

Tolkien's Lord

Essay

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PART ONE

A striking ignorance afflicts discussion of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Some dullards dismiss literary interpretation outright. They scream 'Creativity!' until the mindless noise smothers discussion. For others, all fiction is no more than a textured cloud of entertaining romance that thrills and fills empty imaginations. On the other hand, the average person has not read the original novel and suffers from the Hollywood disadvantage of thinking that a clever but childish formula of manful heroes slaying unrepentant villains, impressive cinematic effects, cute secondary characters, creepy monsters, dastardly traitors, and a heavenly mystical force versus an evil mystical force somehow clumps together meaningful and easily digestible chunks of Tolkien's epic. As the culmination of Professor Tolkien's life and research, one can assume that neither the trivialization, nor the gutting of his magnum opus would be a thrill.

To lay a discursive foundation and overcome the general unfamiliarity with the novel, the first part of this essay lists supporting quotations for six of the novel's essential ideas, while the second part attempts an argument, or at least a suggestion, of what Tolkien's themes might be.

1.A. —The Voice

For those sensitive to religious issues, the most obvious aspect of *Rings* is the mysticism. Although Tolkien was a devout Catholic, his novel has not been formally accepted as proper Catholic reading material. Mysticism in any form has not found favor with the Church, since it implies that contact with the Divine Being, and thus salvation, is possible outside the official hierarchy. However, at least one Catholic scholar speaks of *Rings* as a "Catholic poem", and notes that many devout believers are informally introduced to this work by preceding generations. Moreover, countless Tolkien lovers from all the world's religions and cultures have been touched by this universal story of values in conflict. No matter where one comes down on the issues involved, either religious or aesthetic, the novel prompts questions. This first set of quotes exhibits the mystic 'Voice' that moves people to do what they should, and not

merely what they can.

Note: The quotations are marked with "B" for Book, and "c" for chapter.

B. —Quotations

Frodo, on leaving the Shire with Sam, Pippin, and Merry, has the sudden desire to *hide* from an approaching rider, that turns out to be a Black Rider, even though the Ring otherwise prompts him to *expose* himself.

'[Even] as he said it, he had a feeling that it was not so, and a sudden desire to hide from view of the rider came over him...' [B1,cII]

In the Old Forest, when Pippin & Merry are trapped inside Old Man Willow, Frodo runs calling for help.

'Frodo, without any clear idea of why he did so, or what he hoped for, ran along the path crying *help! help! help!*' [B1,cVI]

Escaping Boromir, Frodo finds the seat of Ammon Hen, where the eye of Sauron holds him, and the Voice warns him.

'The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger...' [B2,cX]

Confronted by the hideous Shelob in her lair, Frodo holds up the phial of Galadriel.

'*Aiya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima!* he cried, and knew not what he had spoken; for it seemed that another voice spoke through his, clear, untroubled by the foul air of the pit.' [B4,cIX]

Shelob has poisoned Frodo. As she crouches to spring on Sam, he pulls out the phial of Galadriel.

'And then his tongue was loosed and his voice cried in a language which he did not know...*o menel palan-Dirielle nallon sí di'nguruthos!*...And with that he staggered to his feet and was Samwise the hobbit, Hamfast's son, again.' [B4,cX]

Sam looks for an entrance to rescue Frodo from the orc-tower, Cirith Ungol.

'He took off the Ring, moved it may be by some deep premonition of danger, though to himself he thought only that he wished to see more clearly.' [B6,cI]

The Watchers at the gate of Cirith Ungol forge an invisible wall that prevents Sam's entrance.

'Then greatly daring, because he could think of nothing else to do, answering a sudden thought that came to him, he drew slowly out the phial of Galadriel and held it up. Its white light quickened swiftly...' [B6,cI]

Unable to find his Master in the tower of Cirith Ungol, Sam sits on a step, weary and defeated.

'And then softly, to his own surprise, there at the vain end of his long journey and his grief, moved by what though in his heart he could not tell, Sam began to sing.' [B6,cI]

Struggling to climb Mount Doom to the Chambers of Fire, Sam drops exhausted beside the prostrate Frodo.

'Suddenly a sense of urgency which he did not understand came to Sam. It was almost as if he had been called: "Now, now, or it will be too late!"' [B6,cIII]

2.A.—God's Plot

The mysticism that literally holds the characters to the preordained sequence of events manifests itself mostly through 'chance'. Everyone is kept strictly on schedule in the divine plot through these subtle interventions—recognized as miraculous by the 'Wise'—so it would seem that the only free will allowed in Tolkien's world is to choose God, or not. Those perverted by the selfishness, or subjectivism, of the Ring think that everything they do is by personal choice, even when they are merely lesser evils manipulated by more powerful ones. At bottom, to Tolkien, there is no meaner, nor more dangerous sin than pride.

B. —Quotations

Gandalf explains to Frodo the most unusual aspect of the Ring's history.

'Bilbo's arrival just at that time, and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark... there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it.' [B1,cII]

As Frodo, Sam, and Pippin walk to Buckland, a Black Rider appears, but the menace is thwarted by the coincidental appearance of High Elves, very few of whom remain in Middle-earth.

'Once more the desire to slip on the Ring came over Frodo...almost before he realized what he was doing, his hand was groping in his pocket. But at that moment there came a sound like mingled song and laughter.' [B1,cIII]

After saving the hobbits from Old Man Willow, Bombadil reveals that this was his last visit to that part of the Forest until the next year.

'Did I hear you calling? Nay, I did not hear: I was busy singing. Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it.' [B1,cVI]

Elrond opens the Council in Rivendell.

'What shall we do with the Ring...That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world.' [B2,cII]

The Elves and Wizards drove Sauron out of Mirkwood.

'...and that was in the very year of the finding of this Ring: a strange chance, if chance it was.'
[B2,cII]

Aragorn sought long for the elusive Gollum.

'I, too, despaired at last, and I began my homeward journey. And then, by fortune, I came suddenly on what I sought: the marks of soft feet beside a muddy pool.' [B2,cII]

The luck of the Gollum shows itself when, Haldir the elf hesitates before shooting him.

'It was not an orc... It seemed to be wary, and to have some skill in trees, or I might have thought that it was one of you hobbits...I did not shoot, for I dared not arouse any cries: we cannot risk battle.' [B2,cVI]

The three Pursuers meet Gandalf the White in Fangorn, where they discuss the hobbits, Merry and Pippin.

[Gandalf] 'They were brought to Fangorn, and their coming was like the falling of small stones that starts an avalanche in the mountains.' [B3,cV]

Saruman's treacherous attempt to steal the Ring has foiled many plans.

[Gandalf] 'For the Enemy has failed—so far. Thanks to Saruman...So between them our enemies have contrived only to bring Merry and Pippin with marvellous speed, and in the nick of time, to Fangorn, where otherwise they would never have come at all!' [B3,cV]

Gandalf explains what happened to Merry and Pippin.

'Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest...Merry and Pippin have been fortunate: they met him here, even where we sit.' [B3,cV]

Aragorn is comforted by Gandalf about his painful decision not to follow Frodo but to rescue Merry and Pippin.

'You chose amid doubts the path that seemed right: the choice was just, and it has been rewarded. For so we have met in time, who otherwise might have met too late.' B3,cV

When Pippin looks into the Palantir, Gandalf quickly examines him.

'You have taken no harm... A fool, but an honest fool, you remain, Peregrin Took... You have been saved, and all your friends too, mainly by good fortune, as it is called.' [B3,cXI]

Lieutenants of Faramir discuss their Captain.

'He leads now in all perilous ventures. But his life is charmed, or fate spares him for some other end.' [B4,cIV]

Sam has blundered into naming the Ring while talking to Faramir.

[Faramir] 'So that is the answer to all the riddles! The One Ring that was thought to have perished from the world. And Boromir tried to take it by force? And you escaped? And ran all the way—to me! And here in the wild I have you: two halflings... A pretty stroke of fortune!' [B4,cV]

Faramir soothes Sam for his mistake in naming the Ring.

'If you seem to have stumbled, think that it was fated to be so.' [B4,cV]

Sam and Frodo talk about the old tales as they walk to Cirith Ungol.

'Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it...' [B4,cVIII]

Aragorn admits that he revealed himself to Sauron through the Stone of Orthanc.

'I deemed that the time was ripe, and that the Stone had come to me for just such a purpose.' [B5,IX]

The luck of the Gollum appears again after he escapes orcs and steals a mail-shirt discarded by Frodo.

'Curse him! No sooner had he slipped us and run off than word came he's wanted alive, wanted quick... [The mail-shirt] saved his life anyhow... Why, before I knew he was wanted I shot him, as neat as neat, at fifty paces right in the back; but he ran on.' [B6,cII]

By chance, Frodo and Sam have joined a column of orcs marching at quick time across Mordor, and subsequently have to find a way to escape.

'Frodo's strength began to give out... just as [Sam] was putting his hand to the hilt of his sword, there came an unexpected relief... Sam woke up, grasped quickly at his chance, and threw himself to the ground... Then he pitched down into a shallow pit that opened unexpectedly before them...' [B6,cII]

Galadriel and the others encounter Saruman on the road after his fall.

[Galadriel] 'Saruman... we have other errands and other cares that seem to us more urgent than hunting for you. Say rather that you are overtaken by good fortune; for now you have a last chance [to repent].' [B6,cVI]

3.A.—Continuity

Tolkien was a scholar of literature with a theological bent who had created languages for a hobby since he was a teenager, and whose personal experience included societal violence and devastation. WWI killed all his friends. As a scholar, he recognized that civilization is knowledge incorporate, and that the story of civilization is the chronicle of wisdom, both achieved and lost. Unlike people who are assumed birthed in sin, neither accumulated knowledge, nor civilization were inherently bad, only they are applied makes them creative or destructive. In *Rings*, Gandalf exemplifies knowledge for the benefit of others. Sauron, by contrast, is the archetypal perversion that uses knowledge for the advancement and glorification of self. Tolkien did consider spiritual revelation greater than wisdom, so that the growth of civilization through knowledge involved only a very small part—a few scenes—of God's cosmic drama. However, for him, continuity of knowledge becomes wisdom, wisdom becomes civilization, and civilization becomes the human story within the spiritual story that is God's plot. Thus, the essential principle of Tolkien's world is the continuity of growth, and most especially, of growth to God.

B. —Quotations

In Rivendell, on being shown the Ring that once was his, Bilbo seems to become 'a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands'.

[Bilbo] 'Put it away! I am sorry: sorry you have come in for this burden: sorry about everything. Don't adventures ever have an end? I suppose not. Someone else always has to carry on the story.'
[B2,cI]

Elrond opens the Council at Rivendell by stating its purpose.

'You will hear today all that you need in order to understand the purposes of the Enemy... You will learn that your trouble is but part of the trouble of all the western world... What shall we do with the Ring... That is the doom that we must deem.'
[B2,II]

The three Pursuers must decide whether to proceed in the dark, or wait until morning, and so debate the matter hurriedly but in logical fashion, finally laying the matter to Aragorn who has the greatest knowledge of woodcraft in the Western world.

[Gimli] 'You are our guide...and you are skilled in the chase. You shall choose.'
[B3,cII]

A Rohirrim laughs that the three Pursuers run over the green earth in search of 'halflings' from old songs and children's tales, to which Aragorn answers.

'The green earth, say you? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!'
[B3,cII]

Éomer and the three Pursuers debate thoughtfully over what is best to do, although pressed from all sides, with Éomer unsure because of a world 'all grown strange' to which Aragorn replies.

'Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.'
[B3,cII]

Treebeard, at the Entmoot, explains to Merry and Pippin that Ents make swift, unhesitating decisions once they have the facts.

'...deciding what to do does not take Ents so long as going over all the facts and events that they have to make up their minds about.'
[B3,cIV]

Faramir reveals a careful deliberation that is quite unlike his brother Boromir's impulsiveness.

'I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness...I love only that which they defend: the city of the Men of Numenor; and I would have her loved...Not feared, save as men may fear the dignity of a man, old and wise.'
[B4,cV]

Nor does Faramir delight in the need of his days.

'[We] now love war and valour as things good in themselves... and though we still hold that a warrior should have more skills and knowledge than only the craft of weapons and slaying, we esteem a warrior, nonetheless, above men of other crafts.'
[B4,cV]

Sam and Frodo discuss the millenia old tale of Beren and the Silmaril, which contain the

light of the stars.

[Sam] '...you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?' [Frodo] 'No, they never end as tales. But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended.' [B4,cVIII]

After the collapse of Sauron's first attack on Gondor, the leaders of the West meet at the tents of Aragon outside the walls of the city to analyze intelligently what must be their strategy.

[Gandalf quotes Denethor] "'...against the Power that has now arisen there is no victory.'" I do not bid you despair, as he did, but to ponder the truth in these words.' [B5,cIX]

4.A.—The Personal Virtues

Pity, duty, sacrifice, personal will (i.e., tempered character), redemption, and choice are universal ideals and personal virtues crucial to Tolkien and *Rings*. *Duty* is the acceptance in Tolkien's world of the cross to be born, and whether you *choose* to bear it, or not, is the point on which your *redemption* stands. *Will* carries you through *sacrifice* to the completion of *duty*, while *pity* saves you if you fall in trial. So completely did he believe in pity as a divine virtue that Tolkien shared the troubles of both close friends and complete strangers with patience and compassion. So absolutely did he believe in pity as divine attribute that Tolkien gave a gangrel murderer like Gollum, and the master traitor, Saruman, more than one opportunity to repent.

B. —Quotations

When Frodo regrets that Bilbo did not kill Gollum, Gandalf replies.

'It was Pity that stayed his hand. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so... I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it.' [B1,cII]

Elrond speaks from the wisdom of ages concerning the Ring.

'[For] good or ill it belongs to Middle-earth; it is for us who still dwell here to deal with it.' [B2,cII]

Gandalf stands against half-measures and easy roads in dealing with the Ring.

'...it is not our part to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace...' [B2,cII]

To the Ringbearer yet unknown, Elrond implies that faith would serve better than power or knowledge in this task.

'The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong.' [B2,cII]

At the gates of Minas Morgul, Sam urges an exhausted Frodo to hurry.

'Despair had not left [Frodo], but the weakness had passed. He even smiled grimly, feeling now as clearly as a moment before he had felt the opposite, that what he had to do, he had to do, if he could...' [B4,cVIII]

Sam once thought that the people in tales and stories sought out these adventures because they found life dull.

'But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind... But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't.' [B4,cVIII]

Shelob, in terrible pain, turns to destroy Sam but finds his will dominant.

'As if his indomitable spirit had set its potency in motion, the [Phial of Galadriel] blazed suddenly like a white torch in his hand. It flamed like a star that leaping from the firmament sears the dark air with intolerable light.' [B4,cX]

Gandalf reminds Denethor, Steward of Gondor, that the future of Middle-earth, and not just of Gondor, must be considered.

'You think as is your wont, my lord, of Gondor only... Yet there are other men and other lives, and time still to be. And for me, I pity even his slaves.' [B5,cIV]

The leaders of the West in the tents of Aragorn before Gondor are counseled by Gandalf to have hope, or faith.

'You have only a choice of evils; and prudence would counsel you to strengthen such strong places as you have... I do not counsel prudence... I still hope for victory, but not by arms...' [B5,cIX]

Duty to the future, notes Gandalf, is done by ordering the present.

'[It] is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.' [B5,cIX]

But, continues Gandalf, such is not easy.

'We must walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves... But this, I deem, is our duty. And better so than to perish nonetheless—as we surely shall, if we sit here—and know as we die that no new age shall be.' [B5,cIX]

The debate before the city of Gondor reaches a crucial point, and now the leaders must decide whether to trust in hope, or power.

'At length Aragorn spoke. "As I have begun, so I will go on. We come now to the very brink, where hope and despair are akin. To waver is to fall."' [B5,cIX]

Sam faces a will much greater than his own at the gate of the Watchers, so again he uses the phial of Galadriel.

'Its white light quickened swiftly... For a moment Sam caught a glitter in the black stones of their eyes, the very malice of which made him quail; but slowly he felt their will waver and crumble into fear.' [B6,cI]

After they assess their chances of struggling across Mordor, 'a dying land', Frodo admits to Sam.

'It's no worse than I expected. I never hoped to get across. I can't see any hope of it now. But I've still got to do the best I can.' [B6,cI]

Frodo and Sam are under forced march in an orc column.

'They had gone some miles... when Frodo's strength began to give out and his will wavered.'
[B6,cII]

Sam's geniality is tempered by the bitter realization that, even if they achieve the destruction of the Ring, all that awaits them is death.

'But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him...' [B6,cIII]

As the last stage of their journey approaches, Sam debates with his inner voice of despair.

[Despair]'Don't be a fool, Sam Gamgee...It's all quite useless...you'll die just the same, or worse. You might just as well lie down now and give it up.' [Sam] 'I'll get there, if I leave everything but my bones behind...So stop arguing!' [B6,cIII]

On Mount Doom, Sam holds the murderous Gollum with his sword but is unable to strike.

'His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved...But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him...now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to the Ring...' [B6,cIII]

Saruman in the Shire is nearly mobbed by wrathful hobbits, but Frodo stops them.

'I will not have him slain. It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing...He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it.'
[B6,cVIII]

Frodo explains to the weeping Sam why he must forever leave the Shire.

'I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them...' [B6,cIX]

5.A.—The Valued Heart

The hobbits received their strength of character, and their discretion in judging the integrity of others, from living close to the virtues of Nature. Life grows, nature grows. Hobbits are people of the soil who have direct experience with the values that hurt life as well as those that enhance it. For Tolkien, the values of life weld the appreciation of life (rather than disdaining or denying it) to the greater value of the spirit to create an universal continuity. While value for some resides in the spirit alone, in contrast to others who claim life as value's well-spring, *Rings* suggests that both life and spirit have their respective value, and neither should be denied. Tolkien's vision saw life and spirit fusing in the heart, where nature's life-values prompt growth toward divine value. And it is through the heart that the Voice of Divinity, when needful, speaks to the devout.

B. —Quotations

Tom Bombadil tells the hobbits about the world of the Old Forest.

'As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home.' [B1,cVII]

At the Council in Rivendell, Elrond explains patiently to Boromir why the Ring cannot be used.

'The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman... nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so.' [B2,cII]

In choosing the Company, Gandalf advises Elrond to include the hobbits, Merry and Pippin, for they were a choice of the heart.

'I think, Elrond, that in this matter it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom.' [B2,cIII]

Frodo finds Boromir's arguments for the Ring to be reasonable, but his heart warns against them.

[Boromir] 'Warning? Warning against what?' [Frodo] 'Against delay. Against the way that seems easier. Against refusal of the burden that is laid on me. Against—well, if it must be said, against trust in the strength and truth of Men.' B2,cX]

Following Gollum from the Black Gate of Mordor, Frodo and Sam enter the fair country of Ithilien.

'As they walked, brushing their way through bush and herb, sweet odours rose about them. Gollum coughed and retched; but the hobbits breathed deep, and suddenly Sam laughed, for heart's ease not for jest.' [B4,cIV]

Sam has foolishly revealed the secret of the Ring to Faramir.

'If you seem to have stumbled, think that it was fated to be so. Your heart is shrewd as well as faithful, and saw clearer than your eyes...' [B4,cV]

Faramir admires the keen sense of value displayed by Frodo and hobbits in general.

'If you took this thing on yourself, unwilling, at others' asking, then you have pity and honour from me. And I marvel at you: to keep it hid and not to use it. You are a new people and a new world to me... Your land must be a realm of peace and content, and there must gardeners be in high honour.' B4,cV

Gandalf has been warned of Denethor's madness and finds a porter dead.

'Work of the Enemy...Such deeds he loves: friend at war with friends; loyalty divided in a confusion of hearts.' [B5,cVII]

Merry and Pippin agree after the battle of Gondor that though the average hobbit can't live on the heights for long, they can honor them.

'It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep.' [B5,cVIII]

The Warden of the Houses of Healing finds the hobbits surprising in their resiliency.

'They are a remarkable race... Very tough in the fibre, I deem.' [B5,cVIII]

The instant that Sam puts on the Ring temptations arise to seduce him.

'Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age... at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit... In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat...' [B6,cI]

On the wastes of Mordor, Sam stares quietly at the stars in the night sky.

'[Like] a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach... Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him... putting away all fear he cast himself into a deep untroubled sleep.' [B6,cII]

6.A.—Perversion

Tolkien felt that subjectivism—selfishness or relativism—seeing the self as the whole, rather than as an aspect of the whole—was core to the problem of evil. Out of it came all the variations of perversity: Gollum, who loved and hated himself; Sauron, blind to all but desire; Shelob, obsessed with feeding her greatness on all life; Barrow-Wights, guarding hoarded treasure they cannot use; and the wizard Saruman who was seduced, like Sauron, by the thought that if knowledge is power, then personal power makes one a god—the ultimate, futile self-glorification of subjectivism. For Tolkien, the root and purpose of subjectivism, and thus of evil, is endless, unquenchable desire.

B. —Quotations

Gandalf tells Frodo of Gollum under the mountain where Bilbo found him.

'All the "great secrets" under the mountains had turned out to be just empty night... He hated the dark, and he hated light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of all... He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter.' [B1,cII]

Strider describes the Black Riders to the hobbits.

'And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it.' [B1,cXI]

The Council of the Wise was misled by Saruman who had been seduced by want of the Ring.

[Gandalf] 'I was lulled by the words of Saruman the Wise... In all the long wars with the Dark Tower treason has ever been our greatest foe.' [B2,cII]

Trapped in Isengard, Gandalf worried over his friends far away.

'Fear was ever in my heart for my friends in the Shire; but still I had some hope... And both my fear and my hope proved ill-founded. For my hope was founded on a fat man in Bree; and my fear was founded on the cunning of Sauron... [but] the power of Sauron is still less than fear makes it.' [B2,cII]

Evil knows only desire, as Gandalf implies about Sauron, never completion.

'For he is very wise, and weighs things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power, and so he judges all hearts.' [B2,III]

Haldir must blindfold fellow elf, Legolas, before he may enter Lothlorien.

'Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him.' [B2,VI]

Frodo offers the Ring to Galadriel who refuses the temptation and perversion of power in order to keep her spirit unsoiled.

'I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.' [B2,VII]

Frodo realizes that the seductive power of the Ring is tearing the Company apart.

'This at least is plain: the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone...' [B2,X]

If good's bane is despair, then doubt is evil's nemesis—it can trust no one but itself.

[Gandalf] 'Indeed he is in great fear, not knowing what mighty one may suddenly appear, wielding the Ring, and assailing him with war, seeking to cast him down and take his place. That we should wish to cast him down and have no one in his place is not a thought that occurs to his mind... For imagining war he has let loose war, believing that he has no time to waste... Wise fool. For if he had used all his power to guard Mordor, so that none could enter, and bent all his guile to the hunting of the Ring, then indeed hope would have faded: neither Ring nor bearer could long have eluded him.' [B3,V]

Saruman as ally, notes Gandalf, is treacherous for Sauron.

'...they have filled themselves with new doubts that disturb their plans. No tidings of the battle will come to Mordor, thanks to the horsemen of Rohan; but the Dark Lord knows that two hobbits were taken in the Eryn Muil and borne away towards Isengard against the will of his own servants. He now has Isengard to fear as well as Minas Tirith. If Minas Tirith falls, it will go ill with Saruman.' [B3,cV]

Gimli hazards that a war between Saruman and Sauron would benefit Middle-earth.

[Gandalf] 'The victor would emerge stronger than either, and free from doubt...But Isengard cannot fight Mordor, unless Saruman first obtains the Ring... I look into his mind and I see his doubt.' [B3,cV]

Orcs, easily manipulated by Sauron, are portrayed as brutal and ignorant.

'Orcs sprang up [the ladders] like apes in the dark forests of the South.' [B3,cVII]

Isengard has been shaped by Saruman's ambition into a copy of Barad-dur.

'A strong place and wonderful was Isengard... But Saruman had slowly shaped it to his shifting purposes, and made it better, as he thought, being deceived... so that what he made was naught, only a little copy, a child's model or a slave's flattery, of that vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power, Barad-dur, the Dark Tower, which suffered no rival, and laughed at flattery...' [B3,cVIII]

Saruman refuses Gandalf's offer of safe conduct if he would but leave Orthanc of his own free will.

“The treacherous are ever distrustful,” answered Gandalf wearily.’ [B3,cX]

The same evil appears at its two extremes, slave and master.

'For a moment it appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds. Gollum raised himself and began pawing at Frodo, fawning at his knees.' [B4,cI]

The ultimate end of evil is...nothing.

'Even to the Mere of Dead Faces some haggard phantom of green spring would come; but here neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived...They had come to the desolation that lay before Mordor: the lasting monument to the dark labour of its slaves that should endure when all their purposes were made void; a land defiled, diseased beyond all healing... "I feel sick," said Sam. Frodo did not speak.' [B4,cII]

Gollum feels the call of the Ring—the exaltation of self over all.

'See, my precious: if we has it, then we can escape, even from Him, eh? Perhaps we grows very strong, stronger than Wraiths. Lord Smeagol? Gollum the Great? The Gollum! Eat fish every day, three times a day, fresh from the sea. Most Precious Gollum! Must have it. We wants it, we wants it, we wants it!' [B4,cII]

As there is the will to duty is, there is the will to evil, as when Shelob 'plays' with Frodo and Sam in her dark hole, but the former has larger intent, the latter has only self.

'[S]uddenly it was easier to move, as if some hostile will for the moment had released them.' [B4,cX]

As evil often does in cleverness or anger, Shelob hurts herself while attempting to crush Sam under her, impaling herself on his sword.

'...Shelob, with the driving force of her own cruel will, with strength greater than any warrior's hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike. Deep, deep it pricked, as Sam was crushed slowly to the ground.' [B4,cX]

The army of the Enemy encircles the walls of Gondor.

'But soon there were few left in Minas Tirith who had the heart to stand up and defy the hosts of Mordor. For yet another weapon, swifter than hunger, the Lord of the Dark Tower had: dread and despair.' [B5,cIV]

Evil is a force which must be met in all ages.

[Gandalf] 'Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary.' [B5,cIX]

Gandalf depicts evil as a perverse desire—ravenous and envious—which can never satisfied.

'If [the Ring] is destroyed, then he will fall...and he will be maimed for ever, becoming a mere spirit of malice that gnaws itself in the shadows...' [B5,cIX]

Sauron watches and worries in his arrogance.

[Gandalf] 'He is not yet sure...He sees much and hears much. His Nazgul are still abroad... His doubt will be growing... His Eye is now straining towards us, blind almost to all else that is moving...we must at all costs keep his Eye from his true peril... We must make ourselves the bait, though his jaws should close on us. He will take that bait...' [B5,cIX]

Evil once again shoots itself in the foot.

'...the Eye of Mordor, searching, trying to pierce the shadows that it had made for its own defence, but which now hindered it in its unquiet and doubt.' [B6,cI]

Evil is the spirit of destruction, of anti-growth.

[Frodo] 'The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them...' [B6,c I]

Evil is obsessive.

[Frodo] '...the Ring is so heavy, Sam. And I begin to see it in my mind all the time, like a great wheel of fire.' [B6,cII]

Forced to march with a slave column of thug-like orcs, a fierce *uruk* slave-master keeps the unwilling and the lazy moving with a whip, and laughs.

'Where there's a whip there's a will, my slugs. Hold up!...Don't you know we're at war?' [B6,cII]

The hobbits return to find the Shire afflicted with evil that stretches from the rebellious Morgoth (who fashioned Mordor) through Sauron to Saruman and on to others, each but a copy of a copy.

[Frodo] 'Yes, this is Mordor...Just one of its works. Saruman was doing its work all the time, even when he thought he was working for himself. And the same with those that Saruman tricked...' [B6,cVIII]

Tolkien's appendix tells of The One's destruction of the Numenor, where Sauron had seduced many of the forefathers of men.

'Sauron was indeed caught in the wreck of Numenor, so that the bodily form in which he long had walked perished; but he fled back to Middle-earth, a spirit of hatred borne upon a dark wind...and his power thereafter was through terror alone.' [Appendix A]

PART TWO

7.—Comparisons

J.R.R. Tolkien did not claim originality in his work as this would threaten its validity. *The Lord of the Rings* was God's revelation, gift, and duty, rather than an act for which he could take personal credit. Basically, he saw himself as a humble man who took dictation from the Divine Spirit. This is not an uncommon attitude. Both the saint and the artist must subdue their arrogance, which tends to smother principles and overvalue selected facts, so that they may clearly differentiate the pattern of reality's fabric. Rather than a simplistic allegory with obvious moralizing, Tolkien fashioned a 'Secondary World' that embodied principles with 'applicability' to life in God's first creation, the 'Primary World'. As artist and preacher, he pulled the reader into issues he felt vital to life and spirit. His theological and aesthetic ideas are an interwoven: half of the novel grounds itself in the values of growth, or life-values, which enhance life's ability to reach its fullest potential. While these life-values are portrayed in the hobbits' tremendous resistance to physical torture and spiritual seduction, the characters of evil are possessed by and obsessed with perversion—they don't love life or living, they love themselves. Between the two extremes, Tolkien painted the race of men as waffling between seduction and obedience.

Literary parallels exhibit lucidly how others have dealt with these and similar issues. Although the extremes of idealism vs. cynicism are less marked, Frodo, the idealist, and Sam, the skeptic, reflect two characters who are actually one as seen in Cervantes' Don Quixote/Sancho Panza. The Christian attitude of distrust for the things of the world was stated by St. Paul—Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. In other words, possessions bind the person more closely to this world. The tradition continues with the novelist, Stephen King, in such works as *Needful Things*, where the devil uses the love of un-needful objects to catch souls, and *Christine*, in which a teenager is seduced and possessed by a 'bad' object. In Tolkien's novel, the Ring itself is an object that is both machine and symbol: Saruman with his mind of wheels and gears desires the ring of Power, and does not love growing things. But the tradition of St. Paul disdains things that entangle one more closely to life, whereas Tolkien implies that living close to the good earth tempers one's character with a value that is integral to God's intention. As a last note on this point, *Rings* could be seen as a systematic rebuke to Nietzsche, whose main criticism was that Christians avoided responsibility in life by *splitting off* all value from life and dumping it into a heavenly abstraction. Whatever

Tolkien though about this criticism, it is interesting that he found it necessary to write a story that exemplifies life as *unified* to spirit.

In another literary parallel, Gandalf echoes a thought enunciated by Tolkien's contemporary, George Orwell.

'Indeed there is a power in Rivendell to withstand the might of Mordor, for a while: and elsewhere other powers still dwell. There is power, too, of another kind in the Shire. But all such places will soon become islands under siege...' B2,c1

It doesn't take, Orwell wrote, a formal triad of huge power structures to have a dystopia matching the essentials of the fictional *1984*. By the principle of weight and measure, a globe pocked with many small tyrannies generates an identical dynamic. Civilization, as the embodiment of stability within change, tends to stratify into intransigent power structures, thus losing the capacity for creative change. And since empires of all sizes are grounded in *arbitrary* relations of power which cannot adapt to any substantive change, they inevitably become brittle and, in time, break. In an atmosphere of hostility and cold-hot aggression, the world adapts itself under force of the mindless 'law' of necessity, or simply falls apart, into a clustering of hostile camps. Cleverness often and fraud always characterize the 'law' of empires, with the smallest making the biggest squeaks of pomposity, but the intelligence essential to growth is forbidden within their influence. Real change threatens power.

A second novel, much less known than either Orwell or Tolkien's, *The Roots of Heaven* by Romain Gary, holds a particularly close thematic analogy to *Rings*. Gary, an experienced politician who served in an embassy post, wrote a politically realistic tale set in Africa about Morel, a man who survived a Nazi concentration camp by dreaming of elephants as gigantic symbols of freedom. After the war, Morel follows a "mad" scheme to save the elephants from extinction.

'Today you say that elephants are archaic and cumbersome, that they interfere with progress, and the temptation will be so great to let them fall by the road and not to burden ourselves with that extra load. And in the end man himself will become in your eyes a clumsy luxury, an archaic survival from the past, and you'll dispense with him too, and the only thing left will be total efficiency and universal slavery and man himself will disappear under the weight of his material achievement... But just try explaining to young yet stunted hearts that we had not only to move forward but to encumber ourselves with the elephants as well, take a weight of that size along on the journey.' [*Roots of Heaven*]

And then again—

'Any fellow who's known war, fear, who thinks of his children and of the hydrogen tests, and of political oppression, is beginning to understand that the protection of nature concerns him directly.' [*Roots of Heaven*]

As can be seen, Gary's realistic tale reflects the concerns of Tolkien's fantasy. The values of nature are vital to any meaningful existence, because nature recreates raw

existence into the substance of value. In other words, life is simultaneously value and creation—life is the medium of life. The ‘heaven’ of both men, whether it be spiritual or material, roots itself in the living earth. They also share the conviction that suffering improves understanding, because it tempers one’s personality, i.e., values exposed to conflict in a conflicted world are thus strengthened. This is reminiscent of Tolkien’s argument for a tempered character as embodied in the hobbit, Samwise Gamgee. But one might note that suffering will as likely destroy as temper; and while challenges to one’s beliefs can prompt personal growth, brutality merely brutalizes. The orcs of the world exist in and through conflict.

The last comparison is interesting because it’s at once so similar to Tolkien, and so divergent. Like Tolkien, Edgar A. Poe worked with big ideas. A year before his death, he wrote an obscure work called *Eureka*—obscure as in little known and difficult, not trivial—in which he used topical scientific data interwoven with his religious convictions to portray an intimate link between God and His creations throughout the universe. Poe saw the values of the heart and of life in continuity with what he called the ‘Heart Divine’.

‘In the conduct of this Discourse, I am aiming less at physical than at metaphysical order... keeping unbroken that chain of *graduated impression* by which alone the intellect of Man can expect to encompass the grandeurs of which I speak, and, in their majestic totality, to comprehend them... [A]ccording to the schools [of science], I prove nothing. So be it:--I design but to suggest--and to convince through the suggestion.’ [*Eureka*]

Tolkien was also quite clear about his intentions.

‘*The Lord of the Rings* is fundamentally a religious and Catholic work. The religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.’ [Tolkien]

By the continuity of the physical with the divine, each would lead his readers by suggestion to religious insight.

Poe and Tolkien’s religious currents root in a civilization permeated with Dante’s profound casting of beauty as central to Earth and Heaven, where beauty is the medium and the embodiment of the divine. Since the two men hated the obvious moralizing of allegory, one author fashioned a poem of existence in the tradition of Lucretius, and the other constructed a fictional ‘Secondary’ world. Beauty that is Goodness that is Truth lies at the heart of both works.

‘I offer this Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true... I present the composition as an Art-Product... or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem.’ [*Eureka*, Preface]

‘The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness...’ [Tolkien]

To establish the continuity of spirit and material—in short, to lay a foundation for the

idea of value—they insisted that *wholeness* become the standard of reference, since value cannot exist in isolation, ideal or practical, and so must be an active part of the larger reality. Two problems ensue when value is torn from the whole. One is endlessness—which Poe attacked in the concept of infinity—and concerns arbitrary relations such as power and exploitation. Throughout his writings, Poe assumes or speaks directly to the idea of gradation, that all things relate to all things, ‘Life within Life... and all within the Spirit Divine.’ He denied the conception of an *infinite* universe, of existence without end, because then even the atoms could not come into relation:

‘[No] aggregation of Matter — no stars — no worlds — nothing but a perpetually atomic and inconsequential Universe...’ [*Eureka*]

Although Tolkien pursued the same idea his greatest concern was salvation, so his was a different emphasis. The soul excised from the complex whole of life with its values and moral laws would seek to impose itself on others by power and aggression. In such an existence, action with its pre-ordained ends is perverted into the endless and meaningless *processes* of conflictual ‘survival’ and amoral ‘necessity’, e.g., the Nazgul are forever ravenous (‘at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it’); Shelob forever devours more life until she would crush the mountains with her bulk; Gollum only lives to forever cherish his ‘Precious’; and Sauron can never satisfy, nor slacken, nor gorge his appetite for *absolute* control.

Secondly, both authors condemn subjectivism—overvaluing of the self even to the point of valuing nothing but the self—as one of the deepest and most far-reaching tragedies of human civilization. One aspect of Poe’s psychological criticism of subjectivism, most sustained in his short stories, uses obsession to explore the idea of ‘perverseness’, in which impulse drives a person to do something wrong because one *knows* that it is wrong.

‘[P]erverseness is one of the *primitive impulses* of the human heart... which give direction to the character of Man. [my italics] Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination...to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This [is a]... longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong’s sake only...’ [*The Black Cat*]

This idea resonates in R.L. Stevenson’s analysis of the monster, ‘Edward Hyde’, a portrait that characterizes an impulse, formless and primitive, an ego that glories and wallows in the destructiveness and chaos traditionally called evil, because it can give *no shape* to its mindless energy. Hyde lacks the order that individualizes the person.

Tolkien wasn’t concerned with psychological analysis. Desire and fall were his themes, so the characters of his Secondary World developed in relation to either

salvation, or damnation.

'All this stuff is mainly concerned with the fall, mortality and the machine. By the machine, I intend all use of external devices or even the use of inherent inner powers, with the corrupted motive of dominating and bulldozing the real world. The machine is our more obvious modern form. The enemy in successive forms is always concerned with sheer domination, and so the Lord of Machines...' [Tolkien]

Pride—the sin of Satan and of Tolkien's 'fallen angel', Morgoth—was a perversion because self-glorification sacrifices the soul to the petty wants and blind impulses of the ego.¹ In part, both authors wrestled with questions of corruption from different ends of the spectrum, Poe at a personal level, and Tolkien from the inherently vast perspective of theology (embodied in *The Silmarillion*, written before *Rings*); then they worked each in his way along this spectrum toward opposite ends to grasp the essential laws of the whole of existence.

In their separate theologies, Poe and Tolkien both found existence to be a 'plot of God', in which the particularized universe moves by divine plan. In *Eureka*, Poe wrote—

'The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God.'

However, as do most religions and religious devouts, the two authors differed on the place of personal choice in their distinct and divine schemata. Poe conceived existence as incessantly evolving due to God's permeation of the material universe with His Essence. Therefore, what Poe thought of as 'intuition' was interpreted not only as personal sensitivity to quality, but the unconscious presence of the divine *within* daily life, including the memories of past lives and the continued presence of the dead, who shifted from material to nonmaterial 'brain' through the metamorphosis of death. For him, the universe was created so that He might experience the infinite pleasure and pain to which flesh is heir.

'...the design of variety out of unity—diversity out of sameness—heterogeneity out of homogeneity—complexity out of simplicity—in a word, the utmost possible multiplicity of relation out of the emphatically irrelative One.' [*Eureka*]

As the universe ages, Poe felt that it ultimately condenses back into Oneness. As this progresses, substantive material changes such as the birth of a planet or a sun literally create the material and intellectual advances of life. He denied any significant progress, social or scientific, that might be due to man's efforts. The growing sensitivity and intelligence of individual life-forms marked God's unfolding of Himself in the material universe before inevitably reforming as the One. Unlike Tolkien—and this is where they diverged most radically—Poe explicitly rejected direct intervention by the Spirit Divine.

'For my part, I have no patience with fantasies at once so timorous, so idle, and so awkward. They belong to the veriest Cowardice of thought...[With] the very idea of God, omnipotent, omniscient, we entertain, also, the idea of the infallibility of his laws... do we not insult him in supposing his laws so contrived as not to provide for every possible contingency?—or, rather, what idea can we have of any possible contingency, except that it is at once a result and a manifestation of his laws?' [Eureka]

By stark contrast, the essential thread to the fabric of Tolkien's thought is choice, through which one follows either the hard path of obedience, or the easy way to damnation. Yes, the Divine plot is fixed, Tolkien believed; but intuition is God's voice speaking from *outside* the material world, using divine intervention to keep His plotlines from being fouled. The Voice speaks for Frodo at the Council of Elrond. Gollum is protected from death at the hands of, to name only a few, Faramir, the Elves, Samwise, and the Orcs, so that, by ensuring that he steals the Ring, Gollum saves Frodo's soul from almost certain temptation. The Orcs rush Merry and Pippin to the very place they need to be in order to prompt the Ents into action and the Enemy into attacking before he intended. Samwise, fighting desperation, exhausted in every fiber, is told by the Voice to get off his butt and get moving before it's too late. The Voice keeps the divine plan intact, while continually holding out salvation to each and all. This way, the aspect of incessant change becomes part of the divine intention.

'The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence [the world] out.' [B1cIII]

But incessant change necessitates inevitable choice; for example, many things included under the label 'Progress' are potentially seductive and destructive.

'If there is any contemporary reference in my story at all, it is to what seems to me the most widespread assumption of our time: that if a thing can be done, it must be done. This seems to me wholly false.' [Tolkien]

Instead, Tolkien insisted that by following your heart to the Good, no matter how arduous the road, salvation will always be possible, even when His plans for you include neither prosperity, nor survival.

¹ *The author claims no expertise in psychological terminology, however, I believe that what is colloquially called 'ego' (labeled 'id' by Freud), is generally considered to be a mindless clot of raw impulse—the infant—or the idea of self-esteem. In my usage, ego is the whole person, rather than a piece or isolated aspect, with especial reference to its capacity to grow in breadth and depth which are theoretically limited only by time. The ego—the person—can be untrained (shapeless impulse—the infant) or trained (spontaneous sensibilities, i.e. shaped by quality). The point is that people can grow by structuring their thoughts and feelings in and through habit, and are not fixed and unchangeable genetic shapes. The potential lies in the genetics which are vast; the reality lies in the training.*

8.—Contradictions

Ideas surge from, and through, the continuum of civilization, a fact particularly noticeable in the institution of literature in which Tolkien was an acknowledged master. Dante's *Commedia*—'Divina' was later appended—established the Italian language. It is a dark satire of the politics of the day, both Church and profane; 'an encyclopaedic view of the highest culture and knowledge of the age'; and a 'spiritual testament' detailing a divine continuity from Earth to Heaven that culminates in true, absolute beauty. As mentioned, in such works as *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, R.L. Stevenson studied the origins of subjectivism with its characteristic cleverness, self-glorification, and violence, i.e., the self as impulse without order. Cervantes' characters of 'Don Quixote' and 'Sancho Panza', universal in literature and world culture, range from 'Holmes' (the cynic) and 'Watson' (the idealist) to our friends, Frodo and Sam. Orwell's work shares with Tolkien the significant insight that life at large and societies in particular have overriding moods which can reinforce or detract from the practical actions as well as the quality of daily life, e.g., depression, anxiety, paranoia, etc., spread through unemployed populations the way a disease proliferates in unsanitary conditions. And Gary's *The Roots of Heaven* agrees with Tolkien in finding the life-values of nature intimately linked to our ideals of heaven. Unfortunately, as Gary puts it, 'just try explaining to young yet stunted hearts' that the path to truth is through the heart rather than the calculating mind. Almost all these authors seek to reshape their readers by immersing them in ordered knowledge, a knowledge that includes both facts and tempered feelings—in short, an artwork—so that their writings might open the readers' heart to truth.

Despite the radical divergence of their theological structures, the individual ideas of Edgar Poe very often matched Tolkien's insights into such vital principles as wholeness, value, end, the dynamism of self and world, and that ideas have the capacity to reorder feelings and thought. For both authors, the heart and its 'voice' was fundamental to the divine purpose. However, Poe considered 'intuition' to prove the immanence of spirit in material, whereas Tolkien saw spirit as distinct from the world, although active in shaping it. Social progress, for Poe, was a chimera: only the development of personal virtues was real. Although Tolkien also assumed social advance ultimately ephemeral, he insisted that a person grounded in the values of nature could develop the personal will needed to guard the soul from desire, seduction, and adversity. And both men affirmed that the heart imbued with life-values leads unswervingly to

God, and that these values of life and its growth are universal and unchanging from nation to nation or era to era.

'Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.' [B3,cII]

On the vital issue of subjectivism, each once again followed a different emphasis. Poe focused on value and the human, using the phenomenon of obsession to analyze the minute workings of minds which have become isolated from the whole, studying the *how* of humanity; while Tolkien, investigating the *why* of humanity, concentrated on the definition of perversity in material and spiritual terms, and how such deviation effects a splitting off from the valued and the divine. In the end, however, they drew the identical conclusions that self-worship has no goal other than mere continuance of self, and this equals infinite chaos.²

And so, in considering its opposite, subjectivism, we return to the idea of a continuum of value. Throughout history, Poe saw only human foolishness ('the mob'), nature as the reference for wholeness, growth as the medium of value, and knowledge as the medium of intelligence. He probably thought of literature as the only non-divine, creative institution of humanity. Tolkien's view was more informed and more focused. Life-value merged with divine value to shape a path that leads to grace and redemption with the heart as the medium of beauty, the judge of quality, and a direct link to God. Although he saw knowledge as the ground of civilization, living close to the soil gave true valuation of 'progress', and thus a clearer choice between seduction and obedience. For Poe and Tolkien, value on earth rooted in the beauty of life, and this beauty stretched heavenward as an integral aspect of God.

Unfortunately, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* never transcends the personal aspects of such material and spiritual issues as virtue, value, and evil. Literature and civilization, which represent the characteristic accumulation of knowledge and wisdom by countless people over space and time, are the sole exceptions to Tolkien's emphasis on the personal.

'[The] wise man, while doing the best he can in the circumstances as he sees them, is prepared to accept the eventual outcome as the will of providence, and *thus he alone is free*... his wisdom includes understanding the difference between what is in his power and what is not.' [Oxford, 'stoicism', my italics]

The typical stoic view believes in a world governed by fate, whether this means divine intent or historical process, so the single 'reality' in which he can effect change is his personal feelings. Having no choice about the course of the larger world, and often his

own actions, the best the stoic can do is endure with grace (as Poe strove to do), cultivate natural beauty, live simply, and practice tolerance. Tolkien, who detested the invention of the 'infernal combustion' engine, once described his life in these terms.

'I am in fact a hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe and like good plain food...' [Tolkien]

His belief in personal growth included a feeling for the wholeness of nature, the nourishing aspects of life-values, and the importance of intelligence. But, essentially, a valued life to him was simply a personal choice.

However, stoicism does not see the whole of things. In particular, it is blind to the capacity of life to act in and through different forms than the individual organism. , Microscopic or elephantine, each living organism is a corporation or body, *composed* of subtle and complex systems functioning as one system, and this corporation of systems lives *within* the larger systems of the earth. Nothing living exists in total isolation. Varying systems of life and the nonliving bind one another together into countless relations, so that the corporate *person* emerges. A marriage or family is a corporate person, because more aspects of reality than sex and socializing go into its existence and growth, e.g., medicine, law, education, and property. Furthermore, through space and time, the characteristic activities of life develop into the corporate person writ large—the institution. A family grows crops; society pursues the institution of agriculture. And it is the implications of these larger dimensions of life, having grown into a vast accumulation of corporations and institutions, the far-reaching actions of which stoicism is ignorant. These huge 'action-bodies' are not necessarily good or evil. They are reflections of actions characteristic to life, which includes but is not exclusive to human life. For example, war is a popular institution that, unless you're winning, is condemned as evil and excused by necessity. The stoic interprets war in terms of an uncontrollable urge or law or force of history, an evil of the *unchangeable* structure of life. Rather than examining institutional actions to evaluate the possibility of creative work to reshape for the better the quality of human life, they judge people by the presence, or lack, of personal values exhibited under pressure. Even the state with personal freedoms, religion with personal beliefs, and, in the case of a scholar like Tolkien, literature as a body of personal interests, the stoic interprets as a mixture of necessity, feeling, and the sacred. Although Tolkien encouraged us to pity one another, he insisted that the root cause of all trouble was desire, 'a confusion of hearts'. Such institutions as law, politics, medicine, economics, and education, as well as life in general, would somehow be without conflict, or at least better off, if people returned to

simplicity—farming without the ‘infernally combustion’ engine, loving one’s neighbor, and holding to pure values. His answers to both the universal and political questions of life and ‘evil’ are aesthetic, ahistorical, and grounded in mysticism.

Artists throughout history would typically have agreed with Tolkien. The artist envisions for us the ideals of society in terms of feeling, so that the influence of art on all aspects of life is indirect and incalculable. Unfortunately, while realizing that nature is *the* teacher of order, the artist frequently tutors us to disdain social and political life as an arbitrary aggregation of individuals who lurch blindly about under the pressure of mass and impetus—‘the mob’—rather than an active structure composed of the interrelated systems of nature and civilization. There are no distinctions of larger complexities embodied as active entities, which can be either ethical (consistent with life-values), or chaotic, or a contradictory mishmash. And this is where the contradiction lies in Tolkien’s work. Although he draws on life-values to nurture the person as a whole, rather than as an impulse swollen in isolation, he then throws the person into conflict with the real world, where the greatest ‘value’ is absolute necessity, even as personal salvation is the ultimate end. In short, he upholds the supreme importance of saving one’s self while condemning selfishness. Desire is not the only form of subjectivism. There is a quote somewhere—and if there isn’t, there should be—by one of his sons that he attempted to reconcile his philosophy with his theology without wholly succeeding. Tolkien’s philosophy is sound in its aesthetics as far as they go, but as for the theology, each must find his own dead reckoning.

² Literature by selecting important facts gives order and value to civilization. Both men, as professionals in literature, would have *a sensitivity to order*, which is the key to grasping the arbitrary structure that characterizes subjectivism.

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