

WHICH WAY, WESTON MAN?

GOOD, EVIL, AND COSMOLOGICAL
MODELS IN *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET*

Louis Markos

The world of Narnia studies was changed forever by the publication of Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia* in 2008.¹ How could readers of the Chronicles of Narnia and lovers of C.S. Lewis not have seen it all along? Lewis was a great explicator of the medieval cosmological model, and Ward masterfully revealed that the Narnia books clearly take place in a world inspired by it. Prior to publishing *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in 1950, Lewis had even written his science fiction Ransom Trilogy of novels, explicitly engaging the medieval cosmological mode as he

1. Portions of this essay have appeared previously in "Apologist for the Past: The Medieval Vision of C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy and Chronicles of Narnia," *Mythlore* 88 (3.2), Spring 2001, and in Chapter 3 of *Lewis Agonistes* (Broadman & Holman, 2003).

transported readers to Mars (*Out of the Silent Planet*) and Venus (*Perelandra*), before bringing the influences of those two planets, and others, down to Earth to help good triumph over evil (*That Hideous Strength*).

Ward connected the dots between Lewis's love of the medieval cosmos and his fiction, arguing that both Narnia and the Ransom Trilogy allow modern readers to experience on a deep, intuitive level, the ethos and ambiance of the Middle Ages—or, to put it more sharply, the ethos and ambiance of reality. Lewis once off-handedly referred to the atmosphere of Donegal as “Donegality”, and in *Planet Narnia*, Ward adopted this word to refer to Lewis's approach to “atmosphere” in general.² Ward defines it as

the spiritual essence or quiddity [“thingness”] of a work of art as intended by the artist and inhabited unconsciously by the reader. The donegality of a story is its peculiar and deliberated atmosphere or quality; its pervasive and purposed integral tone or flavour; its tutelary but tacit spirit, a spirit that the author consciously sought to conjure but which was designed to remain implicit in the matter of the text.³

To read Lewis's fiction is to absorb the donegality of the medieval cosmos. In what follows, I shall first map

2. C.S. Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 115. It is now often said that Ward coined “donegality”, but this is obviously not the case.

3. Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 75.

out, physically and spiritually, the medieval cosmological model as Lewis describes it in *The Discarded Image*, a work completed shortly before his death in 1963, but not published until the following year. I shall then show how, in *Out of the Silent Planet*, the responses which the characters Ransom and Weston have to this model push them toward opposing poles of good and evil. Finally, I shall discuss what Christians today can learn from that polarization.



Arriving at Oxford in the years following the First World War, Lewis accepted with little question the post-Enlightenment belief that the medieval world was a Dark Age of ignorance, superstition, and obscurantism. Luckily, with the help of such friends as Owen Barfield and J. R. R. Tolkien, he overcame his chronological snobbery, eventually becoming both a Christian and an apologist of the age he had once derided.

Though scholarly assessments are changing, many still dismiss the Middle Ages, derisively assuming, among other things, that the Medievals thought the earth was flat. Lewis debunks this decisively. “Physically considered,” writes Lewis in *The Discarded Image*, “the Earth is a globe; all the authors of the high Middle Ages are agreed on this.”⁴

4. C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 140.

It is true that the Medievals believed that the earth was at the center of the universe, but that is only because, absent modern telescopes, this made the most sense of the celestial phenomena that could be perceived with the human eye.⁵ They did not center the Earth out of pride. Rather, they considered Earth the darkest, heaviest, coldest spot in the cosmos, “the ‘offscourings of creation,’ the cosmic dust-bin.”⁶ Their universe was geocentric, but it was “not in the least anthropocentric.”⁷ To be at the center of the universe meant being at the bottom of it.

The Medievals were also aware of the vastness of the universe and the smallness of the Earth. “Earth was, by cosmic standards, a point—it had no appreciable magnitude. The stars, as the *Somnium Scipionus* [“Dream of Scipio”] had taught, were larger than it.”⁸ Still, they did not make the mistake of equating size with value. For all its smallness, the Earth was nonetheless imbued with beauty, purpose, and design. “[T]he Model universe of our ancestors had a built-in significance. And that in two senses; as having ‘significant form’ (it is an admirable de-

5. Copernicus’ eventual discovery of heliocentrism in the sixteenth century should not be regarded as a rejection of medieval astronomy, but rather as its natural conclusion and fruition, resolving things which had puzzled astronomers for centuries. Without the diligent efforts of countless medieval Christian monks, heliocentrism would have eluded us who knows how much longer.

6. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 63.

7. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 55.

8. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 97.

sign) and as a manifestation of the wisdom and goodness that created it.”⁹

Neither the Ancients nor the Medievals were fools. They had eyes that saw, and they used them well. But *what* they saw and, more importantly, *how* they saw differed greatly from us. When they gazed upward at the heavens, they saw a cosmos of perfect order, balance, and harmony, an ornament—the root meaning of the Greek word, *kosmos*—fashioned by a God who is himself a being of perfect order. Around a fixed, central Earth, a series of nine concentric, crystalline spheres rotated in perfect circular orbits. Embedded in these spheres were, the seven medieval planets (in ascending order the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn), the fixed stars, and the *primum mobile*, or “first mover,” which set all the other spheres in motion and was itself set in motion by God, the Unmoved Mover.

Rubbing against each other, the rotating spheres produced a heavenly music so refined and ethereal that our dull, earthly ears could not hear it. How different our own, post-Enlightenment perception of the universe: “The ‘silence’ which frightened Pascal was, according to the model, wholly illusory; and the sky looks black only because we are seeing it through the dark glass of our own shadow. You must conceive yourself looking up at a world lighted, warmed, and resonant with music.”¹⁰

As Lewis describes it in *The Discarded Image*, the medieval model struck its contemplators with all the power

9. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 204.

10. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 112.

and beauty of an epic poem. Their universe was not, like ours, a lifeless object to be merely studied and dissected for practical benefit, but an animated presence eliciting admiration and love. Whereas our age *reasons* that the vast actions and interactions of the cosmos are best defined in terms of abstract, objective *principles* (e.g., the laws of gravity and of thermodynamics), the Medievals *saw* a more personal, subjective universe whose intricate movements, like those of a dance, were set in motion and choreographed by divine *influence*.

Medieval poets like Boethius, Dante, and Chaucer, as well as Renaissance poets like Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton, lived in a sympathetic, rather than a clockwork, universe, in which the stars have something to do with us. As the planets shed down their influence, they drew certain minerals out of the earth and certain personality types out of humans. Thus, while “Mars makes iron [and] gives men the martial temperament,” the Sun “produces the noblest metal, gold [and] makes men wise and liberal.”¹¹ In the same way, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn draw silver, mercury, copper, tin, and lead out of the earth and make men fickle (or “lunatics,” thanks to the *lunar* influence), mercurial, amorous, jovial (thanks to *Jove*, another name for Jupiter), and melancholy (or, perhaps, “saturnine”).

That is not to say that the medieval church condoned horoscopes and fortune-telling, but she did accept the interrelatedness of the changing world below and the unchanging world above. “Celestial bodies affect terrestrial bodies, including those of men. And by affecting our

11. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 106.

bodies they can, but need not, affect our reason and our will.”¹² The influence is real, but our reception of it determines our nature and character. Thus, the influence of Saturn can make us holy contemplatives or despairing suicides; the influence of the Sun can make us generous with our riches or to hoard our gold like a dragon.

For the Medievals, everything in the universe is free to follow its instincts, yet nothing is haphazard. In all things, there is order and hierarchy. Every heavenly being—from seraphim to cherubim to archangel—every man, every animal, even every plant has its place in that Great Chain of Being that stretches from God to the lowest form of inorganic life.

The medieval cosmos was indeed a thing of beauty in which all things found their proper place. Lewis celebrated it for its ability to integrate vast amounts of speculative material—pagan and Christian, philosophical and theological, scientific and poetic—into a unified system. Out of a chaos of forms and ideas, the Medievals, like the God they worshiped, forged a unified system in which order and hierarchy were the rule. And yet, as difficult as it may seem for us inhabitants of a democratic, anti-aristocratic world to believe, that order was clear, logical, and coherent and that hierarchy just, reasonable, and, in the most exalted sense of the word, human. Like Aquinas’s *Summa* and Dante’s *Commedia*, their cosmos was “vast in scale, but limited and intelligible. Its sublimity is not the sort that depends on anything vague or obscure.... Its contents, however rich and various, are in harmony. We see how

12. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 103.

everything links up with everything else; at one, not in flat equality, but in a hierarchical ladder.”¹³



Though *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) was written a quarter of a century before *The Discarded Image* (1964), it embodies its cosmology in narrative form. It transports its readers back to a cosmos in which hierarchy, plenitude, and influence are still the rule. Thus, though Lewis adopts the modern, “correct” ordering of the planets, he presents those planets as retaining their medieval connotations, and populated by rational creatures (*hnau*) who live in un-fallen, Edenic worlds of peace and plenty. Each planet, or sphere, is watched over by a guardian spirit that he calls the Oyarsa, who is at once a biblical archangel and the “intelligence” of ancient astronomy, both the servant of the Creator (known as Maleldil in “Old Solar”, the forgotten common language of our solar system) and the master of his sphere’s inhabitants. They bring order and harmony to their world, shedding over it and even radiating out into the cosmos their benign influence.

On Mars, or “Malacandra” in Old Solar, the Oyarsa oversees three distinct species of *hnau* who live in a state of innocence: a race of Homeric warriors known as the *hrossa*, resembling giant beavers or seals; a race of frog-like craftsmen known as the *pfifltriggi*; and a race of tall, thin, abstract-thinking philosophers known as the *sorns*. Sadly, the situation on Earth is quite different. The Oyarsa of Earth (Satan) rebelled against Maleldil (God) and even

13. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 12.

sought “to spoil other worlds besides his own.”¹⁴ To preserve the rest of the cosmos, God quarantined the earth, which is why it is now called “Thulcandra” by its neighbors: “the Silent Planet.” Even worse, in imitation of their Bent (evil) Oyarsa, the inhabitants of the Earth came to be rebels also, so much so that “every one of them wants to be a little Oyarsa himself.”¹⁵

As a result, our world has become detached from the proper order and hierarchy of the cosmos. To win back the Earth, Maleldil (Christ) was sent by his Father, the Old One, to redeem Thulcandra. Nevertheless, the events of *Out of the Silent Planet* end Thulcandra’s silence, opening up a new phase of cosmic spiritual warfare, one that will take place on a spiritual level that modern man knows little about. In the wonderfully apocalyptic closing chapter, Ransom, the protagonist, begins to marshal himself, the narrator, and us readers for the battle. To resist the coming evil, we need “not so much a body of belief as a body of people familiarized with certain ideas. If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.”¹⁶

That such a change is possible is dramatized in Ransom’s arc. Like Lewis himself, Ransom progresses from being a modern, skeptical university professor to a man of deep faith and humility whose eyes are permanently

14. C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), ch. 18, 153.

15. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 16, 129.

16. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 22, 198.

opened to the beauty, awe, and hierarchy of the cosmos, making him a better, braver, more virtuous man. Ransom's pilgrimage begins when he is kidnapped by the scientist Weston and his old college acquaintance Devine and taken to Malacandra. From here on, he quickly undergoes an education in the wonders of the unseen world, beginning as he looks out the window of the spaceship.

He had read of "Space": at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds.... He had thought it barren: he saw now that it was the womb of worlds...No: Space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory.¹⁷

The cosmos is not as he imagined it. It is not a cold, dark vacuum but a field of light and warmth. Life, meaning, and purpose pervade it. Slowly, like a morning glory opening to the sun, Ransom lets go of the scientific-existential myth in which he was raised, embracing a more mystical *and* humanistic medieval myth.

This is only the beginning. Once on Malacandra, Ransom escapes and falls in with the *hrossa*. Their simple nobility forces him to rethink his instinctual privileging of technological advances—of which the *hrossa* have none—over traditional, chivalric virtues such as honor, courage, and loyalty, all of which the *hrossa* have in abundance.

17. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 5, 35.

When the *hrossa* invite him to join them for an epic hunt, Ransom at first seeks an excuse to bow out. But then, “in obedience to something like conscience,” he chooses “to hold on to his new-found manhood; now or never—with such companions or with none—he must leave a deed on his memory instead of one more broken dream.”¹⁸

The courage that fills Ransom’s chest is not an abstraction or a vague feeling but a concrete, rational virtue that reflects and participates in the greater cosmic order. Malacandra, corresponding to the warlike Mars, exercises a *martial* influence, which Ransom lets mold him into a medieval knight, reordering and redirecting his desires so that he embraces the hunting party: “They were all *hnau*. They had stood shoulder to shoulder in the face of an enemy, and the shapes of their heads no longer mattered. And he, even Ransom, had come through it and not been disgraced. He had grown up.”¹⁹

Having learned proper awe and gratitude before the wonders of the created cosmos and found fortitude and friendship by fighting among the *hrossa*, Ransom must overcome one last deeply-entrenched prejudice: the modern suspicion of and distaste for authority and religious hierarchy. Having experienced and accepted “heroism and poetry at the bottom” of Malacandran society, Ransom continues to fear what he thinks is a “cold scientific intellect above it [the *sorns*], and overtopping all some dark superstition [the *Oyarsa*] which scientific intellect, helpless against the revenge of the emotional depths it had ignored,

18. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 13, 99.

19. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 13, 100.

had neither will nor power to remove.”²⁰ It is only when he meets and speaks with one of the *sorns* that he realizes that they do not compete politically or economically with the *hrossa* and *pfifltriggi*. Rather, all three races respect each other’s special gifts. As for the Oyarsa, Ransom discovers that, far from a soulless tyrant, he is a warm and personal patriarch who loves the creatures he rules and seeks what is best for them.

No such realization or change occurs in the hearts of Ransom’s abductors. From beginning to end, Weston and Devine remain blind to the beauties of Malacandra and deaf to the gentle entreaties of the Oyarsa. To them, the inhabitants of Mars are nothing more than savages controlled by a witch doctor. Like modernist Pharisees, they have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear.

Of the two, Devine is the lesser villain, for he is motivated by simple greed. Gold is abundant on Mars, and the avaricious Devine seeks to profit by it. Weston, in contrast, is a serious, respected, humanitarian scientist who has devoted his life to the preservation of humanity. His devotion, however, exists in a moral vacuum, cut off from the goodness, truth, and beauty that define the medieval cosmological model. He is more than willing to kill all the indigenous *hnau* of Mars if it will allow him to further his “humanitarian” ends. Refusing to accept the Oyarsa’s warning “that all worlds will die,” Weston explains that he will move humans to Mars if and when Earth dies, and then to another planet if and when Mars dies (though he

20. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 14, 107.

has nothing to say when asked what he will do when all worlds die).²¹

The difference between Devine and Weston is that, while the former is “broken,” according to the Malacandran Oyarsa, the latter, like the fallen Oyarsa of Earth, is “bent.” In fact, after learning about Maleldil and the Bent One, Weston musters enough Malacandran language to declare on which side of the cosmic-spiritual battle he falls: “You say your Maleldil let all go dead. Other one, Bent One, he fight, jump, live—not all talkee-talkee. Me no care Maleldil. Like Bent One better: me on his side.”²² Unlike Ransom, whose reception of the martial influence of Malacandra expands him into a knight, and, if need be, a martyr, Weston’s reception of the same shrinks him to a megalomaniac willing to commit genocide in order to achieve his idol of species survival.

Weston is part Thrasymachus, who argues, in Plato’s *Republic*, that justice is the will of the stronger; part Machiavelli, who taught that the ends justify the means; and part Nietzsche, who called for a superman, an *Übermensch*, with the charisma to rise above middle-class morality and assert his absolute will to power. Lewis brilliantly exposes and deconstructs the hollowness of his high-sounding utopian rhetoric by having Weston explain his reasons for appropriating Mars for humans in his own euphemistic language and then having Ransom translate his propaganda into the innocent, unfeigned language of the unfallen Malacandrans:

21. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 179.

22. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 179.

“Your tribal life with its stone-age weapons and beehive huts, its primitive coracles and elementary social structure, has nothing to compare with our civilization—with our science, medicine and law, our armies, our architecture, our commerce, and our transport system which is rapidly annihilating space and time. Our right to supersede you is the right of the higher over the lower...”

“He says that, among you, *hnau* of one kindred all live together and the *hrossa* have spears like those we used a very long time ago and your huts are small and round and your boats small and light and like our old ones, and you have only one ruler.... He says we build very big and strong huts of stones and other things—like the *pfiflriggi*. And he says we exchange many things among ourselves and can carry heavy weights very quickly a long way. Because of all this, he says it would not be the act of a bent *hnau* if our people killed all your people.”²³

For Weston, who has blinded himself to the beauty of hierarchy, deafened himself to the music of the spheres, and severed himself from the Great Chain of Being, progress and technology become the only markers of value. Accepting no authority above himself and his cause, Weston rejects not only the geocentric universe of the Middle Ages, but the heliocentric and anthropocentric universes of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. His universe is

23. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 173-4.

purely and finally egocentric. Indeed, so narcissistically confident is he of the absolute justness of his cause that, after he kidnaps Ransom, he assures himself that Ransom “cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights or the life of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison with this.”²⁴



What then are we to learn in the twenty-first century from a book written one year before the outbreak of the Second World War? Certainly not that modern astronomical science is mistaken on a factual level. Neither Lewis nor I would advocate a return to the medieval cosmological model in astronomy. Science *has*, Lewis freely admits, disproven such medieval assumptions as the circular movements of the spheres and geocentrism. Nevertheless, he insists, this does not validate any smug self-assurance that we now have all the truth that is worth having.

Our modern cosmological model is just that: a model—one that can, at any moment, be dramatically altered by some new scientific discovery, and which is inescapably freighted with meaning and metaphor. We laugh at the Medievals for their quaint metaphorical notion that heavenly bodies move through celestial influence, but is such a view any more metaphorical than our notion that objects “obey,” like citizens, the “laws” of gravity? “Hardly any battery of new facts,” Lewis explains in the Epilogue to *The Discarded Image*, “could have persuaded a Greek that the universe had an attribute so repugnant to him as

24. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 4, 28.

infinity; hardly any such battery could persuade a modern that it is hierarchical.”²⁵ All people, whether ancient or modern, medieval or enlightened, have their presuppositions, and they cannot help but bring those presuppositions with them into their study of the cosmos. In *Miracles*, Lewis suggests that differing views of cosmological hierarchy correspond to different views regarding hierarchy *per se*. Our Supernaturalist forebears, imagining themselves in a literally hierarchical universe, with God at its summit, regarded other forms of hierarchy positively; modern Naturalists, however, see both differently: “[J]ust as, in a democracy, all citizens are equal, so for the Naturalist one thing or event is as good as another, in the sense that they are all equally dependent on the total system of things.”²⁶ Lewis avoids a “chicken and egg” discussion of the two, but his suggestion is clear: both the Medievals and Moderns, the Supernaturalists and the Naturalists, have models of the universe, and these models relate, unavoidably, to the value judgments they make about and within that universe.

The deepest lessons to be learned from *The Discarded Image* and *Out of the Silent Planet*, then, are not scientific but spiritual, not technological but theological, not physical but philosophical. If the universe in which we live is ordered and rational, if it possesses design and purpose, then, whether we put the Earth or the sun at the center, we can have faith that our own beliefs and actions within that universe matter, and that one thing is not necessarily as

25. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 222.

26. C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: William Collins, 2016), 9.

good as another. We are not merely morally inconsequential clusters of cells adrift in space; rather, we are rational moral agents, *hnau*, placed in the Heavens with a purpose. In a cosmos so logically and lovingly shaped, our choices not only have consequences; those consequences serve a greater whole that transcends scientific measurement. This is what Lewis means when he speaks of the *Tao* in *The Abolition of Man*: “It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supersonic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar.”²⁷

When Weston and Ransom arrive on Malacandra, neither thinks he can learn anything from the indigenous inhabitants. Soon however, Ransom sheds his self-protective biases; Weston, meanwhile, continues to dismiss the inhabitants as savages. Ransom learns and grows, while Weston becomes more entrenched in his own prejudices. One of the reasons the past century has fostered so many Westons who count the development of human society as an absolute good on which no limits should be placed is that we have cut ourselves off from the very ancient philosophical wisdom that we desperately need if we are to properly assess our scientific progress. Ironically, the reason we have cut ourselves off from that wisdom is that we consider our ancestors to be less enlightened than we because they lacked the very technology we cannot control. Knowledge of the *Tao*, or our ordered cosmos, is desper-

27. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: Fount Paperback, 1978), 15-16.

ately needed—both to enrich Christian discipleship as we seek to live with wisdom, and to hold out as Good News to those unbelievers weary of a nihilistic technocracy which views the universe with Weston’s cold pragmatism.

But there is an even deeper, more pressing lesson that Lewis has to teach us today. As dual heirs of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, we tend to think of good and evil as subjective emotions rather than objective realities. We have forgotten the reality of a state in which we are in harmony with the God-created cosmos without and the God-implanted conscience within. Vice marks a breach of that harmony, a disordering and misdirection that skews our desires and leaves us open to the base passions that control people like Devine and the faulty reasoning that enables people like Weston to justify great evil.

Paul beseeches the believers of Rome not to conform themselves to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:2). Today, we risk conformity to a world that has lost any sense of transcendent purpose, meaning, and order. To conform to such an anti-teleological model is to leave oneself open to the kind of utopian thinking that drives Weston. If the cosmos is meaningless, then it is up to us to impose meaning on it, as Weston attempts to do through his obsession with species survival. “Life is greater than any system of morality,” says Weston, “her claims are absolute.”²⁸ This vitalist obsession is one shared by many of our leaders today, whether in Silicon Valley or Washington DC. But if we will, like Ransom, allow our reductive, existentialist vision of the cosmos to be transformed and renewed, if we can

28. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 174.

perceive once again a goodness in unity, a truth in order, and a beauty in hierarchy, then we too might find a new courage to join the hunt.

Weston chooses to be on the side of the Bent One rather than Maleldil because he considers the former to be active (“he fight, jump, live”) and the latter to be passive (“all talkee-talkee”). It was for this very reason that Romantic poets William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley considered Milton’s dynamic, energetic, rebellious Satan, not his static, immobile, monarchical Jehovah, to be the true hero of *Paradise Lost*. Lewis wrote his *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942) in order to correct this misreading. I would agree that Milton’s Satan seems more active than his God, but that is only because he is governed by disordered desire, without control, focus, or purpose. His passions overflow, but turn against themselves in the end. The Oyarsa of Malacandra makes a similar judgment of Weston: “Let me see if there is anything in your mind besides fear and death and desire.”²⁹ In fact, the Oyarsa *does* see more than he expected in Weston, when the latter explains that his motivation is to propagate the human race: “your will is less bent than I thought. It is not for yourself that you would do all this.”³⁰ Weston’s love of his kindred is, the Oyarsa concedes, a law known to all *hmanu*—but the Bent One has made Weston willing to break all other laws in service of it, and to say so openly. For this reason, the “bent” Weston is a greater danger than the “broken” Devine, who is simply greedy. Weston’s inordinate desire and inordinate com-

29. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 172.

30. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 176.

mitment to one genuine good over and against all others puts him on his dynamic Satanic path. Ransom's attempted translation of one line of Weston's speech—"it is better to be alive and bent than to be dead"—seems a conscious echo of Milton's Satan's famous dictum: "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n."

Milton's God may seem more passive than his Satan, but that is only because the Almighty Creator has dignity, solemnity, and gravitas. He is controlled, focused, and purposeful—not because he is a cosmic tyrant, but because he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient—the Unmoved Mover. Instability versus stability, rage versus calm, chaos versus rest, reckless activity versus regal composure—these would be more accurate dichotomies for Milton's Satan and God than "active versus passive." These are all virtues in which Christians should seek to grow as we are renewed in the image of our Creator (Col. 3:10)—not simply because our Creator explicitly commands us to do so, but because those commands reinforce truths declared to us daily in the warp and woof of creation.

On a more mundane level, many today, Christians included, echo Milton's Satan and Lewis's Weston not simply by rebelling against God or actively pursuing sin, but in our perpetual busyness and distraction. Could we only stop and contemplate, with David, the majesty of the cosmos—as Ransom does on his journey to Malacandra—we might see that the heavens do indeed speak forth the glory of God and proclaim the beauty of his handiwork (Ps. 19:1). The pagans of Rome are without excuse, Paul explains, because God's power and majesty are clearly written in the cosmos he created. (Rom. 1:20). Yet we suppress this. We miss God's presence and glory in creation

because we have lost the ability to stop, look, and listen, and to receive non-human creation for the gift that it is.

By admiring Milton's Satan, Lewis argues, we give our "vote not only for a world of misery, but also for a world of lies and propaganda, of wishful thinking, of incessant autobiography."³¹ The same holds true for those who admire Weston—and there *are* many who do, even if they do not recognize it. Weston may seem noble, with his philanthropic plan for perpetuating the human race through interplanetary conquest, but, in his desire to carry out that plan at all costs, he surrenders truth and reality to lies, propaganda, and wishful thinking. The Oyarsa even concludes that Weston does not actually love humanity:

You do not love any one of your race—you would have let me kill Ransom. You do not love the mind of your race, nor the body. Any kind of creature will please you if only it is begotten by your kind as they now are. It seems to me, Thick One, that what you really love is no completed creature but the very seed itself: for that is all that is left.³²

The same is true of many who claim to be driven by the future of the human race today, who care only for their nebulous imagined humanity of the future, not real hu-

31. C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 102.

32. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, ch. 20, 177.

man beings as they find them. We, like Weston, are egoists trapped in an egocentric universe of our own construction.

If we would break out of Weston's egoism, we must also break out of his egocentric universe. That does not mean we must forget everything we have learned from cosmology and the telescope. It means, rather, that we must, like Ransom, regain a medieval sense of awe, wonder, and humility before the beauty and majesty of God's ordered cosmos. We must remember that we are not apes hanging in space, but *hnau* dancing in the Heavens—and not just *hnau*, but humanity, placed in Maledil's infinitely wise choreography at the center of the dance. Only thus will we be able to see again the deeper spiritual realities that lurk behind and within the physical, material realities perceived with our senses. Only then, will we recognize the battle—even the *battlefield*—for what it is and the stakes for what they are.

But beware: with renewed vision comes the need for renewed volition. For the Christian with eyes to see, our earth *is* enemy-occupied territory, and we must choose this day whom we will serve: Maleldil or the Bent One.