

# IS CHRISTIANITY CHILDISH? RHETORICAL ADVICE FOR CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST FROM C. S. LEWIS'S ESSAY: "ON THREE WAYS OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN"

**Peter S. WILLIAMS**

*NLA University College, Norway*

## **Abstract**

In his 1952 essay "On Three Ways of Writing for Children", C. S. Lewis discusses three approaches to writing children's literature and defends "that particular type of children's story which is dearest to my own taste, the fantasy or fairy tale" from the charge that it is "childish". In this paper, I define Christian apologetics as "the art and science of persuasively communicating and advocating Christian spirituality across spiritualities, through the responsible use of rhetoric, as being objectively beautiful, good and true/reasonable" and see how Lewis' advice about the rhetoric of children's stories can be generalized and applied to the discipline of Christian apologetics. In particular, many atheists charge Christian Spirituality with being childish. For example, British atheist Richard Dawkins says that religious people "have their Bronze Age myths, medieval superstitions and childish wishful thinking" (Dawkins, *Scientific American*). Describing his own childhood, Dawkins says: "I think I did believe it up to the age of eight or nine, when preachers said if you really, really pray for something it can happen. Even moving mountains, I believed it could really happen... I grew up. I put away childish things." (Dawkins, "Claims Fairy Tales Are Harmful To Children") In this paper I explore how the dialectical moves made by Lewis in "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" can shape a rational response to such rhetoric.

**Keywords:** *Apologetics, Spirituality, Rhetoric, Childish, Fairy Stories*

Everyone has a way of life, a spirituality, that includes a worldview. A spirituality is made up of worldview assumptions (the ideas about reality that one believes and/or acts upon), combined with attitudes that jointly lead to actions. The tripartite structure of spirituality fits with a number of other traditional triadic concepts (see fig. 1), such as the three traditional elements of rhetoric (i.e. logos, ethos and pathos):

**Fig. 1** The tripartite structure of spirituality and some other traditional triadic concepts

<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>Spiritual Capacities</b>	<b>Communicated by</b>	<b>Rhetoric</b>	<b>Judged &amp; fulfilled by</b>	<b>Transcendental Values</b>
Actions (Hands)	Conscience	communicated by	Ethos	judged & fulfilled by	Goodness
Attitudes (Heart)	Imagination	communicated by	Pathos	judged & fulfilled by	Beauty
Assumptions (Head)	Reason	communicated by	Logos	judged & fulfilled by	Truth

In a series of publications, I have developed a holistic understanding of Christian apologetics as a matter of helping people to be persuaded that a Christ-centered spirituality is a beautiful, good and reasonable commitment. In other words, I define Christian apologetics as “the art and science of persuasively communicating and advocating Christian spirituality across spiritualities, through the responsible use of rhetoric, as being objectively beautiful, good and true/reasonable” (that is, as being at least no less, and ideally more reasonable and/or true, good and beautiful than any of the alternative spiritualities one might

mention).<sup>1</sup> To re-contextualize an image from Socrates, the Christian apologist is a spiritual “midwife” (Plato, 150a), helping people deliver as strong and healthy a spiritual response to Jesus as they can muster.

In this paper, I aim to show how C. S. Lewis’ essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”—which was first delivered as a talk at the Library Association in 1952, and was published posthumously in *Of Other Worlds* in 1966—can serve as a resource for thinking about the role of rhetoric in Christian apologetics in general, and specifically for responding to the rhetorical charge that Christianity is “childish”.

### **The Association of Christianity with “Childishness”**

As Roy Porter (“The Enlightenment”) explains:

over two hundred years ago, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote an essay entitled “Was ist Aufklärung?” (“What is Enlightenment?”). For Kant, Enlightenment was mankind’s final coming of age, the emancipation of the human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance and error.

While Kant (like many key figures in the Enlightenment) believed in God, some inheritors of *the secular strand of the Enlightenment* have adapted Kant’s metaphor as a rhetorical way of putting peer pressure on religious believers. Before turning to Lewis’s essay, I will analyse some examples of the rhetorical use of childhood in relation to Christianity.

### **Peer Pressure from a Nobel Prize Winning Scientist at Cambridge University in the 1960s**

Oxford mathematician and philosopher of science Professor John C. Lennox (“Lennox Was Pressured To Give Up His Christianity”) describes how, while studying at Cambridge (where he attended some of the last lectures of C. S. Lewis, in 1962):

I found myself at a formal college dinner sitting beside [a] Nobel Prize winner . . . I tried to ask him some questions . . . In particular, I was interested in whether his wide-ranging studies had led him to reflect on the existence of God. It was clear that he was not comfortable with that question, and I immediately backed off. However, at the end of the meal, he invited me to come to his study. He had

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<sup>1</sup> See: Williams, 2021. See also this book’s web-page @ [www.peterswilliams.com/publications/books/apologetics-in-3d-essays-on-apologetics-and-spirituality/](http://www.peterswilliams.com/publications/books/apologetics-in-3d-essays-on-apologetics-and-spirituality/).

also invited two or three other senior academics but no other students. I was invited to sit, and, so far as I recall, they remained standing.

He said, “Lennox, do you want a career in science?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied.

“Then,” he said, “in front of witnesses, tonight, you must give up this childish faith in God. If you do not, then it will cripple you intellectually and you will suffer by comparison with your peers. You simply will not make it.”

Talk about pressure! I had never experienced anything like it before.

Note the atheist Nobel Prize winner’s use of the rhetorical phrase “this childish faith”, and his (false) assumption that religious faith would intellectually “cripple” Lennox, who goes on to recount:

I sat in the chair paralysed and shocked by the effrontery and unexpectedness of the onslaught. I didn’t really know what to say, but eventually I managed to blurt out, “Sir, what have you got to offer me that is better than what I have got?” In response, he offered me the concept of “Creative Evolution” put forward in 1907 by French philosopher Henri Bergson.

In fact, thanks to C. S. Lewis, I knew a little about Bergson and replied that I could not see how Bergson’s philosophy was enough to base an entire worldview upon and provide a foundation for meaning, morality and life. With a shaking voice, and as respectfully as I could, I told the group standing around me that I found the biblical worldview vastly more enriching and the evidence for its truth compelling, and so, with all due respect, I would take the risk and stick with it.

Who was really being the more “childish” here: Lennox, or the atheistic scientist (and his colleagues) who used peer—pressure rather than arguments in an attempt to change Lennox’s worldview?

## Richard Dawkins

British atheist and Oxford University evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins states in his best—selling anti—religious polemic *The God Delusion* (360) that:

There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else . . . has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point. The truly adult view, by contrast, is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it.

Dawkins’ use of the terms “infantile” and “adult” here is purely “rhetorical” in the modern sense that it bypasses the classical rhetorical element

of *logos* (or logical argument) and functions purely at the rhetorical level of *pathos*, attempting to make the audience *feel* well-disposed towards that which he labels “adult” and ill-disposed towards that which he labels “infantile”.

Responsibility may be *associated* with adulthood, but Dawkins is begging the question against the intellectually responsible point—one made by plenty of intellectually responsible atheists—that there is a significant distinction between the objectively given meaning (i.e. value) and teleological purpose that one’s life might have if and only if it is a Creation, and the subjective, self-invented meaning and purpose one might attribute to one’s own life. If one’s life has, or even if it *might* have, an objectively given meaning and purpose (the sort of thing that is discovered rather than invented), then evading this issue by shifting the subject of discussion to the sort of subjective meaning and purpose one can invent for oneself is hardly intellectually responsible! Nor would there necessarily be anything “infantile” about discovering and/or accepting this objectively given meaning and purpose.

At the end of his more recent book *Outgrowing God: A Beginner’s Guide* (Black Swan, 2020), Dawkins appeals to his readers to become theoretical agnostics who are also functional atheists: “I think we should take our courage in both hands, grow up and give up on all gods. Don’t you?” (277) He says this having already admitted:

We don’t positively know there are no gods, just as we can’t prove there are no fairies or pixies or elves or hobgoblins or leprechauns or pink unicorns; just as we can’t prove that Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy don’t exist. There’s a billion things you can imagine and nobody can disprove. The philosopher Bertrand Russell made the point with a vivid word picture. If I were to tell you, he said, that there is a china teapot in orbit around the sun, you could not disprove my claim. But failure to disprove something is not a good reason to believe it. In some strict sense we should all be “teapot agnostics”. In practice we are a-teapotists. And until somebody offers a reason to believe, we are wasting our time bothering to do so (12).

Setting aside Dawkins’ contentious assumptions that reasons for belief in God are both epistemologically necessary and unavailable,<sup>2</sup> if he can make this argument with teapots, why make it with fairies? The *rhetorical subtext* here is clearly that, while teapots are for adults, *fairies are for children*. However, this rhetorical subtext is questionable on several counts.

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<sup>2</sup> See: Evans, *Natural Signs*; Williams, 2022; Williams, 2020; Williams, 2019.

For one thing, adults are perfectly able to appreciate stories about fairies, and to appreciate them in a fully adult way. For another thing, fairy stories are, generally speaking, works of adult creativity. Finally, adults can and do believe in fairies. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes detective stories, was famously taken in by faked photographs of fairies.<sup>3</sup> The issue with Doyle's belief in fairies was not that he was a child (since he was an adult), nor that his belief was one shared by some children, but that it was naïve. It is rhetorically illegitimate to attempt to transfer this judgement of naiveté from one subject of belief to another subject of belief by mere word association. Such a maneuver, which reflects the methods of the lowest forms of advertising, begs the question about the epistemological status of belief in the subject at hand.<sup>4</sup>

Dawkins has a long history of associating religion and childhood to rhetorical effect. At the 2014 Cheltenham Science Festival in England, he speculated that it may be “pernicious to inculcate supernaturalism into a child” by reading them fairy tales uncritically (“Richard Dawkins Claims Fairy Tales Are Harmful To Children”). As reported by the *Times Educational Supplement*:

Dawkins has claimed that reading fairy tales to children could be harmful because they contain events that are “statistically improbable”. The evolutionary biologist used a spot at the Cheltenham Science Festival to question whether we should allow children to go along with the “fantasies of childhood”. He asked whether instilling a false belief in the supernatural from a young age could actually be “pernicious”, but added that that perhaps parents should use fairy tales to “foster a spirit of scepticism” instead. “I think it’s rather pernicious to inculcate into a child a view of the world which includes supernaturalism . . .” he said. “Even fairy tales, the ones we love, with wizards or princesses turning into frogs or whatever it was. There’s a very interesting reason why a prince could not turn into a frog: it’s statistically too improbable.” . . . Even Professor Dawkins admitted to believing in religion when he was a child. “I did believe up to the age of 8 or 9, when preachers said if you really, really pray for something it can happen. Even moving mountains, I believed it could really happen.” But he added: “I grew up. I put away childish things.” (“Not such a wizard idea?”)

Interestingly, Dawkins quotes the apostle Paul’s phrase about putting away childish things (from 1 Corinthians 13:11). However, as theologian Rusty Osborne explains (“Childlike faith is not childish”):

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<sup>3</sup> See: Williams, “Cottingley Fairies”.

<sup>4</sup> On the epistemology of belief in the existence of God, see: Evans, *Natural Signs*; Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

childlike faith is not childish faith. The first resonates with and embraces the neediness, dependency, and smallness of those who understand their place in the kingdom of God. The second simply refuses to grow up. Over and over again in the New Testament we see the apostles exhort Christians to mature as Christians — to grow up in the gospel. Paul exhorts the church in Corinth toward Christian maturity, insisting that the apostolic wisdom he imparts will be grasped by the “mature [*teleiois*]” (1 Cor. 2:6). Later he writes: “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature [*teleioi*]” (1 Cor. 14:20). Paul isn’t contradicting Jesus’s teaching about becoming like a child in order to inherit God’s kingdom. He’s simply recognizing that having childlike faith doesn’t mean celebrating childish thinking. In fact, he informs the Colossians that the focus and aim of his ministry is maturity: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature [*teleion*] in Christ . . .” (Col. 1:28).

Elsewhere, Dawkins says religious people “have their Bronze Age myths, medieval superstitions and childish wishful thinking.” (*Scientific American*.) The association here is between unreliable truth claims and youth, but this is a false generalization. Young cultures and young people alike can believe many true things. Indeed, both probably have more true beliefs than false beliefs. Dawkins himself undoubtedly believes many true things that Bronze Age people believed and that modern children believe! In sum, Dawkins indulges in the fallacies of “cherry picking” (the selective use of data), and what C. S. Lewis famously called “chronological snobbery”:

Chronological snobbery is the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively), or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 207-8).

## Jeffrey Taylor

Jeffrey Taylor, contributing editor at *The Atlantic*, writing in *Salon Magazine* in 2015, asserted that:

belief in a deity motivates people to behave in all sorts of ways — some childish and pathetic, others harmful, a few outright criminal—most of which, to the nonbeliever at least, mimic symptoms of an all-encompassing mental illness, if of widely varying severity. Why childish? A majority of adults in one of the most developed countries on Earth believe, in all seriousness, that an invisible,

inaudible, undetectable “father” exercises parental supervision over them, protecting them from evil (except when he doesn’t), and, for the mere price of surrendering their faculty of reason and behaving in ways spelled out in various magic books, will ensure their postmortem survival. Wishful thinking characterizes childhood, yes, but, where the religious are concerned, not only. That is childish (“The religious have gone insane”).

Setting aside Taylor’s many theological inaccuracies, he assumes *without evidence or argument* both that “Wishful thinking characterizes childhood” and that theistic Spiritualities stem from “Wishful thinking”. Ironically, this is an example of wishful thinking on Taylor’s part.

Taylor uses “childish” as an analogical term of abuse for behaviours associated with “belief in a deity”, associating being “childish” with being “pathetic”, but this *ad hominem* attack ignores the fact that, like adults, children have belief-forming mechanisms that, at the very least, put the burden of proof on anyone questioning their products. Moreover, Taylor implicitly admits to begging the question against religious belief, when he asserts that religious belief appears to mimic mental illness “to the nonbeliever at least”.

## Rhetorical Lessons and Responses from Lewis

In “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, Lewis discusses three approaches to writing children’s literature, stating that he thinks “there are three ways in which those who write for children may approach their work; two good ways and one that is generally a bad way” (56). Lewis discusses the bad way first, and the lesson drawn is further illustrated by the second way. Finally, Lewis defends “that particular type of children’s story which is dearest to my own taste, the fantasy or fairy tale” (59) from the charge that it is “childish” (59). In what follows, I will explore how the dialectical moves made by Lewis in “On Three Ways of Writing for Children” can inform the rhetoric of Christian apologetics in general and provide a rational response to the accusation that Christianity is “childish” in particular.

### The First (bad) Way

Lewis relates how:

In my own first story I had described at length what I thought a rather fine high tea given by a hospitable faun to the little girl who was my heroine. A man, who has children of his own, said, ‘Ah, I see how you got to that. If you want to please grown-up readers you give them sex, so you thought to yourself, “That won’t do for children, what shall I give them instead? I know! The little blighters like



plenty of good eating.” In reality, however, I myself like eating and drinking. I put in what I would have liked to read when I was a child and what I still like reading now that I am in my fifties (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 56).

Lewis complains that the man “conceived writing for children as a special department of ‘giving the public what it wants’” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 57), and stresses in response that: “In reality, however, *I myself like eating and drinking*. I put in what I would have liked to read when I was a child and what I still like reading now that I am in my fifties” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 56, my italics). In other words, Lewis *rejects condescension*:

I rejected any approach which begins with the question “What do modern children like?” I might be asked, “Do you equally reject the approach which begins with the question ‘What do modern children need?’ . . . with the moral or didactic approach?” I think the answer is Yes . . . because I feel sure that the question ‘What do modern children need?’ will not lead you to a good moral. *If we ask that question we are assuming too superior an attitude. It would be better to ask “What moral do I need?” for I think we can be sure that what does not concern us deeply will not deeply interest our readers, whatever their age* (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 68-69, my italics).

In a final and delightful anecdote, Lewis goes on to relate how:

Once in a hotel dining—room I said, rather too loudly, “I loathe prunes”: “So do I,” came an unexpected six-year-old voice from another table. Sympathy was instantaneous. Neither of us thought it funny. We both knew that prunes are far too nasty to be funny. That is the proper meeting between man and child as independent personalities (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 70).

### **Apologetic Application *re* the First Way**

We can apply Lewis’ rhetorical advice to the field of apologetics by generalizing his particular point:

In Particular: Lewis rejected condescension and shared something *that he himself appreciated as both a child and an adult*.

In General: Authenticity is key. Sincere belief in the value of the thing communicated should precede the communication of that thing as being valuable. Good rhetoric aims at a “proper meeting . . . between

independent personalities” (Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 70).

In Apologetics: The apologist should reject condescension and aim at a “proper meeting... between independent personalities”, which means communicating *what they themselves appreciate and find persuasive about Christianity*.

## **The Second Way**

Lewis says that the second way of writing for children:

is the way of Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Graham; and Tolkien. The printed story grows out of a story told to a particular child with the living voice and perhaps *ex tempore*. It resembles the first way because you are certainly trying to give that child what it wants. But then you are dealing with a concrete person, this child who, of course, differs from all other children. There is no question of “children” conceived as a strange species whose habits you have ‘made up’ like an anthropologist... Nor, I suspect, would it be possible, thus face to face, to regale the child with things calculated to please it but regarded by yourself with indifference or contempt. The child, I am certain, would see through that. In any personal relation the two participants modify each other. You would become slightly different because you were talking to a child and the child would become slightly different because it was being talked to by an adult. A community, a composite personality, is created and out of that the story grows (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 57).

## **Apologetic Application of the Second Way**

Again, we can apply Lewis’ rhetorical advice to the field of apologetics by generalizing his particular point:

In Particular: Lewis says that when one responds to the particularity of a specific child, he suspects it would not “be possible, thus face to face, to regale the child with things calculated to please it but regarded by yourself with indifference or contempt.”

In General: Authenticity is key, and it’s hard to fake sincerity.

In Apologetics: In one—on—one discussion, the apologist can focus on the particular needs of a specific dialogue partner but can’t regale them

with things calculated to please yet regarded by themselves with indifference or contempt.

It is tempting to think that Lewis' advice, though true, is trivial (being so obvious as to hardly need mentioning). However, one might characterize the rise of so-called "liberal" theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an ill-advised and ill-fated attempt to make Christianity popular precisely by forcing it to fit within a preconceived notion of what the "modern" public wants, thereby producing a theology "calculated to please" people influenced by the modernist worldview, rather than a theology willing and able to defend the pre—modernism of historic, orthodox Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

A major influence upon liberal theology was Rudolf Bultmann, who inaccurately opined that: "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles." (Bultmann et al, 5.) As historian Paul L. Maier (39) observes:

Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976) of the University of Marburg was famous for his insistence on "demythologizing" the Bible—that is, cutting out any mention of miracles in Scripture since these are impossible then and now, he asserted. This, he claimed, would make the Bible more acceptable to modern readers. The Gospels must have been written many years after the events which they reported, he claimed, during which time the faith of the writers overcame the facts of what actually happened.

Bultmann's project of "demythologizing" scripture followed in the footsteps of 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish philosopher David Hume in rejecting the consideration of *a posteriori* evidence for a miraculous revelation provided by the testimony of historical sources on the basis of an *a priori* commitment to a naturalistic worldview.<sup>6</sup> However, as Alvin Plantinga (405) observes:

Very many well-educated people (including even some theologians) understand science and history in a way that is entirely compatible both with the possibility and with the actuality of miracles. Many physicists and engineers, for example, understand "electrical light and the wireless" vastly better than Bultmann or his contemporary followers, but nonetheless hold precisely those New Testament beliefs Bultmann thinks incompatible with using electric lights and radios . . . there are any number of . . . contemporary intellectuals very well acquainted with

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<sup>5</sup> See: Williams, "A Pre-Modern Reflection on the Modernist Roots of Postmodernism" in *Apologetics in 3D*, Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> For a defence of belief in miracles, see: Lewis, *Miracles*; Williams, 2019.

science who don't feel any problem at all in pursuing science and also believing in miracles . . .

Ironically, “liberal” churches have failed to attract new adherents, whereas churches that have retained a pre-modern worldview have fared comparatively well. According to research conducted by David Haskell, a professor of religion and culture at Wilfrid Laurier University: “Conservative Protestant theology, with its more literal view of the Bible, is a significant predictor of church growth while liberal theology leads to decline.” (“Liberal churches are dying”.)

### **The Third Way**

Lewis (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 57) writes that the “third way” of writing for children:

which is the only one I could ever use myself, consists in writing a children's story because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say: just as a composer might write a Dead March not because there was a public funeral in view but because certain musical ideas that had occurred to him went best into that form.

### **Apologetic Application of the Third Way**

Again, we can transfer Lewis's point from one context of application to another:

In Particular and in General: Choose “the best art-form for something you have to say”.

In Apologetics: Remember that apologetics can be conducted in a variety of rhetorical and artistic forms!

Of course, Lewis epitomizes this advice in his own apologetic writings.

I recently wrote a book responding to Richard Dawkins' book *Outgrowing God* (Black Swan, 2020). Because I was addressing a teenage audience, and I wanted to represent how people with different worldview opinions might think about the issues, I wrote in the ancient philosophical form of a dialogue between different characters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See: Williams, 2021.

### The Third Way — Expanded Upon

Lewis (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 59) writes that:

Where the children’s story is simply the right form for what the author has to say, then of course readers who want to hear that, will read the story or re-read it, at any age. I never met *The Wind in the Willows* . . . till I was in my late twenties, and I do not think I have enjoyed [it] any the less on that account. I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story . . . This canon seems to me most obviously true of that particular type of children’s story which is dearest to my own taste, the fantasy or fairy tale.

Lewis gives us a distinction between bad children’s stories (which are enjoyed only by children) and good stories that can be appreciated by children (but also by adults). A story that can be appreciated by a child may also be a story that can be appreciated by an adult. The fact that children appreciate a story doesn’t mean that adults can’t, or won’t, or shouldn’t appreciate it. Therefore, if the Bible contains stories children appreciate, that doesn’t mean adults can’t, or won’t, or shouldn’t appreciate those stories. It doesn’t mean that those stories are “childish”, especially since such appreciation may be *intellectual* as well as artistic.

One way of illustrating this point is to note that one and the same biblical narrative may be presented differently to the differently aged readers of a children’s Bible on the one hand and the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible* (B&H, 2017) on the other hand.

Lewis (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 59) comments:

Now the modern critical world uses “adult” as a term of approval. It is hostile to what it calls ‘nostalgia’... Hence a man who admits that dwarfs and giants and talking beasts and witches are still dear to him in his fifty—third year is now less likely to be praised for his perennial youth than scorned and pitied for arrested development.

Note what happens to Lewis’s second sentence if we substitute some key terms:

Hence a man who admits that [God] and [angels] and [Balaam’s Ass] and [the Witch of Endor] are still dear to him in his fifty-third year is now less likely to be praised for his perennial youth than scorned and pitied for arrested development.

Lewis offers three responses to the critic set upon the rhetorical use of “adult” as a term of approval.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Defence

I reply with a *tu quoque* [you too]. Critics who treat adult as a term of approval, instead of as a merely descriptive term, cannot be adult themselves. To be concerned about being grown up, to admire the grown up because it is grown up, to blush at the suspicion of being childish; these things are the marks of childhood and adolescence. And in childhood and adolescence they are, in moderation, healthy symptoms. Young things ought to want to grow. But then on into middle life or even into early manhood this concern about being adult is a mark of really arrested development (Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 59-60).

In other words, the peer pressure attached to the critical use of “adult as a term of approval” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 59) relies upon an *ambiguity* that ignores the distinction drawn by Lewis between “children’s stories” and “stories appreciated by children”. As Lewis (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 60) observes:

When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Defence

Lewis (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 60) argues that:

The modern view seems to me to involve a false conception of growth. They accuse us of arrested development because we have not lost a taste we had in childhood. But surely arrested development consists not in refusing to lose old things but in failing to add new things? . . . I now enjoy Tolstoy and Jane Austen . . . as well as fairy tales and I call that growth: if I had had to lose the fairy tales in order to acquire the novelists, I would not say that I had grown but only that I had changed. A tree grows because it adds rings: a train doesn’t grow by leaving one station behind and puffing on to the next.

He adds that:

In reality, the case is stronger and more complicated than this. I think my growth is just as apparent when I now read the fairy tales as when I read the novelists, for I now enjoy the fairy tales better than I did in childhood: being now able to

put more in, of course I get more out (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 60).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Defence**

Lewis notes that “The whole association of fairy tale and fantasy with childhood is local and accidental” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 61), and argues for an appreciation of the fairy tale as an exercise of human nature:

According to Tolkien the appeal of the fairy story lies in the fact that man there most fully exercises his function as a “subcreator” . . . making, so far as possible, a subordinate world of his own. Since, in Tolkien’s view, this is one of man’s proper functions, delight naturally arises whenever it is successfully performed. For Jung, fairy tale liberates Archetypes which dwell in the collective unconscious, and when we read a good fairy tale we are obeying the old precept “Know thyself” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 61-62).

Likewise, we can note that the whole association of religious faith with childhood is local (very local) and accidental. The association is a “talking point” arising from Enlightenment rhetoric, despite the fact that many leading figures of the Enlightenment were theists and/or Christians (e.g. Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Thomas Reid, Mary Wollstonecraft...).

### **CONCLUSION**

Whether the rhetorical subject at hand is writing for children or doing Christian apologetics for people of various ages, Lewis advises that authenticity is key. The apologist should reject condescension and aim at a “proper meeting . . . between independent personalities” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 70), communicating what they themselves appreciate and find persuasive about Christianity.

Lewis would allow that in one-on-one discussion, the apologist can focus on the particular needs of a specific dialogue partner, but he would caution that the apologist can’t regale their audience with things calculated to please but regarded by themselves with indifference or contempt.

Christianity offers a story that can be appreciated by children, but which is *not* merely “a children’s story”. The whole association of religious faith with childhood “is local and accidental” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 61), and assumes “a false conception of growth” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, 60). Many adults, including adult intellectuals of the highest caliber

(such as Lewis himself), find that the more they put more in to appreciating the gospel and the Bible, the more they get out.

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## BIONOTE

**Peter S. WILLIAMS** ([www.peterswilliams.com](http://www.peterswilliams.com)), English philosopher. Based in Southampton, England, he is Assistant Professor in Communication and Worldviews at Gimlekollen College, NLA University, Norway. His publications include: *Apologetics in 3D: Essays on Apologetics and Spirituality* (Wipf & Stock, 2021); *Outgrowing God? A Beginner's Guide to Richard Dawkins and the God Debate* (Wipf & Stock, 2020); *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense About the Jesus of History* (Wipf & Stock, 2019); *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Wipf & Stock, 2019) and *C. S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists* (Paternoster, 2013). His peer reviewed papers have appeared in journals including *Philosophia Christi*, *Linguaculture*, *Theofilos* and *Think*.  
Email: [peterswilliams@googlemail.com](mailto:peterswilliams@googlemail.com)