

PREFACE.

This book is, I believe, the first attempt to reverse a movement of THE HIERARCHY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH since the beginning of philosophy.

The process whereby man has come to know the universe is from one point of view extremely complicated; from another it is alarmingly simple. A New Diagram of Man in the Universe

D. E. HARDING

Man himself is skin to the gods. The advance of knowledge gradually supplants this rich and genial universe: first of its gods; then of its colours, sounds, odours, and tastes, finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined. As these items are taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account, described as our sensations, thoughts, images or emotions. The subject himself grows, inflated, at the expense of the Object. But the matter does not rest there. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to empty ourselves. The weakness of the method soon announces that we were just as mistaken in mistaking in such the same way as we attributed "souls", or "souls" or "minds" to human organisms, as when we attributed souls to the trees. Animism, apparently, begins at home. We who have personified all other things, turn out to be ourselves mere personifications. Man is indeed skin to the gods: that is,

With a Preface by

C. S. LEWIS

Preface.

This book is, I believe, the first attempt to reverse a movement of thought which has been going on since the beginning of philosophy.

The process whereby man has come to know the universe is from one point of view extremely complicated; from another it is alarmingly simple. We can observe a single one-way progression. At the outset the universe appears packed with will, intelligence, life and positive qualities; every tree is a nymph and every planet a god. Man himself is akin to the gods. The advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and genial universe: first of its gods, then of its colours, smells, sounds, and tastes, finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined. As these items are taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account: classified as our sensations, thoughts, images or emotions. The Subject becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object. But the matter does not rest there. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to empty ourselves. The masters of the method soon announce that we were just as mistaken (and mistaken in much the same way) when we attributed "souls", or "selves" or "minds" to human organisms, as when we attributed Dryads to the trees. Animism, apparently, begins at home. We who have personified all other things, turn out to be ourselves mere personifications. Man is indeed akin to the gods: that is,

he is no less phantasmal than they. Just as the Dryad is a "ghost", an abbreviated symbol for all the facts we know about the tree foolishly mistaken for a mysterious entity over and above the facts, so the man's "mind" or "consciousness" is an abbreviated symbol for certain verifiable facts about his behaviour: a symbol mistaken for a thing. And just as we have been broken off the bad habit of personifying trees, so we must now be broken off our bad habit of personifying men: a reform already effected in the political field. There never was a Subjective account into which we could transfer the items which the Object had lost. There is no "consciousness" to contain, as images or private experiences, all the lost gods, colours, and concepts. Consciousness is "not the sort of noun that can be used that way."

For we are given to understand that our mistake was a linguistic one. All our previous theologies, metaphysics, and psychologies were a bye-product of our bad grammar. Max Müller's formula (Mythology is a disease of language) thus returns with a wider scope than he ever dreamed of. We were not even imagining these things, we were only talking confusedly. All the questions which humanity has hitherto asked with deepest concern for the answer turn out to be unanswerable; not because the answers are hidden from us like "goddess private", but because they are nonsense questions like "How far is it from London Bridge to

Christmas Day?" What we thought we were loving when we loved a woman or a friend was not even a phantom like the phantom sail which starving sailors think they see on the horizon. It was something more like a pun or a sophisma per figuram dictionis. It is as though a man, deceived by the linguistic similarity between "myself" and "my spectacles", should start looking round for his "self" to put in his pocket before he left his bedroom in the morning: he might want it during the course of the day. If we lament the discovery that our friends have no "selves" in the old sense, we shall be behaving like a man who shed bitter tears at being unable to find his "self" anywhere on the dressing table or even underneath it.

And thus we arrive at a result uncommonly like zero. While we were reducing the world to almost nothing we deceived ourselves with the fancy that all its lost qualities were being kept safe (if in a somewhat humbled condition) as "things in our own mind." Apparently we had no mind of the sort required. The Subject is as empty as the Object. Almost nobody has been making linguistic mistakes about almost nothing. By and large, this is the only thing that has ever happened.

Now the trouble about this conclusion is not simply that it is unwelcome to our emotions. It is not unwelcome to them at all times or in all people. This philosophy, like every other, has

its pleasures. And it will, I fancy, prove very congenial to government. The old "liberty-talk" was very much mixed up with the idea that, as inside the ruler, so inside the subject, there was a whole world, to him the centre of all worlds, capacious of endless suffering and delight. But now, of course, he has no "inside", except the sort you can find by cutting him open. If I had to burn a man alive, I think I should find this doctrine comfortable. The real difficulty for most of us is more like a physical difficulty: we find it impossible to keep our minds, even for ten seconds at a stretch, twisted into the shape that this philosophy demands. And, to do him justice, Hume (who is its great ancestor) warned us not to try. He recommended backgammon instead; and freely admitted that when, after a suitable dose, we returned to our theory, we should find it "cold and strained and ridiculous." And obviously, if we really must accept nihilism, that is how we shall have to live: just as, if we have diabetes, we must take insulin. But one would rather not have diabetes and do without the insulin. If there should, after all, turn out to be any alternative to a philosophy that can be supported only by repeated (and presumably increasing) doses of backgammon, I suppose that most people would be glad to hear of it.

There is indeed (or so I am told) one way of living under this philosophy without the backgammon, but it is not one a man would

like to try. I have heard that there are states of insanity in which such a nihilistic doctrine becomes really credible: that is, as Dr. I.A. Richards would say, "belief feelings" are attached to it. The patient has the experience of being nobody in a world of nobodies and nothings. Those who return from this condition describe it as highly disagreeable.

Now there is of course nothing new in the attempt to arrest the process that has led us from the living universe where man meets the gods to the final void where almost-nobody discovers his mistakes about almost-nothing. Every step in that process has been contested. Many rearguard actions have been fought: some are being fought at the moment. But it has only been a question of arresting, not of reversing, the movement. That is what makes Mr. Harding's book so important. If it "works", then we shall have seen the beginning of a reversal: not a stand here, or a stand there, but a kind of thought which attempts to reopen the whole question. And we feel sure in advance that only thought of this type can help. The fatal slip which has led us to nihilism must have occurred at the very beginning.

There is of course no question of returning to Animism as Animism was before the "rot" began. No one supposes that the beliefs of pre-philosophic humanity, just as they stood before they were criticised, can or should be restored. The question is whether the first thinkers in modifying (and rightly modifying)

them under criticism, did not make some rash and unnecessary concession. It was certainly not their intention to commit us to the absurd consequences that have actually followed. This sort of error is of course very common in debate or even in our solitary thought. We start with a view which contains a good deal of truth, though in a confused or exaggerated form. Objections are then suggested and we withdraw it. But hours later we discover that we have emptied the baby out with the bath and that the original view must have contained certain truths for lack of which we are now entangled in absurdities. So here. In emptying out the dryads and the gods (which, admittedly, "would not do" just as they stood) we appear to have thrown out the whole universe, ourselves included. We must go back and begin over again: this time with a better chance of success, for of course we can now use all particular truths and all improvements of method which our argument may have thrown up as bye-products in its otherwise ruinous course.

It would be affectation to pretend that I know whether Mr. Harding's attempt, in its present form, will work. Very possibly not. One hardly expects the first, or the twenty-first, rocket to the Moon to make a good landing. But it is a beginning. If it should turn out to have been even the remote ancestor of some system which will give us again a credible universe inhabited by credible agents and observers, this will still have been a very

(Signed) C. S. Lewis

important book indeed.

It has also given me that bracing and satisfying experience which, in certain books of theory, seems to be partially independent of our final agreement or disagreement. It is an experience most easily disengaged by remembering what has happened to us whenever we turned from the inferior exponents of a system, even a system we reject, to its great doctors. I have had it on turning from common Existentialists to M. Sartre himself, from Calvinists to the Institutio, from "Transcendentalists" to Emerson, from books about "Renaissance Platonism" to Ficino. One may still disagree (I disagree heartily with all the authors I have just named) but one now sees for the first time why anyone ever did agree. One has breathed a new air, become free of a new country. It may be a country you cannot live in, but you now know why the natives love it. You will henceforward see all systems a little differently because you have been inside that one. From this point of view philosophies have some of the same qualities as works of art. I am not referring at all to the literary art with which they may or may not be expressed. It is the ipseitas, the peculiar unity of effect produced by a special balancing and patterning of thoughts and classes of thoughts: a delight very like that which would be given by Hesse's Glasperienspiel (in the book of that name) if it could really exist. I owe a new experience of that kind to Mr. Harding.

(Signed) C.S. LEWIS.

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PART I

CHAPTER I THE VIEW OUT AND THE VIEW IN

1. (page 1 of full version) The missing head. This book is an unconventional attempt to discover, for myself and in my own way, what I am and what I amount to in the universe.

What am I? Let me try to answer this question as honestly and as simply as I can, forgetting the ready-made answers.

At once I make a startling discovery -- I have no head! Here are my hands, arms, parts of my trunk and shoulders -- and, mounted (so to say) on these shoulders, not a head, but this paper and desk, the wall of this room, the window, the sky beyond.... My head has gone, and in its place is a world. And all my life long I had supposed myself to resemble other men and animals!

2 (3) The head found. A further discovery follows: while I have no head where I thought I had one, I have innumerable heads where I thought I had none -- heads mysteriously shrunken and variable, twisted back-to-front, and multiplied endlessly, in every reflecting surface. That my head pervades the region round about is indicated, first, by the fact that I have only to give any object there a polish to find my head in it; second, by the fact that if I take a box with a small hole in it (that is, a camera) and point it to the centre of the region, I find my head trapped inside the box; third, by the fact that my friends tell me that my head is present to them where they are, so that they can describe it in detail.

3 (5) The human region and its centre. There is, then, a zone where I keep my heads. Approaching observers report that, towards the in-

ner edge of this zone, my head grows till only a part is visible, and that this part gets hazier and hazier till nothing appears at all; receding observers, on the other hand, say that towards the outer edge of the zone my head shrinks till its place is taken by the whole body, and this in turn shrinks till it vanishes altogether. These, therefore, are the inner and outer boundaries of what may be called my human region. My friend, entering this region, takes on my head; and I take on his, for each of us is situated in the human region of the other.

But we are not content to exchange heads. Neither of us holds on to what is presented to him, but instead projects it upon the other. Thus my friend insists that the head he registers is not where he is, but here at the centre of my human region; and he says this regardless of the fact that if he were to come here to verify his statement he would find on the way things very different from my head, and then nothing. Or, if he came all the way here, he might find, not what he calls my head, but what he calls his own.

I am haunted by elsewhere-ness. If I take myself as I am to myself, I find presented these men, trees, clouds, stars; and I scatter them all as if in a giant centrifuge, leaving the centre empty. If, instead, I take myself as I am to others, I am a host of creatures of numberless shapes and sizes; and all of them, though they belong out there, I pull in here as if by a powerful magnet, leaving none at large. Accordingly it is impossible to pin me down either to my centre here or to the centres of my regional observers there. I am something like a game of hide-and-seek in which hider and seeker never meet, because each takes refuge in the other.

4 (8) The view outwards from the centre. Let me now examine, in more detail, the view out. I find presented here the most diverse objects, which may be sorted in many ways: notably according to their range or remoteness. All the men I register are dispatched to my human region a few feet or yards away; all the clouds to a greater distance; all the stars still further. If my friend is to reveal himself to me as a man, he must keep his distance; if he comes too near he is likely to appear as a mass of very lowly animals, and nearer still he may take on the guise of mere particles. In other words, the class distinctions I note among my guests are linked with residential distinctions. If you are a star, you can never trespass out of my star region into any other; if a man, your home cannot be far away. I allow no slumming in my zoned suburbs, and no social climbing.

5 (11) The view inwards towards the centre. No host can be found here amongst these ill-assorted guests, on the point of moving off for their segregated homes. To find him it is necessary to accompany them on their outward journey. I must identify myself with a retreating observer, who reports what I am in each successive region. His story is of a dwindling head, a mannikin, a house, a street of houses, a town, a country, a planet, a star (a star that has developed into a solar system), a galaxy, and in the end a spark of light that goes out altogether. And if, finding this report unsatisfactory, he decides to approach me instead of going away, his tale is equally curious, and the end is the same. Whether he moves away or draws near, he finds all manner of nonhuman transformations, and finally nothing.

6 (12) A common-sense objection answered. To the objection that it is not I who am so transformed, it may be replied: what I am is the question at issue, and may not be prejudged. In any case, if one view of me (say the back view) is not enough for the observer in my human region, if it is necessary for him to move about there to find out what I am, then there seems to be no good reason for restricting his movements to that one region, provided he keeps the centre of all the regions in view. Again, if I, from my side, am concerned with the inhabitants of many regions, it would appear fitting that my observer should not restrict himself to one of them. Moreover, if it is admitted that the near view, revealing something less than a man, is nevertheless germane to my nature, then there seems no compelling reason why the far view, where the scene becomes more comprehensive, should not be equally relevant. At least at this stage, neither can be given preference, and neither ignored.

7 (14) The view inwards and the view outwards brought together. Both my own view out and my observer's view in are so unexpected that, if either had to stand by itself, it might well be taken for an illusion. But they agree, each complementing and supporting the other. Looking in at me, and looking out with me, come to much the same thing -- with this vital difference, that whereas the first reveals my head, my human body, my planet, my star, my galaxy, the second reveals other heads, other bodies, other planets, and the rest. Thus the two accounts agree in describing me as human, planetary, sidereal, galactic, and differ only as to which men, planets, and so on, are involved. The view in is of a particular one of these; the view out is of the others. And their combination, the

twofold story which must now be told, is of a pair of mutual observers who, whether they retreat or advance, keep equal status. When one of them finds himself in the other's star region, he too is revealed as a star; when each inhabits the other's human region, they are men; venturing closer, they are less than men. Always their relationship is symmetrical.

8 (16) The elastic self. Now these remarkable metamorphoses are happening all the while. Consider the place I call here. When I tell my dog to come here, I mean to this part of the room; when my friend comes here, he comes to this house; when foreigners come here, they come to this country; if one day Martians arrive, they will arrive here, even though they alight in Australia. The rule is that my here expands and contracts along with my there.

Again, I find myself taking up the viewpoint of, and identifying myself with, such diverse units as my solitary human self, my family, town, nation, race, and even planet. And this unit that I think for, that I vaguely feel behind me, that I have for backing, is on a par with what I am facing or up against. Once more, equality. I grow at a moment's notice a 'body' to match what I have in 'mind', though it is true I can discover this body only by taking up my station in other bodies, in my regional observers who are where I keep all my property. Here at the centre is nothing but a receptacle for others -- an infinitely elastic receptacle for infinitely elastic objects. In fact, this centre is continually swelling to include in its own nonentity the surrounding regions with their full population of observers, and continually shrinking to extrude them again, like rabbits out of a magician's top hat. Thus to perceive another man

is to abolish this man -- atoms, molecules, cells, head, limbs -- in his favour; thus to perceive another planet is not merely to look beyond all of this one, nor merely to incorporate it, but also to dissolve the whole of it into room (so to speak) for that planet. When mutual observers approach, thereby shrinking in each other's estimation, each produces the other from his own central void; and when they recede again, thereby growing in each other's estimation, each does so by re-absorbing the other.

An important complication is that my observer finds it necessary, from time to time, to shift slightly the direction of his gaze. He attends, say, to a cell; and then, as the cell shrinks and vanishes and a limb comes into view, his line of sight is likely to move a little. It moves again when the whole man takes the limb's place; and later there are shifts of direction from the planet's centre to the solar system's, and from this to the Galaxy's. And once more the inside story confirms the outside; my observer sees truly when he finds the lesser me eccentric to the greater; for when I temporarily forget my private interest and identify myself with my town, or country, or planet, I acknowledge a more distant centre, and for the time-being place myself there. The larger the unit to which I am thus attached, the more remote its headquarters are likely to be. Initially eccentric, I can only grow by correcting this condition, stage by stage. My observer finds this out in his own fashion, as I do in mine.

CHAPTER II MY PERCEPTION OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD

9 (19) The depth of the picture. In place of the head I have lost, then, I can have almost anything here I like, so long as I project it, attribute it to another, read depth into it. This dimension of

depth is peculiar: I have only to look at the house opposite to see that its distance is not given as its height and breadth are given. It is more actively and less directly discerned. The object's distance is our distance apart, a joint effort, shared in a way that its apparent breadth is not shared between us.

There would seem to be three stages. (1) Between a pair of stars simultaneously presented here for inspection, there is evidently a space which I can measure; but between this star -- the Sun -- and either of them there is no such space, for the line connecting us, seen end-on, has no length at all. The pair of stars is here. (2) Yet I find it impossible to keep them here: they are bent on a long journey in depth. I see my guests home. (3) But in fact they are not simply scattered in my regions, nor simply lumped together here at the centre, nor simply on their way in or out. Neither the unified flat world here, nor the same world in fragments and scattered in all directions and to all distances, is enough by itself: everything suggests that they are conjoined in a living unity of process which is at once flat and deep, here and there, mine and not mine. I can see no way of ridding my constitution of this far-reaching ambiguity.

10 (22) Epilogue to Chapter I. This self-portrait is as yet a tentative outline, which will be corrected as the details are filled in.

CHAPTER II MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD

1 (24) The scientist is called in. Common sense suggests that, before going on, I should hear the scientist's account of the way I come to experience these objects of mine. How, in his view, do I

see the hand that writes these words?

2 (25) The scientist's account of vision -- light. He tells me, in effect, that a portion of a star detaches itself, travels to my hand, and bounces off it into my eyes, where a pair of small inverted pictures of my hand is formed. I find this story full of difficulties. For instance, since sunlight (whatever that may be) takes time to get across from my hand to my eye, I see, not the hand I have now, but the hand I once had; and I do not see even this out-of-date hand; but only its surface, or rather, less than half its surface. Moreover, if the light by which I see my hand is the light it rejects, which it refuses to make its own, is not the thing I see somehow the very opposite of my hand? How can I say it is pink, if pink is the one colour it will have none of?

Again, I seek in vain any comprehensible account of what happens in the gap between my hand and my eye. If neither my hand itself, nor a flock of replicas of it, makes the journey, if what travels is quite different from what lies at either end, and it not starlike or handlike or pink or five-fingered, then all manner of doubts arise -- doubts which convenient little words such as light, and waves, and photons, seem wholly unable to resolve.

3 (26) The scientist's account of vision -- nerves and brain. Putting all these difficulties to one side, let me consider the rest of the story. I am told that somehow there occurs at the back of my eye a picture of my hand -- shrunken, upside-down, and right-side-left. How do I get to know of it? The answer I am offered is, at its briefest, that no man can see my hand, but millions of animals, and that each of them sees not my hand but a tiny part of it,

and in fact does not see that part but tastes it, and in fact does not taste it but tastes (I should say: reacts chemically to) certain changes in a light-sensitive substance in my eye -- all of which is going on in a place remote from my hand.

Certainly it is nothing like a taste, and still less like a star or a sunbeam or a hand, which passes along my optic nerve to my brain. The story is now of electrical impulses travelling along attenuated animal bodies. And what happens at the terminus in my visual cortex is no less obscure. It is safe to say, however, that no surgeon operating on my brain is ever likely to find there a model of my hand; and even if he did so, he would have to explain how this dwarfed and pitch-dark version of my hand, composed of one kind of animals, can do justice to the full-size illuminated original, composed of a different kind of animals.

This is not the whole story -- much more than retinæ, optic nerves, and visual cortex, is involved in vision -- but its point is now sufficiently clear. It is that everything depends upon the unbroken incoming train of events: events in a star, space, my hand, my eye, my nerves, my brain. For if this train is interrupted anywhere (as when the Sun is darkened at night, or my eyes are shut, or my brain is injured in a certain way) then I cannot see my hand.

4 (28) The unknown outside world. If the foregoing account is in the main correct, I can only know what happens in a part of my brain, at the terminus of the incoming train of events. The outside world is an inference. Worse, it is the wildest of guesses, if we bear in mind all the hazards of that journey, with its variety of vehicles, and the exigencies of changing from one to another, and above all the immense discrepancy between the universe at one end

and the brain cell at the other. To believe that 'the world I see' at this end is even remotely like 'the world as it is' at the other end, is blind faith. Moreover the entire story from sun to visual cortex is itself more than suspect; for it is impossible to throw doubt upon what this apparatus is alleged to reveal, without throwing doubt also upon the apparatus itself. And so, if I take the scientist's tale seriously, I am not even left with that tale, but only with my private collection of coloured and moving shapes, which may have no relevance whatever to any universe beyond themselves.

5 (30) The senses other than vision. Nor does the scientist's account of the other senses help. For in every instance the story is essentially the same -- a story of outside events, of events in a sense organ, of events in nerves and brain. And only the last, which nobody pretends is like the first, is directly experienced. In short, my senses, whether taken singly or all together, are more like blinds than peepholes. If by some fortunate chance a chink should let through a ray of outer sunshine, I have no means of telling it from the candlelight within.

6 (31) Am I alone? The world, then, may be my dream, and I its sole dreamer. And even the dreamer may be a dream within this dream. At this moment a pink patch is moving across a larger white patch, to the accompaniment of a faint grating sound; there are also a certain warmth and a certain pressure. To be sure of much more than this is impossible.

7 (32) Shall I reject the scientist's story? The scientist's explanation of how he knows the world turns out to be an explanation of how he cannot possibly do so. And from the very start, by assum-

ing the very thing that needed proof -- namely his knowledge of an external sun and hand and eye and all the rest -- he was involved in contradictions. Nevertheless I do not propose, on this account, to ignore his story. For, firstly, both he and I, if we are outside a lunatic asylum, cannot help but take on trust our perceptions of the external world; and secondly, we both believe his story to be substantially true and of the greatest practical importance. Instead of rejecting it, then, I shall try to retell it in a way that gets rid of its inconsistencies.

8 (33) The confusion in the scientist's story. He tells me that my world is not over there, but here 'in my head'. Now this is what I found in the previous chapter, with one all-important difference -- I find only the world here 'on my shoulders': he finds my head as well. He overcrowds this spot I call here. But in fact my head and my percept will not mix. Here I am headless, eyeless, brainless: all are crowded out by my world. I keep all my bodily apparatus over there in my regions, for my observers to appropriate: my world and my brain must keep apart. And this is only common sense. Manifestly my head cannot contain the sun. I am where the sun is, not where my brains are, though it is true that they play their part in bringing about the sun's presence here.

The sun I see is not shut up here in any little bone box; no hordes of primitive animals stand in its way. Freed now from all competition or confusion with eyes and nerves and brain, my objects are at liberty to come to themselves -- not copies or impressions of themselves -- here at the centre. The sun is a sun and sunny, not over there in itself, but here in me and in its other regional

Note: This is not
the version which is
now being printed;
but it is substantially
the same.

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