

Movies, Video Games, Songs, and Apologetics

Dónal O'Mathúna – Xenos Summer Institute 2013

Reason and emotion

The role of the imagination

C. S. Lewis: imagination is ‘the organ of meaning’ (Bluspels & Flalansferes)

“Before we act or think, we understand meaning, in Lewis’s view, and so the provision of meaningful images becomes the hallmark of his apologetic method” (Michael Ward, 2012).

Imagination, reason, will, God

An example

History of philosophy and theology

Plato: rational soul – head

impulsive soul – heart

appetitive soul – gut

Immanuel Kant: “The principle of apathy, according to which the wise man must never succumb to emotion ... is a correct and sublime moral principle of the Stoic school, for emotion makes a person [more or less] blind” (*Anthropologie*, I, 74)

“The source of evil is not in passion, in the throbbing heart, but rather in hardness of heart, in callousness and insensitivity... the biblical writers frequently regarded some emotions or passions as having been inspired, as reflections of a higher power... The utterances of the psalmist are charged with emotion, are outpourings of emotion. Reading the prophets, we are stirred by their passion and enlivened imagination. Their primary aim is to move the soul, to engage the attention by bold and striking images, and therefore it is to the imagination and the passions that the prophets speak, rather than aiming at the cold approbation of the mind” (Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 38).

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37)

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35)

Video games and emotion

Beauty

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (John Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn, 1819)

Eugene Peterson: the pursuit of beauty “works out of the unconscious, is not practical, cannot be quantified, is not efficient, and cannot be ‘used’ for very long without corrupting either the art or the artist” (in Ryken, pp. 82-83).

Myth

C. S. Lewis: “It arouses in us sensations we have never had before, never anticipated having, as though we had broken out of our normal mode of consciousness and ‘possessed joys not promised to our birth.’ It gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives” (Preface)

Ugliness

Sticks and Stones

Application

Our hearts are being drawn in various directions by video games, songs, art, movies, etc. Are you aware of this? Are you reflecting on it? Are you challenging the unhealthy emotional pulls?

Our emotions are part of how God has made us. Are you feeding them Godly nutrition?

Are you engaging emotionally and imaginatively and creatively with your friends?

Are you developing your emotional and imaginative and creative responses to people and issues, as well as your intellectual responses?

Do you know how God has gifted you emotionally, imaginatively, or creatively? Are you developing and using these gifts for the glory of God?

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What Secret Purple Wisdom

What word informs the world,
and moves the worm along in his blind tunnel?

What secret purple wisdom tells the iris edges
to unfold in frills? What juiced and emerald thrill

urges the sap until the bud resolves
its tight riddle? What irresistible command

unfurls *this* cloud above *this* greening hill,
or one more wave – its spreading foam and foil –

across the flats of sand? What minor thrust
of energy issues up from humus in a froth

of ferns? Delicate as a laser, it filigrees
the snow, the stars. Listen close – What silver sound

thaws winter into spring? Speaks clamor into singing?
Gives love for loneliness? It is this

unterrestrial pulse, deep as heaven, that folds us
in its tingling embrace, gongs in our echo hearts.

--Luci Shaw in Ryken, p. 81-2

The Miner

“Sir,” said the old man, as he turned his gaze upon Henry, and wiped some tears from his eyes, “it must be that mining is blessed by God; for there is no art, which renders those who are occupied in it happier and nobler, which awakens a deeper faith in divine wisdom and guidance, or which preserves the innocence and childlike simplicity of the heart more freshly. Poor is the miner born, and poor he departs again. He is satisfied with knowing where metallic riches are found, and with bringing them to light; but their dazzling glare has no power over his simple heart. Untouched by the perilous delirium, he is more pleased in examining their wonderful formation, and the peculiarities of their origin and primitive situation, than in calling himself their possessor. When changed into property, they have no longer any charm for him, and he prefers to seek them amid a thousand dangers and travails, in the fastnesses of the earth, rather than to follow their vocation in the world, or aspire after them on the earth's surface, with cunning and deceitful arts. These severe labors keep his heart fresh and his mind strong; he enjoys his scanty pay with inward thankfulness, and comes forth every day from the dark tombs of his calling, with new-born enjoyment of life. He now appreciates the pleasure of light and of rest, the charms of the free air and prospect; his food and drink are right refreshing to one, who enjoys them as devoutly as if at the Lord's Supper; and with what a warm and tender heart he

joins his friends, or embraces his wife and children, and thankfully shares the delights of heart-felt intercourse.”

“His lonely occupation cuts off a great part of his life from day and the society of man. Still he does not harden himself in dull indifference as to these deep-meaning matters of the upper world; and he retains a childlike simplicity, which recognises the interior essence, and the manifold, primitive energies of all things. Nature will never be the possession of any single individual. In the form of property it becomes a terrible poison, which destroys rest, excites the ruinous desire of drawing everything within the reach of its possessor, and carries with it a train of wild passions and endless sorrows. Thus it undermines secretly the ground of the owner, buries him in the abyss which breaks beneath him, and so passes into the hands of another, thus gradually satisfying its tendency to belong to all.

“How quietly, on the contrary, the poor miner labors in his deep solitudes, far from the restless turmoil of day, animated solely by a thirst for knowledge and a love of harmony. In his solitude he tenderly thinks of his friends and family, and his sense of their value and relationship is continually renewed. His calling teaches indefatigable patience, and forbids his attention to be diverted by useless thoughts. He deals with a strange, hard, and unwieldy power, which will yield only to persevering industry and continual care. But what a glorious flower blooms for him in these awful depths,--a firm confidence in his heavenly Father, whose hand and care are every day visible to him in signs not easily mistaken! How often have I sat down, and by the light of my lamp gazed upon the plain crucifix with the most heart-felt devotion! Then for the first time I clearly understood the holy meaning of this mysterious image, and struck upon a heart-vein of the richest golden ore, and which has yielded me an everlasting reward.”

After a pause the old man continued:--

“Truly must he have been divine, who first taught men the noble art of mining, and who has hidden in the bosom of the rock this sober emblem of human life. In one place the veins are large, easily broken, but poor; in another a wretched and insignificant cleft of rock confines it; and here the best ores are to be found. It often splits before the miner's face into a thousand atoms, but the patient one is not terrified; he quietly pursues his course, and soon sees his zeal rewarded, whilst working it open in a new and more promising direction.

“A specious lump often entices him from the true direction; but he soon discovers that the way is false, and breaks his way by main strength across the grain of the rock, until he has found the true path that leads to the ore. How thoroughly acquainted does the miner here become with all the humors of chance, and how assured that energy and constancy are the only sure means of overcoming them and of raising the hidden treasure.”

--Novalis, Henry of Ofterdingen