

Miracles by C. S. Lewis
Chapter 4 “Nature and Supernature”
Outline

I. Intro

- A. If the argument has been sound so far, acts of reasoning are not interlocked with the total system of Nature as its other items are all interlocked with each other.
- B. They are connected a different way
 - i. As the understanding of a machine is connected with the machine but not like the way its parts are connected with each other
 - ii. Knowledge of a thing is not one of the thing's parts
 - iii. Not arguing that consciousness is in the same position
 - a) pleasures, pains, fears, hopes, affections and mental images are consciousness but they are not necessarily “about” anything.
 - iv. The distinction is not between:
 - a) mind and matter
 - b) soul and body
 - v. but between:
 - a) Reason and Nature
 - the frontier is not where the “outer world” ends and “myself” begins but *between* reason and the mass of events whether physical (on one side) or psychological (on the other).
 - This probably explains the spatial idea of “between” that he discusses in ch. 3 (p. 35 Signature Series), BH

II. The Traffic across the frontier

- A. This frontier has a lot of traffic but it is all one way traffic
 - i. Rational thoughts induce and enable us to alter the course of nature
 - a) Mathematics enables us to build bridges (physical nature)
 - b) Arguments enable us to alter our own emotions (psychological nature)
 - c) We are more successful at altering physical nature than psychological nature
 - but do do both
 - ii. Nature is powerless to produce rational thoughts
 - a) Nature does modify our thinking, but the moment she does so it ceases (for that reason) to be rational
 - b) “a train of thought loses all rational credentials as soon as it can be shown to be wholly the result of non-rational causes” (39)
 - Nature only succeeds in killing rational thought
 - c) Comments on the extension of rational thought
 - joke about making money with change machines. Put in one dollar, and it gives back only four quarters! “But how do you make money?” “On volume!” he replies. “We buy a lot of change machines and just imagine how much money we’ll make!”
 - Contrarily, a person who discovers he can throw further by aiming higher might think, “if I throw high enough, I could throw a mile.” He doesn't realize that after aiming over 45° high he will be throwing mostly up and will therefore reduce his distance.
 - iii. Nature can only raid Reason to kill, but Reason can invade Nature to take prisoners and

colonise.

- a) Examples: objects before us: walls, ceiling, furniture, book, our own washed hands and cut fingernails are evidence of the colonisation of Nature by Reason.
 - None would have been this way by Nature alone
- b) Even example of our current attention to the subject is the result of Reason disciplining our inclination to mental wandering.
 - A toothache or anxiety might prevent our attention, and thus interfere with our thought, but such interference does not produce a new type of reason, but only suspends Reason altogether to the extent that she affects it.
- iv. Traffic at the frontier is an Unsymmetrical Relation
 - a) Not like brother-brother relationship, but like a father-son.
 - If A is the brother of B, B is the brother of a
 - If A is the father of B, B is NOT the father of A (40)
 - Reason is not related to Nature as Nature is related to Reason.
- v. The shock of this analysis
 - a) It may feel shocking to those who have been brought up with Naturalism
 - b) It makes them feel that Nature is pock-marked over with orifices at which something different from herself can do things to her.
 - c) Lewis asks, “begs”, whether such repugnance is rational or only emotional
 - He knows that the desire for a pantheistic nature is deep-seated in the modern heart
 - the example warning from Bacon that human understanding often believes things are more tidy and orderly than they really are. (41)
 - Modern science attests to that, as Quantum physics was not expected, but seems more true than Newtonian atomism.

III. Summary

- A. Rational thought is not part of the system of nature
- B. Each man (i.e., rational) must have an area of activity independent of nature
 - i. Rational thought goes on “of its own accord” or exists “on its own”
- C. This area is not necessarily *absolutely* existent on its own
 - i. it may be dependent on something else
 - ii. “It is not dependence simply but dependence on the non-rational which undermines the credentials of thought.”
 - iii. Example:
 - a) one man's reason can be led by another man's reason and still be rational thought
 - iv. there may be a long chain of rational dependencies
 - a) but at each step you would have Reason coming from Reason
 - b) like a valid argument [BH]
 - v. But, when you are asked to believe that reason could come from non-reason you must 'cry Halt' (42)
 - a) for if you don't, all thought is discredited.
- D. Therefore, there must be, sooner or later, a Reason that exists on its own

IV. The source of Self-existent Reason

- A. this can't be ourselves
 - i. We are not eternal, something created (or procreated) us
 - ii. Our reason grows up gradually
 - iii. Our reason ceases for a few hours every night

- B. But if our thought is valid, there must be such a self-existent Reason somewhere “that neither slumbers or sleeps” that our minds depend upon
 - i. Ps. 121:4; cf. also 1 Tim. 6:16 speaking of God who “ alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. ” and v. 17 “immortal, eternal, invisible”
- C. Human minds are not the only supernatural entities that exist
 - i. it must be supernatural because it is rational, BH
 - i. Our minds each have their own tap-root in an eternal, self-existent, rational Being, whom we call God. (43)
 - ii. Each mind is an incursion of that Supernatural reality into nature.
- V. Questions about agency (*who* is thinking rationally?)
 - A. Being as our minds are sometimes rational and sometimes not, it might be better to say not that “I” am a product of eternal Reason, but that eternal Reason occasionally works itself through me
 - i. Examples
 - a) like a wire and electricity
 - b) like a carpenter with a hammer [BH]
 - B. Answer: thinking is not an object that knocks against us or even a sensation we feel.
 - i. Reason doesn't happen to us, we *do* it.
 - ii. There is always the “I think” of Kant¹
 - C. The idea that we are creatures to whom God has given reason seems more philosophical than to say that our thinking is only God's thinking through us
 - i. For how could we think correctly, but arrive at a wrong conclusion due to bad facts?
 - ii. Why would God be obligated or condescend to think one of his perfect thoughts through us who are bound to produce errors in thought? (44)
 - iii. Being as we think we are doing the thinking,
 - a) Why does God mistake his thoughts for mine?
 - b) Why does he cause me to mistake his thoughts for my own?
 - iv. It seems best to say human thought is not God's but God-kindled
- VI. Scope of this book, reason for this focus
 - A. This book is about miracles, not everything
 - i. Not attempting a doctrine of man
 - ii. not arguing an immortality of the soul
 - iii. Early Christians did not emphasize the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the whole man
 - a) Excerpts from “Religion Without Dogma” from *Timeless Writings of C. S. Lewis*, pp. 387-8
I do not define the essence of religion as belief in God and immortality.

The Jew is athirst for the living God (Ps. 43:2), he delights in His Laws as in honey or treasure (Ps. 19:10), he is conscious of himself in Jehovah's presence as unclean of lips and heart (Isaiah 6:5). The glory or splendour of God is worshipped for its own sake.

¹ This has been called “the famous statement that opens §16 of the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” from, I think (!), *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Although Kant doesn't completely agree with Descartes, it has been said “Kant endorses Descartes’ claim that the statement 'I exist' is contained in the statement 'I think.' ” Quoted from <http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2575/longuenesse1.pdf>

In Buddhism, on the other hand... a doctrine of immortality is central ... salvation from immortality, deliverance from reincarnation, is the very core of its message.

I cannot sufficiently admire the divine tact of thus training the chosen race for centuries in religion before even hinting the shining secret of eternal life.

- B. Our interest in man is because his rationality is the tell-tale rift in Nature which shows that there is something beyond or behind her.
- C. Illustration (45)
 - i. Pond with surface covered with scum & floating vegetation, has few waterlilies
 - ii. From their structure you could deduce that they had stalks underneath with roots that went to the bottom.
 - iii. The naturalist thinks the pond is of indefinite depth—water all the way down
 - iv. Our claim is that some things on the surface indicate they are not floating but attached by stalks to the bottom
 - v. Therefore the pond has a bottom. Go deep enough and you will come to something that is not pond—to mud and earth and then to rock and finally the earth and the subterranean fire.

Pond	Universe
Top of pond, covered with scum, few water lilies	Nature, covered with events, with a few rational beings
Water, Naturalist thinks this is all there is, “there is no <i>bottom</i> ”	All of interlocked Nature, Naturalist thinks this is all there is, “there is no <i>beginning</i> ”
Bottom, where the lilies are anchored	Divine Reason, where rational human minds get their reason.

VII.Can Naturalism still be saved?

- A. One can be a naturalist and still believe in a cosmic consciousness to which the whole show gives rise.
 - i. An *emergent* God.
 - ii. Is a transcendent God necessary?
 - a) Notes how people would prefer a God of nature...
- B. It is possible that nature could have gotten into a configuration that knows consciousness
 - i. this consciousness might have thoughts
 - ii. those thoughts might pass through minds
 - iii. But, because those thoughts are the product of non-rational causes they would have no validity
 - iv. We have not escaped the difficulty, only pushed it further back.
- C. A cosmic mind can only help us if it is:
 - i. at the beginning
 - ii. is not dependent on nature
 - iii. is therefore self-existent.
 - iv. Such a God is transcendent and supernatural
 - v. Thus, this attempt (to save Naturalism) only leads us back to where we started (a Divine, Supernatural Reason) (47)

VIII. Precedence of God and nature

- A. There is a God who is not a part of Nature
- B. We have not yet said that He must have created her.
- C. Could they be eternally co-existent?
 - i. Hard discussion of the weakness of an unrelated dualism.
 - ii. It seems gratuitous to attempt this here for we've already discovered that the two (God and Nature) already have a relation, a common frontier—in every human mind. (48)
- D. Discussion of the frontier
 - i. They are mixed
 - a) Our reason and our non-rational attributes are all part of what we call “me”
 - ii. They are one way, unsymmetrical
 - a) physical nature (on its own) impacts my brain with disorder
 - b) But when reason dominates, (and produces order, BH) it is still very much my brain
 - iii. They are monarchical
 - a) Reason saves and strengthens the whole system
 - b) The whole system, when it rebels against reason, destroys reason and itself.
 - iv. The metaphor of a spear
 - a) poorly chosen, for Reason is not like a weapon but more like
 - a beam of light which illuminates
 - or a principle of organization which unifies and develops
 - v. The priority or precedence of Reason over Nature.
 - a) Nature is not “invaded” by Reason, Reason comes in like a rightful king among his own subjects like or a mahout visiting his own elephant
 - cf. the scene when Richard the Lionhearted returns in Robin Hood (1938). Even Robin Hood and his “merry men”, criminals all, bow at the entrance of the rightful king, Richard the Lionhearted, returning from the crusade.
 - Elephant may run amuck, nature may be rebellious, but when they obey it is obvious that it is their nature to be a subject. “All happens as if she had been designed for that very role.” (49)
- E. Conclusion of precedence question
 - i. To believe that Nature produced God or the human mind is, as we've seen, absurd.
 - ii. To believe they are both independent is impossible
 - iii. There remains, therefore, the belief that God created nature
 - a) this eliminates problem of sheer otherness (unrelated)
 - b) This fits in with the frontier situation, where nature is under a lawful sovereign
 - c) Nature, though not intelligent, is intelligible
 - events in the remotest parts of space appear to obey the laws of rational thought
 - iv. The idea of creation does not present us with any of the intolerable difficulties of every other hypothesis.
 - v. There is also a similarity to creation in our own minds: the imagination
 - a) We can cause to exist the mental pictures of material objects, human characters and events.
 - b) We fall short of real creation in two ways
 - We can only recombine elements borrowed from the real universe
 - can't imagine a new primary color or a sixth sense
 - What we imagine only exists in our consciousness
 - we can by communication have others imagine something similar

Note: there is a fascinating point in G. K. Chesterton's essay about Shakespeare's "Midsummers Night's Dream" in which he discusses the imagination. In the play, the fairies, elves, and merry tricksters of dreamland fool and provoke the characters. And at the end of the play "Theseus and his train retire with a crashing finale, full of humour and wisdom and things set right, and silence falls on the house. Then there comes a faint sound of little feet, and for a moment, as it were, the elves look into the house, asking which is the reality. 'Suppose we are the realities and they the shadows.'"

- vi. God can invent the colors as well as color itself and has the ability to impose what he has invented on created minds.
 - a) This doesn't seem an intolerable assumption
 - b) It is far easier than the idea of Nature producing valid thought
- vii. He does not maintain that God's creation of Nature can be proved as rigorously as God's existence, but it seems overwhelmingly probable.
 - a) No one with an open mind should seriously entertain any other hypothesis
 - b) It's rare to find someone who has grasped the existence of a supernatural God without them also believing he is the Creator.
 - c) No philosophy seems to be able to improve on Gen. 1:1
 - He makes some comments about the poetry of this, quoting Jerome (on this cf. also Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI Sections 1-13; Book XII)