On C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*¹: its form and content

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On 20 July 1940, Lewis wrote to his brother Warren:

After the service was over... I was struck by an idea for a book which I think might be both useful and entertaining. It would be called ‘As one Devil to another’ and would consist of letters from an elderly retired devil to a young devil who has just started work on his first ‘patient’. The idea would be to give all the psychology of temptation from the other point of view...²

The imaginary epistles written according to this idea is published as *The Screwtape Letters*, letters from a veteran devil Screwtape, to his nephew Wormwood.

In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis points out that literature consists of “’Poiema’ (something made)” and “’Logos’ (something said)”,³ and that the content is much influenced by the form. In the case of *The Screwtape Letters*, this is especially true. We shall, therefore, discuss this book from the two viewpoints of form and content, clarifying, first, the effects of its epistolary form and, next, the important points in terms of content.

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In terms of form, *The Screwtape Letters* is, first of all, an epistolary fiction. It has also an aspect of medieval morality play: in the preface to “Screwtape Proposes a Toast,” published in 1960 as a sequel to *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis writes,
Ideally, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood should have been balanced by archangelical advice to the patient's guardian angel. Without this the picture of human life is lop-sided.  

The 'patient' here is not what we call a 'patient' in the modern sense of a person under medical treatment but a person worked on by a devil. The concept of such a 'patient' and 'guardian angel' must have come from traditional morality plays which Lewis in his academic career has been familiar with. The reason why this "guardian angel" does not appear in *The Screwtape Letters* is that Lewis finds it impossible for a man to make up a character so good as to counterbalance the devil's evil nature. In discussion on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he sees the reason why Milton's Satan appears more lively and vigorous than God as follows:

To make a character worse than oneself it is only necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash...But if you try to draw a character better than yourself, all you can do is to take the best moments you have had and to imagine them prolonged and more consistently embodied in action. But the real high virtues which we do not possess at all, we cannot depict except in a purely external fashion. We do not really know what it feels like to be a man much better than ourselves.

Then, as to his own *Screwtape Letters*, too, he finds the lack of angelic advice as unavoidable:

But who could supply the deficiency? Even if a man—and he would have to be a far better man than I—could scale the spiritual heights required, what "answerable style" could he use? For the style would really be part of the content. Mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven.

As the morality play is a sort of allegory, so *The Screwtape Letters* holds some characteristics of that style. Allegory is an attempt at expressing universal truth behind some typical case or instance of human
story, and so is this work. Screwtape reveals what is universal not only of human nature but of the good and evil behind the personal case of Wormwood’s patient. The effect is in a sense the same as that of St. Paul’s Epistles. Likewise as St. Paul’s letters address us today beyond their historical recipients and tell us universal truth and Reality of God, Screwtape’s letters show us the truth and Reality though here the truth and Reality is often presented in a crooked, reversed form by the devil, who would present truth as falsehood and falsehood as truth. Though Lewis says Screwtape’s evil advice should have been balanced by angelic advice, *The Screwtape Letters* is no way a mere truncated allegory or a failure. On the contrary, in this work, lack of the guardian angel is producing several positive effects.

For one thing, when the good angel is missing, the reader by himself cannot but think of what counter arguments are to be made against the devil, and participate in the work more actively than when the good advice were already presented in an angel’s voice. In that process, the reader cannot be merely passive but reflect on what is good and what is evil, and on whether or how far the devil’s remarks are true. He would also be forced to reflect on himself. Thus, the reader of *The Screwtape Letters*, by lack of angelic advice, should play the part both of a good angel and a patient, rather than only of a patient as the audience of a traditional morality play would.

Secondly, a devil’s letters will necessarily show what the devil sees and what he does not, betraying what it is like to be a devil. Sometimes Screwtape tells Wormwood about devils’ characteristic weaknesses, which he has to hide from man lest they should be obstacles to temptation. Yet from Lewis’s viewpoint, it is these weak points of theirs that every man must know. In all the books by Lewis, what strikes us about the nature of evil is perversion and ultimate powerlessness before God. In *The Screwtape Letters*, it is also true. Clyde S. Kilby remarks, “In the preface to the new edition Lewis adds a note on the source of his names, saying that Screwtape probably arose from such phonetic associations as
Scrooge, screw, thumbscrew, tapeworm, and red tape.” Since Lewis says “probably,” these are not necessarily the exact sources of the devil’s name, but it can at least be said that when Lewis wrote that preface, these were associated in his mind with the name “Screwtape”, so that the devil should be as self-centred and mean as the stingy Scrooge, and a cruel, exacting, worm-like, vainly red-tape thing. Robert Houston Smith says,

“Always,” [Lewis] wrote in one of his poems, “evil was an ape.” Lewis and the church fathers who used the analogy of the Devil as an ape owed much to Plato, who thought not only of lower levels of reality as imitating higher ones, but also of wrong institutions as perversely mirroring right ones. Just as images are reversed in mirrors, so false structures reversed the proper values, often on a one-to-one basis. This reversal is thus a form of imitation and at the same time a total distortion of reality.

Indeed, what Screwtape rejoices in is what the good ones find unfavourable or wrong, and therefore the devil’s value standard is reverse to the right one. Yet more exactly, Lewis’s evil is, as St. Augustine teaches us, perversion of good. Screwtape says “Everything has to be twisted before it’s any use to us.” (p.112) He knows that every existence and other good things (i.e. “good” from Lewis’s point of view) such as pleasures are all God’s creation, and admits thus:

Our research department has not yet discovered...how to produce any virtue. This is a serious handicap. To be greatly and effectively wicked a man needs some virtue. What would Attila have been without his courage, or Shylock without self-denial as regards the flesh? (p.146)

Since evil needs some virtue or good things to twist in order to do any evil, it is actually dependent on God, who alone can produce that virtue. When Screwtape thus admits that the evil cannot produce even
evil but can only twist good things into evil, while the Good, i.e. God, can produce good, Screwtape is admitting the evil’s inferior position to the Good. It is also noteworthy that Screwtape also admits virtue as virtue which God has made as good. In judging virtue and vice with the standard of heaven, Screwtape is unconsciously adopting God’s law of good and evil or of the right and wrong.

We remember that Lewis denies Dualism of Good and Evil on the ground: first, we call something good and something evil by the standard of good, approving good as right and disparaging evil as wrong; and secondly, evil is nothing but perversion of good, that is, it only comes out of pursuing some sort of good by wrong means. Therefore, Screwtape is admitting his defeat by both of Lewis’s two grounds for denial of Dualism.

Besides, evil is not only incapable of creating any virtue but also blind to it. It is significant that while Screwtape has a remarkable insight into human nature in respect of its frailty, once it comes to any real virtue or good, he fails to understand it at all. Screwtape’s words about human weakness can be also taken as Lewis’s words, but about God or about virtue, Screwtape’s words are far from the truth and often its reverse.

For instance, devils do not understand disinterested love. They suspect some hidden motives behind God’s creation instead of believing it to be an act of love. Since the first principle of hell is self-interestedness, they cannot but think disinterestedness of God’s love and charity as mere propaganda.

…that the Enemy really loves the humans. That, of course, is an impossibility. He is one being, they are distinct from Him. Their good cannot be His. All His talk about Love must be a disguise for something else—He must have some real motive for creating them and taking so much trouble about them... We know that He cannot really love: nobody can: it doesn’t make sense. If we could only find out what He is really up to! (pp.96–98)
Screwtape does not understand a Christian family at all, either, because they act on genuine charity which he axiomatically denies as "an impossibility". Screwtape says thus:

We are certain...that each member of the family must in some way be making capital out of the others—but we can’t find out how. They guard as jealously as the Enemy Himself. (p.113)

The central principle in Heaven is so far from that of hell that it is simply unthinkable to the devils.

Moreover, the evil is incapable of understanding even evil itself. As Richard Purtill points out, in Lewis's works "the evil characters essentially expect their opponents to be like themselves." Screwtape does not know that his own self-centred principles are applied only to the hellish mind but thinks them universal. As in the relation between Jekyll and Hyde, good understands evil well but not vice versa. Therefore, while he is trying to hide the good and the true morality from man, he does not himself know either good or evil, and in fact, ironically for the devil, trying to hide what he himself does not know. It is a miserable and blind attempt. Lewis’s devil has nothing heroic. Commenting on Milton’s Paradise Lost, Lewis says, “What we see in Satan is the horrible co-existence of a subtle and incessant intellectual activity with an incapacity to understand anything.” This comment is perfectly true also of his own Screwtape.

A corollary of the fact that evil does not understand good nor evil is that those who come to understand them are no longer evil however evil they might have been so far. Just as Plato nearly identifies “knowing good” and “being good”, Lewis presents the idea that “knowing good” necessarily leads to “being good”. In Lewis’s fiction, there is no characters who know themselves to be evil and cannot repent while wishing to be good. All his evil characters regard themselves as good and righteous through self-deception or self-justification. When one realizes his sin, he
will repent and get atonement. This should be another reason why Screwtape tries to hide the good and evil from man.

Besides, because no one tries to hide what does not exist, Screwtape’s attempt to hide the real absolute good and evil turns out, to the reader’s eye, to be testimony of its existence. Thus while trying to hide the world of reality from the patient, Screwtape is in a way insisting on its existence to the readers. Lewis says that an evil person will, in doing evil, be “used by God, without his own knowledge or consent, to produce the complex good” so that he should serve God “as a tool,” for anyone will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however he may act. It is true of Screwtape. All his manuals to lead the patient into hell turn out to be manuals to lead the reader to God and heaven. Likewise as Goethe’s Mephistopheles, Screwtape will be “Ein Teil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.”

Now, the third advantage that Lewis has got by using epistolary form is that it makes it easy for him to express the relation between devils, for the letters are direct words from one devil to another. What the devils take for granted is, then, falsehood and one’s devouring of others. For example, Screwtape’s words as follows show that love in hell is literally devouring love.

"Rest assured, my love for you and your love for me are as like as two peas...The difference is that I am the stronger...Love you? Why yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on. (p.156)"

For him, “a human is primarily food.” (p.45)

Then, the forth advantage of its epistolary style is that it enables Lewis to express without hortatory didacticism what otherwise tends to be boringly didactic.

Thus, without angelic advice, The Screwtape Letters has many successful points that medieval morality plays do not.

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In terms of content, what Screwtape directly teaches Wormwood is devil’s strategy to turn the man toward hell. In his advice, he shows keen insight into human weakness which could be available in temptation. In this book, Lewis reveals ambivalence of human nature which has potentiality of participating in the reality of God while also having possibility of falling into hell. On one hand, he holds reason, imagination and morality as three important faculties that enable man to perceive Reality. Imagination is an intuitive power into metaphysical meanings behind the factual world. It recognizes reflections of heaven, makes man yearn for heaven so as to lead him there and to God. Reason logically shows the truth of Christianity and existence of God, while itself participating in God’s absolute Reason. Morality shows us the objective law of good and evil, or of right and wrong. Yet on the other hand, Lewis is also conscious that these faculties in man are not perfect. Screwtape tries to keep man’s reason, imagination and morality from working properly. Through his strategies, then, we shall see what weaknesses and fallibilities Lewis sees in these faculties of man. Among those human faults some are universal and some are particularly modern. As Kazuo Takeno points out, *The Screwtape Letters* is twofold satire.15) Through the letters of Screwtape, a devil working in this twentieth century, Lewis is making satire on the modern ways of thought, customs and manners and at the same time mocking what he finds to be the devils’ essential blindness and foolishness.

Especially, contemporary relativism is ironically criticized through Screwtape’s voice. Lewis believes in absolute objective standards in philosophy, ethics, and human thought in general, regarding them as having their root in the world of objective Reality. On the other hand, he sees such belief in objective standards are being lost nowadays and has great misgivings about it. Screwtape in his first letter writes of the young man whom Wormwood is in charge of:

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He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily "true" or "false", but as "academic" or "practical", "outworn", or "conventional" or "ruthless". (p.11)

As long as a man weighs the value of thoughts and ways of life with such relative standards as contemporariness, novelty, and conventions, he is neglecting essential concerns such as Truth, Reality, or Good. These are objectivity derived directly from God, and beyond any relative value. When he seriously begins to pursue Reality and Truth, believing that things have their objective reality, he will sooner or later encounter God, who is the ultimate Reality. Screwtape therefore tells Wormwood, "Keep his [the patient's] mind off the plain antithesis between True and False." (p.52)

Screwtape advises Wormwood to avoid philosophical argument altogether because argument awakes man's reason to attend to "universal issues." (p.12) Lewis says in Miracles, that our reason is "God kindled." Human mind, or reason, "has its tap-root in an eternal, self-existent, rational Being, whom we call God. Each is an offshoot, or spearhead, or incursion of that Supernatural reality into Nature." Therefore, Screwtape the devil tells his nephew that argument merely "moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy's own ground." (p.12) Though a man may be dissuaded from Christianity by logical argument, it is more likely that rational thinking leads him to the Christian belief.

Relative thinking is not in fact either logical or philosophical because it is not concerned with any ultimate reality which is the proper concern of true logic and philosophy. Since human reason is not God's but only "God-kindled", it sometimes sleeps or fails to function well. Lewis says that human reason is "the natural organ of truth" and as long as it is "natural" and human, it might be kept by relative thinking from pursuit of Reality. Relativism, which denies objective standards and therefore necessarily fails to pursue objective values and truth, keeps human reason from pursuit of Reality. If a man says, for example, materialism is worth holding because it is strong, or because it will be the philosophy of
the future, and not because it is true, it is in reality "practical propaganda" (p.12) and not argument at all.

Another thing that Screwtape encourages, and therefore Lewis warns against, is what Screwtape calls "the Historical Point of View" in reading old books. It demands the reader's attention to be focused on such matters as influences on the author, or on his textual consistency rather than the truth of what he says. It reduces ancient writers to be no more than subjects of historical study who are to be judged by the present standards. It takes them simply wrong or primitive if their views are different from modern ones, instead of taking them as sources of living knowledge or thoughts that can still now enlighten and modify people's life. However, in fact, there are cases in which generally accepted views of the present age are wrong and those of former ages are right, since human reason is so limited that it is impossible for the reason of one generation alone to grasp the whole reality. Each generation has its own characteristic errors. Reading old books as living texts is a way of correcting such contemporary mistakes, but "the Historical Point of View" would cut that way.

Screwtape says as a tempter,

[W] here learning makes a free commerce between the ages there is always the danger that characteristic errors of one may be corrected by the characteristic truths of another. But thanks to our Father [i.e. the Father Below, or Satan] and the Historical Point of View, great scholars are now as little nourished by the past as the most ignorant mechanic who holds that "history is bunk." (p.140)\(^19\)

T.S. Eliot, who claims himself to be a classicist, in "What is a classic?" finds in the literature of former ages a power of correcting contemporary "provincialism of time."\(^20\) He maintains that "the perfect classic must be one in which the whole genius of a people will be latent, if not all revealed; and that it can only appear in a language such that its whole genius can be present at once."\(^{21}\) Therefore, a classic has such
comprehensiveness\textsuperscript{22} and universality \textsuperscript{23} as modify and correct each generation’s provincialism. With this idea, Eliot tries to evaluate the modern age objectively in the whole perspective of tradition. Lewis also finds it greatly illuminating and even necessary to know both ancient thoughts and contemporary ones, though different from Eliot, Lewis seems to think it impossible for a generation to grasp the whole tradition, saying,

Perhaps every new learning makes room for itself by creating a new ignorance...Man’s power of attention seems to be limited.\textsuperscript{24}

In his inaugural lecture at Cambridge University as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature, he says,

In the individual life, as the psychologists have taught us, it is not the remembered but the forgotten past that enslaves us. I think the same is true of society. To study the past does indeed liberate us from the present, from the idols of our own market place. But I think it liberates us from the past, too. I think no class of men are less enslaved to the past than historians. The unhistorical are usually, without knowing it, enslaved to a fairly recent past.\textsuperscript{25}

What is important is to read the text of the past as a living nourishing thing. In the twentieth century, many people accept scientific texts on the universe as true and neglect mythological ones as simply fantastic. Even theology sometimes sees the old mythological world picture as obsolete, and proposes to demythologize Scriptures. Against such tendency, Lewis proposes true impartial historical points of view, instead of blindly modern point of view which Screwtape ironically calls “Historical.” As a professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature, Lewis calls himself to be an old Western, and seems temperamentally to be so. Yet, as Dabney Adams Hart points out,
Sometimes Lewis seemed to be guilty of chronological snobbery in reverse, that is, of assuming that the past was superior to the present. His designation of himself as "Old Western Man" can be thus interpreted, his role seen as exemplary—but...Lewis’s frequent disparagement of the present "period" was a deliberate corrective to some moderns’ patronizing attitudes toward earlier periods.  

In his lecture at Cambridge University Lewis warns against what he thinks to be the dominant contemporary tendency of taking it for granted that the newer things are always better. In this as well as in the criticism of "the Historical Point of View", Lewis insists we should judge the things and opinions with the objective standard of the true or false, using our reason properly, and not with relative standards. The pursuit of newness or novelty as such is wrong. Screwtape says,

The humans live in time, and...they must experience change. And since they need change, the Enemy [i.e. God] (being a hedonist at heart) has made change pleasurable to them...He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence. He has contrived to gratify both tastes together...by that union of change and permanence which we call Rhythm. He gives them the seasons, each season different yet every year the same, so that spring is always felt as a novelty yet always as the recurrence of an immemorial theme...Now just as we pick out and exaggerate the pleasure of eating to produce gluttony, so we pick out this natural pleasantness of change and twist it into a demand for absolute novelty. This demand is entirely our workmanship. (pp.126–127)

Lewis follows St. Augustine in holding that the evil is privation or perversion of good. This idea is expressed also in The Screwtape Letters. Too eager a demand for novelty is perversion or an inordinate exaggeration of natural pleasure of change. Lewis sees sensual pleasures as foretaste of heaven. They reveal a part of its Reality. And he thinks it is imagination as an intuitive power of reality that receives such revelation. However, in man, imagination, as is the case with reason, has
limitation. It is sometimes perverted or spoiled. Especially, when reason is asleep, imagination is liable to be affected by feelings, emotions, and mood of the person, which are changeable and easily affected by physical conditions. In such a case, it ceases to be a true intuitive power and may even affect man's rational belief adversely so as to draw him back from Reality. For instance, the natural pleasure of change, when turned into a demand for novelty for the novelty's sake, may be aggravated into what Lewis calls through Screwtape's mouth, "the horror of Same Old Thing." (p.128) People's tendency to be moved by new vogues or current fashions is the product of this "horror of Same Old Thing." Lewis interprets "the general Evolutionary or Historical character of modern European thought," that is the general tendency of Evolutionism, to be a philosophical justification of this horror, and expresses his critical attitudes through Screwtape's statement as a tempter:

Now if we can keep man asking "Is it in accordance with the general movement of our time? Is it progressive or reactionary? Is this the way that History is going?" they will neglect the relevant questions. And the questions they do ask are, of course, unanswerable; for they do not know the future...Once they knew that some changes were for the better, and others for the worse, and others again indifferent. We have largely removed this knowledge. For the descriptive adjective "unchanged" we have substituted the emotional adjective "stagnant". (pp.129-130)

Thus Lewis warns us against the confusion between "Evolution" and "progress for the better", reminding us that evolutions and changes are not necessarily for the better. His point is again that we should go back to the objective value standard of good and evil, knowing that the newer is not always the better.

Lewis calls the popular version of Evolutionism as "a Great Myth" and points out that for the real scientist, Evolution is a theory about changes and not belief in progress, as he quotes J.B.S. Haldane, "We are... inclined to regard progress as the rule in evolution. Actually it is the
exception, and for every case of it there are ten of degeneration."\(^ {29} \)

In The Screwtape Letters, Lewis presents the belief in general progress as the devil's work who has concealed the real nature of evolution. Here, the so called Evolutionism is a serious sin that keeps man away from God. In fact, in this work, Lewis shows relative thinking combined with this Evolutionism as a characteristically modern vice which is as serious as pride that has traditionally been regarded as the greatest sin in Christianity.

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Then, as the devil also knows, there are yet other cases in which human imagination is so perverted as to separate man from Reality. For instance, Lewis points out that when a man rationally came to believe that Christianity is true, and that God and heaven are real, his mental habits will take longer to get accustomed to the new belief. At first it will be difficult for him to feel it true and real, for it is naturally difficult for a man to feel something beyond his sensual experience to be real. His mental habit is likely to make him think that the visible daily life is more real than God. Screwtape advises his nephew to take advantage of this human tendency:

Your business is to fix his attention on the stream [of immediate sense experiences]. Teach him to call it "real life" and don't let him ask what he means by "real". (p.12)

In Miracles, after presenting a rational argument for the existence of Christian God and truth of His miracles, Lewis says,

And yet...and yet...It is that and yet which I fear more than any positive argument against miracles...The moment rational thought ceases, imagination, mental habit, temperament, and the "spirit of the age" take charge of you again. New thoughts until they have themselves become habitual, will affect your consciousness as a whole only while you are actually thinking them.\(^ {30} \)
Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity* that it is not always easy for a new convert to keep his faith. There will be some moment when Christianity seems unlikely or inconvenient to him, for instance, when there is a bad news, or he is in trouble, or he wants to do something that Christianity forbids. In such a moment, Lewis says, “The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.”

Thus, although human imagination is in itself a reality perceiving faculty, it is liable to be misled by wrong emotions and give man wrong idea of the world and Reality. For example, in the case of the new convert, discrepancy between his preconceived image of what Christians would be like and the actual Christians he meets in church can be an obstacle. Where he was expecting especially spiritual people, he would find ordinary people who seem nothing different from others outside church. He may feel disappointed about the church people, and then about Christianity as a whole. Yet, in reality, if the church people do not seem pious, it does not falsify Christianity at all. Such disappointment is in a way God’s ordeal to make the new convert obstinate in his belief. Screwtape knows this, and warns about the ambivalent effect of this first disappointment. He says to Wormwood,

The Enemy allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavour...In every department of life it marks the transition from dreaming aspiration to laborious doing ...If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt. (pp.17–18)

For Lewis, faith is “the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.” He says,

If we wish to be rational, not now and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, or experience, or all three, have
once delivered to us for truth.34)

Faith is not an art of belief against reason. On the contrary, we need faith to fortify our rational belief. Screwtape points out thus:

Human’s are amphibians—half spirit and half animal...As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time. This means that while their spirit can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continual change, for to be in time means to change. (p.44)

Imagination which is connected with feeling and emotion is likely to draw man back to the mutable world. In order to avoid that, man has to know that feeling real is one thing and being real is another.

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Likewise as reason and imagination, morality of man, which is capable of connecting man to reality, can also be perverted or kept from working well and lead man astray.

As to the moral law, all that the devil can do is to hide or pervert it. They cannot re-create it wholly anew as they like, for they are after all no more than perversion of good, while the moral law is an autonomous objective reality which cannot be changed by anything. Screwtape therefore says,

humans must not be allowed to notice that all great moralists are sent by the Enemy not to inform men but to remind them, to restate the primeval moral platitudes against our continual concealment of them. (p.118)

Yet, what Screwtape wants to keep man from noticing thus is, of course, a vital truth Lewis wants us to remember.

When the patient is getting near to hell, the devil tries not to let him realize his fate until it is too late to repent. It is another concealment.
The way to hell should be unnoticed:

Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one— the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. (p.65)

Hell does not want him to notice his degradation because once he notices it, he may turn back toward God. Lewis finds that a man would go deeper into evil when he does not know he is committing a sin than when he is consciously or even determinedly doing evil. Evil is weak before Good. If it openly fights with God in the heart or mind of the patient, there is no possibility of its victory. The fact that all that the devils can do about the good moral law is to conceal it also reveals their powerlessness. They cannot even demolish the law, to say nothing of making an alternative.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis points out that morality is concerned with three things: first, with relation between man and man; secondly, with harmony inside each man: and thirdly with relation between man and God.35)

A Christian is enjoined to have love, faith and hope. Among these three, faith is the particular virtue concerning man's relationship to God. Love is concerned with morality between man and man, and hope is a matter of harmony inside each man. These Christian virtues should also fail when morality fails.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, perversion of morality is shown to be occurred through self-deception, self-righteousness, and most of all through man's Original Sin, pride, that Lewis is always reminding us of as the greatest sin. As Lewis sees ambivalence of human nature which has both potentialities of attaining reality of heaven and of falling into hell, a man may waver between pride and humility: Satan's vice and Christ's virtue. In the relationship between man and God, humility, or
humbleness on the part of man is indispensable. Lewis says, "In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all."\(^{36}\)

When Lewis became a Christian, one of the greatest problems for him is apparent impossibility of sincere prayer. In a letter to one of his life-long friends, Arthur Greeves, he writes how he finds it difficult to make prayer without feeling proud of being humble enough to pray:

What worries [sic] me much more is Pride... Sitting by, watching the rising thoughts to break their necks as they pop up, one learns to know the sort of thoughts that do come. And, will you believe it, one out of every three is a thought of self-admiration: when everything else fails, having had its neck broken, up comes the thought ‘What an admirable fellow I am to have broken their necks!’ I catch myself posturing before the mirror, so to speak, all day long... Its [sic] like fighting the hydra (you remember, when you cut off one head another grew). There seems to be no end to it.\(^{37}\)

When a man is conscious of his humbleness, he easily gets proud of his humbleness, and it is the end of the true humbleness. His humbleness will be no more than disguised pride, even though he may still believe it to be sincere humility. Screwtape advises Wormwood:

Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, “By jove! I’m being humble”, and almost immediately pride—pride at his own humility—will appear. If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt—and so on, through as many stages as you please. (p.71)\(^{38}\)

Thus, once a man gets conscious of his humility, he may be driven into a vicious circle of getting the more humble, the more proud. Lewis’s suggestion against such a vicious circle is to cease to take the dilemma

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between pride and humility too seriously. Screwtape tells Wormwood that when a man comes to see the dilemma with a “sense of humour and proportion”, “he will merely laugh at you and go to bed.” (pp.71-72) This is especially an important remark. Naoyuki Yagyu even sees this as the main theme of *The Screwtape Letters*. 39) In the epitaph at the beginning of this book, Lewis quotes Luther and Thomas More:

“The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.” *Luther.*
“The devil...the prowde spirite...cannot endure to be mocked.”

*Thomas More* (p.7)

The sense of humour protects a man from being proud because it enables him to see himself in a detached manner and laugh at his own pride as absurdity. If he can laugh at his pride thus, he is no longer proud but rather humble.

Man’s ambivalence between pride and humility is shown in the case of morality within each individual as well. In this case pride appears with self-deception. Lewis shows how man can disguise his pride in humility, even to himself. Whenever one thinks he is consciously showing condescension to others, he is actually proud. For example, if an intelligentsia thinks of himself as above the others in his church and “thinks that he is showing great humility and condescension in going to church with these “smug’, commonplace neighbors at all”, (PP.18-19) he does not have any real humility at all. It is an example of self-deception into which man easily falls.

Moreover, while he inwardly believes he is intellectually superior to the others in church, he may be also feeling to be spiritually superior, for example, to his intellectual circle outside church. In that case he is actually proud in two inconsistent ways, as Screwtape says,

Thus, while being permanently treacherous to at least two sets of people,
he will feel, instead of shame, a continual undercurrent of self-satisfaction. (p.56)

In this case self-deception is spoiling the person's morality in respect not only of things within himself but also in respect of relation between he and other people.

Love, a matter of morality between man and man, is also shown to be corruptible. An example in this book is prayer. Lewis shows that self-deception can also occur in prayer for others. When one prays for another person's soul, or asking God for forgiveness of the person's sin, he will likely to count as sin any of the person's actions which is not itself wrong but happens to be inconvenient or unpleasant to him. Then the devil "can keep rubbing the wounds of the day a little sorer even while he is on his knees." (p.21) Lewis reminds us here of the fact that it is easy for a man to feel self-righteous while it is difficult to forgive others from the bottom of his heart. Thinking himself to be asking God forgiveness of the other's sin, he is in fact judging and punishing the other inwardly. Such self-righteousness is hidden even to himself, as he really thinks the other person's action is a sin.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis appears to be opposed to prayer for the others' souls altogether, though as for petitionary prayer, he rather recommends them to us not only for ourselves but also for others.  

In prayers for the soul of others, besides the danger of disguised self-righteousness, there is danger that the prayer should be made for an imaginary person, because a man's ideas about another person's soul will be necessarily crude and erroneous. Screwtape tells Wormwood to have his patient pray for his mother's soul and, in that, to "make that imaginary person daily less and less like the real mother." (p.21) The devil wants the cleavage to be so wide that people "could be turned at a moment's notice from impassioned prayer for a wife's or son's 'soul' to beating or insulting the real wife or son without a qualm." (p.22) It is another case of a man's self-deception that he often mistakes unreality
(in this case, for example, the imaginary wife, or son) for reality and self-contentedly acts on the illusion. In this self-deception, man can wrong others without guilty conscience. Because he consciously wishes the others’ good at least on one hand, he does not notice that he is actually doing wrong to them on the other.

It is further shown that one would sometimes hurt others without feeling guilty even when he knows he is hurting them. As long as he believes he is doing or saying the right things, he can think it is the party who is being hurt that is wrong. The devil Screwtape recommends Wormwood to take advantage of such self-righteous cruelty in man. In domestic life, for example, Screwtape points out that people hurt each other often by the tone and timing of remarks without using harsh, offensive words. Because those words would be innocent if taken literally, even when they are in such an unmistakably offensive tone as never to be taken literally, the one who has said them could feel it wrong for the other to get offended. Screwtape says,

You know the kind of thing: “I simply ask what time dinner will be and she flies into a temper.” Once this habit is well established you have the delightful situation of a human saying things with the express purpose of offending and yet having a grievance when offense is taken. (p.23)

This is another self-righteous, self-conceited tendency of man which is available to the devil in order to pervert human morality.

Lewis finds that other sorts of vices such as gluttony may appear with self-conceitedness and spoil the right relation between individuals. An example he shows in this book is what he calls “All-I-want” state of mind.” (p.87) Screwtape writes of the patient’s mother.

She is always turning from what has been offered to her to say... “Oh please, please...all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeniest bit of really crisp toast”. You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she
never recognises as gluttony her determination to get what she wants...
At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practicing temperance. (pp.86-87)

A man generally do not want to look selfish. As another example of perverted morality between individuals, Lewis points out a case in which seeming unselfishness together with self-righteousness produce an effect Screwtape likes. He calls it “the Generous Conflict Illusion.”(p.133) Suppose one person wants to do something and other person consents to do it not because he wants to do it himself but just because he does not want to look selfish, the first person will know it and will withdraw the proposal to show he is as unselfish as the other. In such a situation, nothing but bitterness will occur.

Just because the contention is reversed and each side is fighting the other side’s battle, all the bitterness which really flows from thwarted self-righteousness and obstinacy...Each side...manages to feel blameless and ill-used itself, with no more dishonesty than comes natural to a human. (p.134)

As we see from his words: “with no more dishonesty than comes natural to a human,” Lewis sees such self-righteousness as an almost unavoidable natural tendency of man. All the same, however, he gives us warning through Screwtape.

It is because self-sacrifice and self-abandonment are principles of heaven that Screwtape tries to hinder the true self-sacrifice and generosity. In The Problem of Pain Lewis points out that God Himself is obeying that principle. “What is outside the system of self-giving is not earth, nor nature, nor ‘ordinary life’ but simply and solely Hell.”[41] Yet, the true self-abandonment in heaven is not at all painful but as pleasant and joyful as dance.

The golden apple of selfhood, thrown among the false gods, became an
apple of discord because they scrambled for it...But when it flies to and fro among the players too swift for eye to follow, and the great master Himself leads the revelry, giving Himself eternally to His creatures in the generation, and back to Himself in the sacrifice, of the Word, then indeed the eternal dance “makes heaven drowsy with the harmony”...As we draw nearer to its uncreated rhythm, pain and pleasure sink almost out of sight. There is joy in the dance, but it does not exist for the sake of joy...It is Love Himself, and Good Himself, and therefore happy.42)

In The Four Loves, Lewis illustrates how supposedly selfless love may be twisted into false one by an example of a lady, who boasted herself “that she lived for her family”43) and spent all her life in taking care of them, doing everything she could, even things they did not want nor did they need. In reality, her devotion is only for her self-satisfaction. She is enjoying feelings of selflessness and at the same time enjoying “the pleasures of resentment,” since her family do not appreciate her needless devotion and she is able “to feel ill-used, therefore, to have a continual grievance.”44) In The Screwtape Letters, too, what is originally selfless love between family members is shown to be liable to turn into self-centred noxious love, boasting self-righteous false selflessness and enjoying the pleasures of resentment.

In morality between individuals, where love is the most important virtue, it is natural that Lewis emphasizes the importance of the actual Christian deed. Thus, Screwtape tries to prevent man from performing real act of charity by sticking him to the self-examination of his own inner life and “spiritual” prayer for others.

Keep his mind on the inner life...Keep his mind off the most elementary duties by directing it to the most advanced and spiritual ones...Make sure that [the prayers] are always very “spiritual”, that he is always concerned with the state of her soul and never with her rheumatism. (pp.20-21)

Whether one actually behaves as a Christian is rather a matter of
will than that of feelings. Whatever virtue a man may have, it means nothing unless it is put into practice by will. Hence, Screwtape says,

It is only in so far as they reach the will and there embodied in habits that the virtues are really fatal to us...All sorts of virtues painted in the fantasy or approved by the intellect or even, in some measure, loved and admired, will not keep a man from our Father’s house. (pp.37-38)

Virtues in the fantasy, that is, virtues which a person does not have at all but vainly imagine what it would be like if he had, has no meaning. (Here, what he calls “fantasy” should have nothing to do with the intuitive faculty of “imagination”; for as far as I know Lewis does not use the word “fantasy” as a synonym of “imagination.”) Approvement of any sort of virtue by heart or mind, that is, in feelings or in intellect, is also different from realization of that virtue. Screwtape knows it well.

On the other hand, if a man feels some weakness or flaw in himself, it does not matter seriously if it does not influence upon his actual behaviour. If a man feels himself a coward, for example, and yet acts bravely in some crisis, he is in fact brave, not a coward. As Screwtape says, “the act of cowardice is all that matters,” it is no sin to feel fear. (p.150) Only, we have to get over it and act courageously. If a man feels himself coward, it can even do him good, for it may make him humble before God, and this humbleness is the opposite of pride and a virtue in itself.

Likewise as feeling real and being real are not the same, “feeling faithful” is not the same thing as “being faithful”. The sincerity of faith does not depend on devotional feelings. What is important is to be faithful, loving, and courageous instead of merely feeling to be such. Screwtape tells Wormwood,

Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the action of their own wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for
themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to feel forgiven. (p.26)

Lewis always stresses the importance of expressing faith in the form of action. Faith without action is not in fact real faith because to have faith in God means “trying to do all that He says.” When Wormwood’s “patient”, who has strayed from real faith for some time, makes repentance, Screwtape says,

As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. (p.69)

It should be noted, however, that Lewis does not think that the feelings has no importance or meanings nor that they are not real at all. On the contrary, in the matter of morality, Lewis stresses the objective reality of ethical emotional reactions and moral feelings. The physical facts and their emotional effects on a human consciousness are both real and concern the objective moral law. To regard the emotion as merely subjective is as wrong as to pay too much attention to it. Lewis is against those moral theories which regard man's moral feelings as merely subjective and which therefore lead to loss of confidence in the authenticity of the moral law. Later in That Hideous Strength, Lewis is to express in length his misgivings about such moral subjectivism and consequent corruption of morality. Yet here in The Screwtape Letters, he only points out the mistake and inconsistency of those who would not recognize objective meanings in feelings: they may ignore their pleasures as nothing more than a state of mind, yet they could not help feeling their own pains or anguish as irresistible reality. For, though pleasures can be ignored, pains and anguish cannot be ignored so easily. Lewis says “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.”47) Consequently they would find pain to be real while thinking
pleasures as nothing more than a state of mind. But then, they see only a half of reality. Lewis finds a lot of people today see the world in such a wrong way. To hide the half of reality and present the rest as if it were the whole is a way of the devil’s twisting reality. Screwtape says:

The general rule which we have now pretty well established among them is that in all experiences which can make them happier or better only the physical facts are “real” while the spiritual elements are “subjective”; in all experiences which can discourage or corrupt them the spiritual elements are the main reality and to ignore them is to be an escapist. Thus in birth the blood and pain are “real”, the rejoicing a mere subjective point of view, in death, the terror and ugliness reveal what death “really means”...Your patient, properly handled, will have no difficulty in regarding his emotion at the sight of human entrails as a revelation of Reality and his emotion at the sight of happy children or fair weather as mere sentiment. (p. 155)

These words are expression of Lewis’s misgivings about the general loss of normal sensibility and moral reaction.

* * *

In this book, Lewis shows us ambivalent human nature and devil’s negative powerlessness and perversion. In order to attain Reality of God, man should be careful not to fall into the devil’s snare. As we have seen, Lewis shows us that reason, imagination and morality in man are not infallible. While understanding Lewis’s idea of reason, imagination and morality as Reality-perceiving faculties, we also have to remember his awareness of their human weakness.

Screwtape’s insight into human weakness and to some wickedness in man is in striking contrast to his blindness to God’s reality. If we fall into evil, we, too, will be blind to God’s reality, which is to be shown again in such later works as the Chronicles of Narnia and Till We Have Faces.

Among the weakness of human nature that Lewis presents in this
book, tendency to self-deception that comes from the original sin of pride is the most serious one. It is natural for a self-conceited, self-righteous, proud man to hesitate to stand before God and show Him his real self which he is hiding even to himself. Screwtape says that “real nakedness of the soul in prayer...the humans themselves do not desire it as much as they suppose.” (p.28)

This hesitation to stand before God will be a central problem in Lewis’s last novel *Till We Have Faces*. This shows the deepness of his concern about the difficulty man has in facing God honestly. Until self-conceit is overcome, man cannot be in the right relation to God, and therefore never attain Reality either.

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“Screwtape Proposes a Toast”, the sequel to *The Screwtape Letters*, is written as Screwtape’s speech addressed to young devils at the Tempters’ Training College. In it Screwtape especially draws the audience’s attention to those faults of modern democracy which are favourable to the devils. In terms of content, then, this is Lewis’s criticism on modern democratic society.

Democracy is, as Lewis remarks, “properly the name of a political system, even a system of voting...And of course it is connected with the political ideal that men should be equally treated.” (“Toast”, p.18) Yet, this ideal is now transformed into “a factual belief that all men are equal.” (Ibid.) Lewis criticizes this because he finds this belief leads to approve jealousy against those who are superior. Since there is perversion in this change of an ideal to a false belief, it must have been convenient for him to use the form of the devil’s speech, because perversion of the truth is, in Lewis, a devil’s work. Through Screwtape’s remarks Lewis expresses his opinion thus.

[Y] ou can use the word *Democracy* to sanction in his thought the most degrading (and also the least enjoyable) of all human feelings. You can get him to practise, not only without shame but with a positive glow of

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self-approval, conduct which, if undefended by the magic word, would be universally derided. The feeling I mean is of course that which prompts a man to say I’m as good as you... The claim to equality, outside the strictly political field, is made only by those who feel themselves to be in some way inferior... Under the name of Envy it has been known to the humans for thousands of years. (“Toast” pp.18–19).

Screwtape remarks that modern men not only tend to disapprove someone else’s superiority to or even mere difference from others as “undemocratic” but sometimes those who have good qualities suppress them by themselves since they are afraid of becoming “undemocratic” and want to be the same or as low as the others. (“Toast”, p.20) If there are some talented children, the modern “democratic” education would not give them enough chance to improve their quality. In such a society today, Screwtape sees “the vast, over-all movement towards the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence—moral, cultural, social, or intellectual.” (“Toast”, pp.20–21) He says, “‘democracy’ in the dialobical [sic] sense (I’m as good as you, Being like Folks, Togetherness) is the finest instrument we could possibly have for extirpating political Democracies from the face of the earth.” (“Toast”, p.24) The society which is opposed to every sort of excellence will produce no excellent personage who will lead and improve it. Therefore, “the whole attitude of mind, which democracies naturally like and enjoy...will destroy democracy.” (“Toast”, p.25)

Lewis criticizes this feelings of “I’m as good as you” especially because he finds this “as a state of mind...necessarily excluding humility, charity, contentment, and all the pleasures of gratitude or admiration, turns a human being away from almost every road which might finally lead him to Heaven.” (“Toast”, pp.25–26)

If The Screwtape Letters shows us human weakness and obstacles to heaven, “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” expresses Lewis’s anxiety about the loss of individuality in modern society. That loss is serious. Screw-
tape says, "the real end is the destruction of individuals. For only individuals can be saved or damned." ("Toast," p.25)

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In *The Screwtape Letters* and "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," Lewis thus criticizes such modern tendencies as relativism, materialism, and false democracy. Yet these are not at all mere works of didacticism. Wormwood’s patient after all goes through the devil’s fingers and saved by God. Then Screwtape, condemning Wormwood, betrays that man is essentially made for heaven and that the blessings prepared for man cannot be understood those in hell. The following words of Screwtape, which John R. Willis finds to be "Lewis at his finest,"[49] will be Lewis’s final message to us, expressing his own hope for heaven. Those who turn down the devil’s temptation will enjoy such blessings in heaven as this:

He had no faintest conception till that very hour of how they would look, and even doubted their existence. But when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realised what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not "Who are you?" but "So it was you all the time."...He saw not only Them; he saw Him...What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. You would like, if you could, to interpret the patient’s prostration in the Presence, his self-abhorrence and utter knowledge of his sins...on the analogy of your own choking and paralysing sensations when you encounter the deadly air that breathes from the heart of Heaven. But it’s all nonsense. Pains he may still have to encounter, but they *embrace* those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure. All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed. (*Screwtape*, pp.158-160)
notes

19. The “danger” here is a danger from Screwtape's viewpoint.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Lewis, “'De Descriptione Temporum',' Selected Literary Essays, p. 12.
30. Lewis, Miracles, p.170.
31. Lewis, Mere Christianity (1952 ; Collins, 1955 ; paperbacks, 1977), p.120.
32. “successfully” here is told from Lewis's viewpoint.
33. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp.121-122.
34. Lewis, "Religion : Reality or Substitute?" Christian Reflections, p.43.
35. cf. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp.67-70.
36. Lewis, Mere Christianity. p.108.
38. In this quotation, “danger” is danger from Lewis's viewpoint, showing how difficult it is to keep diabolical viewpoint.
39. 柳生直行『お伽の国の神学』（新教出版社，1984）, p.43.
41. Lewis, Pain, p.140.
42. Lewis, Pain, p.141.
44. Lewis, Four Loves, p.54.
45. cf. “a safe god...soon proclaims himself to any sound mind as a fantasy.” Lewis, Malcolm, p.76.
46. Lewis, Mere Christianity, p.127.
47. Lewis, Pain, p.81.

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48. "least enjoyable" here means least enjoyable from Lewis's viewpoint.


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