

## C.S. Lewis: Reason, Imagination, and the Abolition of Man

Luke C. Sheahan

Duquesne University

The inclusion of arguably the foremost Christian apologist and dialectician of the twentieth century in a book on anti-rationalist thinkers may seem at the outset ridiculous. If anyone put their faith in reason, it was the esteemed Oxford don C.S. Lewis, the one for whom it could be said, “The most casual remark was taken as a summons to disputation.”<sup>1</sup> One biographer writes, “His rhetorical temper provided a compulsiveness and a posture which could be resolved only in argument. Training, taste, and talent equipped him for an academic and apologetic career, to the exclusion of nearly all others.”<sup>2</sup> But he was also the author of the children’s fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the science fiction *Ransom Trilogy* and a famed scholar of medieval and renaissance literature. While he certainly made use of reason, it was in the imagination that he put his faith.

Lewis wrote several famous works of Christian apologetics including *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *Miracles* (1947), and *Mere Christianity* (1952). But he found that their efficacy depended upon a deeper mode of knowing. Through science fiction and children’s fantasy, Lewis engaged in what McGrath calls “imaginative narrative apologetics.”<sup>3</sup> Lewis believed in the rational soundness of his faith in that he believed that the Christian faith made claims that were historically and philosophically true, but he further believed that the imagination, not the

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<sup>1</sup> This comment was written about W.T. Kirkpatrick, the tutor of Lewis’s youth, but it applied equally to him. James Como, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C.S. Lewis* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing, 1998), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Como, *Branches*, 140.

<sup>3</sup> Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 255.

reason, was the key to understanding reality, including the reality of the Christian faith. Rationalism contributes to understanding truth insofar as it is shaped by a healthy imagination. Rational apologetics has a place in the arsenal of the Christian, but it is not of prime importance because it is inadequate to capture the full truth of the Christian faith, or anything else for that matter. Lewis scholar Michael Ward writes, “Lewis was of the opinion that rational argumentation was too rudimentary for the task of conveying Christian truths.”<sup>4</sup> The imagination is not irrational or sub-rational, but *supra*-rational. It transcends rational argument, undergirds it, providing the groundwork that enables rational arguments to make sense.

As an academic Lewis certainly valued reason, but he looked askance at a thin rationalism, one that held that human syllogizing could provide better insight into reality than imaginative narrative. He believed in the “epistemological reliability of the imagination, especially when realized in the forms of metaphor, symbolism, and myth, to establish meaning, the antecedent of truth.”<sup>5</sup> Reason did have value for Lewis and it was certainly one way in which a person could access truths. But reason’s ability to yield insight into reality was limited because reason itself is in large part determined by the imaginative backdrop, by the model of the universe that underlies it. The structure of one’s imagination determined in advance how one will reason. It is not so much that rationalism is a failure as a means of inquiry, it is that to Lewis rationalism is woefully inadequate to grasp the fullness of reality compared to the imagination.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores various motifs in Lewis’s work that demonstrate the way in which he prioritized the imagination over the reason. The first is his idea of “looking at” versus “looking along.” This idea explains the dichotomy between his apologetic works (full of rational

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

<sup>5</sup> Como, *Branches*, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley and Sons, 2014), 134.

argumentation) and his narrative fiction. The second is his idea of “transposition.” He believed that the translation of higher truths cannot be expressed or explored easily in rational discourse due to rationalism’s limited “vocabulary.” Our rational faculties are inherently inadequate to account fully for truths grasped imaginatively. Third is Lewis’s use of the metaphor of light to demonstrate the necessity of an outer source of illumination for the reason. Fourth is his understanding of the influence of the prevailing model of the universe, grasped through the imagination, upon the ability of reason to understand the nature of that universe. Fifth, I conclude by explaining Lewis’s Platonic understanding of the “chest” as the seat of the emotions through which the reason rules the appetite. Whatever value the reason may have, it is consequential insofar as a man’s sentiments are rightly ordered by the imagination. The rationalists’ devaluing of the imagination is dangerous because it abolishes the center of man and, ironically, compromises the efficacy of reason itself.

### **“Looking At” vs. “Looking Along”**

Lewis believed narrative fiction better at conveying truth than rational argument by making truth experiential, helping the reason to “look along” the faith, rather than to “look at” it. Lewis explained the difference between “looking at” and “looking along” as two types of cognitive experience in a brief essay titled “Meditations in a Tool Shed.” He begins the essay describing himself standing in a toolshed with a sunbeam coming through a crack in the top of the door. Specks of dust drift through the shaft, but all else is mostly dark. Lewis writes, “I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.”<sup>7</sup> But then he moves and stands in the shaft.

Immediately the specks of dust disappear and he sees through the crack above the door to the

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<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 212.

world outside. He sees green leaves against the blue sky and, beyond that, the sun. He is now looking *along* the beam. He summarizes this experience writing, “Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.”<sup>8</sup>

Lewis follows up with a few poignant examples of how this distinction functions in cognition. A young man falls in love. To him, a few minutes of light conversation with this girl is better than a thousand favors from any other. The young man is “looking along” the experience called “being in love.” A neuroscientist looks at the young man and says that the experience is due to his genetic makeup and hormonal responses to the biological need for sex and procreation. The latter figure is “looking at” the young man’s experience from the outside. “That is the difference between looking *along* the sexual impulse and looking *at* it,”<sup>9</sup> Lewis writes. Another example includes a mathematician who contemplates figures and the neuroscientist who notes that what the mathematician thinks is a matter of “timeless and spaceless truths about quantity” is really just electrical pulses in his gray matter.<sup>10</sup>

These two types of experiencing the same thing raise a question. “Which is the ‘true’ or ‘valid’ experience? Which tells you the most about the thing?”<sup>11</sup> The idea of “looking at” is associated with science and reason and the experience of “looking along” is associated with the imaginative and poetic interpretation of real experiences. Lewis is making two points here. The first is that, contrary to what many think, both ways of “looking” are means of grasping reality. Both are telling us true things. We do not necessarily need to choose between them. The second is a subtler point. It is that “looking along” is the more fundamental experience, the more essential point. The experience of “looking at” is only relevant because the “looking along” has

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 212.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 212. Emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 213.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 213.

occurred. The neuroscientist is only interested in what is happening in the smitten young man's brain because he has already been felled by Cupid's arrow, or in the mathematician's because the mathematician has already done figures. The primary thing that is being "looked *at*" is one of concrete experiencing grasped through the imaginative narrative of the one who is "looking *along*" the experience.

Now certainly the imaginative experience of "looking along" has led many astray. Many have fallen in love with an unlovely person, or been drawn away from accurate academic assessments by what turns out at bottom to be a psychological bias. But the whole point of "looking at" something, reasoning about it, is to think more accurately about that thing, as a check on the primary experience of the imagination. But it doesn't follow that the primary experience itself is therefore invalid. In fact, the second type of looking, Lewis points out, is still a type of *seeing*. "Looking at" also depends upon a fundamental belief in the accuracy of sight, just as "looking along" does. If the neuroscientist points out that the calculations of the mathematician are not a reflection of reality but only electric pulses in the mathematician's brain, a second neuroscientist could come along and say the same about the first neuroscientist, that his analysis of the mathematician's brain is not an accurate assessment, but only the result of electrical impulses in *his* gray matter. And of course, a third neuroscientist would have to say the same about the second, and so on in perpetuity. Lewis asks, "Where is the rot to end?"<sup>12</sup> His answer is, "that we must never allow the rot to begin. We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything."<sup>13</sup> Reason and imagination are not at odds

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 215.

but two mutually reinforcing ways of approaching truth. Nonetheless, it is the imagination that takes precedence.

In many ways Lewis's work can be categorized as either "looking at" or "looking along" his own beliefs, approaching subjects both through fiction and non-fiction, giving his readers an exposition of a subject by "looking at" it in a scholarly or apologetic treatise as well as the experience of "looking along" the same subject through narrative fiction. He says this explicitly in the preface to *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the third installment of the *Ransom Trilogy*, writing that the book is making the same points through fiction that he made in his non-fiction work *The Abolition of Man* (1943).<sup>14</sup> Something similar could be said about his arguments in *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles* and the fantastical storytelling in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The narrative fiction helps his readers "look along" his Christian beliefs and the apologetic pieces help them "look at" them.

### **Transposition**

Another approach Lewis takes, and one that also demonstrates why rationalism as such is less adequate to fully grasping reality than is the imagination, is explained in his essay "Transposition." Lewis is writing about the difficulty in translating higher theological realities, those of heaven, into the language of lower realities, our common experiences on earth. He writes, "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."<sup>15</sup> Experiences of aesthetic delight, for example, are often described in terms of physical

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<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1965), 7.

<sup>15</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1980), 99.

sensations, even nausea. But, of course, positive aesthetic experiences are not like getting sick but they do bring with them an unsettling of the diaphragm, which is also part of the experience of nausea.<sup>16</sup> When we *contemplate* the higher experience of aesthetic delight we must translate the experience into language that is not quite up to the task, that does not have the breadth of meaning appropriate to these higher pleasures. If one language has twenty-two letters and the other only five, then to write the same word one must use one letter in the lower alphabet to represent several in the higher. If music written for an orchestra is only played upon a piano, the piano rendition must necessarily transpose melodies and harmonies into the keys of the piano, making a larger piece of music fit the smaller medium.<sup>17</sup> What results may be the same tune, but the fullness of the musical experience will not be completely realized. The rational faculty operates on a sort of lower level, a smaller vocabulary, a more limited alphabet. It cannot capture the fullness of reality, especially regarding the ultimate reality of the Christian faith. To communicate these higher realities one must use symbols and metaphors, lower things signifying the higher realities.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, those rationalists who value reason above all else present another problem for Lewis. They are like the person hearing a musical score on a piano who is unaware that the score was intended to be played by an orchestra and, what's more, doubts that such a thing as an orchestra exists. Or like someone who reads a translation from a language with twenty-two letters to one with five, but has never heard of an alphabet with more than five letters and cannot imagine that such a thing exists. Those who adhere to this thin sort of rationalism cannot explain the higher realities that we experience. The fact that we struggle to translate these experiences

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 96-7.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 100-1.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 102.

into communicable concepts does not mean that they are not real, but that they are beyond the grasp of our rational capacity. To be contemplated these experiences must be transposed into a lower medium with a more limited vocabulary that is not entirely adequate to a full expression of those realities.

For Lewis, the remedy is not to *contemplate* these truths per se, but to help people *experience* them or something like them, demonstrate through symbol and metaphor the reality of the orchestra or the twenty-two letter alphabet. Lewis's appeal through both his apologetic work and, more effectively, through his imaginative fiction is to present his readers with other possibilities, with a vision of the world where Christianity is true, but not explicit, experienced, but not contemplated. By presenting this greater whole the non-rational but real experiences of ordinary life begin to make sense within a larger imaginative framework, which for Lewis included the Christian worldview. McGrath calls this *abduction*, "the process by which we observe certain things, and work out what intellectual framework might make sense of them."<sup>19</sup> This abductive process reveals "the role of the imagination in generating possible schemes of things within which experience and observation might be accommodated."<sup>20</sup> Needless to say, the imaginative constructs may be inaccurate. But it is only through these constructs that the right imaginative construct, one that actually grasps reality in its fullness, can be presented. Lewis's own belief in Christianity began because he believed it made sense of what he and other human beings actually experienced in the world.<sup>21</sup> His fiction from *Out of the Silent Planet* (1937) to *The Chronicles of Narnia* to *Till We Have Faces* (1956) can all be understood as being written in

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<sup>19</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 122.



this vein. These works are not arguments for Christianity, but an abductive presentation, an imaginative rendering of what a world might be like were Christianity true.

### **The Metaphor of Light**

Another way that Lewis explains how the imagination functions in relation to reason is through the metaphor of light.<sup>22</sup> He famously writes at the end of his essay “Is Theology Poetry?” “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.”<sup>23</sup> There is a difference for Lewis between seeing something and the thing by which one sees, which demonstrates in another way how he believed reason to be the junior partner in the search for truth. McGrath writes, “The image of light allowed Lewis to emphasize the *derivative* ability of the mind to comprehend.”<sup>24</sup> Reason helps us to see things, to understand them. But just like the eyes require light by which to see, so reason requires a source of illumination by which it may behold the truths of reality. Christianity, for Lewis, provided the central light that allowed him to see, to make sense of the world around him. There are, of course, other ways by which one can see, other “suns” besides Christianity. But Lewis’s approach to apologetics reflects the understanding that the light cast by these other stars do not make sense of the world in the way that Christianity does. The metaphor of a source of light separate from the activity of “seeing” demonstrates that pre-rational source of intellectual illumination. Sure, we need eyes to see, but our eyes are irrelevant if we do not have a light by which they may behold the things around us. Furthermore, the quality of the source of light will

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<sup>22</sup> This is an under-studied aspect of Lewis’s thought. McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 83. “Curiously, Lewis scholarship has paid surprisingly little attention to the way in which Lewis privileges metaphors relating to sun, light, vision, and shadows in his writings.”

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 140.

<sup>24</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 95. Italics in original.

greatly affect the ability of our eyes to perceive. The rational faculty will not operate effectively, will not behold reality accurately, unless the light by which it sees is from a reliable source, the true sun rather than a false star with a partial spectrum that limits what the reason may apprehend. To see things rightly, one must be seeing by the right light. McGrath writes, “[T]he ability of reason to illuminate things is itself a consequence of it already having been illumined by the Divine reason. Reason is not autonomous, especially in relation to the things of God. It must be enabled to see; otherwise, it sees only dimly, if at all.”<sup>25</sup>

This understanding of reason is sharply contrasted with the movement that more than any other claimed the ocular metaphor: the Enlightenment. For Lewis, many Enlightenment thinkers were blinded by their reliance upon an abstract rationalism, conceiving reason as independent of culture and tradition as well as authoritative above all other means of perceiving truth. This type of rationalism “reduces reality to abstractions in order to master it [rather than] see[ing] something *as it really is*.”<sup>26</sup> Reason was important to Lewis, but his conception of it was contextualized within a deeper understanding of how one must grasp reality. “Lewis was concerned to affirm the importance of reason, while avoiding the aesthetically bleak and metaphysically austere vision of reality resulting from an exaggeration of reason’s power and a failure to comprehend the importance of other human mental faculties—above all, the imagination.”<sup>27</sup>

## The Model of the Universe

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<sup>25</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 95.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual Worlds*, 95-6. McGrath is comparing Lewis’s understanding to that of David Michael Levin. See David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York: Routledge), 1988, 440.

<sup>27</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual Worlds*, 95.

Lewis's use of the metaphor of light was derived from his realization that "what he was able to "see" was shaped "by a controlling worldview which, in effect, determined what he saw."<sup>28</sup> Lewis writes that the "interpretation of experiences depends on preconceptions."<sup>29</sup> Those preconceptions are shaped by the fundamental model governing the mind's perception of the universe. Lewis writes in *The Discarded Image*, "[I]n every age the human mind is deeply influenced by the accepted Model of the universe."<sup>30</sup> Every age has a Model, the "backcloth of the arts" that shapes the imagination and the emotions of all who live under it.<sup>31</sup> Ours is shaped by Freud and Einstein. We live in a universe that is empty and silent. The heavenly bodies are "pitch-black and dead-cold vacuity."<sup>32</sup> But medieval man lived in a universe that was warm, full of life and music. Rather than empty space, the universe was composed of spheres, each governed by its own intelligences that in turn were driven to their circular rotations by a love that sought to participate in its object by imitating it. The regular rotation in a circle is the most perfect shape, one that mimics the perfection of God.<sup>33</sup>

The model of the universe cannot help but to have a profound emotional effect on those who believe in it. Medieval man who looked up at the stars and wondered at the nature of the universe was "like a man being conducted through an immense cathedral, not like one lost in a shoreless sea."<sup>34</sup> To the medieval mind, morality was knit into the very structure of the universe. Each of the spheres was oriented by its love of God and indeed the whole universe was surrounded by the outer sphere which was itself where God dwelt. All higher intelligences were

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<sup>28</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 222.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 114.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 100.

oriented toward God and not toward the earth. The earth was at the center of the universe but the universe was conceived as sort of funnel, with the center at the bottom. When man looked up, he was indeed looking *up* in a definitive sense, up a stairway to a majestic spectacle towering above him.<sup>35</sup> Lewis writes, “Man looked up at a patterned, populous, intricate, finite cosmos; a builded thing, not a wilderness; ‘heaven’ or ‘spheres,’ not ‘space.’”<sup>36</sup> Looking up at the stars was to behold a feast, an opera, or a dance.<sup>37</sup> In such a universe, disbelieving in God was nearly imaginatively impossible. How could He not exist when one looked up and saw the entire universe encompassed by His existence and ordered toward His will?

Contrast this to modern man who looks up to see the vast coldness and emptiness of space, infinite in its chaos, with no center as such and no order. The planets move in imperfect elliptical rotations for reasons that have nothing to do with divine order and morality, let alone love. Man beholds his place in the universe with terror and bewilderment, perceiving no meaning in the vast coldness and emptiness of space, populated only by planetary debris and balls of burning gas that would kill him if he were even capable of coming within millions of miles of them. Such a model cannot help but to make his life seem meaningless, rather than moral. In such a universe, believing in God is imaginatively difficult. How could one maintain belief in God’s existence when one looks up and sees the vast emptiness of space with no moral order and with no apparent place or need for Him?

Of course, the new model is more accurate as far as physical observations go. But for Lewis, it may be less accurate in its depiction of the moral nature of the universe and humanity’s place within it. The benefit of the old model is that it provided a backdrop which made sense of

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 185.

<sup>36</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, 59-60.

the actual experience of human beings with each other and with God. The new model affects the emotions in a way that may lead to distortion of moral reality rather than a more accurate grasp of it. While we can no longer believe the literal physical medieval model of the planets, it may yet serve as a constellation of permanent spiritual symbols that help us to understand the moral nature of the world around us.<sup>38</sup>

The preservation of permanent spiritual symbols is precisely this point that is the key to all of Lewis's imaginative works. Michael Ward presents a strong argument that *The Chronicles of Narnia* was Lewis's attempt to help moderns live in, to experience a universe that is oriented toward God according to "the discarded image" of the medieval model of the universe.<sup>39</sup> According to Ward, in each book Lewis is attempting to show the readers what it *feels* like to believe in such a thing by depicting a world imbued with the qualities of each of the planetary spheres. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis helps his readers to "look along" the Jovial spirit,<sup>40</sup> in *Prince Caspian* the Martial, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* the Solar, and so on. While we do not have space to explore fully Ward's case, our point here is one that is widely accepted in Lewis scholarship: Lewis believed that one's imaginative backdrop would dispose one toward moral truth or away from it. Reason tends only to prove postulates that one is already predisposed to accept. But literature can shape the imaginative backdrop and good literature can make moral reality palatable to reason. Lewis writes, "Literature as Logos is a series of windows, even of doors,"<sup>41</sup> by which he means that literature is a way to see truth and even to enter into it. An imaginative tale can give one the experience of truth, even if that truth is

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<sup>38</sup> Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ward gathers an impressive array of sources from Lewis's scholarship, poems, and fictional accounts to demonstrate the planetary schemes throughout his work.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 138.

contrary to one's professed beliefs. By providing the true meaning of the world in a deeper imaginative sense literature can prepare it to accept propositional truths. Lewis pointed out that in his own childhood he rejected religion at least partially because he was told he ought to believe it. Being told one ought to show reverence for something is a good way of making someone, especially a child, reject the required reverence. But through fairy stories, Lewis thought, he might "steal past those watchful dragons," to communicate the true meaning of the world and what he believed to be the truth of Christianity to those predisposed to reject Christian theological propositions.<sup>42</sup> These stories could give the experience of living in a world where the medieval planetary scheme is true in a moral sense and where Christianity is true in a theological sense. A person under that influence would then be more open to the propositional presentation of moral and theological truths.

### **Abolition of Man**

We have explained above what Lewis thought about reason and its limited ability to grasp truth. But his concern is not merely academic. Exalting the rational over what I have called here the imaginative strikes to the very heart of what makes man, man. In *The Abolition of Man* (1943), Lewis examines a trend in education that denigrates the tendency to insist on correct emotional responses to certain things or to certain pieces of literature. It is not, this view holds, that a sunset demands a response of reverence for its sublimity, it is that any sublime feelings are simply the subjective response of the viewer. According to this view, to encourage students to *feel* rightly, they will inevitably be weakened in their ability to *think* rightly. But, Lewis writes, "For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three

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<sup>42</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 70.

who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments.”<sup>43</sup> Rather than irrational as such, some sentiments are appropriate for some things. They are signposts directing us toward truth and the real meaning of the universe. Maybe a sunset really does demand an emotional response that regards such a thing as sublime. The rejection of this view in general is to reject truth and goodness as such. Lewis calls this body of fundamental truths and primary goods the *Toa*.

This tendency to quash sentiments derived from the imagination is to bereave persons of the ability to control their appetites. While Plato may have been right that the Reason ought to rule, it only rules through the chest, the imaginative seat of the emotions. Lewis writes, “[It is] by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.”<sup>44</sup> The result of such an education is to produce “men without chests,” men who do not have this middle element, this ability to control their appetites. It is wrong to call them intellectuals, Lewis writes, “It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out.”<sup>45</sup>

If we extirpate this essential element what we get is not a more reasonable populace, but one that cannot be governed by reason at all. In the final analysis to reduce everything to reason by eliminating the seat of emotion and imagination is to abolish the ability of the reason to rule, which allows the appetite full reign. When we have eliminated the emotive power of Justice and Goodness we are left with only “I want.” We are left only with the rule of appetite, the part of the

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<sup>43</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1974), 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 25.

man that he shares with the beasts. Focusing only upon the rational side of man abolishes man as man, depriving him of the very ability to be rational.

## Conclusion

Lewis writes in “On the Reading of Old Books,” “Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes.”<sup>46</sup> Reason operates in each age to affirm the spirit of the age and it is rejected when it is against it.<sup>47</sup> Rather than guiding the search for truth, reason relies upon an imaginative framework which determines what it reasons about and prejudices its conclusions. This is the difference in priority that Lewis posited between “looking at” and “looking along.” Our reason is constricted to “look at” what the model of the universe has determined our imagination must “look along.” And the light by which we see, by which we are able to “look along” will to a great extent determine what we see. McGrath writes, “This is one of the reasons why Lewis appealed to the imagination—not to retreat into irrationality, but to escape the austerity of a purely rational view of reality, which could only offer a partial and inadequate account of things.”<sup>48</sup> Lewis’s friend, Austin Farrer described reading Lewis thus, “We think we are listening to an argument; in fact, we are presented with a vision, and it is the vision that carries conviction.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 202.

<sup>47</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 45.

<sup>48</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 138.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in McGrath, *Intellectual World*, 139.