

A Different Conversion by a Different C. S. Lewis:  
An Analysis of *Surprised by Joy*

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Abstract:

C. S. Lewis is perhaps as well known for his life story as his literary accomplishments. Central to that narrative is his shocking conversion from atheism to Christianity. Despite this *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis's primary work on the subject, has not been the centre of a focused study.

This thesis reveals that, prior to writing *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis developed a growing appreciation for how experiences and story factored in religious belief. Rather than focusing on arguments, *Surprised by Joy* tells the story of how Lewis came to terms with his fundamental experiences of the world. Tension between these experiences and his worldview drove Lewis onward until they were reconciled by his acceptance of The True Myth. Using Vollenhoven's Reformed Philosophy, I show the implications of *Surprised by Joy*: that the stories we feel ourselves to be living in circumscribe our experiences and knowledge, and that conversion involves coming to inhabit the biblical story.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Chapter 1-A: Opening Words

Perhaps because of Lewis's fame as an apologist, scholars discussing his conversion could be forgiven for placing their emphasis upon the reasoning which brought Lewis to Christ, and the logical connection between Lewis's experiences of Joy and the existence of heaven. Yet the story told in *Surprised by Joy* is not a story of intellectual development or of Lewis moving through premises until he found the right conclusion. Rather, I believe that there was something more complex going on: the story of a man struggling to come to terms with, and make sense of, his experience of living in the world. This was a holistic process which required all of Lewis's faculties, not just his intellect.

Indeed, considering the traditional emphasis on reason by interpreters, it may come as a shock for readers to realize that the famous (or perhaps infamous) 'argument from desire' is never made in *Surprised by Joy*. Rather, *Surprised by Joy* is a tour of Lewis's feelings and desires, the books he read and the friends he made. If we simply look at the subject matter of *Surprised by Joy* for an indication, we might suppose that Lewis's conversion was the result of his life experience and personal development, with intellectual arguments only becoming important late in the process.

### Chapter 1-B: Frustrated by Joy

That *Surprised by Joy* is not telling the kind of story scholars expect is evident from the difficulty biographers, philosophers, and literary scholars, have had while examining it. For example, philosopher Adam Barkman believed Lewis felt he had to downplay the philosophical

nature of his conversion in *Surprised by Joy*.<sup>1</sup> As a result, his *C. S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life*, tends to rely more heavily on *The Pilgrims Regress* for information about Lewis's philosophical development and conversion.<sup>2</sup>

Yet scholars seem to have the most trouble with those chapters of *Surprised by Joy* which are most explicitly *not* focused on how Lewis's argumentation developed, such as Lewis's life before he began studying with Kirkpatrick.

Alister McGrath seemed unable to fathom why so much of *Surprised by Joy* was devoted to Lewis's time at Wyvern, stating in apparent confusion: "While Lewis served on the battlefields of France in 1917 and 1918, experiencing the horrors of modern warfare, *Surprised by Joy* makes only scant reference to it. Lewis clearly believed that his woes during his year at Malvern College [Wyvern] were of greater importance than his entire wartime experience..."<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in his biography of Lewis, McGrath states:

*Surprised by Joy* devotes three of its fifteen chapters to railing against his experiences at 'the Coll,' faulting it at point after point. Yet this accumulation of Lewis's vivid and harsh memories curiously fails to advance his narrative of the pursuit of Joy. Why spend so much time recounting such painful and subjective memories, which others who knew the college at that time (including Warnie) criticised as distorted and unrepresentative? Perhaps Lewis saw the writing of these chapters of *Surprised by Joy* as a cathartic exercise, allowing him to purge his painful memories by writing about them at greater length than required. Yet even a sympathetic reader of this work cannot fail to see that the pace of the book slackens in the three chapters devoted to Malvern, where the narrative detail obscures the plotline.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Barkman. *C. S. Lewis. & Philosophy as a Way of Life*. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Barkman. *C. S. Lewis. & Philosophy as a Way of Life*. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Alister, McGrath. *C. S. Lewis.-A Life: Eccentric Genius. Reluctant Prophet*. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Alister, McGrath. *C. S. Lewis.-A Life: Eccentric Genius. Reluctant Prophet*. 31. (underline added for emphasis)

At the end of this incredulous paragraph –almost as though he cannot resist- McGrath leaves a footnote, with the following addendum: “the narrative can be found in *Surprised by Joy*, 95-135, taking up 18 percent of the text of the book.”<sup>5</sup>

So too, we see that Peter J. Schakel was vexed by the space in *Surprised by Joy* which Lewis had given over to the portrayal of his time at Wyvern. Schakel intimates that Lewis may have spent so much time discussing Wyvern because he was taking the opportunity to “express, perhaps unintentionally, some of the bitterness the experience, and the lack of awareness on his father’s part, engendered in him.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, I believe Schakel found that chapter of the book so unsatisfactory because of the role he thought it served in the narrative of *Surprised by Joy*:

It is difficult to justify the long, detailed, intense accounts of “bloodery” and pederasty in Chapter 6, and even much of Chapter 7, on the grounds that they clarify Lewis’s development and character in any significant sense. Chapter 6 says comparatively little about Lewis. The point of it and Chapter 7, that Malvern College (he calls it “Wyvern”) made him a Prig, that “the Public School system had thus produced the very thing it was advertised to prevent or cure” ... could have been made more briefly and believably.<sup>7</sup>

If that were the point, perhaps I too should wonder at its length. Yet my interpretation asserts that Lewis was correct in granting this part of his childhood so much attention in *Surprised by Joy*, and that those years were indeed important to his religious and philosophical development. After all, rather than passing over his time at Wyvern (as Lewis passed over his early vacation in Normandy,<sup>8</sup> and many parts of his later life<sup>9</sup>) Lewis chose to commit a

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<sup>5</sup> Alister, McGrath. *C. S. Lewis.-A Life: Eccentric Genius. Reluctant Prophet*. 405.

<sup>6</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. 154.

<sup>7</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. 157. Encloses a quote from C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 104-5.

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15, 104.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis omits a “huge and complex episode” because it is supposed to be unimportant to *Surprised by Joy*, and involves someone else (perhaps Miss Moore?) (C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 198). He also chooses to pass over a number of wartime experiences (C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 197), and other “matters as would go into a full biography” like his father’s final illness and death, his appointment at Univ, his fellowship at Magdalen, and the

significant portion of *Surprised by Joy* to that period. This is especially significant because Lewis overtly tried to draw the attention of his readers to the importance of the boyhood chapters of *Surprised by Joy*:

The book aims at telling the story of my conversion and is not a general autobiography, still less “Confessions” like those of St. Augustine or Rousseau. This means in practice that it gets less like a general autobiography as it goes on. In the earlier chapters the net has to be spread pretty wide in order that, when the explicitly spiritual crisis arrives, the reader may understand what sort of person my childhood and adolescence had made me. When the “build-up” is complete I confine myself strictly to the business and omit everything (however important by ordinary biographical standards) which seems, at this stage, irrelevant. I do not think there is much loss; I never read an autobiography in which the parts devoted to the earlier years were not far the most interesting.<sup>10</sup>

Nor should it be taken for granted, that the book's full title is: *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (emphasis mine).

In light of the complaints above, I would put forward the following hypothesis: that Lewis believed his childhood, and the way it shaped him, had as much or more to do with his conversion as apologetic arguments. To Lewis such an understanding was essential: without a grasp of “what kind of person [his] childhood and adolescence... made [him]” he did not think his readers would be able to understand why he converted at the moment of spiritual crisis (viii, *Surprised by Joy*).

In latter chapters I shall explain what I consider the nature of that development to have been (as written in *Surprised by Joy*). First, however, I would give a brief account of why Lewis

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“many men whom [Lewis loved and to whom he was] deeply in debt; G. H. Stevenson and E. F. Carrit,... the Fark... and five great Magdalen men who enlarged [his] very idea of what a learned life should be...” (C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 215-216). These last might have shed light on Lewis’s intellectual development, and their omission suggests to me that that development was not as central to his conversion and *Surprised by Joy* as some might think. Similarly, an event which many biographers believe to be central to his conversion (a nighttime conversation with Hugo Dyson and J. R. R. Tolkien which is believed to have led to Lewis’s first realization of the mythic significance of Christ and of God as the origin of Joy) is also omitted by Lewis (Alister, McGrath. *C. S. Lewis.-A Life: Eccentric Genius. Reluctant Prophet*. 146-151).

<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. Viii. (underline added for emphasis).



moved from an argument and reason based interpretation of his conversion, to a one which focuses more heavily on personal development and formation.

#### Chapter 1-C: Why the Confusion? Lewis's Shifting Emphasis from Information to Formation

The question must be asked, if this really were the kind of story which Lewis was telling in *Surprised by Joy*, why have so many scholars focused on the reasoning elements of Lewis's conversion? Furthermore, why is an illumination of *Surprised by Joy* even necessary when its story has told so many times? Simply put, most scholars have interpreted Lewis's conversion in intellectual terms because Lewis himself, for much of his career, held such an interpretation. He did not, however, maintain that view, and I posit that his understanding of his conversion had changed considerably by the time *Surprised by Joy* was written. So, to answer my second question, an illumination of *Surprised by Joy* is necessary because *Surprised by Joy* cannot be read as a confirmation of the conversion story which Lewis had hitherto told. To read the story of *Surprised by Joy* as written, it would seem almost better to approach it without prior knowledge of certain of Lewis's previous works. If that is impossible, then the best way to approach *Surprised by Joy* is with a firm understanding of how Lewis's views on reason and human formation changed over the course of his life.

Lewis's early letters confirm his reason-centric interpretation of his conversion, for he says it was "not an emotional conversion... [and] almost purely philosophical."<sup>11</sup> He also noted in at least two of his letters, that his conversion required too much knowledge of technical philosophy for it to be helpful for regular people.<sup>12</sup> Lewis's early work –such as his semi-

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<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis. "Autobiographical Note," prepared by the Macmillian Company in 1946, (The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 1.

<sup>12</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis.: Volume Two; Books, Broadcasts, and the War 1931-*

autobiographical, *The Pilgrims Regress* (1933) – also confirms that interpretation. As Lewis’s first take on the story of his conversion, *The Pilgrims Regress* focused heavily on the various philosophical positions available on the road to Christianity and their relative shortcomings. Moreover, when the main character of that tale, John, was unable to move forward, it was the personification of Reason who heroically appeared on the scene to rescue John and show him the way.<sup>13</sup> Lewis’s apologetic works might also have suggested to readers that his conversion was largely a matter of reasoning as *The Problem of Pain* (1940), the 1942-1944 radio talks that would become *Mere Christianity* (1952), and *Miracles* (1947), all paid particular attention to the intellectual viability and intrinsic reasonableness of Christianity. Indeed, even much of his earlier fiction prominently featured argumentation.<sup>14</sup>

Why then, when *Surprised by Joy* was published only a little more than ten years after those letters, did Lewis speak of Joy as “the central story of [his] life”,<sup>15</sup> and make it, not philosophical arguments, the focus of his spiritual autobiography? What about his writing or his life changed his view on the matter? The answer is that Lewis wrote *Surprised by Joy* during a period of considerable change and growth in his understanding of human persons and the world.

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1949, ed. 568 [April 12, 1943]. 575 [May 20, 1943].

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Pilgrims Regress; An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism*. Book Three IX, Book Four, Book Five IV, Book Six III, Book Nine II, V.

<sup>14</sup> “The potential for reconciliation [between reason and imagination] is there, but ... In the stories of the early and mid-1940’s statement of principle exists side by side with imaginative depiction of experienced offered by the story as story, with an element of tension between them. Lewis continues to be careful not to leave imaginative modes to themselves, without expository or dialectical devices for conveying theme” (139). Of *Perelandra* Schakel writes that no other book, save for *Till We Have Faces*, gives such an imaginative and successful rendering of a world more closely related to God than our own (140). Yet, for all this, “the heart of the book... is an extended philosophical-theological discussion...” (140). A similar pattern is elucidated in *That Hideous Strength* (with its “miny essays” 141) and *The Great Divorce* (which “talks of tasting reality... [but] does not itself offer such a taste” 147). Peter J. Schakel. Reason and Imagination in Lewis. 139-147.

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 17.

Peter Schakel argues convincingly that Lewis's literary career displays an expanding awareness of the importance of subjectivity, and a growing appreciation of the power of imagination and story for shaping and forming readers, as well as preparing them to accept truths. It is this expanding appreciation of Lewis's which I credit with shedding new light on his conversion, revealing the ways in which his experiences, and the story of his life, prepared him to accept Christ intellectually as well as spiritually.

It may seem strange to some that *Surprised by Joy* differs from other conversion accounts because of Lewis's developing understanding of imagination and reason and their relation. After all, it is often thought that his conversion resulted from his discovery of the proper relationship between truth and myth and the reconciling of his imaginative self with his rational self (to borrow the language of Peter J. Schakel). Indeed, the bringing together of truth and myth, of the rational and the imaginative, was a very important part of Lewis's conversion, and such an interpretation is not unreasonable given Lewis's own accounts. Despite this, Schakel states:

...Lewis affirmed... that an enlarged understanding of the relation of myth to Christianity played a crucial part in his conversion. That affirmation has sometimes been taken as evidence of a complete and abrupt change in attitude towards myth and the imagination and their relation to reason. The evidence supplied by his works, however, does not support this...<sup>16</sup>

Though Lewis's conversion helped expand his attitudes towards myth and imagination, he was by no means finished grappling with these issues. Indeed Lewis's understanding of these things, and of reason and truth as well, would continue to grow and change even after he wrote *Surprised by Joy*. As Schakel's book on reason and imagination states:

“...the thought of C. S. Lewis shows that a shift... occurs not at the time of his conversion but in the late 1940's or early 1950's. Prior to that... Lewis relied heavily on, or put his ultimate trust in reason... imagination becomes the more striking feature of his work from 1950's on... [with] reason and

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<sup>16</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. 108.

imagination... at last, reconciled and unified... in some of his later works, such as *Till we Have Faces* and *Letters to Malcom*...<sup>17</sup>

As I noted above, the change most important for interpreting *Surprised by Joy* would be Lewis's growing recognition of the way imagination and myth can shape their recipients and put them in the right disposition for reasoning. Schakel describes this as the power of myth to "fuse the 'knowing' of ideas central to Christian growth with the 'taste' of experienced reality necessary to give that knowledge vitality."<sup>18</sup> Before we can begin to reason we must attain the correct disposition towards the subject matter. If we cannot do this through experiencing something for ourselves, story may allow us to experience it second hand. For example, Schakel draws on this episode from *Letters to Malcom*:

After a discussion in Letter VII of the relation between petitionary prayer and determinism, Lewis creates a dramatic situation in which George (Malcom and Betty's son) is ill, perhaps seriously ill; the diagnosis awaits the result of medical tests. Letter VIII opens with a comment on the difference this situation makes: "The distance between the abstract, 'Does God hear petitionary prayers?' and the concrete, 'Will He- can He- grant our prayers for George?' is apparently infinite"...<sup>19</sup> The abstract issues discussed in Letter VII... somehow seem hollow, for the moment, in the face of an immediate, personal situation and the anxiety it causes."<sup>20</sup>

Schakel then quotes an excellent passage from *Letters to Malcom* wherein Lewis states the importance of having the right emotional disposition before addressing certain issues:

"Certainly we were talking too lightly and easily about these things... The stakes have to be raised before we take the game quite seriously. I know this is the opposite of what is often said about the necessity of keeping all emotion out of our intellectual process—"you can't think straight unless you are cool." *But then neither can you think deep if you are.*"<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. x.

<sup>18</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. 176.

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer*. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis.: A Study of Till We Have Faces*. 177.

<sup>21</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Letters to Malcom*. 66.

Lewis goes to great lengths in *Letters to Malcom* to ensure that his readers are ‘thinking deeply’, for the letters and much of their contents are contrivances. Malcom, Betty and their son George are all fictional, but we are drawn in by their fictional lives and concerns, and hearing those helps to shape us into the kind of readers who can understand and accept what Lewis is saying. Taking only Lewis’s first, and more intellectual discussion about the fulfillment of prayer, a reader might be tempted to consider the issue flippantly. When Lewis draws our attention to George and his illness however, things change. We feel concern for him, and remember our own anxious desperation when we experienced such fears ourselves. If a question like ‘does God answer petitionary prayer’, is approached without having first entered into that context, then it is not really approached at all, for the nature of the problem is not understood.

Perhaps this is why reactions to books like *Mere Christianity* tend to vary so much. For some, these arguments confirm their experience; for those who have felt the cold cruelty of evil are far more ready to acknowledge, when Lewis sets about undermining the idea that morality is only a social construction, that evil is not merely of personal, but of eternal significance- a blight on the universe. Yet such an argument is much less efficacious when the hearer has not experienced true evil, or has allowed their memory of such grow distant and far away.

If one’s experiences have not yielded such glimpses of reality, it must be left to myth and story to shape them into the kind of persons who are able to recognize and accept truth when it appears. This is what I believe Lewis sought to do with much of his fiction, for he wrote more fiction as he aged. As his appreciation of imagination and myth grew, he became more aware of the ways in which stories prepared his readers for reason, and spurred them to action.

This new found wisdom must have also shed light on his own life, for this is precisely the kind of pattern Lewis illuminates in *Surprised by Joy*: the story of how Lewis was driven and

shaped by his experiences in order that he might see and accept, first Theism, and then the truths of the Christian faith.

In the next chapter I shall discuss Sorrow and Joy, two fundamental experiences of the world which Lewis describes in *Surprised by Joy*. My argument is that these two fundamental ways of experiencing life undergirded the competing visions of the world with which Lewis struggled in *Surprised by Joy*. I mean to prove that these two experiences lay at the basis of Lewis's most fundamental beliefs, circumscribing the parameters of his thought, and producing a tension which drove his intellectual and religious development forward. They are the heart of *Surprised by Joy*; it is with them that my analysis must begin.

## Chapter Two: The Nature of Sorrow and Joy

### Chapter 2-A: Opening Words

Rather than posing detailed arguments for the reasonableness of Christianity, *Surprised by Joy* places the greatest textual emphasis on describing Lewis's most basic experiences living in the world: Sorrow and Joy. However, I cannot show how these experiences prompted Lewis to develop new beliefs, and eventually convert, without giving an account of these experiences. In doing so I hope to establish something of the nature of these experiences, and also that these experiences were deep enough and significant enough to help shape Lewis's view of the world.

### Chapter 2-B: A Reminder of Joy

Although readers of *Surprised by Joy* should already be familiar with Joy, it is important enough to my argument to warrant review. More than anything else, Joy was a feeling of incredible desire or longing.<sup>22</sup> Aside from Joy's shocking intensity, it was also mysterious in that it was directed at an unknown or obscured object. Both these qualities are evident in Lewis's first experience of Joy from *Surprised by Joy*:

"The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden (given the full, and ancient meaning to "enormous") comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. Ἰοῦλίαν ποθῶ<sup>23</sup> –and before I knew what I desired,

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis notes that the common thread between the various instances of Joy was "an unsatisfied desire which [was] itself more desirable than any other satisfaction" (17-18). Elsewhere Lewis writes of Joy as making him "...sick with desire; that sickness better than health" (119). C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>23</sup> "Ἰοῦλίαν ποθῶ / Oh, I desire too much : ?? The phrase really consists of three words and may be transcribed as *Iou, lian potho* ("Oh, / too much / I desire")." Arend Smilde. "Arend Smild's C. S. Lewis pages." <http://www.lewisiana.nl/>. 2 September, 2014. <http://www.lewisiana.nl/sbjquotes/>.

the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for that longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.”<sup>24</sup>

It is important to recognize the relatively non-intellectual character of Joy. It was not something Lewis thought, or a way Lewis thought about the world. Neither was it something Lewis did. It was an experience, something which happened to Lewis as he lived in the world. Accordingly Joy’s nature, meaning, and significance, were somewhat opaque to Lewis. Furthermore, Joy was not under Lewis’s control: it came upon him unbidden,<sup>25</sup> and he could not provoke it.<sup>26</sup>

Joy was also of broad and enduring importance throughout Lewis’s life. Though young Lewis sometimes saw Joy as only being a part of one side of his experience (like his inner life)<sup>27</sup> he actually experienced Joy in relation to a number of areas of his life: his imaginings,<sup>28</sup> the idea of Autumn,<sup>29</sup> of Northernness, Norse mythology,<sup>30</sup> music, and sex,<sup>31</sup> the far off hills as seen from the old house,<sup>32</sup> and nature as seen on walks<sup>33</sup> and the spires of Oxford,<sup>34</sup> everyday objects

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<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> We see this in the above event with the current bush. Lewis was surprised by this experience of Joy and it left him before he could understand it.

<sup>26</sup> Throughout *Surprised by Joy* Lewis depicts himself frequently attempting to provoke Joy. Lewis hoped to find Joy through studying Norse myth,(165-167) through experiencing the erotic,(171) and even through occult means,(174-178) but in the end “all such efforts were failures.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 166.

<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 118-119. 170-171.

<sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 17.

<sup>30</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 72-73.

<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 165-169.

<sup>32</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 7.

<sup>33</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 169.



like the coals in the fire grate,<sup>35</sup> etc. Not only did Lewis experience Joy in a number of areas of his life, he also continued to experience Joy as he aged. Lewis described his first experience of Joy happening when he was approximately six to eight years old.<sup>36</sup> During those years Lewis's experiences of Joy in relation to his imaginative life were of great importance: "the imaginative<sup>37</sup> experience of those years now seems to me more important than anything else."<sup>38</sup> That these experiences of Joy were still important to Lewis late in life is revealed by the fact that Lewis remembered them and felt the need to record them in *Surprised by Joy* (which was not published until 1955). Though this paper is focused on *Surprised by Joy* in particular, it may be helpful to note that Joy was an important aspect of many of his post-conversion works: some written immediately after his conversion (consider the far off isle of *The Pilgrims Regress*, 1933) and some written much later (such as the longings of Psyche in *Till We Have Faces*, 1956). Despite the reality that Joy itself was an infrequent occurrence, it was experienced by Lewis in many contexts, and continued to influence Lewis throughout his life.

Finally, despite its opaque nature, Joy revealed something about the nature of existence to Lewis, and led him to develop a number of beliefs to which he was deeply committed at different times throughout his life as depicted in *Surprised by Joy*. The most significant of these beliefs might just as well be called intuitions or gut feelings: fundamental beliefs which helped to

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<sup>34</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 184.

<sup>35</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 181.

<sup>36</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis takes care to point out that "imagination is a vague word" and that a great deal of his imaginings had nothing to do with Joy even though they were plainly imaginative (like his creation of Animal-Land). C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15.

circumscribe the world for Lewis, creating a framework in which he approached the everyday. To summarize, Joy helped Lewis to come to believe in the reality of beauty, morality, and truth, which could be discovered in the world. These beliefs are central to my interpretation of the narrative of *Surprised by Joy*, and will be addressed in more detail later.

#### Chapter 2-C: A Sketch of Sorrow

As Sorrow is never explicitly named by Lewis in *Surprised by Joy*, I will take more time to describe the experience. As stated in my first chapter, *Surprised by Joy* offers little in the way of intellectual argument, but dwells a great deal on the (largely negative) events of Lewis's early childhood so that the reader might understand the kind of man Lewis became and why he converted.

To this effect, the early chapters of *Surprised by Joy* serve to paint an incredibly detailed account of how Lewis felt about the world whilst he was young: feelings which were formed by experiences of Sorrow. One of Lewis's first experiences of Sorrow resulted from his mother's early death:

Grief in childhood is complicated with many other miseries. I was taken into the bedroom where my mother lay dead; as they said, "to see her," in reality, as I at once knew, "to see it." There was nothing that a grown-up would call disfigurement-except for that total disfigurement which is death itself. Grief was overwhelmed in terror. To this day I do not know what they mean when they call dead bodies beautiful. The ugliest man alive is an angel of beauty compared with the lovelies of the dead. Against all the subsequent paraphernalia of coffin, flowers, hearse, and funeral I reacted with horror.<sup>39</sup>

I chose, for the purpose of this thesis, to name this kind of experience *Sorrow*, because it seems a more natural counterpoint to Joy. That said, I might as well have chosen horror, as Lewis's use of the word in the above chapter does much to capture the nature of the experience.

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<sup>39</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 19-20.

Once one knows to look for it, it becomes clear that it was primarily experiences of Sorrow (not Joy) which typified his childhood.

Lewis recounts a wide range of Sorrowful experiences in the early chapters of *Surprised by Joy*, including his unhealthy relationship with his father. By Lewis's own estimation, his father never really got to know him,<sup>40</sup> partly because of the early death of Lewis's mother,<sup>41</sup> and partly because Lewis's father was impossible to communicate with.<sup>42</sup> In fact, these two causes of discord between the younger Lewis and his father, may have been the same, for it seemed that Lewis's father, a man never possessing much "talent for happiness",<sup>43</sup> was emotionally unhinged

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<sup>40</sup> However, no passage so well displays the total inability of the Lewis boys to communicate with their father as this, which I feel obliged to pass on:

"...my father ... had... more power of confusing an issue or taking up a fact wrongly than any man I have ever known. As a result it was impossible to drive into his head any of the realities of our school life, after which (nevertheless) he repeatedly inquired... having earnestly asked, he did not 'stay for the answer' or forgot it the moment it was uttered. Some facts must have been asked for and told him, on a moderate computation, once a week, and were received by him each time as perfect novelties. But this was the simplest barrier. Far more often he retained something, but something very unlike what you had said... some accidental hint had set his imagination to work, he had produced his own version of the facts, and believed he was getting it from you... his own version, once adopted, was indelible, and attempts to correct it only produced an incredulous 'Hm! Well that's not the story you used to tell.' Sometimes, indeed, he took in the facts you had stated; but the truth fared none the better for that... It was axiomatic to my father (in theory) that nothing was said or done from an obvious motive... he... applied to the behavior of people he had never seen the spectral and labyrinthine operation which he called 'reading between the lines'... he would believe till his dying day in some deadly quarrel, some slight, some secret sorrow or some immensely complex machination, which was not only improbable but impossible. Dissent on our part was attributed... to our innocence, gullibility, and general ignorance of life." (120-122)

Lewis states that he and Warren were not inclined to confide in their father (37-38, 120), and that the pattern of their home life drove Warren and Lewis further apart: "Everything invited us to develop a life that had no connection with our father" (40-41, 119). Lewis points out on a couple of occasions, how poorly his father listen to, or understood him (49, 54, 183-184). C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>41</sup> "It divided us [Lewis and his brother Warren] from our father as well as our mother... His nerves had never been of the steadiest and his emotions had always been uncontrolled. Under the pressure of anxiety his temper became incalculable; he spoke wildly and acted unjustly. Thus by a peculiar cruelty of fate, during those months the unfortunate man, had he but known it, was really losing his sons as well as his wife." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Of his father, Lewis says: "the obvious meaning of any fact or document was always suspect: the true and inner meaning, invisible to all eyes except his own, was unconsciously created by the restless fertility of his imagination... he was a man not easily informed. His mind was too active to be an accurate receiver. What he thought he had heard was never exactly what you said." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 30.

<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 3.

by the death of his wife.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Lewis Sr. had moods which fluctuated violently<sup>45</sup> and gave guilt laden rants which would leave Lewis terrified,<sup>46</sup> so much so that he would lie awake at night for fear that his father would take his brother and leave while he slept.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Lewis Sr. instilled in Lewis the firm impression that adult life consisted of little more than misery, work, and the constant threat of financial ruin.<sup>48</sup>

Yet Lewis goes well beyond his relationship with his father to elaborate on his experiences of Sorrow. Lewis writes that he had lost all stability at the death of his mother: “with my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life. There was to be... no more of the old security. It was sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis.”<sup>49</sup> Despite this, Lewis was sent, just two weeks after her death, to a Dickensian boarding school (called Oldies in *Surprised by Joy*)<sup>50</sup> complete with a headmaster who was literally insane<sup>51</sup> and who never failed to dole out brutal and arbitrary

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<sup>44</sup> “My father never fully recovered from this loss” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 18.

<sup>45</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 19.

<sup>46</sup> “...A worse treatment could hardly have been applied. Up to a certain age these invectives filled me with boundless terror and dismay.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 38-39.

<sup>47</sup> “... It is significant that at this time if I woke in the night and did not immediately hear my brother’s breathing from the neighboring bed, I often suspected that my father and he had secretly risen while I slept and gone off to America—that I was finally abandoned.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 39.

<sup>48</sup> “I had heard ever since I could remember, and believed, that adult life was to be an unremitting struggle in which the best I could hope for was to avoid the workhouse by extreme exertion. My father’s highly colored statements on such matters had sunk deeply into my mind... I remember summing up what I took to be our destiny... ‘Term, holidays, term, holiday, till we leave school, and then work, work, work till we die.’” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 64-65. Lewis also describes his father speaking in such a way on page 23 and 39. The young Lewis of the novel automatically accepts this as true.

<sup>49</sup> (21). Lewis also states “Everything that made our house a home had failed us” (19). C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, to get an idea of Lewis’s feelings about the place, one need only consider the title to his chapter on Oldies: “Concentration Camp.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 22.

<sup>51</sup> McGrath confirms what Lewis never knew for certain, that the man was indeed institutionalized shortly

beatings.<sup>52</sup>

In his youth, we find (at least until the preparatory school called Chartres) a Lewis who considered himself to be a Christian, but for whom religion was an almost unbearable burden. For example, he compulsively practiced anxiety-ridden and doubt-fuelled prayers which kept him up late into the night, and which caused him such unhappiness that anticipating them made his evenings miserable.<sup>53</sup>

Nor did things seem to get better for Lewis as he got older. At (so called) Wyvern College, Lewis struggled under the yolk of systematized bullying, to the extent that existence became a burden to him during the days when “consciousness itself was becoming the supreme evil; sleep, the prime good.”<sup>54</sup>

These experiences coloured young Lewis’s understanding of the universe, leaving him with the belief that there was something fundamentally wrong with it, that it was deeply hostile,<sup>55</sup> and that it resisted any attempts to make good of it.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the “long, detailed, intense accounts of ‘bloodery’ and pederasty”<sup>57</sup> of chapters six and seven were not included to

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after the closure of his school. Alister, McGrath. *C. S. Lewis. -A Life: Eccentric Genius. Reluctant Prophet.* 27.

<sup>52</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 27.

<sup>53</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 61-62.

<sup>54</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 100. On the same page, this chapter concludes with the words “if only sleep could last forever.”

<sup>55</sup> Pages 63-65 describe some of this understanding, and includes the passage: “...my earliest reading... had lodged very firmly in my imagination the vastness and cold of space, the littleness of man. It is not strange that I should feel the universe to be a menacing and unfriendly place.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 63-65.

<sup>56</sup> “...I had very definitely formed the opinion that the universe was, in the main, a rather regrettable institution... I believe that the clumsiness of my hands was at the root of the matter... What they really bred in me was a deep (and of course, inarticulate) sense of resistance or opposition on the part of inanimate things.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 63-64.

<sup>57</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy.* 157.

Also, for clarity, it should be noted that Lewis’s descriptions of bloodery and pederasty are quite different. Bloodery is one of the prime subjects of chapter’s six to eight. It is referred to purely in negative terms,

illuminate Lewis's priggery, but to shed light on his experiences of Sorrow and the beliefs which they inspired. These may not have "advance[d] his narrative of the pursuit of Joy", but, as you shall see in the following chapter, they are central to the most important narrative of *Surprised by Joy*: how Lewis came to convert to Christianity.

Furthermore, the fact that Lewis's portrayal of the school was not historically or objectively accurate,<sup>58</sup> should not undermine the argument I am going to make. Rather, it should confirm it. As the preface to *Surprised by Joy* states, this book is not meant to give a biographical account of Lewis's life. Rather, it is meant to give us an idea of the kind of man Lewis became, and the way he experienced the world, in order that we might understand how he was shaped into the man his readers love and admire- the C. S. Lewis who accepted Christianity. We may perhaps be charitable then, if Lewis depicted his childhood as he experienced it, rather than as it actually was.

It should be noted that Sorrow shared a number of characteristics with Joy. Like Joy, Sorrow hit Lewis at a deeper level than that of conscious reflection. If anything, Lewis seemed less conscious of his experiences of Sorrow than of Joy. Consequently, whereas Lewis fixated on Joy and overemphasized the subjective element of that experience (seeking to generate experiences of Joy by the efforts of his own mind), Lewis typically seemed unaware that there was any subjective element to his experiences of Sorrow and quickly associated it with the 'real'

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and Lewis goes to some lengths to point out the negative effects this bullying had on him. On the other hand, pederasty (in this case, homosexual acts consensually committed between students of disparate ages), was mentioned only incidentally, and not wholly critically: "...pederasty, however great an evil in itself, was, the only foothold or cranny left for certain good things... in his unnatural love affairs, and perhaps only there, the Blood went a little out of himself, forgot for a few hours that he was One of the Most Important People There Are." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 109.

<sup>58</sup> "The story is, I fear, suffocating subjective; the kind of thing I have never written before and shall probably never write again." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. viii.

nature of the world. Though different in this regard, both these differences stem from the impenetrability of Sorrow and Joy, which made their nature and character so difficult to discern. Similarly to Joy, Lewis was also unable to control his experiences of Sorrow. As Joy could not be provoked, Sorrow could not be avoided, and came upon Lewis when it would.

Like Joy, Lewis experienced Sorrow over the course of his lifetime and throughout the different areas of his life. I have already mentioned the significance of Lewis's early loss of his mother. Indeed that event, and its effect on Lewis, is my prime example of the experience of Sorrow. Whereas experiences of Joy were typified by a deep longing and desire, Sorrow was typified by horror, and a desire to draw back. Though the death of his mother was a defining moment for Lewis in terms of experiencing Sorrow, we might posit that experiences of Sorrow already appeared in Lewis's earliest memories: "I [Lewis] remember nothing earlier than the terror of certain dreams... window[s] opening on what is hardly less than hell."<sup>59</sup> The prominence of Sorrow in Lewis's early life can be seen by the great attention it garnered from him in *Surprised by Joy*, and Lewis did not forget Sorrow after his conversion. Indeed, Lewis's earliest Christian works display references to it. In *The Pilgrims Regress* it can be seen in the mindset of those who gravitated to the North, choosing to be hard and to face the cruel reality of the world rather than hiding behind illusions.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, *The Problem of Pain* dedicates a number of pages to expressing the way Sorrow had led Lewis to look at the universe.<sup>61</sup> These issues and others relating to Sorrow are re-examined by Lewis in parallel works later in his career: *Surprised by Joy* and *A Grief Observed*, respectively. Not only did Lewis experience and

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<sup>59</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 8.

<sup>60</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Pilgrims Regress; An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism*. Book Six.

<sup>61</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. 1-3.

contemplate Sorrow throughout his lifetime, he also experienced Sorrow in a number of areas: his religious life, his relationships, his tedious schoolboy days, and his nightmares.<sup>62</sup> Thus, I can confidently declare that Sorrow was part of Lewis's experience of the world throughout his whole life.

Finally, like Joy, Sorrow led Lewis to form new beliefs, including the belief that there was something deeply unjust, arbitrary and wrong with the world. I believe Lewis's experiences of Joy and Sorrow, and the beliefs they helped to form in him, helped to promote productive tensions in Lewis's thought, the overcoming of which, led Lewis to conversion. Not all the beliefs which sprang from these experiences survived Lewis's progression towards Christian conversion, but these first foundational beliefs did, finally being reconciled by Lewis in Christianity: a religion and worldview which can acknowledge both the deep wrongness of existence, as well as the real presence of genuine goodness, truth and beauty.

My overall task is to establish that Sorrow and Joy led to Lewis's conversion. To do so I needed to describe Sorrow and Joy, and establish their depth and significance for Lewis, so that it might seem probable that they would shape Lewis's experience of the world and form the core of *Surprised by Joy*.

In order to make this argument, I established that these experiences happened to Lewis, coming upon him unbidden from the world, or at least as the result of his living in the world. I also established that these two experiences of the world were of great import throughout the various areas and stages of Lewis's life. Lastly, and most importantly, I established that these two experiences, despite their opacity, still seemed to reveal something about the world to Lewis,

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<sup>62</sup> See above sections and his footnotes on his religious life, his relationships, his schoolboy days, and his nightmares.



and led to his developing new beliefs. How this was so, and how these beliefs led to Lewis's conversion, is the focus of my next chapter.

## Chapter Three: An Account of the Narrative of *Surprised by Joy*

### Chapter 3-A: Opening Words

In this chapter I will demonstrate that the narrative of *Surprised by Joy* is of Lewis's struggle to find holistic, consistency and cohesion between the following: his most fundamental experiences of the world, his gut level beliefs or intuitions about the character of the world, his likes and dislikes, his theoretical conceptions of the world, and his manner of living in the world. To make the analysis easier to follow, I have spilt it into seven sections (B-H), each of which corresponds roughly with a distinct period of Lewis's life, as portrayed in *Surprised by Joy*, and with no more than one or two major developments in Lewis's struggle to find consistency.

### Chapter 3-B: Life before Kirkpatrick

I noted earlier that Lewis considered the early parts of his life to be the most important for understanding his conversion, and it is not hard to see why: this chapter of his life lays the foundation for all that is to follow in Lewis's development, and provides us with the basic elements which would comprise his view of the world.

It is during this period that Lewis first experienced Joy, typically evoked by nature or mythology, and characterised by powerful longing. Yet Joy was not the only deep and powerful experience Lewis would have during his youth; nor was it the most prominent.

Indeed, Lewis's account of his childhood in *Surprised by Joy* is largely tragic and he goes to great lengths to establish his primary experience of the world: Sorrow. While Lewis's experiences of Joy did not seem to manifest themselves in any beliefs, Lewis's experiences of Sorrow did. As the result of experiences of Sorrow, Lewis developed a deep-seated belief that

there was something fundamentally wrong with the world, that the vast universe was largely hostile,<sup>63</sup> and that it resisted any attempts to make good of it.<sup>64</sup>

This stern impression of the world, combined with religious teachings which emphasized the wrath of God and the perils of hell, bestowed upon Lewis an incredibly negative impression of the Christian religion. Lewis hated the “Transcendental Interferer”<sup>65</sup> who had created so awful a universe, and his experiences of Sorrow made him feel “outrage[d] that [he] had been created without [his] own permission.”<sup>66</sup> That God had created such a horrible universe, and threatened to extend the Sorrow of this life everlastingly in hell, was no doubt why Lewis's faith at Oldie's had contained “a good deal of fear...,”<sup>67</sup> particularly fear of Hell.<sup>68</sup> Even some time later, under Kirkpatrick's tutelage, Lewis recalled that he “...was anxious that those full-moonlit nights in the dormitory would never come again.”<sup>69</sup>

This understanding of religion laid the foundation for important parts of *Surprised by Joy*. For one thing, it would be a barrier to Lewis's conversions from Absolute Idealism to Theism,

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<sup>63</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 15, 19-20, 63-65, 115, 172.

<sup>64</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 63-64.

<sup>65</sup> “No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word *Interference*. [and] Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a Transcendental Interferer” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 172.

<sup>66</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

<sup>67</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

<sup>68</sup> “There [at Oldie's] first I became an effective believer... What really mattered was that I here heard the doctrines of Christianity... taught by men who obviously believed them... In this experience there was a great deal of fear. I do not think there was more than was wholesome or even necessary; but if in my books I have spoken too much of Hell, and if critics want a historical explanation of the fact, they must seek it not in the supposed Puritanism of my Ulster childhood but in the Anglo-Catholicism of the church at Belsen. I feared for my soul...” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 33-34

<sup>69</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

and from Theism to Christianity. It may even have contributed to Lewis's reticence before accepting Absolute Idealism and rejecting his previous materialism.

However, it had a more important and problematic effect on Lewis because it helped lead to his abandonment of his childhood Christianity, his adoption of atheism, and his acceptance of a purely material universe. Lewis abandoned Christianity and accepted a kind of Lucretian therapeutic philosophy and materialism sometime after his thirteenth birthday.<sup>70</sup> These new beliefs would result in significant tensions for Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* as they would clash and contradict the other beliefs Lewis would develop based on his experiences of Joy. We can see that Lewis's acceptance of this philosophical and religious position was informed by Sorrow in two different ways.

Firstly, this conversion was informed by Sorrow through Lewis's negative experience of Christianity. Certainly Lewis must have been attracted to Lucretius, as atheism would free him from the terrible and taxing form of Christianity which he was then practising.<sup>71</sup> Long tormented by the threat of hell, young Lewis found the materialist universe greatly comforting, for it

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis had more or less accepted the argument from undesign *before* ever reading Lucretius (65). Furthermore, this sentiment was not the only thing which undermined his faith. Lewis was also shaken by his exposure to other religious traditions, such as the occult leanings of one of his early teachers, (59-60) and the paganism of Virgil (62). Lewis was left to wonder why he should think one religion true and not these others (62-63). Yet, Lewis only speaks of losing his faith at Chartres, and only says he was an atheist in hindsight, after he had gone to Kirkpatrick in Bookham: "the reader will remember that my own Atheism and Pessimism were fully formed before I went to Bookham (139-140). As such, sometime between his thirteenth year (when Lewis went to Chartres, 56) and going to Bookham, young Lewis (at least as he is portrayed in *Surprised by Joy*) passed from Christianity to agnosticism to atheism.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, of his loss of Christianity, Lewis states that he was "desperately anxious to get rid of [his] religion.": "...I had rendered my private practice of that religion an intolerable burden... I had been told as a child that one must not only say one's prayers but think about what one is saying. Accordingly, when (at Oldie's) I came to a serious belief, I tried to put this into practice. At first it seemed plain sailing. But soon the false conscience... came into play... 'Are you sure you were really thinking about what you said?'... The answer, for reasons I did not then understand, was nearly always No. 'Very well... hadn't you, then, better try it over again?'... night after night, dizzy with desire for sleep and often in a kind of despair... This was the burden from which I longed with soul and body to escape..." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 61-62.

assured him that “No strictly infinite disaster could overtake [him]...” as “suicide would always be possible” as a means of “escape.”<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, Lewis was also won over by Lucretius because the latter's writings fit perfectly with Lewis’s experiences of Sorrow. After all, Lucretius’s “argument from undesign”<sup>73</sup> expressed that God would not have created so flawed a universe, and Lewis had experienced that flawed universe first hand.<sup>74</sup>

### Chapter 3-C: Time with Kirkpatrick

It is during this time that Lewis developed a dualistic way of looking at the world which would form a barrier on his path towards a holistically consistent way of experiencing, interpreting, and living in it. The seeds of this duality were planted earlier, when Lewis studied at public school, as Lewis perceived a stark contrast between his miserable everyday life at school and the moments of myth fueled Joy which punctuated it. This resulted in a “duality” of experience which made his life at that time “difficult to narrate.”<sup>75</sup> During this period Lewis

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<sup>72</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

<sup>73</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 65, 172.

<sup>74</sup> *Loki Bound*, a work Lewis wrote while at Wyvern, provides some interesting insight into Lewis’s mindset at the end of that period. The basic shape of the story is this: “...Loki was not merely malicious. He was against Odin because Odin had created a world though Loki had clearly warned him that this was a wanton cruelty. Why should creatures have the burden of existence forced on them without their consent?” Clearly Loki manifested Lewis’s personal pessimism: “like so many Atheists or Antitheists... I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world... Loki was a projection of myself; he voiced that sense of priggish superiority whereby I was, unfortunately, beginning to compensate myself for my unhappiness.” Odin seemed to represent the God of Lewis’s imagination who had erred in creating, although “Thor was the real villain” whom Lewis later came to see “was, in fact, the symbol of the Bloods.” The connection between the story and Lewis’s minds is clear: he was unhappy because of the bloods, but the ultimate source of that unhappiness was the flawed nature of existence itself. C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 115

<sup>75</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 118.

describes himself as living “two lives” which were completely separated like “oil and vinegar, a river running beside a canal, [or] Jekyll and Hyde.”<sup>76</sup>

This duality seems to have begun with young Lewis’s association of experiences of Sorrow and Joy with his outer and inner lives, respectively;<sup>77</sup> and perhaps this is only natural. After all, it was in Lewis’s day-to-day life at school that he encountered the experiences of Sorrow associated with bullies, fagging, and games. On the other hand, it was in books and his imagination that Lewis typically found solace, and occasionally Joy.

Yet, if Lewis had been able to reflect back on his earlier life, he might have observed that this association was ultimately a false one, for he had had both very ‘external’ experiences of Joy (like Joy inspired by the countryside or nature) as well as very ‘subjective’ or ‘internal’ experiences of Sorrow (like his fearful religious experiences and prayers).<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, this dualistic way of looking at the world would be reinforced and expanded by Lewis’s time with Kirkpatrick. Lewis says that “if ever a man came close to being a purely logical entity, that man was Kirk. Born a little later, he would have been a Logical Positivist.”<sup>79</sup> Lewis was tutored by Kirkpatrick after leaving Wyvern school. Upon arriving at the train station and meeting Kirkpatrick, Lewis mentioned that the landscape of Surrey was ‘wilder’ than he had expected. Kirkpatrick then did two things: first, he questioned Lewis about his terms until it became clear to Lewis that “I [Lewis] had no clear and distinct idea corresponding to the

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<sup>76</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 119.

<sup>77</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 118-119.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis also had developed a certain distrust of emotion and sentiment as the result of his father’s emotional instability and inconstancy, (3-4) a feeling reinforced after the death of Oldies wife (33). While this might have confirmed Lewis’s suspicion and distrust of ‘the imaginative’, it also shows us another example of the inconsistency of young Lewis’s dualism at that time, for, unlike Joy, that imaginative/subjective/emotional experience was deeply negative. C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>79</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 135.

word 'wildness.'<sup>80</sup> Second, Kirkpatrick questioned Lewis about where he had gotten the idea that Surry would not be wild; and, when Lewis could not offer hard evidence in favour of that earlier belief, pronounced ““Do you not see, then, that you had no right to have any opinion whatever on the subject?”<sup>81</sup>

Lewis notes that Kirkpatrick never mocked or berated religion in his presence,<sup>82</sup> and I can fathom no reason why we should doubt Lewis's account. Kirkpatrick was an atheist,<sup>83</sup> and Lewis knew it (how could he not when he was boarding with the Kirkpatricks<sup>84</sup>) but there is no reason to suspect that this would have any special effect on Lewis. Indeed, the damage done to Lewis's faith and perception of the world by Kirkpatrick has nothing to do with his atheism. Rather, it had to do with what Lewis called Kirkpatrick's 'Logical Positivism'.<sup>85</sup>

Here we see that, under Kirkpatrick's tutelage, Lewis is entertained by two kinds of conversation only (“the only two kinds of talk I wanted were the purely imaginative and the almost purely rational”<sup>86</sup>), and it’s clear which Kirkpatrick considered to be “really about something.”<sup>87</sup> Though it may not have been Kirkpatrick's intention, I believe it was Lewis's

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<sup>80</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 134.

<sup>81</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 135.

<sup>82</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 140.

<sup>83</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 139.

<sup>84</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 135.

<sup>85</sup> This is how I understand Lewis when he states: “...my own Atheism and Pessimism were fully formed before I went to Bookham. What I got there was merely fresh ammunition for the defense of a position already chosen. Even this I got indirectly from the tone of his mind or independently from reading his books.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 140. (underline added for emphasis)

<sup>86</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 136.

<sup>87</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 137.

studies with him which solidified that duality which was already developing in Lewis: Sorrow, and the harshness of Lewis's 'outer world' was being tied to the realms of truth and reason, whilst Joy, and the beauty of Lewis's inner world was being dispelled as false. Can any other result have been expected? After all, Lewis says that “the idea that human beings would exercise their vocal organs for any other purpose except that of communicating or discovering truth was to [Kirkpatrick] preposterous”<sup>88</sup>. Yet how could Joy, something which is, by its very nature, ungraspable,<sup>89</sup> ever be expressed in the clear and distinct manner which Kirkpatrick would acknowledge as meaningful?<sup>90</sup> Thus, there seems to be the beginning of a dualism in Lewis between his external, supposedly objective, and rational life on the one hand (associated by Lewis with Sorrow, for I do not think it a coincidence that Kirkpatrick was also a great fan of that famous pessimist Schopenhauer<sup>91</sup>), and, on the other, his internal, supposedly subjective, and imaginative life (associated by Lewis with Joy). This is the very confusion which Lewis describes in *The Screwtape Letters*; the person believes they are making a distinction between subjective and objective truths, but is really only distinguishing between pessimistic and optimistic interpretations of reality with the assumption that the pessimistic must be more real simply because it is less appealing.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, when Lewis later discovered that the reading of myths was less often giving rise to

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<sup>88</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 136.

<sup>89</sup> Because the object of Joy is that which cannot be possessed, and Joy itself is the wanting, “the very nature of Joy makes nonsense of our common distinctions between wanting and having... to want is to have.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 166.

<sup>90</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 167-169.

<sup>91</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis; Family Letters 1905-1931*. 151 [November 15, 1915].

<sup>92</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*. 108. 1961. Touchstone. New York, NY.



Joy, he made a fatal error: “...I ought to have drawn the conclusion that the Object [of Joy], the Desirable, was further away, more external, and less subjective, than even such an external and public thing as a system of mythology- had, in fact, only shone through that system.”<sup>93</sup> Instead, having already presumed Joy and its object to be less real than Sorrow and its object, Lewis supposed that Joy had no real or fixed object at all and was simply a state of his own mind “which might arise in any context.”<sup>94</sup> Believing Joy to be nothing other than a state of his own consciousness, Lewis tried a number of activities in the hopes of experiencing it (which are roughly the topic of his eleventh chapter in *Surprised by Joy*).

Firstly, Lewis tried to give rise to Joy<sup>95</sup> by immersing himself in the scholarly study of Norse Myth<sup>96</sup> and by examining his own mind for the presence of Joy “while reading every poem, going for every walk, [and] hearing every piece of music.”<sup>97</sup> Rather than helping Lewis to grasp Joy, this process often thwarted and prevented his experiencing of Joy, which only arose when he was focused on the object evoking Joy and not the state of his own mind.<sup>98</sup> Secondly, Lewis turned to the erotic to see if it might give rise to Joy, but found that, in sex, he had

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<sup>93</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 168-169.

<sup>94</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 169.

<sup>95</sup> In all fairness to the admirable Kirkpatrick, he was neither the first, nor the chief source of Lewis' spiritual problems—he only reinforced problematic tendencies in Lewis' character. As Lewis notes here, this particular tendency—to focus on the subjective elements in experience—was present in his childhood experience of religion: “You will remember how, as a schoolboy, I had destroyed my religious life by a vicious subjectivism which made 'realizations' the aim of prayer; turning away from God to seek states of mind, and trying to produce those states of mind by 'mastery.' With unbelievable folly I now proceeded to make exactly the same blunder in my imaginative life; or rather, the same pair of blunders. The first was made at the very moment that I formulated the complaint that the 'old thrill' was becoming rarer and rarer. For by this complaint I smuggled in the assumption that what I wanted was a 'thrill,' a state of my own mind... And the second error is, having thus falsely made a state of mind your aim, to attempt to produce it.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 168.

<sup>96</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 165-167.

<sup>97</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 169.

<sup>98</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 169. 218-219.

“...wandered from the real point...”<sup>99</sup> Lastly, he tried to experience Joy by studying the Occult.<sup>100</sup>

All these errors were engendered because Lewis had somehow reached a place where...

“...the two hemisphere's 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... I could almost have said with Santayana, “All that is good is imaginary; all that is real is evil.”

Yet we cannot fault, or think too badly of Kirkpatrick for these wanderings by Lewis, for these developments were partially the result of something very positive which Lewis was taught by Kirkpatrick: the virtue of consistency.<sup>101</sup> Nor do I think Lewis meant us to interpret it as merely intellectual consistency. Indeed, Lewis’s recollections show how Kirkpatrick took his pseudo ‘logical positivism’<sup>102</sup> well beyond its intellectual consequences, and let it shape his whole approach to living in the world. If it were only an intellectual approach, Lewis says, he “might have resented it. But he [Kirkpatrick] knew no other way of talking. No age or sex was spared the elenchus”<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Kirkpatrick was committed enough to that way of thinking and living, that it got him into arguments with his neighbors, his wife’s friends, and even other professors.<sup>104</sup> Kirkpatrick desired to say what he meant, and for what he meant to be based on

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<sup>99</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

<sup>100</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 174-178.

<sup>101</sup> “...I had learned something from Kirk about the honour of the intellect and the shame of voluntary inconsistency” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 173.

<sup>102</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 135.

<sup>103</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 137.

<sup>104</sup> On one such occasion Kirkpatrick was heard to exclaim: ““Good heavens! I have no *opinions* on any subject whatsoever.”” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 137-139.

verifiable evidence, and assumed others meant their comments to be taken the same way, whether they were speaking academically or not.<sup>105</sup>

Lewis had taken up the materialist position, at least in part, to escape the burden of his childhood religion.<sup>106</sup> The belief that the world was meaningless fit well with some of Lewis's experiences of the world, particularly his experiences of Sorrow. However, this worldview clashed with and seriously relativized Lewis's experiences of Joy. Kirkpatrick's emphasis on consistency (and his example as an atheist and philosopher who lived consistently with his beliefs) prompted Lewis to try to live in a manner consistent with his own beliefs.<sup>107</sup> This, in turn, brought the inconsistency between Lewis's beliefs and experience to the fore, including his fruitless attempts to experience Joy through activities.

Indeed, the unsatisfactory nature of this arrangement was already creating tension in Lewis, causing him to “try to have it both ways: to get the comforts of both a materialist and of a spiritualist philosophy without the rigours of either.”<sup>108</sup> This tension was only to be aggravated by Lewis's exposure to *Phantastes, a faerie Romance*, by George MacDonald.

#### Chapter 3-D: *Phantastes* by George McDonald

Previously, Lewis had always interpreted Joy as an addition to reality made by his

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<sup>105</sup> Kirkpatrick was constantly astonished that others did not want to be corrected. C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Lewis notes that working with Kirk encouraged this understanding (and reinforced his atheism), saying: “as Kirk's rationalism taught me to see it... [the universe] might be grim and deadly but at least it was free of the Christian God.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 171.

<sup>107</sup> “The materialist universe had one great, negative attraction to offer me. It had no other. And this had to be accepted; one had to look out on a meaningless dance of atoms... to realize that all the apparent beauty was a subjective phosphorescence, and to relegate everything one valued to the world of mirage. That price I tried loyally to pay. For I had learned something from Kirk about the honour of the intellect and the shame of voluntary inconsistency.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 172-173.

<sup>108</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 178.

subjective self during experience—which is why Lewis sought the origin of Joy in his own mind, rather than the object of his Joyful desire. Yet, the Holiness which Lewis encountered when he read George MacDonald’s novel *Phantastes* for the first time reversed that relationship and changed Lewis’s conception of the world ever after. To Lewis, Joy would no longer appear to be his subjective addition to experience. Instead Joy revealed itself to be something too close and fundamental to existence for his subjective self to easily grasp:

“It was as though the voice which had called me at the world’s end was now speaking at my side. If it had once eluded me by its distance, it now eluded me by proximity—something too near to see, too plain to be understood, on this side of knowledge.”<sup>109</sup>

In his chapter on the Great War, *Guns and Good Company*, Lewis describes how he felt after being hit by the bomb which injured him and had him removed from the front. Lewis described the feeling of being taken out of himself, where he simply observed without interference from “the subjective self of reflection.”<sup>110</sup> For whatever reason, something similar seemed to have happened here. Lewis suddenly felt that his subjective self was not conjuring Joy and adding it onto dead matter. Rather, Lewis felt that his subjective self was actually getting in the way of experiencing the Joy that was already present in even the humblest aspects of existence:

“Now for the first time I felt that it [Joy] was out of reach not because of something I could not do, but because of something I could not stop doing. If I could only leave off, let go, unmake myself, it would be there... gradually, with a swelling continuity (like the sun at mid-morning burning through a fog) I found the light shining on the woods and cottages, and then on my own past life, and on the quiet room where I sat and on my old teacher... it had had no... disenchanting power over the bread upon the table or the coals in the grate... Up till now each visitation of Joy had left the world momentarily a desert... Even when real clouds or trees had been the material of the vision, they had been only so by reminding me of another world; and I did not like the return to ours. But now I saw the bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged. Or, more accurately, I saw common things drawn into that bright shadow.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 180. (underline added for emphasis)

<sup>110</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 182.

<sup>111</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 180-181.

This work did something for Lewis which the previous experiences of Joy had failed to do—it revealed that Joy could alight upon, not just the objects of myth, but the everyday realities of “the bread upon the table or the coals in the grate.”<sup>112</sup>

In the first, it tied Joy to the everyday and made it harder for Lewis to dismiss as merely subjective. The deep wrongness which Lewis experienced in his everyday living had been the justification for his materialistic and atheistic interpretation of the universe. After all, if the universe were nothing but “the random dance of atoms”,<sup>113</sup> it ought to appear arbitrary and wrong. Yet now he could no longer claim that his experience was not giving rise to moments of real and objective beauty, goodness and Joy. Thus, if Lewis was already “beginning to try to have it both ways: to get the comforts of both a materialist and of a spiritualist philosophy without the rigours of either”<sup>114</sup> this development was not going to help.

One result of the revelation of Joy in the real everyday experience of Lewis's life was his sudden appreciation of more positive and energetic interpretations of the universe. It is no coincidence that now, after having seen Joy in the everyday, Bergson is able to teach Lewis “to relish energy, fertility and urgency; the resource, the triumphs, and even the insolence, of things that grow.”<sup>115</sup> And this is not the only work to so affect Lewis in this post war period: “I became capable of appreciating artists who would, I believe, have meant nothing to me before; all the resonant, dogmatic, flaming, unanswerable people like Beethoven, Titian (in his mythological

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<sup>112</sup>C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 181.

<sup>113</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 172.

<sup>114</sup>C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 178.

<sup>115</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 198.

pictures), Goethe, Dunbar, Pindar, Christopher Wren, and the more exultant Psalms.”<sup>116</sup> So too, did Arthur and A. K. Hamilton Jenkins<sup>117</sup> reinforce Lewis's new perspective on the world by their ability to find wonder in the regular world. It was this change in perspectives which I believe Lewis referred to, when he stated that his ‘imagination was baptised’<sup>118</sup> by the reading of *Phantastes*.

If the first effect of *Phantastes* was to make Joy appear just as objective as Sorrow in everyday experience, the second effect was to settle, once and for all, that the intense desire of Joy was emphatically not for those objects which help to evoke it or happened to accompany Joy’s arrival (as Lewis had become confused about the Nordic myths earlier in Chapter 9). This was true even in spite of, or perhaps because of, the close relation between *Phantastes* and that which it evoked:

“There was no temptation to confuse the scenes of the tale with the light that rested upon them... Yet, at the same time, never had the wind of Joy blowing through any story been less separable from the story itself. Where the god and the *idolon* were most nearly one there was least danger of confounding them. Thus, when the great moments came I did not seek to break away from the woods and corteges that I read of to seek some bodiless light shining beyond them, but gradually, with a swelling continuity... I saw the bright shadow coming out of the book and into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged.”<sup>119</sup>

Lewis saw that the light was closer to the everyday than anything else, and yet it was not the everyday. Thus, he no longer believed that Joy could be found in the objects which helped to evoke it. In fact, Lewis later realized that he had already proven this to be true, by “process of

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<sup>116</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 198.

<sup>117</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 199.

<sup>118</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 181.

<sup>119</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 180-181.

elimination.”<sup>120</sup>

These two developments would each have consequences further on. The first and most significant was that this new Joy-based belief in the reality of goodness and beauty was not consistent with his belief in materialism (stemming from Sorrow) and would be the object of Owen Barfield’s expert attacks to be examined in Chapter 3-F.

Secondly, the reality that Joy was not a state of Lewis’s mind, and yet was not likely to be originating from the everyday objects around him (like the coals in the grate) posed a question to Lewis which his theoretical understanding was not able to answer: “what is the object of Joyous desire?”

#### Chapter 3-E: Lewis and the Great War

The scope of this paper is limited to the greater illumination and articulation of the story of *Surprised by Joy*. As such, I tend to take the greatest care examining those areas to which Lewis devoted the greatest areas of attention. Yet, of all the areas which Lewis chose to pass over or ignore, Lewis’s WWI experience seem the most unusual. Ought not the brutality of the environment to have affected or entrenched Lewis’s experience and interpretation of Sorrow, or encouraged his dualistic understanding of the world? Certainly there are materials from outside of *Surprised by Joy* that suggest that this is so, such as the letter where Lewis wrote the equation “matter=evil=satan.”<sup>121</sup>

If this was the case, why did Lewis discuss his WWI experiences so briefly? The likely

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<sup>120</sup> “Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the value lay in that of which Joy was desiring. And that object, quite clearly, was no state of my own mind or body at all. In a way I had proved this by elimination. I had tried everything in my own mind and body; as it were, asking myself, ‘Is it this you want? Is it this?’... Inexorably Joy proclaimed, ‘You want—I myself am your want of — something other, outside, not you nor any state of you.’” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 220-221.

<sup>121</sup> Written in a letter to Arthur Greeves. C. S. Lewis. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis; Family Letters 1905-1931*. 271 [May 23, 1918].

reason is that many of the memories from this period were probably quite hard to relive for Lewis. What little documentation we have of Lewis's WWI experiences suggest that they were much harsher than he might have had us believe, and the extreme paucity of material about that time from Lewis personally is itself suggestive, as he was a man who chronicled parts of his life quite thoroughly through journals and letters.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, the scarcity of information from this period makes it difficult to comment upon, and for whatever reason, the material left outside of *Surprised by Joy* is beyond the scope of this paper, except as a point of interest.

At the very least, in light of Lewis's typical reticence to discuss the war, we may now look upon Lewis's wartime chapter "Guns and Good Company" in a new light: as a relatively large account of his experiences in WWI. Indeed, though small, it is the largest account of his war experience which Lewis will ever give us. Thus, even if Lewis labels this time in his life, and chapter, as somewhat unimportant,<sup>123</sup> it must have some significance to the narrative of *Surprised by Joy*.

One of the most striking parts of Lewis's recollections about the war was his sudden friendship with a fellow soldier: Johnson. Lewis was drawn intuitively to Johnson, who at once revealed to Lewis that he possessed a gift for dialectic, a love for poetry, and an interest in theism.<sup>124</sup> Most of all, Johnson had the "alarming", but apparently unconscious, conviction that

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<sup>122</sup> K. J. Gilchrist's *A Morning After War; C. S. Lewis & WWI* is an excellent study in this regard, but he presents more evidence (to the effect that Lewis's war experience was worse than might be supposed by reading *Surprised by Joy*) than I could summarize here.

<sup>123</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 196.

<sup>124</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 192.



one ought to be moral, or virtuous: “It crossed my mind for the first time since my apostasy that the severer virtues might have some relevance for one’s own life.”<sup>125</sup>

More surprisingly for Lewis, he found himself instinctively attracted to Johnson’s morality and desired to imitate it<sup>126</sup> just as he had been instinctively drawn to, and enjoyed, G. K. Chesterton’s goodness as revealed through his writing.<sup>127</sup> The origin of this attraction for Lewis is unclear (Lewis himself chalks it up to an innate liking for goodness).<sup>128</sup> Whatever the reason, this was strange. Certainly an appreciation for goodness was not inconsistent with Lewis’s materialistic philosophy, but neither was it encouraged by it.

The attraction Lewis felt towards Johnson foreshadowed later developments in Lewis. For one thing, Lewis’s automatic liking of Johnson (a moral man who lived his beliefs) foreshadowed Lewis’s later desire to live in line with his philosophy and have it change him morally (Chapter 3-F), and harkened back to the respect Lewis had for Kirkpatrick’s holistic consistency (Chapter 3-C).

It also foreshadowed Lewis’s sudden surprise at the discovery of the discontinuity between his reading life where he was strongly attracted to theistic and Christian writers, and his real life where he dismissed the actual beliefs of Christianity. In a similar vein, Lewis would continue to be surprised that so many Christians and theists seemed to, in so many ways, be men after his own heart, sharing with him many experiences of the world, and beliefs and intuitions about it. If this didn’t expose to Lewis that his manner of engaging the world was in some sense

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<sup>125</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 192.

<sup>126</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 192-193.

<sup>127</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 190-191.

<sup>128</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 191.

out of sync with his intellectual conception of it, it at least revealed to him the reality that a man could indeed be a theist or a Christian and possess all those traits he most valued in (or desired for) himself.

### Chapter 3-F: Lewis and The Great War (with Owen Barfield)

The inconsistency between Lewis's Sorrow-inspired materialist beliefs, and his Joy-inspired belief in real moral goodness and beauty, came to a head in what Lewis called his Great War with Owen Barfield. Along with helping Lewis overcome his "chronological snobbery",<sup>129</sup> Barfield brought Lewis's attention to the fact that...

"...positions [I] had hitherto held left no room for a satisfactory theory of knowledge. We had been, in the technical sense of the term, "realists"; that is, we accepted as rock-bottom the reality of the senses. But at the same time we continued to make for certain phenomena of consciousness all the claims that really went with a theistic or idealistic view."<sup>130</sup>

Lewis wanted to affirm the reality of indisputable truth, the validity of moral judgement, and the real value of aesthetic experience,<sup>131</sup> but: "if thought were a subjective event these claims for it would have to be abandoned"<sup>132</sup>.

Lewis seems to have been faced with two options, he needed either to accept Behaviorism and the unreality of truth, goodness, and beauty, or move closer too theism or idealism in order to justify them. To his distress, the first seemed impossible to accept:

"...If one kept (as rock-bottom reality) the universe of the senses... one would have to go much further... and adopt a Behaviouristic theory of logic, ethics and aesthetics. But such a theory was, and is, unbelievable to me. I am using the word "unbelievable," which many use to mean "improbable," or even "undesirable," in

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<sup>129</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 207.

<sup>130</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 208.

<sup>131</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 208.

<sup>132</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 208.

a quite literal sense. I mean the act of believing what the behaviourist believes is one my mind simply will not perform... It is as final as a physical impossibility.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that this option was unbelievable (rather than merely improbable or undesirable) is a point of interest for me, on which I will spend some time during my more systematic review of this in Chapter 4. What is important for now is to recognize that, due to Lewis's experiences of the world, this means of escape from his dilemma was closed—it was as impossible for him to believe it as to “...scratch [his] ear with [his] big toe or pour wine out of a bottle into the cavity at the base of that same bottle.”<sup>134</sup>

That left the other possibility, of accepting theism or idealism in order to justify the reality of goodness, beauty and truth. Lewis did not want to become a theist, probably because he still harbored deep apprehensions about theism stemming from his youthful experiences of religion. That he still harbored such apprehensions is evident by the resistance Lewis made to converting both to theism<sup>135</sup> and later from theism to Christianity.<sup>136</sup> However, this will be discussed more in later chapters.

In the end, Lewis accepted Absolute Idealism. Lewis was satisfied that the “cosmic Logos” of Absolute Idealism was impersonal,<sup>137</sup> and nothing like the “God of popular religion”<sup>138</sup> and so it did not inflame that dread which Lewis suffered under as a boy -though

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<sup>133</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209. (underline added for emphasis)

<sup>134</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>135</sup> “I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armor, as if I were a lobster.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 224.

<sup>136</sup> “...I felt a resistance almost as strong as my previous resistance to Theism.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 237.

<sup>137</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>138</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222-223.

that satisfaction was self-delusion, according to Lewis, who stated that that belief was nearly indistinguishable from theism and that it took his mixing “wilful blindness” with “The English Hegelians” to avoid realizing it.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the conversion to Absolute Idealism worked for Lewis in another way, which happens to be quite interesting.

Namely, Lewis’s conversion to Absolute Idealism solved the problem of the object of Joy: it was the Absolute. This began when Lewis read Alexander's *Space Time and Deity*.<sup>140</sup> That theory establishes two aspects of thought called contemplation and enjoyment. According to Lewis, that which is contemplated is the object of the thought, and that which is enjoyed is the sensation which accompanies the contemplation of the object.<sup>141</sup> As Lewis explains, that which is enjoyed not only necessitates the existence of that which is contemplated, but the nature of the enjoyment is also characterized by the object of contemplation.<sup>142</sup> From this it became clear that Lewis’s experiences of Joyous desire could not simply have no object, and the mere experience of Joy (itself a longing) could not be what he desired.<sup>143</sup> Lewis had discovered that those things which he first saw as evoking Joy were not the real objects of his Joyful longing.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, Lewis came to believe that *something* outside himself and his experience was revealing *itself* to

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<sup>139</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>140</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 217.

<sup>141</sup> Thus, “In bereavement you contemplate the beloved and the beloved's death, and... 'enjoy' the loneliness and grief.” The result of this is that “...one essential property of love, hate, fear, hope, or desire was attention to their object.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 217-218.

<sup>142</sup> “Joy... owes all its character to its object. Erotic love is not like desire for food, nay, a love for one woman differs from a love for another woman in the very same way and the very same degree as the two women differ from one another. Even our desire for one wine differs in tone from our desire for another... [etc]” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 220.

<sup>143</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 220.

<sup>144</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 220-221.

him through Joy, and the nature of Joy was characterised by the nature of that *thing*.<sup>145</sup>

Consequently, Lewis linked this discovery about Joy to his philosophy of the Absolute.

Before *Phantastes*, Lewis did not consider Joy to be revelatory. However, in his new post-*Phantastes* philosophical interpretation, Joy represented “the moments of clearest consciousness [he had had].”<sup>146</sup> To describe Lewis’s new interpretation of Joy in light of *Phantastes* and Absolute Idealism, is to say that Lewis had come to believe that we ourselves are mere dream and appearance compared to the Absolute, and in Joy we long to be connected with that reality which is the Absolute.<sup>147</sup>

I do not think it coincidental that Lewis's post *Phantastes* philosophical reformulation found a place for, if not God, then at least for “the Absolute.”<sup>148</sup> After all, if the longing (and thus the object) of Joyous desire was no longer to be confused with the particular instances which granted occasion for longing, or Lewis own mind, the only possibility remaining was that the object of Joyous longing lay in some realm beyond those realities. Lewis's philosophy, therefore, must eventually have produced some account of what the object of that longing might have been.<sup>149</sup> In any case, Absolute Idealism provided Lewis with the philosophical framework to

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<sup>145</sup> “... I thus understood that in deepest solitude there is a road right out of the self, a commerce with something... the naked Other.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 221.

<sup>146</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222

<sup>147</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 221-222.

<sup>148</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>149</sup> Lewis had discovered that Joy was in some sense real (if not more-than-real) and that the objects evoking Joy were not that to which Joy pointed. This meant that Lewis had an unexplained phenomenon. The following quote is from *Surprised by Joy* and is supposed to portray Lewis' interpretation of the Absolute *before* Lewis actually came to recognize it as the object of Joy. You can see how the relationship might present itself to Lewis: “The Absolute was ‘there,’ and that ‘there’ contained the reconciliation of all contraries, the transcendence of all finitudes, the hidden glory which was the only real thing there is. In fact, it had much of the quality of heaven.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 210. (underline added for emphasis)

accommodate the expansion of his experience which came with *Phantastes*.

This is a significant point because it displays how Lewis's philosophical life was finally becoming firmly connected with his actual life as lived:

“Considerations from quite different parts of my experience were beginning to click. This new dovetailing of my desire-life with my philosophy foreshadowed the day, now fast approaching, when I should be forced to take my “philosophy” more seriously than I ever intended.”<sup>150</sup>

As we have seen, this adoption of the Absolute as the object of Joy, was not simply a deduction which 'happened' to utilize evidence garnered by Lewis's experience. Rather, it was a solution which was as emotionally satisfying as it was intellectually satisfying.<sup>151</sup> It fit with, and made sense of, the life Lewis had lived. It did not simply explain the most powerful aspects of Lewis's experience. Rather, it fit them into a narrative of the universe which acknowledged the significance and meaning at the heart of these experiences. Sorrow and suffering were the result of our existence as mere appearance, and Joy was the experience of longing to be united (or reunited) to the Absolute.

Lewis did not believe in the Norse Gods, but he did believe in the Absolute.<sup>152</sup> Thus, this new way of seeing the world provided Lewis with an intellectual justification for what he had already felt since *Phantastes*: that beauty and goodness and truth were real, and maybe even more real than 'reality'. This affirmed intellectually what Lewis had hoped (or what had been too good to hope)<sup>153</sup> his whole life, and represented a significant advance towards unifying the

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<sup>150</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222. (underline added for emphasis)

<sup>151</sup> “This seemed quite satisfactory intellectually. Even emotionally too; for it matters far more that Heaven should exist than that we should ever get there.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222.

<sup>152</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 211.

<sup>153</sup> “It is more important that heaven should exist than that I should reach it.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 211. The object of Lewis' Joy was indeed real, even if Lewis could not grasp it.

sometimes desperate aspects of his personhood.

### Chapter 3-G: Absolute Idealism

Lewis became an Absolute Idealist and his most fundamental experiences of the world started to come closer to his intellectual conception of it. Even so, the time and difficulty which it took Barfield to get Lewis to realize and accept that his claims for rationality were inconsistent with his philosophy<sup>154</sup> (a process that got quite heated and took several years)<sup>155</sup> suggests that Lewis's intellect was deeply out of touch with his experiences of the world at that time. Thus, before he became an Absolute Idealist, he already found that those who shared his philosophical interpretation of the world were precisely those who did not share his experience of it. Regardless of the intellectual/philosophical camp with which Lewis had cast his lot, his feelings and, dare I say his heart, sympathized with others, such as the theistic authors he was reading:

“Indeed, I must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen, long before, the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader. George MacDonald had done more to me than any other writer; of course it was a pity he had that bee in his bonnet about Christianity. He was good in spite of it. Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together; barring, of course, his Christianity. Johnson was one of the few authors whom I felt I could trust utterly; curiously enough, he had the same kink. Spencer and Milton by a strange coincidence had it too. Even among the ancient authors the same paradox was to be found. The most religious (Plato, Aeschylus, Virgil) were clearly those on whom I could really feed. On the other hand, those writers who did not suffer from religion and with whom in theory my sympathy ought to have been complete -Shaw and Wells and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire- all seemed a little thin; what as boys we called “tinny.” It wasn't that I didn't like them. They were all (especially Gibbon) entertaining; but hardly more. There seemed to be no depth in them. They were too simple. The roughness and density of life did not appear in their books.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> As noted above, Lewis' materialistic views (and intellectual position stemming ultimately from his experience of Sorrow) clashed with the claims he was instinctively making regarding morality, aesthetics and rationality. Yet we also see that he was hesitant about becoming an idealist because he wanted to assert nature's independence from human perception: “I wanted nature to be quite independent of our observation; something other, indifferent, self-existing. (This went with the Jenkinian zest for rubbing one's face in the mere quiddity.)” This resistance may have had something to do with Lewis's experiences of Joy (which were often linked to experiences of nature) but this is far from certain. C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>155</sup> Considering that the profound changes wrought by *Phantastes* began *before* Lewis fought in the First World War.

<sup>156</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 213-214.

It is important to realize that it was not simply that Lewis did not enjoy the works of those who had agreed with him philosophically. It was not even that Lewis disagreed with them. Rather, it was that Lewis's experiences of the world were not confirmed by those authors who shared his intellectual beliefs. Thus their writings lacked "the roughness and density of life..." as Lewis had experienced it.

And it was not just in the realm of reading that Lewis found his heart (if not his mind) drawn to the theists. In a similar way to Lewis's readings, the lifestyles to which Lewis was drawn, and the friends he wanted to make and imitate, were those who tended to be more theistic than atheistic. Lewis's wartime friend Johnson, and his pen pal Arthur Graves fall into this category, along with A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, Owen Barfield and A. C. Harwood,<sup>157</sup> as did Lewis's new friend Nevill Coghill:

"...the shock of discovering that he—clearly the most intelligent and best informed man in that class—was a Christian and a thoroughgoing supernaturalist. There were other traits that I liked but found... oddly archaic; chivalry, honor, courtesy, 'freedom,' and 'gentleness.'"<sup>158</sup>

This way of being immediately appealed to Lewis and challenged his assumptions about the modern world: "had something really dropped out of our lives? Was the archaic simply the civilized, and the modern simply the barbaric?"<sup>159</sup> In every area of his life, Lewis felt himself instinctively or innately drawn to a way of life other than that which was suggested by his philosophical beliefs.

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<sup>157</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 199-201.

<sup>158</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 212.

<sup>159</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 213.



However, when Lewis took up Absolute Idealism and his intellectual philosophy began to come closer to his experiences of the world, “considerations arising from quite different parts of [his] experience were beginning to come together with a click.”<sup>160</sup>

Despite that encouraging development, Lewis still found that he could not bring his manner of living in line with his beliefs. Lewis’s attention was drawn to the problem of living one’s beliefs when, while having lunch with his pupil Griffiths and Owen Barfield, Lewis “happened to refer to philosophy as ‘a subject.’

“‘It wasn’t a *subject* to Plato,’ said Barfield, ‘it was a way.’ The quiet but fervent agreement of Griffiths, and the quick glance of understanding between these two, revealed to me my own frivolity. Enough had been thought, and said, and felt, and imagined. It was about time that something should be done.”<sup>161</sup>

This does not mean Lewis’s Absolute Idealism had no ethic attached to it, only that Lewis had not yet seriously attempted to live by it:

“The way to recover, and act upon, this universal and objective vision was daily and hourly to remember our true nature, to reascend or return into that Spirit which, in so far as we really were at all, we still were. Yes; but now I felt I had better try and do it.”<sup>162</sup>

Lewis was finding that task hard, for his idea of the Absolute (carefully constructed to be too vague to be threatening) was not even coherent enough to be taught<sup>163</sup> and, as such, was simply too insubstantial to be taken up as a way of life:

“You must not do, you must not even try to do, the will of the Father unless you are prepared to ‘know of the doctrine.’ All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with universal Spirit. For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a

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<sup>160</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222.

<sup>161</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 225.

<sup>162</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 226.

<sup>163</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222-223.

zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion. Of course I could do nothing... without continual conscious recourse to what I called Spirit. But the fine, philosophical distinction between this and what ordinary people call 'prayer to God' breaks down as soon as you start doing it in earnest. Idealism can be talked, and even felt; it cannot be lived."<sup>164</sup>

Still, Lewis's impulse to simply accept theism was strongly resisted by the lingering impression of religious Sorrow which had troubled him since childhood. Summarizing what I have put forward earlier: the fear of, and distaste for, a God who would permit so terrible a world as this, as well as the possibility of hell (where temporal Sorrow might be extended indefinitely) had become real obstacles for Lewis.

Thus, Lewis maintained that amazing ability to put things out of his mind which allowed him to remain carefree even when the threat of active duty loomed on the horizon.<sup>165</sup> Lewis resisted Barfield, but he also resisted clarifying his idea of the Absolute, accepting God could be related to personally, or that the idea that Christianity might be true (even if Christianity, and not just Christian authors, now appeared very reasonable to him).<sup>166</sup> Of his conversion to Theism Lewis states:

"I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armor, as if I were a lobster"... The fox had been dislodged from the Hegelian Wood and was now running in the open, 'with all the wo in the world,' bedraggled and weary, hounds barely a field behind. And nearly everyone was now (one way or another) in the pack; Plato, Dante, MacDonald, Herbert. Barfield, Tolkien, Dyson, Joy itself."<sup>167</sup>

Lewis was actively trying to prevent himself moving further in the direction of Christian conversion. What then got Lewis over this final boundary? In the end it seems that Lewis's

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<sup>164</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 226.

<sup>165</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 158.

<sup>166</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222-223.

<sup>167</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 224-225.

resistance could only be overcome by a divine act.

“The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. In a sense. Without words and (I think) almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out... I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice... Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I knew that to open the door... meant the incalculable. The choice appeared to be momentous but it was also strangely unemotional. I was moved by no desires or fears. In a sense I was not moved by anything. I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen to rein. I say, 'I chose,' yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite. On the other hand I was aware of no motives. You could argue that I was not a free agent, but I am more inclined to think that this came nearer to being a perfectly free act than most that I have ever done. Necessity may not be the opposite of freedom, and perhaps a man is most free when, instead of producing motives, he could only say, 'I am what I do!'... Then came the repercussion... I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt... I rather disliked the feeling.”<sup>168</sup>

Many of Lewis's most famous arguments depend upon free will (consider his theodicies in *The Problem of Pain*, and *Mere Christianity*). Yet if God did not overwhelm Lewis's free will (“He cannot ravage, He can only woo”,<sup>169</sup> as Screwtape says) then He at least went to extreme lengths in order to woo this convert.<sup>170</sup>

Thus we see that Lewis's experiences of the world were more often gratified by theistic authors and friends. Armed with an expanded understanding of the Absolute, and a desire to truly live in consistency with his beliefs, he was brought to the very cusp of theism. Yet it took what Lewis reports as an act of the divine presence, for him to finally convert.

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<sup>168</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 224-225.

<sup>169</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*. 39-40.

<sup>170</sup> There is significantly more to this. Lewis speaks of being pursued by like a fox in a hunt (225). Moreover, Lewis said of his final move from Absolute Idealism to Theism:

“You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words *compelle intrare*, compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 228-229.

### Chapter 3-G: Conclusion: Sorrow and Joy united in Christianity

It is interesting that Lewis put relatively little focus on his final conversion from theism to Christianity. Like the first conversion, it contained stages of holding back, and then eventual surrender.<sup>171</sup> Yet the events surrounding this last conversion are lightly touched upon, and seem to Lewis to be of little importance in comparison to what came before.

So it seems that the arrival at Christianity forms a natural (if uneasy) stopping point for *Surprised by Joy*, in light of this narrative interpretation. The doctrines of Christianity seem to naturally fit with the Joy based beliefs Lewis had held earlier (the belief in real goodness, meaning and beauty). So too did Christianity sit well (if uneasily) with Lewis's experiences of Sorrow. Lewis was forced to abandon his belief in materialism, but was justified in the experiences of the world which had informed it. For the first story of the Christian and Jewish Scriptures (the creation) establishes that the world was created good, and meant to be good, but is now deeply flawed and damaged.<sup>172</sup> That Lewis was indeed aware that Christianity could be settled with the reality of suffering (and that Lewis wanted to know how) is evidenced by the fact that Lewis's very first apologetic work tackled *The Problem of Pain* (1940): a defence of Christianity in light of the evil and suffering in the world.

The focus now, at the end of this summary, must be on the overall pattern which *Surprised by Joy* illuminates. Its center was the experiences of Sorrow and Joy, and Lewis's search to reach a holistic consistency between his deep-seated beliefs, his personal inclinations, his manner of living, and of course his intellectual conception of the world—all of which were

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<sup>171</sup> C. S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*. 236-237.

<sup>172</sup> These are known as the Christian doctrines of creation and fall, ultimately based on Genesis 3-4.

influenced by both these experiences in one way or another.

Lewis's experiences of Sorrow resulted in a belief that there was something deeply wrong with the world. Lewis accepted materialism and atheism as a response to this. Experiences of Sorrow, in association with his religious life, resulted in an ingrained fear of hell and prejudice against theism.

Kirkpatrick provided the example of a person whose life and personhood were truly consistent with his belief system, just as Lewis's experiences of the world, and thoughts about it, were becoming all the more bifurcated.

Lewis's experiences of Joy had three important consequences. Firstly, they reaffirmed the validity of Joyful experiences. Secondly, they established, or help to establish, new deep-seated beliefs (like Lewis's Sorrow based belief in the wrong-ness of the universe) which could not be contradicted at the intellectual level. Thirdly, they raised the question: 'what is the object of Joyous desire?'

Lewis discovered that, whatever his intellectual commitments, he found himself drawn towards, and at home with, theistically minded persons, be they friends in real life or the authors of books he enjoyed.

Owen Barfield pointed out the inconsistencies between some of Lewis's beliefs and his intellectual conception of the universe. Lewis was 'physically unable' to accept the tenants of Behaviorism, because they contradicted his deep-seated beliefs about the world. Instead he accepted Absolute Idealism, which turned out to be a more holistically satisfying philosophy.

Finally, Lewis found his highest level of holistic consistency. After finding that theistic writers were truly capturing the nature of existence as he experienced it, that he felt most at home (intellectually and personally) amongst those theistically minded of his friends, and that his

desire to truly live in line with his beliefs could not be satisfied by the vagaries of his form of Absolute Idealism, Lewis converted to theism and eventually Christianity.

The significance is this: that for the first time Lewis had an intellectual conception of the world which validated and confirmed both of his two deepest reactions to being in the world, and the deep beliefs about the world which Lewis formed as a result of these experiences.

## Chapter Four: Justifying and Explicating the Reading in Light of Vollenhoven

### Chapter 4-A: Introduction

Though a significant pattern of the narrative of *Surprised by Joy* has been illuminated, some key matters need to be clarified. To this end, *Surprised by Joy* will be discussed in light of the Christian philosophy of D. H. T. Vollenhoven. Indeed, the pattern just elaborated in Chapter 3, although present in *Surprised by Joy*, was only brought to the fore when considered in light of Vollenhoven's observations about religion and knowledge. Using Vollenhovian insights explicitly as hermeneutical aids will allow for a deeper account of the story than can be garnered by discussing *Surprised by Joy* alone, and will make transparent, through precise philosophical distinctions, that which remains opaque in Chapter 3. Yet, that pattern is not the product of Vollenhoven's philosophy being imposed on *Surprised by Joy*. Rather, that philosophy is the tool by which it was extricated and clarified, and by which I will now endeavor to explain it. Yet the question must be asked, 'why analyse Lewis in light of this particular obscure philosopher?'

Certainly, part of the advantage of looking at *Surprised by Joy* through Vollenhoven's philosophy is simply that his philosophical system is rigorously and soundly constructed with clearly defined and consistent terms. By this I mean no criticism of Lewis, for it is clear that *Surprised by Joy* is not, and was never meant to be, a rigorously philosophical text. *Surprised by Joy* was written for the general public and is more literary in its form, telling the story of (or giving the shape of) Lewis's early life. Accordingly, this form makes sense for telling how Lewis came, not just to believe in Christianity, but to actually *be* a Christian. In this I believe Lewis was successful, but without philosophical analysis the text leaves some quite significant questions to be answered, such as: (1) what exactly are Sorrow and Joy (not just 'what are they

in themselves’ but also ‘of what kind of thing are they’)? (2) How did they differ from other kinds of experience? How did they relate to, and perhaps form, beliefs? (3) And, how and why did those (fundamental) beliefs differ from other kinds of belief?

Certainly Vollenhoven’s philosophy is not the only one capable of putting forward answers to these questions, but several characteristics recommended it. Firstly, Vollenhoven was vividly aware that our relationship to God as His creatures is the most fundamental aspect of every human being.<sup>173</sup> As such, this relationship to God takes a central place in Vollenhoven’s anthropology, as the human heart and its movement away or towards God lies beneath all the various ways in which humans exist and live.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, assuming that there are no *a priori* reasons to doubt Lewis’s accounts of the import and power of Joy (and some very good reasons to trust them), what is needed is a philosophy which can explain (rather than explain away) these experiences. Vollenhoven’s awareness of grace and sin, God’s call and revelation orient his philosophy towards the spiritual depths of existence. It is this spiritual orientation that leaves it well placed to give an account of (1) Sorrow and Joy and (2) what makes them distinct from other forms of experience.

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<sup>173</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 13.

<sup>174</sup> Vollenhoven says that “besides the two simplest determinants discussed above, namely, that if individuality and modality, a third most simple determinant occurs in the earthly subject. It is that of ‘good’ and ‘evil’... the character born by this diversity is not only a purely dual one; it is also antithetic. Evil stands *over against* good as disobedience [to God stands] over and against obedience” (§ 85, 86). In § 87-91, 88 most of all, Vollenhoven makes clear the mutual irreducibility of the good and evil antithesis to any of the other diversities he discusses (§ 87-91). Rather, Vollenhoven attests that:

“because good and evil, in spite of the sharp opposition between them, are both included under the ‘direction of human life’ and because the difference in direction does not originate in the functions... we must look for some indication of that which directs these functions for good and for evil and which must, hence, itself lie before—or, if you prefer, behind—all human functions. Here, too, Holy Scripture points the way. Simply think of the passage ‘Out of the heart are the issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23; see also Matthew 12:34b-35; 15:18; Luke 6:45). (§ 92, a). D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*.



Furthermore, Vollenhoven strove to avoid those dualisms and antinomies which so often lie at the basis of what he understood to be pagan philosophies and their accounts of human existence.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, his philosophy can give an account of Joy and Sorrow and the involvement of a divine call without invoking a divine faculty or the spirit-body dualism which it implies.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, Vollenhoven's philosophy is able to provide a good account of conversion and solve the third question left unanswered by *Surprised by Joy*: (3) the difference between different types of belief and their relation. Just as Vollenhoven rejected the body/soul dualism of certain ancients, so too does he reject the body/mind dualism of certain early moderns.<sup>177</sup> Rather, he strove to recognize the whole human person as portrayed in the scriptures: all of it created

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<sup>175</sup> A good place for beginning the study of Vollenhoven, in this regard, is *The Significance of Calvinism for the Reformation of Philosophy*, wherein Vollenhoven discusses a number of such confusions and the negative effects they have had on Christian thought when the two have been brought into synthesis. Therein, Vollenhoven states:

“Pagan philosophy has often tried to force this rich variety [of God's creation] into a scheme of one or two differences which the systematician had perceived. Calvin's idea is different. The world is a creation of God. That is why creation is far richer than man can discover or know. Thus he mounts above the construction which can lead to nothing but crooked contrasts” (393.).

“...just because all these thinkers are right insofar as they find the differences which are irreducible, they are all wrong as soon as each one wants to force all the rich variety into the frame-work of the one difference which he discovered anew... and which he now unjustly values too highly” (397).

<sup>176</sup> “Instead of ‘heart’ in this sense of the term—it does have another meaning—we can sometimes say ‘soul’ or ‘spirit.’ But if we use these words in the sense intended here, we must remember that they are identical with heart and not with the higher functions, like the supraorganic, suprap psychic, or suprajuridic. If we forget that, we fall into functionalism, overlook what is peculiar about humans, and end up in a teleological or ascetic pseudoreligion” (§ 92, com. 2.).

“As far as the relationship of soul and body is concerned, it follows from the above that they are not related to each other as higher group functions and lower group functions, but as that which determines the direction and that which in the same person is so determined in its direction. Hence, the connection between them both is intraindividual. Yet it is not an intraindividual connection between functions or between constituents, moments, and so on. For while the connections discussed previously all lay in the area of the function, this connection is one by which the *entire* cloak of the functions (2 Corinthians 5:1-8) is nothing more than one of the relata” (§ 93).

See also D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 88-91.

<sup>177</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 88-93.

good,<sup>178</sup> all fallen to sin,<sup>179</sup> and all in need of being brought in line with God's will.<sup>180</sup> As such, his philosophy is not prone to the kind of interpretation of personhood and conversion which would only muddle the story of *Surprised by Joy* further: the kind which puts a premium on reflective intellectual thought and sees propositional assent as the locus of conversion and origin of personal change and development. As Chapter 3 has shown, the narrative of *Surprised by Joy* does not support such an interpretation. Though Lewis's moment of spiritual surrender to God is addressed in some detail,<sup>181</sup> there seems to be no account in *Surprised by Joy* of the moment Lewis assented intellectually to Christianity. Instead of the somewhat 'top-down' story of his early conversion, *Surprised by Joy* tells the story of a 'bottom-up' conversion which started from Lewis's experiences of Sorrow and Joy, and progressed through his dispositions (his likings and dislikings) and his intuitions about the world, to finally affect his conscious reflective beliefs.

Vollenhoven was more than aware of the way fundamental beliefs and worldviews shape experiences of the world and reflections upon that experience. Thanks to his fully embodied vision of human life, Vollenhoven recognized that human persons always approach scientific thinking from the mode of everyday thought.<sup>182</sup> In everyday living, humans do not reflect upon

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<sup>178</sup> "...the covenant of creation can also be called a 'covenant of favor,'... Whichever term is chosen, however, the doing of works in this covenant was not an earning of God's favor but the execution of a double task that was assigned to Adam by virtue of that favor." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 121, com. 1.

<sup>179</sup> The effect of the fall is discussed briefly in § 122, affecting all of humanity through the office bearer Adam. That the direction of obedience to God was changed from faithfulness to unfaithfulness. D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 122. see also *The Significance of Calvinism for the Reformation of Philosophy*. 391.

<sup>180</sup> The reality that all of a person must be redeemed, is encapsulated by concept of the heart as lying "before—or, if you prefer, behind—all human functions" (§ 92, a). Particular functions are not obedient or disobedient to God. Rather the whole person is fallen into disobedience and unfaithfulness. D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*.

<sup>181</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 224-225.

<sup>182</sup> "Theoretic thinking and knowing is completely different from non-theoretic thinking and knowing. The latter always has to do with things in their totality, as for instance, when I perceive things around me. But theoretic (scientific) thinking proceeds methodically. Each of the special sciences... investigate one aspect of the whole. Their

and question everything all the time. Rather they engage life while relying on their intuitions and assumptions to fill gaps in knowledge.<sup>183</sup> In scientific thinking (as Vollenhoven calls it) specific objects are brought under scrutiny, but the more attention paid to that object, the more of the world must be bracketed for the time being.<sup>184</sup> That being the case, a person's worldview and beliefs continue to contextualize their data, and shape their expectations and interpretations, even during focused rational examination.<sup>185</sup>

*Surprised by Joy* seems to portray Lewis's developing beliefs and feelings about the world, based on his experiences therein, and the way in which they shaped his reasoning. As such, Vollenhoven's philosophy seems perfectly suited to an inquiry into the nature and

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method is not only determined by our thinking, but also by the field of investigation... Nontheoretic and theoretic thinking cannot be reduced to one another. The former is not less important than the latter, but different... this does not mean that they are at odds with each other. Actually, there is a positive connection between these two. For knowing begins with nontheoretic knowing and then, sometimes, proceeds to the differentiated knowing found in the special sciences; and subsequently turns back, on this detour, deepened and enriched, in philosophy to the knowledge of the whole." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. "Faith: Its Nature, Structure, and Significance for Science." 75-76.

"...only an extremely small percentage of people are engaged in scientific activity. In fact, the number of those who do have some belief or other but lack every scientific capacity is quite large." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 11.

<sup>183</sup> Already discussed above (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. "Faith: Its Nature, Structure, and Significance for Science." 75-76. D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 11.). Vollenhoven also discusses non-scientific knowing at great length in § 149-197.

<sup>184</sup> "Scientific knowing everywhere relies on nonscientific knowing... Knowing in the special sciences distinguishes itself... by its ongoing isolation of increasingly refined interrelations in the several law spheres... Through analysis, and aided by the *principium exclusae antinomiae* (principle of excluded antinomy,) such a law-sphere first needs to be analyzed out of the cosmic context in which it is found. In doing so, it becomes a 'field of investigation'..." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 198-201.

<sup>185</sup> "... this knowledge [nonscientific faith knowledge, or as it is called in *Isagoge Philosophiae*, sacred believing] has to do with the main issues; if you will, with circumspective concepts... the concepts of nontheoretic faith knowledge are... all totality concepts. They cannot replace the concepts of scientific investigation, but they can circumscribe them. Whatever I find by way of scientific investigation is there before the investigation begins and sooner or later fits within that framework.

Faith, whether Christian or pagan, may not be considered 'beyond' investigation. But such theoretic work is always a special science about faith, that field of investigation is there before that investigation can begin, and therefore is not constructed of founded by science." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. "Faith: Its Nature, Structure, and Significance for Science." 76.

formation of Lewis's core beliefs (for example, Lewis's certainty that morality was not a social construct) and how those beliefs shaped him.

To answer the above questions in depth and expound upon Chapter 3, I must begin by introducing two concepts from the philosophy of Vollenhoven which will shed light on *Surprised by Joy* and create a framework in which it can be understood: *heart*, and *worldview*.

#### Chapter 4-B: Vollenhoven's Concept of the Heart

The human heart is one of two key concepts which will help to shed light on *Surprised by Joy*. With his concept of heart, Vollenhoven illuminates something which I believed Lewis recognized, but did not seem to clearly articulate. Beneath all the various facets of personhood (including reason and imagination) there lies a central unity.<sup>186</sup> This unity does not come from our having some part of ourselves which is spiritual and not a part of the created realm, like an immaterial soul.<sup>187</sup> Rather, it is derived from our place as individual creatures before God, either moving towards Him or away –that response being our *religion* or *religious direction*.<sup>188</sup> Consequently, the human heart must not be confused with any particular aspect of human persons, or any of our particular ways of being.<sup>189</sup> The religious direction of our heart is much

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<sup>186</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92.

<sup>187</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 88-93.

<sup>188</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92. 116.

<sup>189</sup> “And so, looking at the history of science (wetenschap), we feel that we can distinguish already between the following functions: the arithmetical, the spatial, the physical (that is, the energetical, including kinetic energy which was the only thing the old mechanicians saw), the organic, the emotional, the analytical, the historical, the linguistic, the social, the economical, the aesthetic, the juridical, the ethical and the function of faith (pistis).” Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. *The Significance of Calvinism for the Reformation of Philosophy*. 379.

Yet, the heart lies before, or behind, all these functions (already discussed above, D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92.), though it is often confused with the higher functions (discussed above, D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 88-93.).

more than what we consider religious in the popular sense, for it cuts across everything we do and are.<sup>190</sup> Because of this, we can observe the effects of the religious direction of someone's heart, even though the heart will always remain inaccessible.<sup>191</sup>

According to Vollenhoven, movements of the heart are not initiated by human persons.

Rather, the human heart responds to God's call and sovereign faithfulness:

"This fruit of his [Christ, the Mediator's] work is now conferred by the glorified Christ on all who belong to him in their justification, which is comprised in that calling by which he makes the spiritually dead alive. For this making alive or regeneration is the turning around of the heart which has the effect that the renewed person, acquitted of guilt and punishment and having eternal life, begins to walk according to all of God's commandments..."<sup>192</sup>

God's regeneration prepares the human heart to accept the preaching of the Word and to accept as beliefs the dictates of the gospel.<sup>193</sup> In this way, a heart moving away from God into

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<sup>190</sup> In § 125 Vollenhoven describes the work of Christ the Mediator as "that calling by which he makes the spiritually dead alive. For this making alive or regeneration is the turning around of the heart, which as the effect that the renewed person, acquitted of guilt and punishment and having a right to eternal life, begins to walk according to all of God's commandments." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*.

That the heart is prefunctional as already established above Already discussed above (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92.). That it is irreducible to said functions has already been established above. (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 88-93.)

Thus, it is clear that "it is from out of the heart that religion radically and totally determines and dominates the human living" John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education." John Kok also cites the following: Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. "Religie en geloof." 1-3.

<sup>191</sup> The "functions are, as it were, the fields within which the human heart expresses itself" (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *The Groundmotives of Biblical Philosophy*. 3.) Also discussed above, D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92. The direction of the heart should be evident because it is in the functions, but the heart itself will be inaccessible precisely because it is not one of the functions, but rather, is prefunctional. As Vollenhoven scholar John Kok says:

"The antithesis in religion, like the individual hear that is open or closed to God's word, is said to be 'prefunctional' and, as such, not accessible to human analysis or judgement. Rather, what lives in a person's heart, and hence also the antithesis in religion, comes to the fore only in the various modes of earthly existence, in human activities and their results, all of which are accessible to human analysis." John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education."

<sup>192</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 125.

<sup>193</sup> "This act of God [calling] is not to be identified with the preaching of his Word by the envoys of Christ, for regeneration precedes the opening of the heart to the word of their preaching... Regeneration also affects a turnabout in the pistic function (the *fies quae creditur*, in other words, faith by which a person believes). By virtue of

disobedience can become a heart moving towards God and greater obedience and unity with Him, thereby changing that person's religious direction.

#### Chapter 4-C: The Heart in Lewis

Throughout Lewis's life, as depicted in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis experienced the call of God transforming him into the sort of person who could hear, see, accept, and believe the Word of God. I say *hear* and *see* in particular because, according to Vollenhoven, God's Word is revealed by God in every atom of his created universe (though only definitively inscripturated in the Bible).<sup>194</sup> Sorrow and Joy were indeed movements of the heart in response to God's call which changed Lewis's religious direction by permitting him to become the kind of person capable of seeing and accepting the truth of God's Word in creation and in scripture.

Firstly, the source of Sorrow and Joy is mysterious. As established above, Sorrow and Joy cannot simply be classified as emotions within Lewis, or any other part of his being. Nor could they be satisfactorily explained by the external circumstances of Lewis's life wherein Sorrow and Joy were experienced –indeed, Lewis ran into trouble (in the form of a false dualism) when he tried to “pin-down” the nature of those two experiences by associating reason

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this turnabout, faith is now directed to the Word of God that is preached, by the ecclesiastic office bearer, especially to its essence, namely the Gospel.” D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 125.

<sup>194</sup> “While not to be equated with (all) the words of God (ever spoken), the Bible is the divine and holy inscripturated word of God... Hence, Scripture, the sixty-six books of the Bible, is word-revelation. But, Vollenhoven will add, not all word-revelation is written down in Scripture. Scripture is the inspired, humanly inscribed word of God, but not all of God's words were inscripturated (see, e.g., John 21:25).” John Kok. “Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education.”

As Vollenhoven says: “God, therefore, can be known through two means. If one uses the terms *Scripture* and *nature* for these means, one ought to keep in mind: a) that there was a time when the Word of God was not yet written; b) than nature should be understood to be all the work of God and especially not only one group of earthly creatures. In this sense, nature also includes all institutions and the genetic course of affairs therein, for better and for worse.” D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 173.

and imagination with Sorrow and Joy.<sup>195</sup> Instead, Lewis came to recognize that Sorrow<sup>196</sup> and Joy<sup>197</sup> came from outside himself. All this is what ought to be expected, for the human heart is foundational, and its religious direction cuts across all the particular parts of a person and the ways in which they live in the world.<sup>198</sup> Rather, the ultimate origin of the heart's movement is the call of God, who is beyond the human heart and creation.<sup>199</sup>

Secondly, Sorrow and Joy marked Lewis's recognition of God's Word in creation. Scripture reveals to us that there is a universal antithesis running through all of creation: every thing, every person, and every way of being.<sup>200</sup> This is the antithesis of good and evil, grace and sin, and obedience and disobedience to God's will. Lewis's experiences of Sorrow and Joy marked his first recognition of these creaturely realities as revealed by God's Word: that we live in a world which has been tarnished by sin, but which is also under the promise of grace. This was not a recognition which occurred in the mind (like intellectually grasping a problem), but

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<sup>195</sup> The nature of this confusion is discussed in depth in Chapter 3-B of this thesis.

<sup>196</sup> As I argued in Chapter 3 Lewis's rejection of the 'wrongness of the universe', his defense of morality, and perhaps even his rejection of Behaviorism, all affirmed that Lewis saw moments of Sorrow as having significance far beyond the particular circumstances of particular instances. The evil which gave rise to Sorrow, for Lewis, had cosmic significance far beyond Lewis's personal feelings about it, or the particular relative situation in which it occurred.

<sup>197</sup> Lewis's conversion to Idealism had much to do with Lewis's realization that the object of Joy lay outside of his own mind, and the particular situation in which Joy arose, which I argue in Chapter 3-E.

<sup>198</sup> Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. *The Significance of Calvinism for the Reformation of Philosophy*. 379. See also, D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-93.

<sup>199</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 125.

<sup>200</sup> "For Vollenhoven, true religion is not the "thesis" and false religion the "antithesis." The antithesis in humankind's relation to God is found in the opposition between true and false religion. But the antithesis is not limited to religion, just as religion is not limited to the prefunctional. The antithesis is also present on the functional level. In fact, wherever two things stand in opposition to each other as do good and evil, Vollenhoven does not hesitate to refer to the antithetical relationship between them. The antithesis is the radical, thorough-going, and irreconcilable opposition between obedience and disobedience to God's precepts, between good and evil, wherever this opposition is found." John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education." n.p., "Religion and Antithesis" para. 16.

was rather the deep recognition of a heart being opened to the truth of God's Word. Sorrow was Lewis's first and most basic apprehension of evil in the universe. In the immortal words of G. K. Chesterton:

“evil is... an exception but an enormous exception; and ultimately... an invasion or yet more truly a rebellion... right has a right to be right and therefore a right to be there, and wrong has no right to be wrong and therefore no right to be there. It is the prince of the world; but it is also a usurper.”<sup>201</sup>

Joy, on the other hand, always seemed to be evoked by some particular creational thing, be they myths or mountains, but Joy always included a desire for something more or beyond those things: God and the grace of that God who is present in creation, but is also infinitely more than creation can hold. All this is in accordance with Vollenhoven's ontology. The changing of Lewis's heart was instigated by God's revelation, coming from outside of creation in order to reveal to Lewis something of the nature of that creation in order that the direction of his life might change.

So we have seen that Sorrow and Joy should be considered movements of the heart. They are movements stemming from the call of God; a call coming from beyond creation, which always concerns the whole of one's being, and whose effects cannot therefore simply be understood as purely “emotional” or “imaginative” or “intellectual.” However, these are not the only characteristics a movement of the heart should have. A movement of the heart, or a change in the religious direction of an individual, ought to produce a total conversion of that person, an ongoing process by which all the disassociated and rebellious aspects of one's being are brought in line with the will of God.<sup>202</sup> We can see from Chapter 3 that these two movements of the heart

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<sup>201</sup> G. K. Chesterton. *The Everlasting Man*. 159. (underline added for emphasis)

<sup>202</sup> In § 125 of *Isagoge Philosophiae*, Vollenhoven discusses how conversion brings one in line with the will of God. This does not mean that Lewis, much less all people who are called, are in all ways consistent.



did in fact begin a process which resulted in Lewis's conversion to Christianity. Yet the question remains: how did this process really occur?

#### Chapter 4-D: Types of Knowledge, and Worldview

Vollenhoven's philosophy is also exceedingly helpful because it makes some very important distinctions between the various kinds of thinking and ideas. In general, Vollenhoven recognizes that there are everyday beliefs (notions about the nature of the universe as a whole, which are operative when one experiences life in the mode of the everyday) and scientific-beliefs (which are formed by systematic reflection upon a specific and narrowly defined area).<sup>203</sup>

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Vollenhoven is very clear that human beings are all in rebellion and will not be in all ways consistently obedient to God's call and moving towards obedience to Him:

"Vollenhoven warns against equating scripture and the believer's listening to Scripture. Scripture is divine and holy, while our use of it is human and always tainted by sin" John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education." John Kok also cites Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. "Religie en geloof." 1-3.

Also: "Actual living exhibits a mixture of striving in both directions at once." Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. "Het geloof, zijn aard, zijn structuur en zijn waarde voor de wetenschap." In Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. *Levensbeschouwing en levenshouding van de academicus*. 71-77.

However, as noted above, the nature of God's relationship is perennial and complete faithfulness, and our inconsistency (and rebellion) is contrasted on God's side of the relation by a call to bring our whole selves in line with Him. As God's work in us is perfected, therefore, this consistency should too become more evident, and God's rein should become evident in more and more facets of our lives, and functions of our being:

"...the process of working out the covenant, being declared righteous becomes a being-made-righteous (justification)... this fruit of his work is now conferred by the glorified Christ on all who belong to him in their justification, which is comprised in that calling by which he makes the spiritually dead alive. For this making alive or regeneration is the turning around of the heart, which has the effect that the renewed person, acquitted of guilt and punishment and having a right to eternal life, begins to walk according to all of God's commandments." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 125.

The result should be a life that is less in conflict with itself, and more unified in its obedience to God. The kind of life that Lewis seems to achieve near the end of *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>203</sup> "Theoretic thinking and knowing is completely different from non-theoretic thinking and knowing. The latter always has to do with things in their totality, as for instance, when I perceive things around me. But theoretic (scientific) thinking proceeds methodically. Each of the special sciences... investigate one aspect of the whole. Their method is not only determined by our thinking, but also by the field of investigation... Nontheoretic and theoretic thinking cannot be reduced to one another. The former is not less important than the latter, but different... this does not mean that they are at odds with each other. Actually, there is a positive connection between these two. For knowing begins with nontheoretic knowing and then, sometimes, proceeds to the differentiated knowing found in the special sciences; and subsequently turns back, on this detour, deepened and enriched, in philosophy to the knowledge of the whole." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. "Faith: Its Nature, Structure, and Significance for Science." 75-76.

Everyday beliefs are not scientific propositions or scholarly opinions. Rather, beliefs are non-scientific, which for Vollenhoven means that they are basic beliefs or assumptions which concern the nature of reality as a whole.<sup>204</sup> There are many everyday-beliefs which are of little enough importance. However, some beliefs about the nature of the world, often inherited or not reflected upon, are very important; so important that they actually help to circumscribe how we understand and think about our experiences.<sup>205</sup> An example of one such belief, from Vollenhoven, would be the belief that the world was created by God.<sup>206</sup>

Collections of these beliefs can be formed into a worldview.<sup>207</sup> Like beliefs, worldviews are not scientific. Rather they are our general conception of what we think the world is.<sup>208</sup> They circumscribe the ways we experience the world and the assumptions we make about it, particularly when we dive into the more narrow and rigorous area of scientific thinking.<sup>209</sup> This means that, when we experience life or examine something particular, we see and understand it in the context of our worldview. However, a worldview is more than a collection of commitments. Our worldview is the story we are already in whenever we experience the world. It is there before our experiences and defines how we take up those experiences and what they

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<sup>204</sup> Already discussed above (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92.).

<sup>205</sup> “Vollenhoven did not find proceeding from a religiously defined framework exceptional. He was convinced that everyone does just that—every theory and practice, as well as what one counts as learning, is rooted in a web of basic beliefs, all of which are ultimately a response to God’s law for creation.” John Kok. “Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education.”

<sup>206</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 13.

<sup>207</sup> John Kok. “Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education.” See quotations below.

<sup>208</sup> John Kok. “Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education.” See quotations below.

<sup>209</sup> John Kok. “Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education.” See quotations below.

mean to us. This is true even when we think critically. In the words of Vollenhoven scholar John

Kok:

A worldview is conceptual in the sense discussed above [about particular beliefs], but it is also more than that. A worldview is more intuitive and dynamic, and on that score also more elusive conceptually, than are the concepts [or beliefs], irrespective of their inclusiveness, which are included in a worldview. Vollenhoven, in one place, distinguishes within nonscientific knowing between worldview and experience<sup>210</sup> and, describing its role, writes that "worldview sets the practical knowledge of all experiences in the correct context."<sup>211</sup> Worldview is a circumscribing whole, a unity of vision; one might also say, a sense of place, calling, purpose, and context...<sup>212</sup>

And again:

... [Worldview] is more than a collection of knowledge that rests on gradually widening the horizon, on continually coming into contact with other people, on expanding the scope of perception. It is the vision that you get from home, or that you've assimilated with difficulty. It is not a theoretical conception, but a view of God, of the world, life, being human, your fellowman, also of yourself.<sup>213</sup>

For Vollenhoven, the biblical norm for worldview is the Scriptures,<sup>214</sup> wherein people can find the true story of the world. This story has also been written upon every atom of creation, for it is in creation that this story is being played out, and many people can find parts of it there.<sup>215</sup> However, without the proper starting place of the biblical narrative, one cannot hope to proceed successfully. This is made clear through his historiographical accounts of the mixed

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<sup>210</sup> Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. "Religie en geloof." *Mededelingen van de Vereniging voor Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte*. (December, 1953).

<sup>211</sup> D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, "Levens-eenheid." *Dies-rede voor de afdeling Utrecht der S. S. R.*

<sup>212</sup> John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education."

<sup>213</sup> John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education."

<sup>214</sup> Vollenhoven, D. H. Th. "Wijsbegeerte en theologie." 3-5.

<sup>215</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 173. Already discussed above (John Kok. "Vollenhoven, Scriptural Philosophy, and Christian Higher Education." And D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 173.).

success of philosophers.<sup>216</sup> Yet, every person must have some sort of worldview, and therefore some narrative will circumscribe, condition and contextualize everyone's understanding. This is especially true for philosophy. Without the proper narrative starting point of the Scriptures, tension is created within the worldview (between the contradictory beliefs which comprise it) or between the worldview and one's experiences (as the world refuses to fit with one's worldview).<sup>217</sup> Antinomies, reductionisms, and dualisms then arise as incorrect circumscriptive beliefs make their effects known, and pieces of information become harder and harder to reconcile to the lopsided or incomplete framework. This is key for understanding the entire process which Lewis depicts himself undergoing in *Surprised by Joy*.

#### Chapter 4-E: Understanding Lewis's Development

God's call made Lewis alive to His Word as revealed in creation, which includes God's rejection of sin's unnatural place in that creation. Thus, when Lewis encountered evil and sin in the world, his heart was moved and revolted against its presence. This movement was Sorrow: Lewis's deep revulsion at, and rejection of, the wrongness of evil's presence in the world.

The power of Sorrow was such that it helped to form the way in which Lewis experienced the world: Lewis formed a circumscriptive belief that there was something fundamentally wrong with the world. This was not a belief founded on that more perfect knowledge of sin offered by the Scriptures. Thus, this belief was imperfect, and only reflected part of what sin's presence in the world actually means (the part revealed by Sorrow).

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<sup>216</sup> Already discussed above (D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. 85-92.).

<sup>217</sup> "...philosophy, however much it differs from this action [sacred believing] and its correlate [science], must not only reflect on the place and task of each but be mindful that it is in accordance with both as well. If philosophy neglects this, then it will leave its adherents behind as people whose life is rent by a struggle between science and belief." D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 11. (underline added for emphasis)

Because this belief was isolated from the full narrative of scripture, Lewis's circumspective belief became central to the atheistic-materialistic worldview which he was developing at the time. Indeed, it was probably the prime stimulus for this new view<sup>218</sup> (this shows the importance of proper context). While other events in Lewis's life undoubtedly contributed to this worldview, the important thing was that this worldview made sense of the wrongness (Sorrow) which Lewis experienced: the world seemed wrong because it was accidental; an arbitrary mistake devoid of meaning.

Without the context of God's entire Word (or even God's entire Word about sin) Lewis's worldview was destined to paint a skewed and incomplete portrait of reality. When this is the case, conflict between worldview and the actual experience of reality is unavoidable.

#### Chapter 4-F: Reduction and Tension

Conflict and contradiction became prominent as Lewis experienced God's grace in creation, particularly as it was manifested in Joy. The extreme pessimism of Lewis's worldview could not produce a satisfactory explanation of Joy. Lewis's worldview had explained suffering by positing the meaninglessness of the universe, but the first testimony of Joy was that it was immensely meaningful: it made "...everything else that had ever happened... insignificant in comparison."<sup>219</sup>

The result of this incongruity is just as Vollenhoven would suggest: without room for real experiences of Joy within his circumscribing worldview, Lewis made Joy the subject of reductionism. Joy, with all its comings and goings at different times and in response to different

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<sup>218</sup> Lewis was also motivated to escape the oppressive version of Christianity which he was then practicing.

<sup>219</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 16.

stimuli, could not be tied securely to any concrete thing in the material universe. Yet, Lewis did not believe in any metaphysical realities. The only answer left him was that Joy was the result of some inner subjective process of his own, and was consequently devoid of the grand significance which it suggested.

The result of this reductionism was tension, both within the worldview and its inconsistent beliefs, and between that worldview and experience. Firstly, this reductionism revealed the power that worldviews have in constituting and circumscribing experience. After all, Joy's natural tendency should have been to draw Lewis, via longing, through creation to that which is beyond it and beyond himself. Yet, because of Lewis's lopsided worldview, Joy had almost the opposite effect, directing Lewis's attention inward to the states of his own mind and their manipulation. Despite this, Joy did not profess itself to be meaningless or illusory, but meaningful, and it did not point inward, but outward. As long as that meaning needed to be denied, Lewis's conception of the world would continue to rub up against his experience of it. This was most clear during Lewis's continued attempts to generate Joy, through various means, all equally unsuccessful.<sup>220</sup>

Another consequence of this reduction was that Joy, Lewis's worldview, and his experiences, became wrapped up in a dualism. As Lewis had already resolved the external material world into a kind of meaningless (evil) accident and saw Joy as being a wholly internal mental event, Lewis's universe soon seemed separated by a great divide between the material and mental worlds: the world of evil, and the world of good.<sup>221</sup> Certainly there were problems

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<sup>220</sup> As discussed in Chapter: 3-B, Lewis, read poetry and walking the woods, had sex, and even studying the occult (all the while directing his attention inward to his own mind), but Joy remained elusive.

<sup>221</sup> "Such, then, was the state of my imaginative life; over and against it stood the life of my intellect. 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

relating to internal consistency within this worldview, but what is most shocking is how this belief circumscribed Lewis's experience.

Lewis was a materialist (not yet an idealist), so his mind was thought of as mere matter. Therefore he concluded that the inner goodness of his mental experiences must be purely illusory and was not representative of the real nature of the universe.<sup>222</sup> Yet the question could have been asked: why did Joy defy the true nature of the universe by offering bliss? Furthermore, what made Sorrow the true experience of the universe? After all, both Joy and Sorrow were felt in the mind, and both Joy and Sorrow were occasioned by real, external, things in the world. It makes little sense therefore, to consider one to be internal and subjective, and not the other, and yet this was indeed how Lewis experienced the world –for a time.

#### Chapter 4-G: New fundamental beliefs

Long ago, Sorrow had brought Lewis to accept (on a deep and primordial level) part of God's Word regarding sin, and had helped Lewis form his first deep-seated belief. Lewis also responded to Joy with pleasure, recognizing, on some level, that it was deeply good and worthy of desiring. Yet unlike Sorrow, Lewis's movement of the heart in response to grace (revealed through Joy) had not led Lewis to form new beliefs or to change his worldview. The explanation for this seems to be that Joy seemed *too* otherworldly to affect Lewis's understanding of the world –perhaps because his conception of the universe had already been influenced so heavily by Sorrow, or perhaps because his understanding of God and Christianity had been too wrapped up

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believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless... Hence at this time I could almost have said with Santayana, 'All that is good is imaginary; all that is real is evil'" C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 170-171.

<sup>222</sup> It certainly is true that Lewis understood Joy at this time, largely in terms of the state of his own mind. C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 169.

in Sorrow to be clearly linked to Joy. This would make sense in terms of Vollenhoven's ontology, as worldviews tend to contextualize and shape new experiences for us, and Lewis's atheistic-materialist worldview had no place for Joy and would therefore undermine the legitimacy of Joyous experiences. Whatever the reason, Joy had remained unconnected to the world in which Lewis lived and had not helped to form his worldview. That would change with *Phantastes*.

Because of the mundane things upon which Joy alighted after reading *Phantastes* (as God's grace alights on all of creation), Lewis's experiences were intense enough to overcome the parameters set on experience by his atheistic-materialistic worldview. That worldview would need to take on a new shape so that it might fit with Lewis's new circumscriptive belief: that the world contained real (not subjective) meaning, goodness, and beauty. The end of this process would be Lewis's final rejection of that worldview.

In time, Lewis was made aware of a contradiction between his materialism and the claims he made about beauty, truth and goodness. This contradiction did not arise because the experiences of Sorrow and Joy (or the things they revealed) were inimical. Rather, it arose because the materialism which Lewis inherited was not one which had, at the outset, recognized the reality of both sin and grace in the world. Having been formed without knowledge of grace, it had no place in which to truly account for it. It may be that it was only a matter of time before some experience showed Lewis that there was no room for Joy in the story of the world which he had adopted.

Lewis was not yet ready to confront the intellectual consequences of what he had experienced. Worldview, however, is not about intellectual formulations, but fundamental beliefs which frame our experiences of the world. Accordingly, new experiences began to open up for



Lewis almost immediately after *Phantastes*. New artists, new musicians, and new friends,<sup>223</sup> were all suddenly revealing aspects of the regular world which Lewis had denied. Lewis's new way of experiencing the world also brought him into contact with theologically minded persons, both in real life<sup>224</sup> and in literature.<sup>225</sup> This was not because Lewis's experience of Joy had made him a Christian, or even spiritual. Rather, because of *Phantastes*, Lewis and these Christians were now sharing the same world as they had never done before.

#### Chapter 4-H: Inconsistent Worldview Revised

Many a person lives their whole life with inconsistent beliefs about the world, but Lewis was a philosopher, and Owen Barfield would have none of it. Lewis would not be allowed to affirm both materialism, and the reality of goodness, beauty, and truth.<sup>226</sup>

However, while Lewis could have had an out in the form of Behavioristic accounts of morality, truth, and beauty, he was totally unable to accept this option: Lewis found considering such an alternative to be almost a "physical" impossibility.<sup>227</sup> Despite the strangeness of this, *Surprised by Joy* gives little explanation as to why it should have been so. The Vollenhovan answer would be that Behaviorism would have undermined Lewis's newly formed fundamental

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<sup>223</sup> "I became capable of appreciating artists who would, I believe, have meant nothing to me before; all the resonant, dogmatic, flaming, unanswerable people like Beethoven, Titian (in his mythological pictures), Goethe, Dunbar, Pindar, Christopher Wren, and the more exultant Psalms." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 198.

<sup>224</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 199-201, 212.

<sup>225</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 213-214.

<sup>226</sup> While a belief in real truth certainly does not contradict Lewis's revelations through Joy, I am not certain it originated there (unlike Lewis's belief in moral goodness and beauty). Rather Lewis may have held a realist belief in truth and reason as early as his studies with Kirkpatrick, as these seem like beliefs Kirkpatrick might endorse. However, Lewis's writing of the article *Miracles*, suggests that Lewis, like the Owen Barfield of *Surprised by Joy*, did not in the end find these phenomena to be defensible under a naturalistic conception of the universe.

<sup>227</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

beliefs. Lewis's acceptance of Behaviorism would have meant more than the reconsideration of these beliefs. Rather, it would have been the invalidation of the experiences which had helped to form them. Furthermore, those beliefs had broadened Lewis's experience of the world, and their rejection would mean the loss or invalidation of all the vistas that had opened up to Lewis since *Phantastes*.

Instead, Lewis accepted Absolute Idealism, which fit well with both his Joy and Sorrow based circumspensive beliefs. Like the new beliefs Lewis accepted after reading *Phantastes*, Absolute Idealism brought Lewis into contact with new experiences.<sup>228</sup> It also began to bring the disparate aspects of Lewis's life into harmony with each other and God's will –the ultimate consequence of a movement of the heart.

Indeed such a growing harmony could almost be said to have been late in coming. The call of God is to bring one's whole life (beliefs of all kinds, and actions) in line with the will of God –and that call had begun long ago. Furthermore, Lewis already felt as though he were “try[ing] to have it both ways”<sup>229</sup> while he was working with Kirkpatrick, who really did believe *and* live his worldview.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Cited earlier: “Considerations from quite different parts of my experience were beginning to click. This new dovetailing of my desire-life with my philosophy foreshadowed the day, now fast approaching, when I should be forced to take my “philosophy” more seriously than I ever intended.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222.

Also: “Indeed, I must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen, long before, the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader. George MacDonald had done more to me than any other writer; of course it was a pity he had that bee in his bonnet about Christianity. He was good in spite of it. Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together; bating, of course, his Christianity. Johnson was one of the few authors whom I felt I could trust utterly; curiously enough, he had the same kink. Spencer and Milton by a strange coincidence had it too. Even among the ancient authors the same paradox was to be found. The most religious (Plato, Aeschylus, Virgil) were clearly those on whom I could really feed. On the other hand, those writers who did not suffer from religion and with whom in theory my sympathy ought to have been complete -Shaw and Wells and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire- all seemed a little thin; what as boys we called “tinny.” It wasn't that I didn't like them. They were all (especially Gibbon) entertaining; but hardly more. There seemed to be no depth in them. They were too simple. The roughness and density of life did not appear in their books.” C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 213-214.

<sup>229</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 135.

<sup>230</sup> Discussed in Chapter: 3-B

In any case, Lewis now believed that the object of Joyous desire was real. Lewis states that this satisfied an emotional need for him,<sup>231</sup> but what I think Lewis really described was how this belief filled a pistic need for him. One of the ways in which humans were created to exist, according to Vollenhoven, is pistically. For Vollenhoven, the pistic function is the function which governs faith and worship, so to say all human beings exist pistically, is to say that all human beings are faith-ing and worshipping beings.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, this is just what Vollenhoven asserts: that all human beings put their faith in, and worship, something.<sup>233</sup> All of his life Lewis had experienced an incredible longing for he-knew-not-what. Lewis's discovery that that object was real, and was the source of beauty, truth, and goodness, fulfilled the human need in Lewis to be devoted and committed to Him who is the source of all good things.

One might protest that Lewis should not be satisfied by the establishment of the Absolute as the object of his pistic worship, as the Absolute is quite different from the God of the Christian Bible. However, Lewis states that his beliefs at this time were nearly indistinguishable from theism.<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, we must remember that Vollenhoven does not glorify human reason above all the other ways of being human. Thus, assertion to Christian intellectual propositions are not the be-all-and-end-all of Christian conversion, and if God was "slowly bringing more and more of Lewis's life under his control"<sup>235</sup> there is no reason why Lewis should not be brought to worship God before he recognized intellectually that that is what he was

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<sup>231</sup> "This seemed quite satisfactory intellectually. Even emotionally too; for it matters far more that Heaven should exist than that we should ever get there." C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 222.

<sup>232</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 31.

<sup>233</sup> D. H. T. Vollenhoven. *Isagoge Philosophiae*. § 11, 31.

<sup>234</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

<sup>235</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 209.

doing. Indeed, this is typical of the overall pattern of Lewis's conversion, which began with movements of the heart and fundamental beliefs, and then worked its way through much of his life (such as his faith life, and his ethical life)<sup>236</sup> before reaching his intellect. Although Lewis's intellectual life contradicted the beliefs of theists and Christians, other areas of his life had already been brought in line with God's will. In Chapter 3 I noted how Lewis was drawn to Christians and theists, as they possessed those characteristics he admired in others and sought for himself. This is because the principle force of movement in their lives was the same; the call of God was drawing them all in line with His will. Furthermore, with similar worldviews, they could be said to have been living in the same world, or partaking in the same story. If Lewis differed from these others, it was only because they had gone further towards unifying their whole being under the will of God than had Lewis.

#### Chapter 4-I: The True Myth, God's Story of the Existence

However, after all this long work on the part of Lewis, it still took a visitation of God's divine grace for Lewis to get out of his "shell."

Lewis writes little about what happened after that spiritual conversion to theism, but it should be noted that Lewis came to Christianity (as opposed to another kind of theism) because he recognized that Christianity was paganism full grown, and the life of Christ was the true myth of which all myths are only reflections.<sup>237</sup> God's story of creation, fall, and redemption, is present in all of creation, and calls out to pagans and Christians alike through his Word in creation (thus, according to Lewis, we see the pagan precursors of Christ). This is something

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<sup>236</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. 226.

<sup>237</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*.

Lewis recognizes in his concept of Myth. Here we may also see why myths evoked Joy in Lewis. Lewis was being called by God to open his heart to the Word, but was closed to the Scriptures (because of fear). Instead, Lewis saw that Word where it was available to him, in those myths which are the shadow of the true Myth.

All throughout his spiritual journey, Lewis struggled with the fact that the reality he experienced everyday was broader than the narrative (worldview) into which he was trying to make it fit. By recognizing God's Word as the fulfillment of myth (as the true myth), Lewis confirmed that the biblical story is the true story of existence, into which all true stories fit.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### Chapter 5-A: Implications for the Study of Lewis

Because *Surprised by Joy* did not tell the story which his readers expected, it has not gained the recognition it deserves. By showing *Surprised by Joy* in this new light, I hope admirers of Lewis will see it as a strong depiction of how Lewis became the kind of person who could *be* a Christian, rather than as a weak depiction of the arguments which convinced Lewis to credit Christianity.

More importantly, this thesis sheds light on Lewis's whole development. Earlier I mentioned Peter J. Schakel and his writing on *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis*. I mentioned how, early on in Lewis's career, reason was very central to his Christianity and that was born out in his writing. However, as Lewis developed as a Christian and a writer his views became more complex, and that too was born out in his writing. Schakel's analysis revealed how story, myth, human imagination, and subjectivity, all become more and more central to his work. Lewis recognized that these things grant people the 'taste' of reality and which puts them in the right 'place' to reason.

As *Surprised by Joy* takes place nearer the end of this development, it displays this change in thinking, especially compared to his earlier accounts of conversion. In *Surprised by Joy*, the principle driving force behind Lewis's search for truth are Sorrow and Joy, and the basic beliefs about the world which they inspire. Lewis's reasoning is not the instigator of the process. Instead, it was the means by which Lewis came to terms with Sorrow and Joy and the beliefs they inspired.

Accordingly, this thesis should help to promote a greater understanding of *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis's conversion, and the development of his thought.

## Chapter 5-B: Implications for Understanding “Belief”

This thesis has helped the real meaning of belief to be understood. When someone believes God’s Word, they do not merely assent to the truth; they live it.<sup>238</sup> That is part of why Vollenhoven stated that the heart is pre-functional. The turnaround of someone’s heart signals the turnaround of that entire person.

This makes sense if we think of worldview in terms of narrative or story. Then, accepting a biblical worldview is not about accepting maxims, but inhabiting the true story of the world as God has revealed it through scripture and creation. That is why Vollenhoven says scripture always addresses us in the language of the everyday: in the mode of the everyday we do not merely study the world, we live in it and grapple with it. To truly believe that “God is love”, then, is to have experienced God’s love in one’s own life, or to have seen that love at work in the lives of others and to, in turn, become loving.<sup>239</sup>

This is made evident by *Surprised by Joy*. When Lewis encountered the truth of God’s Word in revelatory experiences of Sorrow and Joy, he began to become aware that he was living the true Myth: God’s creation of the world, it’s fall into sin, and it’s salvation by grace. From then on, no story but the true story of the bible could ever satisfy Lewis without denying the world in which he had begun to live. He did not just assent to truths (though in time that did come), he loved what God loved, and hated what God hated, and lived as God would have him live.

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<sup>238</sup> As Christ said, “...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...” John 14:6 NIV Bible Gateway

<sup>239</sup> “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” John 4:8 NIV Bible Gateway

### Chapter 5-C: Implications for Apologetics and Evangelism

If a change in worldview must precede the acceptance of the intellectual facts of Christianity, then Christians may need to rethink the role of apologetics. Pure apologetics may still have a purpose, such as the edification of persons who have come to believe, but are not yet intellectually reconciled to that belief. Evangelism in general, however, might be better served by Christians living their whole lives in keeping with God's Word. In that way, the truth of His Word might become evident in any and every part of life.

That this can happen is evident because it already has. All throughout *Surprised by Joy* Lewis encountered individuals –directly or indirectly- whose lives testified to the truth of the Word. Their music, art, stories, academic pursuits, and behaviors, all embodying some aspect of God's Word: the value of selflessness, the honor of chivalry, the beauty of fecundity, and the Godliness of goodness in all its forms. Many of these persons were Christians, some were not, but all helped foster Lewis on the path to conversion by being living witnesses of the truth of God's Word and the story of the bible.

### Chapter 5-D: Implications for Understanding the Power of Story

Fundamental beliefs can be changed by the direct experience of the truth of God's Word in creation, including through living witnesses of that Word. Another way that this can happen is through stories.

Indeed the stories which Lewis wrote are a good example of this. At first, as noted in the introduction, Lewis's early stories often contained some arguments for the reasonableness of Christianity hidden within the narrative. In his later writings this was not the case. Rather Lewis became adept at portraying the world as lived in line with the Word of God. To put it another



way, all of Lewis's stories took place firmly within the story of the world as depicted in the bible. Not that all of Lewis's stories were attempts at evangelism or apologetics. Indeed, they did not need to be, for a life lived in accordance with the Word is its own witness.

Still, it seems that there is a mysterious power in stories to bring someone out of his or her own world, and into another. No doubt this is why Lewis thought his conversion could be best understood by people who first knew the story of his life.

In turning to story, Lewis followed the lead of the bible, whose myriad stories of different types reveal this power clearly. By broadening the horizons of one's experience, biblical stories bring people into God's story, by connecting that story and their own, and making them into the kinds of people who can accept and embody Christianity in other ways, including intellectually.

#### Chapter 5-E: Implications for Understanding Truth.

This thesis pays heed to the idea that the sciences, for all their power to uncover facts, are hopelessly unable to bestow significance or meaning upon them. Lewis's experiences of Sorrow and Joy could be talked about in terms of factual events—a sensation of revulsion, a sensation of longing—but the meaning of these experiences was based on his beliefs, his worldview, what he had faith in, his story of the world.

It is not science, or reason, which renders religion meaningless. Rather, it is religion which renders science meaningful. Without fundamental beliefs, without worldview, without story, without faith, the fruits of science must be without meaning.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> In fact, the first place where I encountered this kind of thinking was in *The Abolition of Man* by C. S. Lewis. Any Lewisian interested in studying the matter further could start their research there.

This, I suspect, is part of why Vollenhoven made doing justice to all the complexities of existence the central task of philosophy. For if the biblical story is the true story, it should be proved true, not by its ability to pronounce facts, but its ability to do justice to all of existence, and to put everything in its proper place. Indeed, this is precisely what Lewis recounts experiencing in *Surprised by Joy* as he moved closer to Christianity: a greater appreciation for all sorts of experience, and the validation (rather than reduction) of his experiences of Sorrow and Joy, and the realities to which they pointed. As Lewis famously remarked in his essay “Is Theology Poetry” (1945): “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.”

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