

Great Books Session: “Is Theology Poetry?”

An Essay in *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis

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Discussion Outline to accompany a C.S. Lewis College Great Books Session
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CSLewisFoundation> The C.S. Lewis Retreat 2019

- I. **The Intellectual Context: The Philosophical concern with Value-Language**
 - a. David Hume (1711 – 1776) Empiricism
 - i. Matters of Relation and Matters of Fact
 - ii. Fact and Value split
 - iii. Ethics and values a product of social utility and sentiment
 - b. John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) Utilitarianism
 - i. Utility – the greatest happiness for the greatest number
 - ii. Finite god – not so good, or powerful, or knowledgeable to do anything
 - iii. Pleasure and social feelings are the basis for morality
 - c. Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) Evolutionary Vitalism
 - i. Evolutionary model applied to all areas of thought as a “meta-theory”
 - ii. Naturalistic explanation for life
 - d. Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970) Analytic Empiricism
 - i. Atomism and pervasive nominalism
 - ii. Meaningful language must be reducible to logic
 - iii. Subjectivity of values – no moral “facts”
 - iv. “...the world is horrible.”
 - e. C. S. Lewis (1898 – 1963) Christian Theism
 - f. A. J. Ayer (1910 – 1989) Logical Positivism
 - i. Accepts Hume’s empirical epistemology
 - ii. Facts must be verifiable empirically
 - iii. All language that is not derived from verifiable sense experience or logical tautologies is “non-sensical” and thus non-cognitive
 - iv. Ethics, religious statements, and metaphysical statements are only emotive expressions, i.e. like “poetry”
- II. **The Cultural Context: Scientific Naturalism and Value-Language**
 - a. Scientific naturalism (like H. G. Wells), the “scientific outlook” or “worldview”
 - b. Value-language only expresses emotions not reality
- III. **The Contours of the Argument**
 - a. Introduction: Definitions?
 - b. Is Christianity only Mythology?
 - c. The Mythology of the “Scientific Outlook”
 - d. Christianity and pre-Christian thought
 - e. The Metaphorical nature of all language
 - f. The Analysis of “Worldviews”
 - g. Towards the “Best Explanation”
- IV. **The Best Explanation** – “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” (140)