

June 2008—*The Importance of Thinking Things Through*

It is quite fashionable in today's postmodern culture to be impatient of logical reasoning. The use of reason is dismissed with a sneer as a residue of modernism. No doubt, the devil is very pleased with this attitude. Serious, careful reasoning is a threat to the philosophies, ideologies, and assorted jargon with which he blinds and deceives human beings.

Through Screwtape's advice to Wormwood in *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis makes this point in relation to the then-popular philosophy of materialism:

...I note what you say about guiding your patient's reading and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle *naïve*? It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was the way to keep him out of the Enemy's clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily "true" or "false," but as "academic" or "practical," "outworn" or "contemporary," "conventional" or "ruthless." Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church. Don't waste time trying to make him think that materialism is *true*! Make him think it is strong, or stark, or courageous—that it is the philosophy of the future. That's the sort of thing he cares about.

The trouble about argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy's own ground. He can argue too; whereas in really practical propaganda of the kind I am suggesting He has been shown for centuries to be greatly the inferior of Our Father Below. By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result? Even if a particular train of thought can be twisted so as to end in our favor, you will find that you have been strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences. Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it "real life" and don't let him ask what he means by "real."

What Lewis said of materialism applies just as well to the postmodernist, who can happily "...have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head." By patiently engaging our postmodern friends, family and colleagues in a subtle process of rationally examining the implications of their beliefs, we may "...awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?"

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C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 185-186.