

2 THE RELATION OF REASON AND IMAGINATION

*If reality consists of nothing but physical objects and abstract concepts, then reality has, in the last resort, nothing to say to us. We are in the wrong universe. Man is a passion inutile; and so, good night. And yet, the supposedly real universe has been quarried out of man's sensuous experiences.*²³

C. S. Lewis found his philosophical position not while he was studying philosophy for Greats (1920–1922), but only much later in a long process of thinking and reflecting on his own experiences. Part of his intellectual development took place when he worked as a philosophy tutor and recognized that he had difficulties making clear his position to his pupils.²⁴ But no less important was the long philosophical debate with his friend Owen Barfield that is commonly known as the “Great War”.²⁵ It had started in 1923 when Barfield (and with him Cecil Harwood, another mutual friend) got to know the writings of Rudolf Steiner and showed himself to be impressed by this esoteric Austrian philosopher; it ended in 1930 when Lewis accepted a personal God.

As Lewis refused to follow Barfield on the road to anthroposophy, it became necessary for him to reflect on his epistemological position and to argue for his own metaphysical views.²⁶ This helped him to appreciate human experience in its actual concreteness and to clarify the relationship between man's reason and imagination. In Pt. 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, more will be said about the development of Lewis' philosophical thinking with regard to his *view of being*; the following pages will focus on his *epistemological* reflections.

2.1 The distinction between “enjoyment” and “contemplation”

The basis of Lewis' epistemology is a conceptual distinction he adopted from the Australian philosopher Samuel Alexander. Alexander, who in turn mentions G. E. Moore's essay “The Refutation of Idealism” (1903) as his source, distinguishes in *Space, Time and Deity* (1920) two elements which constitute in their mutual relation every experience.²⁷ On the one hand, there is an *act of mind* (or awareness); on the other hand, there is the *object* the mind is aware of

23 *Letters to Malcolm* 146f.

24 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 173 and the introduction to Pt. 3.2.

25 Cf. *ibid.*

26 Cf. Thorson, “Imagination I” 12.

27 Cf. Alexander 11. *Space, Time and Deity* originated as the Gifford Lectures in Glasgow of 1916–1918. For the following see also Feinendegen, “Contemplating” 29–37, *idem*, “A Reply” 69–79 and *idem*, “Introduction” 20–25.

in an experience.²⁸ Both elements are present in every experience, but our relation to them is not the same, for it is the *mind itself* as one of those two elements which has the experience: it is the togetherness or “compresence” of those two elements in the experiencing mind which constitutes the experience.

The one element is present in the experience as the experiencing (as the act of having the experience), the other as the experienced (as the object of that experience). The experiencing mind always knows that it is itself having the experience. When I see (for example) a table, I not only do the seeing, but I *know* that I do the seeing, and I see not only the table, but I *know* that I see the table.²⁹ Lewis, who read *Space, Time and Deity* in March 1924, immediately accepted this distinction and kept on using it for the rest of his life.³⁰

Alexander suggests that both elements have found expression in language as well, for here we find the distinction between the *cognate* accusative and the *objective* accusative. Cognate accusative means that the thing spoken of is produced by the activity of the subject – e.g. if you fight a battle or devise a logical riddle. Objective accusative means that an act refers to an object that is other than the experiencing subject – e.g. if you fight your enemy with a sword or think about the theorem of Pythagoras.³¹

Both Alexander and Moore argue that the object of an experience cannot be a part of (or element in) the experiencing mind but must be considered to exist independent from it.³² For if sensation (or any other experience) did not mean being aware of something other than the experiencing mind – that is, if it were not an aspect *distinguishable* from the act of experiencing – then no man could be aware even of himself.³³ Lewis also claims that the self can only be aware of itself if it recognizes itself in contrast to something other that is not itself.³⁴

28 “[I]n every sensation or idea we must distinguish two elements, (1) the ‘object,’ or that in which one differs from another; and (2) ‘consciousness,’ or that which all have in common – that which makes them sensations or mental facts” (Moore, “Refutation” 20).

29 Cf. Alexander 12, *Surprised by Joy* 170 and Pt. 2.2.3.

30 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 169 and AMR 301, 304.

31 Cf. Alexander 12 and *Surprised by Joy* 169.

32 Cf. Moore, “Refutation” 27 and Alexander 15. In 1924, Lewis already criticized Locke for believing that our perceptions are only subjective states in our minds (cf. “Tutorial Notes” 111).

33 Cf. Moore, “Refutation” 28.

34 “There is no reason to suppose that self-consciousness, the recognition of a creature by itself as a ‘self’, can exist except in contrast with an ‘other’, a something which is not the self?” (*Problem of Pain* 23, cf. “Summa” 65).

Alexander calls the act of *being aware of* or *attending to* (= the experiencing as something that is consciously done by the mind) an “enjoyment” which “contemplates” its object (= the experienced).³⁵ Lewis illustrates the application of these concepts using the example of seeing a table:

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.³⁶

However, we should be aware that while both Alexander and Lewis draw their examples from sensory experience, the underlying analysis applies to *any act of mind* we may perform: Acts of thinking or knowing are no less enjoyments than any other experience the mind is living through, and a particular notion as their object is no less contemplated than any material object.³⁷

For Alexander, this is an analytical truth: it is what it *means* to have an experience. Hence, it is no less impossible that there is an enjoyed act of mind without a contemplated object than that there is a child without a mother, or a mother without a child. There is never an experience which does not have those two elements in it:³⁸ every enjoyment of an experience (as an act of mind) *is* a contemplation of the experienced object. Because of this, Alexander is willing to call the whole experience an enjoyment *and* a contemplation:

There are no two separate mental acts, one of enjoyment and one of contemplation. The mind, in enjoying itself, has before it, and therefore contemplates, the object. Contemplation is a name for the same act as enjoyment, only in reference to the object.³⁹

In other words, in every experience, it is possible to distinguish between an experiencing subject and an experienced object. With regard to the activity of the experiencing subject, the experience is called an *enjoyment*; with regard to its object, it is called a *contemplation*. But if an experience is defined by the togetherness or “compresence” of an act of mind and an experienced object in the experiencing mind, it may suffice to refer to one of these two elements in order to ensure that the whole experience is meant. It is not necessary to mention the other element explicitly because it is self-evident that it is present in the experience as well.

According to Alexander, however, it is not the same – it is actually two different experiences – to enjoy a certain experience or to contemplate it.

35 Cf. Alexander 12.

36 *Surprised by Joy* 169.

37 Cf. Alexander 12f.

38 Cf. *ibid.* 16.

39 *Ibid.* xiv, cf. *ibid.* 12.

When we see a table, we enjoy the act of seeing (which is still a contemplation, namely a contemplation of the table). But we may also contemplate the act of seeing (which is still an enjoyment, namely an enjoyed act of investigating the phenomenon called “human perception”). Hence, the enjoyment of an act of seeing (as an act of mind = an internal experience) would not be the same experience as a contemplation of this same act of seeing (as an object = seen from the outside).

And we should be aware that while every experience is enjoyed, not every experience is contemplated. In the vast majority of cases, the object we contemplate is not a human experience but some other object like a sunset, a mathematical problem, a loved person or an argument in a philosophy book. To choose an experience (or experiences in general) as the object of our contemplation means to choose from all possible objects of contemplation a special class of them, namely the act of experiencing itself, in order to enjoy the activity called epistemology (in philosophy), perceptual psychology (in psychology), or neurophysiology, optics etc. (in the natural sciences).

In “Meditation in a Toolshed”, Lewis calls the enjoyment of an experience (= the experiencing) a “looking *along*”, and the contemplation of an object (= the experienced) a “looking *at*”. (In “Early Prose Joy”, *The Personal Heresy* and *An Experiment in Criticism*, he calls the enjoyment of an experience a “looking *through*”, and the contemplation of an object a “looking *at*”.⁴⁰)

Lewis illustrates in this essay also what happens when we switch from enjoying (“looking *along*”) an experience to contemplating (“looking *at*”) it. He steps in his toolshed in and out of a sun beam which illuminates the shed, that is, he steps in and out of a certain experience.⁴¹ While he is looking *along* (enjoying the act of seeing along) the beam, he looks *at* (contemplates) the leaves and the sun ninety million miles away. When he steps out of the beam, he looks *at* (contemplates) the beam (= his own previous experience) from the outside but still enjoys an act of seeing, of looking *along* his visual impulse.⁴² In other words, the act of looking *at* his own former experience is a new and different experience, but still a looking *along*. Both experiences – the inside vision of looking *along* the beam *and* the outside vision of looking *at* the beam – are an enjoyment as well as a contemplation.

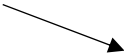
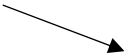
It is the same with Lewis’ other examples from “Meditation in a Toolshed”. A young man is in love with his girl: he is looking *along* (enjoying) his sexual impulse and looking *at* (contemplating) the girl. Then a psychologist comes

40 Cf. “Early Prose Joy” 32, *The Personal Heresy* 12, 25 and *Experiment* 36.

41 Cf. “Toolshed” §1f.

42 Cf. *Ibid.* §10.

and performs an act of psychological research: he is looking *along* (enjoying) his act of psychological research and looking *at* (contemplating) the young man's sexual impulse. A mathematician performs an act of mathematical thinking: he is looking *along* (enjoying) an act of mathematical thinking and looking *at* (contemplating) timeless and spaceless truths. Then a cerebral psychologist comes and performs an act of scientific investigation: he is looking *along* (enjoying) that act of scientific investigation and looking *at* (contemplating) the mathematician's act of thinking. Each of these experiences is an act of looking *along* and of looking *at*, of enjoying a particular act of mind and contemplating a particular object. Put in a table, the equations are thus:

Enjoyed	Contemplated	Whole experience called
Act of mind	Object	Enjoyment (Lewis: "looking <i>along</i> ") <i>and</i> Contemplation (Lewis: "looking <i>at</i> ")
1a. Act of seeing a table	Table	Enjoyment of the act of seeing a table <i>and</i> Contemplation of the table
		
2a. Act of doing Optics	Act of seeing a table	Enjoyment of the act of doing Optics <i>and</i> Contemplation of the act of seeing a table
1b. Act of mathematical thinking	Timeless and spaceless truth	Looking <i>along</i> the act of mathematical thinking <i>and</i> Looking <i>at</i> timeless and spaceless truth
		
2b. Act of cerebral psychology	Act of mathema- tical thinking	Looking <i>along</i> the act of cerebral psychology <i>and</i> Looking <i>at</i> the act of mathematical thinking ⁴³

43 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 169, "Toolshed" §3f and *Preface to Paradise Lost* 132. From experience 1 to 2, the act of seeing (or thinking) is moved from being the enjoyed to being the contemplated. It is therefore a great difference whether a particular experience is enjoyed (from the inside) or contemplated (from the outside): it means, in the case of an act of seeing a table, to switch from experience 1a to 2a or, when thinking about a mathematical problem, from 1b to 2b.

The fact that Lewis also uses both terms to denote the whole act of experiencing (for example in his “Summa”) has produced some confusion among Lewis scholars.⁴⁴ It must therefore be emphasized that both, Alexander and Lewis, consider it impossible that there could ever be an enjoyed act of mind without a contemplated object: an experience *always* consists of the togetherness or “compresence” of an enjoyed act of mind and a contemplated object in the experiencing mind.

Lewis’ constant use of Alexander’s distinction shows the great importance he attributed to it in epistemological questions. But we should be aware that he did not follow Alexander in his metaphysics. When he accepted Alexander’s distinction, he was an Idealist,⁴⁵ and he kept on using it after he had accepted the Christian faith. He therefore rejected Alexander’s naturalistic interpretation of the knowledge relation.

This is important because a main characteristic of acts of experiencing is that they “are ‘about’ or ‘refer to’ something other than themselves”:⁴⁶ by taking something other than themselves as the object of their awareness, acts of experiencing have the character of being *intentional*.⁴⁷ For Alexander, being a naturalist, the cognitive relation between the mind and its objects was *not* unique: he believed that man’s mind or consciousness is in the last resort identical with brain processes.⁴⁸ But Lewis followed Kant, Bradley and Moore in believing that the relation between the mind and its objects is utterly different from any relation that could possibly exist between objects *as* objects. It is not the relation of a thing to its quality, or of a thing to a part of it, but the relation of *knowing* a thing or consciously *being aware* of it.⁴⁹ This is essential to Lewis’ whole thinking; it is for example a vital element in his “Argument from Reason” (Pt. 1.1.4 and 2.2.3).

In most cases, Lewis uses the enjoyment/contemplation distinction strictly in Alexander’s sense. But in his literary theory, he sometimes uses it in an analogical way. For here he states that the reader ought not to look *at* the poet but *through the eyes of* the poet (or through the spectacles the poet is wearing), in order to *see what the poet sees*. In Alexander’s terms: the reader should not

44 Cf. Adey 32 and Starr, *Light* 51, Fn 25. Part of this confusion is due to the fact that Lewis a) did not define these terms in his “Summa”, that he b) applied them to his pantheistic view of being (cf. Thorson, *Joy* 37, 54), and that c) Barfield misunderstood them (cf. Feinendegen, “Contemplating” 37–40).

45 Cf. Pt. 3.2.1. and 3.2.2.

46 *Discarded Image* 165, cf. Alexander xix–xxi and *Miracles* 21.

47 Lewis’ description of acts of experiencing as “being about” or “referring to” something other than themselves matches with today’s definitions of intentionality.

48 Cf. Alexander xvii, 26.

49 Cf. Moore, “Refutation” 24f, “De Futilitate” §16 and *Discarded Image* 165f.

contemplate the poet but enjoy the act of mind the poet is enjoying, in order to contemplate the object as the poet contemplates it.⁵⁰ This is not a strict application of Alexander's distinction, for the reader's consciousness is not meant to be identical with the poet's consciousness; it is only meant to share it in its quality of experiencing.⁵¹

Another way of presenting this analogical application of the enjoyment/contemplation distinction is Lewis' use of the French words *savoir* (= to contemplate or have "knowledge about" the poet and the historical situation he was living in) and *connaître* (= to enjoy or have "knowledge-by-acquaintance" of what the poet has experienced or imagined by sharing his point of view as it is expressed in his books).⁵²

2.2 Mental acts are irreducibly subjective

The enjoyment/contemplation distinction was an important tool for Lewis, whose application had far-reaching epistemological consequences. It showed him most notably that there are two separate approaches to the phenomenon "human experience". We can step inside (look *along*) an experience and we can watch (look *at*) an experience from the outside. We can *enjoy* or *contemplate* an experience.

But what we see or perceive while we are looking *along* an experience is very different from what someone else would see or perceive when looking *at* this same experience from the outside. These two – the things as they are experienced by the mind (like a perception of the colour green) and the physiological processes observed from the outside (like the stimulation of a visual nerve or the activity in a certain brain area) – are so utterly different that neither philosophy nor today's brain specialists have yet any idea as to how they are connected. What's more, because this connection is completely unknown, the

50 Cf. *Personal Heresy* 11f and *Experiment* 139.

51 Reading literature is for Lewis an "imaginative sharing of the poet's eyes" (ibid. 100); the reader does not become ontologically one with the poet. In the Pantheism of his "Summa", however, the individual soul was supposed to be identical with the divine Spirit, and the soul's acts of enjoyment literally *were* Spirit's acts of enjoyment (cf. Pt. 3.2.2).

52 Cf. "Anthropological Approach" §12, "De Audiendis Poetis" §19, *The Four Loves* 120 and *CL II* 206, to Dom Bede Griffiths, 14 September 1936. Bassham and Thorson fail to recognise that *connaître* is gained by *seeing what the poet sees*, and therefore analogous to enjoyment: "It is *connaître* not *savoir*; it is *erleben*; we become these other selves. Not only nor chiefly in order to see what they are like but in order to see what they see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre, to use their spectacles and be made free of whatever insights, joys, terrors, wonders or merriment those spectacles reveal" (*Experiment* 139, cf. Bassham, "Enjoyment" 13f and Thorson, *Joy* 54, Fn 19).

things we perceive while we are in an experience do not even appear in our scientific explanation from the outside. Lewis writes:

The mathematician sits thinking, and to him it seems that he is contemplating timeless and spaceless truths about quantity. But the cerebral physiologist, if he could look inside the mathematician's head, would find nothing timeless and spaceless there – only tiny movements in the grey matter.⁵³

As it is quite easily possible to be mistaken in our subjective account of an experience, the question arises whether we should not trust the objective results of our acts of looking *at* an experience more than the results of our acts of looking *along* them. According to Lewis, this is what has more or less been done during the past two centuries: Science and philosophy gave the act of looking *at* experiences precedence over the act of looking *along* them. But while this approach may have had its practical advantages, he denies that it is possible to discard all inside experiences as mere subjective illusions. For the act of knowing can never be fully understood by merely looking *at* it.⁵⁴ If we ignore the enjoyed aspects of our experiences, we will inevitably lose the object of our study – for it is only these enjoyed aspects which provide us with the knowledge of the phenomena we are trying to explain:

A physiologist, for example, can study pain and find out that it 'is' (whatever *is* means) such and such neural events. But the word *pain* would have no meaning for him unless he had 'been inside' by actually suffering. If he had never looked *along* pain he simply wouldn't know what he was looking *at*. The very subject for his inquiries from outside exists for him only because he has, at least once, been inside.⁵⁵

In other words, we must know what pain or light *is* before we can start to explain them scientifically, and we can only attain this knowledge in an enjoyed act of mind which *precedes* the later act of contemplating these things. Unless it is perceived by an experiencing mind, there is in the final analysis no object at all, and thus no object of scientific investigation as well.

- 53 “Toolshed” §4. This problem occurs not only in our acts of rational thinking but in *every* experience: “Even if we left our rational thought out of the question and considered our mere sentience we should still meet a difficulty. How are the movements of optic nerves and the disturbances they set up in the brain related to what we mean when we say, ‘I see that tree?’” (*Miracles* [1958] 80).
- 54 Lewis anticipates here a main point of Thomas Nagel’s famous essay “What is it like to be a bat?” (1974) which argues that it is impossible to exclude the 1st person perspective from our scientific description of the world (cf. Nagel 165–180).
- 55 “Toolshed” §8. Frank Jackson introduced into the philosophy of mind a similar argument in order to prove the falsehood of physicalism: the thought experiment of the scientist Mary who grew up in a room that is held entirely in black and white and has never seen a colour (cf. Jackson 130).

Lewis concludes that the true reality of pain or light (or any other quality) is not the physiological processes in the human body as they are observed by the physician or scientist, it is the *actual experience* of pain or light, whatever may correspond to it in the physical world.⁵⁶ In his opinion, “experience”, as an epistemological term, should thus be defined as “[t]hat part or result of any event which is presented to consciousness.”⁵⁷

Translated into the language of his stage analogy, this claim would read: It is inherently impossible to leave the stage of human perception in order look behind it. Everything we perceive is presented to us as an appearance onstage, and we must take it seriously as the appearance it is, whatever may correspond to it in the supposedly “real” world behind the stage scenery.⁵⁸ And the same holds true for our attempts to *speak* about our experiences. They too can only be described as they appear onstage, for “nothing can be described except in terms of its effects in consciousness.”⁵⁹

Lewis ascribed the fact that so few people are aware of this epistemic situation to the development of modern science during the past four hundred years. For in the sciences, the focus lies almost entirely on the object of investigation and hardly ever on the act of experiencing itself.⁶⁰ But he also mentions another reason for the widespread neglect of this epistemic situation: the widespread belief that it possible to gain insight into our own inner life by using the method of *introspection*; many people fancy that they can watch their own mental states as if they were another object of contemplation.

His analysis of the act of experiencing, however, convinced Lewis that this is a mere self-delusion. Alexander had already stated that “[m]y own mind is never an object to myself in the sense in which the tree or table is.”⁶¹ Lewis takes up this point and argues that it is never possible to take the enjoyment of an experience as the object of one’s own contemplation. In *Surprised by Joy*, he explains by using the examples of our enjoyment of love and fear:

It seemed to me self-evident that one essential property of love, fear, hope, or desire was attention to their object. To cease thinking about or attending to the woman is, so far, to cease loving; to cease thinking about or attending to the dreaded thing is, so far, to cease being afraid. But to attend to your own love or

56 Cf. *CL III* 1338f, to Kenneth R. W. Brewer, 9 May 1962 and *Personal Heresy* 109.

57 “By experience I mean ‘That part or result of any event which is presented to consciousness.’ Thus in a Toothache the total event is a complex physiological, bio-chemical, and (in the long run) atomic event: what is presented to consciousness, i.e. the Pain, I call an experience” (*CL II* 928f, to Edward T. Dell, 28 March 1949).

58 Cf. *Letters to Malcolm* 106f, *Personal Heresy* 109, Fn I and Pt. 2.1.

59 “Is Theism Important?” §6.

60 Cf. *Miracles* 45f.

61 Alexander 19.

fear is to cease attending to the loved or dreaded object. In other words the enjoyment and the contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible.⁶²

This passage has caused some confusion among Lewis' readers: doesn't this suggest that he believed (in contrast to Alexander) that there are two different mental activities, one of (pure) enjoyment and one of (pure) contemplation?⁶³ But it can be shown that Lewis' views are wholly consistent with Alexander's views. All we have to do is remember that while both Alexander and Lewis are willing to call the whole experience an enjoyment *and* a contemplation (in the sense explained), they still insist that there is never an enjoyed act of mind without a contemplated object. And then the problem with introspection (which is of course an enjoyed act of mind) becomes obvious:

If we introspect, we try to contemplate (= attend to) our own enjoyment, e.g. our enjoyment of seeing a tree. But in order to attend to our enjoyment of seeing the tree, we must stop attending to the tree. The object of our contemplation is now our own (past) enjoyment, and no longer the tree. And because every contemplation has its corresponding enjoyment, this is equal to saying that our enjoyment has changed as well (in our table from experience 1a to experience 2a).⁶⁴ We are in fact in a *new experience* – an experience that is utterly different from our previous act of seeing the tree. Hence, whatever we may contemplate in our attempt at introspection is not our actual enjoyment of seeing the tree.

Alexander as well as Lewis assert that *no* attempt at introspection (to contemplate, in a given experience, one's own enjoyment) will ever achieve what it sets out to do. It is like trying to look at one's own eyes:

If you pulled out your eyes in order to look at them, you would not be able to see either your eyes or anything else. If you stop loving or enjoying or attending to something in order to examine your love or enjoyment or attention, of course you will not find the love or enjoyment or attention still going on. You yourself have just stopped them.⁶⁵

But why is this hardly ever recognized? Lewis' answer is simple: because our attempts at introspection don't find nothing; they find what is left in the mind

62 *Surprised by Joy* 169f, cf. Alexander 20.

63 Cf. Bassham, "Enjoyment" 15.

64 Because every enjoyment of an experience *is* the contemplation of a certain object, a change of our enjoyment always corresponds to a change of the object of contemplation – and *vice versa*. Alexander explains: "[A]s the object varies, however minutely, so does the corresponding enjoyment vary however minutely" (Alexander 26).

65 "Prayer Manuscript" 41, cf. *AMR* 394, *Personal Heresy* 11 and *CL II* 983, to 'Mrs Lockley', 27 September 1949.

after we have stopped the previous act of enjoying.⁶⁶ Our “introspection” either finds the results of the previous act of experiencing, or else its physiological and psychological concomitants: pictures, sensations and emotions which the previous enjoyment elicited in us and which do not immediately disappear when we interrupt an experience in order to introspect it.⁶⁷ (In “Meditation in a Toolshed”, it is not the previous experience of looking *along* the beam of light that is seen when we step out of the beam, but only specks of dust floating in the air.)⁶⁸

The same is true for the ideas or concepts we find by trying to introspect an act of thinking. For example, if a logician tries to find out what is in his mind while he is thinking about some universal (e.g. what it is that all the objects we call “chairs” have in common), he will find mental pictures, concepts like the words of a definition or physical sensations: the thinking itself, he will not find, for he stopped the actual act of thinking by trying to introspect it.⁶⁹

Neither of these concomitants or by-products is the act itself; this should be obvious in the case of the sensations and the mental pictures,⁷⁰ but it is no less true for the concepts (or the definition). For how could the logician find the correct concepts if he couldn’t compare them with the thoughts themselves?⁷¹ And the same holds true also for the relation between our acts of imagining and the results or concomitants of these acts (i.e. the pictures or images these acts leave behind in our minds after the real imagining has ebbed).⁷²

Of course, it is possible to look for natural causes of this mixture of concomitants, by-products and outcomes of an act of experiencing. This is as possible as it is possible to scientifically examine the physiological processes

66 Cf. Moore, “Refutation” 20 and Alexander 17–20.

67 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 170 and *Preface to Paradise Lost* 135f. Lewis already writes in June 1924, only three months after his first acquaintance with Alexander: “Is it that there is something wrong about this kind of test? For to ask ‘what is in my mind while I am thinking’ usually means to stop the real thinking and then ‘introspect’ and then I naturally find only the irrelevant pictures or words which, as a matter of psychological fact, do accompany the thinking. Perhaps the thinking, being an act, cannot be introspected – only the *παθήματα* [= symptoms] – same way will cannot be introspected. Does all introspection always leave out all the important things?” (“Tutorial Notes” 127).

68 Cf. “Toolshed” §10.

69 Cf. “Tutorial Notes” 152 and “Early Prose Joy” 32.

70 Cf. “Is Theology Poetry?” §18, “Horrid Red Things” §5–7 and *Miracles* 74f. Lewis criticizes Hume as early as in August 1924 for not having seen this (cf. “Tutorial Notes” 152).

71 “The possibility of finding [...] these concepts] may be a good test of the value of that previous activity; certainly the only test we have” (“Language” §22).

72 Cf. *CL III* 1606f, GW Letter I/2, *Personal Heresy* 19, Fn 1 and *Mere Christianity* 146.

which accompany every act of experiencing. Such a scientific-causal investigation on the level of physiology or psychology may explain everything – except the act of mind (or enjoyment) itself which the experience actually *is*.

In Lewis' view, the easiest way to see this is to apply the alleged scientific explanation of human experiences to the scientist's own act of trying to explain them. He uses once more his example of a cerebral physiologist who tries to explain a mathematician's thinking (an enjoyed act of mind) by looking *at* the physiological processes which accompany it. We only have to remember that the brain specialist's investigation of the mathematician's thinking is yet another act of thinking (a further enjoyed act of mind). Therefore, another brain specialist may come and explain *his* act of thinking in like manner:

The cerebral physiologist may say, if he chooses, that the mathematician's thought is 'only' tiny physical movements of the grey matter. But then what about the cerebral physiologist's own thought at that very moment? A second physiologist, looking at it, could pronounce it also to be only tiny physical movements in the first physiologist's skull.⁷³

In other words, whoever ceases to look *along* (= to enjoy) a certain experience in order to look *at* (= to contemplate) it inevitably steps inside another experience he will be looking *along*. Hence it is never possible to exclude the knowledge we gain while we are inside an act of experiencing (or thinking) from a scientific explanation of the world, for scientific explanations are also enjoyed acts of mind.

Lewis concludes that the knowledge we gain by scientifically looking *at* experiences cannot be everything that is to be known. In the language of his stage analogy: the scientist has no independent access to the world; the starting point of his explanation of the world is also the appearance of things on the subjective stage of his own mind. It is thus a grave error to equate that part of reality which can be scientifically observed and explained with the whole of reality, and to discard everything else (that is, our experiences of quality, value, and meaning) as mere subjective illusions.

But while Lewis believes that the empirical sciences are unable to reconstruct the subjective aspect of man's experience of the world with their methods, he does not disregard the knowledge they gain. He only rejects the claim that it suffices to scientifically look *at* our experiences from the outside alone: this claim refutes itself in its universal application. Lewis suggests that we should judge every experience on its own merits and, while doing so, always take into account both perspectives. In some cases, we may have good

73 "Toolshed" §11.

grounds to prefer one of the two views of a given experience to the other, but in most cases, they will rather supplement than exclude each other.⁷⁴

2.3 The *phenomenal* and the *noumenal* self

While the mind's enjoyment of itself cannot be introspected, it is always conscious. Alexander is no less clear about this than Lewis. In an experience, the mind is not only aware of its object but also aware that it is *itself* who is aware of it: "I am aware of my awareness as I strike a stroke or wave a farewell. My awareness and my being aware of it are identical."⁷⁵ In other words, to have an experience and to know that it is I who is having this experience is inseparable.

Lewis concludes that the mind's awareness of itself is not a product of a previous act of reflecting: it is, prior to any reflection of the mind about itself, an integral part of every act of experiencing. He therefore considers it necessary to expand the usual distinction between conscious acts of mind and unconscious processes in the human psyche into a "three-fold division: the Unconscious, the Enjoyed, and the Contemplated".⁷⁶ Of course, there are processes in us of which we are not consciously aware, as depth psychology teaches. But we are aware of both the acts we enjoy and the objects we contemplate. The difference between these two is that while the objects we contemplate may also be contemplated by others, the enjoyment of our own experiences – of our acts of thinking, imagining, grieving etc. – cannot be observed from the outside; it cannot even be introspected by ourselves.⁷⁷

This three-fold epistemic distinction has important implications for Lewis' view of the human self. He suggests that what we usually call our "self" is a product of our attempts to reflect upon, and therefore to *contemplate*, our own self: it is an image of ourselves we build on the basis of "memories, glimpses in the shaving-glass, and snatches of the very fallible activity called 'introspection'":⁷⁸ We create an idea of ourselves as if it were another person by setting

74 Cf. *ibid.* §12.

75 Alexander 12.

76 *Surprised by Joy* 170.

77 "The very essence of our life as conscious beings, all day and every day, consists of something which cannot be communicated except by hints, similes, metaphors, and the use of those emotions (themselves not very important) which are pointers to it. I am not in the least talking about the Unconscious as psychologists understand it. At least, though it cannot be fully introspected, this region is, in many of us, very far from unconscious" ("Language" §23).

78 *Letters to Malcolm* 108.

our life in a historical context, comparing our views with the views of others and giving ourselves a place as an object in a world of objects.⁷⁹

But what is the “I” that is doing all this – which looks *at* itself as if it were an object and creates such an image of itself? Lewis considers it impossible for the image to create itself: prior to our image of ourselves, and distinct from it, there must be a real, enjoyed self which performs this act of creating. Otherwise, there would be no image at all, and it would also be impossible for us to have a *false* image of ourselves.⁸⁰

Of course, this dual conception of the human self is not new to philosophy. Lewis points to Kant’s distinction between the *phenomenal* or *empirical* self (i.e. the “me” we refer to when we are talking about ourselves) and the *noumenal* or *transcendental* self which is present in all our acts of thinking, and actually in all our conscious experiences. Thinking (and experiencing in general)

is not an object which knocks against us, nor even a sensation which we feel. Reason doesn’t ‘happen to’ us: we *do* it. Every train of thought is accompanied by what Kant called ‘the *I think*’.⁸¹

According to Kant, there must be such a noumenal self, or an “I think”, which accompanies all our experiences, for otherwise these experiences wouldn’t be *our* experiences.⁸²

The Kantian distinction was for Lewis a fact of personal experience. When he was wounded by splinters of an English shell during the First World War, he noticed that he had stopped breathing and concluded without any emotion that a man was dying here. But he was surprised to find that the “I” who drew this conclusion was not identical with the empirical “me” of the dying person (that is, with what he usually called his “self” with its fears and hopes). It was almost as if he was watching a different person.

The fruit of this experience was that when, some years later, I met Kant’s distinction between the Noumenal and the Phenomenal self, it was more to me than an

79 Cf. “Early Prose Joy” 32. “Man might be defined as a reflexive animal. A person cannot help thinking and speaking of himself as, and even feeling himself to be (for certain purposes), two people, one of whom can act upon and observe the other. Thus he pities, loves, admires, hates, despises, rebukes, comforts, examines, masters or is mastered by, ‘himself’” (*Studies in Words* 187).

80 Cf. *Letters to Malcolm* 108.

81 *Miracles* 32f.

82 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 81f.

abstraction. I had tasted it; I had proved that there was a fully conscious 'I' whose connections with the 'me' of introspection were loose and transitory.⁸³

Such a noumenal self in the sense of Kant's "transcendental unity of consciousness" is for Lewis a necessary prerequisite for any real knowledge; this distinguishes him from Alexander. A mere phenomenal or empirical self would be a causally determined sequence of events that is unable to know itself or anything else. In order to know anything, we must not only *have* experiences, we must know that these are our own experiences.⁸⁴ And this requires that there is an experiencing self, or I, who "is aware of himself as something distinct from all other things."⁸⁵

Lewis usually calls our inner self or I more traditionally our "(rational) soul" (and sometimes our "spirit"), but it should be noted that his account of man's soul (or spirit) is not medieval but modern; he can also express his Christian views in Kantian terminology.⁸⁶ This must be kept in mind when he relates our awareness of being distinct from all other things to the medieval concept of *common sense* (as one of man's five inward wits or senses). Its function is described by Robert Burton as

the judge or moderator of the [... other senses], by whom we discern all differences of objects; for by mine eye I do not know that I see, or by mine ear that I hear, but by my common sense [...].⁸⁷

Medieval psychology ascribed this faculty, "which turns mere sensation into coherent consciousness of myself as subject in a world of objects",⁸⁸ to the

83 *Surprised by Joy* 153, cf. "Early Prose Joy" 24, 31f and *Perelandra* 175. Lewis explains that "Kant was troublesome because [...] one important element in his philosophy jumped so with an experience of my own that it was a kind of perversity to deny it" ("Early Prose Joy" 31). This discovery was one of the things which forced him to abandon Realism and accept Idealism.

84 As the word "conscious" goes back to the Latin word "scire" ("to know"), the expression "consciously know" is almost a tautology (cf. *Studies in Words* 181, 187). But this is precisely the point: "I know", if applied to human experience, always implies "I know that I know".

85 *CL III* 22, to Frank L. Jones, 6 April 1950, cf. *Problem of Pain* 23f.

86 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 153, *Personal Heresy* 52f and *CL II* 268, to Owen Barfield, August 1939. Thorson states with reference to "Appendix A" of *Miracles* that Lewis believed man to have a "spirit" (= reason), "soul" (= psyche) and "body" (= physis) (cf. Thorson, *Joy* 68f). This is correct, but it should be noted that Lewis does not intend to present here a full doctrine of man: he only makes the distinctions he thinks necessary "for the present discussion" (ibid. 176). Lewis accepted the traditional (Aristotelian) view that man has a "rational soul" (= *reason*), i.e. an "immaterial, intelligent, immortal substance" (*Studies in Words* 270) which includes the functions of the "sensitive soul" (= *sentience* or psyche, which man shares with the animals) and the "vegetable soul" (= *life*, which man and animals share with the plants) (cf. *Discarded Image* 153, *Problem of Pain* 65f and *CL III* 429f, to Herbert Palmer, 19 February 1954).

87 Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* Pt. I, i, M2, subs. 7 (quoted after *Discarded Image* 164, cf. *Studies in Words* 147f, 211f).

88 *Discarded Image* 164f, cf. *Studies in Words* 148. Lewis also writes that according to pre-modern psychology, the stimuli of our five distinct outer senses are "united into a reflection of the world by Common Sense" (*Preface to Paradise Lost* 114).

sensible soul of man (which man has in common with the animals), and not to his rational soul. But Lewis knew, and agreed with, those modern philosophers who categorised it as a faculty of man's reason (or rational soul),⁸⁹ for its function is basically the same as that which Kant described as *apperception*, and Coleridge as one of the functions of the *primary imagination*.⁹⁰

This becomes clear in light of his view that the soul, in order to have a consciousness of itself as a subject in a world of objects, must stand far enough outside the flow of events that it can perceive the *passing of time*. Only then it will be able to recognize a given sequence of perceptions as perceptions made by one and the same person, so that the sequence becomes a coherent experience of an experiencing mind.⁹¹

Lewis explains this in *The Problem of Pain* by distinguishing between a “succession of perceptions”, which is something that animals also have, and a “perception of successions”, which can only be perceived by a self-conscious mind.⁹² Knowledge of reality in an epistemic sense is only possible if there is a conscious centre of experiencing that is distinct from the succession of the perceptions A–B–C, so that it may recognize the following of B after A, and C after B, and which knows itself identical throughout this whole process.⁹³ Without such a centre, we could not organise our sensations into a coherent experience; we could in fact never say that “I am in pain”.⁹⁴ Even the simplest perception of a succession A–B–C requires a consciousness that is

89 He was for example aware that Descartes' *Discourse on Method* identified “le bon sens” (= common sense) with “la raison” (= reason) (cf. *Studies in Words* 153), and that Coleridge did the same for common sense and reason (as a handwritten note in his copy of *The Friend* shows).

90 Cf. *Discarded Image* 165, Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 304 and the subsequent Pt. 2.2.4.

91 This is for Lewis one of the reasons why the human soul, “though experiencing time, is not itself completely ‘timeful’” (*Problem of Pain* 105, cf. *ibid.* 61).

92 Lewis distinguishes *consciousness* from *mere sentience*, consciousness here defined with Samuel Clarke as “the Reflex act by which I know that I think and that my thoughts ... are my own and not another's” (Clarke, *Second Defence* [1707], quoted after *Studies in Words* 211f).

93 Lewis' remarks in *The Problem of Pain* are so similar to Kant's “transcendental unity of apperception” that they are almost a translation of Kant's conception into ordinary language (cf. *Problem of Pain* 105f and Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 81–84). Lewis' marginalia to T. H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1924) already state that “a series of psychical events is not the knowledge that there is a series. The knowledge implies an eternal subject – i.e. in so far as my consciousness is a becoming (A, B, C) I cannot know that B follows A. To know this I must distinguish myself from A, B, C” (quoted after Barkman, *Philosophy* 277).

94 In sleep or anaesthesia, we lose the awareness of being a conscious self; “we begin to fall apart into atoms of sensation & lose unity of apperception. There is this pain & that pain but no ‘I feeling this pain along with that pain’” (“Commentarium” 148).

not itself a mere succession of states, but rather a permanent bed along which these different portions of the stream of sensation roll, and which recognizes itself as the same beneath them all.⁹⁵

Acts of experiencing thus presuppose that there is a person who can “look upon itself as an object”,⁹⁶ that is, who is able to reflect upon itself in order to distinguish between its own acts and mere events on the psychological level – who can discern between its noumenal and its phenomenal self.⁹⁷

That is also why Lewis considers it necessary to distinguish with Bradley “‘idea as event’ from ‘idea as meaning’.”⁹⁸ In so far as ideas are mere events in a person’s psyche, they signify nothing and are incapable of being true or false. In order to be capable of being true or false, they must be the meaningful content of a conscious mind, and they must refer to something other than themselves. This intentional character of our ideas (their “being about”, or “referring to” a certain part of reality) is entirely different from anything that happens on the level of purely natural events.⁹⁹

Of course, meaning and intentionality are not the same, but they are closely related to each other. Lewis carefully distinguishes three senses of the word “meaning”, the third one being “the one that Language principally has.”¹⁰⁰ He calls this third sense the *symbolical* sense of “meaning” and explains that in this case, the sign or symbol we use does not draw our attention to a specific issue by mere chance, but “is intended to do so. To mean, in this third sense, is ‘to draw attention to not accidentally but on purpose’.”¹⁰¹ Meaning in this symbolical sense is thus a case of intentionality: We do not merely make sounds or body movements or draw figures of a sheet of paper which express our inner states: we *intend* these things to symbolise our inner states, and hence to communicate them to others. In a world of pure factuality, neither intentionality nor meaning in this symbolical sense could exist.

Lewis concludes that it is not only our acts of rational thinking and our experiences which cannot be explained on the level of Cause-Effect alone. If there is no noumenal self or rational soul in us which uses its verbal expressions to communicate its ideas about the world to others – which *means* the

95 *The Problem of Pain* 105.

96 *Ibid.* 61.

97 *Cf. Studies in Words* 187.

98 “Religion without Dogma?” §14. The transcription in *God in the Dock* falsely reads “distinguished *idea-event* from *idea-making*” (the reference to the British philologist Henry Bradley given in Fn 15 is also wrong).

99 *Cf. ibid.* §13f and Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* 153f.

100 “Language and Human Nature” 26.

101 *Ibid.*, cf. Reppert, *Defending the Dangerous Idea* 59f.

words it uses to symbolise its ideas – there would be no meaning (and hence no real knowledge) as well. “For meaning is a relation of a wholly new kind, as remote, as mysterious, as opaque to empirical study, as soul itself.”¹⁰²

Our *phenomenal* self is described by Lewis as a “dramatic creation”, as a role that is more or less consciously created and shaped by our noumenal self. It is not our real I but in fact very different from it – in our moments of greatest pride as well as in our moments of deepest humility.¹⁰³

In one of the scenes of *The Great Divorce*, Lewis highlights this difference between our noumenal self and the dramatic construction we tend to put in its place. A small, dwarfish Ghost leads a much bigger Ghost on a chain who is dressed like an actor in a tragedy.¹⁰⁴ While it is usually the Tragedian who speaks, the Lady who came from Heaven to visit the Ghost solely addresses the Dwarf, who is the *real person*. The dwarf dwindles with every word he lets the Tragedian speak for himself, and when he finally disappears, the Tragedian vanishes as well.¹⁰⁵ This scene illustrates that it is only because we have a real, noumenal self that we can create such a dramatic personality who pretends to speak for us, and draft them as a Tragedian, Clown, or Hero.¹⁰⁶

2.4 Imagination: man’s organ to apprehend reality

The question of knowledge requires a closer look at the relation of the experiencing subject to the experienced object. In Lewis’ case, a discussion of this topic might start with Owen Barfield’s B. Litt. thesis *Poetic Diction* which was much debated between the two friends during their “Great War”. Lewis never accepted his friend’s anthroposophy, but he came to agree with him in his critical view of modern philosophy’s commitment to the ideal of scientific knowledge,¹⁰⁷ as well as in his view of the imagination as the source of meanings (and almost of things).

In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield accuses Immanuel Kant’s theory of knowledge of an undue reliance on purely logical categories of thought. Kant had conceived his epistemology as an attempt to translate the methods of the natural sciences into the realm of metaphysics.¹⁰⁸ But the newly emerging sciences owed their

102 “Religion without Dogma” §14.

103 Cf. *Personal Heresy* 10 and *CL III* 632, to Warfield M. Firor, 11 July 1955.

104 Cf. *Great Divorce* 99f.

105 Cf. *ibid.* 106–109.

106 Cf. *Letters to Malcolm* 108 and *Perelandra* 139.

107 Lewis admitted that Barfield’s “[a]nthroposophical critique of modern thought was one of the things that opened the way to my conversion” (*CL II* 729, to Dorothy L. Sayers, 29 July 1946).

108 Kant expressly states in his preface to the 2nd Edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* that he borrowed his method from the natural philosophers (cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* xxix).

success to the fact that their study of nature methodically excluded the individual aspects of their object, as well as any amount of subjectivity that is associated with human perception (Pt. 1.3.1):¹⁰⁹ they were only interested in things which can be measured, objectified, observed in controlled and repeated experiments and put into mathematical formulae (Pt. 1.1.1). And this means before anything else that scientific knowledge is *thoroughly abstract*.

A theory of knowledge which follows the ideal of scientific knowledge will therefore also capture only abstract (logical) relations, that is, data which can be precisely defined and put into univocal terms. In Barfield's opinion, Empiricism and Transcendental Philosophy are actually in the same boat here, for they share the same basic belief that all cognition is "logical in form: and is of the definable only."¹¹⁰

Barfield therefore criticizes Kant's conception of experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason* for its extreme "logomorphism": because it *a priori* restricts every possible knowledge to the logical.¹¹¹ In Kant's philosophy, the subject covers the whole world of possible experience with a net of logical categories, to the effect that only those aspects of an experience are classed as being genuine which can be captured in abstract concepts.¹¹²

Lewis and Barfield jointly object to such a conception that the real world is not abstract but thoroughly *concrete*, and our experience of it is not general but always *particular*. In the last analysis, what is experienced cannot be described in words (which are, apart from proper names, always to a certain degree abstract), but must be *pointed to*. Lewis explains:

In space and time there is no such thing as an organism, there are only animals and vegetables. There are no mere vegetables, only trees, flowers, turnips, &c. There are no 'trees', except beeches, elms, oaks, and the rest. There is even no such thing as 'an elm'. There is only *this* elm, in such a year of its age at such an hour of the day, thus lighted, thus moving, thus acted on by all the past and all the present, and affording such and such experiences to me and my dog and the insect on its trunk and the man a thousand miles away who is remembering it.¹¹³

These sentences are not meant to state a radical nominalism, but to express the difference between reality as we actually experience it and the language we

109 This holds true for Kant as well, cf. Löw, "Freude" 151f.

110 Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 193, cf. *ibid.* 190–194.

111 Cf. Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 193. He directs a similar critique against Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (cf. *ibid.* 191). Lewis criticizes Locke even before Barfield for reading "into 'mere' experience things that mere experience cannot give" ("Tutorial Notes" 113), namely "conceptual garments" which are actually not given in experience itself (cf. *ibid.* 114).

112 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* xxix.

113 *Personal Heresy* 110.

use to talk about it.¹¹⁴ Every concept is, as the tool of thought it is, an *abstraction* from the actual experiences. And it reaches, by means of this, an objectivity and universal communicability which our immediate experiences lack. But in order to build our concepts, we must set aside those aspects of our experiences which are not precisely the same and put our focus on those aspects which *are* precisely the same.

A theory of experience which commits itself solely to abstract concepts is therefore bound to dismiss the concreteness of our actual experiences, although it requires a concrete material to work with, which we can analyse in order to determine the common element in otherwise differing experiences.¹¹⁵ The philosophical or scientific account of our experiences must therefore be preceded by the experiences themselves, which are always particular, and always concrete. And this presupposes that the experiencing subject is able to perceive reality in its actual concreteness.¹¹⁶

Barfield remarks that Kant also knew of such a basic synthetic function in the experiencing subject, and that this function is “necessarily *preceding* the analytical function of the understanding which makes abstraction possible.”¹¹⁷ But for Kant, this faculty called *Einbildungskraft* (imagination), which combines the sheer plurality of man’s sense impressions into a single unity (so that the understanding can relate to it with its concepts), did not stand in contrast to the discursive activity of the understanding.¹¹⁸ On the contrary, while this *Einbildungskraft* has the function of synthesising the diversity of the pure intuition, it nevertheless works (unconsciously) with the categories given by the understanding.¹¹⁹

Because of this basically abstract nature of Kant’s conception of the imagination, Barfield denied that it can be man’s faculty of experiencing reality in its actual concreteness.¹²⁰ He believed – and Lewis was here at one with him – that the imagination must be determined differently. Towards the end of

114 Lewis asserts that “in a sense all words except proper names are general – too general ever to be exactly right. (Poetry can be thought of as the effort to heal this sickness in speech, this wound between language and reality)” (*Spenser’s Images of Life* 115).

115 “R[eason] can’t understand ‘thisness’” (“Nature of Reason” 87). Lewis already professes in the “Great War” to be at one with Barfield in this question, but he also indicates where the differences begin: “*Agreed* (by you and me, also by Kant, Coleridge, Bradley etc) that the discursive reason always fails to apprehend reality, because it never grasps more than an abstract relational framework. The question then is whether it is possible for us to know that Concrete in which alone the thing we have abstracted was *real*” (CL III 1600, GW Letter I/1).

116 Cf. Adey 74.

117 Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 192.

118 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 62f.

119 Cf. *ibid.* 93.

120 Cf. Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 192.

their discussions, they came to agree that the imagination enables the mind to recognize a *concrete unity in diversity*: it enables the mind to perceive similarities in otherwise dissimilar things without having to disregard their differences. The imagination is therefore the epistemic faculty which is capable of recognizing *meaning*.¹²¹

In British philosophy, the imagination as man's faculty of recognising unity in diversity is closely associated with the name of the poet and natural philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his effort to combine German Transcendental Philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Schelling) with the ideas of English Romanticism,¹²² Coleridge called this faculty "primary imagination".¹²³ Its main function is to unify the diversity of the perceived sense data into a concrete unity, so that this diversity becomes a coherent world which the perceiving subject can comprehend: a world in which it can act.¹²⁴

As Kant regarded the imagination as "an operation of the understanding on sensibility",¹²⁵ it could execute its synthesizing function only with the help of abstract logical concepts which were provided by the categories.¹²⁶ Coleridge, on the other hand, determined the imagination as the faculty of recognizing a *concrete unity in multitude* (or diversity).¹²⁷ He believed that the imagination enables us to recognise an organic unity of nature, thus providing the material on which the understanding can draw in its analyses.

In light of this unifying function of the imagination, Barfield criticises those theories of knowledge which commit themselves to the ideal of scientific knowledge, whether Kantian or empiricist like Locke or Hume: Because they ignore the unifying work of the imagination, these theories do not really begin with simple sense perceptions (as they believe), but with abstract ideas,

whereas, in fact, the mind is never aware of an idea until the imagination has been at work on the bare material given by the senses, perceiving resemblance, that is, demanding unity, because it is itself a unity. We can go further than this; the mind can never even perceive an object, *as* an object, till the imagination has been at

121 Cf. *ibid.* 55, cf. *CL III* 1620, GW Letter I/5.

122 Coleridge has also been called the first of the British Idealists of the 19th century (cf. Hedley 2), and his writings helped to spread the thoughts of German Idealism throughout England.

123 "The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. 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" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 304). Early in 1927, Lewis had decided, probably encouraged by Barfield, "to work up the whole doctrine of Imagination in Coleridge" (*AMR* 432, 19 January 1927).

124 Cf. Barth 18.

125 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 93.

126 *Ibid.* 99.

127 Cf. Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* 79, 217.

work combining the *disjecta membra* of unrelated percepts into that experienced unity which the word ‘object’ denotes.¹²⁸

The primary imagination usually works unconsciously,¹²⁹ but its result is a conscious awareness of the experiencing person of being himself in a world of objects. And it is more than a mere psychological function, for it is inseparable from the act of thinking itself, that is, from the conscious knowledge that it is I who is doing the experiencing.¹³⁰ In this respect, it is close to what Kant called the “I think” (or apperception). According to Coleridge, the primary imagination is “the mind’s self-experience in the act of thinking.”¹³¹

The primary imagination works with the materials provided by the senses and the power of *fancy*, which has a role in human perception as well, but which receives its materials from memory and combines or rearranges them by the law of association.¹³² Fancy is therefore responsible for the familiarity of our customs (i.e. the routine of our everyday lives), but works within the frame of our fixed habits.¹³³

In order to fulfil its unifying function, the primary imagination must comprise a *passive* and an *active* element:¹³⁴ on the one hand, it receives its material from the senses or (via fancy) from memory; on the other hand, it modifies the received pictures and sense impressions and combines them into a concrete unity.¹³⁵ While it usually works without our conscious knowledge, it is still an activity of the experiencing mind: it does not simply record something that is already there but has a *positive share* in producing a coherent recognition of the experiencing subject as being itself in a world of objects.

Lewis accepted Barfield’s thesis that an object can be perceived *as an object* only when the imagination exercises its faculty of unifying the diversity of sense impressions into a single, coherent world of experiencing. He uses the visual perception of a tower as an example:

In ordinary life we never see a ‘tower’. We see a coloured shape, which we take to be a tower, because we believe that it has another side, and is solid, and hollow, and fulfils all the other conditions of towerhood, which, however, are not given in

128 Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 26f, cf. idem *What Coleridge Thought* 18. Lewis likewise claims that “every perception is what it is by virtue of its context; and without that context the single perception is an abstraction” (*Personal Heresy* 23).

129 “The difficulty of becoming aware of it arises from the fact that we are never without it except in states which cannot, for that very reason, be fully remembered” (*Discarded Image* 165).

130 Cf. Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* 76, *Discarded Image* 164f and Pt. 2.2.3.

131 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 124, cf. Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* 117.

132 Cf. *ibid.* 304.

133 Cf. Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* 86f.

134 Cf. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 124f.

135 Cf. *ibid.* 85, Fn 2 and Barfield, *Poetic Diction* 27f.

the experience of seeing it. In other words, we turn a mere sense-datum into a tower by attributing to it a context.¹³⁶

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, he puts forward the same view by describing what the philologist Ransom sees when he lands on the planet Malacandra (Mars). In this first encounter with a world that is wholly foreign to him, Ransom sees himself initially confronted with a confusing variety of colour impressions he cannot make any sense of. But then his imagination starts to work:

He saw nothing but colours – colours that refused to form themselves into things. Moreover, he knew nothing yet well enough to see it: you cannot see things till you know roughly what they are. His first impression was of a bright, pale world – a watercolour world out of a child’s paint-box; a moment later he recognized the flat belt of light blue as a sheet of water, or of something like water, which came nearly to his feet. They were on the shore of a lake or river.¹³⁷

Ransom only begins to see *things* after the imagination has succeeded in discerning similarities between his sense impressions and things that are known to him (via fancy) from his own past experiences. Step by step, he is able to see his new surroundings more clearly, so that the first faint associations “a watercolour world out of a child’s paint-box” can be substituted by closer resemblances with objects he knows from Earth.¹³⁸ It is therefore no question to Lewis that the imagination has its share in producing the peculiar quality of our experiences, as well as in generating the appearance of the world of objects we live in.¹³⁹

Due to the work of fancy and its collaboration with memory, we recognize the objects of our familiar world usually much faster than Ransom at his first encounter with the foreign world of Malacandra. And this recognition takes place without our conscious knowledge: trained by education and habit, we automatically identify certain sense impressions with certain objects without being consciously aware of this process.¹⁴⁰ But Ransom’s experience shows what happens when fancy’s routine fails because the usual associations with the objects of our everyday experience do *not* set in: he is nevertheless able to

136 “Image and Imagination” §13.

137 *Silent Planet* 39, cf. Myers, *Context* 45.

138 Lucy experiences in Narnia something similar when she sees a submarine forest, cf. *Dawn Treader* 166–168.

139 I do not share Peter Schakel’s thesis that Lewis’ epistemology underwent a change in the late 1940s/early 1950s. Schakel claims that until the late 1940s, cognition was a quasi-mechanical act for Lewis (cf. Schakel, *Reason and Imagination* 41), and that he came to accept a subjective element in the act of experiencing only late in his life (cf. idem, *Seeing and Knowing* 86f). But Lewis *always* recognized a subjective element in perception; I have not been able to discern any substantial change in his mature epistemological views. The true core of Schakel’s observations is that Lewis believed, in contrast to Barfield, in an independent reality as the source of our subjective phenomena.

140 Cf. *Letters to Malcolm* 117; the example is borrowed from Barfield, *Saving the Appearances* 20.

build, with the help of his imagination, a meaningful world out of the chaotic diversity of his sensual perceptions in which he can orient himself.

Coleridge distinguishes this basic function of the *primary* imagination in constituting the world of objects from the function of the *secondary* imagination, which is a function of basically the same kind but works on a different level.¹⁴¹ Because it is subject to the conscious will and works with the material provided by the primary imagination, our secondary imagination enables us to produce as well as to receive works of poetry and art.¹⁴²

Lewis agreed with Coleridge that there can be no art without the unifying work of the secondary imagination: “Unity in diversity if possible – failing that, mere unity as a second best – these are the norms for all human work, given [...] by the nature of consciousness itself.”¹⁴³ And he was equally at one with Coleridge that both, the primary and the secondary imagination, are rooted in the same source:

The power which welds raw masses of experience into a whole is the same which, in the single phrase, elicits from the chaos of language the perfect words and the perfect syntactical device.¹⁴⁴

The main difference between these two faculties is that the primary imagination deals with *real* sense data while the secondary imagination deals with *hypothetical* sense data and how they would be connected with other things in the real world if they were part of it: “When I imagine a tower I imagine a sense-datum which, if it were given in sense, would be connected thus and thus with the real world.”¹⁴⁵

In subsequent chapters, more will be said about secondary or poetic imagination. But we should be aware that this inventive, or unifying form of imagination (Coleridge’s *secondary* imagination or *esemplastic* power, or Wordsworth’s “plastic power”)¹⁴⁶ is distinct from a lower function of the human

141 “The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation” (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 304).

142 According to E.-M. Höller, the secondary imagination is for Coleridge the higher of the two, for it is an exercise of free will and thus a truly creative activity which expresses man’s greatest likeness to God (cf. Höller 82f, Fn 95). Lewis also describes the function of the secondary imagination (without calling it thus) as an echo of God’s creative activity (cf. *Miracles* 36f), its greatest achievement being the “free creation of the marvellous” (*Allegory of Love* 82).

143 *Allegory of Love* 141.

144 *Ibid.* 155.

145 “Image and Imagination” §15.

146 Cf. “Variation in Shakespeare” §6, “Genesis” §I/19, *Studies in Words* 260, “Arthuriad” 381, “On Criticism” §13, “Review of Gunn” §5 and *CL III* 683f, to Dorothy L. Sayers, 14 December 1955.

psyche which is often called by the same name. Poetic imagination, the “‘Imagination’ which makes a man either a great author or a sensitive reader”,¹⁴⁷ is not to be confused with the “mere image-making faculty”¹⁴⁸ or “‘imagination’ in the common meaning (φαντασία, the *imaginatio* as a psychologist understands it)”.¹⁴⁹ This visualising power works on the psychological level and brings forth the images which spontaneously arise in our minds and accompany most of our thinking and imagining.

Lewis insists that the mental images produced by this image-making faculty are not the actual imagining, just as the concepts or pictures which accompany our acts of thinking are not the actual thinking.¹⁵⁰ And he distinguishes the secondary imagination not only from our mental images but also from other processes which transform such images into (more or less) coherent mental states:¹⁵¹ “distinct from all these we have the plastic, inventive, or constructive power, *homo faber*. This wants to make things out of any plastic material, whether within the mind or without”.¹⁵²

The main difference between the inventive power of poetic imagination and such mental processes is not the materials that are used. The difference is that, while the mind is passively subject to the impulses or influences which produce these imaginative states in the experiencing person, poetic imagination is a *free activity of the mind*.¹⁵³ As it is subject to the conscious will, the exercise of our secondary imagination is not per se good; it can be used for the wrong purposes as well. Lewis mentions two (main) good exercises and one that he believes to be bad:

The true exercise of imagination, in my view, is (a) To help us to understand other people (b) To respond to, and, [for] some of us, to produce, art. But it has also a bad use: to provide for us, in shadowy form, a substitute for virtues, successes, distinctions etc. which ought to be sought *outside* in the real world [...].¹⁵⁴

147 *Letters to Malcolm* 112.

148 *CL III* 683, to Dorothy L. Sayers, 14 December 1955, cf. *ibid.* 1616, GW Letter I/3.

149 *CL III* 1605, GW Letter I/2, cf. *ibid.*, 1619f, GW Letter I/5 and Barkman, *Philosophy* 276.

150 Cf. “Language” §20, *Personal Heresy* 19, Fn 1, “Image and Imagination” §11 and *Letters to Malcolm* 112.

151 Cf. *CL III* 683, to Dorothy L. Sayers, 14 December 1955 and *Surprised by Joy* 10f.

152 *Ibid.* 683f, cf. Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 146.

153 Cf. “Image and Imagination” §14 and *CL III* 1606, GW Letter I/2. Lewis distinguishes this “free”, or “disinterested” use of the imagination in creating art from an “enslaved”, “wish-fulfilling”, or “compensatory” form, cf. “Psycho-analysis” §11, *Surprised by Joy* 10f, 26 and *English Literature* 424, 429.

154 *CL III* 759, to Keith Masson, 3 June 1956. Lewis writes with regard to point (a) that our success in achieving an understanding of people of other times and cultures depends on “the most in-

In case of such a bad use of one's own imagination, a self-critical person will of course be able to become "aware that the imagination at work is his own", and that "he is only weaving a fantasy."¹⁵⁵

Like the primary imagination, the secondary imagination is not part of man's sensitive soul (or psyche) but part of man's rational soul (or spirit). According to Lewis, "will and reason and attention and organized imagination"¹⁵⁶ – these all are part of the rational soul or spirit of man. If he had put the imagination on the level of the sensitive soul (i.e. the psychological as opposed to the spiritual as it is defined here), this would have been equal to saying that it is wholly determined by the blind and meaningless forces of the Cause-Effect relation. It would in fact follow the *laws of association* (much in the same way as in the higher animals), instead of being a free activity of the mind which is able to perceive as well as to generate meaning.¹⁵⁷

2.5 The relation of subject and object

In spite of the great parallels in Lewis' and Barfield's view of the imagination, there is an important difference between their respective accounts of this epistemic faculty. Barfield emphasizes the *active* (or *productive*) role of the primary imagination so much that the perceived object is almost entirely produced by the activity of the imagination: in his opinion, the object virtually *is* what the subject perceives with the aid of the imagination.¹⁵⁸ Lewis, on the other hand, gives more weight to the *passive* (or *receptive*) role of the primary imagination. In his opinion, the imagination can carry out its activity of unifying our perceptions only if there is an independent reality the perceiving subject can *refer*

tense, yet at the same time most sternly disciplined, exercise of our imaginations" ("De Audiendis Poetis" §4). And he adds with regard to the bad use of the imagination that it is "enslaved to the wishes of its owner for whom it has to provide imaginary gratifications" ("Psycho-analysis" §11).

155 *Four Loves* 132.

156 *Preface to Paradise Lost* 136, cf. *Miracles* 30.

157 Cf. *CL III* 1136, to Mrs Robert Manly, 25 February 1960 and *Problem of Pain* 65. Thorson claims that the "Christian Lewis placed human imagination in the realm of the soul, not even in the created human spirit" (Thorson, *Joy* 144, cf. *ibid.* 150). But he neglects the different meanings in which the post-conversion Lewis uses the word "imagination". All the examples he quotes in support of his thesis can be shown to mean not poetic imagination but the mere image-making faculty. Or else, Lewis is really calling poetic imagination a part of man's soul, but then "soul" does not mean the *sensitive* but the *rational* part of man. This is especially the case in "Christianity and Culture", where he uses the words "soul" and "psyche" to mean the *whole rational part* of man (cf. Thorson, *Joy* 143f and "Christianity and Culture" §1/2, §1/3, §1/33).

158 Cf. *Saving the Appearances* 17, 41. For Barfield, even the "unrepresented" can be understood as a product of a "collective unconscious" shared by all men (cf. *ibid.* 154).

to in its acts of knowing. He believes that Barfield, whether he intended or not, came very close to abolishing any independent reality.

During the “Great War”, Lewis had already stated in a letter to Barfield that he “thought we both believed in the *Ding an sich*, in the sense that if there is appearance there is something that appears.”¹⁵⁹ And this was for him equivalent to saying that if “reality” does not mean the source of all possible phenomena which can (or will) ever be privately or collectively perceived,

then, I confess, I can’t see what ‘real’ means, except as a eulogistic term applied to those parts of our essentially erratic, subjective experience wh[ic]h you happen to like.¹⁶⁰

According to Lewis, reality is not merely constituted in the mind of the perceiving subject: it must be thought of as existing in its own right. But he was aware that what we can *know* of this reality (= the noumenal world, which he also called “the Real”, *Ding an sich* or, in Greek, τὸ ὄν [= being]),¹⁶¹ is only a small part of what this reality actually is: what can be known (in the strict sense of the word) of the world outside ourselves is only an abstract relational framework, for this is all that can be discerned by *discursive reason*.¹⁶²

This holds true also for the knowledge which the natural sciences gain about their subject matter:

As regards material reality, we are now being forced to the conclusion that we know nothing about it save its mathematics. The tangible beach and pebbles of our first calculators, the imaginable atoms of Democritus, the plain man’s picture of space, turn out to be the shadow: numbers are the substance of our knowledge, the sole liaison between mind and things.¹⁶³

In our everyday lives (= the life we lead in the phenomenal world, i.e. the empirical world, the world of appearances, or τὰ φαινόμενα ἀνθρώπων¹⁶⁴), the knowledge supplied by reason and the sciences is supplemented by our habits, memory, fancy and imagination, which give us a “substitute for knowledge which works tolerably well for *practical* purposes.”¹⁶⁵

159 *CL III* 1630, GW Letter I/6.

160 *Ibid.* cf. Adey 80 and Thorson, “Imagination I” 13, 32 Fn 7.

161 Cf. *Surprised by Joy* 153, and *CL III* 1600, 1602, GW Letter I/1 and *ibid.* 1630, GW Letter I/6.

162 Lewis symbolizes this abstract relational framework in a drawing as a steel frame which surrounds the mirror in which the experiencing person sees the objects of his everyday world (cf. *CL III* 1600, 1602f, GW Letter I/1).

163 “Dogma and the Universe” §15.

164 Greek: “what is apparent to man”, cf. *Surprised by Joy* 153, *CL III* 1600, 1602, GW Letter I/1 and *ibid.* 1630, GW Letter I/6.

165 *CL III* 1600, GW Letter I/1, cf. *Letters to Malcolm* 107. “[W]hat οἱ πολλοί [= the people] call the ‘real world’ is a construction from sense, one sense confirming another, details supplied by memory and imagination, theory, hypothesis” (*CL III* 1645, GW Letter II/2).

But while we may *know* of the world outside ourselves only its abstract mathematical relations, Lewis denies that the world as it is described by the sciences is *all that really is*.¹⁶⁶ He uses once more his stage analogy to illustrate that what we call the “world of appearances” is by no means less important than the supposedly “real” world of the sciences. For in the theatre, the whole back-stage apparatus (the stage machinery behind the scenes) exists only in order to produce the *appearance*, that is, to enable the play that is performed on-stage.¹⁶⁷

Lewis holds this to be true for our knowledge of reality as well. The physical world as it is captured in our scientific formulae may be the material out of which actual objects are made, but it cannot be those objects themselves:

The truth of the flower is not the facts about it, be they correct as ideal science itself, but the shining, glowing, gladdening, patient thing throned on its stalk – the compeller of smile and tear. ... The idea of God is the flower: His idea is not the botany of the flower. Its botany is but a thing of ways and means – of canvas and color and brush in relation to the picture in the painter’s brain.¹⁶⁸

Hence, Lewis believes that we are justified (without being able to prove it in the strict sense of the word) in saying that other organisms, and among them other men, really exist, although we should be aware that we perceive of them is still only an appearance, and not these organisms or men as they really are.¹⁶⁹ But if we know these other organisms only as they appear to us, and if their appearance is created with the aid of the imagination, the way in which the imagination presents the world to us must somehow reflect reality as it really is: there must be “a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself.”¹⁷⁰

This idea of a “truth or rightness” in the imagination only makes sense if we assume that there is another imagination behind these phenomena which created them – in order that they may be perceived by men who have the kind of senses and imaginations they received from this other imagination. Lewis suggests that it is at least “not inconceivable that the universe was created by an Imagination strong enough to impose phenomena on other minds.”¹⁷¹ This seems to be what he finally retained from his former Subjective Idealism (Pt. 3.2.2 and 3.3.3), with “Imagination” now meaning God’s creative thoughts:

166 The main philosophical concept which Lewis sets against this conclusion is the principle of Transposition, cf. Pt. 3.3.

167 Cf. “Behind the Scenes” §15 and Pt. 2.1.

168 MacDonald, *Anthology* 95, cf. *Dawn Treader* 159.

169 Cf. “Behind the Scenes” §17.

170 “Bluspels and Flalansferes” §23, cf. *Miracles* 162 and Bevan 51f.

171 “Bulverism” §19.

We should have to attribute to God the power [...] of inventing not only colours but colour itself, the senses themselves, space time and matter themselves, and also of imposing what He has invented on created minds. This seems to me no intolerable assumption.¹⁷²

In Lewis' view, the primary imagination is therefore not the source of the world of objects; it is the faculty of mediating between the subject and the object. If the perceiving subject shall be able to recognize a world of real objects (and organisms among them) which exist outside the perceiving mind, the imagination cannot be the source of the perceived objects (or persons) but must enable us to get into contact with them. Lewis therefore describes – in continuing divergence to Barfield – the act of experiencing as a tasting of, or entering into reality.¹⁷³

But there are different degrees of entering into reality. At one end of the scale, there are the precise, measurable experience of the scientific experiment. Here, the subjective aspect (the peculiar quality of the colour “red” of the LED of a metrical device, or the individual design of a measuring scale) can be neglected in favour of those aspects that are relevant for the experiment (LED *on* or *off*, pointer to 9.5 or 10). At the other end of the scale, there are experiences which consist of almost pure qualities (for example experiences of beauty or pain), so that in the moment of experiencing, a separation of subject and object is wholly impossible.

The imagination is thus not to be seen in exclusive opposition to discursive reason. Our acts of thinking must comprise *both* elements if the conclusions we reach shall be correct but are to have a content that is higher than zero.¹⁷⁴ In other words, discursive reason can exercise its abstracting power in different degrees – from very light abstraction up to a total separation of the thinking mind from any concrete reality in the tautologies of formal logic.

Lewis sees here a principle of inverse proportionality at work; he writes: “The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think.”¹⁷⁵ And he is aware that the deeper – in the sense of richer, more meaningful – a particular experience of reality is to be (so that a clear separation of experiencing subject and experienced object is impossible), the more we must be *open* for what happens. This is especially true for experiences of meaning, for example moments of Joy. In order to be able

172 *Miracles* 37.

173 Cf. “Myth Became Fact” §8.

174 Lewis develops this point in detail in “Bluspels and Flalansferes”, cf. also Pt. 2.3.2.

175 “Myth Became Fact” §8.

to have such experiences, we must be ready to enter into them without reservation, may the object be a work of art or nature:

Total surrender is the first step towards the fruition of either. Shut your mouth; open your eyes and ears. Take in what is there and give no thought to what might have been there or what is somewhere else. That can come later, if it must come at all.¹⁷⁶

To think too much *about* such experiences, to reflect about the conditions under which they occur, or about the effects they produce, can therefore become a serious hindrance for having them at all.¹⁷⁷ Such experiences are only possible if we give up the distanced attitude of looking *at* them and are willing to look *along* them.

In conclusion it can be stated: Lewis holds it to be impossible to know the whole of reality by merely looking *at* experiences. We know reality in its actual diversity and concreteness only by looking *along* our experiences, and this is only possible with the aid of the imagination. The imagination, insofar as it is subject to our conscious will (= Coleridge's "secondary imagination"), is the true agent of our human creative acts. As man's "organ of meaning", and it is the source of the meaning of words. Lewis therefore holds it necessary to reflect upon the function of the language we use in speaking about our experiences in science, philosophy, theology and poetry. This will be the topic of our next chapter.

176 *Surprised by Joy* 112, cf. Löw, "Freude" 146.

177 Cf. "Lilies that Fester" §5.