



# AN ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERARY REVIEW

ONLINE ARTICLE

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# A Dialogue Concluded

## “Enjoyment” and “Contemplation” as Used in Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis’s “Great War”

Norbert Feinendegen’s article in Volume 24 of *SEVEN* entitled “Contemplating C.S. Lewis’s Epistemology” prompted a response from Stephen Thorson, and further comment from Dr. Feinendegen, both of which appeared in Volume 25. Their subsequent correspondence in which they reach a mutual conclusion is recorded here.

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Dear Norbert,

I have just received my copy of *SEVEN*, and have re-read the articles. I think I finally see why we don’t agree, or at least an important clarifying point I hadn’t seen before. (By the way, can you send me the English summary of your German thesis that you already sent to Starr? Maybe I would understand our differences even more.)

From within the epistemology of the *Summa* we all (Lewis, you, and I) deny that the soul can contemplate Spirit, but I had not realized until now that you also deny the Spirit’s ability to contemplate souls (as objects) except through another soul! (See bottom of page 74 in your “Reply”).

On page 75 you say, “[Thorson] maintains that Spirit is the self that contemplates the soul and *not the enjoying self of the soul.*” Your “and” is the problem. It is *not true* that I deny the Spirit as the enjoying self of the soul. I *do* believe the Spirit is the enjoying self of the soul. That is all through the *Summa*! But I *also* believe that for Lewis the Spirit can and does contemplate the “soul” (as an object) and without going through another soul! I *think* this is what you deny. Therefore, I think you misunderstood what I was trying to say, when I said that my original point 2 was only about the Spirit-soul relationship! You don’t think the Spirit directly contemplates the “soul”, correct? If that is your thought, here is my thesis:

The *Summa* shows that the Spirit *both* enjoys the soul (when contemplating the world or other souls through that soul), and *also* directly contemplates the “soul” (when stepping back and focusing on a particular “soul”—and of course enjoying the thought or changed focus). I put the directly contemplated “soul” in quotation marks, because in one sense, you are correct. The Spirit does not directly

contemplate a living soul, since Lewis does say that the soul is "annihilated" as a thinking, feeling *subject* when the Spirit ceases to enjoy that soul. But I maintain that Lewis thought the soul is still an *object* that the Spirit *can*, and frequently *does*, contemplate (though not continuously)!

For example, in section vii on Intermediaries Lewis says, "Hamlet ceases to exist (as a soul—he is still an object, of course) ... thinking and feeling ceases to go on in Hamlet, when Shakespeare, no longer enjoying Hamlet, sits back to think of the play as a whole." This is all I meant by "the Spirit contemplates the soul." In my previous articles, no one had read the *Summa*, and I wanted to focus on the Spirit-soul relation. So I didn't put quotation marks around the directly contemplated "soul" words in my articles. It wasn't the focus of my argument. I was focusing on Barfield's pantheism and occultism, and trying to clarify for readers how Lewis's temporary agreement with Barfield's emergent evolutionism could not really help him fend off Barfield's super-sensible awareness (or in other words, Barfield's high view of Imagination as a path to true-false distinctions in epistemology).

But what is this "soul" that Lewis believes the Spirit can directly contemplate, as "an object"? In section x, "Limits of the artistic analogy" Lewis says, "By creation I mean the poet's enjoyment of *a certain element in his own soul which he also contemplates* and separates from the rest as a 'character'. By fiction I mean the feigning of 'minor characters' through whom the poet does not look, but whom he constructs from the outside. These are contemplated, but enjoyed by no one, and are not souls." For Lewis, a poet can create a (major) character that remains a potential "soul" at least, even when the poet has ceased to enjoy that soul (look through it) and is now working on the minor characters that the poet does not "look through". Of course, Shakespeare can contemplate Hamlet (as an object) directly, and *not* only through Polonius!

Section xiii, "How soul dies into Spirit" reads "when I as Spirit cease to separate and *to contemplate the elements that make up the particular soul* called 'myself', I may be said either to annihilate that soul or to awake it from death into real life." Again, the Spirit at least can contemplate the elements that make up a "particular soul". The Spirit objectifies those elements of himself when contemplating the "soul" he is creating. Shakespeare can think about Hamlet even when he is not "looking through" him or through another soul, but directly.

I think we can both cry *mea culpa*. We didn't see this big difference between us. I had assumed you saw what I saw, that the Spirit and the intermediaries can directly contemplate the "souls" below them, even when not "looking through" another soul. But I now realize that all Lewis's talk about Spirit "annihilating" the soul (as subject) can make people think that the Spirit can never directly contemplate the soul (as object). But such a state would put

blinders on Spirit (not Lewis's high view of Spirit), and certainly does *not* make an understandable analogy with artistic creation.

In summary,

- Spirit enjoys soul (we both agree Lewis said this)
- Soul enjoys spirit (we both agree Lewis said this)
- Soul cannot contemplate Spirit (we both agree Lewis said this)
- Spirit can directly contemplate "soul" as an object created from part of the elements in the whole Spirit (I think Lewis said this; what do you think?)

Go back and read my final corrected point 2 again, and see where I was coming from. I expand it thus:

2. We souls cannot both enjoy and contemplate Spirit, for the Spirit is the self that can enjoy itself [or enjoys the thought] while contemplating the individual soul (and also can enjoy the soul that is contemplating other things), and the soul is the limited self that can never contemplate the Spirit, but can only enjoy the Spirit's use of the soul (when that soul is contemplating the world or other souls).

My point was that the Spirit-soul relationship is one-way—from Spirit to or through soul. Spirit can both contemplate soul directly as object, and can enjoy soul as subject when looking through it, but soul as subject cannot ever contemplate Spirit as object, but only enjoy Spirit while contemplating other things.

Does this make any sense? *Do* you, in fact, deny the Spirit's ability to directly contemplate souls as objects?

In Him,

Steve

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Dear Steve,

Thank you very much for your thoughts about our articles. I think we are really coming close to each other! And the first thing I'd like to tell you is that I do agree with each of your four statements:

- Spirit enjoys soul (we both agree Lewis said this)
- Soul enjoys spirit (we both agree Lewis said this)

- Soul cannot contemplate Spirit (we both agree Lewis said this)
- Spirit *can* directly contemplate "soul" as an object created from part of the elements in the *whole* Spirit

I only want us to be sure that we know what we mean when we are saying this: In Lewis's Subjective Idealism, Spirit is "pure Subject" and has no object external to Himself which He could contemplate. Therefore, in the strict sense of the word, He can't contemplate a soul as part of *His* world, but can only contemplate it as part of *our* world. And that means that within His own mind, he can conceive a world, which exists only in so far as He conceives it. In this world are contained what Lewis calls "souls" with a subjectivity which is peculiar to them. And of course Spirit can contemplate those souls from the "outside", without seeing them through the eyes of one of His own created souls: Shakespeare can think, while conceiving a new scene of his play, about Hamlet's relationship to the other characters without taking the place of one of them within the play. Your quotations from the *Summa* are absolutely to the point here, and they are very similar to what Dorothy Sayers writes in *The Mind of the Maker* (a book the Christian Lewis valued very highly!) about two different ways of writing a story: by enjoying the self of your own created characters or by contemplating them from the outside (in the chapter "Free will and Miracle"). And that means: I do not deny that it is possible for the author to contemplate the characters created by himself, but I didn't say it explicitly in my response because that was not my point—because I think it is irrelevant to Lewis's argument.

When I said that for you Spirit does not enjoy the soul, I did it because this was not mentioned (and, as I thought, in the last resort excluded) in your summary of Lewis's argument, while, for me, it is the heart of the whole argument. Of course, you quote in your essay from the *Summa* that spirit enjoys the soul. But later, when you summarize Lewis's argument of the *Summa*, you seem to *forget* that when you write, "We [souls] cannot both enjoy and contemplate [Spirit] at the same time, for the Spirit is the [soul-] contemplating self and the soul is the [Spirit-] enjoying self". You see, the "is" in the sentence "Spirit is the soul contemplating self" is my problem! And I suspected that you may have come to that conclusion by reading Barfield's "contemplation without enjoyment" (although, since then, you would have moved much closer to Lewis's real argument). Of course, *if* Spirit contemplates the soul, *then* He cannot, in the same act, enjoy it. But this is not Lewis's reason why the soul can never contemplate Spirit. The soul cannot do that because it only exists in so far as Spirit enjoys the soul (because, in the same act, the soul cannot contemplate its own enjoying self)—and your summary doesn't say a word about *that* (even not the expanded version of your summary in *SEVEN*). You only maintain that "the soul is the self that can never contemplate the Spirit, but only enjoy the Spirit's use of the soul

(when that soul is contemplating the world or other souls)". Well—wasn't this exactly the thing that needed an explanation?

But now, in your new expanded version of point #2 at the end of your email, I read (as I can see, for the first time) that the soul's impossibility to contemplate Spirit is due to the fact that Spirit is the soul's life. Have we reached full agreement on this point? Then I would take this to mean that you would say, as I do, that Lewis's argument is based on the fact that Spirit is the enjoying self of the soul, not on the fact that Spirit contemplates the soul also from the "outside" (in the sense defined above).

And I think I can find this expressed in your own words when you write, "My point was that the Spirit-soul relationship is one-way—from Spirit to or through soul. Spirit can both contemplate soul directly as object, and can enjoy soul as subject when looking through it, but soul as subject cannot ever contemplate Spirit as object, but only enjoy Spirit while contemplating other things." I agree with every word of that!

All good wishes and the best for the new year 2009!

Norbert