

C. S. LEWIS

*The Discarded
Image*

AN INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL
AND RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

Cambridge University Press

CHAPTER V

THE HEAVENS

Man, walke at large out of thi prisoun.

HOCCLEVE

A. THE PARTS OF THE UNIVERSE

The fundamental concept of modern science is, or was till very recently, that of natural 'laws', and every event was described as happening in 'obedience' to them. In medieval science the fundamental concept was that of certain sympathies, antipathies, and strivings inherent in matter itself. Everything has its right place, its home, the region that suits it, and, if not forcibly restrained, moves thither by a sort of homing instinct:¹

Every kindly thing that is
Hath a kindly stede ther he
May best in hit conserved be;
Unto which place every thing
Through his kindly enclyning
Moveth for to come to.

(Chaucer, *Hous of Fame*, II, 730 sq.)

Thus, while every falling body for us illustrates the 'law' of gravitation, for them it illustrated the 'kindly enclyning' of terrestrial bodies to their 'kindly stede' the Earth, the centre of the Mundus, for

To that centre drawe
Desireth every worldes thing.

(Gower, *Confessio*, VII, 234.)

¹ Cf. Dante, *Par.* I, 109 sq.

Such was the normal language in the Middle Ages, and later. 'The see desyreth naturely to folwen' the Moon, says Chaucer (*Franklin's Tale*, F 1052). 'The iron', says Bacon, 'in particular sympathy moveth to the lodestone' (*Advancement*).¹

The question at once arises whether medieval thinkers really believed that what we now call inanimate objects were sentient and purposive. The answer in general is undoubtedly no. I say 'in general', because they attributed life and even intelligence to one privileged class of objects (the stars) which we hold to be inorganic. But full-blown Panpsychism, the doctrine of universal sentience, was not (to the best of my knowledge) held by anyone before Campanella (1568-1639), and never made many converts. On the common medieval view there were four grades of terrestrial reality: mere existence (as in stones), existence with growth (as in vegetables), existence and growth with sensation (as in beasts), and all these with reason (as in men).² Stones, by definition, could not literally strive or desire.

If we could ask the medieval scientist 'Why, then, do you talk as if they did,' he might (for he was always a dialectician) retort with the counter-question, 'But do you intend your language about *laws* and *obedience* any more literally than I intend mine about *kindly enclynyng*? Do you really believe that a falling stone is aware of a directive issued to it by some legislator and feels either a moral or a prudential obligation to conform?' We should

¹ Everyman edn., p. 156.

² Gregory, *Moralia*, vi, 16; Gower, *Confessio*, Prol. 945 sq.

The Discarded Image

then have to admit that both ways of expressing the facts are metaphorical. The odd thing is that ours is the more anthropomorphic of the two. To talk as if inanimate bodies had a homing instinct is to bring them no nearer to us than the pigeons; to talk as if they could 'obey laws' is to treat them like men and even like citizens.

But though neither statement can be taken literally, it does not follow that it makes no difference which is used. On the imaginative and emotional level it makes a great difference whether, with the medievals, we project upon the universe our strivings and desires, or with the moderns, our police-system and our traffic regulations. The old language continually suggests a sort of continuity between merely physical events and our most spiritual aspirations. If (in whatever sense) the soul comes from heaven, our appetite for beatitude is itself an instance of 'kindly enclynyn' for the 'kindly stede'. Hence in *The King's Quair* (st. 173)

O wery gost ay flickering to and fro
That never art in quiet nor in rest
Til thou com to that place that thou cam fro
Which is thy first and very proper nest.¹

The ultimately sympathetic and antipathetic properties in matter are the Four Contraries. Chaucer in one place enumerates six: 'hoot, cold, hevvy, light, moist, and dreye' (*Parlement*, 379). But the usual list gives four: 'hot, cold,

¹ The passage in Chaucer's *Troilus*, iv, 302, is not, in the simplest sense, the 'source' of this. Chaucer had twisted the idea into an erotic conceit, but King James untwists Chaucer back into complete seriousness. Both poets knew clearly what they were doing.

moist and dry', as in *Paradise Lost*, II, 898. We meet them in Milton's Chaos thus raw because Chaos is not the universe but only its raw material. In the Mundus which God built out of that raw material we find them only in combination. They combine to form the four elements. The union of hot and dry becomes fire; that of hot and moist, air; of cold and moist, water; of cold and dry, earth. (In the human body they combine with a different result, as we shall see later.)¹ There is also a Fifth Element or Quintessence, the aether; but that is found only above the Moon and we mortals have no experience of it.

In the sublunary world—Nature in the strict sense—the four elements have all sorted themselves out into their 'kindly stedes'. Earth, the heaviest, has gathered itself together at the centre. On it lies the lighter water; above that, the still lighter air. Fire, the lightest of all, whenever it was free, has flown up to the circumference of Nature and forms a sphere just below the orbit of the Moon. Hence Spenser's Titaness in her ascent passes first 'the region of the ayre', then 'the fire', before reaching 'the circle of the Moone' (*F.Q.* VII, vi, 7, 8), and in Donne the soul of Elizabeth Drury is travelling from air to Moon so quickly that she does not know whether she went through the sphere of fire or not (*Second Anniversary*, 191-4). When Don Quixote and Sancho believed they had reached this stage in their imaginary ascent, the knight was very afraid they would be burnt (II, xli). The reason why flames always move upward is that the fire in them is seeking its 'kindly stede'. But flames are impure fire, and

¹ See below, p. 170.

The Discarded Image

it is only their impurity that makes them visible. The 'elemental fire' which forms a sphere just below the Moon is pure, unadulterated fire; hence invisible and completely transparent. It was this 'element of fire' that was 'quite put out' by 'new Philosophy'. That was part of Donne's reason for making Elizabeth Drury pass too quickly to solve the vexed question.

The architecture of the Ptolemaic universe is now so generally known that I will deal with it as briefly as possible. The central (and spherical) Earth is surrounded by a series of hollow and transparent globes, one above the other, and each of course larger than the one below. These are the 'spheres', 'heavens', or (sometimes) 'elements'. Fixed in each of the first seven spheres is one luminous body. Starting from Earth, the order is the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; the 'seven planets'. Beyond the sphere of Saturn is the *Stellatum*, to which belong all those stars that we still call 'fixed' because their positions relative to one another are, unlike those of the planets, invariable. Beyond the *Stellatum* there is a sphere called the First Movable or *Primum Mobile*. This, since it carries no luminous body, gives no evidence of itself to our senses; its existence was inferred to account for the motions of all the others.

And beyond the *Primum Mobile* what? The answer to this unavoidable question had been given, in its first form, by Aristotle. 'Outside the heaven there is neither place nor void nor time. Hence whatever is there is of such a kind as not to occupy space, nor does time affect

it.’¹ The timidity, the hushed voice, is characteristic of the best Paganism. Adopted into Christianity, the doctrine speaks loud and jubilant. What is in one sense ‘outside the heaven’ is now, in another sense, ‘the very Heaven’, *caelum ipsum*, and full of God, as Bernardus says.² So when Dante passes that last frontier he is told, ‘We have got outside the largest corporeal thing (*del maggior corpo*) into that Heaven which is pure light, intellectual light, full of love’ (*Paradiso*, xxx, 38). In other words, as we shall see more clearly later on, at this frontier the whole spatial way of thinking breaks down. There can be, in the ordinary spatial sense, no ‘end’ to a three-dimensional space. The end of space is the end of spatiality. The light beyond the material universe is intellectual light.

The dimensions of the medieval universe are not, even now, so generally realised as its structure; within my own lifetime a distinguished scientist has helped to disseminate error.³ The reader of this book will already know that Earth was, by cosmic standards, a point—it had no appreciable magnitude. The stars, as the *Somnium Scipionis* had taught, were larger than it. Isidore in the sixth century knows that the Sun is larger, and the Moon smaller than the Earth (*Etymologies*, III, xlvii–xlvi), Maimonides in the twelfth maintains that every star is ninety times as big, Roger Bacon in the thirteenth simply that the least star is ‘bigger’ than she.⁴ As to estimates of distance, we are fortunate in having the testimony of a thoroughly

¹ *De Caelo*, 279^a. ² *De Mundi Universitate*, II Pros. vii, p. 48.

³ J. B. S. Haldane, *Possible Worlds* (1930), p. 7.

⁴ Lovejoy, *op. cit.* p. 100.

The Discarded Image

popular work, the *South English Legendary*: better evidence than any learned production could be for the Model as it existed in the imagination of ordinary people. We are there told that if a man could travel upwards at the rate of 'forty mile and yet som del mo' a day, he still would not have reached the *Stellatum* ('the highest heven that ye alday seeth') in 8000 years.¹

These facts are in themselves curiosities of mediocre interest. They become valuable only in so far as they enable us to enter more fully into the consciousness of our ancestors by realising how such a universe must have affected those who believed in it. The recipe for such realisation is not the study of books. You must go out on a starry night and walk about for half an hour trying to see the sky in terms of the old cosmology. Remember that you now have an absolute Up and Down. The Earth is really the centre, really the lowest place; movement to it from whatever direction is downward movement. As a modern, you located the stars at a great distance. For distance you must now substitute that very special, and far less abstract, sort of distance which we call height; height, which speaks immediately to our muscles and nerves. The Medieval Model is vertiginous. And the fact that the height of the stars in the medieval astronomy is very small compared with their distance in the modern, will turn out not to have the kind of importance you anticipated. For thought and imagination, ten million miles and a thousand million are much the same. Both can be conceived (that is, we can do sums with both) and neither

¹ Ed. C. d'Evelyn, A. J. Mill (E.E.T.S., 1956), vol. II, p. 418.

can be imagined; and the more imagination we have the better we shall know this. The really important difference is that the medieval universe, while unimaginably large, was also unambiguously finite. And one unexpected result of this is to make the smallness of Earth more vividly felt. In our universe she is small, no doubt; but so are the galaxies, so is everything—and so what? But in theirs there was an absolute standard of comparison. The furthest sphere, Dante's *maggior corpo* is, quite simply and finally, the largest object in existence. The word 'small' as applied to Earth thus takes on a far more absolute significance. Again, because the medieval universe is finite, it has a shape, the perfect spherical shape, containing within itself an ordered variety. Hence to look out on the night sky with modern eyes is like looking out over a sea that fades away into mist, or looking about one in a trackless forest—trees forever and no horizon. To look up at the towering medieval universe is much more like looking at a great building. The 'space' of modern astronomy may arouse terror, or bewilderment or vague reverie; the spheres of the old present us with an object in which the mind can rest, overwhelming in its greatness but satisfying in its harmony. That is the sense in which our universe is romantic, and theirs was classical.

This explains why all sense of the pathless, the baffling, and the utterly alien—all agoraphobia—is so markedly absent from medieval poetry when it leads us, as so often, into the sky. Dante, whose theme might have been expected to invite it, never strikes that note. The meanest modern writer of science-fiction can, in that department,

The Discarded Image

do more for you than he. Pascal's terror at *le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis* never entered his mind. He is like a man being conducted through an immense cathedral, not like one lost in a shoreless sea. The modern feeling, I suspect, first appears in Bruno. With Milton it enters English poetry, when he sees the Moon 'riding'

Like one that had bin led astray
Through the Heav'ns wide pathless way.

Later, in *Paradise Lost*, he invented a most ingenious device for retaining the old glories of the builded and finite universe yet also expressing the new consciousness of space. He enclosed his cosmos in a spherical envelope within which all could be light and order, and hung it from the floor of Heaven. Outside that he had Chaos, the 'infinite Abyss' (II, 405), the 'unessential Night' (438), where 'length, breadth and highth And time and place are lost' (891-2). He is perhaps the first writer to use the noun *space* in its fully modern sense—'space may produce new worlds' (I, 650).

It must, however, be admitted that while the moral and emotional consequences of the cosmic dimensions were emphasised, the visual consequences were sometimes ignored. Dante in the *Paradiso* (xxvii, 81-3) looks down from the sphere of the Fixed Stars and sees the northern hemisphere extended from Cadiz to Asia. But according to the Model the whole Earth could hardly be visible from that altitude, and to talk of seeing any markings on its surface is ridiculous. Chaucer in the *Hous of Fame* is lower by unimaginable distances than Dante, for he is

still below the Moon in the air. But even so, it is extremely unlikely that he could have made out ships and even, though *unethes* (with difficulty), 'bestes' (II, 846-903).

The impossibility, under the supposed conditions, of such visual experiences is obvious to us because we have grown up from childhood under the influence of pictures that aimed at the maximum of illusion and strictly observed the laws of perspective. We are mistaken if we suppose that mere commonsense, without any such training, will enable men to see an imaginary scene, or even to see the world they are living in, as we all see it today.¹ Medieval art was deficient in perspective, and poetry followed suit. Nature, for Chaucer, is all foreground; we never get a landscape. And neither poets nor artists were much interested in the strict illusionism of later periods. The relative size of objects in the visible arts is determined more by the emphasis the artist wishes to lay upon them than by their sizes in the real world or by their distance. Whatever details we are meant to see will be shown whether they would really be visible or not. I believe Dante would have been quite capable of knowing that he could not have seen Asia and Cadiz from the *stellatum* and nevertheless putting them in. Centuries later Milton makes Raphael look down from the gate of Heaven, that is, from a point outside the whole sidereal universe—'distance inexpressible By Numbers that have name' (VIII, 113)—and see not only Earth, not only continents on Earth, not only Eden, but cedar trees (V, 257-61).

Of the medieval and even the Elizabethan imagination

¹ See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1960).

The Discarded Image

in general (though not, as it happens, of Dante's) we may say that in dealing with even foreground objects, it is vivid as regards colour and action, but seldom works consistently to scale. We meet giants and dwarfs, but we never really discover their exact size. *Gulliver* was a great novelty.¹

B. THEIR OPERATIONS

So far our picture of the universe is static; we must now set it in motion.

All power, movement, and efficacy descend from God to the *Primum Mobile* and cause it to rotate; the exact kind of causality involved will be considered later. The rotation of the *Primum Mobile* causes that of the *Stellatum*, which causes that of the sphere of Saturn, and so on, down to the last moving sphere, that of the Moon. But there is a further complexity. The *Primum Mobile* revolves from east to west, completing its circle every twenty-four hours. The lower spheres have (by 'kindly enclyning') a far slower revolution from west to east, which takes 36,000 years to complete. But the daily impulse of the *Primum Mobile* forces them daily back, as with its wash or current, so that their actual movement is westward but at a speed retarded by their struggle to move in the opposite direction. Hence Chaucer's apostrophe:

O firste moeving cruel firmament
With thy diurnal sweigh that crowdest ay
And hurlest al from Est til Occident
That naturelly wolde holde another way.

(*Canterbury Tales*, B 295 sq.)

¹ See below, pp. 113-16.

The reader will no doubt understand that this was no arbitrary fancy, but just such another 'tool' as the hypothesis of Copernicus; an intellectual construction devised to accommodate the phenomena observed. We have recently been reminded¹ how much mathematics, and how good, went to the building of the Model.

Besides movement, the spheres transmit (to the Earth) what are called Influences—the subject-matter of Astrology. Astrology is not specifically medieval. The Middle Ages inherited it from antiquity and bequeathed it to the Renaissance. The statement that the medieval Church frowned upon this discipline is often taken in a sense that makes it untrue. Orthodox theologians could accept the theory that the planets had an effect on events and on psychology, and, much more, on plants and minerals. It was not against this that the Church fought. She fought against three of its offshoots.

(1) Against the lucrative, and politically undesirable, practice of astrologically grounded predictions.

(2) Against astrological determinism. The doctrine of influences could be carried so far as to exclude free will. Against this determinism, as in later ages against other forms of determinism, theology had to make a defence. Aquinas treats the question very clearly.² On the physical side the influence of the spheres is unquestioned. Celestial bodies affect terrestrial bodies, including those of men. And by affecting our bodies they can, but need not, affect our reason and our will. They can, because our

¹ By A. Pannecock, *History of Astronomy* (1961).

² *Summa*, I^a, CXV, Art. 4.

The Discarded Image

higher faculties certainly receive something (*accipiunt*) from our lower. They need not, because any alteration of our imaginative power¹ produced in this way generates, not a necessity, but only a propensity, to act thus or thus. The propensity can be resisted; hence the wise man will over-rule the stars. But more often it will not be resisted, for most men are not wise; hence, like actuarial predictions, astrological predictions about the behaviour of large masses of men will often be verified.

(3) Against practices that might seem to imply or encourage the worship of planets—they had, after all, been the hardest of all the Pagan gods. Albertus Magnus gives rulings about the lawful and unlawful use of planetary images in agriculture. The burial in your field of a plate inscribed with the character or hieroglyph of a planet is permissible; to use with it invocations or ‘suffumigations’ is not (*Speculum Astronomiae*, x).

Despite this careful watch against planetolatry the planets continued to be called by their divine names, and their representations in art and poetry are all derived from the Pagan poets—not, till later, from Pagan sculptors. The results are sometimes comic. The ancients had described Mars fully armed and in his chariot; medieval artists, translating this image into contemporary terms, accordingly depict him as a knight in plate armour seated in a farm-wagon²—which may have suggested the story in Chrétien’s *Lancelot*. Modern readers sometimes

¹ Cf. Dante, *Purg.* xvii, 13–17.

² See J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. B. F. Sessions (New York, 1953), p. 191.

discuss whether, when Jupiter or Venus is mentioned by a medieval poet, he means the planet or the deity. It is doubtful whether the question usually admits of an answer. Certainly we must never assume without special evidence that such personages are in Gower or Chaucer the merely mythological figures they are in Shelley or Keats. They are planets as well as gods. Not that the Christian poet believed in the god because he believed in the planet; but all three things—the visible planet in the sky, the source of influence, and the god—generally acted as a unity upon his mind. I have not found evidence that theologians were at all disquieted by this state of affairs.

Readers who already know the characters of the seven planets can skip the following list:

Saturn. In the earth his influence produces lead; in men, the melancholy complexion; in history, disastrous events. In Dante his sphere is the Heaven of contemplatives. He is connected with sickness and old age. Our traditional picture of Father Time with the scythe is derived from earlier pictures of Saturn. A good account of his activities in promoting fatal accidents, pestilence, treacheries, and ill luck in general, occurs in *The Knight's Tale* (A 2463 sq.). He is the most terrible of the seven and is sometimes called The Greater Infortune, *Infortuna Major*.

Jupiter, the King, produces in the earth, rather disappointingly, tin; this shining metal said different things to the imagination before the canning industry came in. The character he produces in men would now be very imperfectly expressed by the word 'jovial', and is not very easy to grasp; it is no longer, like the saturnine

The Discarded Image

character, one of our archetypes. We may say it is *Kingly*; but we must think of a King at peace, enthroned, taking his leisure, serene. The Jovial character is cheerful, festive yet temperate, tranquil, magnanimous. When this planet dominates we may expect halcyon days and prosperity. In Dante wise and just princes go to his sphere when they die. He is the best planet, and is called The Greater Fortune, *Fortuna Major*.

Mars makes iron. He gives men the martial temperament, 'sturdy hardiness', as the Wife of Bath calls it (D 612). But he is a bad planet, *Infortuna Minor*. He causes wars. His sphere, in Dante, is the Heaven of martyrs; partly for the obvious reason but partly, I suspect, because of a mistaken philological connection between *martyr* and *Martem*.

Sol is the point at which the concordat between the mythical and the astrological nearly breaks down. Mythically, Jupiter is the King, but Sol produces the noblest metal, gold, and is the eye and mind of the whole universe. He makes men wise and liberal and his sphere is the Heaven of theologians and philosophers. Though he is no more metallurgical than any other planet his metallurgical operations are more often mentioned than theirs. We read in Donne's *Allophanes and Idios* how soils which the Sun could make into gold may lie too far from the surface for his beams to take effect (61). Spenser's Mammon brings his hoard out to 'sun' it. If it were already gold, he would have no motive for doing this. It is still hore (grey); he suns it that it may become gold.¹ Sol produces fortunate events.

¹ F.Q., versicle to II, vii.

The Heavens

In beneficence Venus stands second only to Jupiter; she is *Fortuna Minor*. Her metal is copper. The connection is not clear till we observe that Cyprus was once famed for its copper mines; that copper is *cyprium*, the Cyprian metal; and that Venus, or Aphrodite, especially worshipped in that island, was Κύπρις, the Lady of Cyprus. In mortals she produces beauty and amorousness; in history, fortunate events. Dante makes her sphere the Heaven not, as we might expect from a more obvious poet, of the charitable, but of those, now penitent, who in this life loved greatly and lawlessly. Here he meets Cunizza, four times a wife and twice a mistress, and Rahab the harlot (*Paradiso*, ix). They are in swift, incessant flight (viii, 19-27)—a likeness in unlikeness to the impenitent and storm-borne lovers of *Inferno*, v.

Mercury produces quicksilver. Dante gives his sphere to beneficent men of action. Isidore, on the other hand, says this planet is called Mercurius because he is the patron of profit (*mercibus praeest*).¹ Gower says that the man born under Mercury will be 'studious' and 'in writinge curious',

bot yit with somdel besinesse
his hert is set upon richesse.

(*Confessio*, vii, 765.)

The Wife of Bath associates him especially with clerks (D 706). In Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis*² he is the bridegroom of Philologia—who is Learning or even Literature rather than what we call 'philology'. And I am

¹ See Augustine, *De Civitate*, vii, xiv.

² *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. F. Eyssenhardt (Lipsiae, 1866).

The Discarded Image

pretty sure that 'the Words of Mercury' contrasted with 'the Songs of Apollo' at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* are 'picked', or rhetorical prose. It is difficult to see the unity in all these characteristics. 'Skilled eagerness' or 'bright alacrity' is the best I can do. But it is better just to take some real mercury in a saucer and play with it for a few minutes. *That* is what 'Mercurial' means.

At Luna we cross in our descent the great frontier which I have so often had to mention; from aether to air, from 'heaven' to 'nature', from the realm of gods (or angels) to that of daemons, from the realm of necessity to that of contingency, from the incorruptible to the corruptible. Unless this 'great divide' is firmly fixed in our minds, every passage in Donne or Drayton or whom you will that mentions 'translunary' and 'sublunary' will lose its intended force. We shall take 'under the moon' as a vague synonym, like our 'under the sun', for 'everywhere', when in reality it is used with precision. When Gower says

We that dwelle under the Mone
Stand in this world upon a weer

(*Confessio*, Prol. 142)

he means exactly what he says. If we lived above the Moon we should not suffer *weer* (doubt, uncertainty). When Chaucer's Nature says

Ech thing in my cure is
Under the Moone that mai wane and waxe

(*Canterbury Tales*, C 22)

she is distinguishing her mutable realm from the translunary world where nothing grows or decreases. When

Chaucer says 'Fortune may non angel dere' in the *Monk's Tale* (B 3191) he is remembering that angels inhabit the aetherial realm where there is no contingency and therefore no luck, whether good or bad.

Her metal is silver. In men she produces wandering, and that in two senses. She may make them travellers so that, as Gower says, the man born under Luna will 'seche manye londes strange' (VII, 747). In this respect the English and the Germans are much under her influence (*ibid.* 751-4). But she may also produce 'wandering' of the wits, especially that periodical insanity which was first meant by the word *lunacy*, in which the patient, as Langland says (C x, 107), is 'mad as the mone sit, more other lasse'. These are the 'dangerous, unsafe lunes' of the *Winter's Tale* (II, ii, 30); whence (and on other grounds) *lunes* in *Hamlet* (III, iii, 7) is an almost certain emendation for Quarto's meaningless *browes* and Folio's unmetrical *lunacies*. Dante assigns the Moon's sphere to those who have entered the conventual life and abandoned it for some good or pardonable reason.

It will be noticed that while we find no difficulty in grasping the character of Saturn or Venus, Jove and Mercury almost evaded us. The truth which emerges from this is that the planetary characters need to be seized in an intuition rather than built up out of concepts; we need to know them, not to know about them, *connaître* not *savoir*. Sometimes the old intuitions survive; when they do not, we falter. Changes of outlook, which have left almost intact, and almost one, the character of Venus, have almost annihilated Jupiter.

The Discarded Image

In accordance with the principle of devolution or mediation the influences do not work upon us directly, but by first modifying the air. As Donne says in *The Extasie*, 'On man heaven's influence works not so But that it first imprints the air'. A pestilence is caused originally by malefical conjunctions of planets, as when

Kinde herde tho Conscience and cam out of the planetes
And sente forth his forayers, fevers and fluxes.

(*Piers Plowman*, c. xxiii, 80.)

But the bad influence operates by being literally 'in the air'. Hence when a medieval doctor could give no more particular cause for the patient's condition he attributed it to 'this influence which is at present in the air'. If he were an Italian doctor he would doubtless say *questa influenza*. The profession has retained the useful word ever since.

It is always necessary to remember that *constellation* in medieval language seldom means, as with us, a permanent pattern of stars. It usually means a temporary state of their relative positions. The artist who had made the brazen horse in the *Squire's Tale* 'wayted many a constelacioun' (F 129). We should translate 'looked out for many a conjunction'.

The word *influence* in its modern sense—the sense in which this study has so often forced me to use it—is as grey an abstraction as the whole range of our language affords. We must take great care not to read this, the word's withered senility, back into its use by older poets where it is still a fully conscious metaphor from astrology. The ladies in *L'Allegro* (121) 'whose bright eyes Rain

influence' are being compared with the planets. When Adam says to Eve

I from the influence of thy lookes receive
Access in every vertue. (*Paradise Lost*, IX, 309)

he is saying far more than a modern reader might suppose. He is making himself an Earth, and her a Jove or Venus.

Two traits remain to be added to our picture.

Nothing is more deeply impressed on the cosmic imaginings of a modern than the idea that the heavenly bodies move in a pitch-black and dead-cold vacuity. It was not so in the Medieval Model. Already in our passage from Lucan¹ we have seen that (on the most probable interpretation) the ascending spirit passes into a region compared with which our terrestrial day is only a sort of night; and nowhere in medieval literature have I found any suggestion that, if we could enter the translunary world, we should find ourselves in an abyss of darkness. For their system is in one sense more heliocentric than ours. The sun illuminates the whole universe. All the stars, says Isidore (III, lxi) are said to have no light of their own but, like the Moon, to be illuminated by Sol. Dante in the *Convivio* agrees (II, xiii, 15). And as they had, I think, no conception of the part which the air plays in turning physical light into the circumambient colour-realm that we call Day, we must picture all the countless cubic miles within the vast concavity as illuminated. Night is merely the conical shadow cast by our Earth. It extends, according to Dante (*Paradiso*, IX, 118) as far as to the

¹ See above, p. 33. Cf. also Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* II, vii.

The Discarded Image

sphere of Venus. Since the Sun moves and the Earth is stationary, we must picture this long, black finger perpetually revolving like the hand of a clock; that is why Milton calls it 'the circling canopie of Night's extended shade' (*Paradise Lost*, III, 556). Beyond that there is no night; only 'happie climes that lie where day never shuts his eye' (*Comus*, 978). When we look up at the night sky we are looking through darkness but not at darkness.

And secondly, as that vast (though finite) space is not dark, so neither is it silent. If our ears were opened we should perceive, as Henryson puts it,

every planet in his proper sphere
In moving makand harmony and sound
(*Fables*, 1659)

as Dante heard it (*Paradiso*, I, 78) and Troilus (v, 1812).

If the reader cares to repeat the experiment, already suggested, of a nocturnal walk with the medieval astronomy in mind, he will easily feel the effect of these two last details. The 'silence' which frightened Pascal was, according to the Model, wholly illusory; and the sky looks black only because we are seeing it through the dark glass of our own shadow. You must conceive yourself looking up at a world lighted, warmed, and resonant with music.

Much could still be added. But I omit the Signs, the Epicycles, and the Ecliptic. They contribute less to the emotional effect (which is my chief concern) and can hardly be made intelligible without diagrams.

C. THEIR INHABITANTS

God, we have said, causes the *Primum Mobile* to rotate. A modern Theist would hardly raise the question 'How?' But the question had been both raised and answered long before the Middle Ages, and the answer was incorporated in the Medieval Model. It was obvious to Aristotle that most things which move do so because some other moving object impels them. A hand, itself in motion, moves a sword; a wind, itself in motion, moves a ship. But it was also fundamental to his thought that no infinite series can be actual. We cannot therefore go on explaining one movement by another *ad infinitum*. There must in the last resort be something which, motionless itself, initiates the motion of all other things. Such a Prime Mover he finds in the wholly transcendent and immaterial God who 'occupies no place and is not affected by time'.¹ But we must not imagine Him moving things by any positive action, for that would be to attribute some kind of motion to Himself and we should then not have reached an utterly unmoving Mover. How then does He move things? Aristotle answers, κινεῖ ὡς ἐρώμενον, 'He moves as beloved'.² He moves other things, that is, as an object of desire moves those who desire it. The *Primum Mobile* is moved by its love for God, and, being moved, communicates motion to the rest of the universe.

It would be easy to descant on the antithesis between this Theology and that which is characteristic of Judaism (at its best) and Christianity. Both can speak about the

¹ See above, p. 96.

² *Metaphysics*, 1072^b.

The Discarded Image

'love of God'. But in the one this means the thirsty and aspiring love of creatures for Him; in the other, His provident and descending love for them. The antithesis should not, however, be regarded as a contradiction. A real universe could accommodate the 'love of God' in both senses. Aristotle describes the natural order, which is perpetually exhibited in the uncorrupted and translunary world. St John ('herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us')¹ describes the order of Grace which comes into play here on earth because men have fallen. It will be noticed that when Dante ends the *Comedy* with 'the love that moves the Sun and the other stars', he is speaking of love in the Aristotelian sense.

But, while there is no contradiction, the antithesis fully explains why the Model is so little in evidence among spiritual writers and why the whole atmosphere of their work is so different from that of Jean de Meung or even Dante himself. Spiritual books are wholly practical in purpose, addressed to those who ask direction. Only the order of Grace is relevant.

Granted that the spheres are moved by love for God, a modern may still ask why this movement should take the form of rotation. To any ancient or medieval mind I believe the answer would have been obvious. Love seeks to participate in its object, to become as like its object as it can. But finite and created beings can never fully share the motionless ubiquity of God, just as time, however it multiplies its transitory presents, can never achieve the *totum simul* of eternity. The nearest approach to the

¹ I John iv. 10.

divine and perfect ubiquity that the spheres can attain is the swiftest and most regular possible movement, in the most perfect form, which is circular. Each sphere attains it in a less degree than the sphere above it, and therefore has a slower pace.

This all implies that each sphere, or something resident in each sphere, is a conscious and intellectual being, moved by 'intellectual love' of God. And so it is. These lofty creatures are called Intelligences. The relation between the Intelligence of a sphere and the sphere itself as a physical object was variously conceived. The older view was that the Intelligence is 'in' the sphere as the soul is 'in' the body, so that the planets are, as Plato would have agreed, ζῷα—celestial animals, animate bodies or incarnate minds. Hence Donne, speaking of our own bodies, can say 'We are The intelligences,¹ they the spheare'. Later, the Scholastics thought differently. 'We confess with the sacred writers', says Albertus Magnus,² 'that the heavens have not souls and are not animals if the word *soul* is taken in its strict sense. But if we wish to bring the scientists (*philosophos*) into agreement with the sacred writers, we can say that there are certain Intelligences in the spheres. . . and they are called the souls of the spheres. . . but they are not related to the spheres in that mode which justifies us in calling the (human) soul the entelechy of the body. We have spoken according to the scientists, who contradict the sacred writers only in name.' Aquinas³

¹ *The Extasie*, 51.

² *Summa de Creaturis* I^a, Tract. III, Quaest. XVI, Art. 2.

³ I^a, IXX, Art. 3.

The Discarded Image

follows Albertus. 'Between those who hold that they are animals and those who do not, little or no difference is to be found in substance, but only in language (*in voce tantum*).'

The planetary Intelligences, however, make a very small part of the angelic population which inhabits, as its 'kindly stede', the vast aetherial region between the Moon and the *Primum Mobile*. Their graded species have already been described.

All this time we are describing the universe spread out in space; dignity, power and speed progressively diminishing as we descend from its circumference to its centre, the Earth. But I have already hinted that the intelligible universe reverses it all; there the Earth is the rim, the outside edge where being fades away on the border of nonentity. A few astonishing lines from the *Paradiso* (xxviii, 25 sq.) stamp this on the mind forever. There Dante sees God as a point of light. Seven concentric rings of light revolve about that point, and that which is smallest and nearest to it has the swiftest movement. This is the Intelligence of the *Primum Mobile*, superior to all the rest in love and knowledge. The universe is thus, when our minds are sufficiently freed from the senses, turned inside out. Dante, with incomparably greater power is, however, saying no more than Alanus says when he locates us and our Earth 'outside the city wall'.

It may well be asked how, in that unfallen translunary world, there come to be such things as 'bad' or 'malefical' planets. But they are bad only in relation to us. On the psychological side this answer is implicit in Dante's allocation of blessed souls to their various planets after

death. The temperament derived from each planet can be turned either to a good or a bad use. Born under Saturn, you are qualified to become either a mope and a mal-content or a great contemplative; under Mars, either an Attila or a martyr. Even the misuse of the psychology imposed on you by your stars can, through repentance, lead to its own appropriate species of beatitude; as in Dante's *Cunizza*. The other bad effects of the 'infortunes'—the plagues and disasters—can no doubt be dealt with in the same way. The fault lies not in the influence but in the terrestrial nature which receives it. In a fallen Earth it is permitted by Divine justice that we and our Earth and air respond thus disastrously to influences which are good in themselves. 'Bad' influences are those of which our corrupt world can no longer make a good use; the bad patient makes the agent bad in effect. The fullest account of this which I have met comes in a late and condemned book; but not, I presume, condemned on this score. It is the *Cantica Tria* of Franciscus Georgius Venetus (*ob.* 1540).¹ If all things here below were rightly disposed to the heavens, all influences, as Trismegistus taught, would be extremely good (*optimos*). When an evil effect follows them, this must be attributed to the ill-disposed subject (*indisposito subjecto*).²

But it is time we descended below the Moon, from the aether into the air. This, as the reader already knows, is the 'kindly stede' of the aerial beings, the daemons. In Lazamon, who follows Apuleius, these creatures can be either good or bad. It is still so for Bernardus, who

¹ Parisiis, 1543.

² *Cantici Primi*, tom. iii, cap. 8.

The Discarded Image

divides the air into two regions, locating the good daemons in the upper and more tranquil part, the bad in the lower and more turbulent.¹ But as the Middle Ages went on the view gained ground that all daemons alike were bad; were in fact fallen angels or 'demons'. Alanus is taking this view when in *Anticlaudian* (iv, v) he speaks of the 'airish citizens' to whom the air is a prison; Chaucer remembered the passage.² Aquinas clearly equates daemons with devils.³ The Pauline passage in Ephesians (ii. 2) about 'the prince of the powers of the air' probably had much to do with this, and also with the popular association between witchcraft and foul weather. Hence Milton's Satan in *Paradise Regained* calls the air 'our old conquest' (I, 46). But much doubt, as we shall see, still hung about the daemons, and Renaissance neo-Platonism revived the older conception, while Renaissance witch-hunters felt more and more confident about the new one. The Attendant Spirit in *Comus* is called the Daemon in the Trinity manuscript.

This much would suffice for daemons if we were at all sure that they confined themselves to the air and if they were never identified with creatures that bear a different name. I shall deal with those in the next chapter.

I can hardly hope that I shall persuade the reader to yet a third experimental walk by starlight. But perhaps, without actually taking the walk, he can now improve his picture of that old universe by adding such finishing touches as this section has suggested. Whatever else a

¹ *Op. cit.* II, *Pros.* vii, pp. 49-50.

² *House of Fame* II, 929.

³ I^a, LXIV, i, *et passim*.

modern feels when he looks at the night sky, he certainly feels that he is looking *out*—like one looking out from the saloon entrance on to the dark Atlantic or from the lighted porch upon dark and lonely moors. But if you accepted the Medieval Model you would feel like one looking *in*. The Earth is 'outside the city wall'. When the sun is up he dazzles us and we cannot see inside. Darkness, our own darkness, draws the veil and we catch a glimpse of the high pomps within; the vast, lighted concavity filled with music and life. And, looking in, we do not see, like Meredith's Lucifer, 'the army of unalterable law', but rather the revelry of insatiable love. We are watching the activity of creatures whose experience we can only lamely compare to that of one in the act of drinking, his thirst delighted yet not quenched. For in them the highest of faculties is always exercised without impediment on the noblest object; without satiety, since they can never completely make His perfection their own, yet never frustrated, since at every moment they approximate to Him in the fullest measure of which their nature is capable. You need not wonder that one old picture¹ represents the Intelligence of the *Primum Mobile* as a girl dancing and playing with her sphere as with a ball. Then, laying aside whatever Theology or Atheology you held before, run your mind up heaven by heaven to Him who is really the centre, to your senses the circumference, of all; the quarry whom all these untiring huntsmen pursue, the candle to whom all these moths move yet are not burned.

The picture is nothing if not religious. But is the

¹ Seznec, *op. cit.* p. 139.

The Discarded Image

religion in question precisely Christianity? Certainly there is a striking difference between this Model where God is much less the lover than the beloved and man is a marginal creature, and the Christian picture where the fall of man and the incarnation of God as man for man's redemption is central. There may perhaps, as I have hinted before, be no absolute logical contradiction. One may say that the Good Shepherd goes to seek the lost sheep because it is lost, not because it was the finest sheep in the flock. It may have been the least. But there remains, at the very least, a profound disharmony of atmospheres. That is why all this cosmology plays so small a part in the spiritual writers, and is not fused with high religious ardour in any writer I know except Dante himself. Another indication of the cleavage is this. We might expect that a universe so filled with shining super-human creatures would be a danger to monotheism. Yet the danger to monotheism in the Middle Ages clearly came not from a cult of angels but from the cult of the Saints. Men when they prayed were not usually thinking of the Hierarchies and Intelligences. There was, not (I think) an opposition, but a dissociation between their religious life and all that. At one point we might have expected contradiction. Is all this admirable universe, sinless and perfect everywhere beyond the Moon, to perish at the last day? It seems not. When scripture says the stars will fall (Matt. xxiv. 29) this may be taken 'tropically'; it may mean that tyrants and magnates will be brought low. Or the stars that will fall may be only meteorites. And St Peter (II Pet. iii. 3 *sq.*) says only that

the universe will be destroyed by fire as it once was destroyed by water. But no one thinks the flood rose to the translunary regions: neither, then, need the fire.¹ Dante exempts the higher heavens from the final catastrophe; in *Paradiso*, vii, we learn that whatever flows immediately from God, *senza mezzo distilla* (67), will never end. The sublunary world was not created immediately; its elements were made by secondary agents. Man was made directly by God, hence his immortality; so were the angels, and apparently not only they but the *paese sincero nel qual tu sei* (130) 'this stainless realm where now thou art'. If this is taken literally, the translunary world will not be destroyed; it is only the (four) elements below the Moon which will perish 'with fervent heat'.

The human imagination has seldom had before it an object so sublimely ordered as the medieval cosmos. If it has an aesthetic fault, it is perhaps, for us who have known romanticism, a shade too ordered. For all its vast spaces it might in the end afflict us with a kind of claustrophobia. Is there nowhere any vagueness? No undiscovered byways? No twilight? Can we never get really out of doors? The next chapter will perhaps give us some relief.

¹ St Augustine, *De Civitate*, xx, xviii, xxiv. Aquinas, *III^a*, Supplement, Q. LXXIV art. 4.