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Lewis and Barfield on Imagination

Abstract

Contrasts Lewis's and Barfield's views on imagination, and its relationship to truth and knowledge.

Additional Keywords

Anthroposophy and imagination; Barfield, Owen—Epistemology—Imagination; Imagination—Relation to knowledge; Imagination—Relation to truth; Imagination, Theory of; Lewis, C.S.—Epistemology—Imagination

Lewis and Barfield

on Imagination

Stephen Thorson

About 12 years ago, Owen Barfield was asked to speak on the topic "Lewis, Truth, and Imagination." He commented, "

How effortlessly Lewis could use his imagination, and with what success!... [But] the use of the imagination is one thing: a theory of imagination is another. For a theory of imagination must concern itself, whether positively or negatively, with its relation to truth.

Barfield reminded his audience that he and Lewis had had a "special, and rather protracted, tussle" over that very question when both were young. This, of course, was their 1920s "Great War," as Lewis called it *Surprised by Joy*. Regarding Lewis' view after his conversion, Barfield commented, "If he no longer denied, as he had done at the time of the tussle, that imagination had a positive relation to truth, he was disinclined to give any attention to it." The implication is that Lewis later accepted a positive relationship between imagination and truth. On a different occasion, however, Barfield has stated flatly that the later Lewis "held that imagination has nothing to do with knowledge."¹ At first glance these two statements by Barfield appear to be contradictory. But in fact, both statements are true. How can this be?

To answer that we must take a closer look at the importance of imagination in Lewis' epistemology: the place of the imagination in his view of "how we know." A careful distinction must be made between Lewis' pre-conversion view during the "Great War" and Lewis' view as it changed after his conversion to Christianity.

In 1924 a poem by Lewis was published in *The Beacon*.² Lewis titled the poem "Joy," but used the term "Beauty" interchangeably with Joy. It described, of course, that recurrent transitory experience Lewis called Imagination in his unpublished *Summa* and Desire in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. "To-day was all unlike another day / ... As I woke. / Like a huge bird. Joy with the feathery stroke / Of strange wings brushed me over. Sweeter air / Came never from dawn's heart." Four lines have special significance for the discussion at hand.

We do not know the language Beauty speaks,
She has no answer to our questioning,
And ease to pain and truth to one who seeks
I know she never brought and cannot bring.

One cannot find a clearer statement of Lewis' view of Imagination at the beginning of the "Great War." Beauty

(or Joy, or Imagination) cannot bring truth. Lewis did not even "know the language Beauty speaks."

Barfield, on the other hand, thought he did know the language "Beauty speaks." His thesis for the degree of B. Litt. was all about that language as it was found in poetry. It was eventually published as *Poetic Diction* in 1928, but begun as early as 1922. In fact, the arguments in that book provided the material for much of the "Great War" debate. The book focused on the very question Barfield considered so crucial to any theory of imagination — What is the relation of imagination to truth and knowledge?

Barfield: Imagination as Knowledge

In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield limited his attention to aesthetic experience as found in poetry, calling this *poetic imagination*. Barfield defined poetic imagination as a "felt change of consciousness" (PD, 48), further defining this change as an "expansion" of consciousness, resulting in "knowledge" (PD, 55). In poetry, this new knowledge comes to us through metaphors, which enable us to recognize "resemblances and analogies," allowing us to see meaning we could not see before. Barfield believed that "the poet makes the terms" which carry this new meaning. He denied that logic or rational thinking could make new meaning or knowledge; it could only help us become more aware of the meaning or truth "already implicit in the words, ... deposited or imported by the poetic activity" (PD, 31).

Subtitled *A Study in Meaning*, the book argued for the essential role of imagination in the creation of meaning.

Language does indeed appear historically as an endless process of metaphor transforming itself into meaning. Seeking for material in which to incarnate its last inspiration, imagination seizes on a suitable word or phrase, uses it as a metaphor, and so creates meaning... inspiration grasping the hitherto unapprehended, and imagination relating it to the already known. (PD, 140-141)

Thus imagination is not only a way or path toward knowledge, but the only way toward new knowledge of reality.

In 1929 Barfield read an address before the Lotus Club at Oxford which was later published as the first essay in Barfield's *Romanticism Comes of Age*. He began with an assertion that was not only central to this volume of essays, but to his entire thought regarding poetic imagination —

that the Romantic Movement never “came of age”, because the English Romantics never developed a philosophical base for their high view of imagination.³ “To make Romanticism into a self-sufficient organic being... there ought to have been added to the new concept, beauty, to the renewed conception of freedom, a new idea also of the nature of truth” (RCA, 28). Of course Romantics such as Shelley and Keats claimed that imagination (poetic imagination) “bears some special relation to Truth,” but they did not even ask, much less answer, the question: “In what way is Imagination true?” Even Coleridge, who had proposed a very high view of Imagination indeed, failed to complete his philosophical essay on the nature of Imagination and its relation to truth.

Coleridge’s thought about poetry and imagination became central to Barfield’s own views. In his *What Coleridge Thought*, one would be hard put to find any major (or even minor) difference between Barfield and Coleridge, at least as Barfield has interpreted him.⁴ In a few paragraphs it is impossible to do justice to a topic requiring an entire book by Barfield to explain, but some attempt must be made. We can simplify matters by limiting our discussion to the topic of Imagination alone.⁵

Coleridge distinguished a primary Imagination from a secondary Imagination. This distinction must be quoted in full:

The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the former in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. (quoted in WCT, 74)

This certainly is consistent with Barfield’s view of imagination. What may not be clear at this point is that Lewis also supported this view toward the end of the “Great War.” To see that fact, Coleridge must be understood as Barfield interpreted him.

Barfield accepted the view of Being described in the Lewis’ *Summa*, Part I, i.e. that the soul is projected or emerges from Spirit, such that each soul can say that it is, at some level, Spirit. Barfield himself stated, “‘I’, while remaining one of the parts, must also be in some sense, the Whole.”⁶ Along with the subjective soul, however, the world of Nature is also projected from Spirit. Therefore Lewis had said that the world also “is the creation of what I, at some level, am” (*Summa*, I, xii). Similarly, Coleridge wrote that “of all we see, hear, feel, and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves” (WCT, 80). For both Coleridge and Barfield the world of Nature is the unconscious mind of man.⁷

In this system, then, Coleridge’s primary Imagination actually is this separation of the soul from the world of Nature around us (“the eternal act of creation”). Normally this is unconscious. It becomes secondary, Barfield said,

“when it is raised to, or nearer to, the level of consciousness and therewith becomes expressible” (WCT, 77). What becomes expressible is the organic relation between man and nature, the “oneness” that truly exists between man and nature in this philosophical system, a “unity in multiteity.”

While, then, imagination at its primary stage empowers experience of an outer world at all, at its secondary stage it both expresses and empowers experience of that outer world as the productive ‘unity in multiteity,’ which results in a whole and parts organically related to one another (WCT, 81).

It is this vision of essential oneness between man and the world of Nature that the Romantics attempted to express, to re-create, in their work.

In the preface to the second edition of *Poetic Diction* Barfield argued that “as the secondary imagination makes meaning, so the primary imagination makes ‘things’” (PD, 31). During the “Great War” it was the secondary Imagination, the making of meaning which was in dispute. What is the nature of this meaning? Can this meaning show Truth about reality? If so, does it always do so? And if not always, how can we know when to trust it?

In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield only hinted at the answers to some of these questions. For example, he noted the necessity for poets to develop the “presence of mind” required to judge their visions and words while still remaining in the imaginative experience (PD, 209). He did not tell his readers how to develop that “presence of mind”. But he believed that a method was available — Steiner’s Anthroposophical training.

In England Barfield had looked in vain for the philosophical maturing or the “coming of age” of the Romantic Movement. In Germany, however, Barfield found what he was looking for. Steiner had developed from Goethe a method of knowledge which was, essentially, “systematic imagination” (RCA, 37). In Anthroposophy, Barfield had found a philosophy that included a place for Imagination, as well as a method for using that Imagination to obtain new knowledge of spiritual reality. And because all reality is in fact “spiritual,” new knowledge of so-called physical reality can be obtained as well.

There are three stages to the Anthroposophical Way: Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. Considered as the first stage of Anthroposophical training, Imagination does not seem precisely the same term as used by Coleridge or when used by Barfield himself in the term “poetic imagination.” This first stage of Steiner’s method is a “systematic imagination,” involving concentration and meditation. Systematic imagination results in a sort of “picture-consciousness, a vigilant dreaming,” which is only a “semblance of truth”. It is only at the second stage of Inspiration, that “the perceptive faculty itself is enhanced in a way that begins to have objective value for cognition” (RCA, 16). During the “Great War”, Barfield explained to Lewis that the Poet merely “feels” the truth of a metaphor, but does not “know” it like the trained Anthroposophist at the second stage (*Replicat*, p.11).

It is this second stage, and the third, Intuition, that chiefly interested Barfield, since Steiner claimed that this method or Way not only resulted in a true knowledge of reality, but also provided a way to influence that reality. Barfield had discussed this method with Lewis during the "Great War", noting Steiner's distinction between our "sensible" awareness and the "super-sensible" awareness of the trained Anthroposophist. But Lewis rejected out of hand any belief that seemed to him to be derived from authority alone. He distrusted the "super-sensible" world of Steiner, suspecting it was not more "real" than the common phenomenal world, but rather just more phenomena (and dangerous because it was not recognized as such).

Therefore, most of the "Great War" did not center on the Anthroposophical Way, but on that experience which was common to both Barfield and Lewis — that particular recurrent experience which Lewis called Joy and Barfield called Poetic Imagination. This was their common ground.

Lewis: Imagination as Spiritual Awareness

While in his teens, Lewis had attempted to believe in a materialistic world view, which excluded any meaningful place for his experiences of Joy, or even of Beauty. He could not keep denying that Beauty had meaning, however. As he told Greeves in one of his letters at the time, "I have formulated my equation Matter=Nature=Satan, and on the other side Beauty, the only spiritual and non-material thing that I have yet found" (TST, 214). He included this concept in his book of poems, *Spirits in Bondage*, published in 1919. In the poem, "Song", he said, "Atoms dead could never thus/ Stir the human heart of us/ Unless the beauty that we see/ The veil of endless beauty be/..." (SiB, 51). Lewis had sent this poem to Greeves before its publication. Commenting on it, he said, "The beauty therefore is not in the matter at all, but is something purely spiritual, arising mysteriously out of some indwelling spirit behind the matter of the tree..." (TST, 217).

At this time Lewis did not always distinguish Beauty from his transitory experiences of Joy. "The conviction is gaining ground on me that after all Spirit does exist; and that we come into contact with the spiritual element by means of these 'thrills'." He began to believe that "Something right outside time and space" did exist, and that "Beauty is the call of the spirit in that something to the spirit in us" (TST, 217).

And yet in *Surprised by Joy* Lewis made clear that at the start of his "Great War" with Barfield he had retreated from these vague beliefs. He had become a "realist," accepting "as rock-bottom reality the universe revealed by the senses" (SbJ, 208). Years later Lewis gave Barfield the credit for a major shift in his thought during their "Great War". Barfield pointed out to Lewis that such "realism" was inconsistent with his desire to claim that logical thought led to truth, that moral judgement was objective, and that aesthetic experience was "valuable."

Notice that Lewis did not end up saying, as Barfield did, that aesthetic experience leads to knowledge or truth.

He did not accept Barfield's view of Imagination as a way toward knowledge. But neither did he wish to accept a Crocean alternative in which art is completely divorced from knowledge. He desired to maintain that his experiences of Joy or poetic imagination were "valuable."

He thought that his new idealist position had provided him a way to do so, and attempted to convince Barfield in his *Summa*. In Part I of the *Summa* he detailed his view of Being — (i.e. the evolution of soul from Spirit), but along the way he made a few comments of importance for his view of Imagination. In Section x he said, "The analogy between cosmic and artistic creation is more than an analogy, the latter being simply the lowest grade of the former." This is straight out of Coleridge's view of primary and secondary Imagination, of course. Based on this identity in *kind* between artistic and cosmic creation, he stated in Section xvii that because God creates by an act of imagination, God cannot be different than himself. Further, he wrote that God imagines men's souls and the world they live in, and that in some sense, he himself actually is God. Note that for Lewis the term "creation" here meant an *evolution* of both soul and the world of Nature from Spirit. In Section xx, Lewis distinguished two image-making faculties, dismissing Phantasy as a lesser faculty since it is limited to the material of memory. But Spirit has no raw material outside itself, and must make an image by separation of his own substance. Again this echoes Coleridge (and Barfield) closely (WCT, 75-76).

In Part II, "Value," Lewis settled down to the business of showing Imagination to be valuable. Although recognizing that his view of Being implied that all souls and all moments must be considered "spiritual," Lewis wished to keep the word as a useful term of approval for a "higher" or "better" life. For Lewis becoming more spiritual was a reawakening or a consciousness of one's participation in Spirit (Sec. ii). The creation of a resisting matter inevitably brings pleasure and pain, and therefore the passions. The Spirit only has a limited view through souls, all of whom are corrupted by passions. By great struggle, however, human souls can fulfill their goal to multiply consciousness from a diversity of viewpoints to add richness to the life of the Spirit (Sec. iii). Therefore, "The approximation of souls to their *qualitative equality* with the consciousness of Spirit constitutes their spirituality" (Sec. iv). This is the primary definition of "spirituality" and was the basis for his view of Imagination as "Spiritual Awareness," not knowledge. Even in the 1950's Lewis described his earlier view of the spiritual life this way. The goal of man was to "multiply the consciousness of Spirit... while yet remaining qualitatively the same as Spirit" (SbJ, 225).

Lewis defined two Modes of the Spiritual life. The First is the Practical Mode, commonly called Virtue or Morality. The second is the Theoretical Mode, of which there are many examples. Potentially, each Mode has two stages. The difference between the two stages is similar to the difference between Coleridge's primary and secondary Imagination as Barfield interpreted it, i.e. the secondary

stage involves an increased consciousness of, and participation in, that which was unconscious at the first stage (WCT, 75-78). He states that the first stage of the Practical Mode is to will to do right.⁸ The second stage is to realize that this inner law of right willing (at first appearing as a command coming from outside the self) is actually what one really wills at the deepest level. Thus the second stage involves a heightened "spirituality", which Lewis had just defined as an "approximation of souls to their qualitative equality with the consciousness of Spirit" (Sec. iv). A little later he defined it as a "conscious participation" in Spirit (Sec. ix).

Lewis ended a lengthy discussion of the Theoretical Modes of the spiritual life by summarizing: the supreme mode of the spiritual life must be as universal as Science, as concrete as History, as disinterested as Art, and as free from "the great primary abstraction" as Philosophy is. But it must also, like Charity, consciously cooperate with Spirit. Is there, he asked, a faculty for seeing any and every part of our environment as art does unreal objects and charity does special objects? If so, such a faculty would fulfill the ideal function of the spiritual life. Souls would become like clear spectacles for Spirit to see through, and thus multiply the consciousness of Spirit without corruption (Sec. xi).

Needless to say, Lewis believed there was such a faculty. After long and careful preparation, Lewis finally revealed his candidate for the highest mode of the spiritual life — Imagination.

It may appear to us as a rediscovery, as if we came home after a long exile: because we are indeed coming to recognise that we are Spirit and are everywhere in our own country and our own house. Or it may appear to us as a longing which is also fruition, and a losing which is also keeping, because we then veritably become aware of our dual nature and our division from ourselves, which we are at once the Spirit that possesses all and the soul that is abandoning that possession... Others feel that what seemed dead things are charged with life, and people the hills and trees with vague personality: nor are they wrong, for we share the life of the Spirit which knows itself alive beneath all its vesture. But all alike know that such moments are our highest life. For their continuation would be the redemption of the world... *This highest form of the spiritual life I call Imagination.* (Sec. xiii)

He went on to describe the transitory nature of Imagination as it is seen in the experiences of mystics, in the epiphanies described by some, or even in the moments of insight experienced by philosophers and scientists. Elsewhere, as we have seen, he called these moments, "Joy."

In a later section of the *Summa*, Lewis defined Imagination as "the activity of discerning as Spirit" (Sec. xviii). For the Lewis who wrote the *Summa*, Imagination meant Spiritual Awareness. And this Spiritual Awareness was a consciousness of the soul's oneness with universal Spirit as well as the soul's oneness with the world of Nature, both of which are the product of a separative evolution from that same Spirit. Thus, we see that Lewis' view of Imagination was based firmly on his view of Being.

The same cannot be said for his view of knowledge and truth, however. Shortly before writing his *Summa*, Lewis had come across a very important concept. It came to displace in importance his experience of Joy in the formulation of his theory of knowledge. He had read in Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity* of Alexander's distinction between "Enjoyment" and "Contemplation".⁹ As it is crucial to understand it, I will quote at length Lewis' discussion of the concept.

When you see a table you "enjoy" the act of seeing and "contemplate" the table. Later, if you took up Optics and thought about Seeing itself, you would be contemplating the seeing and enjoying the thought... I accepted this distinction at once and have ever since regarded it as an indispensable tool of thought. A moment later its consequences — for me quite catastrophic — began to appear. It seemed to me self-evident that one essential property of love, hate, fear, hope, or desire was attention to their object. In other words, the enjoyment and contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible... Of course the two activities can and do alternate with great rapidity; but they are distinct and incompatible. This was not merely a logical result of Alexander's analysis, but could be verified in daily and hourly experience. (*Sbj*, 217-218)

But I must quote his comments a bit further on.

It followed that all introspection is in one respect misleading. In introspection we try to look "inside ourselves" and see what is going on. But nearly everything that was going on a moment before is stopped by the very act of our turning to look at it. Unfortunately this does not mean that introspection finds nothing. On the contrary, it finds precisely what is left behind by the suspension of all our normal activities; and what is left behind is mainly mental images and physical sensations. (*Sbj*, 218)

These two passages are extremely important for our understanding of Lewis' epistemology. For this concept — the enjoyment/contemplation distinction — became the cornerstone for Lewis' theory of knowledge, and Lewis had incorporated this concept into his view of Being in the first part of the *Summa*: "The Spirit is pure subject and can only be enjoyed, never contemplated" (I.iv). This allowed him to deny several beliefs of Anthroposophy regarding communication or travel to other or higher spiritual worlds, as well as any communication between soul and Spirit. It also allowed him to deny Barfield's (and Anthroposophy's) view of Imagination as a path toward true knowledge. The emphasis of a previous article of mine was mainly on how this enjoyment/contemplation distinction was not consistent with Lewis' view of the soul's evolution from Spirit.¹⁰ Barfield's initial responses to the *Summa* tended in that direction. In this article we will emphasize how Alexander's enjoyment/contemplation distinction was inconsistent with Lewis' high view of Imagination.

Almost immediately after his eloquent description of Imagination (for which Barfield in his *Replicat* wrote profuse thanks), Lewis plunged into several more sections aimed against Anthroposophy. He made good use of his enjoyment/contemplation distinction. He stated that we

cannot see spiritually by turning our eyes inward, but only through turning our eyes outward. We should not strive to examine our own souls but to enjoy Spirit by contemplating external things, such as the world, art, philosophy, history, or imagination. Souls that are introspective are, Lewis felt, in danger of the foolishness of ascetic practices or its opposite lawlessness, or even liable to a major reaction like "the dark night of the soul" described by some mystics. The spiritual life, like Spirit, must look outward. Since to live spiritually is to see things as Spirit sees them, not as our passions show them, Lewis rejected any concern for one's own spiritual life as itself unspiritual (Sec. xv, xxiv).

Further, he emphasized the disinterestedness which must be a mark of the spiritual life. He resisted any attempt to show that any particular thing had "empirical value" for his life. Value can only arise through an object because of its relationship with Spirit; attributing that value to the object itself is Idolatry. Therefore, he wrote that if the actual existence of heaven and hell, or of the God of the Christians could be demonstrated, it would become impossible to consider them in a spiritual way (Sec. xvi). Lewis regarded Religion as mostly Idolatry mixed with false opinions about facts. But at times Religion may actually be Charity with false opinion; in that case, the false opinions would not take away the spirituality. Even Charity will cease to be spiritual, however, if it is practised in deference to a god's external command (Sec. xvii).

Lewis long held that any motive to do right based on a commandment from without or based on what the doer would receive in reward was actually unspiritual. This discussion of Idolatry was important for his attack on Anthroposophy, since Lewis believed Anthroposophists to be anything *but* disinterested; years earlier, he had suspected that some adherents to Anthroposophy were attracted by "the sugar plum of promised immortality" or "comfort."¹¹ He could not see himself accepting a philosophy that promised to lead to "supersensible" knowledge or reality without that acceptance being tainted with wrong motives (*SbJ*, 206-207).

The concept of Idolatry also had direct relevance for Lewis' denial of Imagination as a source of knowledge. For example, Lewis considered it Idolatry to mistake a myth or symbol as factually true. For this would be to attribute empiric value to something which has contingent value. Imagination ("the activity of discerning as Spirit") does not need justification, he stated. There can be no reasons from outside the spiritual itself that can justify it. Value is absolute, not empirical (Sec. xviii, xxii).

Lewis proposed that Imagination can take any first degree mode and convert it into one of the second degree (i.e. make it more spiritual), but that Art can be transformed the easiest. "Imagination is *par excellence* the content of Art," and Art is "*par excellence* the vehicle of imagination." By definition the result is imaginative art, an art which is consciously spiritual. Imaginative art is superior because it brings about an actual formation of

concrete experience, not just a conceptual statement from that experience (Sec. xix).

Lewis' special interest was imaginative fiction. Imaginative fiction created consciously by the artist he called "symbolism," that created unconsciously by a group or people he called "myth." Elaborating further, Lewis noted the relation of symbol and myth to metaphor. With all three "an experience of one kind [is] expressed, and enriched, by the supposal or suggestion (not the actualisation) of an experience of another kind" (Sec. xx). With the removal of the parenthetical remark, Barfield himself could have written that definition.

In Sections xx and xxi toward the end of the *Summa*, the conflict between Lewis' view of knowledge and his view of Imagination becomes more obvious. On the one hand, his claims for Imagination as Spiritual Awareness were very high. He stated that a poet who experiences a landscape imaginatively also "consciously cooperates with Spirit in making that landscape"; such a poet will naturally use metaphors while recording this spiritual experience, for "Spirit experiences all things ordered and articulated in a perfect unity." Spirit perceives the "absolute relevance... sees no object in isolation." Spirit can contemplate many things souls cannot, and *in their context*. The "suggestion of that context" or rather such "fragments allowed us by Space and Time... is metaphor," he proposed. The soul of man caught up in an imaginative experience (the highest Spiritual experience, remember) "sees as Spirit sees, wills as Spirit wills." When such a man returns from his imaginative experience, the remaining fragments of contexts could become (for him) a myth. So far so good.

But suddenly, Lewis paused to say that these fragments of "contextual experience" which become metaphors "need no experience of the objective world." They may be mere "subjective fantasies." In some way these subjective fantasies, as metaphors, allow us to "see the object more spiritually, that is, more really: but though they lend reality they do not receive it." The fact that metaphor makes such imaginative experiences more real does not prove them to be more than fantasies. Lewis broke the spell still further by flatly stating, "The existence of beings used as symbols (e.g. faeries, etc.) is therefore to be handed over to the sciences for empirical inquiry." After all, truth must be objectively demonstrated.

What is happening? Handing fairies over to scientists for experimentation? We feel as if a dream has been rudely interrupted. The disturbance is more than emotional, however; something has happened to Lewis' argument. What exactly is left of Lewis' high view of Imagination?

If Spirit perceives "absolute relevance", sees all things "in perfect unity," then how can anything Spirit sees be really untrue? A distinction between metaphors associated with objective truth and those associated with subjective fantasies seems impossible to uphold — at least with such a high view of Imagination. Lewis tried to salvage as much as he could, however. First, he extended

Spirit's sight a bit. He agreed that we may see oaks more spiritually if we view them as "green-robed senators" in Keat's *Hyperion*. But that is because Spirit sees our fantasies in addition to the real world, and sees them also "in perfect unity" (Sec. xx). The metaphor itself does not have to be true, Lewis said. Although they "lend reality they do not receive it." Notice that he had been very careful in his definition of metaphor. Lewis maintained that whatever is true of imaginative experience is not what is conveyed in metaphor, myth, or symbol. At worst they are only the residue left in the mind after the soul has returned from an experience of Imagination to a normal state. At best metaphor, myth, and symbol are only "fragments" or "suggestions" of the context and unity which only Spirit sees.

Second, Lewis tried to show, for mythology at least, that being "untrue" was not a stumbling block, but rather its essential nature. He insisted again that if beings used as symbols were shown to actually exist, their symbolical value would be destroyed.¹² For symbols are not given as facts to us, but taken "by free spiritual activity" (i.e. by Imagination). If factually true, such beings would be objects of fear or desire, giving them empirical value. They would need "to be 'disenchanted' i.e. stripped of empirical value and condemned *qua* worldly terribles or desirables before they were 're-enchanted' by the spiritual point of view." Lewis went so far as to say that "if all mythology were proved as fact, the poets would throw it away and invent a new one, warranted untrue" (Sec. xxi).

In his *Replicat*, Barfield attacked both these attempts by Lewis to make his denial of truth to metaphor consistent with his high view of Imagination. If Imagination is a Spiritual Awareness or consciousness of the soul's oneness with universal Spirit as well as the soul's oneness with the world of Nature, then how can anything be merely "subjective"? Barfield pointed out that the universal "relevance" which all find in Spirit destroys the distinction between the objective and subjective. At the very least, he said, subjective fancies become objective when given form and placed in memory. Further, Barfield disputed the claim that a myth found to be true would be deprived of symbolic value. He pointed out that this flatly contradicts Lewis' earlier statement (in Sec. xiii) that during moments of Imagination Spirit knows itself alive under the vesture of the natural world. Therefore, the natural vesture can become symbolic. If Imagination is 'taking' the symbol, then the symbol is actually 'taken' by Spirit — and therefore is also 'given' to the soul. In other words, Lewis' view of Imagination, based as it was on his view of Being, implied some sort of reality to all that is experienced via Imagination.¹³

In Part I of the *Summa* Lewis was primarily concerned with establishing his particular idealist view of Being. In Part II, he was primarily trying to show the pre-eminence of Imagination in the spiritual life. It is only at the very end that his denial of truth to metaphor is brought in, seriously clashing with what he was built up so carefully beforehand. However, it was this very question of the truth of metaphor (and Imagination) that had been the

main point of argument in the "Great War" letters.¹⁴ ❧

(Part II to be published in the next issue.)

Abbreviations

(All references to Lewis' and Barfield's works in this essay are cited parenthetically in the text, using the abbreviations listed below.)

Lewis' books Cited

- AoL *The Allegory of Love*. 1936. New York: Oxford UP, 1958.
 CR *Christian Reflections*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967.
 EC *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961.
 L *The Letters of C.S. Lewis*. New York: Harcourt, 1966.
 PH *Personal Heresy*. With E.M.W. Tillyard. London: Oxford UP, 1939.
 SbJ *Surprised by Joy*. 1955. New York: Harcourt, 1956.
 SiB *Spirits in Bondage*. 1919. New York: Harcourt, 1984.
 SMRL *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: UP, 1966.
 TST *They Stand Together*. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Barfield's Books Cited

- PD *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. 3rd ed. London: Faber & Faber, 1965.
 RCA *Romanticism Comes of Age*. 2nd ed. 1966. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1967.
 WCT *What Coleridge Thought*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1971.

Notes

1. The first statement is from Barfield's, "Lewis, Truth, and Imagination," *Kodan* [Wheaton College] (Winter 1978): 17-26. The second is from Barfield's Postscript to "C.S. Lewis: Science-Fiction and Theology," by Charles Davy, *The Golden Blade* 1976; 95-97.
2. Clive Hamilton, "Joy," *The Beacon* 3.31 (May 1924): 444-445. Clive Hamilton was Lewis' pen name at the time.
3. For examples, see Barfield's "Either/Or," *Imagination and the Spirit*, ed. Charles Huttar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 25-42; and Barfield's *What Coleridge Thought*.
4. Barfield attempted to demonstrate through the use of liberal quotes that many of the philosophical views of Coleridge have been misunderstood or simply ignored by the vast majority of those commenting on them.
5. For example, the complicating factor of Coleridge's distinction of Imagination from Fancy ("a mode of Memory emancipated from the world of time and space" — WCT, 75) will not be discussed in the text. It should be noted, however, that Fancy for Coleridge was not "creative" of the outer world at all; it remained an "aggregating power; it combines and aggregates given units of already conscious experience; whereas the secondary imagination 'modifies' the units themselves" (WCT, 86).
 In addition, Fancy and Imagination exist in a polar relationship. Many, including Barfield himself, might wish for a lengthy discussion of Coleridge's concept of *polarity* in this article. However, that concept is not a central part of the "Great War" materials themselves. Barfield did come to see that Lewis' insistence on the enjoyment/contemplation distinction (related to the "Law of Non-Contradiction") could only be overcome by the "imagination of the polarity of contraries (Coleridge's 'polar logic')"; but in the "Great War" materials this concept can only be found in Barfield's *Autem*, written toward the very end of the dispute. See Barfield's Introduction to *Light on C.S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, 1965).
6. Barfield, *De Toto et Parte*, "Notes on the Definitions," IV. All quotes from the "Great War" materials in this article are from previously published excerpts. Unless stated otherwise, they appear either in my article, "Knowing and Being in C.S. Lewis' 'Great War' with Owen Barfield," *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society*, 169 (Nov. 1983), 1-8; or in Lionel Adey's book, *C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series 14 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1978).

(Notes continued on page 32)

Commedia: or rather a role. For it is precisely the point of the story to have Dante the pilgrim (and thus the reader) so recover a proper vision of the world that he will escape from it. At the beginning of the poem's action (described in *Inferno* II, 99 *et seq.*), it is St. Lucy, the patroness of those with afflicted sight, who acts as the messenger from the Blessed Virgin to Beatrice. Dante sees that the human race has been given that deathlessness for which it always longed, but he also learns the fairy-story lesson that deathlessness in itself can be, even for Virgil, a torture: and he sees, we see, how to escape that torture — see it, in this moment, in the figure of Beatrice, and, in the end, in a flash beyond the power of fantasy, in an Enchantment of Love which draws him and us into the Primary Reality. ☞

Notes

1. *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine - Cantica II Purgatory*. New York, Penguin (1955), p. 308.
2. As early as *Inferno* I, 121-126, where the transition is first adumbrated:
To which glad places, a worthier spirit than I / Must lead thy steps, if thou desire to come, / With whom I'll leave thee then, and say good-bye; / For the Emperor of that high Imperium / Wills not that I, once rebel to his crown, / Into that city of His should lead men home." [Sayers, ...*Cantica I Hell*... (1949), p.74]
3. e.g., *Inferno* IV, 76-78; XIII, 52-54; XV, 85; *Purgatorio* XXI, 85.
4. p. 285. Curiously, Beatrice is not explicitly invoked in *Inferno* XVI, where Dante is particularly terrified. She may be represented by some sort of sequence involving Geryon (Fraud incarnate) and the Siren (who defrauds by accepting the projection of Dante's own fantasies), as contrasted with her own, "We are, we are, Beatrice"; or the mysterious business of the cord with which Dante meant to restrain the Leopard of incontinent desire may have some sort of reference to the woman whom (in however courtly a sense) Dante desired.
5. One could argue that Dante is in fact an Orpheus who regains his Eurydice as well as a Knight who rescues his Lady, in the sense that what he really quested for was self-knowledge; but despite Virgil's figurative crowning and mitring — or rather precisely because of them, as sacramental acts — I think that it would be wrong to conflate the inner grace of what Dante the pilgrim learns with the outward signs of what happens to him.
6. *The Tolkien Reader*, New York: Ballantine 1966), p. 52.
7. Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins, *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, Cambridge: Harper and Row (1985), p. 10.
8. This is probably the point at which to note that Tolkien has been quoted as condemning Dante's "petty relations with petty people in petty cities," a remark he made to interviewers from the *Daily Telegraph Magazine*. His posthumously published *Letters* show Tolkien responding to a draft copy of the interview:
My reference to Dante was outrageous. I do not seriously dream of being measured against Dante, a supreme poet. At one time Lewis and I used to read him to one another. I was for awhile a member of the Oxford Dante Society (I think at the proposal of [C.S.] Lewis, who overestimated greatly my scholarship in Dante or Italian generally). It remains true that I found the 'pettiness' that I spoke of a sad blemish in places.
The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin (1981), p. 377.

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- . "On Fairy-stories" in *The Tolkien Reader*. New York: Ballantine, 1966.

Notes to Lewis and Barfield. (continued from page 19)

7. *What Coleridge Thought*, pp. 79-80. One could argue that Barfield interpreted Coleridge in the most radical sense possible. R.J. Reilly, for example, in the chapter on Barfield in his *Romantic Religion: A Study of Barfield, Lewis, Williams, and Tolkien* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1972) takes a more "traditional" stance, i.e. Coleridge merely held that "by means of the Primary Imagination we 'create' the phenomenal world by our unconscious structuring of the Kantian noumena" (p. 26). Barfield's view is more radical in that there seems to be nothing but phenomena (or "collective representations"); the "noumena" do not exist. No physical reality stands behind the phenomena, only something that could be called the "collective unconscious" (SA, 153-154). Elsewhere Barfield said, "Nature unperceived is the unconscious, sleeping being of humanity; just as Nature perceived is the self-reflection of waking humanity" (RCA, 210).
8. Morality for Lewis was not intrinsically superior to other modes of the spiritual life, but was "pre-emptive" because it is concerned with action. Many have tried to trace Lewis' emphasis on morality to his Christian beliefs. But Lewis had placed morality as one of the highest modes of the spiritual life well before his Christian conversion. His acknowledged master in this area was Kant, not Christian revelation. Lewis stated in Part II of his *Summa* that a sound theory of ethics, such as Kant's, implied the metaphysics he had presented in Part I.
9. A recent edition is Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity* (London: Macmillan, 1966).
10. See my article, "Knowing and Being in C.S. Lewis' 'Great War' with Owen Barfield," *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society*, 169 (Nov. 1983), 1-8.
10. See my article, "Knowing and Being in C.S. Lewis' 'Great War' with Owen Barfield," *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society*, 169 (Nov. 1983), 1-8.
11. *Letters*, p. 89. After his conversion, Lewis pointed out that he had begun with no "belief in a future life". "I now number it among my greatest mercies that I was permitted for several months, perhaps for a year, to know God and to attempt obedience without even raising that question... I have never seen how a preoccupation with that subject at the outset could fail to corrupt the whole thing" (*Sbj*, 231).
12. Lewis seems to have never lost his belief that this was true. In his "Is Theology Poetry?", published in 1945, Lewis said, "In a certain sense we spoil a mythology for imaginative purposes by believing in it" (*WG*, 77). By this time, however, he could caution against going too far. A believed mythology was spoiled only "in a certain sense", not in all senses. He admitted that many things we enjoy depend on their supposed reality in order to achieve their effect on us. Nonetheless, the kind of pleasure received is different.
13. Symptomatic of the fundamental problems in his argument, Lewis' distinction between Art and Imagination cannot be maintained. Earlier in Part II, Lewis claimed that Art is only an "image" of the spiritual life because the objects of Art are not "real", and often are mere "subjective fancies" (Sec. viii). But in the concluding sections of Part II "subjective fantasies" have been made legitimate objects for Imagination, although they or their associated metaphors still are denied "reality" (Sec. xx).
14. The "Great War" letters were for the most part written before the *Summa* and the tractates that followed. However, the main point of disagreement in the letters only appears at the end of the *Summa*. Therefore, our examination of the "Great War" letters has been left till after our examination of Lewis' view of Being and Imagination in the *Summa*. This is perfectly consistent with Lewis' own opinion that metaphysics (the question of Being) is primary.



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