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C. S. Lewis held the conviction that all humans have meaningful images embedded in their minds that are often expressed in myths and legends. The richness of the Narnia Chronicles is often traceable to mythic patterns and philosophic thought employed by Lewis.

In The Chronicles of Narnia, C. S. Lewis envisions heaven through the symbolic presentation of “Aslan’s Country.” Every other world is linked to it as a peninsula is connected to a mighty continent. It can be reached only through magic or more often “the door of noble death.” Its boundaries expand according to the exploration quests of its inhabitants. Hence, Aslan’s admonition to come “further up and further in!”
C. S. Lewis, Platonism, and Aslan’s Country: 
Symbols of Heaven in the Chronicles of Narnia
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Introduction

The Narnia Chronicles has been hailed as a wonderful use of mythic symbol to illustrate the ultimate story of redemption in Jesus Christ. Yet with much popular attention given to Lewis’ use of symbolic myth, the influence of Platonic thought on the Narnian Chronicles is often ignored. This seems a curious response since some have said that to remove Plato from Narnia would be a form of amputation robbing the reader of the philosophic framework out of which the stories are structured.  

Perhaps this lack of attention can be traced to a disharmonious relationship between biblical truth and certain aspects of Platonic thought. In the apostolic proclamation of the κήρυγμα, Platonism has been seen as a stumbling block to the gospel’s acceptance. Paul’s gospel witness to Greek philosophers on the Areopagus received a mixed and largely negative reaction (Acts 17:22-34). The apostle’s proclamation of the interruption of history, a final judgment, and the resurrection were all at cross-purposes with the most popular Greek philosophical ideas of the day. Platonic ideas of the separation of spirit and matter, the soul imprisoned in the body, the idea of reincarnation, and the continuance of time without interruption were widely held.  

If certain Platonic ideas are incompatible with the Christian εὐαγγέλιον, then why would Lewis still include other aspects of Platonism in the mythic retelling of the story of Christ? To answer that question, it will be the purpose of this paper to provide a brief overview of Lewis’ journey of faith, his use of Platonism in Narnia, and his conception of heaven as seen in Aslan’s country.

C. S. Lewis’ Journey Through Myth to Christ

On November 29, 1898, Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, to Albert and Flora Lewis. While he was still a small boy, his mother contracted cancer and died. Some believe this heartbreak is what led Lewis later to become an atheist.

Lewis’ voluminous reading and lively intellectual discussions with people of faith, however, eventually caused him to doubt his denial of God. He began to wonder if there was more to life than he had seen.
Having read Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Lewis was struck by how different mythologies repeated the themes of a dying and rising god. These varied stories seemed to either anticipate or echo the New Testament story of the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus’ claims to be a king; his powers to heal; his wisdom in teaching; and his sacrifice, death, and resurrection seemed to Lewis to be the ultimate Story behind all stories.

Lewis concluded, however, that what seemed to make the story of Jesus unique was that his miraculous life had taken place in real history. As he reflected on the historic reliability of the New Testament documents, he found further reasons to recognize the reality of Jesus’ life. Over time, C. S. Lewis’ atheism began to crumble and he eventually became a Christian.

As a professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Oxford, C. S. Lewis wrote in a wide variety of genres: literary criticism, science fiction, poetry, and Christian apologetics. His science fiction work showed how fantasy could be used to illustrate Christian principles. But Lewis’ creative writing skill did not stop with these genres. One day he saw a picture of a faun carrying a bundle of packages in a snowstorm, and in his mind he began working on a children’s fantasy.

Like his friend J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, C. S. Lewis believed that the writing of good fantasy conveyed truths from our world but with fresh insight. As David C. Downing observes in his book *Into the Wardrobe*:

> Lewis believed ... all readers ... share deeply embedded images and meanings that are evoked in myths, legends, stories, and even dreams. For Lewis, a well-constructed story draws upon these universal images and meanings. Much of the thematic richness of the Chronicles derives from Lewis’s skill in drawing on mythic patterns—the god who dies and comes back to life, the voyage to the end of the earth, the flight to freedom, the rescue of captives from the underworld, the beginning and the end of created things.

On the basis of these personal beliefs, Lewis created Narnia, a parallel world that could be entered by different means—a wardrobe, magic rings, or an enchanted horn. He designed this side-by-side existence so that the experience of time could be different than our own. In the world he created, a few days as we know them could span long epochs in Narnian time. As a result, in The Chronicles of Narnia the same children from our world could enter into the experience of creation, the entrance of sin into the world, the redemption provided through sacrificial death and resurrection, and the recreation of a new world in its place.

However, in spite of the many Christian symbols built into the world of Narnia, we must not jump to the conclusion that Lewis intended The Chronicles of Narnia to be an allegory or extended symbolic story with a deeper meaning. Instead he considered Narnia to be a “supposal.” As Lewis explains in a letter:
Aslan [a lion king] is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, "What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to incarnate and die and rise again in that world as he actually has done in ours?"4

This great "supposal" of how Christ might have behaved if He had become a lion in a land of talking animals allowed Lewis to repackage Christian themes in a fresh new way. Each character, place, and event in the Chronicles does not necessarily have a symbolic meaning, but the Chronicles do contain striking parallels to the Christian truths.

**C. S. Lewis' Use of Platonic Ideas in Narnia**

As the creator and sovereign of the parallel world of Narnia, Aslan exhibits personality and powers unmistakably reflective of the New Testament portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. But mythic characters alone were not adequate to develop the philosophic structure of this imaginary world. As Lewis painted a picture of Narnia, he chose to use select concepts in Plato to realize this vision.

**The Socratic Way to Reality**

Plato’s most influential mentor was Socrates. The Socratic way of arriving at truth is to provide dialogue through guiding questions so as to arrive at more accurate conclusions. Socrates’ mother was a midwife, and he drew a parallel between his method with students and her delivery of babies. In making the comparison between birthing ideas and birthing babies, Socrates is reported to have said:

> Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs; but differs, in that I attend men and not women, and I look after their souls when they are in labor, and not after their bodies: and the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth.5

Interestingly, Digory, the first boy to visit Narnia, uses the Socratic method when he becomes an old man. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Digory questions Susan and Peter about their doubt after hearing their sister Lucy’s report that she has discovered a world called Narnia by going through a wardrobe. Because Susan and Peter have had no direct experience with this other world, they assume she must be lying.

> "How do you know," [Digory] asked, "that your sister’s story is not true?"
> "Oh, but—" began Susan, and then stopped. Anyone could see from the old man’s face that he was perfectly serious. Then Susan pulled herself together and said, "But Edmund said they had only been pretending."
> "That is a point," said the Professor, "which certainly deserves consideration; very careful consideration. For instance—if you will excuse me for asking the question—does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?"
“That’s just the funny thing about it, sir,” said Peter. “Up till now, I’d have said Lucy every time.”

Digory seeks to guide the children to the possibility of Lucy’s report being true without letting them know that years ago he had actually visited Narnia himself.

An approach similar to the Socratic dialogue can be found in the New Testament. On the Road to Emmaus, the risen Christ uses guiding questions to help those walking with Him to reexamine their assumptions about what the Messiah would be like (Luke 24:13-31). Similarly, the apostle Paul used dialogue as a means of evangelizing Jews and God-fearers he encountered in the synagogue (Acts 17:2). Of course dialogue comes from the Greek word for discussion (διαλέγομαι). However, a key distinction is our Lord’s and the apostles’ appeal to the Old Testament as the basis for the quest for truth. Unlike the Greeks, who exalted pure reason, Jesus and Paul pointed to a proper understanding of revealed truth as the frame of reference for inquiry.

The “Gadfly” Called To Awake the Sleeping

Another concept of Plato that appears in Narnia is the role of the “gadfly,” who has been called to awaken people out of intellectual slumber. Once again, Plato quotes his great teacher Socrates’ concept of himself as agitating the nonreflective minds of the Athenians to respond to the quest for truth.

I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. (Attributed to Socrates - Apology, Plato)

Sleep can be pleasant and being awakened can be irritating. The unlikely candidate for gadfly in Narnia is the innocent and warmhearted Lucy Pevensie. In Prince Caspian, Lucy initially is the only member of their group who can see and hear Aslan. She is spiritually awake. Because of her openness to the great lion, she comments that he has grown bigger than she remembers. Aslan tells her that his size has not changed but her growing awareness of him has. For the present, the others are blind to perceiving him and could be considered as spiritually asleep.

“Look! Look! Look!” cried Lucy.
“The Lion,” said Lucy. “Aslan himself. Didn’t you see?” Her face had changed completely and her eyes shone.
“Do you really mean—?” began Peter.
“Where did you think you saw him?” asked Susan.
“Don’t talk like a grown-up,” said Lucy, stamping her foot, “I didn’t think I saw him. I saw him.”
“Where, Lu?” asked Peter.
“Right up there between those mountain ashes. No, this side of the gorge. And up, not down. Just the opposite of the way you want to go. And he wanted us to
go where he was—up there.”

“How do you know that was what he wanted?” asked Edmund.

“He—I—I just know,” said Lucy, “by his face.”

The others all looked at each other in puzzled silence. 8

Lucy will not deny her glimpses of Aslan. Her persistent witness to what she has experienced soon becomes an annoyance to the others. But she remains faithful in reporting his reality for the other children's own benefit.

As illustrated by Susan and Peter, the concept of spiritual slumber is a repeated theme in Scripture. Jesus' parable of the virgins illustrates that a nonresponsive attitude to their expected Lord requires the need to wake them up (Matthew 25:1-13). Likewise, in writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul uses the strong words of rebuke to awaken believers who have become spiritually asleep in a lifestyle of sin. “For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Ephesians 5:12-14).

Growing in the awareness of Christ in our lives is never static. It requires vigilance and being open to evidences of his work in heart and circumstance. Because of this tendency of spiritual lethargy within the Christian heart, other members of the body of Christ may have to awaken us during times of stagnation and spiritual sloth. We are to “stir up” (παροξυσμός—literally, irritate) each other to love and good deeds as we await the Lord’s return (Hebrews 10:24-25). This role of spiritual “gadfly” may be annoying, but is necessary to become awakened.

Liberation from the Cave

Perhaps Plato’s most famous illustration of people enslaved to the superficial world of appearances is his allegory of the cave. It carries with it the idea of people in bondage mistaking illusion for reality. Of this Plato wrote:

Behold! human beings living in an underground den ... Like ourselves ... they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave. 9

The Silver Chair provides a vivid retelling of the reality of eternal ideas that are not bound by the transient nature of the material world. Prince Rilian has been kidnapped and put under a spell in the underground world of the Green Witch. The evil witch promotes a reductionist view of reality in which only those items that can be verified in the underground world are true. She claims that the outer world of Narnia, Aslan, and even the sun are enhanced fairytales made up out of human need. In her persuasive words, we may hear the worldview of the reductionist scientist of our day.
The Witch shook her head. "I see," she said, "... You have seen lamps, and so you imagined a bigger and better lamp and called it the sun. You've seen cats, and now you want a bigger and better cat, and it's to be called a lion. Well, 'tis a pretty make-believe, though, to say truth, it would suit you all better if you were younger. And look how you can put nothing into your make-believe without copying it from the real world of mine, which is the only world. But even you children are too old for such play. As for you, my lord Prince, that art a man full grown, fie upon you! Are you not ashamed of such toys? Come, all of you. Put away these childish tricks. I have work for you all in the real world. There is no Narnia, no Overworld, no sky, no sun, no Aslan. And now, to bed all. And let us begin a wiser life tomorrow. But, first, to bed; to sleep; deep sleep, soft pillows, sleep without foolish dreams."

Despite the one-to-one verification principle drawn to a reductionist extreme, what is said is not spiritually neutral. There is a personal evil at work. The parallel between this Narnian scene and Paul’s view of satanically induced blindness is quite striking. "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Even reductionist philosophies springing from scientific enquiry may have in their origin fallen spiritual beings who deny the Word of God and replace it with alternative views (Genesis 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:1).

Although writing in a pre-Christian culture, Plato understood the seductiveness of error. Plato wisely observed: "Everything that deceives may be said to enchant." Plato believed that erroneous ideas have their own seductive power that can in a way render their believers spellbound.

Certainly, many cases of spiritual blindness are not solely traceable to the enemy of the faith. The unregenerate heart begins with choices that lead further away from the reality of the One true God. It is this progressive self-inflicted blindness that is part of mankind’s turning its back on God (Romans 1:21). Although Plato used the allegory of the cave as an illustration of philosophic awakening, C. S. Lewis used it masterfully to address the naturalistic assumptions that rule out the reality of God.

**Knowledge that Blinds**

A naïve assumption may expect that acquiring knowledge will always bring intellectual light. However, it is possible for individuals to acquire a broad range of information and still keep themselves in a stupor of self-deception. This is often done through suppressing valid information and replacing it with false data. Plato moralizes on this by writing: "False words are not only evil in themselves, but they infect the soul with evil." Plato believed that false words are not only evil in themselves, but they infect the soul with evil.

In an age of epistemological relativism, Platonic thought passes moral judgments on self-deception and finds heinous the tendency to promote these same ideas. Writes Plato: "The partisan, when he is engaged in a dispute, cares nothing about the rights of the question, but is anxious only to convince his hearers of his own assertions."
In *The Magician's Nephew*, the erudite but morally flawed Uncle Andrew has fallen into this error. His pursuit of knowledge is motivated by the quest for power at the expense of truth and integrity. His self-imposed blindness has so affected his perspective that he cannot understand Aslan, the creator of Narnia. When he sees an iron bar grow into a lamp post, Uncle Andrew’s mind fills with ideas of wealth through exploitation of this new world. Yet somehow he knows instinctively that the lion is the only thing standing in his way of this vision of exploitation.

I have discovered a world where everything is bursting with life and growth. Columbus, now, they talk about Columbus. But what was America to this? The commercial possibilities of this country are unbounded. Bring a few old bits of scrap iron here, bury 'em, and up they come as brand new railway engines, battleships, anything you please. They'll cost nothing, and I can sell 'em at full prices in England. I shall be a millionaire. And then the climate! I feel years younger already. I can run it as a health resort. A good sanatorium here might be worth twenty thousand a year. Of course I shall have to let a few people into the secret. The first thing is to get that brute shot.¹⁴

Uncle Andrew’s perception of Aslan is that he is just a lion who is dangerous and must be killed. He seems oblivious to the great lion’s role in the creation of this new world and is unaware of all that could be learned from this mysterious creator.

The orientation of loyal subjects of Aslan in Narnia is rooted in submission to and learning from the great lion. Through Aslan, there is a growing perspective about what is not only true but also morally right. He is the great mentor and guide that leads them into all truth.

With Christ at the center of his quest for knowledge, Lewis understood that the experience of reality and the moral good would grow within the believer. Certainly this echoes the teachings of Paul who spoke of Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Philosophy that does not begin and remain anchored to Christ can mislead and even take one captive. “Beware lest anyone cheat [ὁ συνηχείας τοῦ σ σοφίας, i.e., “to enslave as in spoils of war”] you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Concerning the intellectual and spiritual sight Christ brings, Lewis said: “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.”¹⁵

C. S. Lewis’ Conception of Heaven: Aslan’s Country

Despite his use of select concepts of Plato’s thought to craft the imaginary world of Narnia, Lewis also shows surprising self-restraint in removing Platonic elements that are noncompatible with orthodox Christian faith. The best example of this is found in Lewis’ reflections on heaven illustrated in Aslan’s country.
The Environment

The parallel world in which Aslan resides provides a profound picture of the Christian heaven. Its weather, terrain, and surroundings illustrate this. Aslan’s country is covered with orchards of ripening fruit, majestic forests, the sound of waterfalls and singing birds against a “background of immense silence.” The weather in this marvelous place is characterized by late spring, midsummer-fresh breezes. In mythic symbol, winter often represents lifelessness and death, as spring represents rebirth and new life. The meaning of Christ and spring is explained in a collection of essays by C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*:

> We have the power either of withstanding the spring, and sinking back into the cosmic winter, or of going on into those “high mid-summer [romps]” in which our Leader, the Son of man [sic], already dwells, and to which He is calling us.\textsuperscript{16}

Jesus Christ’s resurrection from death clothed him with a glorified body that uniquely qualifies him to lead the way into his eternal kingdom. In Lewis’ understanding, Christ is experiencing the “spring” of the New Creation far different from what we experience now.

The reason Christ resides in spiritual spring is that after his resurrection, he inaugurated the prototype of the New Creation. In his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis makes a distinction between miracles of the Old Creation (our current space-time physical world) and those of the New Creation (the New Heaven and the New Earth yet to come). In his first advent, when Jesus introduced supernatural energy to alter the laws of physics in our present world, he acted as the Creator to whom current creation responded as Sovereign. But in miracles of the New Creation, though performed in our space-time world, we see a preview of the new order that Christ is preparing for us (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:1).

Of this New Creation, Lewis writes, “The Miracles of ... the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension ... are the true spring, or even the summer, of the world’s new year. The Captain, the forerunner, is already in May or June, though His followers on earth are still living in the frost and east winds of Old Nature.”\textsuperscript{17}

In this aspect of his own theology, Lewis makes a clear break with Plato’s view of the afterlife. Here resurrection is portrayed in contrast to Plato’s belief in reincarnation. Of Plato’s view, Dr. Michael Sudduth writes:

> Plato’s account of post-mortem survival presents disembodied and embodied ... vehicles of survival, but disembodied ... is clearly the highest form of survival ... the immaterial realm of the Forms is the highest form of existence. ... Hence, bodily existence is less perfect than disembodied existence. The goal of life is for the soul permanently to escape the body.\textsuperscript{18}
Rather than escaping the body, the Christian is promised a new indestructible body. Similarly, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Aslan’s coming back to life after his death on the Stone Table has strong implications for other Narnian characters. In *The Silver Chair*, we read of old King Caspian being reunited with his long lost son, Prince Rillian. They have only a short greeting before the elderly king dies. Eustace and Jill are saddened to have witnessed such a bittersweet ending to their mission of liberating Prince Rillian. They are then transported to Aslan’s country where they see the dead body of King Caspian lying in a stream on a golden streambed. Aslan allows a drop of blood to fall from his paw into the flowing water and washes over the body. Caspian is transformed into the radiant young man that he once was.

At first Eustace and Jill are frightened by Caspian’s transformation.

> Eustace made a step towards him with both hands held out, but then drew back with a somewhat startled expression.
> “Look here! I say,” he stammered. “It’s all very well. But aren’t you—? I mean didn’t you—?”
> “Oh, don’t be such an ass,” said Caspian.
> “But,” said Eustace, looking at Aslan. “Hasn’t he – er – died?”
> “Yes,” said the Lion in a very quiet voice, almost (Jill thought) as if he were laughing. “He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are few who haven’t.”
> “Oh” said Caspian, “I see what’s bothering you. You think I’m a ghost, or some nonsense. But don’t you see? I would be that if I appeared in Narnia now; because I don’t belong there any more.”

Then being told Eustace and Jill must go back to Earth, the young prince longs to go with them. His request and Aslan’s response are very revealing.

> “Sir,” said Caspian, “I’ve always wanted to have just one glimpse of their world. Is that wrong?”
> “You cannot want wrong things any more, now that you have died, my son,” said Aslan.

Clearly, the resurrected persons in Narnia have been transformed internally in spirit as well as in body. In this way, C. S. Lewis affirms a redemption that transforms believers into the ultimate “form” (i.e., τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ νεότιον αὐτοῦ) that God has intended from eternity (Romans 8:28-29). Each believer is unique, but all conform to the image of our great Exemplar, Christ. The heavenly body and spirit must match the new heavenly environment yet to come.

### The Geography

The geography of Alsan’s country also provides clues on how Lewis sought to harness Plato’s thoughts for biblical purposes. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy, and Eustace are called from our world to Narnia to help King Caspian.
The crew of the great ship, the *Dawn Treader*, is in search of seven lost lords. Their voyage takes them through many adventures until they reach the edge of Aslan’s country in the Eastern Sea.

As they travel the Great Eastern Ocean, Ramandu’s Island marks “the beginning of the end of the world.” There the boundary is “sweet water” where seawater is replaced by vital and pure water, which in concert with the dazzling sun makes the crew invigorated with little need for sleep. Finally, at the Silver Sea, a wave opens to Aslan’s country and the warrior mouse Reepicheep gets in a boat and eagerly paddles toward this marvelous place he has always longed to see.

Lewis tells us that Aslan’s country is bordered by Narnia, Earth, and the dying world of Charn. Although he allows room for a variety of multiple worlds, he limits his focus to Earth and Narnia in relationship to Aslan’s country. Mountain ranges surround each world and the Silver Sea provides boundaries that separate each world, preserving its identity as a sphere of existence. Aslan’s country is a high mountain with breathtaking beauty, extraordinary height, and mysterious untried opportunities.

Aslan’s country is a destination point. It is not a home to which humans return. This is in contrast to Plato’s idea of the afterlife in which he envisioned the return to a preexistent state. The Christian view of heaven as separate from but related to our current world through Christ is the “now” and “future” of the believer. As a symbol in Narnia, it is a distinct place and is the ultimate destiny for those who have responded to the call of the rightful king Aslan. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Reepicheep seems to illustrate the otherworldly orientation of that life of faith. Although we live in this world, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

Of the “otherness” of heaven, Jesus told his disciples: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

And yet the New Testament also emphasizes a present connection with that world through Christ. In the mind of the apostle Paul, earth and heaven are related spheres of existence but are also distinct. And in Christ, the believer is connected to both through his sovereign work as Lord of both realms. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“In the heavenly places in Christ” (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ) most likely refers to the sphere of heavenly reality into which the believer is placed by virtue of being in union with Christ. In Narnia, subjects relate to Aslan in the present, as loyal subjects who know that he comes and goes as his sovereign will demands. Yet his home country of Aslan’s country is a different place to which they will ultimately go. Their growing relationship with the great king prepares them for some day occupying a new heavenly geography.
The Form, Not the Copy

In the final chronicle, The Last Battle, Lewis’ conception of the Christian heaven becomes explicitly reflective of Platonic thought. Plato believed in the unity of “the form” providing continuity to the “particular” or “copy.” The world of appearances is only a vague shadow of the ultimate reality of eternal ideas.

In The Last Battle, those Narnians and humans who reach Aslan’s country require a time of orientation to familiarize themselves with their new environment. Earlier, Peter had been told by the great lion that he could not come back to Narnia where their adventures together first began. Now Peter is surprised he has been allowed to return to Narnia, and it takes Digory’s explanation for him to understand why.

“Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan’s real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia though the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.”

His voice stirred everyone like a trumpet as he spoke these words: but when he added under his breath, “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato, bless me, what do they teach them at these schools?” the older ones laughed.21

This explicit reference to Plato clearly supports Lewis’ sympathies with the idea of “form” and “copy” being compatible with Scripture. But does the inspired canon itself ever use similar terms?

Certainly the author of the epistle to the Hebrews uses thought forms that reflect some kind of Platonic orientation. In this inspired book, we are told that the law, the tabernacle, the Jewish ritual, and the high priest are mere “shadows” (Σκιάς) of the real heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ. What the historic Christ did is the real “image” (εἰκόνα) of redemption. Only in this reality can our salvation become complete (τελειωσάω). “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Hebrews 10:1).

Of this passage, the IVP Bible Background Commentary remarks: “Without adopting a thoroughgoing Platonic worldview, the writer of Hebrews agrees that the earthly tabernacle, at least, is a shadow of the heavenly one.”22

A concession to Platonic thought within the epistle in no way threatens the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration. For just as the Holy Spirit chose to inspire the use of koine Greek words, so he had the freedom to select seemingly secular ideas to be included in Scripture because they reflected divinely revealed truth in Christ.
That is why C. S. Lewis found the indestructible, objective moral universe that Plato postulated to be so compatible with his own Christian worldview. In a similar vein, the conformity of each individual believer to the image of Christ (εἰκόνας) seems to resonate with the idea of copy and form (Romans 8:28-29).

The Culture

One of the most fascinating aspects of Lewis' conception of the afterlife in Narnia is the survival of the good aspects of human culture. In The Last Battle, we see the children's response to the real Narnia after the copy had just been destroyed.

About half an hour later – or it might have been half a hundred years later, for time there is not like time here – Lucy stood with her dear friend, her oldest Narnian friend, the Faun Tumnus, looking down over the wall of that garden, and seeing all Narnia spread out below. But when you looked down you found that this hill was much higher than you had thought: it sank down with shining cliffs, thousands of feet below them and trees in that lower world looked no bigger than grains of green salt. Then she turned inward again and stood with her back to the wall and looked at the garden.

"I see," she said at last, thoughtfully. "I see now. ... It is far bigger inside than it was outside."

"Of course, Daughter of Eve," said the Faun. "The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside."

Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden at all, but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all.

"I see," she said. "This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below ... I see ... world within world, Narnia within Narnia..."

"Yes," said Mr. Tumnus, "like an onion: except that as you go in and in, each circle is larger than the last."23

Lewis' statements "further up and further in" and "The inside is larger than the outside" are intriguing. They seem to describe what a finite being might experience in the presence of an almighty creator. Entering into the depth of God's holy love is like someone diving into the sea and never being able to touch bottom. It may well be that the eternal state will be the experience of being self-actualized into the greater reality of God's character and realm. In this environment, to grow in appreciation is to never find limits except those of the holy love that guides the way.

But, in the afterlife, will we take our personal cultures and life experiences with us? Certainly, Plato believed this: "The soul takes nothing with her to the other world but her education and culture; and these, it is said, are of the greatest service or of the greatest injury to the dead man, at the very beginning of his journey thither."24

Lewis expresses this same idea at the end of the temporal world of Narnia. He explains why all the good things contained in culture survive in Aslan's country.
“Why!” exclaimed Peter. “It’s England. And that’s the house itself—Professor Kirke’s old home in the country where all our adventures began!”
“I thought that house had been destroyed,” said Edmund.
“So it was,” said the Faun. “But you are now looking at the England within England, the real England just as this is the real Narnia. And in that inner England no good thing is destroyed.”

With the limited amount of biblical information we have about what heaven will really be like, Lewis indulges in speculation about human culture. We often think that what constitutes a human being may be understood in body, intellect, and emotion. But often the culture that has conditioned this person is left out.

One hint of the survival of human culture comes in the songs of praise from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. It seems to imply that what makes believers ethnically distinct will survive in the eternal state.

And they sang a new song, saying:
“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Human beings are connected by tribe (φυλή), language (γλώσσα), people groups (λαός), and nations (νόμος). In this picture of redeemed humanity, we find all of these distinctions that make up culture present in those who respond in heavenly praise to their redeemer.

**Conclusion**

Earlier we asked why Lewis would include Platonic ideas in the retelling of the story of Christ in mythic form. The answer lies in their shared belief in objective and indestructible realities. Both C. S. Lewis and Plato believed in an unchanging world of ideas that included imperishable, objective, ethical standards. Likewise they concluded that this current transient world is only a shadow of a more real world that lies beyond.

Christian believers stand between two worlds. The temporal is where they must live, but their eternal home is their ultimate reality. In all this, perspective is everything. “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

At the end of the last chronicle of Narnia, we hear the great lion say:
"The [school] term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.

And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth as read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better that the one before."
Notes


2 I am indebted to Paul F. Ford’s insightful book, *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). In it I received a preliminary introduction to Platonic thought in Narnia. I highly recommend reading it for many other fruitful insights into C. S. Lewis’s marvelous world of fantasy.

3 David C. Downing, *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*, p. 34.


7 James A. Colaiaco, *Socrates Against Athens*, http://books.google.com/books?id=8bzssb0f5REC&pg=PA148&lpg=PA148&dq=i+am+that+gadfly+which+god+socrates&source=web&ots=gvHWl0Zh31&sig=k4Yw0BAwUh56Z-NH8s4aJp5xw


11 Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, Ib. 413–C, p. 84.

12 Ibid., Ib. 91.

13 Ibid.


15 “Quote DB,” http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/17


20 Ibid., p. 662.

21 Ibid., *The Last Battle*, p. 759.

22 The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Logos Software.

23 Ibid., *The Last Battle*, p. 765.


26 Ibid., p. 767.
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