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MEETING MARY IN MYTH:  
PURSUING PRE/POST/MODERN APOLOGETICS

When considering Christianity's division into its spread of competing denominations and sects, the Oxford Fellow C.S. Lewis tried to paint an encouraging picture, saying:

We are all rightly distressed, and ashamed, also, at the divisions of Christendom. But those who have always lived within the Christian fold may be too easily dispirited by them. They are bad, but such people do not know what it looks like from without. Seen from there, what is left intact despite all the divisions, still appears (as it truly is) an immensely formidable unity.<sup>1</sup>

With only a few bits of editing, it would seem that precisely the same statement could be made for the present state of academic philosophy: dichotomized, tribalized, and specialized it might be, but the differences that professional philosophers base careers upon are often far too technical and esoteric for the common person either to care about or to understand. As we approach the possibility of a post-Divide culture in the philosophical world and we recognize the hurdles yet to be cleared for such a harmony to characterize the discipline, we must not forget that for a great many people who have never lived in the ivory tower, this debate over the analytic/continental split and the proper way to speak philosophically is not much different than Tolkien fans debating the relative merits of Quenya versus Sindarin.<sup>2</sup>

An interesting question is what role, then, analytic and continental approaches to philosophy might play when discussing philosophical concepts with those outside either respective tradition who will only be too happy to cross back and forth between the two general schools of thought. A helpful case study found in the philosophy of religion is the sub-field of apologetics. Whereas many apologetists have been trained in a particular method or follow a popular tradition, the respective strengths of both analytic and continental philosophy of religion can be understood by considering prime students of both schools: for the former, William Lane Craig, and John D. Caputo for the latter. Moreover, in the interest of encouraging cross-tradition dialogue, might it be possible to "mashup" the best strengths of both traditions in order to develop an approach to apologetics that makes the most convincing theological argument in a philosophically sound

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, introduction to St. Athanasius' *On the Incarnation: the treatise De incarnatione Verba Dei*, with an introduction by C.S. Lewis, trans. and ed. by a religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>2</sup> These are two of the several complex Elvish dialects created by J.R.R. Tolkien for his fantasy world of Middle-Earth.

manner? Not only is this possible, but it has been done – and was, ironically enough, completed in the early years of the analytic/continental split itself.

It is scarcely possible to mention contemporary apologetics or analytic philosophy of religion—particularly on the popular level—without considering Talbot School of Theology’s William Lane Craig. A powerful public speaker and a prolific author of both technical philosophy and accessible adult educational material, Craig has spent decades studying, developing, and defending a uniquely Christian philosophy of religion that is explicit in its scientific-apologetic endeavors. His many skillful debates with non-Christians and his facility with the internet, including the creation of his extremely successful online presence, [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org), have earned him widespread recognition, giving him a platform to systematically defend the logical coherence of his worldview on everything from university campuses to Fox News.

And while continental philosophy of religion might not have quite such a celebrity in its ranks (although Calvin College’s James K.A. Smith appears to be moving in that direction), John Caputo—Smith’s PhD supervisor and Professor Emeritus for both Syracuse and Villanova Universities—comes rather close. A pioneer of deconstructive hermeneutics, Caputo has worked for more than forty years to relate the phenomenology and postmodern philosophy of thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion to Christian theology and practice. With his unique view of God as a “weak force,” Caputo has defended an apologetic method grounded on the hope of the coming Kingdom and the poetics of what he calls “the impossible.”<sup>3</sup>

Although we must take care to avoid overstating the differences between these two thinkers (and their respective traditions), differences do seem to abound. Specifically, Craig and Caputo appear to be motivated by different metaphysical commitments, to appeal to different evidentiary standards, and to aim at different dialogical goals. Craig’s confident analytic approach has done wonders as a scientific, evidential apologetic; Caputo’s enrapturing theo-poetics has led many hearts to stir with wonder at the inspiring suggestions of his prose. In true mashup fashion, what follows aims not to develop a radically new reading of either thinker nor establish a fresh and innovative category of philosophy, but rather to appropriate the best aspects from both thinkers in order to envision new options for reading them together—and, by extension, to explore the constructive possibilities that become available when philosophers draw on both analytic and continental resources.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, we shall find, however, that such mashup work may not be all that innovative. I will suggest that the apologetic approach of C.S. Lewis implicitly offered just such a model roughly two decades before either Craig or Caputo ever published a word.

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<sup>3</sup> To be fair, and as will be discussed below, much of Caputo’s work has itself been aimed at nudging academic philosophy beyond the current dichotomy, so his categorization here on one side of the conversation should be understood more heuristically than as a strict limitation on his work.

<sup>4</sup> Whereas analytic paths are abundant, for a continental approach to the idea of apologetics, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) or J. Aaron Simmons, “Apologetics After Objectivity,” in *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion With Religion*, eds. J. Aaron Simmons and Stephen Minister (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012), 23-59.

## ATHENE AND DEMETER: SEEKING A CONCORD

Though his accomplishments in the field of poetry were never recognized on the same level as his novels or essays, Lewis worked to compose short lyrics for much of his life. In one poem, published only after Lewis' death, the creator of Narnia and defender of Christianity laid out the struggle he recognized at the heart of apologetics (and, indeed, Christian psychological existence): the tension between a purely rational case for faith and an aesthetically satisfying one. Titled "Reason" by the editor of the collection, the poem sees Lewis present his soul as the rope in a divine tug-of-war between Athene, goddess of wisdom, and Demeter, whom he used to represent the imagination:

1. Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands
2. A virgin arm'd, commercing with celestial light,
3. And he who sins against her has defiled his own
4. Virginity: no cleansing makes his garment white;
5. So clear is reason. But how dark, imagining,
6. Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
7. Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
8. Is loaded, and her pains are long, and her delight.
9. Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
10. Demeter, nor rebel against her mother-right.
11. Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
12. Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
13. Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
14. Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
15. Then could I truly say and not deceive,
16. Then wholly say that I BELIEVE.<sup>5</sup>

On one hand, Lewis upholds the pristine and logical sensibility of Athene's reason; a sin against her is clearly unforgiveable (line 4). But on the other, the enticing warmth of Demeter's mystery is a damnable temptation away from the "soul's acropolis" (line 9) - what can be done? Lewis, unwilling to part with either his artistry or his philosophy, bemoans his desire for a marriage of the two goddesses that could satisfy both his intellectual and his aesthetic desires. Only with an answer to split the horns of Tertullian's infamous dilemma could Lewis feel properly justified in claiming to "believe."<sup>6</sup>

Although it should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with his apologetic works, Lewis did finally discover the concord for which he was searching, though it took him a good deal of time and effort. Interestingly, according to Malcolm Guite (following Alister McGrath), Lewis finished this poem a full five

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<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Books, 1992), 81.

<sup>6</sup> It was Tertullian who famously questioned the connection between rigorous philosophy and the proclamation of beautiful religious truths when he asked "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (*Tertullian, De Praescriptione haereticorum*, ch. 7). Lewis was not satisfied with merely picking a side for he recognized the deep existential impact of both elements.

or six years before his conversion to Christianity,<sup>7</sup> which means that he wrestled with these goddesses for years before coming to any genuine synthesis. Far easier would it have been to simply choose a side and dedicate himself to either the uniquely analytic Athene or the imaginative and continental Demeter, but Lewis recognized the human experience sitting precisely at their confluence:

This is our dilemma – either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste – or, more strictly, to lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are outside it. As thinkers we are cut off from what we think about; as tasting, touching, willing, loving, hating, we do not clearly understand. The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think.<sup>8</sup>

We might say that for Lewis the starting point was not “faith seeking understanding,” but rather “taste seeking understanding.”<sup>9</sup> Lewis could not give up either of his two goddesses, but sought for something new that could combine – or even mashup – the best of both figures to create something holistic and existentially satisfying. First, though, the two goddesses must be considered separately before Lewis’ discovered concord can be properly assessed. In order to do that, I will turn to Craig and Caputo as illustrative examples.

#### MEETING ATHENE: WILLIAM LANE CRAIG’S REASONABLE FAITH

According to Craig,

If you want to do apologetics effectively, you need to be trained in analytic philosophy. And I say this even if your area of specialization is not philosophical apologetics. Whatever your area of specialization, you will be better equipped as an apologist if you have had training in analytic philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Although he would likely strive to clarify just what it means to be “commercing with celestial light” as Lewis describes Athene, Craig’s decades-long apologetic ministry is a prime example of analytic theology for the public. Rising to a particular prominence in recent years, in part thanks to the clever online promotion of his many debates and speaking engagements, Craig has influenced a generation of Christian apologists with his rational apologetic approach that relies heavily on scientific and historical evidence to defend his theological

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<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Guite, “Poet,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 306-7.

<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper, in *The Collected Works of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Wm. B. Eerdmans’ Publishing Co., 1996), 342.

<sup>9</sup> This is an attempt to connect the book of Psalms with Augustine (in light of Anselm’s famous phrase). Importantly, though, Lewis began not with faith, but with an appreciation of the artistic beauty of Christian scripture and the gospel it contains. It was this sublime category that he sought to analyze.

<sup>10</sup> William Lane Craig, “Apologetics Training – Advice to Christian Apologists,” *Reasonable Faith.org* (accessed 05/05/2015), <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/apologetics-training-advice-to-christian-apologists>.

conclusions.<sup>11</sup> Grounding himself on the field of natural theology to offer his arguments the support that they need, Craig is a model of the modernist analytic theologian, confident in his “clarity of definitions, careful delineation of premises, and logical rigor of argumentation.”<sup>12</sup>

In fact, such argumentation is quite explicitly Craig’s intention, given that “the task of showing Christianity to be true involves the presentation of sound and persuasive arguments for Christian truth claims.”<sup>13</sup> Whereas Craig’s criteria of personal justification for holding a Christian belief is something unique to the individual, he draws a hard distinction between how one *knows* and how one *shows* Christianity to be true. Such a distinction, he claims, requires apologists to engage non-believers actively on their own ground. Taking what he calls a “classical approach” to apologetics, Craig stresses the equal importance of both negative and positive (also “offensive” and “defensive”) apologetics that both tear down competing positions and reinforce the proofs of one’s own side, respectively, typically within a probabilistic paradigm. Operating as a two-step process, Craig’s understanding of classical apologetics aims “to show that God’s existence is at least more probable than not, and then to present Christian evidences, probabilistically construed, for God’s revelation in Christ.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, Craig defends theism first and Christianity second.

Craig’s work is defined by a twofold task in that he both contributes to contemporary philosophical discussions via his prolific publication record, but also works hard to write and speak on a popular level. Having spoken publicly on countless occasions since the days of his high school debate team, Craig strives to present a wealth of information in a succinct and memorable way with plenty of resources earmarked for further optional study.<sup>15</sup>

Craig lays out proofs like a server hands out plates. Whether in print or in person, Craig never hesitates to present a veritable smorgasbord of logical options on which his audience might chew, bouncing to and fro from the ontological, teleological, cosmological, moral, and historical-based arguments of natural theology with sophistication. Always careful to construct his arguments in their proper philosophical form, Craig lays out premises that lead logically to his defensible conclusions, be they on the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, the existence of God, or some other topic in the philosophy of religion. To his credit, and contrary to some disgruntled detractors, Craig can hardly be accused of

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<sup>11</sup> The internet has indeed been a powerful tool for Craig’s ministry. In fact, a recent chapter of his focuses specifically on responding to criticisms of the *kalam* argument that have been raised by online detractors: See “Objections So Bad I Couldn’t Have Made Them Up (or, the World’s 10 Worst Objections to the Kalam Cosmological Argument),” in *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, eds. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 51-66.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, “Apologetics Training,” accessed 05/05/2015. This is in contrast to continental philosophy which Craig describes as “obscure, imprecise, and emotive.”

<sup>13</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 52. “Showing Christianity to be true” is, to Craig, the definition of apologetics; see William Lane Craig, “The Classical Method,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 45.

<sup>14</sup> Craig, *Five Ways*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Oftentimes, Craig does this via a formal debate structure. See <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates> for a library of many such debates.

drowning his opponents in a pathetic “Gish gallop,” for each argument he references is formally structured and strongly developed.

Notably, many of Craig’s theistic arguments are grounded firmly in either science or probability theory. To take the latter field first, Craig frequently refers to Bayesian theory to justify the subjective rationality of believing certain propositions based on objective facts about the world and even goes so far as to write out the related mathematical formulae in his books, his articles, and his PowerPoint slides.<sup>16</sup> Or consider the *kalam* cosmological argument that he has popularized since his doctoral studies in England in the mid-1970’s. The argument, at its most basic, runs as follows:

- 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- 2) The universe began to exist.
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Craig dedicates nearly a quarter (over one hundred pages) of his most famous textbook, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* to a discussion of the theoretical physics that can serve as evidence for the truth of Premise Two. For the average reader, Craig’s facility with cosmological models, information theory, and sociobiology can appear daunting, but Craig is faithful to his Enlightenment roots and strives to bend the best of contemporary science to his apologetic purposes.<sup>17</sup> Taken all together, Craig’s theistic arguments (not including his specifically Christian claims) comprise over a third of this 400-page book.

Having defended the existence of a “Personal Creator”<sup>18</sup> who is “the greatest conceivable being”<sup>19</sup> that is timeless, immaterial, changeless, uncaused, and unimaginably powerful,<sup>20</sup> Craig takes the second step to establish the historical reliability of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Typically relying on standard methods of textual criticism (here applied to the New Testament), Craig builds another argument that the best explanation of the events leading up to and away from Jesus’ death on the cross lead the thinking person to conclude that God raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>21</sup> Often, Bayesian probability rears its head again to justify the likelihood of such a miraculous event, given the cultural and religious background in which it took place, and Craig always stresses the objectivity of the Resurrection as a genuinely historical event. As he says (in what might also function as a summary of his methodology as a whole):

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<sup>16</sup> *Reasonable Faith* presents nine such references spanning twelve separate pages and three distinct topics; in *Five Ways* Craig uses it against two of his four interlocutors.

<sup>17</sup> In an interview with popular apologist Lee Strobel, Craig remarked, “Certainly there have been earlier ages when the culture was more sympathetic toward Christianity, but I think it’s indisputable that there has never been a time in history when the hard evidence of science was more confirmatory of belief in God than today.” See Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points Towards God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 123.

<sup>18</sup> Craig, *Five Ways*, 48

<sup>19</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?,” in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 163-4. See also Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 360.

Fortunately, the Christian faith does not call for us to put our minds on the shelf, to fly in the face of common sense and history, or to make a leap of faith into the dark. The rational person, fully apprised of the evidence, can confidently believe that on that first Easter morning a divine miracle took place.<sup>22</sup>

### *An Assessment*

Taken all together, Craig's apologetic approach presents an eminently logical package that can offer an individual a great deal of intellectual confidence in his conclusions. Functioning synergistically as a cumulative case, his collection of arguments packs a powerful rhetorical punch and Craig enjoys several oratorical benefits from the techniques he uses to present his case.

Firstly, Craig's technical skill at debating and speaking publicly has garnered him a good deal of authority from articulation—that is, from his ability to present and respond to ideas intelligently and eloquently in real-time, Craig has earned considerable prestige. In fact, a small cottage-industry has begun to develop in certain rural backwaters of the Internet that aims specifically to prepare individuals to face Craig behind the debating podium.<sup>23</sup> Such an atmosphere only serves to further buttress the popular perception of Craig as an apologetic celebrity, wielding the weapons of philosophy to strike down all those standing in his way.

A related benefit of his style of apologetics is Craig's reception by certain communities that would otherwise often remain untouched by such ideas; that is to say that he has gained access to an unusual audience for an academic philosopher. Thanks to the evidentialistic rigor of his analytic approach, Craig has noticed that many of the individuals who respond most strongly to his evidentialist arguments are "engineers, people in medicine, and lawyers," who are all accustomed to treating existential questions as matters of more abstract concern.<sup>24</sup> Whereas an artist or an English major might not appreciate a full page spread of Bayesian calculus that appears to distill God down to the conclusion of a math problem, a scientist or a lawyer accustomed to working in just such a manner will likely find such an approach to resonate much more strongly, given certain prior assumptions about truth, meaning, and method. This is not to say that only scientists or engineers respond well to Craig's mathematical approach (as the hundreds of attendants at his lectures and website evidence), but simply that his reach is quite intentionally applied in a scientific direction that draws in even his non-scientific audience as well.

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<sup>22</sup> Craig, "Did Jesus Rise," 166. Similar language also appears as the conclusion to Craig's opening statement in many of his debates.

<sup>23</sup> For two more sophisticated examples see Luke Muehlhauser, "How to Debate William Lane Craig," *Common Sense Atheism* (blog), April 22, 2009, <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=1437> and Sean Carroll, "William Lane Craig Debate," *Preposterous Universe* (blog), January 28, 2014, <http://www.preposterousuniverse.com/blog/2014/01/28/william-lane-craig-debate/> (both accessed 05/05/2015).

<sup>24</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 22.

But if analytic apologetics affords Craig authority with a particular audience, it does sometimes limit his flexibility in other ways. For example, one benefit of the desired clarity of analytic philosophy is the ability to derive cleverly articulated chunks of argumentation that can be repetitively quoted in a wide variety of settings and Craig is no stranger to the witty sound-bite. For someone familiar with Craig's work, certain stock phrases (like "bicycles, Beethoven, and root beer" or "nothing comes from nothing"), illustrations (such as Hilbert's Hotel or "when a lion kills a zebra, it kills the zebra, but it doesn't *murder* the zebra"), and quotes (from Michael Ruse, Gerd Lüdemann, N.T. Wright, and others) become quite easy to repeat after hearing Craig's frequent repetition of the same scripted lines. On a larger scale, the entirety of Craig's opening speech is nearly identical from debate to debate and he routinely uses the same four or five arguments in his cumulative case for Christianity.

Although perhaps aesthetically unappealing, such repetitiveness is not necessarily a problem and is, in fact, quite sensible when analytic clarity is key – why spend the time formulating a clever new way to present information once you have already developed a sufficient option? However, ironically, this does trend in a direction that can lead to unique concerns going unanswered. It is not uncommon to see Craig link a question from an audience member during a Q&A session to some pre-established category in his repertoire and then proceed to present his stock answer in response to that idea, perhaps neglecting the unique concerns of the individual in front of him for the sake of answering the more generally applicable question.

Even more problematic than these aesthetic concerns, though, is the technical games that analytic philosophers can appear to play that allow them to declare victory while standing on contestable conclusions. When Craig starts talking about "defeater-defeaters" as an escape from criticisms brought against his position<sup>25</sup>—or, even more strongly, when conclusions are based on their plausibility rather than their probability, as in Craig's standard explanation of the doctrine of Hell or the Problem of Evil<sup>26</sup>—the individual in the audience may walk away with a possibly true and sensible answer that still remains subjectively unsatisfying. Questioners are likely looking for more than the sorts of logical options or "escapes" that these philosophical games can offer—people want more than simply to be told "this might be true, so you can't say it's logically impossible." In general, people often want assurance of their beliefs and guidance further down the path towards existential confidence—especially in cases where their lecturer claims to be so certain about his conclusions. Analytic philosophy, and so too apologetics, sometimes relies too heavily on the technical rules of deductive logic that can qualify a statement as "true," but leave it so

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<sup>25</sup> William Lane Craig, "In Defense of the Kalam Cosmological Argument," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 14, no. 2 (1997): 236.

<sup>26</sup> Craig often says that "it *may* not be feasible for God to actualize a world" that has less evil in it than this one or wherein all persons freely accept the salvation offered by Christ, for examples see: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/defenders-2-podcast/transcript/s4-32>, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/can-a-loving-god-send-people-to-hell-the-craig-bradley-debate>, and "The Debate: Is Faith in God Reasonable?" in *Is Faith in God Reasonable: Debates in Philosophy, Science, and Rhetoric*, eds. Corey Miller and Paul Gould (New York: Routledge, 2014), 36. This is remarkably different than firmly stating "it is *not* feasible..."



existentially thin as to remain un compelling for personal investment and commitment.

Finally, it is important to remember that Athene was not only the Greek goddess of wisdom, but of warfare as well and analytic apologetics has certainly appropriated this mentality in its approach. To consider Craig's vocabulary – and the frequency with which words like offense, defense, training, argue, tear down, opponent, guard, and more<sup>27</sup> all appear – leads one to recognize that this position is firmly grounded on the imagery of combat. Granted, parallels can easily be drawn to biblical passages like II Corinthians 10:5 or Jude 3 that employ similar language, but as Michel Foucault and others have demonstrated, our vocabulary shapes our perspective of the subject in question – and the combative attitudes of many analytic apologists serve as evidence of this as well.<sup>28</sup>

In summation, the modernist apologetics of William Lane Craig present a God who is out there in the universe to be pursued through the tools of philosophy, logic, and science. The task of Craig's analytic apologetics, then, is to present the formulae that mathematically lead ("logically and inescapably" in Craig's oft-repeated words) to the conclusion "God exists." Cold it might seem, but rational it quite consciously is.

#### MEETING DEMETER: JOHN CAPUTO'S IMPOSSIBLE POETICS

Speaking of the relation between analytic and continental philosophy, Caputo suggests:

Analytic philosophers say that continental philosophers are people who can't understand logic. Continental philosophers say the analytic philosophers are people who can't understand foreign languages. But philosophically it's a much more fertile region for dialogue than the politics of this.<sup>29</sup>

While his brow might not be dark, nor (if his prolific publication record is any indication) his eyes heavy with sleep, John Caputo would most certainly be proud to tempt or wound Athene's dogmatic superiority and "rebel against her mother-right" as a postmodern incarnation of Lewis' Demeter. For much of his career, Caputo has worked to bring Christian ideas into conversation with Derridean deconstructionism and to show how religiosity is not confined to mere churches, but that the desire for a transcendental encounter is a defining feature for human experience. Dubbing this event "the Impossible," Caputo has spent much ink unpacking and polishing the many facets of this most peculiar (and peculiarly interesting) notion.

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<sup>27</sup> See particularly Craig's popular-level book, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Here I do not necessarily have Craig himself in mind, but rather the hordes of would-be apologists on the internet influenced by Craig and others who look to pick fights with atheists or non-Christians (or even Christians with the "wrong" ideas).

<sup>29</sup> John Caputo, interviewed by Luke Muehlhauser, "John Caputo – Postmodernism and Religion," *Common Sense Atheism* (blog), September 15, 2010, <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=9750> (accessed 05/05/2015).

For Caputo, the impossible “refers not to a logical but to a phenomenological impossibility, that is, a radical unforeseeability, where experience is structured around horizons of expectation” that are perpetually being anticipated.<sup>30</sup> Waxing eloquent on questions of intention, giftedness (in the sense of “givenness”), and calling, Caputo adapts elements from both Derrida and Marion to ground his view of the Impossible as the ultimate hope of humanity, that is, the potential experience that can provide radical existential satisfaction in an eschatological sense. To be precise, Caputo would identify the impossible as functioning beyond the reach of rigid, externalized description; so, despite its empyrean flavor, Caputo is explicit that it would be a categorical mistake to ontologize the impossible into something like a divine plan. Instead, the impossible is something that appears phenomenologically to a person as the event that opens up the possibility for all other events.<sup>31</sup>

The crux of the matter, though, is the paradoxical nature of the impossible as a gift of the *tout autre* which is always being given, but is never received. The beauty of a gift comes from its benevolence, but the act of reception necessarily attaches the recipient to the giver in a bond of obligation; the gift only remains genuine in its “givenness” until it is actually received (at which point it is no longer being “given”). Consequently, the impossible—as the ultimate gift above all gifts—must always be coming and must never actually fully have come, lest it sully its generosity for the sake of its presence.<sup>32</sup> As Caputo says, “The impossible is like a Messiah whose very structure is never to appear in the present and who, by thus deferring his appearance, keeps the future open, a Messiah whose condition of possibility is the very impossibility’ of his ever showing up, who does not have to be because he must not be.”<sup>33</sup>

In fact, much of Caputo’s theology is concerned with the deconstruction of the conservative onto-theo-political conception of God as a—or, truly, *the*—powerful being in relation to the universe instead into a distillation of divinity that decries God dwelling in a particular place and defends an understanding of God as an event sheltered by a Name that ever-calls out, unconditionally, to any who will listen. In contrast to the centuries of seeing God as a strong, omnipotent force in the world who is defied at one’s own risk, Caputo argues that his postmodern understanding of God as a weak force preserves the possibility for an individual to respond genuinely out of love and to return to the state of mind wherein all things are possible. God as a weak force does not brazenly shock and awe individuals with feats of “thaumaturgical intervention” in order to sway their

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<sup>30</sup> John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 317n1. Caputo references Husserlian “protentions” and Heideggerian “hermeneutical forestructures” as comparable notions.

<sup>31</sup> As he says, “With God, all things are possible, even the impossible” (Caputo, *Weakness*, 102).

<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon is exceedingly (perhaps depressingly) familiar and can be witnessed most easily at children’s birthday parties or on Christmas morning when the little one discovers that the freedom of her imagination inside her anticipation of opening her presents was far sweeter than the actual presents underneath the wrapping.

<sup>33</sup> John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, “Apology for the Impossible: Religion and Postmodernism,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8. Caputo makes the same point again in his stand-alone essay in the same volume: “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion” (1999), 186.

emotions, but instead makes a powerless, unconditional claim on an individual, thereby opening up the possibility of the impossible (that the powerless will receive power).<sup>34</sup> God is not present to Caputo and has no omnipotence to control (or even effect) his call, but faithfully maintains that call—that gift—holding it out for those who would respond. So, such a response is not an ontological consequence, but a phenomenological—or perhaps even existential—effect.

Therefore, it is important to clarify that the weakness of God, for Caputo, is far from a hopeless notion. As he explains, “The mistake would be to treat this blindness, as do deconstruction's critics, as so much nihilism and despair, instead of seeing there exactly the opposite, a work of faith, of hope, and desire for a future to come.”<sup>35</sup> Instead of giving up at the impossible prospect of meeting the wholly Other, Caputo recognizes this call of the Name as a call to action; a call pointing towards an event that sparks an infinity of other events along the way; indeed, “Being impossible is what ignites our passion, gets us off dead center, and drives our desire to make it happen.”<sup>36</sup> Even if the ultimate goal is fundamentally unattainable, Caputo still sees value in the journey.<sup>37</sup>

Quite notably, though coherent (given his conception of God), Caputo's apologetic approach is far from concerned with simply defending the positive truth value of a proposition, but rather with “restoring the good name of the impossible, of what the old Enlightenment declared impossible; to make it respectable.”<sup>38</sup> Logical apologetics (perhaps, “apo-logos-etics”) is far from Caputo's field of concern; it is not a matter of propositional evangelism, but of promoting the appreciation of something that should be recognized as beautiful. However, his inability to point to an ontological space wherein God rests (as opposed to describe or characterize a hoped-for time of God's arrival as the impossible event) hamstring most argumentation before it can even begin. The one exception, the single touchpoint between now and eternity, is what Caputo dubs the kingdom of God, which “provides a perfect way to concretize or embody the weak force of God.”<sup>39</sup>

Like in other interpretations of Christianity, Caputo's view of God's kingdom is the domain over which God's decrees are applied, but Caputo's view of God's weakness shifts everything paradoxically into a kingdom without a king, leaving only the beautiful chaos of a “sacred anarchy” in its wake that confronts the painful ways of the world not with power, but with powerlessness. To Caputo, the kingdom is defined not by an omnipotent presence, but by the surprising and unexpected ripples of divine good will that emanate throughout the world from below and within. As Caputo says in a passage worth quoting at length:

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<sup>34</sup> As Caputo says, “The name of God opens what is closed, breathes life where there is desolation, and gives hope where everything is hopeless. The name of God is powerful, not with the power of brute strength, but with the power of an event” (Caputo, *Weakness*, 88).

<sup>35</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, “Apology,” 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> In fact, Caputo would likely argue that a strong theology (with God as the omnipotent All-Father) limits the ability of an individual to act, whereas his weak theology actually amplifies the significance of human responsibility.

<sup>38</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, “Apology,” 3.

<sup>39</sup> Caputo, *Weakness*, 102.

The kingdom comes to contradict the world and contest the world's ways. And it always looks like foolishness to the world's good sense, moving as it does between logic and passion, truth and justice, concepts and desire, strategies and prayers, astute points and mad stories, for it can never be merely or simply the one or the other. The whole idea of an anarchic strategy is not to break these tensions but to settle into and deploy them, negotiating the distance between them. The whole idea is to create a disturbance, to insinuate a dangerous "perhaps," to speak out in the name of justice, in the name of God, in the name of an event, of something, I know not what, to raise hell, holy hell, or to raise the roof, a sacred roof, which is what happens if you call for the coming of the kingdom, if you pray and weep for the coming of justice, right out in public. The kingdom comes to put the world in question, to put it on the spot, to put it into question. May thy kingdom come. *Viens, oui, oui.*<sup>40</sup>

According to Caputo's account, the best method for accomplishing this grassroots-level disturbance that can encapsulate both "logic and passion" well is a poetic demonstration of the many reasons why the impossibility encapsulated by the name of God is attractive and valuable. Consequently, Caputo's apologetics for the impossible do not consist of arguments or scientific evidence,<sup>41</sup> but of "a discourse with a heart, supplying the heart of a heartless world."<sup>42</sup> To give up an onto-theological God of power for the sake of Caputo's weak force is to give up addressing "possible occurrences in the world, while a poetics addresses the event of being addressed" and glorifies it which, on the personal level, is often far more impactful.<sup>43</sup> In short, for Caputo, apologetics is primarily a question of aesthetics, not epistemology.

Following from Craig, and in the interest of fairness, painting the impossible in an attractive light like this can be done via debate, but one with the flavor of a pub-style conversation among friends, not a gentleman's duel between enemies.<sup>44</sup> Whatever form it takes, the key is that a proper poetics is "a certain constellation of idioms, strategies, stories, arguments, tropes, paradigms, and metaphors—a style and a tone, as well as a grammar and a vocabulary, all of which, collectively, like a great army on the move, is aimed at gaining some ground and making a point."<sup>45</sup> This is not factual ground or an objective point, but *factual* ground (in a Heideggerian sense) with a deeply subjective point (after the pattern of Kierkegaard's "truth for which I can live and die").

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>41</sup> Caputo's more recent work has started to recognize more explicitly the importance of (and even call for an increased focus on) a genuine consideration of mathematics and scientific investigations. See John Caputo, "Continental Philosophy of Religion: Then, Now, and Tomorrow," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2012): 356, as well as the entire third movement of his most recent *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Caputo, *Weakness*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>44</sup> *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* facilitates just such an engagement between Derrida and Marion.

<sup>45</sup> Caputo, *Weakness*, 104.

In his more recent work, Caputo has explicitly explored the possibility that God does not exist as an entitive being, but that the human experience rests precisely inside the tension of the “perhaps” that necessarily accompanies “the fear and trembling before the uncontainable, for the unforeseeable.”<sup>46</sup> The experience humans have of being called by God is something that Caputo sees as approachable only via artistic or fantastical expression, so much so that he bluntly argues “that a theology of the event can only be undertaken as a poetics of the event, which is the spine of a theo-poetics, which is the point I am trying finally to establish.”<sup>47</sup>

### *An Assessment*

In a bit of an ironic turn (at which he would, no doubt, chuckle heartily), Caputo’s apologetic methodology is largely concerned with undercutting Craig’s style of apologetics.<sup>48</sup> Still, Caputo’s theo-poetic endeavors intentionally present a persuasive case that aims to buttress (or even support) the experience contained within the event of God to his audience. One strength here is the inherent approachableness of Caputo’s perspective since, indeed, it is focused primarily on the existential events shared by all humanity—the wish, the tugging, the draw of the call to something greater than ourselves or our universe. Caputo takes this desire for transcendence as something that needs no defense (or, perhaps, could not withstand a defense), but is very much a natural facet of life and is, consequently, something with which Caputo’s audience can easily connect.

Similarly, Caputo’s witty and erudite writing style is an aesthetic strength of his approach that any good mashup will be hard-pressed to maintain. With his playful references and allusions to other works that demonstrate his cleverness, as well as his willingness to boldly confront his accusers and dissenters in the pages of his writing, even going so far as to make jokes at their expense,<sup>49</sup> displays a freshness and spiritedness that is all-too-often missing from the cold, sanitized propositionalism of analytic discourse.

That being said, it is certainly a fair criticism to point out that Caputo’s cleverness does sometimes stand in the way of his clarity. Caputo’s playfulness with words and their meanings, particularly for a non-specialist who lacks the appropriate background information, does lend itself to more confusion than an otherwise standardized use of terms would offer. Strangely, Caputo’s artistic talent for wielding words in this fashion still manages to come off as appealing in

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<sup>46</sup> Caputo, *Insistence*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> John Caputo, “Theopoetics as Radical Theology,” in *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*, eds. Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 129.

<sup>48</sup> As he says, “the first effect of radical theology is subversive, disarming the apologetic armatures of the various confessional traditions so that one can continue to belong (or not!) to the confessional community only with a very considerable amount of unease” (Caputo, “Theopoetics,” 130).

<sup>49</sup> Consider, for example, his reference to the “self-appointed and anointed defenders” of Jesus he mentions in *Weakness* (103).

as near-hypnotic fashion, but it seems impossible for a reader to complain about an author being “too clear” – a complaint that no reader of Caputo’s will ever make. Indeed, this is often at the core of many critiques of continental philosophy.

However, Caputo must be commended for his willingness to overcome the boundaries between the current political camps in academic philosophy (as his above quote indicates). It might very well be argued (as he himself has done) that Caputo’s entire theo-poetic project is already seeking to shakeup the status quo of the present dichotomy, using, as he does, rational categories and logical concepts (however unusually defined), but primarily as tools to further conversation and inquiry – never as gods in their own right. Analytic philosophy is not a devil to be punished or avoided (in the way that continentalism is for some analytic philosophers),<sup>50</sup> but is one more perspective with which we can enter into conversation.

#### MEETING MARY: A MYTHOPOETIC MARRIAGE

So, like any dichotomy borne mostly out of taste and tact, the analytic and continental traditions both have their own particular strengths and weaknesses. For the purposes of our present case study in mashup approaches to apologetics, William Lane Craig’s analytic theology presents an exceedingly clear and logical case that is masterfully delivered such that it appropriates considerable authority by articulation, thereby granting Craig access to audiences that are often otherwise unavailable or disinterested in entertaining the ideas he wishes to discuss. However, the stepwise and logical approach of the analytic apologist often requires supplemental material or explanation to incorporate the existential impact of the ideas under consideration; the stark rationality can leave its audiences cold. The continental theology of John Caputo certainly avoids this charge; indeed, the approachableness of his writing, both of the phenomenological core of theological experience and the aesthetic flair that Caputo uses to discuss it, is a hallmark of Caputo’s corpus. But the whimsical fancy of Caputo’s fun with words can fall prey to severe confusion and technical obscurity in a manner unlike anything from Craig’s clear definitions.

In fact, this is precisely the split that Lewis decried in his ode to the two competing facets of his own psyche: Athene, goddess of wisdom, “so clear is reason” (line 5) meeting Demeter, “warm, dark, obscure and infinite” (line 6) in a dangerous mashup of their own. In a painful shout that echoes much of Lewis’ early intellectual life he cries, “Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother / who make in me a concord of the depth and height?” (lines 11-12) as he underscores the pain he felt at being torn to choose between these two options – between his intellectual reason and his fantastical imagination. Elsewhere Lewis writes:

Such, then, was the state of my imaginative life; over against it  
stood the life of my intellect. The two hemispheres of my mind

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<sup>50</sup> See footnote 12.

were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow "rationalism." Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless... I was so far from wishful thinking that I hardly thought anything true unless it contradicted my wishes.<sup>51</sup>

Though he was not himself a philosopher and lived in the earliest days of the analytic/continental split, Lewis yearned for a reconciliation of these two emphases—reason and imagination—into a holistic synthesis that could satisfy every piece of human intellectual life. For Lewis, this was found in a two-step process: firstly, appreciating the transformative power of mythical literature and its naturally organic didactic ability, and secondly, recognizing the unique historicity of one particular myth: the Christian story of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. As Guite explains, "The pagan goddesses must be *either* maid *or* mother [line 11], but the Virgin Mary, in whom their numina is subsumed for Christian devotion, is *both* maid *and* mother."<sup>52</sup> In Christianity, approached through the intricate web of mythical story, Lewis found his concord.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, the apologetic he laid out for his theology facilitates both analytic rationality and continental creativity; Lewis valued argument, but primarily when it was accompanied by artistry, pointing out that "by his intellect [man] is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal"—and the disconnection of these two will inevitably lead to widespread error.<sup>54</sup> For Lewis, a genuinely Christian apologetic would make sense of both reason and imagination such that he could properly answer his existential question:

13. Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
14. Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
15. Then could I truly say and not deceive,
16. Then wholly say that I BELIEVE.<sup>55</sup>

Notably, Lewis demonstrates an apologetic approach that preserves precisely the qualities desired for a mashup of analytic and continental apologetics: he is articulate, collects a wide audience, is ultimately approachable, and absolutely aesthetically pleasing—and all thanks not to modernism nor postmodernism, but to his well-grounded background in medieval or *premodern* thinking that maintained a holistic understanding of the human thought life that vastly predates any mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical split.

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<sup>51</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, in *The Inspirational Writings of C.S. Lewis* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1994), 95.

<sup>52</sup> Guite, "Poet," 307.

<sup>53</sup> Naturally, this bled out into Lewis' own stories once he began writing himself; see Holly Ordway, "C.S. Lewis: An Integrated Life," *Renewing Minds: A Journal of Christian Thought*, Fall 2013, 47-55; as well as Colin Duriez, "The Fairy Story: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis," in *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007): 13-24.

<sup>54</sup> Herein lies Lewis' famous "men without chests" image from *The Abolition of Man* of a human being who has not been taught to properly adjudicate his or her thoughts and feelings through the processes that allow for a good and useful life.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis, *Poems*, 81.

## LEWIS' SEHNSUCHT: PREMODERN APOLOGETICS FOR A POST/MODERN WORLD

Although the current categories of analytic and continental philosophy are relatively recent developments, they might be understood (according to some accounts) as having their roots in a much older dichotomy between factual statements and valuative statements that dates back at least as far as David Hume.<sup>56</sup> Although Hume never put the point so bluntly, the famous summary statement of Humean ethics—that one cannot derive an “ought” from an “is”—shifted the conversation of value, significance, and meaning (the topics with which continental philosophers tend to concern themselves) away from the empirical sciences (with which analytic philosophy has become associated). Although a proper treatment of this complex division is impossible here, suffice to say that the foundational material for Christian theology long predates such 18<sup>th</sup> century distinctions.

But, without too much forcing, both modern and postmodern apologetics—at least as far as they have been briefly summarized here—tacitly repeat such a fact/value distinction: Craig’s analytic modernism, with its empirical foundation that needs supplementation to address questions of existential import, lines up better with the “facts,” while Caputo’s continental postmodernism, with its esoteric-yet-attractive call for subjectivity that muddles the supposed clarity of scientific apologetics, falls more closely towards the “values” side.<sup>57</sup> In order to genuinely experience a holistic presentation of theological apologetics that denies the anachronistic divorce of facts from values backwards onto the *premodern* sensibilities of the early Christian church, the apologist would likely need to draw upon material that predates the British empiricists. Importantly, with his studies in medieval and renaissance literature, to such premodern sources is precisely where C.S. Lewis’ thought turns.

On the one hand, influenced by medieval scholasticism and classical philosophy before that,<sup>58</sup> Lewis understood the importance of clarity in his writings, particularly in his argumentation, and did not shy away from presenting both deductive and inductive arguments in the pages of his nonfiction works. Consider his admonition to the parishioners of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin:

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of

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<sup>56</sup> For a solid summary of this history, see Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 14-27.

<sup>57</sup> This is not to say that Craig’s method is devoid of valuative assumptions, nor to imply that Caputo is nonsensical, but simply that both are operating within a framework influenced by these simplistic associations. Explicitly, Craig might not unpack his emotive presuppositions as clearly as Caputo would like, while Caputo might not clearly define his terms as Craig would expect – but this is simply a description of the divide that needs to be overcome, for the divide is not nearly as stark as some would have us believe.

<sup>58</sup> On scholasticism, see C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 29. On Aristotle see *From the Library of C.S. Lewis: Selections from Writers Who Influenced His Spiritual Journey*, ed. James Stuart Bell (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 333.



the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered. The cool intellect must work not only against cool intellect on the other side, but against the muddy heathen mysticisms which deny intellect altogether.<sup>59</sup>

So, it comes as no surprise that Lewis was tapped by representatives of the BBC to deliver a series of radio lectures on Christianity and its relevance in the modern world—the very lectures that would become what is today Lewis' most famous non-fiction work, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis' articulate and logical presentation of premises that led to clear conclusions appealed greatly to an audience hungry for hope in the midst of war.

But even on the radio, Lewis could not help but weave and wind his talented aesthetic sensibilities and playfulness with words around the argument he was making for “the law of nature” (the first section of *Mere Christianity*). Indeed, his propositional logic is coated and filled with analogies, stories, jokes, and wordplay that would entice his listeners (and later his readers) with an approachableness that repeatedly underscores both the significance and beauty of his chosen topic. To Lewis, who considered himself a product of the Romantic tradition,<sup>60</sup> religious language of any stripe was “not a special language, but something that ranges between the Ordinary and the Poetical”—between the “controversy” of apologetics that always uses “terms as definable and univocal as possible” and the artistic, emotional language that continually reminds the reader that the argument being made matters.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, his ability to write fantastical fiction stories that proclaimed his worldview tacitly through their narrative is another example of his approachableness;<sup>62</sup> people may not care to read about Christian theology, but they'll happily discover the same concepts while they are simultaneously entertained by Lewis' story of the lion-God, Aslan, sacrificing Himself for the sake of a poor sinner—often without realizing they are being taught at all.<sup>63</sup> As Grace Tiffany has argued, Lewis' “didacticism is turned

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<sup>59</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Learning in War-time,” in *The Weight of Glory: and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 60. See also the rationality exemplified by the Professor towards the end of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* and his cry of “Logic!”

<sup>60</sup> See the third afterword to his first work, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, for a discussion of his role in this tradition.

<sup>61</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The Language of Religion,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper in *The Collected Works of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 267. Concerning this second type of language, Lewis argues that “there is a special region of experiences which can be communicated *without* Poetic language, namely, its ‘common measurable features’, but most experience cannot.” This holds especially true for religious language.

<sup>62</sup> On the importance of Christian intellectuals allowing their worldview to seep organically into their work, see “Christian Apologetics,” *God in the Dock*, 362. On the ability of a story to teach something important implicitly, see “Myth Became Fact,” as well as J.R.R. Tolkien's essay “On Fairy Stories,” in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd., 2001), 3-81.

<sup>63</sup> For examples of this in action see Jason Lief's pedagogical analysis of *The Magician's Nephew* in “Challenging the Objectivist Paradigm: Teaching Biblical Theology with J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Guillermo del Toro,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12, no. 4 (2009): 321-332; and Peter Schakel's comprehensive study of Lewis' final novel, *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

upside down, entirely subsumed by, and in service to, the fiction [of his stories].”<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, Lewis didn’t seem to enjoy engaging in apologetics for its own sake;<sup>65</sup> he was always far more interested in writing stories and poetry that could serve himself with an opportunity to naturally (and organically) present his premodern conception of God that wrapped itself in romanticism to avoid falling prey to any post-Humean dichotomies. Rather than viewing God simply as a technical element of outer existence somewhere to be discovered through either science or logic à la Craig, or, on the other hand, imagining God as an inner experience of some existentially satisfying moment of understanding that has no roots in an ontological being à la Caputo, Lewis held to an artistic tension of both perspectives: God can be approached neither “out there,” nor “in here,” but only via the simultaneous union of both reason and imagination that allows the individual to be drawn towards the God Who Is There in a way that demands a personal, meaningful response—like entering a cathedral with an altar that can only be physically approached by crawling on one’s knees and lying prostrate before the cross.

To Lewis, this experience of God is not only a unique encounter with the ultimate “naked Other, imageless (though our imagination salutes it with a hundred images), unknown, undefined, desired,”<sup>66</sup> but is the defining aim for all humanity. Dubbing this phenomenon “Joy,” Lewis spent much of his Christian career reflecting on this ultimate, transcendental desire for something unfound naturally or physically, arguing that “if I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”<sup>67</sup> Similar to the shadows dancing on the walls of Plato’s Cave (or, perhaps, I Corinthians 13:12),<sup>68</sup> the physical world is filled with images and objects that are drawn from something greater than themselves, but that can likewise draw one’s imagination back towards their source, functioning as would-be triggers for a transcendental experience of that

unnameable something, desire for which pierces us like a rapier  
at the smell of a bonfire, the sound of wild ducks flying  
overhead, the title of *The Well at the World’s End*, the opening

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1984). For a slightly different sort of demonstration of this technique applied to Lewis’ own biography see Robert Velarde, *Conversations with C.S. Lewis: Imaginative Discussions About Life, Christianity, and God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008) and Peter Kreeft, *Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Grace Tiffany, “C.S. Lewis: The Anti-Platonic Platonist,” *Christianity and Literature* 63, no. 3 (2014): 361.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Lewis warns that “nothing is more dangerous to one’s faith” in “Christian Apologetics,” *God in the Dock*, 369.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 121. Compare this idea to Caputo’s “tout autre”.

<sup>67</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 136-137. Lewis makes very similar comments in both *The Weight of Glory*, and *Surprised by Joy*.

<sup>68</sup> Lewis was a conscious devotee of Plato, framing some stories around platonic concepts (*The Great Divorce*) and even having his characters reference the Greek philosopher (such as Uncle Digory in the closing pages of *The Last Battle*).

lines of *Kubla Khan*, the morning cobwebs in late summer, or the noise of falling waves.<sup>69</sup>

Dubbed “*Sehnsucht*,” this “inconsolable longing” towards something greater than our selves sounds to be something akin to Caputo’s continental Call, but with the objectivity of Craig’s analytic ontotheology.<sup>70</sup>

So, while Craig might endorse Lewis’ focus “only with the intellectual attack”<sup>71</sup> and Caputo would likely resonate with Lewis’ idea that “apologetics is controversy,”<sup>72</sup> we need look no further than Lewis for an apologetic synthesis sufficient for incorporating the best aspects of analytic and continental approaches. Lewis stood firm on an older worldview less affected by today’s differences that, therefore, more easily mashes up both perspectives to create a harmonious symphony that can “present that which is timeless in the language of our own age.”<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, Lewis’s mashup philosophy marries reason and imagination in order to make an argument that sounds beautiful and joins ordinary and poetic speech to describe something transcendent, looking out towards God and in towards ourselves simultaneously to understand both.<sup>74</sup>

This is more than some Hegelian synthesis of Craig and Caputo’s perspectives (and not simply because Lewis’ view is temporally misplaced in the sequence), but rather a hopeful call in the face of methodological balkanization. For the contemporary philosopher of religion, faced with two approaches that have, on occasion, devolved into bitter disagreement, Lewis’ work stands as a reminder that productive conversations between these two schools are not only possible, but that any thought to the contrary is barely a generation old.

Ultimately, Lewis’ work demonstrates the simplified value of a unified approach that does not divorce our rationality from our artistic creativity. As he said in an essay on literary theory, “for me, reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination the organ of meaning”<sup>75</sup> – when the two work in tandem, a human being can fully appreciate life and a penitent believer might fully meet God. Apologetics, then, becomes not a focus on arguing for the mathematical

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<sup>69</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, in *The Collected Works of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 158.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 72.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” 367. In a recent interview, Craig described how he has attempted to include a Lewisian existential or imaginative factor in his apologetic methodology by “arguing that apart from the existence of God life is ultimately absurd” which, though certainly true and likely impactful, is still something quite different than the genuinely imaginative narrative or poetic construction that Lewis so frequently engaged in (if for no other reason than that it is still an argument and not a story) (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2VSTUEff1s>, accessed 05/05/2015). However, Craig’s *What is God Like?* series of children’s books are stories indeed; explicitly didactic ones, yes, but a step closer to Lewis’ idea of myth than a formal argument.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis, “The Language of Religion,” 267.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” 366.

<sup>74</sup> It is noteworthy that the three theistic arguments for which Lewis is most famous – the Moral Argument, the Argument from Reason, and the Argument from Desire – all rest comfortably in this external-internal tension and require some connection to both objective and subjective facts.

<sup>75</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: University Press, 1980), 265.

probability of a proposition's truth value, but neither is it simply concerned to defend the possibility of religious truth. It instead presents truth claims with poetry and style, welcoming story-seekers into an adventure (rather than a debate) and asking them to play – if both their hearts and minds are stirred along the way, then so much the better.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> I should note that this, if properly done (which is by no means easy), is even more simple than the basic two-step approach that J. Aaron Simmons alludes to in "On Shared Hopes for a (Mashup) Philosophy of Religion," *Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 2 (2013): 703, since it does not require an apologist to "shift" methodologies from one step to the next. Many thanks to J. Aaron Simmons and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Any mistakes or missteps that remain are my own (though they are welcome to claim them if they so desire).