

Miracles

C. S. Lewis (1960)

Notes by Jacob H. Nie

CHAPTER ONE - THE SCOPE OF THIS BOOK (1-4)

- The question of whether miracles can or cannot occur cannot be settled by experience or history until the philosophical question is answered.
 - If we decide miracles are fundamentally impossible, no amount of historical evidence can prove a miracle occurred. Similarly, all observations of the senses would be thrown away and considered illusion. It all depends on the preliminary assumption.
 - "This book is intended as a preliminary to historical inquiry. I am not a trained historian and I shall not examine the historical evidence for the Christian miracles."
 - "It is no use going to the texts until we have some idea about the possibility or probability of the miraculous. Those who assume that miracles cannot happen are merely wasting their time by looking into the texts: we know in advance what results they will find for they have begun by begging the question." (4)

CHAPTER TWO - THE NATURALIST AND THE SUPERNATURALIST (5-16)

- Definitions:
 - Miracle - an interference with Nature by supernatural power
 - Nature, or what Naturalists believe in
 - We cannot simply define "everything" to be Nature. (This would include the supernatural as well, if there is one.)
 - So what is Nature? Nature (you can think of the word naturally, or by nature) is "a vast process of space and time which is going on of its own accord." (8)
 - (Of course, a Naturalist would not believe that humans have free will: to do so would be to acknowledge some kind of independent uncaused cause.)
 - A democratic view of reality
 - Nature and Supernature, or what Supernaturalists believe in
 - There are two classes: something that is basic and original, existing on its own. And something else that is derivative from that other thing.
 - A monarchical view of reality.
 - Perhaps then, the Supernaturalists were simply inspired to take this view based on the ancient monarchical structures. But then, the Naturalists are equally affected by modern democratic structures.
 - There might well be other Natures aside from the Nature we observe.
- Naturalism v. Supernaturalism is not the same as atheism v. theism
 - Even a naturalist could accept a kind of God: "The great interlocking event called Nature might be such as to produce at some stage a great cosmic consciousness, an indwelling 'God' arising from the whole process as human mind (according to Naturalists) arises from human organisms." (11)
 - "What Naturalism cannot accept is the idea of a God who stands outside Nature and made it."
- It does not directly follow from Supernaturalism that Miracles can occur: it is possible that God does not even interfere with Nature.
- But the impossibility of Miracles follows directly from any confirmation that Naturalism is true.

CHAPTER THREE - THE CARDINAL DIFFICULTY OF NATURALISM (17-36)

- If Naturalism is true, every event must (in principle, but not in reality) be explainable in terms of something else within Nature. Naturalism is ruined if there is something that is not only impossible to explain, but proven to be impossible to explain.
- Here, Lewis goes on a brief tangent exploring some of the philosophical implications of quantum mechanics on Naturalism. However, he does not completely believe what he says: that accepting some kind of Subnature (the randomness associated with quantum mechanics) to directly influence Nature makes it easier to see how it is possible that a Supernature could influence Nature.
- All possible knowledge depends on the validity of reasoning. (21)
 - If the concept of certainty/truth is merely a feeling within our minds, then nothing can actually be true.
 - " 'If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be comprised of atoms.' (Possible Worlds, 209)"
 - Naturalism seems to have this issue.
- Note: the two usages of "because":
 - "Billy must be late today because he slept through his alarm clock." The cause-and-effect usage of because.
 - "Billy must be late today because his desk is empty right now." The ground-and-consequent usage of because.
 - The first: "a dynamic connection between events" and the second, "a logical relation between assertions"
- All reasoning must take place in chains of ground-consequent relations in order to hold any water.
- But, all events in Nature must be connected by cause-effect relations. Hence, the Naturalist believes that each step of reasoning, each thinking event, occurs through cause-effect relations. Real logical truth is undermined. **"To be caused is not to be proved."**
 - "The mere existence of causes for a belief is popularly treated as raising a presumption that it is groundless, and the most popular way of discrediting a person's opinions is to explain them causally: 'You say that because (the cause-effect kind) you are a capitalist, or a hypochondriac, or a mere man, or only a woman'."
 - The act of knowing "must be determined by the truth it knows. If it were totally explicable from other sources it would cease to be knowledge." (27)
- Counter: but even so, the act of making a logical connection based on ground-consequent relation remains a psychological event. Which must inevitably have a cause.
 - Nevertheless, acts of thinking are deeper than normal cause-effect events, though there may be causes for them. For example, not the difference between the statements: "B followed A in my thoughts" and "B follow from A." 26)
- "[Naturalism] offers what professes to be a full account of our mental behavior; but this account, on inspection, leaves no room for the acts of knowing or insight on which the whole value of our thinking, as a means to truth, depends." (27)
- Counter: reason came into existence through an evolutionary process.
 - This is either impossible or highly highly unlikely. Natural selection operates by enhancing or eliminating responses to stimuli, but the "relation between response and stimulus is utterly different from that between knowledge and the truth known."
- Counter: reason came into existence through the process of tradition and instruction. People who see fire every time they see smoke come to equate the two and discover: "if smoke, then fire."

- However, "if smoke, then fire" remains an inference based on the idea that if one thing happened many times then it should happen again. However, reason is quick to distinguish expectation from truth/logic.
- We cannot put Reasoning on trial. Proofs that there are no proofs or proofs that there are proofs are meaningless. (33)
- "For the theist, the human mind in the act of knowing is illuminated by the Divine reason. It is set free, in the measure required, from the huge nexus of non-rational causation; free from this to be determined by the truth known." (34)
- To call the act of knowing supernatural does not sound good: it does not mean that it is a spiritual thing in any way. We merely mean that the act of knowing does not fit into the chain of causation that defines Nature.

CHAPTER FOUR - NATURE AND SUPERNATURE

- To be clear, we don't need to include the vast majority of human consciousness as being outside of nature. "Pleasures, pains, fears hopes, affections, and mental images" can be considered parts of nature. (38)
- There is a "frontier" between Reason and all the non-rational (note the difference between irrational and non-rational) events of Nature.
 - This is a one way frontier: our Reason can produce lots of change in Nature, but Nature cannot influence Reason (though of course it can a little bit). Because Reason is lost when Nature is causing it. "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)
 - Many people dislike the one-way relation between Reason and Nature as being asymmetric and not aesthetic, but this is not cause enough to throw it away.
- The Reason possessed by each man and woman does not necessarily exist on its own. A dependence on the non-rational is not allowed, but the reason of one man can depend on the reason of another man. We might then find a long chain of dependence until we finally arrive at a Reason that exists absolutely on its own. Supernaturalists say that God is exactly this Reason that exists absolutely on its own.
- Counter: What if we are already self-existent Reason, thus eliminating the need for a separate self-existent Reason completely outside of Nature?
 - In order to be self-existent, it must have existed incessantly, for a truly self-existent Reason cannot disappear and recall itself back into existence. Whereas this is exactly what happens to our own Reasons. Our Reason gradually develops as we are born, and our Reason is interrupted as we sleep.
- What if we are merely natural beings and the Reason we experience is merely the eternal Reason directly working through our bodies? (i.e. God is simply thinking through me)
 - Then it is difficult to explain how sometimes we reason completely correctly but arrive at a false conclusion because the original assumptions were flawed. God would not arrive at a false conclusion if he had perfect knowledge of all the real facts!
 - "It seems much more likely that human thought is not God's but God-kindled." (44)
- Can we still save Naturalism by believing in some kind of "universal consciousness" or "emergent God"?
 - This still does not satisfy the criteria of Reason not being a product of any non-rational causes.
- Instead of Nature and Supernature, can we accept Dualism? That God and Nature are both self-existent and independent of each other? (Not independent in the sense that they never interact, but that one did not create the other.)
 - Lewis accepts that Dualism is much more reasonable than any Naturalism, but does not accept it as being very likely. If two things co-exist and one did not create the other, then they must be occupying some kind of common medium (in our minds it would be a common space) that only puts them together in one simply larger system.
 - And already, we have seen that God and Nature have a very unidirectional frontier within the Reason of each human mind. Only the Reason of Supernature can affect Nature—

Nature, by definition, cannot affect Reason (though it can give rise to rational events, it cannot affect the truth behind the events.)

- Obviously, Nature cannot produce the Reason of Supernature (God) and it seems unlikely that they coexist independent of each other. So it is most likely that God created Nature.
 - "Everything looks as if Nature were not resisting an alien invader but rebelling against a lawful sovereign." (49)
- "I do not maintain that God's creation of Nature can be proved as rigorously as God's existence, but it seems to me overwhelmingly probable, so probable that no one who approached the question with an open mind would very seriously entertain any other hypothesis." (50)
- "No philosophical theory which I have yet come across is a radical improvement on the words of Genesis, that 'In the beginning God made Heaven and Earth'. ... If you compare it with the creation legends of other peoples—with all these delightful absurdities in which giants to be cut up and floods to be dried up are made to exist *before* creation—the depth and originality of this Hebrew folk tale will soon be apparent." (51)

CHAPTER FIVE - A FURTHER DIFFICULTY IN NATURALISM

- Reasoning is the best defense against Naturalism because the Naturalist cannot deny it without "cutting his own throat"
- Men also make moral judgments.
 - There are two possible views that are both acceptable for the purposes of this book: that moral choices are made as a byproduct of Reason, and that moral choices are made as a byproduct of a wholly different power. Lewis himself subscribes to the first.
- The same argument made for Reason can be made for Morality. Justification by non-moral or non-rational forces one to throw out the justification.
 - "'He believes in the sanctity of property because he's a millionaire'—'He believes in Pacifism because he's a coward'—'He approves of corporal punishment because he's a sadist.'" (55)
 - These kinds of arguments show what kind of principle is being used here: that morality cannot be explained by any non-rational cause. "No one (in real life) pays attention to any moral judgment which can be shown to spring from non-moral and non-rational causes."
- Counter: the illusion of morality is simply a result of evolution: organisms who behave in one way live longer than those who don't. Teaching of offspring promotes these behaviors, and patterns of behaviors are built up. Tribes kill people who do not conform to these standards, and gods are invented to punish departures from these standards. But this impulse is often at odds with the other impulses, and gradually the man is led to say "I want to do A but I ought to do B."
 - Whether this actually explains why men make moral judgments is not relevant: this still does not explain why they are actually right when they make them. "If Naturalism is true, 'I ought' is the same sort of statement as 'I itch' or 'I'm going to be sick.' In real life when a man says 'I ought' we may reply, 'Yes. You're right. That is what you ought to do,' or else, 'No. I think you're mistaken.' But in a world of Naturalists, the only sensible reply would be, 'Oh, are you?'" (57)
- This is not as self-contradictory as the previous arguments for reason, because the Naturalist is still completely able to respond to all this by saying "Yes, you're right. There is no morality." But many Naturalists are quite hypocritical about this point when they denounce so many

things and promote certain actions as being right. They forget. "The Naturalists must not destroy all my reverence for conscience on Monday and expect to find me still venerating it on Tuesday." (60)

- The conscience of man is not a product of Nature, this moral wisdom must exist on its own as part of a Supernature.

CHAPTER SIX - ANSWERS TO MISGIVINGS

- Reason and Morality are both dependent on the state of the brain: it is impaired when the brain is impaired, but this is by no means a difficulty in our arguments toward Nature and Supernature. Rational thought always involves the brain, which is in the end nothing more than interaction between atoms, but this only represents the frontier that exists between Reason and Nature. It does not mean that rational thought is nothing more than interaction between atoms.
- So why, if something like Supernature exists, why is it only accessible through such a convoluted argument through the examination of human reason? Why is it not more obvious?
 - It is not uncommon for very relevant things to go largely unnoticed: when we are looking outside from our homes, we can go a long time before consciously thinking of the window that we look through. When we speak our native languages, the grammatical rules that allow us to understand and be understood are completely unnoticed. "He knew it (in one sense) so well that (in another sense) he did not know it existed." (64)
 - "The fact which is in one respect the most obvious and primary fact, and through which alone you have access to all the other facts, may be precisely the one that is most easily forgotten, forgotten not because it is so remote or abstruse but because it is so near and obvious. And that is exactly how the Supernatural has been forgotten." (64)
- Access to the Supernatural used to be easily accessible by even commoners with no particular desire for such arguments, simply by just listening to religious authority. But after rejecting this simple path towards the truth, simple men are required to go to great lengths to access such truths. It's entirely possible that humanity is making a mistake rebelling against tradition. "If we are content to become humble plain men obeying a tradition, well. If we are ready to climb and struggle on till we become sages ourselves, better still. But the man who will neither obey wisdom in others nor adventure for her/himself is fatal." (67)
- Technically, by our previous definition, the very existence of Reason in every man, a supernatural interference in nature, can be classified as a miracle. But thankfully, this is not the only miracle that we will examine. The rest of the book can be summarized as: "Does Supernature ever produce particular results in space and time aside from how Reason acts through human brains?"

CHAPTER SEVEN - A CHAPTER OF RED HERRINGS

- After we have shown that God exists, we must disprove two things before we can show that miracles exist: either the character of God disallows miracles or the character of Nature disallows miracles.
- Red herring one: miracles don't exist because they are against the laws of Nature. They were believed in the old times because the laws of Nature weren't known back then.
 - A belief in miracles does not constitute a belief that there are no laws of Nature, it is the belief that the laws of Nature can be suspended.
 - The progress of science *does not* alter the question of miracles. Just as miracles were considered deviations from the accepted rules of Nature in the ancient times, so they are now.
 - No miracles will be perceived without the belief that nature works according to regular laws. "If you have not yet noticed that the sun always rises in the East you will see nothing miraculous about his rising one morning in the West." (75)

- Red herring two: miracles made more sense long ago because people believed that humans were the center of the universe. Now we know that humans are but a speck compared to the scale of the universe. "We have discovered our significance and can no longer suppose that God is so drastically concerned in our petty affairs." (77)
 - First of all, the scale of the universe is not a recent discovery. (References Ptolemy.) Why, if the spatial insignificance of the Earth has been acknowledged by Christians for a very long time, has this argument done so well?
 - It is natural for the universe to be very large, so the only two options are that either the rest of space is teeming with life or completely vacant. But both these options are used as arguments against Christianity! If the universe is teeming with life, then it seems ridiculous that God should be concerned with the human race specifically. If the universe is completely vacant, then it seems like life is simply an accidental by-product. It seems like everything is used against him. This objection is not based on the actual observed nature of the universe.
 - "Many a man, brought up in the glib profession of some shallow form of Christianity, who comes through reading Astronomy to realize for the first time how majestically indifferent most reality is to man, and who perhaps abandons his religion on that account, may at that moment be having his first genuinely religious experience." (81)
 - Using the great difference in size between the Earth and the universe to argue the lack of importance the Earth is flawed: we all know that a five-foot man is no less valuable than a six-foot man—hence any difference in perceived importance between very small things and very large things is only an emotional difference and not a rational one.

CHAPTER EIGHT - MIRACLES AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

[In my personal opinion, I believe that this chapter is logically the weakest of the entire book, but thankfully this does not lend itself to any major holes in the overarching argument.]

- We know that Nature follows regular patterns. Is there anything wrong in supposing that a power outside of Nature, given its existence, will produce events that Nature is incapable of producing on its own?
- There are three perceptions of the Laws of Nature: (1) The Laws of Nature are simply facts determined from observation: we know that Nature behaves like such, but we really don't see any reason why it should be that way. (2) Nature is composed of an extremely large number of events, and the Laws we observe are simply manifestations of the law of averages. "Impossible" events are not impossible, but rather "overwhelmingly improbable". (3) The fundamental laws of nature are truths, in the same sense that the laws of mathematics are truths.
 - (1) gives us no assurance against Miracles. The Laws of Nature are simply based on the collective observations of the past, that things should happen as they used to.
 - (2) gives us no assurance against Miracles. There is nothing saying that a force outside of Nature could not "doctor" the results and produce an overwhelmingly improbable result.
 - (3) appears to break the case against Miracles, because to break these Laws of Nature would be self-contradictory. However this is not the case. Miracles are simply an interference in Nature, but the Laws of Nature immediately take over following this interference, and hence they are not broken.
 - [To me, this is logically flawed. Is an unexpected interference not considered breaking the Laws of Nature? What if one of the Laws of Nature is that there cannot be an unexpected interference in the regular causation of events? Thankfully, no reasonable scientist actually believes that the Laws of Nature

are truths. Our Laws of Nature are regularly adjusted to fit new evidence and are by no means immutable truths. So, the reality is closer to (1), and Lewis's overall argument is left safe.]

- A miracle is not an event without cause and without results. Its cause is God and its results obey natural law. It is simply not backwards interlocking within nature: a cause cannot be found by simply examining events in nature. However, a cause exists (but may not be discernible) within the entirety of reality: both Nature and Supernature.
- "In calling them miracles we do not mean that they are contradictions or outrages; we mean that, left to her own resources, she could never produce them." (98)

CHAPTER NINE - A CHAPTER NOT STRICTLY NECESSARY

- Lewis addresses an emotional objection to the picture presented in the previous eight chapters. "I passionately desired that Nature should exist 'on her own'. The idea that she had been made, and could be altered, by God, seemed to take from her all that spontaneity which I found so refreshing." (100)
- "At every stage in the writing of this book I have found my idea of Nature becoming more vivid and more concrete. I set out on a work which seemed to involve reducing her status and undermining her walls at every turn: the paradoxical result is a growing sensation that if I am not very careful she will become the heroine of my book." (102)
- "The reason is not far to seek." For most people and especially to the Naturalists, Nature seems like "everything". But everything becomes different when we realize that Nature is a created thing, with its own flavor. "God's creative freedom is to be conceived as the freedom of a poet: the freedom to create a consistent positive thing with its own inimitable flavor." (102)
- "You must go a little away from her, and then turn round, and look back. Then at last the true landscape will become visible. You must have tasted, however briefly, the pure water from beyond the world before you can be distinctly conscious of the hot, salty tang of Nature's current. To treat her as god, or as Everything, is to lose the whole pith and pleasure of her. ... She is herself. Offer her neither worship nor contempt. Meet her and know her. If we are immortal, and if she is doomed (as the scientists tell us) to run down and die, we shall miss this half-shy and half-flamboyant creature, this ogress, this hoyden, this incorrigible fairy, this dumb witch. But the theologians tell us that she, like ourselves, is to be redeemed. The 'vanity' to which she was subjected was her disease, not her essence. She will be cured in character: not tamed (Heaven forbid) nor sterilized. We shall still be able to recognize our old enemy, friend, playfellow and foster-mother, so perfected as to be not less, but more, herself. And that will be a merry meeting." (104)

CHAPTER TEN - HORRID RED THINGS

- Many who object to Miracles believe that God would not invade nature: "they accuse those who say that it has done so of having a childish and unworthy notion of the Supernatural." (107)
- Many people who grow up with religion are presented with a picture that looks wholly unreal and primitive. "as if God had a palace in the sky from which He had sent down His 'Son' like a parachutist. ... Everything seems to presuppose a conception of reality which the increase of our knowledge has been steadily refuting for the last two thousand years and which no honest man in his senses could return to today." (108)

- Even trying to come up with explanations for this kind of imagery falls flat: it only seems as if the Christian is trying to dig himself out of a hole that he simply sinks deeper and deeper into. "On any matter whereon science has not yet spoken and on which they cannot be checked, they will tell you some preposterous fairytale. And then, the moment science makes a new advance and shows (as it invariably does) their statement to be untrue, they suddenly turn round and explain that they didn't mean what they said." (110)
- An example: if a man imagines New York City, they invariably have a mental picture of the Empire State Building, or perhaps Madison Square Garden. But just because New York has thousands of buildings does not mean that each and every building is contained within his mental picture. To think and to imagine are different things. It is possible for thinking to be sound when the images accompanied by it are false.
- It's even possible, though it is not always the case, for thinking to be sound when the false images are mistaken for true images. It's possible that the core idea or meaning within the false image remains true to the reality when the image is taken away.
- And language is another issue: there are some things that can only be conveyed through an approximate substitute in language. "When a man says that he grasps an argument he is using a verb (grasp) which literally means to take something in the hands, but he is certainly not thinking that his mind has hands or that an argument can be seized like a gun. To avoid the word grasp he may change the form of expression and say, 'I see your point,' but he does not mean that a pointed object has appeared in his visual field." (114)
- Christians do often use these crude, primitive mental images when thinking of these concepts: "descending from Heaven", "the Son and the Father", etc. But that does not mean their underlying conception is at all flawed!
- But would it not be better to simply rid ourselves of these images altogether?
 - "The people who recommend it have not noticed that when they try to get rid of man-like, or as they are called, 'anthropomorphic', images they merely succeed in substituting images of some other kind. ... A girl I knew was brought up by 'higher thinking' parents to regard God as a perfect 'substance'; in later life she realized that this had actually led her to think of Him as something like a vast tapioca pudding. (To make matters worse, she disliked tapioca)." (117)
 - These images are only more absurd than man-images. "For man, after all, is the highest of things we meet in sensuous experience. ... If God exists at all it is not unreasonable to suppose that we are less unlike Him than anything else we know." (118)
- The absurdity of the imagery does not equate to the absurdity of the doctrine. Even if the images were mistaken for real ones, this would not invalidate the thought.
- "Most baffling of all to a modern literalist, the God who seems to live locally in the sky, also made it." (122)
- But the usage of metaphor also does not serve to lessen the real meaning of what is said. Hellfire is metaphorical, but this does not mean it can be treated lightly. Rather, the awe inspired by the metaphor should remain even when the image is stripped away.
- We must be careful to draw the line between metaphor and literal occurrences. Jesus turning water into wine was not a metaphor: this is an event that is well within the capabilities of our senses to describe.
- "Nothing in this chapter helps us to a decision about the probability or improbability of the Christian claim. We have merely removed a misunderstanding in order to secure for that question a fair hearing." (127)

CHAPTER ELEVEN - CHRISTIANITY AND 'RELIGION'

- Lewis uses this chapter to critique modern ideas about religion in favor of the seemingly primitive ideas of Christianity.
- People love the idea of a God that is a spiritual force, or a "a common mind of which we are all parts, a pool of generalized spirituality to which we can all flow." (130) But a purposeful, personal God who acts, commands, and prohibits is very disgusting to these people. Lewis terms these people as Pantheists.
 - Lewis theorizes how this idea came to be: man began by inventing spirits to explain natural phenomena. At first they are quite like himself, but as time goes by and man becomes more "enlightened", the human attributes drop off until all we are left with is "pure abstraction." This is attractive because it seems refined and profound.
 - Lewis: this is not true. It is attractive, but not true. In fact one could argue that this is actually the most *primitive* of ideas and present in ancient religions. Pantheism is "the natural bent of the human mind." Really, it is just the worship of the "life-force" and is nothing new.
 - Pantheism needs correction. The real nature of things is often shocking; this does not discredit its reality.
 - People grow up with Christianity and advance to Pantheism: this is how they believe that Christianity is obvious and Pantheism is complex, sublime, and nuanced. This is completely untrue.
 - Pantheists believe in a type of diffused/concealed being, and they suffer from picture-thinking: they are really thinking of a kind of diffuse fluid in space. Christians believe "God is totally present at every point of space and time, and locally present in none."
 - Christians also believe God is not present equally in all places: "not present in matter as He is present in man, not present in all men as in some, not present in any other man as in Jesus." (135)
 - Christians acknowledge the incomprehensibility of God. Pantheists are actually reducing God into something that's sub-natural.
 - Christians offer a more complex picture of religion than Pantheism, that is for sure. The Pantheist must then reverse his previous statement that Christianity is childish and say that Christianity is far too complex and troublesome to be true. "The ascertained nature of any real thing is always at first a nuisance to our natural fantasies." (137)
- God is also distinctly real. The opaque world could not have been created by something with an existence any less real. "Bookkeeping, continued to all eternity, could never produce one farthing." (139)
 - God is infinite, but if that word causes us to think that he is formless and less real, then it is better to just think of God as a Thing. He is not universal, because there are certainly things that God is not. God uses "I am" in the Hebrew Bible: he has a determinate character.
 - To be clear, saying that God is one thing should not reduce the immense distance that separates Him from all other things.
 - Lewis theorizes how the mystics came to believe in such an "unreal" form of God: if a snail were to describe a human, it would say: "Man has no shell, is not attached to a rock, and is not surrounded by water." The other snails would all think Man as some kind of a jelly. It is the same when we describe God using negatives like "infinite, immaterial, immutable.." Each takes away some human attribute, but it is most important that these human attributes are actually replaced with a divine attribute and not simply stripped away. Unfortunately, our capacity for picturing these divine attributes is limited: we risk reducing our worship to worship of a nonentity.

- The only way for us to understand God more fully is through the experience of doing the things that are "closer" to God: living morally and with devotion. Human philosophy can only give us access to the negative aspects of God.
- Religious imagery is dangerous, but at least it reinforces the concreteness of God. We must reject religious imagery not because it is too real, but because it is not real enough.
- We also say, correctly, that God does not have passions. But this should not reduce his love either. He is simply unaffected by love because He *is* love. "To imagine that love as something less torrential or less sharp than our own temporary and derivative 'passions' is a most disastrous fantasy." (148)
- Traditional imagery should also not reduce the peace attained through God. We think of peace as something that occurs when there is nothing going on, but we experience peace in God not because He has no action, but because his action is timeless.
- The Pantheist's God does nothing. He does not pursue you.
- "It is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. 'Look out!' we cry, 'it's alive!' And therefore this is the very point at which so many draw back—I would have done so myself if I could—and proceed no further with Christianity. An 'impersonal God'—well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads—better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap—best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband—that is quite another matter. There comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a *real* footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ('Man's search for God!') suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to *that*! Worse still, supposing He had found us?" (150)

CHAPTER TWELVE - THE PROPRIETY OF MIRACLES

- Many people feel that God *would* not perform miracles. "Only an incompetent workman will produce work which needs to be interfered with" (151).
 - "Now one often finds that the beginner, who has just mastered the strict formal rules, is over-punctilious and pedantic about them. ... A stupid schoolboy might think that the abnormal hexameters in Virgil, or the half-rhymes in English poets, were due to incompetence. In reality, of course, every one of them is there for a purpose and breaks the superficial regularity of the meter in obedience to a higher and subtler law" (153).
 - We cannot say whether there may be rules beyond the rules we know. We aren't in a position to judge whether miracles are "against the rules."
- A metaphor: God as the author. It would be intolerable if a story was written where the characters were stuck in a hopeless situation and there was simply a magical way out. But if the subject of the book was that magical way out, then this is permissible.
 - If miracles were just magical ways out, I [Lewis] would not believe in them. But the miracles are not exceptions, but rather the primary miracles of Christianity are exactly what the whole story is about.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN - ON PROBABILITY

- So far, we have argued that miracles are possible and it's plausible that God performs them. But this doesn't mean we should believe all stories of miracles.
- We need some kind of criterion of probability. (How much historical evidence do we need?)
 - Most historians take this approach: consider every single natural explanation, however implausible, before admitting the possibility of miracle.

- But this assumes that a miracle is more improbable than the most improbable natural event. Is this the case?
- We must also be clear about what kind of probability we examine. There are things that are inherently improbable, like winning the lottery, but the fact that it has happened is not at all incredible. We are not concerned about that kind of probability, the "antecedent probability of chances." (161) We are looking at historical probability.
- According to Hume, probability is based on the majority vote of our past experiences. Since there is, by definition, a uniform experience against Miracles, it is the most improbable of all events.
 - However, we only have experience against miracles if we know all claimed miracles to be false reports. And we only know they are false if we know miracles have never occurred. So this is circular.
 - But there is a deeper problem: probability depends on the uniformity of nature. And we don't have an assurance of the uniformity of nature because our observations only consist of a minute fraction of all the events that occur. But can we say that at least the uniformity of nature is probable? No, because we can't have any concept of "probable" without the uniformity of nature.
 - Hume answers the question of whether miracles occur by invoking the fact that nature is completely uniform. But, the question of whether nature is completely uniform is the exact same as the question of whether miracles occur or not! Hence, the question is not actually answered: Hume assumes the answer to his question before actually answering it.
 - The question of miracles is examining the structure and uniformity of Nature itself. It is impossible for an invocation of the uniformity of Nature to disprove miracles. We must look beyond the frame of Nature to answer this question.
 - In other words, we cannot say whether uniformity is probable or improbable: the idea of probability itself assumes uniformity.
 - However, this also works against us: just as we cannot claim that uniformity is probable or improbable, we are also unable to claim that miracles are probable or improbable.
- Two irrational causes for why humans believe in uniformity: 1) we are creatures of habit. We expect the future to resemble the past. 2) "When we plan our actions, we have to leave out of account the theoretical possibility that Nature might not behave as usual tomorrow, because we can do nothing about it. It is not worth bothering about because no action can be taken to meet it" (166).
- A third cause that is more rational: "A universe in which unprecedented and unpredictable events were at every moment flung into Nature would not merely be inconvenient to us: it would be profoundly repugnant" (166). So there is an aesthetic side.
 - Even science does this. Science focuses on removing the irregularities of nature, we do not rest until a hypothesis is formed that will tell us that they weren't irregularities after all.
 - If this repugnance against disorder is derived only from our natural convictions, then our arguments against uniformity survive. We would have no reason to trust our conviction that Nature is uniform.
 - But perhaps this disgust for disorder is derived from Supernature, in which case it must be trusted.
 - Interestingly, men first became scientific because of their belief that there had to be a Law in Nature from a Legislator. But this belief has died in most modern scientists.

- So perhaps there is God. But with God we must accept the fact that there are going to be a couple miracles here and there. If Nature were absolute, then we couldn't even make any sense of "uniformity". "Theology offers you a working arrangement, which leaves the scientist free to continue his experiments and the Christian to continue his prayers" (170).
- So how do we judge specific miracles? We must judge it by the "innate sense of the fitness of things, that same sense of fitness which led us to anticipate that the universe would be orderly." [What I think Lewis means here is that we must look at whether it *ought* to happen.] And this is still no substitute for the examination of historical evidence. (Of course, no amount of historical evidence will convince us if we are adamant that miracles are impossible. But now we see that we can make no statement about the impossibility of miracles.)
 - This sense of fitness really is necessary: "no one really thinks that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection is exactly on the same level with some pious tittle-tattle about how Mother Egaree Louise miraculously found her second best thimble by the aid of St. Anthony" (171).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE GRAND MIRACLE

- The central miracle of Christianity is the Incarnation, when God became man. Christianity is not about random miracles, but about a "strategically coherent invasion" which intends "complete conquest." (173)
 - Hence, the credibility of all miracles depends on the fitness in relation to the one central miracle.
- How do we judge the credibility of the "Grand Miracle"?
 - The credibility of the Grand Miracle itself obviously cannot be judged by its fitness in relation to itself. And of course, we cannot argue that it was improbable. After all, if it has only happened once in the entire history of the Earth, it would be infinitely improbable.
 - It is easier to argue on historical grounds. Any explanation of the life, sayings, and influence of Jesus Christ, aside from the Christian explanation, is impossibly difficult.
- Suppose we don't know whether it has happened on historical grounds. Consider the analogy: we possess parts of an incomplete of a symphony, and somebody presents us with the missing piece. We must check whether the new piece brings the rest of the piece together.
 - In the same way, the actual comprehensibility or plausibility of the doctrine is not as relevant as how well it brings together the rest of all knowledge.
- What exactly does it mean by "God becoming man"?
 - This would be a very difficult point if we did not already know that the supernatural activity of reason occurs in every human being.
 - In humans, a supernatural creature unites with a natural creature. In Jesus, it is believed that the supernatural Creator Himself united with a natural being.
 - So the difficulty of the whole concept is somewhat reduced.
- God comes down from the "heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity" and he "goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him" (179).
- This descent and reascent is familiar because it is the pattern of all vegetable life. In fact, it is reminiscent of the "corn-kings" who died and rose again each year. Corn-religions are popular, but the New Testament makes no mention of it. Lewis found this puzzling. "It is as if you met the sea-serpent and found that it disbelieved in sea-serpents" (183). But Jahweh is also clearly not a Nature-God: He is not any part of nature.
 - Lewis claims that the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision, "saw something suspiciously like a dynamo."

- The fact that God is not another Nature-God is more strange than people think. "If people are going to believe in a God at all,' we ask, 'what other kind would they believe in?' But the answer of history is, 'Almost any other kind.'" (186)
 - So why is Christ so similar to the Corn-King but so silent about it? It is because the Corn-King is derived from nature, and nature is derived from its creator.
 - "Where the real God is present the shadows of that God do not appear" (186).
- We are also quite repulsed by the idea of a "chosen people." One man, Abraham, is selected, and there is further selection among his descendants. Some die in the desert, etc. And ultimately it is all narrowed down to Mary, the mother of Jesus.
 - We feel that this is bad, but in reality, Nature is quite like this. Out of so many stars, only very few have planets. And out of all the planets, only one has life, and out of all the life, organisms are being constantly weeded out.
 - But still, the question remains: is this bad? Because if it is bad, then the atheist can simply say: "If there is a God like that who created a Nature like that, then I despise and defy Him." (188)
 - But selectiveness is not bad. It is neither good nor bad, rather it is just a property of nature. It permits competition, arrogance, and envy, but it also permits modesty and admiration.
 - In fact, the selectiveness isn't favoritism: the "chosen people" are not chosen for their own sake: they are chosen to bear a heavy burden.
- But now, isn't this injustice the other way around? Where a certain group of people is chosen to suffer? Now Lewis introduces the concept of "vicariousness," where in Nature, everything is dependent on everything else.
 - The idea that one group suffers for another is inherently neither good nor bad. Both good and bad can come out of it: "In social life without Vicariousness there would be no exploitation or oppression; but also no kindness or gratitude" (191).
- The composite nature of man, descent and re-ascent, Selectiveness, and Vicariousness are both characteristics of God that are reflected in Nature.
 - Religions either confirm properties of nature or deny them. Nature-religions confirm nature and anti-Nature-religions like Buddhism deny nature.
 - Christianity does neither: people who approach Christian beliefs with a love for natural tendencies will be surprised by the inflexible Christian demands. People who approach Christian beliefs with a hate for the Selectiveness and Vicariousness of the world will discover that "it is the same all the way up." (193).
- Of course, this is all implying that Nature is full of evil. And this requires a complete reworking of Nature: even removing all human evil would leave us susceptible to disease.
- How is it that Nature comes to be imperfect?
 - Lewis thinks that this is because God created nature to reach perfection as a process in time.
- How is it that Nature comes to be "positively depraved"?
 - Christians believe that this is due to sin. The sin of both men and supernatural creatures.
 - It is wrong to disbelieve in the existence of sinful supernatural creatures, because is a remnant of our tendencies towards Naturalism. But it is also wrong to fixate on these "demons." "Our attitude should be that of the sensible citizen in wartime who believes that there are enemy spies in our midst but disbelieves nearly every particular spy story" (196).
 - This idea prevents us from simply calling Nature good or evil. "Nature has all the air of a good thing spoiled" (196).

- Why is sin allowed?
 - This is due to free will. Lewis thinks that God surrenders a portion of His omnipotence (this is another case of the theme of descent) because He believes that free creatures, though sinful, can achieve a deeper happiness than a world of automata.
- If the redemption of Man is the marker of Nature's redemption, then is Man the most important thing in Nature?
 - Yes. The smallness of our size does not discredit our importance in Nature.
- What if there are other rational species?
 - Then it is still possible that we are the only one to have fallen, and then we are the only ones in need of a savior.
 - Lewis disagrees that there would be multiple Incarnations for multiple groups of fallen creatures.
- It is also possible that redeemed humanity is going to be even better than an unfallen one. And it is also possible that the Incarnation would have occurred even without sin.
 - But because of sin, the Incarnation took such a painful form. Without sin, the Incarnation would have occurred just for the glorification of the world.
- There are two perspectives towards death: the Stoic perspective that death doesn't matter and the natural perspective that death is the greatest evil. The Christian doctrine is more nuanced:
 - Christ mourned the death of Lazarus: He detested death. But also "only he who loses his life will save it" (203).
 - This mystery of death is very important if we are to focus on the pattern of descent and re-ascend to be the "very formula of reality."
 - Humans before sin were immune to death, and humans following redemption will be immune to it once again.
- Let us approach death by examining, once again, the frontier between the supernatural spirit and the natural body.
 - The spirit and the body are at war with one another. During life, the spirit can protect itself from the psychological and physiological attacks of Nature, but Nature wins out in the end, where death ensues. But before sin, there was no war between the spirit and the body.
 - But it is only a one-sided war. Nature can kill spiritual activities but spiritual activities only improve natural activities. So this is a *rebellion* and not a war.
- We see evidence of this "quarreling" between spirit and body in these two facts: "that men make coarse jokes" and "that they feel the dead to be uncanny" (206).
 - Coarse jokes [probably sexual jokes] reveal that man finds something objectionable about the body—this is evidence of the war between spirit and organism.
 - Our feeling about death reveals that we find something objectionable about the division that inevitably occurs between spirit and body.
 - Whether we decide that jokes and ghost stories are bad, this supports the Christian doctrine that "man was originally a unity and that the present division is unnatural" (207).
- Death is the result of sin. But through Christ, it is also the means of redemption from that sin. "The same thing can be a masterstroke on the part of one combatant and also the very means whereby the superior combatant defeats him" (208).

CHAPTER 15 - MIRACLES OF THE OLD CREATION

- Many of the "miracles" of fantasy seem absurd, and they are. If they really happened, then Nature would truly be invaded. But it would be an invasion by an alien power. The Christian miracle asserts that, through miracle, Nature is being invaded by "not merely a king, but *the King*" (216).

- The miracles of the pagan stories, if accepted, require "accepting a wholly meaningless universe" (217).
- An important footnote from Lewis regarding the Old Testament miracles: Old Testament miracles are not considered in this book. His view is that the truth first appeared in mythical form and then became incarnate as History. Myth is "not merely misunderstood history nor diabolical illusion nor priestly lying but, at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination."
- Lewis classifies miracles into two classes: the Miracles of the Old Creation and the Miracles of the New Creation.
 - The Miracles of the Old Creation: miracles that "reproduce operations we have already seen on the large scale"
 - The Miracles of the New Creation: miracles that focus on those which are still to come.
- Miracles are isolated from humans - humans cannot do them. But they are also not isolated from humans - Christ is bringing up Nature with him and humans will one day share in the powers of Christ.
- Miracles of Fertility (Old Creation Miracle)
 - Water is naturally turned into wine - in Jesus's miracle the shortcut was taken. Certainly the God that drives the miracle is not an anti-Natural God.
 - The multiplication of bread and fish once again follows natural processes of replication. Notably, Jesus refused to turn stone into bread.
 - The virgin birth is no more surprising. Normally, the sperm cell that fertilizes the egg carries the collective genetic history of the father's line. That line was absent in the birth of Jesus - a New Creation.
- Miracles of Healing (Old Creation Miracle)
 - Whether each miracle of healing can be admitted as a "real miracle" is unclear, of course. Many "diseases" are simply cases of hysteria, which can be "cured by suggestion" (226).
 - Even ordinary healing is really only an act of encouraging the body's natural recuperative processes. Jesus's healing was simply the physical, human manifestation of the "energy that energizes the whole system of Nature" (228). "The Power that was behind all healings puts on a face and hands."
- Miracle of Destruction (Old Creation Miracle)
 - The destruction of the fig tree is troublesome to some people, but it is merely reflective of the Natural processes of death.

CHAPTER 16 - MIRACLES OF THE NEW CREATION

- The Resurrection is the center of the New Testament.
 - Details of the gospels came after, as a comment on the fact.
 - One cannot say that the new testament is a construction around the sayings of the gospel. If it must be a construction, then the gospel is a construction around the Resurrection.
 - There were many witnesses to the Resurrected Jesus, many of whom were alive at the time of the writing of certain Epistles.
 - The Resurrection is not simply a proof of the immortality of the soul. If it were, then Jesus would only need to be a ghost.
 - One might expect the New Creation to be completely "spiritual" in the sense that there is a lack of all sensory perception. But then why would the risen Christ ask for a broiled fish to eat?
 - Maybe the bodily risen Christ was simply a hallucination then. But then why would the hallucinations not be immediately recognized as Jesus? (Lk. 24, John 20/21)
 - The Resurrection is not simply a reversal of the Incarnation.

- The risen life will be like and unlike the present life - the new body can be touched, can eat, but has "ghostly" attributes in other respects. In this respect, our present life can be seen as a precursor of sorts.
- The Resurrection cannot be taken independently of the Ascension. The Ascension is necessary to explain where the body went, if it truly wasn't a ghost or a hallucination.
- The miracle of walking on water demonstrates that the New Creation will entail some sort of command over Nature.
 - But it will not be a disorderly Nature either, because all people will be in perfect obedience towards the One who granted them such powers.
- The raising of Lazarus is not as grand as the Resurrection - it is merely a reversal of death. Such a miracle precedes the future "reordering" of the universe that will go against the currently constant increase in disorder.
- The Transfiguration is another miracle of the New Creation, but it is difficult to surmise any conclusion about the New Creation from that event.
- We know very little of what the New Creation will be like.
 - Our speculation is for the purpose of not limiting what we think it could be like. In some ways the descriptions are certainly metaphorical, but in other ways (spatial locality being one) it is literal.
- Many conceptions of earth and heaven are "two-floored" - that one is "real" and the other is "spiritual" and devoid of spatiotemporal relation.
 - But now it seems that the New Life will be on a floor somewhere in between. And furthermore, such a floor will be created out of the old one.
 - But our speculation for such a floor should not detract from the eternal and undimensional Father.
- Regarding what the transition from the Old to the New will look like: the witnesses to the Ascension perceived it as an upward movement. It is unclear whether that is literal.
- Our conceptions of heaven can be faulty as well.
 - Knowing that the New Creation will be a perfect union with the Father makes us think the body rather irrelevant.
 - But knowing that it will be a bodily Resurrection, we are led to think of hedonistic paradises, which we then feel as being rather unimportant.
 - In truth, such a reconciliation between Nature and Spirit is difficult to imagine.
- Others have the perception that the New Creation will be like a constant fast, without the pleasurable sins of the Old Creation.
 - This is like telling a young boy about sex, a great pleasure. The boy asks, do people eat chocolate while having sex? And you answer, no. The boy then associates sex as being the absence of chocolate-eating.
- What are the implications for daily life?
 - All this speculation should not distract from the daily responsibilities of living virtuously and devotionally.
 - But we should not renounce our bodies like the ascetics - the New Creation is not merely a "spiritual" one. It is a complete reconciliation of Nature (body) and spirit. For one might ask, "who will trust us with the true wealth if we cannot be trusted even with the wealth that perishes?" (266)