

## Have you read C. S. Lewis's **MIRACLES?**

Lewis is now known as the writer of children's books, but as an academic at Oxford and later Cambridge, he thought deeply about philosophy and religion.

Formerly an atheist, he became a Christian at the age of 29.

*Here is a taste of his thinking, if he's new to you.*

### **The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist**

Naturalism is the atheistic doctrine that 'nature' is all there is. If the doctrine is true then everything should be explicable in terms of the 'Total System'. In principle at least!

If you found something that could *not* be explained (in principle) in terms of the 'Total System', then the doctrine would disintegrate.

### **Can we explain reason in terms of 'Nature'?**

We reason from sensations of seeing, hearing, &c that there is a world around us. 'Inside this very general inference, all sorts of special trains of inference lead us to more detailed conclusions...we infer the existence of our own brains from what we find inside the skulls of other creatures' &c (pp25-6).

### **All possible knowledge depends on the validity of reasoning.**

It follows that any true account of the universe must allow for the possibility that our thinking is genuine insight. Any theory which invalidated our thinking would be self-contradictory, because the very thinking on which the theory rested would be invalid! It cuts off the branch on which it is sitting.

### **Rational and irrational reason**

If you are scared of dogs, because you think they are demons, the 'reason' for your fear is irrational. If on the other hand, you are scared of one particular dog, because it is always muzzled, the 'reason' for your fear is rational (This dog is muzzled presumably because it bites.)

### **Rule: No thought is valid if it can be fully explained by *irrational* causes.**

Try it out. If a drunken man tells you his house is full of snakes, you pay no attention. If he is sober, you might take notice. A reader of this website might dismiss it as the creation of a bunch of nutters. But if he suspects that reason and knowledge lie at the

bottom of our case for creation, then he begins to take notice! (I don't say that he is persuaded!)

### **Naturalism says that reason is the product of an irrational cause.**

Naturalism says that Nature is all that there is. Inevitably therefore reason at its best and finest is the product of what is irrational. Lewis quotes from J. B. S. Haldane (famous biologist and evolutionist in his day): '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 that my brain is composed of atoms' (pp28-29)!!

### **Is there a way out of this difficulty?**

A thought may be true even though the reason for thinking it is irrational. Now people who thought such thoughts would have an advantage in the struggle for survival—Natural Selection would select them! So presumably their thoughts are reliable!

### **Nah! Wont do!**

Evolution, natural selection, survival of the fittest, &c *are all inferences, whose validity depends on the validity of reason.* You cannot *begin* by assuming that they are true! 'A proof which sets out by assuming the very thing you have to prove, is rubbish!' (p29). But that aside, if you reason that because a thought is useful, it must be true in some degree, then you are assuming the validity of reason—which is what you need to prove!

### **The validity of thought**

There is no way round it. 'The validity of thought is central: all other things have to be fitted in round it as best they can' (p30). Remarkably, reason cannot be *inside* Nature: it has to be *outside* it. The Naturalist is contradicting himself.

## A further difficulty in Naturalism

In chapter 2 Lewis has dealt with the problem of Reason in the Naturalistic (atheistic) scheme of things. Reason must have a cause in Reason, if it is to be rational. If the Naturalist denies that it is ultimately caused by Reason, then he is denying that the reason by which he obtains knowledge is actually reason. In chapter 4 he hits another problem—moral judgements.

### I ought

On the surface we may talk about ‘political correctness’ now, but deeper than that we make moral judgements—‘I ought to do so-and-so’, ‘they ought to do X or Y’, &c. Despite all our progress in eliminating morality from society, we still think that some things are ‘good’, others ‘evil’. Paedophilia is (at the moment) a bad thing, though the murder of unborn babies (abortion) is ‘good’.

### Moral judgements and reason

Lewis thinks that when we make moral judgements, we are using our reason. Moral principles are rationally perceived (In his *Abolition of Man*, he uses the expression ‘practical reason’). ‘I just ‘see’ that there is no reason why my neighbour’s happiness should be sacrificed to my own. Moral principles are self-evident. It is because ‘Their intrinsic reasonableness shines by its own light’ that, when we recall a man to proper conduct, we say, ‘Be reasonable!’

### The basis of moral judgement

Moral judgement raises the same question as reason: if you can trace it to a non-moral, non-rational cause, you have destroyed it! If we discover that a man, who defends abortion on principle, is a back-street abortionist, so much the worse for his ‘principle’. If a man who believes in the sanctity of property turns out to be a millionaire, we don’t think much of *his* moral principle.

### Why moral judgements?

The fact is that if Naturalism is right, we should expunge ‘ought’ and ‘should’ from our vocabulary! Such ideas are an illusion. The theory of evolution can explain how we come to make moral judgements, but it cannot justify them as being right. If the atheist is right—when he says (as Carl Sagan did) that the universe is all there is, ever was or ever will be—then saying ‘I ought’ or ‘they should’ is like saying ‘I itch’ or ‘they stink’.

If Naturalists—like Dawkins—remembered their philosophy, it would not matter that some of us are creationists, any more than it matters that grass is green or the sky is blue. It’s just a fact of Nature, like evolution and the 2nd Law.

### Inconsistent Naturalism

So why do atheists/Naturalists get so hot under the collar about Christianity and creationism? Lewis cited H. G. Wells as a great atheist-cum-moralist, but we have our own Richard Dawkins—convinced that Nature doesn’t add up to anything, yet embarked on a Crusade to save the world from creationism and Christianity. Why? Lewis says that ‘At the sight of injustice [or we might say what is perceived to be injustice, ed] they throw their Naturalism to the winds’ [p47].

### Delicious irony!

We might here observe that Dawkins doesn’t find his campaigning cause and zeal in the laboratory! No amount of zoological knowledge about a species implies ‘This species must be preserved!’ Not all medical research put together proves that a human life is worth saving. The idea that it is worth saving must originate outside science and *outside Nature*, if it is to be valid. A delicious irony presents itself. Though having discovered via Darwinism that the human race amounts to nothing, we still have an NHS—and ambulances wailing and screeching in the streets: ‘Make way!! A worthless, unimportant piece of matter is in danger of changing its form!!’ And no one even laughs!

### Preserving the species

The Naturalist may defend his behaviour by arguing that his views will keep the human race alive, preserve the earth, preserve other species, &c.. He is not arguing for old-fashioned morality! But, warns Lewis, why should I care about the human race, &c, if Naturalism is true? You mustn’t tell me on Monday that my conscience is a load of rubbish, yet expect me to venerate it on Tuesday!

### The case for God

The fact is that if morality, right and wrong, conscience, &c are products of Nature, they can be disregarded. Only if, like reason, moral judgements originate outside Nature, do they possess validity. A Creator, who is Reason Himself, who sets and imparts moral standards, best explains the existence of man’s moral nature. Here! Here!