness the object has, loving it first into existence and then into real, though derivative, lovability.⁵⁴⁴

Lewis establishes the pre-eminence of God's love, its blessing for humanity, and humanity's subsistence upon it. But he goes further, seemingly in anticipation of objection:

Hence, if God sometimes speaks as though the Impassible could suffer passion and eternal fullness could be in want, and in want of those beings on whom it bestows all from their bare existence upwards, this can mean only, if it means anything intelligible by us, that God of mere miracle has made Himself able so to hunger and created in Himself that which we can satisfy.⁵⁴⁵

In this understanding, if God uses language of desire, want, or need (which he certainly does), the reason(s) are likely unknowable to us — 'if it means anything intelligible' to us. The only meaning Lewis imagines is God creating in himself some

⁵⁴³ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) xii-xiii.

⁵⁴⁴ POP 43.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

‘hunger’ that humanity is able to ‘satisfy’. Lewis here seems to run afoul of his prior argument that God can do anything which is possible for God to do. This seems more like nonsense attributed to God, that the all-self-sufficient would create insufficiency in Himself. For inherent in hunger is need, want, lack, and a desire. Or, perhaps it is only a feigned hunger, expressed to us for the appreciation according to our lower senses and understanding. Yet, that too raises questions of things not being as they appear, even in God himself. Whatever the reason Lewis had for wading farther out into the issue, the waters have thereby become murky and more difficult to navigate. Had not so many of Lewis’s closest friends spoken of him being a man of deep conviction, one could be excused for thinking he merely rearranged the theological furniture to suit his aims. Yet that seems unlikely given what is known of him. Whether one agrees with Lewis or not, it must be recognized that he genuinely reasoned to his positions. What is fascinating is that in instances like this we find him more apt to introduce his views—views that would have been novel for many then even as they are today—though they do not always assist his arguments. Though he usually took great pains to avoid theological entanglements, at times a troublesome view like this will pour out. He continues:

If He who in Himself can lack nothing chooses to need us, it is because we need to be needed. Before and behind all the relations of God to man, as we now learn them from Christianity, yawns the abyss of a Divine act of pure giving⁵⁴⁶

Lewis reaffirms his earlier point on the self-sufficiency of God, that He lacks nothing. Yet, God ‘chooses to need us’. This is an instance where Lewis’s normal method of leaving out argumentation from biblical texts is troublesome. He is not painting pictures of what God is like but rather speaking directly to the nature of God and doing so in relation to one of the more difficult aspects of humanity’s relationship with God. He leaves much unaddressed. That God desires to give to humanity and to receive from humanity does not necessitate lack on God’s part. But Lewis leaves alternative views aside and presses the ambiguity further:

if there is in Him something which we have to imagine after the analogy of a passion, a want, it is there by His own will and for our sakes.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid. 46.

Lewis is giving room for interpretation, leaving aside doctrines of such as divine immutability or impassibility that attend these ideas. Almost every facet of the argument is left subjective. The object in question related to God is merely ‘something’. One’s imagination must conceive of it only by analogy to be a passion. There is an attempt to turn the emphasis away from the ‘something’ perceived about God and toward the reason God would have to express himself in such a way that one would so perceive Him. Whatever the ‘something’ is, it is there as we find it because that is what best suits our limited ability to grasp what is a condition we do not possess—impassibility—in a Being we can never be—God. While this method may have the intent of focusing on the action of God’s love and humanity’s condition, it also delves into the nuances of theological speculation regarding impassibility and immutability. Lewis seems to want to diffuse those questions, but his ambiguity is not enough to obscure the issues raised by his arguments.

VI) Divine Judgement

Lewis addresses the offense in divine judgement where there is a perceived incongruity between temporal offenses and retributive, eternal punishment. His approach introduces ambiguities related to the roles of God and humanity in judgment, as well as God’s relation to time. He focuses upon the role of human choice rather than punitive divine action. This approach circumvents pressures that would arise regarding biblical references such as ‘unquenchable fire’ (Matt 3:12), ‘eternal judgment’ (Heb 6:12), or a doctrine of eternal torment via retributive judgement derived from such passages. Though greatly influenced by Augustine,⁵⁴⁸ Lewis did not share Augustine’s emphasis upon conscious, unending suffering in literal fire.⁵⁴⁹ Lewis saw in the history of belief on both Hell and Purgatory, concepts of punishment with which he did not agree.⁵⁵⁰ Rather than dealing directly with questions of divine action, he argued for a duality of responsibility: ‘forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete’.⁵⁵¹ He admits his attempt was not to make the doctrine tolerable, but to evidence it as sufficiently moral.⁵⁵² This approach set the path for him to introduce a

⁵⁴⁸ Lewis admittedly was not well read in modern theologians. Of earlier writers, Augustine was first among those he called to mind, CLIII 979.

⁵⁴⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*. Book 21, chapter 9; Cf. Caroline J. Simon, ‘On Love’ in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 152-153.

⁵⁵⁰ LTM 108.

⁵⁵¹ POP 123.

⁵⁵² Ibid. 121.

different perspective on divine judgement, placing the onus upon the individual rather than God:

The characteristic of lost souls is ‘their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves’. Our imaginary egoist has tried to turn everything he meets into a province or appendage of the self. The taste for the other, that is, the very capacity for enjoying good, is quenched in him except in so far as his body still draws him into some rudimentary contact with an outer world. Death removes this last contact. He has his wish—to lie wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is Hell.⁵⁵³

Lewis’s own context, the Church of England, revised its view of Hell via the 1996 Doctrine Commission, newly describing it as ‘not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being’.⁵⁵⁴ Yet, at the time of Lewis’s writing, the doctrine still included what the Commission later characterized as ‘imagery of hell-fire and eternal torment and punishment, often sadistically expressed’ and ‘theologies which made God into a sadistic monster’ resulting in the infliction of ‘searing psychological scars on many’.⁵⁵⁵ While it is important to recognize that the Commission, like all bodies so tasked, was at risk of anachronistic error related to past experience given the pressure of contemporary distaste for the doctrine, that does not preclude the possibility or even probability of accurately assessing their own history. Not only did the Church of England later adopt a view nearly exact to that of Lewis, nearly a half-century later the Second Vatican Council agreed to a similar formulation: ‘The chief punishment of hell is separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.’⁵⁵⁶ This is not to suggest Lewis as a primary source for the change in either religious body, though his influence was clearly cross-confessional.⁵⁵⁷ There is a great irony here, for Lewis’s aversion to the punitive and retributive aspects of divine judgement, while born of his own need to reconcile the issue, were expressed as an apologist for orthodoxy against

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 125.

⁵⁵⁴ The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God’s Gift: A Report*. 199.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 1035.

⁵⁵⁷ Kreeft, Peter. ‘The Achievement of C.S. Lewis: A Millennial Assessment’ in Joseph Pearce, *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003) xiv. Interestingly, Lewis did have some experience in ecclesiastical revision. In the preface to *Christian Reflections*, Hooper notes that Lewis worked with T.S. Eliot in 1961 on a revision of the Psalter for the Archbishops of Canterbury and York: CR xiii.

liberal theologies. The movement of the religious bodies was in part in response to cultural pressures of later liberal theologies whose incubatory forms Lewis disagreed with. His focus upon individual action rather than divine judgement raises many questions. Is he saying damnation is purely a self-imposed reality?⁵⁵⁸ Does this formulation render God's judgement perfunctory? Or is the self-choice of the condemned synchronous with their condemnation? His summation of the character of lost souls prefigures *The Great Divorce*, with its metaphorical realm of self-damnation. He certainly felt the tension and desired to reconcile a God of such self-sacrificing love with the reality of divine judgement:

Christianity, true, as always, to the complexity of the real, presents us with something knottier and more ambiguous—a God so full of mercy that He becomes man and dies by torture to avert that final ruin from His creatures, and who yet, where that heroic remedy fails, seems unwilling, or even unable, to arrest the ruin by an act of mere power. I said glibly a moment ago that I would pay 'any price' to remove this doctrine. I lied. I could not pay one-thousandth part of the price that God has already paid to remove the fact. And here is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell.⁵⁵⁹

He subtly introduces another ambiguous inference that further alters the argument: the problem is not between eternal retributive divine judgement and temporal human action, but instead between incalculable divine self-sacrifice (mercy) and a populated Hell. Lewis claims to have 'begun with the conception of Hell as a positive retributive punishment inflicted by God because that is the form in which the doctrine is most repellent, and I wished to tackle the strongest obstacle.'⁵⁶⁰ This 'tackle', however, was oblique and it is not until later in the defence that he speaks of issues such as everlasting punishment, destruction, and banishment, all derived from Christ's teachings (Matt 25:46; 10:28; 8:12; 25:11). He does acknowledge the offending implications, that whatever the biblical language refers to, 'all these expressions are intended to suggest something unspeakably horrible, and any interpretation which does not face that fact is, I am afraid, out of court from the beginning.'⁵⁶¹ Yet, an

⁵⁵⁸ Wolfe relates to the desire for power, '...towards the untruth that human beings are self-sufficient, that they can be 'like God' in power, rather than like him in willing self-abandonment.' (Wolfe, Judith. 'On Power' in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 177.); Cf. POP 115. Those who do end up in this self-imposed hell are typified as those who 'do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good.'

⁵⁵⁹ POP 120.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. 124.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 127.

acknowledgement of the character of the biblical language is not the same thing as providing an apologetic for the established doctrine derived therefrom. In fact, at every turn Lewis de-emphasizes those points which are precisely the areas of offense. They are left open and ambiguous, allowing the reader's imagination to reach out from new perspectives. Of the implied disparity found between temporal offence and eternal judgement, he suggests a rethinking of the concept of time. What we perceive as linear time may very well be only one aspect of fuller, more robust time, which exists as a plane or more likely a solid, within which 'the whole reality of a human being' is constituted.⁵⁶² In such thinking, the offense of eternality in divine judgement is radically changed into a statement of quality rather than quantity. This approach inherently carries an immense amount of apologetic ambiguity. Lewis suggests a kind of reality which can, at best, only be grasped at with the imagination.⁵⁶³ It cannot be experientially appropriated for it speaks of a kind of existence that would requisitely place humankind on the other side of this life. He has taken the reader in an entirely different direction. It is not the doctrine that is defended, but rather the possibility of another outcome for what is implied by the biblical texts. The possibility of that outcome, shown to be one reasonable option philosophically, turns the argument away from the offense of overweighted judgement by way of eternal verdict for temporal action, and towards the interwoven arguments Lewis desired to advance—that this outcome is something 'unspeakably horrible' and it is also the natural terminus of a self-focused life.⁵⁶⁴

Here Lewis's thoughts on Purgatory in *Letters to Malcolm* are illustrative. He uncharacteristically displays his Anglicanism in Letter XX, addressing his interlocutor's questions of Purgatory, prayer for the dead, and the relationship of the dead to time. While he shared the Reformation objection to the monetization of the doctrine of Purgatory, he was equally concerned with how the doctrine had deteriorated from the Middle Ages. Dante's earlier *Purgatorio* and More's *Supplication of Souls* cast the doctrine in a different light, and one that had been lost:

⁵⁶² POP 124.

⁵⁶³ See Schakel, *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces*; Sellars; J.T. *Reasoning Beyond Reason*; McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis: A Life*, 135-140; Guite, Malcolm. 'Telling the Truth Through Imaginative Fiction: C.S. Lewis on the Reconciliation of Athene and Demeter' in Ward, Michael and Peter S. Williams, eds. *C.S. Lewis at Poets' Corner* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 15-24.

⁵⁶⁴ 'I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.'; POP 128.

‘In fact, the very etymology of the word purgatory has dropped out of sight.’⁵⁶⁵ The doctrine had degraded into greater emphasis upon divine judgement as retributive punishment.⁵⁶⁶ Lewis concluded that such a view would lead one to forget God rather than draw near to him. He stated he believed in Purgatory,⁵⁶⁷ viewing the Reformers’ objection as not against Purgatory in general, but specifically against its sixteenth century ‘Romish’ iteration. He saw an inconsistency in the traditional Protestant view: ‘all the dead are damned or saved. If they are damned, prayer for them is useless. If they are saved, it is equally useless. God has already done all for them. What more should we ask? But don’t we believe that God has already done and is already doing all that He can for the living? What more should we ask? Yet we are told to ask.’⁵⁶⁸ Lewis’s Purgatory was something far more robust and ambiguous than a state of intermediary punishment. He accepted that suffering would attend Purgatory, but as a matter of function, not purpose: ‘I assume that the process of purification will normally involve suffering. Partly from tradition; partly because most real good that has been done me in this life has involved it. But I don’t think suffering is the purpose of the purgation.’⁵⁶⁹ Thus prayer for the dead is as acceptable as prayer for the living and what comes of the dead during the intermediate state is a matter ascent to that heavenly realm, which reasonably includes suffering as process not punishment. Of whether or not the dead exist in God’s ‘infinite present’, he suggests that their experience of time may ‘have thickness as well as length.’⁵⁷⁰ Lewis uses this same conception elsewhere,⁵⁷¹ and here confesses theological inadequacy (or possibly feigns such to softly recommend his point) while suggesting that a timeless existence for the dead may be ‘inconsistent with the resurrection of the body.’⁵⁷² Into this ambiguousness Lewis draws back to the ontological limits of humanity: ‘I mean, our creaturely limitation is that our fundamentally timeless reality can be experienced by us only in the mode of succession.’⁵⁷³ Thus Lewis affirmed the existence of Purgatory but rejected that its aim was punitive. He affirmed that it will include suffering, but a kind that, if not divinely appointed, we would gladly accept by volition in order to remove what

⁵⁶⁵ LTM 108.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. 107.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. 109.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Cf. M 85 and the relation to a cube; ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 102-103.

⁵⁷² LTM 110.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

remains to attain full healing, like rinsing after a tooth is pulled.⁵⁷⁴ With the doctrine of Purgatory, as with the larger question of divine judgment, Lewis answers his interlocutor with a question, or questions, that redirects the argument and opens a new perspective characterized by an immense amount of ambiguity: a strategic ambiguity that leaves secondary matters, as Lewis considered them, out of view.

In addressing the offense of ‘the frightful intensity of the pains of hell as suggested by medieval art and, indeed, by certain passages of Scripture’,⁵⁷⁵ Lewis briefly references Baron Friedrich von Hügel, who was influential for him in other areas as well.⁵⁷⁶ Lewis noted Hügel as admonishing against the error of confusing ‘the doctrine itself with the *imagery* by which it may be conveyed’.⁵⁷⁷ Hügel’s view of the nature of existence for the damned is strikingly similar to what is found in Lewis:

The lost spirits will persist, according to the degree of their permanent self-willed defection from their supernatural call, in the all but mere changingness, scatteredness, distractedness, variously characteristic of their self-elected earthly life...in the varyingly all but complete self-centeredness [*sic*] and subjectivity of their self-elected earthly life. But now they will feel, far more fully than they ever felt on earth, the stuntedness, the self-mutilation, the imprisonment involved in this their endless self-occupation and jealous evasion of all reality not simply their own selves.⁵⁷⁸

Without suggesting a utilitarian motive on Lewis’s part, this is an understandably attractive argument for a Christian apologist, for it shifts the emphasis from God’s decree to human responsibility—from punitive divine action to individual choice. But the absence of the divine action leaves a large hole. One may come away with a sense of the biblical God as a being whose action is partisan, saving but not condemning. For, if this alternate eternal divine judgement is self-derived, there is a sense in which God becomes passive in relation judgement, as though it were a form of spiritual inertia. As noted earlier, Lewis wrote:

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. 109.

⁵⁷⁵ POP 124.

⁵⁷⁶ Von Hügel appears among those authors Lewis repeatedly recommended to others for understanding the Christian faith. In a letter of 28 Aug 1930 Lewis recommended Von Hügel to Arthur Greeves as ‘an author you shd. [*sic*] read’, (CLI 933). A letter of 19 August 1942 recommended *Eternal Life and Essays & Addresses* (CLII 529); 6 May 1947, (CLII 776); 2 April 1949, (CLII 915); 23 September 1952, (CLIII 228); 6 May 1955, (CLIII 617); and Lewis referenced Hügel’s view on hell in a letter on 14 November 1954 to Dorothy Sayers, CLIII 526.

⁵⁷⁷ POP 112.

⁵⁷⁸ Hügel, Friedrich. *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001) 216-217.

He becomes man and dies by torture to avert that final ruin from His creatures, and who yet, where that heroic remedy fails, *seems unwilling, or even unable*, to arrest the ruin by an act of mere power. [emphasis added]⁵⁷⁹

The alternative offered by Lewis opens new ambiguities surrounding the question of what it would mean that God would be ‘unwilling, or even unable’ to act, when the preponderance of Christian theology so clearly rests final judgement within God’s right alone. Yet, Lewis’s apologetic does carry the reader away from those items apt to leave ‘searing psychological scars’ and invites them to consider another way—one which removes God from the dock and puts humankind up in his place:

To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to have been a man—to be an ex-man or ‘damned ghost’—would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centred [*sic*] in its self and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will.⁵⁸⁰

The result of this ambiguity is the invitation for the reader’s imagination to grasp some meaning from the varied interpretations that might reconcile Hell, Purgatory, and the roles of God and humankind. This may be advantageous, as with Ordway’s observation of an author allowing multiple meanings,⁵⁸¹ or if too prominent, the ambiguity of multiple interpretations may create a challenge to apprehending meaning as with Caglioti’s ‘dynamic instability’.⁵⁸² The point at which ambiguous outcomes can no longer be held in tension presents the boundary for Empson’s allowance that ambiguity permits the presence of multiple views without error.⁵⁸³ Lewis’s creative reframing of divine judgment presents multiple new possibilities which may tend to dynamic instability due to the ambiguous potential outcomes that conflict. However, his invitation for the imagination to explore ideas around doctrines that have been

⁵⁷⁹ POP 120.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 127.

⁵⁸¹ “In the right context, multiple *correct* meanings can operate simultaneously...The greatest authors are able to use these multiple meanings to resonate with each other.”: Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and then Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017) 37.

⁵⁸² Caglioti, Giuseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity* (Berlin New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992) 70: ‘...one must take into account the fact that the perception of an ambiguous figure is realized only after the observer has carried out an elaborate control of the figure... This process consists in collecting the elements mentally which compose the figure and correlating them in coherent schemes, before they slip out of mind. As soon as control of the stimuli exceeds a certain threshold, a dynamic instability is reached which is perceived by the breaking of symmetry and the forming of visual thinking.’

⁵⁸³ William Empson. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949) x. Caglioti describes the limit as ‘The coexistence, at a critical point, of two mutually *incompatible* aspects of the same reality [emphasis added].’: Caglioti, Giuseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity*, 159.

historically demonstratively offensive, whether rightly so or not, is strategically beneficial for keeping the reader journeying along with him.

VII) The Intrinsic Necessities of a World

In his chapter on Divine Omnipotence, Lewis takes up a line of argument that has to do with what he calls ‘the intrinsic necessities of a world’,⁵⁸⁴ wherein he attempts to show that the potential for evil—pain and suffering being symptoms thereof—is necessary given two factors; the world as an ordered system such as we have it, and creatures which have the ability to enact choices according their own inclination:

Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself.⁵⁸⁵

By ‘life’ Lewis here means the kind of life which humanity now experiences. While it is theoretically within the ability of an omniscient and omnipotent God to create life where creatures exist without self-enacted choice or without the possibility of suffering, Lewis argues that it would necessarily be life of an entirely different sort, and an order of existence utterly foreign to humanity.⁵⁸⁶ Yet, his point raises a series of questions left unaddressed. What of that *new* life following resurrection at the close of the age? Must the possibility for suffering continue with humanity into that next phase of existence? Is the heavenly ‘order of nature’ substantively different such that it alters Lewis’s formulation of the problem? If so, is freedom of will substantively different as well? Is heaven a place of volitional communion with God or not? If so, has Lewis created a contradiction in that it seems free wills must continue (under Lewis’s assessment) yet that new life will be qualitatively different, such that the effects of evil are no more (Rev 21:1-4)? In other words, how will free wills exist but never the effects of evil? Or does he envision heaven with merely spatial limits to the extent of evil choices (Rev 21:27a)? Such lines of questioning all spring from ambiguity regarding the intrinsic necessities of the world, and all are open gates. By introducing this question, which Lewis clearly assumed his reader would ask, the ambiguity is too

⁵⁸⁴ POP 25.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ He has previously ruled out questions based on non-contradiction, ‘the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities.’, Ibid. 18.

apparent and becomes an obstacle.⁵⁸⁷ While Lewis does not address such questions, he does attempt to close a different gate; the question of whether it would have been better for God to have left all uncreated rather than create a world that includes suffering:

Nothing so far has been said of this, and no answer attempted to the objection that if the universe must, from the outset, admit the possibility of suffering, then absolute goodness would have left the universe uncreated. And I must warn the reader that I shall not attempt to prove that to create was better than not to create: I am aware of no human scales in which such a portentous question can be weighed. Some comparison between one state of being and another can be made, but the attempt to compare being and not being ends in mere words. 'It would be better for me not to exist' —in what sense 'for me'? How should I, if I did not exist, profit by not existing? Our design is a less formidable one: it is only to discover how, perceiving a suffering world, and being assured, on quite different grounds, that God is good, we are to conceive that goodness and that suffering without contradiction.⁵⁸⁸

It is a brief nod to the question of whether non-existence, or never-existence would have been better than existence with pain. His apologetic is only to acknowledge it and place it beyond human purview. Yet this is perhaps at odds with two points in the work; one expressed, the other implied, and both having to do with God's omnipotence. He opens the chapter quoting Aquinas, 'Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God'.⁵⁸⁹ Lewis, like Aquinas accepted the Greek philosophic view of the perfection of God wherein there can be nothing in God which is contradictory, in either essence or action. But regarding whether anything is impossible for God, Lewis wrote: 'His omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense.'⁵⁹⁰ This, in combination with Lewis's assurance of the goodness of God, implies that what he left unaddressed in the prior quote regarding God not creating (and seemingly 'nonsense') turns out to be a violation of the law of

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. 'We are referring to entropy or uncertainty, to the removal of uncertainty or information, to symmetry and the breaking of symmetry, to order, conservation and ambiguity. Ambiguity plays a central role among these unifying factors.': Caglioti, Giuseppe. *Dynamics of Ambiguity* (Berlin New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992) 135-137; Failure to resolve that tension hinders progress in the pursuit of meaning. In this instance, hindering Lewis's apologetic.; Cf. Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 66-67. He argues that Lewis's ambiguous mix of Romantic and Christian ideas related to the imagination produce a conflict, with the Romantic endorsing the imagination on one hand and Christianity warning against its use on the other.

⁵⁸⁸ POP 27.

⁵⁸⁹ *Summa*, Ia, QXXV, Art. 4; POP 16.

⁵⁹⁰ POP 17.

non-contradiction. It is the theological outcome that, given our true existence, God has not created those beings for whom it is better to have never existed, because to create such a being would have been to enact the *lesser* thing, to have acted below goodness, and thus imperfectly, by creating something which would have been better left non-created. He nearly articulates this in saying, ‘perhaps this is not the “best of all possible” universes, but the only possible one’⁵⁹¹ and rejecting uncertainty in Divine action, ‘Perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be attained, and perfect wisdom cannot debate about the means suited to achieve it.’⁵⁹² Rather than leaving the question ambiguous, Lewis could have, on theological grounds, demonstrated its impossibility and simultaneously furthered his apologetic for the necessity of potential suffering. His philosophy, on this point, may have led him to an impasse which left errant ambiguity unresolved, hovering over the question. He may have viewed it as an area that is beyond the bounds of knowledge.⁵⁹³ On this point, Farrer felt the theological answer was the weaker of the two. He found Lewis as arriving at the ‘nicest point’ of intersection between philosophical and theological approaches.⁵⁹⁴ He suggests that the merit of the philosophical approach is to establish the potential outcomes of evil by basing their existence in the order the world. That is precisely the approach Lewis took. But of the theological approach, though he rightly articulates an overarching aim to reconcile theism and pain, he expresses only a desire to find a ‘positive acceptance of [God’s] will’.⁵⁹⁵ From that perspective Farrer is then able to assign the theological approach something of a fatal flaw in that it leads to ‘revolting paradoxes’.⁵⁹⁶ But this outcome assumes unproven theological distinctions regarding God’s relation to time and thereby the outworking of omniscience and providence, all of which covers his intended aim in an unhelpful ambiguity due to the unresolved questions.

2. Apologetic Ambiguity in *Mere Christianity*

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁹² Ibid. 26.

⁵⁹³ Cf. Lewis’s estimation of the limits of knowledge in ‘Behind the Scenes’, *Time and Tide*, vol. XXXVII (1 December 1956) 1450-1451; reprinted GID 245-249.

⁵⁹⁴ Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 35.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. 35. This is Farrer’s view of the reader’s desire. But if he felt strongly regarding other possible theological explanations, he could have introduced them at this point. He is critical of Lewis at other points in the essay.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. 35.

The most widely known apologetic work of Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, originated as a series of broadcast radio talks which were delivered from 1941 to 1944. They were very successful and immediately put into published form. Their background is relevant to the apologetic ambiguity discovered in the work. The first two series of talks, ‘Right and Wrong’ and ‘What Christians Believe’, were given in 1941 and 1942 and published in one volume in July 1942 under the title, *Broadcast Talks*. That fall the third series of talks, ‘Christian Behaviour’, was delivered and then published the following spring under the same title. The final series of talks, ‘Beyond Personality’, were given in the spring of 1944 and published that fall, also keeping the title. The immediate success of the four series of radio talks and the ongoing popularity of the three books led to their being compiled into a single volume and published in 1952 as *Mere Christianity*. The arguments were originally intended for a wide radio audio audience, and this influenced Lewis’s manner. Despite minor alterations, he maintained that tone in print.⁵⁹⁷ The combination of that colloquial style and his apologetic rhetorical method are part of what produces the instances of ambiguity examined in what follows.

i) ‘Ought’ and Universal Moral Law

As with his apologetic using the *numinous*, Lewis employed an ambiguous experience regarding a sense of ‘ought’ as part of his apologetic for universal moral law in *Mere Christianity*.⁵⁹⁸ It is a term for which he provides description without definition, carrying an attending ambiguity that obfuscates secondary concerns. The argument is developed across several movements touching on the nature of truth, the place of morality in human understanding, and the role and function of universal moral law in the human experience. Though he writes of *ought* in the various verb forms ranging from a logical consequence, an expectation, and a recommendation, his emphasis is the noun sense: a moral obligation. Lewis suggests this *ought* is something that all people feel, something which moves upon a person, urging them toward or away from a given action. In developing his argument in ‘roundabout way’,⁵⁹⁹ the closest he comes to naming the *ought* at this stage in his argument is to point out that in times past it was

⁵⁹⁷ ‘A “talk” on the radio should, I think, be as like real talk as possible, and should not sound like an essay being read aloud.’: MC vii; In the preface to MC he notes that other than expanding contractions and adjusting arguments based on clearer understanding, he maintained the style: MC vii-viii.

⁵⁹⁸ In MC this is part of Lewis’s apologetic in chapters 2-4, ‘Some Objections’, ‘The Reality of the Law’, and ‘What Lies Behind the Law’.

⁵⁹⁹ MC 31.

recognized as the Law of Nature.⁶⁰⁰ It is important to note that Lewis does eventually move toward a definition, specifying a ‘Power’,⁶⁰¹ ‘Director’, or ‘Guide’⁶⁰² in chapter four of book one, and toward Christianity specifically in chapter five.⁶⁰³ The argumentative benefit of this *ought* is that it allows the reader an immense amount of room to reflect upon their own experience(s) without constraint by Lewis. In one sense, the most definitive aspect of the argument arises from ambiguity—that *everyone* experiences this *ought*. The appeal to what is effectively an undefined common experience is broad enough to allow mental ascent from readers with not only different, but even conflicting ideas of what Lewis may have meant.

The effectiveness of this kind of apologetic ambiguity is further seen in *The Abolition of Man*. There, Lewis also uses the approach of an ambiguous universal experience: the *Tao*. His arguments in that work could be considered preparatory for what he attempts with *ought* in *Mere Christianity*.⁶⁰⁴ However, whereas he argues for something supernatural behind the *ought*, the *Tao* is strictly a philosophical argument for the objectivity of moral value and does not approach Christianity, Theism, or any ‘supernatural origin’.⁶⁰⁵ Lewis’s appeal to the universality of objective value is precisely why he chose the *Tao*. It was a way for him to clearly position his argument outside of Christianity and differentiate *The Abolition of Man* from his already successful Christian works, *The Problem of Pain* and *The Screwtape Letters*. By lumping together ‘traditional moralities of East and West, the Christian, the Pagan, and the Jew’,⁶⁰⁶ Lewis removes himself from being bound by any of them. Rather, they are all bound to the requisitely prior *Tao*. He argues that despite ‘many contradictions and some absurdities’ all moral systems principally agree that value is objective.⁶⁰⁷ The

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. 4.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. According to Beversluis, because of ambiguity related to Lewis’s premise for the Moral Argument, he falls into the error of affirming the consequent: ‘if there is a Power behind the facts, it must reveal itself in some way other than that of external observation; we are aware of internal commands; therefore there is a Power behind the facts.’ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 51.

⁶⁰² MC 25.

⁶⁰³ Ibid. 31.

⁶⁰⁴ Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* (Parkridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 20; Cf. Wolfe, Judith. ‘Theology in the Abolition of Man’ in Mosteller Tim and Grayne John Anacker, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on C.S. Lewis’ The Abolition of Man* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 97-98.

⁶⁰⁵ AOM 32.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. 29.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. 32; See Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* (Parkridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 15.

reader is called to recognize that they have been discovering and working out their understanding of the *Tao*, never being in a position outside it. The differences of moral systems are secondary to his argument, eclipsed by his primary emphasis upon the universal experience of objective value, and obfuscated by the *Tao*. Lewis uses the apologetic ambiguity of the *Tao* to avoid particular moral systems which are secondary and thereby also bypasses their corresponding disagreements. The *Tao* allows readers with different views of value to equally journey with Lewis because he is not pitting one against the other but attempting to show what is shared among all. It is the ‘concrete reality’ from which one can participate as truly human.⁶⁰⁸ To attempt to step outside the *Tao* is to forfeit that foundation and lose the ground for Theoretical or Practical Reason.⁶⁰⁹ Ward’s presentation of the wide reception of *The Abolition of Man* demonstrates not only the *Tao* as a kind of fruitful ambiguity, but also the effectiveness of Lewis’s approach.⁶¹⁰ It has been heralded by philosophers and philosophical polymaths, literary critics, and parliamentary and congressional leaders in Britain and America. The argument has been considered on par with greats such as Plato, Dostoyevsky and Pascal.⁶¹¹ Others have called it a profound cultural critique and one that must be put forward to every generation, being a successful counteraction to Nietzsche and Sartre.⁶¹² The diversity of those who find value in the work is hard to overstate: it was equally praised by then future Pope Joseph Ratzinger, secular moral philosopher Mary Midgley, atheist philosopher John Gray, political scientist Francis Fukuyama, and environmental activist and author Wendell Berry. The *Tao* in *The Abolition of Man* is a prime example where apologetic ambiguity advantageously allows disparate views to travel in parallel toward the aim Lewis has in mind. It is the same dynamic he employed in relation to *ought* in ‘Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe’ in *Mere Christianity*.

Lewis illustrated the *ought* in relation to two responses to a perceived dangerous situation: herd instinct and self-preservation,⁶¹³ and a ‘third thing’⁶¹⁴ that produces

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 46-47.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 31.

⁶¹⁰ Ward, Michael. *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* (Parkridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021) 2-3.

⁶¹¹ See Ibid. 2-3: A.N. Wilson, philosophical polymath John Lucas, literary critic Alan Jacobs, Lord Hailsham, Tony Nuttall claimed it ‘thoroughly routs whole volumes of Nietzsche and Sartre’ (*C.S. Lewis: Jack and Giant Killer*, 277; cited in Ward, Michael. *After Humanity*, 3).

⁶¹² See Ward, Michael. *After Humanity*, 2-3: Alan Jacobs, John Lucas, English Professor Tony Nuttall.

⁶¹³ MC 9.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. 10.

within a person the sense of what they *ought* to do. He presents a scenario where one hears cries for help from a person in danger and that in that moment a person will likely experience two intense instincts simultaneously: a desire to help (herd instinct) and a desire to flee (self-preservation).⁶¹⁵ The ambiguous ‘third thing’ suggested by Lewis is a sense of *ought* that adjudicates between the two natural instincts, suppressing one and magnifying the other. He suggests a categorical difference between the reactions, ‘feeling a desire to help is quite different from feeling that you ought to help whether you want to or not.’⁶¹⁶ He argues that what could be reasonably attributable to evolution—herd instinct and self-preservation—are both submitted to this third impulse, and therefore it must be something independent from the other two feelings for it does not present itself to the mind as one of three options, but rather operates outside the other two, judging between them. This ambiguous common experience is wrapped in a subtle ontological explanation, yet metaphysically unclear—the world is such that people experience something within themselves which operates in such a way as to differentiate and classify impulse responses to external stimuli. Lewis makes plain that this experience exists, yet he leaves it undefined, only relating it to what was once called the ‘Law of Nature, or Moral Law, or Rule of Decent Behaviour’,⁶¹⁷ which is essentially to say the same; this world is such that this experience exists. By carrying the apologetic this way, the reader is guided to either accept Lewis’s premise or subjectively evaluate their own experiences against Lewis’s nebulous argument. If the former, then Lewis has already begun to carry the day. But the latter is far more likely, and this process, rethinking one’s own experience in light of the apologetic presented by Lewis, alters the apologetic roles so that Lewis becomes a guide, and the reader thinks alongside him.⁶¹⁸ The ambiguity maintained by Lewis creates the space for this pseudo shared-thinking to occur.

By appealing to an ambiguously defined common experience he creates an argumentatively safe space wherein the reader may consider for themselves what is being argued. This is not to suggest that the reader is author-dependent in their mode of processing the material. A person may reflect upon material this way regardless of the approach or tone used by an author. Astute readers will no doubt be more likely to

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. 9-10.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. 9.

⁶¹⁸ Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis’s Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 83.

do so, as will the distrustful and overtly sceptical, among others. Again, the point here is not to present the reader as either author-dependent or intellectually careless, but to bring to light the diffusing action of ambiguity operating within Lewis's apologetic. Ambiguity creates space for the imagination and intellect that can diffuse the tension of an otherwise contentious issue.⁶¹⁹ Had Lewis argued more aggressively, perhaps charging at the reader with presuppositional arguments, many (if not most) readers would no doubt react in-kind. Newton's Third Law of Motion is poetically relevant for apologetics. But Lewis's argument in this instance calls out softly. It has not forced an instinctive reaction from the reader, rather, apologetic ambiguity regarding the nature of what is behind the *ought* and the *third thing* gives the reader space and time to consider what is being said, advancing rather than arresting the argument.

II) Popular Religion and Doctrine

Lewis, admittedly entering difficult theological territory,⁶²⁰ addressed the doctrine of Christ as begotten of God. He confronts 'popular religion' or the 'popular idea'⁶²¹ of Jesus Christ as a good moral teacher and that by following his teachings the world may avert calamity.⁶²² He does this by juxtaposing it against established Christian doctrines. Apologetically, incredulity is the first step, noting that humanity has not followed the good moral teachers of the past and that Jesus Christ as such makes no difference. The teachings of Plato, Aristotle, or Confucius would all lead to a better society, but humanity simply does not follow them. Adding an obscure Jewish man from first century Palestine would not further the cause.⁶²³ His second step is to raise three doctrines whose claims are meant to preclude any such popular religion. But whereas doctrine is historically meant to bring clarity in expressing Christian beliefs, Lewis uses it to demonstrate complexity and difficulty, and casts a shadow over it with the ambiguous statement 'whatever that means':

But as soon as you look at any real Christian writings, you find that they are talking about something quite different from this popular religion. They say that Christ is the Son of God (whatever that means). They say

⁶¹⁹ E.g., 'The use of notions of a living language thus very often appears not as a simple choice of data applicable to other data, but as a construction of theories and as an interpretation of reality by means of the notions which they make it possible to develop.', Perelman, Chaïm, et al. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 132.

⁶²⁰ MC 156.

⁶²¹ Ibid. 155.

⁶²² 'Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and that if we only took His advice we might be able to establish a better social order and avoid another war', Ibid.

⁶²³ 'There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference', Ibid. 156.

that those who give Him their confidence can also become Sons of God (whatever that means). They say that His death saved us from our sins (whatever that means).⁶²⁴

He argues that one should expect such complexities—that Christian answers ought to be difficult, for they speak of an unseen realm and ultimate reality.⁶²⁵ It is a sentiment he similarly expressed in *The Problem of Pain*, ‘Christianity, true, as always, to the complexity of the real, presents us with something knottier and more ambiguous’.⁶²⁶ His doctrinal selections; Jesus is the Son of God, faith in him (‘give him their confidence’) is necessary for salvation (‘also become Sons of God’), and the Atonement (‘His death saved us from our sins’), are meant to display a summary incompatibility with the aforementioned popular view. He offers no exposition of the doctrines but merely shows that popular understanding about Christianity is neither logically derived from nor concordant with Christian doctrine. Lewis seemed to have had both the Nicene Creed and Scripture in mind,⁶²⁷ yet his argument does not rely on any particular exegesis or interpretation. Undoubtedly Lewis himself had biblical passages in mind and convictions about their meaning.⁶²⁸ What is important here is that Lewis is acknowledging ambiguity even in relation to central Christian tenets, at least at a summary level.⁶²⁹ That is not to suggest that this was Lewis’s entire, or persistent, view of doctrine.

In this argument he is attempting to make clear the irreconcilable differences between what exists in the doctrinal expression of biblical texts, and the popular idea.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Lewis suggests it should be at least as difficult as ‘modern Physics’, Ibid.

⁶²⁶ POP 121.

⁶²⁷ MC 156. He references ‘one of the creeds’ on ‘begotten not created’, which is Nicene and fits Lewis’s efforts to hold common Christian ground, having had MC reviewed by Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic clergy (MC 124). He accepted both the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. ‘Christianity and Literature’ in R 189. He also acknowledges the difficulty in humanity being somehow enjoined with divinity by becoming ‘sons of God’, which is biblical but not creedal (Matt 5:8; Luke 20:36; Rom 8:14, 19; Gal 3:26).

⁶²⁸ Lewis does not indicate the passages to which he was referring. In the gospels Jesus is referred to as the Son of God by: gospel writers (Mark 1:1; John 20:31), Satan (Matt 4:3, 6; Luke 4:3, 9), angels (Luke 1:35), demons (Matt 8:29; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41), and proclaimed as such in worship by eyewitnesses to his miracles (Matt 14:33), by his followers (John 1:49, 11:27), called by the title in accusation and mockery (Matt 26:63; 27:40, 43; Luke 22:70; John 19:7), proclaimed as such by pagan eyewitnesses to his death (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39), and it was a title Jesus used for himself (John 5:25) and used of him after his resurrection (Acts 9:20).

⁶²⁹ Cf. Carnell, Corbin Scott. ‘Longing, Reason, and the Moral Law in Lewis’s Search’ in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 110.

Ambiguity associated with the complexity of those doctrines operates in service of keeping his aim in view:

Of course, you can express this in all sorts of different ways. You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ has defeated death. They are all true. If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does.⁶³⁰

Introducing this sort of ambiguity would normally be utterly counterproductive to the advocacy of doctrine but situated within Lewis's apologetic it is illustrative of the complexity of Christian belief which belies the construct of the 'popular religion' Lewis has in view. As Holmer states: 'He has accommodated and adjusted his reflections in a series of very small moves; but these at once put him outside those rather cursory descriptive positions...and free him from ordinary position-taking and typical pedagogical schemes within which most of us are taught to think.'⁶³¹

Lewis's View of Doctrine and the Influence of Chesterton and Barfield

It is important here to consider Lewis's view of doctrine and its relationship to ambiguity. It is a theological distinctive for Lewis that sheds light on how he communicated orthodoxy in relation to history and myth. His viewed was formed with the help of two significant influences, Chesterton's estimation of the workings of doctrine in *The Everlasting Man*⁶³² and Owen Barfield's rational principle as expressed in *Poetic Diction*.⁶³³ Doctrines have always held an integral role in the Christian faith, being expressed down through the centuries in creed, confession, and catechism; through vocal recitation—both spoken and sung—as well as scribal. Doctrines shape the distinctives between Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant confessions, as well as the vast spectrum of expressions within each that represent organized branches and individual believers alike. For Lewis, primary over doctrine were the historical events upon which the New Testament was written. Reconstructing the influences upon Lewis

⁶³⁰ MC 182.

⁶³¹ Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 96.

⁶³² Chesterton, G. K. *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925).

⁶³³ Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010).

for any given issue is problematic at best given how well-read he was.⁶³⁴ Yet, some understanding may be assembled from his own admissions.

Lewis viewed doctrines as derivative from the primary historical events, not merely in terms of sequence (event followed by description), but in his thought. Given that doctrines are formulations attempting to express the shape and meaning of a belief, his emphasis was upon *a thing which really happened*,⁶³⁵ and it was that *thing* which was primary for Lewis. By example, though he considered *Christus exemplar*⁶³⁶ ‘true and important’,⁶³⁷ it is not Christianity in the sense of the actual, the original. Doctrines are an extrapolation that Lewis admits are of good and right use but are not to be confused with the original article. He would later define a Christian as ‘one who accepts the common doctrines of Christianity’,⁶³⁸ yet ‘Right in the centre of Christianity’⁶³⁹ Lewis himself faced all manner of language that suggested to him things grander and more mysterious than what is strictly communicated by doctrines. This is not to diminish the value which Lewis clearly placed upon doctrine, but to articulate the complexity of his view in making distinctions regarding their importance and even their permanency. In *Miracles*, agreeing with criticism of Christian manipulation of doctrine in response to scientific discovery, he viewed some doctrinal aspects as ‘inessential’ and ‘capable of being changed without damage’.⁶⁴⁰ When Lewis suggests to ‘get on with the [doctrinal] formula that [works]’,⁶⁴¹ there is an implication that a particular doctrinal construct is not primary. Rather, it is the fact of what really happened, the historical

⁶³⁴ Tolkien’s comment of Lewis’s depth was, ‘You’ll never get to the bottom of him.’: Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994) xx.

⁶³⁵ Cf. Lewis’s argument for the intellect of biblical authors and the revelatory process as he understood it within the Christian story, particularly of the Incarnation, ‘What you get is something *gradually coming into focus*... Then in the New Testament the *thing really happens*’; ‘Answers to Questions on Christianity’ pamphlet by *Electrical and Musical Industries Christian Fellowship* (Hayes, Middlesex: 1944); reprinted GID 57.

⁶³⁶ CLI 976. Lewis writes that he previously struggled to see in what sense the life of Christ could effectuate anything for present-day humankind, except by way of example. To which, he immediately comments, ‘And the example business, tho’ true and important, is not Christianity’. It is unclear why Lewis had *Christus exemplar* in view at that time. Although the letter was in October, The Book of Common Prayer, on the Sunday next before Easter, asks God for the ability to follow Christ-as-example in both humility and patience. The second Sunday after Easter quotes from 1 Pet 2:19 where the apostle specifically states Christ left humankind an example that they should follow in his steps. The baptismal reading also calls on believers to follow the example of Christ.

⁶³⁷ CLI 977.

⁶³⁸ MC xii.

⁶³⁹ CLI 977.

⁶⁴⁰ M 71.

⁶⁴¹ MC 182.

event. There is a tension in Lewis between what he viewed as the actual and attempts to qualify or quantify it through doctrinal expression.

This is observed in Lewis from the start of his Christian faith and principally in reference to the Incarnation. It was an emphasis on the historicity of Christ over doctrine that helped move Lewis to Christianity. In a letter to his close friend Arthur Greeves on October 18, 1931, a mere two and a half weeks after he ‘passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity’,⁶⁴² he writes:

Therefore [the story of Christ as true myth] is true, not in the sense of being a ‘description’ of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The ‘doctrines’ we get out of the true myth are of course less true: they are translations into our concepts and ideas of that wh. [*sic*] God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Does this amount to a belief in Christianity? At any rate I am now certain (a) That this Christian story is to be approached, in a sense, as I approach the other myths. (b) That it is the most important and full of meaning. I am also nearly certain that it really happened.⁶⁴³

This excerpt is part of Lewis’s explanation to his life-long friend about what Henry Dyson, whom he had only met a year prior, and Tolkien, who had known Lewis more than five years at this point and the two already close friends, had told Lewis about how to understand the sacrifice of Christ. Namely, to interpret it much in the same way he did other myths—with the caveat that it was an historical reality.⁶⁴⁴ Dyson and Tolkien argued that Lewis’s difficulty lay not with the texts but rather in an inconsistent hermeneutic. Lewis felt an incongruity when reading biblical myth verses pagan myth, specifically related to the idea of a dying and rising god such as Adonis, Bacchus, or Balder. His emotion and imagination were engaged when reading pagan myths, being ‘prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings

⁶⁴² CLI 974. The author agrees with McGrath’s timeline of Lewis’s conversion to Christianity: McGrath, Alistair. *C.S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 141-142.

⁶⁴³ CLI 977.

⁶⁴⁴ His examination of ‘ways of reading’ in *An Experiment in Criticism* defines myth ‘by their effect on us’ (EIC 45). From that view Lewis gives six criteria of myth. Is it extra-literary, not dependent upon elements of surprise, impersonal yet relatable, deals with ‘impossibles and preternaturals’, is always serious (‘grave’), and is awe-inspiring. (EIC 43-44); McGrath concludes this is why Lewis avoided ‘offering a precise definition...because he is aware that the criteria that must be deployed in any such attempt to define its essence are incorrigibly subjective.’, McGrath. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 60-61.

beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in prose "what it meant"⁶⁴⁵ but he was not doing the same with the biblical story of Christ. He was struggling with doctrine, specifically to find clarity in the doctrine of Redemption:

What has been holding me back (at any rate for the last year or so) has not been so much a difficulty in believing as a difficulty in knowing what the doctrine meant: you can't believe a thing while you are ignorant what the thing is. My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ 'saved' or 'opened salvation to' the world.⁶⁴⁶

The 'true myth' engaged Lewis's imagination in beneficial way, being suggestive of great meaning without overly restrictive precision. But the ambiguity of the doctrine, not knowing 'in what sense' it was to be understood was a stumbling block. Both the actual (the historical or primary event) and the doctrine had a degree of ambiguity, of being open to more than one meaning, but the former was a help to Lewis while the latter was a stumbling block. This influenced Lewis's preference for the mythic expression of Christianity over purely creedal 'disembodied abstractions'.⁶⁴⁷

Chesterton spoke of doctrine related to the primary texts, and Barfield provided a philological principle, the dynamic of which is applicable to doctrine. Lewis found that 'right in the centre of Christianity, in the Gospels and St Paul, you keep getting something quite different and very mysterious'.⁶⁴⁸ Chesterton, who was important for Lewis long before Lewis's conversion to Christianity and remained a significant apologetic influence for the rest of Lewis's life, expressed something similar.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. Cf. McGrath, Alister. *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric, Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013) 149.

⁶⁴⁶ CLI 976. This is a fascinating quote, for in it, Lewis expresses both belief and being in a position that precludes belief. Or, at the minimum a willingness to believe, which may be nothing other than belief without admitting so to oneself.

⁶⁴⁷ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 70.

⁶⁴⁸ CLI 976.

⁶⁴⁹ November 1917, at age 19, Lewis mentions Chesterton in a letter to Arthur Greeves (CLI 341). At that time Chesterton was to Lewis a somewhat unknown 'contemporary' author. Three years later in December 1920, Lewis facetiously commented about Chesterton being 'luckless' for likely never seeing Lewis's poetry (Ibid. 513), evidencing his awareness and admiration of Chesterton had grown. March 1936, he wrote that Chesterton was 'one of the major literary events of my life' (CLII 183). February 1949, he speaks of Chesterton's works as where 'the doctrine is as good on its own merits as the art', placing Chesterton alongside the likes of Bunyan, Tolstoi [*sic*], Virgil, and Williams (Ibid. 919). In 1940, then a Christian for almost nine years, he recommended *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man* for understanding Christianity (Ibid. 375). For a defense of Christianity, he again recommended *The Everlasting Man* in 1947 (Ibid. 823) and 1949 (Ibid. 942). In 1950 he described it as 'the best popular apologetic I know' (CLIII 72), similarly eleven years later in 1961 (Ibid. 1265). In 1955 he notes it is 'one book did a great deal for me' (Ibid. 652).

Chesterton argued that facing what is actual, primary in the gospels—apart from doctrinal consideration—would produce in a person an understanding requisitely accommodating mystery, and by implication, its inherent varying degrees of ambiguity:

A man simply taking the words of the story as they stand would form quite another impression; an impression full of mystery and possibly of inconsistency; but certainly not merely an impression of mildness. It would be intensely interesting; but part of the interest would consist in its leaving a good deal to be guessed at or explained.⁶⁵⁰

He argued that doctrine becomes, over time, diminished and eventually abandoned before inevitably re-emerging in its truer, more efficacious form: ‘Again and again, before our time, men have grown content with a diluted doctrine. And again and again there has followed on that dilution, coming out of the darkness in a crimson cataract, the strength of the red original wine.’⁶⁵¹ This is a juxtaposition of impressions; one received from the Church’s action informed by doctrine, and the other being what one would likely obtain from reading the New Testament directly. In the case of the latter, Chesterton argues that one would see that the biblical account is ‘full of sudden gestures evidently insignificant except that we hardly know what they signify, of enigmatic silences; of ironical replies.’⁶⁵² He further specifies how this would occur apart from doctrinal assistance:

I am putting aside for the moment all questions of doctrinal inferences or expositions, orthodox or otherwise; I am simply imagining the effect on a man’s mind if he did really do what these critics are always talking about doing; if he did really read the New Testament without reference to orthodoxy and even without reference to doctrine.⁶⁵³

His point is that such a reading would, rather than dissuade a person from orthodoxy, push them further in line with it, and this would occur through relating to the primary events rather than through doctrine.⁶⁵⁴ Whether or not he is correct in that argument is not relevant to the examination of Lewis. What is relevant is that one finds in

⁶⁵⁰ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925) 227.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.* 324. This cycle is Chesterton advocating for the veracity and durability of doctrine. In the same work he defends to various degree the doctrines of the Trinity (*Ibid.* 74-75), Salvation (*Ibid.* 225), and divinity of Christ. *Ibid.* 231.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.* 227.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ As Farrer observes, ‘Orthodoxy must be made out as argumentatively sound as any other position; but it may seldom be argument that casts the decisive weight. It may more commonly be a direct presentation, allowing the vitality of orthodox ideas to be felt.’, Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 25.

Chesterton the same sort of complex view of doctrine found in Lewis. Both Chesterton and Lewis affirm the good and right of use of doctrine while also making qualifications of the actual over against doctrinal influence.

Similarly, Barfield's 1928 *Poetic Diction*, whose premises were a seminal influence for Lewis⁶⁵⁵ includes a philological argument regarding an object and its abstract which parallels Lewis's way of speaking about the relationship of the historical events of Christianity to Christian doctrine.⁶⁵⁶ Through an examination of the development of language, Barfield explores the concept of linguistic separation of an object—the actual—and its abstract expression. He rejects the idea that over time language evolved from rudimentary terms with metaphorical meaning toward more precise language. He argues that the language of ancient humankind included both object and abstract, though seemingly ancient man had no recognition of the relationship. Concreteness and ambiguity ran together; object and abstraction, the actual and its poetic expression, *the thing which really happened* and what, for the purposes of comparison, may liberally be called its doctrine. For Barfield, the nature of humankind's philological evolution is not an advancement, it is a divorce. The poetic and objective have been separated, creating distinct encampments around objects and their abstractions. The experience and expression of this are articulated in a 'rational principle'—the breaking up of meaning into principle and its abstraction, and a 'poetic principle'—the communication of experience.⁶⁵⁷ One cannot consciously exercise the poetic principle for as soon as it is recognized, one is acting upon the subject matter, not living it. In this way the rational principle is not only essential for appreciation of expression but also becomes the vehicle by which conscious expression may be produced. Barfield contended that modern poetic language moves our understanding toward a kind of interpretive reconciliation:

...the poesy felt by us to reside in ancient language consists in just this, that, out of our later, analytic, 'subjective' consciousness, a consciousness which has been brought about along with, and pardy [*sic*]

⁶⁵⁵ The long and intense intellectual dispute between Lewis and Barfield fed what later appeared in the manuscript, SBJ 194.

⁶⁵⁶ Beyond the work of *Poetic Diction*, Lewis's ongoing philosophical exchange with Barfield, dubbed by Lewis as 'The Great War', lasted roughly from 1925-1930 and in large measure dealt with the interplay of imagination, reason, and the nature of truth. It was immensely instructive for both, SBJ 201. Lewis later dedicated his 1936 *The Allegory of Love* to Barfield, referring to him as 'The wisest and best of my unofficial teachers', AOL v.

⁶⁵⁷ Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010) 103.

because of, this splitting up of meaning, we are led back to experience the original unity.⁶⁵⁸

One might observe this as a kind of philological ecumenism, wherein metaphor and its attendant ambiguity help in reconciling what had become separated into ‘abstract and the concrete, particular and the general, objective and subjective’.⁶⁵⁹ The relation between what is particular and its abstraction, however well or ill-defined the mental boundaries may be for the given the subject matter, is nonetheless guided in part by subjective perception. Ambiguity paves the path of reconciling the primary and its expression. If Barfield’s line of reasoning is applied to doctrine, what emerges is an understanding very akin to what is observed in Lewis. Barfield’s rational principle is necessary for conscious appreciation of what Christianity holds as historically true, and for Lewis, especially so of the Incarnation. In an April 1944 interview, when asked about the relationship of ancient cultic practices to Christianity,⁶⁶⁰ the resolution for Lewis was in the Incarnation: ‘What was vaguely seen in them all comes into focus in Christianity—*just as God Himself comes into focus by becoming a Man.*’ [emphasis added]⁶⁶¹

For Lewis, the Incarnation solves the mystery of all the myths, uniting them under one primary historical event whose historic nature is expressed in the doctrine. The Incarnation not only gives measured validity to religions universal, but there is also a sense in which it parallels Barfield; the historical being the poetic principle (lived) and the doctrine being the rational principle (expressed). Though one cannot return to the actual (historical), its primacy is sought in the mystical union of the believer to Christ

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. 78.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid. Cf. Lewis’s comments on metaphor in ‘Bluspels and Flalanspheres’, where the importance of metaphor in meaning can hardly be overstated, ‘The man who does not consciously use metaphors talks without meaning. We might even formulate a rule: the meaning in any given composition is in inverse ratio to the author’s belief in his own literalness.’, ‘Bluspels and Flalanspheres: A Semantic Nightmare’ in SLE 262; Lewis held to an older, Platonic view of metaphor which also aligned with Barfield’s views on meaning. ‘What truth we can attain in such a situation depends rigidly on three conditions. First, that the imagery should be originally well chosen; secondly, that we should apprehend the exact imagery; and thirdly that we should know that the metaphor is a metaphor.’, Ibid 254; While CSL came to largely agree with Barfield on language and metaphor, he disagreed that metaphor gets one to knowledge. For Lewis, metaphor engages the imagination toward meaning, not knowledge. Myers, Doris T. *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) 11.

⁶⁶⁰ ‘Are not practices like fasting and self-denial borrowed from earlier or more primitive religions?’; ‘Answers to Questions on Christianity’ pamphlet by *Electrical and Musical Industries Christian Fellowship* (Hayes, Middlesex: 1944); reprinted GID 54.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

and doctrines are valid and useful to the extent they successfully aid that journey.⁶⁶² The poetic principle is the experience of the actual. It is akin to Chesterton's estimation of the impression upon a person who experiences the gospels without doctrinal explanations overlaid. What Lewis found in Barfield by way of by general philological principle, Chesterton gave mature expression of related to doctrine.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis expressed a desire to place before the reader what he considered to be doctrines more closely related to the actual, the primary.⁶⁶³ In so doing, he avoided what he considered lesser, or secondary matters. He made distinctions between doctrines in choosing where to argue. In *The Problem of Pain*, it was to restate what was 'ancient and orthodox' and specifying what was speculative.⁶⁶⁴ In *Miracles*, he expressly tried to delineate the "core" or "real meaning" of the doctrines from that in their expression'.⁶⁶⁵ He considered those doctrines and expressions which were outside the 'core' as 'inessential and possibly even capable of being changed without damage.'⁶⁶⁶ Elsewhere, doctrine is a narrow point through which the greater glory may be revealed,⁶⁶⁷ some doctrines are positive assistants,⁶⁶⁸ and the 'fundamental doctrines of Christianity' are 'positive historical statements' that are able to retain that historical grounding while gaining 'increasing complexity of meaning which increasing knowledge puts into them'.⁶⁶⁹ Ward accurately summarizes Lewis's view: 'Doctrines, though useful, are the product of analytical dissection; they recast the original, equivocal, historical material into abstract, less fully realized categories of meaning.'⁶⁷⁰

iii) Real Morality

⁶⁶² As referenced earlier, 'Get on with the [doctrinal] formulation that does', MC 182. This aspect of Lewis is explored further in chapter five under 'Popular Religion and Doctrine'.

⁶⁶³ MC xiii; Cf. Lewis's comments in 'The Language of Religion' regarding theological language, 'We are applying precise, and therefore abstract, terms to what for us is the supreme example of the concrete.', CR 136.

⁶⁶⁴ POP 33.

⁶⁶⁵ M 70.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Dogma and the Universe', *The Guardian*, (19 March 1943) 96 and (26 March 1943) 104, 107; reprinted GID 37.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. 43.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid. 45.

⁶⁷⁰ Ward, Michael. 'The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best' in Davison, Andrew. *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012) 65.

In Lewis's apologetic using the *ought*, he applied the subjective experience to other situations, arguing that this third thing (ought) which judges between responses to external stimuli, suggests the existence of universal morality. Humanity, in applying its ambiguous sense of *ought* to others, judges the beliefs and actions of some individuals, groups, and societies as being morally superior to others, which Lewis argues evidences an external standard:

You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others.⁶⁷¹

Lewis has kept the source of this 'real Right' unnamed. Yet, this common experience of a third thing that is distinct from and presiding over our instincts reveals a 'real Right', a universal morality, and by implication a requisitely universal truth undergirding that morality. This method of argument allows Lewis to travel a great distance while avoiding contentious points of theology. Various views related to prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, and hamartiology, among others, could be engaged in the sphere of what Lewis is suggesting. Yet, he intentionally keeps his argument at this point unidentifiable as theologically Christian.⁶⁷² It is consistent with Christian theology, but not restrictively or uniquely Christian. The ambiguity allows him to make considerable theological statements devoid of any particular theological nomenclature:

the Law of Human Nature tells you what human beings ought to do and do not. In other words, when you are dealing with humans, something else comes in above and beyond the actual facts. You have the facts (how men do behave) and you also have something else (how they ought to behave). In the rest of the universe there need not be anything but the facts. Electrons and molecules behave in a certain way, and certain results follow, and that may be the whole story. But men behave in a certain way and that is not the whole story, for all the time you know that they ought to behave differently.⁶⁷³

He does not speak to the host of other Christian doctrines pertinent to his argument. To bring those into his defence at this point would risk isolating his readers, both from

⁶⁷¹ MC 13.

⁶⁷² Ibid. 25.

⁶⁷³ Ibid. 18.

himself and one another. In translating theological language into common prose⁶⁷⁴ he chose language that is decidedly clear of Christian distinction. Ambiguous elements interact and build upon one another. Only with humans does this ambiguous 'ought' enter the equation. There is an undefined 'something' which is 'above and beyond the actual facts'.⁶⁷⁵ There are many questions that might be put to Lewis at this point. What is the nature of human beings that they are this way? How did this condition come to be? What is the basis for this 'ought'? Are there no other acceptable sets of circumstances which would condition this behaviour in humanity? Are there limits to scientific discovery in this area? At some point, does the scientific definition of 'facts' become inadequate?

As with numinous awe, Lewis pushes for the acknowledgement of an experience that is left ambiguous. There is an implication that there is something beyond the normal operation of things which is a source or impetus for what is otherwise considered normal experience. A similar instance of implying an ambiguous background source is found related to an argument for the miraculous:

The belief in such a supernatural reality itself can neither be proved nor disproved by experience. The arguments for its existence are metaphysical, and to me conclusive. They turn on the fact that even to think and act in the natural world we have to assume something beyond it and even assume that we partly belong to that something. In order to think we must claim for our own reasoning a validity which is not credible if our own thought is merely a function of our brain, and our brains a by-product of irrational physical processes. In order to act, above the level of mere impulse, we must claim a similar validity for our judgments of good and evil. In both cases we get the same disquieting result.⁶⁷⁶

The issue is framed in the broadest sense as 'something beyond' the natural world and is assumed on the premise of necessity that a thing does not explain itself. In this case, reasoning of any kind, including about the miraculous, would have no validity in a purely materialist view.⁶⁷⁷ This is similarly so with the 'real morality' that is evidenced not in itself but presented as necessary for the valid operation of our judgment of

⁶⁷⁴ 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 98.

⁶⁷⁵ MC 17.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid. 27. From the sermon 'Miracles' preached at St Jude on the Hill Church on 26 November 1942, Ibid. 13.

⁶⁷⁷ This line of argument is also employed in *Miracles* where his view that reason must be founded in the miraculous in order to be trustworthy, 'Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true.', M 20.

competing moralities. The ambiguous overarching (or undergirding) morality is not yet defined, it is sufficient for Lewis that it be a ‘real thing’. The development of Lewis’s argument includes persistent ambiguity. Ambiguity surrounds the experience, the way we as humans interact with it, and in the way we apply it to one another and our world:

Consequently, this Rule of Right and Wrong, or Law of Human Nature, or whatever you call it, must somehow or other be a real thing—a thing that is really there, not made up by ourselves. And yet it is not a fact in the ordinary sense, in the same way as our actual behaviour is a fact. It begins to look as if we shall have to admit that there is more than one kind of reality; that, in this particular case, there is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men’s behaviour, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us.⁶⁷⁸

Note that even while the aforementioned questions may threaten and the ambiguity continues, nonetheless a considerable degree of understanding may be deduced up to this point. This ‘ought’ is something all humans feel. It operates authoritatively over natural stimuli responses. It is beyond normal scientific observation and validation, differing from our typical understanding of facts. Its presence is inescapable, and we find it being in some way being universally used to judge ourselves and others. All of this is assembled without stating anything uniquely Christian.⁶⁷⁹ It is an argument built upon ambiguous elements, deployed in such a way that the source and *telos* remain ambiguous as well. For Lewis, the argument led to a high precipice overlooking an implied outcome: there must be another kind of reality. It is a precipice from which Lewis himself takes the first leap.⁶⁸⁰ Though the present popularization of quantum theory makes a logical jump to alternate realities seem passé, the point remains: Lewis has travelled a significant apologetic distance without engaging any of the relevant theological questions lingering so close to his argument. Ambiguity is key to traversing that distance. In part, it allows Lewis to obscure both *arché* and *telos* while keeping the reader with him long enough to create a box the exact size and shape of the biblical God without revealing it as such.

⁶⁷⁸ MC 20.

⁶⁷⁹ Lewis took pains to keep this argument from being restrictively Christian, ‘Do not think I am going faster than I really am. I am not yet within a hundred miles of the God of Christian theology.’, *Ibid.* 25.

⁶⁸⁰ Unexpected logical jumps are seen elsewhere in Lewis. In *Narnia*, when the professor advises to trust Lucy’s unsettling claim of a world in the wardrobe, ‘There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn’t tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth.’, *LWW* 45; Cf. Lewis’s youthful atheistic poetry decrying the ‘elemental people dear’: *Poem XXII*, *SIB* 46.

iv) The Argument from Desire

One of Lewis's more well-known apologetics is his argument from desire. The ambiguity within it operates at the heart of the argument, is powerfully suggestive, and not strictly beneficial. It is enmeshed with his *sehnsucht*, his Joy. The heart of the argument is the logical leap Lewis made in relation to Joy. As with other significant aspects of Lewis's thought, it finds its way into many places in his writing, but is most succinctly expressed in *Mere Christianity*:

The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.'⁶⁸¹

Beverluis considered this to be one of three primary apologetic arguments that Lewis makes.⁶⁸² His critique of this argument is more comprehensive and nuanced than can be fully engaged in this thesis but there are aspects of it related to ambiguity that merit consideration. He finds grounds that Lewis makes a categorical error related to Joy. Lewis compares Joy to natural desires that all have corresponding natural ways of satisfaction while Joy does not. Thus, he concludes that Joy, too, by virtue of being a desire, therefore has a fulfilment, but it must be beyond the natural.⁶⁸³ Beverluis argues that Lewis's conclusion runs afoul of adequate similarity in comparison and rejects Lewis's idea that one is able to have a longing for something unknown. For Joy, as understood by Beverluis, is a desire, and since all desires have an object, Joy must have an object as well. While one can desire something without knowing that you desire it, such as with a young woman mistakenly desiring to marry a man when really she desires to be free from a bad home, 'it is not possible to *know* that one desires something without knowing that one desires it, that is, what it is a desire *for*'.⁶⁸⁴ Borrowing from Searle's *Mind, Language, and Society*, Beverluis argues that the core

⁶⁸¹ MC 137.

⁶⁸² The other two being the moral argument and the argument from reason. Beverluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 31.

⁶⁸³ MC 137.

⁶⁸⁴ Beverluis. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 46.

of desire, which Beversluis correlates to Lewis's Joy, is akin to Searle's *intentionality*. Every desire is a desire *for* something, even if that something does not actually exist—such as Diogenes searching for an honest man or one searching for the land of Oz.⁶⁸⁵ Beversluis's critique of Lewis is precisely about because of ambiguity. While that ambiguity is quite significant, and important questions are raised, the critique seems to fall somewhat afield from what Lewis was communicating. A place like Oz is a fictionalized envisioning of a city like other cities. Lewis's idiosyncratic Joy (and *sehnsucht*)⁶⁸⁶ are an undefinable longing, 'an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.'⁶⁸⁷ Though it is a desire, it is not an objective desire in quite the same sense as other desires: 'The thing I am speaking of is not an experience. You have experienced only the want of it.'⁶⁸⁸ Beversluis seems to desire to push Lewis's argument beyond merely rational religion and into a more empirically verifiable religion, something for which Lewis never makes the case.⁶⁸⁹ Beversluis finds four grounds of error; an indeterminable object for Joy for lack of an intentional object, a desire with no satisfiable condition, an undescribed object and therefore no known method to verify its desirability, and finally, Lewis could not have definitively known that nothing in Nature could satisfy his *sehnsucht*, his Joy.⁶⁹⁰ The first three objections all grow from an empirical root, and within that framework are powerful objections, but Lewis was not arguing from an empirical basis.⁶⁹¹ The fourth criticism, also empirically rooted, remains valid. Beversluis argues that there is a propositional content necessary for desire, for it is precisely that which makes the desired object desirable. But he does not find it in Lewis's Joy. Beversluis sees it as desire bereft of

⁶⁸⁵ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 47.

⁶⁸⁶ This distinctive in Lewis's thought was written on even during his lifetime. Cf. Corbin Scott Carnell's 1960 PhD thesis on Lewis's view of *sehnsucht*, later published as *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974). Also, Carnell, Corbin Scott. 'Longing, Reason, and the Moral Law in Lewis's Search' in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 106-107.

⁶⁸⁷ SBJ 15.

⁶⁸⁸ POP 136.

⁶⁸⁹ Kreeft, who feels that Lewis's argument from desire is the 'most intriguing argument in the history of human thought', second only to the ontological argument by Anselm, observes, 'Finally, it is far more than an argument. Like Anselm's argument, it is also a meditation, an illumination, an experience, an invitation to experiment with yourself, a pilgrimage.' Peter J. Kreeft, 'C.S. Lewis's Argument from Desire' in MacDonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie. *The Riddle of Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 249.

⁶⁹⁰ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, (Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 49-50.

⁶⁹¹ There may be an argumentative disconnect due to something of a continental-analytical divide in this case, though neither assume those definitions.

intentionality and propositional content or object. The ambiguity in Lewis's argument led Beversluis to conclude:

...in the case of Joy, the answer is far from easy because we do not know what it is a desire *for*- what its intentional object *is*. Lewis's account of Joy does not presuppose that desires can be *objectless*, but it does presuppose that a person can be *ignorant* of the object of her desire and still not only *desire* it, but *know* that she desires it.⁶⁹²

He cannot accept Lewis's statement that Joy's object is something 'naked Other, imageless, unknown, undefined, desired'.⁶⁹³ In the argument Lewis has constructed a bridge between heaven and earth through the experience of Joy. The argumentative leaps, all with operative ambiguity, are a locus of recurring frustration for Beversluis:

This is not a fussy point about terminology. It is a problem that plagues many of Lewis's arguments and infects his apologetic with a fundamental ambiguity. Too often readers must pause to ask themselves *exactly* what Lewis claims to have established and in exactly what sense he has done so.⁶⁹⁴

The desire is itself an experience, experiencing the desire for this other experience. Lewis's desire for a desire, that is, his conscious, definable desire for another desire, whatever its source, whether something thrust into his imagination or birthed up from his subconscious, may have, in some undefinable way, fueled his acceptance of a kind of ambiguity which affords the imagination more space. It was the paradigm of his Christian self-conception.⁶⁹⁵ What Beversluis has done is redefine Lewis's Joy such that it may be explained by being able to desire something without knowing that one desires it. In other words, all people who all express this desire simply do not know that there is an object of their desire in Nature, only still unknown to them. If Joy is intentionality, the core of desire, then Beversluis may be right. Yet his position seems to require a kind of knowledge neither he nor anyone else could not possess: to know the reality of all instances of this desire, this Joy. While Lewis overstated his position

⁶⁹² Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 49. It seems he over emphasized Lewis's apologetic intent in SBJ. Lewis explicitly states in the preface that his goal was to share his own journey in relation to his self-defined Joy. Though Beversluis acknowledges this in his introduction, he overinterprets the apologetic aim. Lewis was also writing in hindsight, reflecting upon an experience which he did not grasp at the time related to a desire he more fully understood according to his Christian faith.

⁶⁹³ SBJ 214.

⁶⁹⁴ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 52.

⁶⁹⁵ In the preface to his most significant biographical work, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis makes clear that biography is not truly his aim, rather it was to explain his conversion which he felt could only be understood through the metric of Joy. SBJ ix-x.

by presuming to know that nothing in this world could satisfy his desire,⁶⁹⁶ Beversluis makes a kind of pendulum error by assuming omniscience in the opposite direction. Both take a presently unprovable position. For Lewis—that nothing in Nature can satisfy the desire and thus a supernatural fulfilment exists. For Beversluis—that all expressions of Joy have a natural fulfilment that the one experiencing it has yet to discover. The difference is that Lewis advocates something not yet proven but possible, whereas Beversluis advocates something impossible to know but presumed empirically necessary.⁶⁹⁷ Again, Beversluis gives far greater and more detailed attention to Lewis’s argument and the interaction here should not be seen as fully representative of his case. What is valuable here is to observe that the ambiguity in Lewis’s argument is a significant reason for Beversluis’s challenge. Lewis’s argument from desire is greatly aided by the ambiguity related to what the ultimate object of Joy may be, as well as the vast range of subjective understanding that the reader may infuse into his ambiguous description of the experience itself. In the understanding of ambiguity that emerged only a couple decades later, Lewis may have been heralded for strategic ambiguity, being able to carry disparate views toward a shared aim. But for a trained and experienced philosopher like Beversluis, who is not representative of Lewis’s primary audience, that same ambiguity is key to errors he finds in the argument.

V) Hell

Next to the problem of evil, the Christian doctrine of Hell is arguably the area of most frequent offense to those outside the Christian faith, and many within it, though it is a theological thorn for all three great monotheistic faiths. Key to Lewis’s apologetic for the doctrine of Hell is his ambiguous implications regarding the role of both God and humans. The concept that an all-powerful and morally good creator would cast down in judgement those beings he himself brought into existence is unsettling for many. It

⁶⁹⁶ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 50.

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Lecture V of *Symbolism and Belief* where, as part of his examination of light in religious experience, Bevan, again with reference to Otto, articulates the difficulty of explaining or understanding the experience: ‘The admiration is not due to any usefulness in the bright light, but is an immediate emotional reaction to it. I think it is, further, true that this particular kind of admiration evoked is a feeling *sui generis*, and cannot be analysed into a combination of other more primary feelings; any attempt to define it would inevitably bring in the notion to be defined by the use of some such word as “splendid” or “glorious”. We all know what the emotion is and can indicate it to each other for that reason, but we could not explain it to anyone who had never experienced it.’, Bevan, Edwyn. *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) 142.

can quickly become repugnant when aspects of not merely annihilation, but eternal tortuous judgement are added the doctrine. Hell, like the reality of evil, is a consistent challenge for Christian apologetics. Lewis approaches the issue not from a starting point of doctrinal declaration, but by suggesting a logical outcome of more universally acknowledged character faults:

Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse—so gradually that the increase in seventy years will not be very noticeable. But it might be absolute hell in a million years: in fact, if Christianity is true, Hell is the precisely correct technical term for what it would be.⁶⁹⁸

By reframing the doctrine in this light, Lewis does not lessen the offense but redirects it. At the heart of the offense of the doctrine of Hell is a sense of injustice; that judgement of such a kind and degree is morally unfair on the part of the Christian God. Lewis's conception of Hell, however, says nothing of God doling out punitive retribution. But he does risk a new offense because his view turns the offended into the offender. One finds oneself in Lewis's Hell as the outcome of one's own preferred mode of existence—self-centeredness. In other words, a person chooses self over God and in due time that it precisely what they possess; only themselves and thereby exist incessantly in their flaws, faults, and misgivings. It is both offensive and disarming. Offensive, because the proclamation and condition of eternal judgement is not from God and external torment, but rather from and with oneself. Disarming, because it avoids the language of Divine judgement while maintaining a contemplative tone and suggesting to the reader that there are alternative ways of considering the issue. The degree to which the latter is successful may very well depend upon the degree to which the reader is aware of, and offended by, the former. This perspective was not a passing curiosity for Lewis. Four years later he published a robust creative exploration of this idea in *The Great Divorce*. The opening setting is a 'grey town'⁶⁹⁹ populated by beings in an utterly self-absorbed and hellish state. It is a work which is heavy with themes of Hell, purgatory, heaven, and all hinging on one's choice(s):

⁶⁹⁸ MC 74.

⁶⁹⁹ GD 7.

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it.⁷⁰⁰

Yet this approach is not without risk to the argument. For by this suggestion Lewis introduces ambiguities about the nature of that choice. Pertinent questions related to anthropology, soteriology, and the eschaton remain unexplored. Without prior acceptance of an understanding of the nature of man in relation to the righteous biblical God, is it not equally possible that one could be growing slightly better in the same slow way Lewis suggests he is growing worse? The result would be perfection, or nirvana, or any number of outcomes besides Lewis’s Hell. If Hell is the result of the natural development of one’s faults over time, what is the relation to belief in Christ? If the outcome is Lewis’s Hell, how does that relate to Christ’s own words of judgment? The ambiguity attending the argument, while powerfully suggestive for one to consider the trajectory of their flaws also affords room for new questions in tangential areas. Perhaps Lewis felt that by addressing Hell he was closing an open gate⁷⁰¹ through which the reader might depart from the apologetic journey. And while the reframing of the question does traverse the offence of divine retribution and the related secondary theological concerns by putting them into an undefined, ambiguous space, it also introduces potential new questions and offences.

VI) Exclusivity in Salvation

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis addressed the offense of the exclusive nature of Christianity’s claim that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. His aim was to remove the offence, but his manner introduces divergent, unhelpful ambiguity in relation to that aim. The idea being that, undeniably, there have been innumerable people since the first century who lived and died with no earthly knowledge whatsoever of an obscure carpenter’s son from the Galilean countryside; and that this man, lacking education, rank, or status, who was reported to be the fulfilment of thousands of years of prophecy for a small, remote people and the singular truly divine figure in human

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid. 69. The critical nature of this choosing is also articulated in MC. Without reference to purgatory, literal or figurative hell, Gehenna, hades, or the outer darkness, there is a caution, ‘But I wonder whether people who ask for God to interfere openly and directly in our world realise what it will be like when He does.’, MC 65; Cf. Jerry Walls ‘The Great Divorce’ in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 251-264.

⁷⁰¹ ‘Cross Examination’ interview by Sherwood E. Wirt of Billy Graham Association, 7 May 1963; reprinted GID 263.

history is the only means for someone to be reconciled to God. Lewis presents the objection, on behalf of the reader, on the premises that if this new life comes only to those who hear of Christ and believe in Him, then it is unfair on the part of God that all others would be excluded. The context in which Lewis addresses the challenge is within the scope of salvation, related to the appropriation of a new life attained through faith in Christ.⁷⁰² He raises this issue at the conclusion of his arguments, noting it simply as ‘another thing that used to puzzle me’.⁷⁰³ That he included it hints he sensed the question would likely arise in the mind of some readers. The arrangement of his argument and its anecdotal placement suggests he considered the issue a secondary question in matters of salvation. His response to the challenge is theologically nuanced, and if accepted, introduces a glaringly large piece of ambiguity.

Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; *we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.* [emphasis added]⁷⁰⁴

The exclusivity draws most overtly from Jesus’s self-description and is supported by the teaching of the Apostles Peter and Paul, as well as finding harmony in the Old Testament (John 3:36, 14:6; Acts 4:11-12; Rom 3:21-25; Isa 45:21-22). Lewis here makes no attempt to alter the doctrine on that point, acknowledging Christ as the exclusive mode of God’s salvation, and the method being a combination of hearing, or knowing, and believing. The opening he does create, and where the ambiguity is introduced, is his exclusion of the second premise; that salvation is appropriated by belief in Christ (John 1:12, 3:16, 20:31; Acts 3:16; Rom 3:25, 10:9; Gal 2:16). It is the combination of both premises which lead to the deduction that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are thus excluded. Entering this region of the issue opens in a variety of theological areas which Lewis sought to avoid for they quickly diverge into particular theological camps, those ‘rooms’ of the house where Christians reside.⁷⁰⁵

By dropping the second premise entirely, Lewis creates for himself an opening within the doctrinal formulation. It is a rhetorical door, not a textual or theological one. In

⁷⁰² MC 64.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. xvi.

this, the challenge becomes an argument from silence. According to his formulation, the Christian claim is indeed exclusive, but that exclusivity is founded on the *mode* of salvation without regard to the *method*; salvation in Christ alone is affirmed—faith or belief as requisite is not considered. Thus, he can declare, ‘we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him’. The offense, which had its genesis in the salvific exclusivity of Christ, is now dissolved by the ambiguous possibility of Christ saving through himself those who did not know him in their earthly lives. Lewis affirms the mode—through Christ alone—but scuttles the question of faith in Christ as essential to the method.⁷⁰⁶ He has somewhat deconstructed the argument and left interpretive room for reassembly. In Barfield’s chapter on ‘The Making of Meaning’ in *Poetic Diction*, he contends that the modern poet creates meaning by taking ancient poetic notions contained in terms and, from the poet’s own acumen and stock, reworking them into new meaning. This kind of creation is not *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather refers to a sort of aesthetic and communicative re-working of poetic expression which is accomplished through language with long-established meaning and connotation and using it to reveal more clearly something latent in the reader’s mind; to awaken it from within or shine light upon it from without.⁷⁰⁷ Although Barfield was speaking of new words and new uses of old words, the underlying principle can be seen in Lewis’s apologetic. That the primary works in question are prose and not poetry does not negate the parallel. As in this instance, Lewis re-expresses concepts from the view of what he considered to be the understanding of the average person, with ambiguity often attendant in the process. Then, from his own acumen and stock, Lewis recreates them, or the ambiguity left in the apologetic gives room for the reader’s own re-creation. In this case, the result of this line of reasoning is that it is possible for God to save through Christ even those who have not heard of Him. This apologetic enters a cavernous space which systematic theology has often taken great pains to fill. But Lewis offers nothing for it. He follows this point by suggesting that if one is truly concerned about those who have not heard of Jesus Christ, then join with Christ in his effort rather than argue in pretence: ‘Cutting off a man’s fingers would be an odd way of getting him to do more work.’⁷⁰⁸ He has opened a door in the argument,

⁷⁰⁶ The author is not here advocating any single doctrinal formulation, for example ‘salvation in Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone’, and recognizes the diversity expressed within Christianity. The comparative usage here is beneficial as it evidences Lewis’s restrictive scope, not because the alternate view is considered universal, which it most certainly is not.

⁷⁰⁷ Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010) 106.

⁷⁰⁸ MC 64.

but left it precisely that, *open*. He has not proven anything except that, on his understanding, what appeared to be a closed question is still open, and that that openness rests upon the ambiguous possibilities of God's creative saving action through Christ.

3. Apologetic Ambiguity in *Miracles*

Lewis wrote *Miracles* in a context immensely skeptical of the phenomena, largely viewing the world as fixed system discoverable only by scientific inquiry. The miraculous had become an antiquated and superfluous notion. Lewis wanted to show that not only are miracles reasonable, but that the very nature of human existence is inextricably enmeshed in the miraculous by virtue of reason itself. In this way he uses his interlocutor's primary tool, reason, as one of the greatest proofs for the miraculous. Lewis published *Miracles* in May of 1947, but the central idea was already well-formed five years earlier. In October 1942 Lewis submitted a short article on miracles for *The Guardian*. A month later that article was further worked out in a sermon he gave at Church of St Jude on the Hill in November 1942.⁷⁰⁹ In that immediate period (1942-1943) he produced *The Screwtape Letters*, half of the radio talks that became *Mere Christianity*, the Riddell Memorial Lectures that became *Abolition of Man*, and *Perelandra*. *Miracles* would be completed in 1945 and published in 1947. Whereas *Mere Christianity* was designed for a broad, and one might say casual audience, *Miracles* is denser work and more tightly argued. In terms of style, it is closer to *The Abolition of Man* than *Mere Christianity*. The ambiguities drawn out in what follows relate to Lewis's argument of reason as miracle, and two pillars in his thought: Myth, and the Incarnation.

D) Resurrection and New Creation

By summarizing the account of the resurrection of Jesus in everyday language Lewis opens new angles of consideration. He empties his description of theological terminology and describes the resurrection in general terms based on the eyewitness accounts and thereby draws what seems to be reasonable conclusions:

If the story is false, it is at least a much stranger story than we expected, something for which philosophical 'religion', psychical research, and

⁷⁰⁹ Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 124, 342-343.

popular superstition have all alike failed to prepare us. If the story is true, then a wholly new mode of being has arisen in the universe. The body which lives in that new mode is like, and yet unlike, the body His friends knew before the execution. It is differently related to space and probably to time, but by no means cut off from all relation to them. It can perform the animal act of eating. It is so related to matter, as we know it, that it can be touched, though at first it had better not be touched. It has also a history before it which is in view from the first moment of the Resurrection; it is presently going to become different or go somewhere else.⁷¹⁰

He argues from Gospel scenes (John 20:19, 26; Luke 24:36-43) without reference or exposition of any kind. He takes what is typically wrapped in distinctly Christian religious language translates into conversational prose.⁷¹¹ In doing this, he introduces a kind of language that is markedly different, offering a fresh perspective.⁷¹² He does not change the story of Jesus Christ as regards the accounts of resurrection and ascension but does summarize them in such a plain way that it suggests one may have been missing the forest for the trees, '[the story] is at least much stranger than we thought'. The non-religious language, lacking familiar theological terms and idioms, is equivocal and colloquial, and thereby better able to pass by the various disputes that could arise, particularly between Christians. Certainly, a theologically skilled individual can unwrap the relevant issues regardless of the degree of informal language in which those issues are packaged. The average person is not theologically skilled to that degree,⁷¹³ including the average Christian. But there is something the average Christian reader of Lewis did possess, something that would have posed a threat to his apologetic leading should common theological terms be used: churchmanship. A Christian reader in Lewis's day would likely have had some sensitivity to terms and phrases common in their confession or fellowship. Theological terms and categories repeated in Christian fellowship find a home in memory, even if unaccompanied by depth or breadth of understanding. Such familiar language lays argumentative tripwires set by repetition. These may be evaded by ambiguous rhetoric, guiding the

⁷¹⁰ M 148.

⁷¹¹ Cf. 'Cross Examination' interview by Sherwood E. Wirt of Billy Graham Association, 7 May 1963; reprinted GID 90; McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 69.

⁷¹² Similarly with the Ascension. It is raised as a question, 'if the story is true' related to 'a being still in some mode...corporeal' who chose to withdraw 'from the Nature presented by our three dimensions and five senses' and translated, 'not necessarily into the non-sensuous and undimensioned [*sic*] but possibly...a world or worlds of super-sense and super-space.' The sight of such an occurrence is unpredictable, and therefore 'who is to pronounce this improbable?'; 'Miracles' sermon at St Jude on the Hill Church (26 November 1942); reprinted GID 35.

⁷¹³ Cf. Farrer's remarks regarding Lewis's reader's being unlikely to question at depth. Farrer, Austin. 'The Christian Apologist' in Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 36.

reader through the minefield not by pointing out the danger, but by keeping them from ever approaching it. This is equally observed in the language of Lewis's outcomes:

It must indeed be emphasised throughout that we know and can know very little about the New Nature. The task of the imagination here is not to forecast it but simply, by brooding on many possibilities, to make room for a more complete and circumspect agnosticism.⁷¹⁴

He here argues that intellectual integrity requires acknowledgement and exploration of the ambiguity inherent to the future state. It is not that it can be definitively known, but the awareness of many possible outcomes is an invitation to thought that should be accepted. A dialectic should be employed even if the outcome, in this case 'a more complete and circumspect agnosticism', is known beforehand. His point is apropos for wider application beyond Christ to all who will be resurrected. For Lewis, humanity's present mystical reality as 'composite' creatures⁷¹⁵ carries forward into an even grander destiny which can only be appreciated now by means of embracing its inherent ambiguity:

The destiny of redeemed man is not less but more unimaginable than mysticism would lead us to suppose—because it is full of semi-imaginables which we cannot at present admit without destroying its essential character.⁷¹⁶

These 'semi-imaginables' of a 'wholly new mode of being' present the reader with a direction of thought yet without definition.⁷¹⁷ Lewis calls for contemplation of the various outcomes, guarded by a pre-established acceptance that no resolution will be found. At this point in Lewis's apologetic what the superstructure will become lies in the mind of the reader. He has avoided all circumspection about post-resurrection composition or Christ bodily ascending to the Father who is spirit (Joh 4:24). Though Lewis shares the symbolic language and metaphors of Paul (1 Cor 15), it seems he would be quite content to agree with John, that what Christian resurrection will be is

⁷¹⁴ M 153.

⁷¹⁵ In view of biblical writers being 'intensely interested' in the 'restoration or "resurrection" of the whole composite creature by a miraculous divine act.', Ibid. 38.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid. 159.

⁷¹⁷ This is not to suggest that Lewis was cavalier or unconcerned about the application of this view. As Ward notes, 'The fact of Christ's saving death and resurrection was far more important to him than any theory about how it was to be appropriated by individuals.', Ward, Michael. 'Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depiction of Conversion' in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 151; Cf. 'We shall still be able to recognise our old enemy, friend, playfellow and foster-mother, so perfected as to be not less, but more, herself. And that will be a merry meeting.', M 67.

unknown except that it will be like that of Christ (1 John 3:2). What can be known, can at best be known in part. Lewis has constructed an ambiguous framework upon base level observations of the accounts of the resurrected Jesus, inviting subjective consideration on the part of the reader.

ii) Reason as Miracle

Lewis argues for reason occurring between Nature and Supernature (God). When this understanding is considered alongside his apologetic for how miraculous events are appropriated by Nature, the picture that emerges is one of reason itself being a miraculous event. Such a reframing invites the imagination to consider, or more accurately reconsider, the nature of reason, what it means that reason itself may be a manifestation of the miraculous, and ultimately that one is thereby in constant interaction with the miraculous. He argues that Nature clearly is not *everything*, and that reason is said to be something other than mere nature. It is between Nature (the interdependent material system) and Supernature (God). There is a kind of reason that escapes purely material explanation, that ‘acts of reasoning are not interlocked with the total interlocking system of Nature as all its other items are interlocked with one another’.⁷¹⁸ Nature cannot produce rational thought, though it may alter it.⁷¹⁹ This kind of reason is ‘given before Nature and on reason our concept of Nature depends’.⁷²⁰ In this understanding, reason is a kind of ambiguous bridge between Supernature (God) and the human mind that is operative within the created order (Nature).

Of miraculous events, Lewis’s view is that they do not break Nature, but rather introduce something new into Nature, and following its introduction, the Natural order of things accommodates the new arrival, adjusting it to the pre-existing conditions:

If God annihilates or creates or deflects a unit of matter He has created a new situation at that point. Immediately all Nature domiciles this new situation, makes it at home in her realm, adapts all other events to it. It finds itself conforming to all the laws. If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take it over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born. We see every day that physical nature is not in the least incommoded by

⁷¹⁸ M 25.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. 36.

⁷²⁰ Ibid. 23.

the daily inrush of events from biological nature or from psychological nature.⁷²¹

To illustrate his point Lewis goes first to the Incarnation. He has in view not only that Christ was miraculously conceived but also his earthly life that followed. The supernatural event is attended to by Nature. There is the concordant pregnancy (Matt 1:18), birth (Luke 2:7), and by implication, growth (Luke 2:40). In a kind of bi-directional hospitality, Nature receives and accommodates the miraculous, and the miraculous likewise responds to Nature. The ambiguous bridge created by Lewis in this way of thinking proves to be resilient. The existence of a super-nature would inherently allow the possibility that it may interact with nature, and that any form of interaction is a kind of a communication generally, which may include the communication of words specifically. Lewis's approach is part and parcel to his much broader interest in the defence of the miraculous. He saw the entire created order as intimately interconnected with supernature, no less than any pagan religion. Whatever one may do with the credal assertions of Christianity, the ongoing interplay of Supernature and Nature will be unavoidably present:

I think there are two things that Christians must do if they wish to convince this 'ordinary' modern man. In the first place, they must make it quite clear that what will remain of the Creed after all their explanations and reinterpretations will still be something quite unambiguously supernatural, miraculous, and shocking. We may not believe in a flat earth and a sky-palace. But we must insist from the beginning that we believe, as firmly as any savage or theosophist, in a spirit-world which can, and does, invade the natural or phenomenal universe.⁷²²

Lewis's affirming that what will be left after credal reduction⁷²³ 'will still be something quite unambiguously supernatural, miraculous, and shocking' is itself reliant upon ambiguity. Though the supernatural will, according to Lewis, remain undiminished universally and crucial to Christianity in particular, the argument is ambiguous. There is a wide berth for varying theological interpretations of how this persistent supernatural interrelates with the universe. He has made the first step clear, but all other steps are open to discussion. If Lewis's understanding of miracle is paired with his view of reason, the resultant picture is one where Reason is itself is a

⁷²¹ Ibid. 59.

⁷²² 'Horrid Red Things', *Church of England Newspaper*, vol. LI (6 October 1944) 1-2; reprinted GID 69.

⁷²³ The creed in view is unclear. He does express his acceptance of the Nicene and Athanasian creeds in 'Christianity and Literature', R 189.

continuous miraculous event, arriving from Supernature to Nature by means of the human mind. This transference demonstrates the accommodation and adaptation by Nature, making a place for it as ‘an accomplished hostess’.⁷²⁴ The attending implication is that the reader themselves is in constant interaction with the miraculous.⁷²⁵ Furthermore, the application of reason to understand reason as a miraculous event would itself be another instance of the miraculous. This conception leads into greater ambiguity, complexity, and an undefined but inescapable cycle of reason-as-miracle.

iii) God, Myth, and Imagination

Lewis’s embrace of Christianity as the true myth was the vehicle of unification for his worlds of reason and imagination. The tension of those worlds, already present early in his life, continued to grow, yielding his well-known summary of his mental landscape, ‘On one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow “rationalism”. Nearly all I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.’⁷²⁶ For the first half of his life these seemed to have insurmountable incompatibilities. Their eventual unification did not result in the dissolution of either but produced a profound collaboration and new appreciation of both. He offers this new understanding, one that is in part to guard a person from moving toward a rejection of the miraculous within Christianity,⁷²⁷ while simultaneously bringing unity to the understandings of God and Myth first through imagination:

Just as God is none the less God by being Man, so the Myth remains Myth even when it becomes Fact. The story of Christ demands from us, and repays, not only a religious and historical but also an imaginative response. It is directed to the child, the poet, and the savage in us as well as the to the conscience and to the intellect. One of its functions is to break down dividing walls.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁴ M 60.

⁷²⁵ Lewis’s childhood memory of the shock of his own realization that the miraculous may impede upon Nature remained with him. As a boy, he ‘never, except in a nightmare or a fairy tale, conceived of spirits other than God and men’ though he ‘loved to read of strange sights and other worlds and unknown modes of being’. This has always been an indulgence of the imaginary, ‘never with the slightest belief.’ But the consideration of true spiritual realities shook him, ‘there burst upon me the idea that there might be real marvels all about us, that the visible world might be only a curtain to conceal huge realms uncharted by my very simple theology.’, SBJ 56-57.

⁷²⁶ SBJ 164.

⁷²⁷ M 134.

⁷²⁸ Footnote in ‘Miracles of the Old Creation’, M 139.

By expressing the miraculous nature of the Incarnation in this way Lewis states explicitly what is implicit in this understanding—a call to an imaginative response. Lewis’s mythopoeism operates in a ‘mysterious, luminous, and powerful way’, that both reveals the limits reason alone and opens new ways to apprehend and experiencing truth.⁷²⁹ This imaginative response requisitely includes broad ambiguities that are strategic and even necessary if one is to hold the concepts of God as man, and Myth as myth in concert. Beyond imagination, it is an ontological necessity because Lewis’s readers are neither God nor Myth (not in the same sense as Lewis’s usage). As Merge notes: ‘the Incarnation makes both real analogy and real being possible’.⁷³⁰ The imaginative response to the Incarnation is not a means by which to arrive at a religious or historical understanding, but rather is itself part of the destination. Conceptually, there is an aspect of the Greater (God) in condescension to lesser (humanity), and the lesser being drawn up into the Greater with the result that both are more fully known, and all this via the Myth.⁷³¹ This imaginative response leads to a unified understanding beyond just the Incarnation, but of varied actions of God and even of self and the world. In a 1944 article, ‘Myth Became Fact’, Lewis explains that this lends credence to the faith as a unified whole, like a piece of music where many lines call out and the corresponding answers lead to even more forms of expression, growing in both complexity and unity:

Divine reality is like a fugue. All His acts are different, but they all rhyme or echo to one another. It is this that makes Christianity so difficult to talk about. Fix your mind on any one story or any one doctrine and it becomes at once a magnet to which truth and glory come rushing from all levels of being. Our featureless pantheistic unities and glib rationalist distinctions are alike defeated by the seamless, yet ever-varying texture of reality, the liveness, the elusiveness, the intertwined harmonies of the multi-dimensional fertility of God. But if this is the difficulty, it is also one of the firm grounds of our belief. To think that this was a fable, a product of our own brains as they are a product of matter, would be to believe that this vast symphonic splendour had come out of something much smaller and emptier than itself.⁷³²

⁷²⁹ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 74.

⁷³⁰ Werge, Thomas. ‘Sanctifying the Literal: Images and Incarnation in *Miracles*’ in Schakel, Peter and Charles A. Huttar, eds. *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991) 77.

⁷³¹ Cf. The sermon ‘Transposition’ which further explores this dynamic. WOG 27-28; Cf. Walsh, Chad. *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1949) 29.

⁷³² ‘Myth Became Fact’ in *World Dominion*, vol XXII (September-October 1944); reprinted GID 37.

The imaginative reach that is necessary to embrace the unity of God as man and Myth is equally repaid through a new and comprehensive vision of the interwoven complexity of existence, a ‘vast symphonic splendour’. An illustrative instance of Lewis accepting mystery as something that cannot be fully articulated is in *Letters to Malcolm*⁷³³ in relation to Holy Communion. While uncharacteristically denominational, that one short letter illustrates his mythopatism, theological self-awareness, ecumenical spirit, and pursuit of a *via media*. As with his pre-conversion struggle to understand how the life of Christ would be effectual for someone today,⁷³⁴ he addresses what, if anything, was the spiritual reality in the Eucharist. In typical fashion, he begins with an admission of inadequacy: ‘You ask me why I’ve never written anything about the Holy Communion. For the simple reason that I am not good enough at Theology.’⁷³⁵ He was genuinely modest before the mysteries of Theology, but this may also be a subtle nod that he felt theologians were failing to appreciate the mystery and complexity around the question. To avoid others arguing from his silence,⁷³⁶ Lewis felt something must be said and his ecumenical spirit is present at the outset: ‘But the very last thing I want to do is unsettle in the mind of any Christian, whatever his denomination, the concepts—for him traditional—by which he finds it profitable to represent to himself what is happening when he receives the bread and wine.’⁷³⁷ There is a curious pragmatism in approaching the mysterious. Lewis did not want to over-articulate the inner workings of Holy Communion, respecting whatever conception works for the individual. Definitions themselves were, in this case, counterproductive, reductionist, and produced unnecessary division: ‘I could wish that no definitions had ever felt to be necessary; and, still more, that none had been allowed to make divisions between churches.’⁷³⁸ On one hand, Lewis could not accept a purely memorial view of Holy Communion. If the enactment was only a remembrance, then the effect must be purely psychological. On the other hand, he did not clearly articulate adherence to full transubstantiation. His middle way was an embrace of the mystery and ‘magic’ around and within the ordinance: ‘the something which holds together and “informs” all the objects, words, and actions of this rite is unknown and unimaginable. I am not saying to anyone in the world, “Your explanation is wrong.” I am saying,

⁷³³ LTM 100-105.

⁷³⁴ Cf. The doctrine of redemption and ‘what it meant’: CLI 976.

⁷³⁵ LTM 101.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid. 101-102.

“Your explanation leaves the mystery for me still a mystery.”⁷³⁹ It is a ‘strong magic’ that is juxtaposed to the then contemporary view of ‘spiritual’ as something merely psychological or ethical.⁷⁴⁰ Both are necessary, and the proportions are ambiguous. The Real Presence for Lewis was found in the mysterious, indefinable, and ambiguous divine action. It is ‘a hand from the hidden country’ that ‘touches not my soul but my body.’⁷⁴¹ What mattered to him was the one does indeed come into contact, relation, or proximity with Christ through Holy Communion: ‘It is a permanent witness that the heavenly realm...is a realm of objective facts.’⁷⁴² How this is done, Lewis leaves utterly ambiguous. As with Myth, imagination is key to embracing the mystery, and like Lewis, allowing it to be ‘profound and suggestive’ of things that straight prose fails to express.⁷⁴³ Similar to Lewis’s argument for the objectivity of value using the *Tao* in *The Abolition of Man*, it is discovered not defined: ‘As if we were trying to make rather than to learn. Have we no Other to reckon with?...The command, after all, was Take, eat: not Take, understand.’⁷⁴⁴ Lewis calls the reader to an imaginative reach into the language of the Myth where nearly every element is attended by ambiguities, yet promises a journey that may lead to a harmonized experience of God, Christ, self, world, and of reality.

iv) Receiving the Myth

Just as Lewis’s own conversion to Christianity largely turned upon the suggestion that he receive the story as myth, so too, he made it his practice to recommend others receive it in the same way, ‘It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely’.⁷⁴⁵ It is laden with ambiguities related to the mechanics of reception and the interrelation of myth and story. In what manner is this achieved? What does it look like to ‘receive the myth’? What should one accept or reject? The means of comprehension and appropriation remain ambiguous, floating in the ether for the imagination to grab hold. Un-mythic abstractions will appear once reason has its way, but they are to be held at bay until imagination does its work:

It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely. When we translate we get abstraction—or rather,

⁷³⁹ Ibid. 103.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid. 103-104.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid. 103.

⁷⁴² Ibid. 103-104.

⁷⁴³ Ibid 976.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid. 104.

⁷⁴⁵ ‘Myth Became Fact’ in *World Dominion*, Sept-Oct 1944; reprinted GID 66.

dozens of abstractions. What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; in *hac valle abstractionis*. Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.⁷⁴⁶

If one is to ‘experience the principle’, one must embrace the myth by which it is carried. The principle in view is obviously not the chronologically historical events which had since long transpired. Rather, it is a qualitatively different sort of experience of the principle that Lewis is referring to, one that leads to contact with reality. The rich, imaginative rhetoric is rife with ambiguity. There is something here of Lewis’s view, along with Barfield and Alexander, that thinking and experience, or contemplation and enjoyment, are not simultaneous activities.⁷⁴⁷ One cannot ponder the aspects of ecstasy during the coital embrace. Knowing is in the experience of the moment and thinking pauses the experience. But Lewis affirms that embracing the myth leads to experience of the principle. The implications of what this embrace of the myth entails are considerable. In his short 1944 essay ‘Myth Became Fact’, Lewis articulates what attends this approach to Christianity:

But Christians also need to be reminded—we may thank Corineus for reminding us—that what became Fact was a Myth, that it carries with it into the world of Fact all the properties of a myth. God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less. We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about ‘parallels’ and ‘Pagan Christs’: they ought to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren’t. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome. If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be mythopathic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.⁷⁴⁸

Christianity is to be approached as other myths, with the caveat, as Lewis himself came to think, that it really happened.⁷⁴⁹ From this approach all other myths are, as it

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ He read Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity* in 1924: AMR 301.

⁷⁴⁸ ‘Myth Became Fact’ in *World Dominion*, Sept-Oct 1944; reprinted GID 67.

⁷⁴⁹ CLI 977.

were, afforded their own just deserts. The entire posture of a Christian toward pagan belief and cultic practice is modified in light of this understanding. In 'Religion Without Dogma' he states the case negatively: 'If my religion is erroneous then occurrences of similar motifs in pagan stories are, of course, instances of the same, or a similar error.'⁷⁵⁰ On the other hand, if Christianity is true, then pagan beliefs 'my [*sic*] well be a *preparatio evangelica*, a divine hinting in poetic and ritual form at the same central truth which was later focussed and (so to speak) historicised in the Incarnation.' Other belief systems are thus not shunned outright. Regardless the background of Lewis's reader, rather than being cast into outer darkness they are invited to taste and see, or more accurately, like Thomas, to encounter the risen Christ, for Lewis sees them all culminating in the Incarnation. It summarized his own experience, 'My conversion, very largely, depended on recognizing Christianity as the completion, the actualization, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man.'⁷⁵¹ This sheds an important light on his apologetic. By understanding the Incarnation as the culmination of what is true in all the other myths, Lewis can naturally speak of Christianity in ways that would seem overly ambiguous to those who disagree. Where others may feel the need to demonstrate that complete falsity of other religions, Lewis can paint with broad, ambiguous strokes.

The entire creation, along with the present age and future age, must all be reconsidered in light of this myth-hermeneutic.⁷⁵² McGrath notes that Lewis's idiosyncratic approach to myth liberates it from being considered 'antiquated and fictional', and makes it a powerful narrative. It presents a form of rationality that is able to subsume both external and internal experience, a comprehensive view that is to be lived: 'claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight'. This, however, is given without prescription, and how receiving the myth translates into one's Christian duty remains ambiguous. Yet it was a transition that Lewis considered of great import, integral to the entire experience.⁷⁵³ The importance of the response leading to duty and those being held in concert has reference in *The Screwtape Letters*

⁷⁵⁰ 'Religion Without Dogma', *The Socratic Digest*, No. 4 (1948) 82-94; reprinted GID 132.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 73.

⁷⁵³ It not only led to Christian duty, but acts reciprocally, 'This secret fire goes out when you use the bellows: bank it down with what seems unlikely fuel of dogma and ethics, turn your back on it and attend to your duties, and then it will blaze.', POP 136.

as well. There is a kind of ambiguous equilibrium between the call to faith (receive the myth) and the call to duty (our obedience). This is observed in the context of Lewis presenting the elder tempter's wisdom on keeping the Christian from their duty:

There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human's mind against the Enemy. He wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.⁷⁵⁴

By reversing the inverted apologetic, Lewis is advocating for Christian duty, that God's desire is that those who believe in Him would be thinking about their actions as they are, in fact, doing them. The wrong response in view is fear of outcomes, whereas the right response is not only belief, but a lived faith, duty fulfilled.⁷⁵⁵ Though the work is fiction, it is also apologetic and just as the Incarnation receives an emphasis of receiving the myth without explication, so does the call to duty.⁷⁵⁶ For Lewis, the Incarnation, this foremost historical event, is myth become fact. To 'receive the myth as story' includes realizing that, as Lewis clarifies in the earlier quote, all truth is abstract. Truths are statements made after thinking upon a thing apart from the moments of experiencing it. They are the product of reason's working only after imagination has reached out to embrace the myth.⁷⁵⁷ Lewis's contention that it is by

⁷⁵⁴ SL 25. The importance of duty is further expressed even in areas of suffering, 'It is your business to see that the patient never thinks of the present fear as his appointed cross, but only of the things he is afraid of...resignation to present and actual suffering, even where that suffering consists of fear, is easier and is usually helped by this direct action.': SL 25-26. Cf. 'It may be the custom, down here, to treat the regimental rules as a dead letter or a counsel of perfection: but even now, everyone who stops to think can see that when we meet the enemy this neglect is going to cost every man of us his life. It is then that we shall envy the 'morbid' person, the 'pedant' or 'enthusiast' who really has taught his company to shoot and dig in and spare their water bottles.': POP 52.

⁷⁵⁵ He concerned himself with the entire person, not only success in argument. Cf. Carnell, Corbin Scott. 'Longing, Reason, and the Moral Law in Lewis's Search' in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 113. Also, all are either 'immortal horrors or everlasting splendours', 'The Weight of Glory', a sermon at Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford 8 June 1941, published in *Theology*, Vol. 43 (November 1941): reprinted WOG 19.

⁷⁵⁶ What Wolfe observes in Lewis's fiction, that he intends the imaginative reach to translate into the everyday, is true of his imaginative reach as well, '...what counts primarily is not the speculative vision he has invoked so eloquently, but the everyday, faithful following of Christ... This necessary renunciation of Lewis's images – their acknowledgement as no more than images, themselves incapable of fulfilling that which they promise – is not an activity marginal to the experience of reading Lewis's fantasy, but as crucial to it as it is crucial to the very fact of being human in a hierarchical universe such as that in which Lewis believes.', Wolfe, Judith. 'On Power' in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 184–185.

⁷⁵⁷ In this way, myth is higher than thought itself; 'Myth Became Fact' in *World Dominion*, vol XXII (September-October 1944); reprinted GID 66. Lewis was not opposed to truth, but merely making distinction in this regard. He held that the advocacy of truth is at the heart of the apologetic endeavour, 'One of the great difficulties is to keep before the audience's mind the question of Truth. They always

accepting the story of the Incarnation as myth that one may be brought into experience of the principle affords immense interpretative room. Myth was, and is, popularly conceived of as being based on information that is unknowable or intentionally false.⁷⁵⁸ However, myth in its primary sense is a story of old or ancient history involving supernatural elements.⁷⁵⁹ It is questionable how accessible this understanding would have been the common person of Lewis's day, and as such there is a measure of boldness that Lewis put it forward, not only because it is an uncommon approach to Christianity, but also because it is not a view necessary for him take in order to affirm orthodoxy. But it was clearly so central for Lewis's own conversion and ongoing Christian faith that for him it was not a novel theory to be advanced but immensely practical to a lived faith:

I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other.⁷⁶⁰

The ambiguity of an idea such as 'receiving the myth' may lack prescriptive application, but it is nonetheless, on account of imagination's working, something emotive and felt. Lewis, however, did not advocate purely emotional language, 'What expresses or stimulates emotion directly, without the intervention of an image or concept, expresses or stimulates it feebly.'⁷⁶¹ Such language has no real power for it is anemic in regard to real meaning, 'as words become exclusively emotional they cease to be words and therefore of course cease to perform any strictly linguistic function.' The result is something bestial, functioning 'as growls or barks or tears.' It is tawdry, whereas real and qualitative emotion still has grounding beyond itself. Outside of this,

think you are recommending Christianity not because it is true but because it is good.'; 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 101.

⁷⁵⁸ Lewis himself held something of this view prior to his conversion. In response to Tolkien and Dyson's encouragement to consider Christianity has he did other myths, Lewis is recorded to have said, 'But myths are lies, even though lies breathed through silver.', Carpenter, Humphrey. *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) 147; Medcalf notes Lewis, hyperbolically, as the 'hater of myth' among the three, Medcalf, Stephen. 'The Coincidence of Myth and Fact' in Wadsworth, Michael ed. *Ways of Reading the Bible* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981) 55.

⁷⁵⁹ Lewis's pre-conversion definition of myth as told to Barfield was 'a description or story introducing supernatural personages or things, determined not, or not only, by motives arising from events within the story, but by the supposedly immutable relations of the personages or things: possessing unity: and not, save accidentally, connected with any given place or time.', CLIII 1619.

⁷⁶⁰ 'Myth Became Fact' in *World Dominion*, vol XXII (September-October 1944); reprinted GID 67.

⁷⁶¹ 'At the Fringe of Language' in SIW 325.

words ‘die as words not because there is too much emotion in them but because there is too little—and finally nothing at all—of anything else.’⁷⁶² Chesterton’s influence again comes through at this point. He, too, saw something of this true myth in the Incarnation, the ‘granting of a real romance to the world’, one that brings together what seemingly could have been unified in no other way. The following is a lengthy quote from *The Everlasting Man*, but the degree to which it encapsulates Lewis’s thought bears inclusion:

It met the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story. That is why the ideal figure had to be a historical character as nobody ever felt Adonis or Pan to be a historical character. But that is also why the historical character had to be the ideal figure, and even fulfil many of the functions given to these other ideal figures, why he was at once the sacrifice and the feast, why he could be shown under the emblems of the growing vine or the rising sun. The more deeply we think of the matter the more we shall conclude that if there indeed be a God, his creation could hardly of reached any other culmination than this granting of a real romance to the world. Otherwise, the two sides of the human mind could never have touched at all and the brain of man would have remained cloven and double, one lobe of it dreaming impossible dreams and the other repeating invariable calculations. The picture makers would have remained forever painting a portrait of nobody. The sages would have remained forever adding up numerals that came to nothing.⁷⁶³

The way of receiving the myth is ambiguous yet felt and practical for daily Christian life.⁷⁶⁴ The idea also appears in *The Last Battle* where Lewis describes the difference between the old Narnia and the new sunlit land. He suggests it is like seeing a wonderful view from a window, yet not from the window directly, but indirectly from a mirror on the opposite wall:

[The images seen in the mirror] were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different – deeper,

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Chesterton, G.K. *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925) 310.

⁷⁶⁴ Lewis’s view about principle, truth and myth—that myth is what brings one into experience of the principle and truth is arrived at by detached consideration of the principle—while imaginative, felt, and profound, also gave him trouble as an apologist. In apologetics it seems he was thinking and not experiencing and thus felt the danger of becoming detached, dispassionate about God in the process of defending Him, ‘One last word. I have found that nothing is more dangerous to one’s own faith than the work of an apologist. No doctrine of that Faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal as one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate.’: ‘Christian Apologetics’, Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy (1945); reprinted GID 103.

more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know.⁷⁶⁵

Though one does not see the view directly, it is in a sense more real, more concrete. Lewis puts an ambiguous call before his reader's imagination, without prescriptive action, either in embracing the Incarnation as myth or in living out the faith that follows. The exact destination is unclear, but there is a sense of coming into focus, loosely similar to Bevan's comparison of the evolution of human understanding—perceiving a figure in the mist, at first it appears something like a tree, but eventually becomes clearer, perceived as a face.⁷⁶⁶ Or even the picture of a child who sits before a meal of dull, cold meat, but enjoys it fully by virtue of imagining it is a wild buffalo he himself has hunted, 'the real meat comes back to him more savoury for having been dipped in a story.'⁷⁶⁷ Of course, all of these may not happen as well. The ambiguity may lead to doubts about the reason for having to deal with myth in the way that Lewis has suggested. It may raise questions about the purpose and nature of both natural theology and revelation such that the reader comes away confused. But the lasting impact of Lewis in this regard does suggest the former, that the manner of his own conversion and the role of receiving the story as Myth within it is effective in strategically using ambiguity to obfuscate tangential questions and carrying the reader past the pitfalls of dormant issues toward his desired argumentative destination.

v) **Incarnation**

Characteristic to elsewhere in Lewis, his apologetic for the Incarnation offers his audience alternative ways to consider the issue, reframing the question to accommodate a broader and more ambiguous perspective. The prevalence of this in his apologetic has led one critic to declare that it is Lewis's manner more than his matter that carries offense.⁷⁶⁸ His apologetic rhetorical method invites the reader to stand where Lewis stood, as it were, and consider the issue from his vantage point. The Incarnation was for Lewis the most important aspect of Christianity and thereby for all

⁷⁶⁵ LB 170.

⁷⁶⁶ Bevan, Edwyn. *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) 51. Bevan may have had in mind the account of Christ healing a blind man in gradual steps (Mark 8:22-26).

⁷⁶⁷ 'We do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it. As long as the story lingers in our mind, the real things are more themselves.', 'Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*' in OS 90.

⁷⁶⁸ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 20-22.

human history. It is the ‘Grand Miracle’ in *Miracles*, operating as the hermeneutic by which all other miracles are interpreted:

The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. Just as every natural event is the manifestation at a particular place and moment of Nature’s total character, so every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation. There is no question in Christianity of arbitrary interferences just scattered about. It relates not a series of disconnected raids on Nature but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion—an invasion which intends complete conquest and ‘occupation’. The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depends on their relation to the Grand Miracle; all discussion of them in isolation from it is futile.⁷⁶⁹

The Incarnation is both the centrepiece and focal point of all miracles, and they can only be understood in relation to it. All the varied miraculous events in the biblical record are inseparably tied to the Incarnation, both as indicators and exemplifications of its character and ultimate meaning. In his sermon ‘The Grand Miracle’, the miraculous (with a *telos* of Incarnation) must not be removed in debate about Christianity:

But you cannot possibly do that with Christianity, because the Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle, the Christian assertion being that what is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him. It is precisely one great miracle.⁷⁷⁰

For Lewis, the Incarnation is the fulcrum and defining metanarrative of the biblical story. It is the historical event which supremely encapsulates the entirety of creation’s purpose in the one, historical life of Jesus Christ. That singular life is the mortal arrival of what is behind humanity’s experience of the supernatural in *The Problem of Pain*:

The fourth strand or element is a historical event. There was a man born among these Jews who claimed to be, or to be the son of, or to be ‘one with’, the Something which is at once the awful haunter of nature and the giver of the moral law.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁹ M 108. Cf. Walsh, Chad. *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1949) 34.

⁷⁷⁰ ‘The Grand Miracle’, sermon preached on St Jude on the Hill Church, published in *The Guardian* (27 April 1945); reprinted GID 80.

⁷⁷¹ POP 11.

It is not theological or historical arguments for Christ that Lewis leans upon, but rather the pure historicity. This singular person lived, and in some undefined way, identified himself as being, or being one with, the source of both the universal experiences in Lewis's apologetic using *numinous* and the *ought*.⁷⁷² The person of Christ himself is left quite unexplained. Not that that was unimportant to Lewis, but of the Incarnation it is the uniqueness of Christ's Person in history that mattered, how history itself is reinterpreted by the Incarnation. This understanding shaped Lewis's thought on not only the Incarnation but all of Christianity. It is not merely a doctrine, enjoining abstract language to make clear what is believed about Christ, but a shocking reality that must be accounted for:

Christianity is not the conclusion of a philosophical debate on the origins of the universe: it is a catastrophic historical event following on the long spiritual preparation of humanity which I have described. It is not a system into which we have to fit the awkward fact of pain: it is itself one of the awkward facts which have to be fitted into any system we make.⁷⁷³

The Incarnation not only changes humanity's relationship to history, but to reality itself. Again, in *Miracles*:

They mean that in addition to the physical or psycho-physical universe known to the sciences, there exists an uncreated and unconditioned reality which causes the universe to be; that this reality has a positive structure or constitution which is usefully, though doubtless not completely, described in the doctrine of the Trinity; and that this reality, at a definite point in time, entered the universe we know by becoming one of its own creatures and there produced effects on the historical level which the normal workings of the natural universe do not produce; and that this has brought about a change in our relations to the unconditioned reality.⁷⁷⁴

Lewis used the broadest categories to present a grander, more ambiguous picture of what the Incarnation entails, its implication for how Christianity views the world and for one's own worldview. From Lewis's perspective, appropriation of the historical reality of the Incarnation should lead to a radically new calculus for all of life. It is not that the declaration of God becoming Man is a difficult point to be wrangled into the middle of a religion, but rather that singular event that becomes the cipher for all history. It is not through doctrinal constructs, biblical or systematic theology that

⁷⁷² See Chapter Four, 1, i; 'Numinous Awe'; 2, I: "Ought" and Universal Moral Law'.

⁷⁷³ POP 12.

⁷⁷⁴ M 79.

Lewis forms his case. It is a loose, philosophical theology that appeals to the imagination; a re-conception of God Incarnate and the force of his argument rests on embracing the Incarnation's historicity. According to Lewis's leading, spiritual and physical, immaterial, and material are united in this one Person, one Event whose descent and ascent embodies not only the Christ, but the whole of creation. Lewis's apologetic pulls one away from the narrow kaleidoscope of human perception, aligning the myriad fractured colours of history to consider a much larger and ambiguous image.

CONCLUSIONS

In what ways do the findings of this thesis shape the understanding of Lewis's apologetics and his broad and lasting appeal? How should this research inform Lewis Studies, Apologetics, or Theology? The following are closing observations and recommendations:

1. Outcomes and Relationship to Scholarship

C.S. Lewis's apologetic ambiguity assists in carrying readers past a variety of obstacles that would be brought to the fore by greater clarity. Disagreements on points of theological nuance or doctrinal contention may be left dormant, unaroused due to the space created by ambiguity, permitting differing potential outcomes. Disparate views are either obfuscated or allowed to coexist until they may be more strategically engaged. Narrowly, Lewis used idiosyncratic terms to describe subjective universal experiences, creating immense latitude for readers of not only differing but even conflicting views to equally locate themselves within his descriptions. His apologetic ambiguity offers new perspectives that enable him to navigate theological waters more deftly, engaging or circumnavigating secondary issues at his discretion. He can construct his arguments without having to clearly articulate his positions on anything but the most central Christian beliefs, as Holmer observed early on: 'The give and take with theological matters is there in his pages, but this does not always force him to erect one more thing himself.'⁷⁷⁵ Lewis attempted to guide his reader to observe the argumentative landscape from his vantage point, that they might see what he finds so compelling. His apologetic ambiguity helps to pull the reader out of established positions, using open concepts and images through analogy and metaphor to help them re-imagine a given question, to journey on to what he had found to be true. This was Lewis's own journey in his many stops from atheism to Christianity, onward throughout his life as a Christian, and his apologetic ethos: 'I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.'⁷⁷⁶ His longing for a far country, his true country, was to be maintained, and that even through death itself. His

⁷⁷⁵ Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 97.

⁷⁷⁶ MC 137.

apologetic rhetorical method lends itself to the production of good ambiguities that lead his reader to step back from the mountainside and follow Lewis to a different plateau from which the peak is seen anew.⁷⁷⁷ He is an argumentative guide on an apologetic journey.⁷⁷⁸ Apologetic ambiguity can help suspend opposition or rejection of arguments, carrying disparate views toward what may ultimately become a shared destination—one that would be far more likely rejected if known from the start. Yet, unintended questions may be raised in the reader’s mind as they try to ascertain where and how ambiguities will be resolved. It is an invitation to thought, and as with reason and argument, its outcomes are not guaranteed: ‘It has a life of its own. No man can tell where it will go.’⁷⁷⁹ Apologetic ambiguity may open gates of inquiry that are better kept closed. But despite the risk of unhelpful problems arising in the reader’s mind, it remains that strategic ambiguity helps the reader think alongside Lewis, granting him the role of an apologetic guide rather than a combatant, moving closer to producing that mental disposition where ‘reason and imagination are not on the wrong side’.⁷⁸⁰ Lewis’s apologetic ambiguity is a significantly beneficial outworking of his apologetic rhetorical method.

2. Objections

The originality of what is put forward in this thesis is bound to be met with resistance. While opposition to a new area of scholarship can be difficult to anticipate, there are two likely directions from which protests will arise. The first is in relation to Lewis himself. Some may take issue with the boldness of arguing that Lewis used ambiguity strategically given what can be known about his love for clarity, reason, and organization of thought. The second area is the subject of ambiguity itself. As explained in Chapter Two, scholarship has failed to agree upon a definition for

⁷⁷⁷ ‘As a Christian apologist, Lewis was primarily an imaginative writer. In the midst of a culture dominated by science, technology and a secular outlook, he somehow managed to convey a sense of the reality of an invisible, eternal realm of being.’, Alec Vidler in Kilby, Clyde S. *The Christian World of C.S. & Lewis* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1965) 4, quoted in Ward, Michael. ‘The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.’ PhD Thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) 4.

⁷⁷⁸ ‘It is as if the argument does not begin to gather its force until the reader has realized something about himself. Therefore, the whole picture of rationality itself and what is involved in being responsible objective becomes deeply hedged.’, Holmer, Paul L. *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 8.

⁷⁷⁹ ‘The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club’, preface to *The Socratic Digest*, No. 1 (1942-1943) 3-5; reprinted GID 126; Cf. ‘It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was the way to keep him out of the Enemy’s clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier’, SL 1.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

ambiguity. The best approaches all accept a spectrum of ways it may appear, from lexical or semantic ambiguity to larger conceptual ambiguities that are not objectively identifiable and therefore require contextual analysis. Because of this reality in scholarship, any treatment of ambiguity will invite preexisting disagreements to join the fray. It is quite ironic given that this thesis demonstrates the ability of strategic apologetic ambiguity to navigate past contentious issues. It seems that what ambiguity is able to do for others it cannot do for itself. This research makes no pretense of offering help for scholarship's inability to arrive at a shared definition of ambiguity. As stated in the opening, the aim of this thesis was not to advance ambiguity theory. It was to evidence ambiguity in the most significant apologist of the last century and exposit its operational value, opening a new area of scholarship for Lewis Studies, Apologetics, and indeed, Theology as well.

As for the first category of objections, it is likely that some will contend that Lewis rejected imprecision and advocated clarity, and therefore would not have used ambiguity in the ways argued in this research. After all, it was Lewis who said: 'The reader, we must remember, does not start by knowing what we mean. *If our words are ambiguous, our meaning will escape him.* I sometimes think that writing is like driving sheep down a road. If there is any gate open to the left or the right the readers will most certainly go into it. [emphasis added].'⁷⁸¹ As Harries observed, 'The honest thief, the tender murderer. I don't think Lewis would have denied the possibility of such people. But his calling as a combative Christian apologist, and his chosen weapon of myth and allegory, hardly allowed for the public recognition of such ambiguities. In his world black needed to be black and white white.'⁷⁸² Or there is Tandy's representation of Lewis as having a 'take it or leave it' attitude⁷⁸³ and agreement with Stewart's assertion: 'If you think confusion or ambiguity are virtues, Lewis is not your man.'⁷⁸⁴ That all of these, and others, affirm the clarity that is so obviously present in Lewis in no way necessitates the exclusion of ambiguity. Both things can be, and are, true. C.S. Lewis did desire and employ a great deal of clarity. He also often used varying degrees of ambiguity. To reject the possibility of strategic apologetic

⁷⁸¹ 'Cross Examination' interview by Sherwood E. Wirt of Billy Graham Association, 7 May 1963; reprinted GID 263.

⁷⁸² Harries, Richard. *C.S. Lewis: The Man and His God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1987) 42.

⁷⁸³ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 84-85.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 86.

ambiguity by Lewis is extremely myopic. Some criticism of Lewis stumbles blatantly in that way. Lewis's clarity, or precision, or use of reason, is held so closely to the eyes that all else is eclipsed and the critic fails to recognize it is their proximity to that aspect of Lewis that has blocked out all else, not its size. A single facet of Lewis is taken up and applied universally, like a kind of rhetorical legalism. Where Lewis speaks against ambiguity, it is never rejection in full. Rather, in every instance there is a specific kind of error in view that is related to ambiguity. Ambiguity, as this thesis has affirmed, can be the genesis for many kinds of error. In the prior quote, for example, Lewis is specifically referencing a kind of narrow, lexical, or semantic ambiguity that has to do with poor authorial understanding, poor communication, or both. It is not ambiguity itself that is the problem, but bad ambiguity specifically related to terms ('our words') that fails to convey the intended meaning. Another example is Lewis's response to Pittenger's critique,⁷⁸⁵ which largely centered on ambiguity: 'a style more guarded, more *nuancé*, fineliter shaded, more rich in fruitful ambiguities—in fact, a style more like Dr Pittenger's own—would have been worse than useless.'⁷⁸⁶ With a cursory glance it may seem that Lewis was rejecting ambiguity. Again, it is not a statement about ambiguity in all forms, but rather Pittenger's specific lack of clarity around a central issue combined with a failure to uphold the standard he had applied to Lewis. As with ambiguity itself, Lewis's statements *about* ambiguity need to be assessed in context. His critiques align with his advocacy that to successfully translate Christian belief into colloquial language one must take pains to have carefully thought it through, even to 'the absolute ruddy end'.⁷⁸⁷ The instances of where Lewis speaks negatively of ambiguity, which are few, are always in reference a specific rhetorical, argumentative, or semantic error, and not an outright rejection of all ambiguity.

Turning to consider the likely objections related to ambiguity more generally, one may argue that anything *can* be ambiguous, and that this research is in fact finding something that is not there. Although the initial premise is true (ambiguity can be found anywhere), the conclusion requires a narrow, technical definition for ambiguity and thus fails just as all other similar attempts have done. In Chapter Two, 'Trends in

⁷⁸⁵ See Chapter Two for a fuller critique of Pittenger and Lewis on this issue.

⁷⁸⁶ 'Cross Examination' interview by Sherwood E. Wirt of Billy Graham Association, 7 May 1963; reprinted GID 263.

⁷⁸⁷ 'Christian Apologetics', Lecture for Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy, 1945; reprinted GID 98. Cf. 'a phantasm called "my religion"': LTM 12.

Scholarship’, it was affirmed that one could increase precision (theological, philosophical, or otherwise) until ambiguity is found anywhere. Lewis himself saw this possibility: ‘a text is “but a cheverel glove” to a determined critic, —since everything can be a symbol, or an irony, or an ambiguity— we shall easily find what we want.’⁷⁸⁸ This sentiment is present in Ossa-Richardson’s declaration: ‘A word or phrase can be interpreted in more than one way.’ What, then, does “can” mean? I *can* interpret any sentence to mean anything I want.’⁷⁸⁹ In that sense the objection is partially true: ambiguity can, ultimately, be found anywhere. But to assume the findings of this research are produced from that basis would be both arbitrary and affirming the consequent. Furthermore, to make such an assertion one must establish a boundary definition for ambiguity. You cannot determine something is excessively appraised without a standard for what is *not* excessive. The scope will necessarily be limited to narrow, objectively identifiable semantic or lexical ambiguity. This objection results in the point of reference being driven back to unsuccessful academic attempts of a definition for ambiguity. As evidenced in the literature review of Chapter Two, attempts at a technical definition have failed: ‘I am not sure a definition is in fact possible: all definitions only raise further questions.’⁷⁹⁰ Where anything *can* be ambiguous at one end of the spectrum, at the other end ambiguity must *only* be of a limited, specific kind. Thus, the objection does not support its conclusion and requires a definition for ambiguity that will only prove insufficient. A functional understanding of ambiguity governed by context is the wisest approach. Similarly, it may be argued that what is called ambiguity in this thesis are really instances of vagueness, imprecision, or other objectively identifiable elements. While such distinctions can be made at the word-level, this objection fails to appreciate the myriad of ways ambiguity may manifest more broadly. Narrow elements, such as vagueness, while different than ambiguity at the lexical level, may also be part of a rhetorical method that produces broader conceptual and argumentative ambiguities. Even among Lewis’s critics, the need for a functional understanding is clear.⁷⁹¹ The attempt to reduce all rhetoric and

⁷⁸⁸ EIC 85. Also, the ‘Stylemonger’ whose obsessive narrow literary focus makes him ‘antilitary’, one who ‘criticise the lens after looking *at* it instead of *through* it’; Ibid. 35-36.

⁷⁸⁹ Ossa-Richardson, Anthony. *A History of Ambiguity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 402.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Beversluis finds a ‘fundamental ambiguity’ in Lewis that is related to his assertions that certain outcomes are seemingly unavoidable. His examples have nothing to do with word-level ambiguity, but how Lewis’s statements infuse ambiguity into his larger argument: Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, Rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) 52.

argumentation down to objectively identifiable elements suggests either an epistemological bias against ambiguity, an overly restrictive analytic approach, or both. The history of scholarship on ambiguity supplies every indication that a definition will never be universally agreed upon. The author joins—among others—Empson, Burke, Grice, Ossa-Richardson, Eisenberg, and Lewis himself in setting aside approaches that rely up on a technical definition for ambiguity in favor of a functional understanding governed by context.

3. Recommendations for Further Research

i) Apologetic Ambiguity in Lewis's Fiction

Lewis Studies will benefit from further consideration of when and how this aspect of Lewis's apologetic is operative across his corpus, particularly in his imaginative works. The decision to exclude them was a difficult but necessary, and there remain immense lands to explore in relation to the interplay of ambiguity as it relates to clarity and concreteness in Lewis.⁷⁹² Ward has demonstrated Lewis's immense ability to hold things back from his reader in the service of his larger aims.⁷⁹³ There are likely many smaller ways in which Lewis did this in the telling of his stories that can be examined: ambiguous elements in the character of his characters, how theological and apologetic issues are related to them, what it means that certain things are left unexpressed, all these are areas (and others) are ripe for further research. One example of a start in this direction is the examination of Lewis's apophaticism in Kallistos Ware's article, 'God of the Fathers'. He explores the apophatic approach in relation to characters such as the dwarves of Narnia or Maleldil and the Old One of Perelandra.⁷⁹⁴ Ambiguity is an inherent quality in apophaticism, and one aspect which could be drawn out further.

An instance of Lewis's awareness of the benefit of ambiguity in his fiction is with Ransom, Oyarsa, and the Incarnation. It was prominent enough to prompt Sister Penelope to write Lewis requesting he consider publishing an article to bring more

⁷⁹² The juxtaposition of concreteness and openness in Lewis was first raised by Dr Judith Wolfe, Professor of Philosophical Theology, School of Divinity, University of St Andrews in a December 2016 conversation.

⁷⁹³ The unearthing of Lewis's planetary schema for *The Chronicles of Narnia* is the most significant discovery in Lewis studies: Ward, Michael. 'The Son and Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005); Cf. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁹⁴ Mills, David, ed. *The Pilgrim's Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) 53-69.

clarity what transpired between the characters. The reply demonstrates that Lewis knew the value of ambiguity in such instances, ‘I don’t think, even for “believer’s only” I could “describe” Ransom’s revelation to Oyarsa: the fact that you want me to proves how well advised I was merely to *suggest* it.’⁷⁹⁵ He did not write the follow-up article. As with Lewis’s more direct apologetics, ambiguity in his imaginative works may be operative in beneficial or detrimental ways⁷⁹⁶ and what some consider too reductive or rigid,⁷⁹⁷ may actually be due to what is left unsaid.⁷⁹⁸ The enlarged argumentative space created by ambiguity is part of the effectiveness of the visions he presents in story, allegory, and metaphor. It assists the imaginative reach, which in turn aids the work of reason.⁷⁹⁹ As it regards apologetic ambiguity in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it may be helpful to consider that Lewis had already produced most of this apologetic content before Narnia, affording him greater ability to integrate what were previously direct apologetic arguments into fictional expression. All the primary works for this research were produced during the decade prior to the 1950 release date of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Given that Lewis published Narnia after much of his apologetic writing, it stands to reason that one could expect to discover more nuanced expressions of strategic apologetic within the stories. On this point, Lewis’s well-known comments about the employment of imaginative literature to ‘steal past watchful dragons’⁸⁰⁰ is worth reconsideration. Beyond the romantic language, he is speaking about the communicative efficacy of reframing Christian truths in creative ways. He observed reticence, ‘a certain inhibition’, against believing what one was

⁷⁹⁵ In the same letter he goes on to say, ‘any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people’s minds under cover of romance without their knowing it.’, Letter of 9 August 1939, CLII 262.

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Preface to the third edition of PR Lewis in retrospect identifies two kinds of errant obscurity in the earlier editions. The first due to ignorance of how unusual his journey was from atheism to Christianity (sequentially: popular realism, Philosophical Idealism, pantheism, theism, Christianity) and thus errantly assuming his readers would identify with it. The second due to employing the term ‘romanticism’ which had become too ambiguous, too subjective for beneficial use. PR ‘Preface to the third edition’.

⁷⁹⁷ See notes on the critique of Harries and Pullman and confluence of Lewis’s preferred genres in Wolfe, Judith and Brendan N. Wolfe, eds. *C.S. Lewis and the Church: Essays in Honour of Walter Hooper* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2012) 75-82.

⁷⁹⁸ ‘Lewis is obliged to put his points so briefly as to be open to every attack. But the protection which his arguments lack in particular is made up them in general.’, Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 34.

⁷⁹⁹ ‘Lewis’s stories are didactic in the sense in which he uses the term in *The Abolition of Man*: that is, they offer visions of the good which elicit imaginative or emotional responses preceding or complementing rational deliberation.’, Wolfe, Judith. ‘On Power’ in MacSwain, Roberty and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 183.

⁸⁰⁰ OS 48.

told to believe. The solution lay not in more precise analytic argumentation⁸⁰¹ but in engaging the imagination, ‘casting all these things into an imaginary world’ and specifically removing non-essential, secondary obstacles, ‘stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations’.⁸⁰² He felt that this method could be just as effective with adults as it would be for children, ‘The Fantastic or Mythical is a Mode available at all ages for some readers, for others, at none. At all ages if it is well used by the author and meets the right reader’.⁸⁰³ The reader’s response to the imaginative approach is the determining factor.⁸⁰⁴ For those who accept Lewis’s invitation to thought, regardless of age, ‘it has the same power: to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies.’⁸⁰⁵ Clarifying the view, removing unnecessary additions, and throwing off non-essentials—these are the operative elements that Lewis identified in his fiction.⁸⁰⁶ By casting Christianity into the imaginative, Lewis invites the reader to think alongside him and consider divine claims from an indirect vantage point. This, in turn, can lead to a more robust approach, where one is able to ‘both look *along* and *at* everything.’⁸⁰⁷

Lewis’s fiction could be described as the attempt of the telling of a better story. Vision and expressions that call out to the imagination are the heart of his efforts to invite the reader to consider his point of view, ‘to make others see what he so clearly sees himself.’⁸⁰⁸ As one explores his writings, one finds that at every turn Lewis presents a new way of considering a particular issue or idea, supposing an alternative angle from

⁸⁰¹ Cf. ‘Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains and environment in which belief may flourish.’, Austin Farrer. ‘The Christian Apologist’ in Gibb, Jocelyn, ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 26.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ As Barfield asserts, ‘Only by imagination therefore can the world be known. And what is needed is...that the human mind should become increasingly aware of its own creative activity.’, Barfield. *Poetic Diction*, 28.; Cf. Edwards, Bruce L. Jr. *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis’s Defense of Western Literacy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1986) 77-96.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. ‘You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first. From which it would follow that the question, What things are first? is of concern not only to philosophers but to everyone.’; ‘First and Second Things’, published ‘Notes on the Way’, *Time and Tide*, vol. XXIII (27 June 1942) 519-520; reprinted GID 280.

⁸⁰⁷ ‘Meditation in a Toolshed’, *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, (17 July 1945) 4; reprinted GID 215; Cf. ‘We cannot see light, though by light we can see things. Statements about God are extrapolations from the knowledge of other things which the divine illumination enables us to know.’, McGrath, Alistair. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 95.

⁸⁰⁸ Austin Farrer. ‘The Christian Apologist’ in Gibb, Jocelyn ed. *Light on C.S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965) 25.

which to consider a question and one that leaves some sense that there may be more than one way of understanding what is presented. Whether one finds him convincing or not, Lewis's persistence in this method is indeed formidable: 'The man who wrote *A Preface to Paradise Lost* was ready to write any number of prefaces to paradise regained.'⁸⁰⁹ McGrath observes this as Lewis 'out-narrating'⁸¹⁰ the other stories on offer and sees Lewis's approach to the interconnectedness of the literary canon paralleled in his approach to Christianity. That 'coherence is observed when every individual part of the whole shines on and thereby illuminates the others: *ogni parte ad ogni parte splende*.'⁸¹¹ If Lewis indeed saw Christianity in a similar light, namely, that one could begin anywhere and be led to everywhere; then the point of origin, the port of departure would be somewhat irrelevant. The important bit would be that a start takes place, not the place where one starts. This would allow Lewis the ability to feel free to employ ambiguous elements in his arguments to provide concrete footholds for imagination. Ambiguity invites. Imagination explores. Reason directs. This is not to suggest that ambiguity is the central element of Lewis's fiction, but it is a critical factor whose role in the reader's apprehension of Lewis's narrative is surely able to be explored much further. As one author comments, 'what is left unsaid may sometimes be the key expression.'⁸¹²

ii) Ambiguity in Theology

While any substantive agreement on a definition or scope for ambiguity remains unlikely, that does not mean the conversation should not take place. That which can only achieve one part does not invalidate the effort.⁸¹³ Ambiguity beyond the word-level is something of an argumentative black hole: it is more clearly defined by an absence of what might be said. As explained in Chapter Two, in both definition and action ambiguity remains *ambiguous*. Even so, the operative value of strategic ambiguity is worthy of further research to the broader field of Theology. As ambiguity

⁸⁰⁹ Ward, Michael. 'Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depiction of Conversion' in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 151.

⁸¹⁰ McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 91.

⁸¹¹ McGrath notes that Dante's original draws the point even further, that the light is distributed evenly (*distribuendo igualmente la luce*): McGrath, Alister. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 91.

⁸¹² Ward, Michael. 'The Son and the Other Stars: Christology and Cosmology in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis.' PhD Thesis (University of St Andrews, 2005) *i*.

⁸¹³ Cf. Lewis's analogy of munitions units, 'The Decline of Religion', *The Cherwell*, vol. XXVI (29 November 1946) 8-10; reprinted GID 221.

is present in all languages, New and Old Testament scholarship, along with all disciplines working in ancient languages may benefit from consideration of the function of ambiguity in ancient texts and, where discoverable, the corresponding ancient cultural value of ambiguity. Perhaps new light can be shed upon disputes that have long been in stalemate over purely grammatical arguments. Both biblical and systematic theology can be furthered by a consideration of strategic ambiguity, most beneficially with the former fuelling the latter. Historical theology will do well to consider how ambiguity has played a role in the great debates and the history of interpretation. The arc of theological development throughout history is not driven by clarity alone. Wonder, mystery, and mysticism are all bedfellows with ambiguity. Finally, the author is so bold as to suggest ambiguity be found by those who are not seeking it—it may be that findings from further examination of strategic ambiguity in Lewis can be part of forming something of a bridge between the worlds of analytic and continental philosophical theology. The two approaches live in great tension, and not without just cause and certain irreducible differences. Yet, the author believes that ambiguity, particularly in Lewis’s views of Imagination and Reason, can demonstrate parallels for continental and analytic approaches that are worth exploring.

In closing, C.S. Lewis was not a typical evangelist. His *modus operandi* was not a direct proclamation of the Gospel message. You do not find anything approaching the likeness of scripted prayers, slogans, or popular formulations. He was not an evangelical,⁸¹⁴ though he admitted his works are largely evangelistic.⁸¹⁵ He presents his audience with conditions and scenarios that fit with the sorts of things Christianity claims, and then suggests that those happen to be the very conditions of our world. He creates pictures to show the implications of what Christianity would mean were it indeed fact—to imagine what it might mean if this God does exist and has acted as is claimed, and how that might alter one’s understanding. This was not argumentative

⁸¹⁴ This is apparent to those who read Lewis more widely, but Hooper states it explicitly in ‘C.S. Lewis and C.S. Lewises’, *The Riddle of Joy*, 40.

⁸¹⁵ ‘Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to *tous exo*’; ‘Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger’, *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958) 1359-61; reprinted GID 181. His was an invitation to consider the implications of the reality of Christian claims, what it means for one’s understanding of self, other, world, and God if this God does exist and has acted as is claimed. Ward makes the contrast quite clear, ‘C.S. Lewis never invited unbelievers to come to Jesus. He was a very successful evangelist.’, Ward, Michael. ‘Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis’s Depiction of Conversion’ in Menuge, Angus J.L., ed. *C.S. Lewis Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997) 143.

sleight of hand, but an invitation to thought.⁸¹⁶ Without Lewis's apologetic ambiguity his audience would trust him less, find less of themselves in his supposals, and be far less likely to journey alongside him. Lewis's legacy as an apologist is built on many things and foremost among them is the broad and lasting appeal of his arguments. His apologetic rhetorical method is a large part of that appeal, and that method owes a great debt to ambiguity.⁸¹⁷ It is ambiguity that permits those with disparate or even conflicting views to travel together with Lewis upon the same road. It is ambiguity that allows such a variety of people find a place for themselves in his ideas, identifying with his analogies and metaphors, and through thinking alongside him, come to consider him as one of their own, as having some envisioned relationship with him. This study of apologetic ambiguity in Lewis opens an entirely new area of scholarship for Lewis Studies. Furthermore, it is to the benefit of the wider field of Apologetics that it should listen to and appropriately assimilate lessons from Lewis's apologetic ambiguity. Even those who still find ambiguity distasteful can improve through greater awareness of it. Analytic approaches may become more skilled in both their identification and avoidance of ambiguity. But the real value will be for ongoing work in imaginative apologetic approaches, both prose and poetry, didactic and narrative. There is greater insight to be gained about apologetic ambiguity and ways of incorporating it strategically. Ambiguity itself is not a virtue, but as Lewis demonstrated, it can be used to draw others into contact with those things that are virtuous.

⁸¹⁶ 'Readers soon discover that instead of being soothingly wooed into accepting yet another innocuous form of "religion," they are being paid the high compliment of an invitation to think hard about important and difficult questions.': Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 4.

⁸¹⁷ See Chapter Three, 3, iii.

APPENDIX

Some readers may find it odd that Lewis's Trilemma, arguably his most famous (or infamous) apologetic argument, is conspicuously absent from this thesis. To avoid speculations on account of that ambiguity, I offer here the reasons for that exclusion. Lewis presents the argument most clearly in *Mere Christianity*, Book 2, 'The Shocking Alternative':

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁸¹⁸

Both critics and admirers of Lewis see him being restrictive in this apologetic. For example, Beversluis treats it as an offer of binary options⁸¹⁹ and Tandy considers it a modified Lewisian dichotomy.⁸²⁰ Lewis was certainly putting his reader at a rhetorical crossroad. But what of ambiguity in the Trilemma? Contextually, the area where it might be found is in relation to unexpressed alternatives. Perhaps the limited choices presented by Lewis can create a kind of bad ambiguity because the reader will wonder about the seemingly reasonable options that were left out. Various alternatives have been proposed, such as Jesus's claims being legend and therefore unverifiable. Walsh, albeit sarcastically, suggests that Jesus could have been a 'spiritual mutant', become enlightened, or intended his statements more metaphorically.⁸²¹ The more serious option that is often argued is that Lewis omitted the possibility that Jesus was mistaken.⁸²² In that argument, it is proposed that Jesus could have genuinely believed he was God, but simply had been wrong. It seems to me that despite the philosophical gymnastics, this ultimately falls back to the lunatic category. The mad often sincerely

⁸¹⁸ MC 52; Cf. 'What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ' in Wright, Ronald Selby, ed. *Asking Them Questions*, Third Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) 47-53; reprinted GID 156-160.

⁸¹⁹ Beversluis, John. *C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 38.

⁸²⁰ Tandy, Gary L. *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) 57.

⁸²¹ Walsh, Chad. *The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1979) 206.

⁸²² Davis, Steph. 'Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?' in Davis, Stephen T., ed. et. al. *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 221-245.

believe their madness. If Jesus was not God, then sincerely claiming to be God is the indication of his insanity. It defines the malady. However, my rejection of the notion that it is possible to wrongly believe one is divine without being mad is not a reason for excluding the Trilemma. The issue would supposedly be that Lewis's narrow argument would bring these alternatives to the reader's mind, creating an unhelpful, bad ambiguity. However, the ongoing use of this formulation even to the present day suggests otherwise.⁸²³ It is the philosophers who are troubled by Lewis's simplicity, not the average reader. If the bad ambiguity were significant then surely it would hurt the lasting impact of the argument, which it clearly has not. There simply isn't a clear good or bad ambiguity to exposit. Additionally, the kind of apologetic ambiguity that can occur because of Lewis's use of dichotomy is already examined in Chapter Four, 'The Divine Scheme'. While the Trilemma deserves to receive more work from theologians and philosophers, it did not warrant inclusion for the purposes of evidencing and evaluating ambiguity in the apologetic of C.S. Lewis.

⁸²³ Cf. Groothius attempts to make the argument more analytic than Lewis himself, drawing out each facet in detail: Groothius, Douglas. *Christian Apologetics*, second ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2022) 549-559.

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