C.S. LEWIS ON THE DANGEROUS POLITICS OF PROGRESS

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By

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ABSTRACT

It seems odd to write an essay about the political philosophy of an author who was avowedly apolitical. It is true that C.S. Lewis eschewed party politics. In fact, when offered knighthood by Winston Churchill for his literary contributions and radio addresses during World War II, Lewis declined on the grounds that he did not want the public to think he was merely a mouthpiece of Britain’s Conservative party. Nonetheless, the classically-trained Lewis also realized that human beings are, by nature, political animals and will create order in our societies almost unconsciously. Therefore, in his frequent writings about the nature of man and contemporary social issues, Lewis made great contributions to political philosophy, particularly where natural law crosses paths with modernism, in terms of science and progress.

This paper will analyze the contribution Lewis makes to the understanding of politics through two of his works: the well-known lecture series, *The Abolition of Man*, and his less-well-known novel *That Hideous Strength*, which is the third novel of his Space Trilogy. Both works grapple with the consequences of modern man’s desire to control his destiny by reconstructing his world through science and education—a desire that has not changed in the intervening decades. Lewis argues that such control is illusory, but the consequences of striving for that control are very real and, potentially, very dire.
To all those friends and family who helped along the way, “thanks” is not enough.

Kimberly R. Hill, MA
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**Introduction**

When we talk of politics today, we political scientists almost exclusively refer to structures. We talk of political parties, political systems, polls, and public policies. The "Political Person" today is a person of influence in the governing of others—she could be a politician or a member of the public elite, it really does not matter. She is political because she is involved in political systems or structures.

In this paper, however, I want to take us back to an earlier idea of politics. Perhaps we should call it "Mere Politics." Mere Politics, if you will, is no more or less than the study of human relations. To borrow from an older nomenclature, it is the study of Man versus Nature, Man versus Man, Man versus Himself, and Man versus God. Mere Politics begins with an understanding that human beings were meant to flourish as individuals and all relationships are conducted with that end in mind. It is only as individuals flourish that societies flourish. Mere Politics is bottom-up not top-down politics. The role of the government, then, is minimal. The role of the individual is paramount because she is free to choose how she will flourish.

In this paper, I will explore the idea of Mere Politics through the writings of a man who is better known for his *Mere Christianity*, Oxbridge

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1 "Oxbridge" is shorthand for Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Lewis taught at both and both Universities claim him. However, Cambridge University is where he held a chair in Medieval Literature.
to as “current affairs.” Nonetheless, the Classically-trained Lewis also realized that we human beings are, by nature, political animals and will create order in our societies almost unconsciously. Therefore, in his frequent writings about the nature of man, often in pieces that explored contemporary social issues, Lewis made great contributions to political philosophy, particularly where natural law crosses paths with modernism, in terms of education and progress.

This paper will analyze the contribution Lewis makes to the understanding of politics through two of his works in particular: the well-known lecture series, *The Abolition of Man*, and his less-well-known novel *That Hideous Strength*, which is the third novel of his Space Trilogy. Both works grapple with the nature of societal progress in the face of changing norms as modern man seeks to control his destiny by reconstructing his world through science and education—a desire that has not changed in the intervening decades. Lewis argues that such control is illusory, but the consequences of striving for that control are very real and, potentially, very dire.

**What is Progress?**

In his essay, “Is Progress Possible?”, Lewis gives two definitions of progress. The first follows the idea that progress is the process of moving from Point A to Point B, if indeed Point B is where one wants to go. However, he is quick to note that if we are talking about societal progress, this definition is made impossible given the fact that we are not all

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2 In fact, when offered knighthood by Winston Churchill for his literary contributions and radio addresses during World War II, Lewis declined on the grounds that he did not want the public to think he was just a mouthpiece of Britain’s Conservative party.
going in the same direction—that is, we simply do not have the same goals either as individuals or as members of society. The second definition of progress that Lewis expounds is the notion of relative happiness. Perhaps progress is as simple as being happier now than you were “back then.”

Lewis explores both of these definitions of progress in *That Hideous Strength*. The novel is set in a fictional college (Bracton) in a fictional English village (Edgestowe), which also happens to be steeped in history that extends back to the Arthurian legends. It is rumored that Merlin himself sleeps under the Bragdon Wood that is owned by the college. At the center of the story is the struggle between Traditional Values and the “progressive”, and essentially modern, idea of Subjective Values. Fighting for tradition and objective value is a team of people led by Dr. Ransom, who is also the Pendragon (heir of King Arthur) of Logres—that is, True England. On the side of subjective values is the a group of professors at Bracton College that Lewis refers to as the Progressive Element, and the NICE (National Institute of Coordinated Experiments), which “was the first-fruits of that constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world.”

Caught in the middle of the struggle is Mark and Jane Studdock, a newly minted sociologist and fellow at Bracton College, and his ABD wife. The Studdocks are products of progressive education (which we will discuss later in the paper) and struggle to reconcile what they have been taught to think and to value with the reality that they now face.

At the beginning of the book, Mark Studdock’s greatest desire is to be a member of the Progressive Element. He believes in their idea that progress is really about making things better

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3 *That Hideous Strength*, 23.
and saving Man from himself. It is for this end, that the members of the Progressive Element are working to bring the NICE to Edgestowe come hell or high water. The NICE, so the Progressive Element believes, will mean jobs for Edgestowe and money for Bracton, it will bring extreme efficiency to the village (and then to the whole of England) through cutting edge research and social planning that will move society beyond stagnant traditions and into the future. All of which represents the epitome of progress to Bracton’s Progressive Element. For the NICE, however, the end to be achieved is nothing less than the complete conquering of Nature by Man.

Says Lord Feverstone (a member of NICE and the recruiter of Mark Studdock):

   The third problem is Man himself. . . . Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest—which is another reason for cashing in on it as soon as one can. You and I want to be the people who do the taking charge, not the ones who are taken charge of.4

For a good deal of the book, the Progressive Element and NICE remain on the same path. However, toward the end we see the conflict that Lewis notes in his essay on progress: the goals are different. The Progressive Element wanted increased efficiency and social order through social planning, if it caused diminution of Man then so be it. The NICE, however, sought to gain order through the logical conclusion of social planning: the complete abolition of Man through the elimination of that thing which sets apart man from the animals: his heart, the seat of value and judgment that connects and mediates man’s intelligence and appetites. Indeed, the Progressive Element does not recognize that the NICE has just put into practice all of the theories of progress expounded at Bracton, and indeed, throughout Edgestowe. In discussing the end of the struggle, Frank Denniston, a member of Logres, sums up the situation saying:

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4 *That Hideous Strength*, 42.
I know….One’s sorry for a man like Churchwood. [A fellow from another college in Edgestowe.] I knew him well; he was an old dear. All his lectures were devoted to proving the impossibility of ethics, though in private life he’d walked ten miles rather than leave a penny debt unpaid. But all the same…was there a single doctrine practiced at Belbury [the headquarters of the NICE] which hadn’t been preached by some lecturer at Edgestowe? Oh, of course they never thought any one would act on their theories! No one was more astonished than they when what they’d been talking of for years suddenly took on reality. But it was their own child coming back to them: grown up and unrecognizable, but their own.Ô

The Ends for the Progressive Element and the NICE are different not in essence but in degree. The NICE simply tried to take the idea of subjective values to its logical conclusion: the abolition of man.

The idea of relative progress—am I happier now than then—is addressed throughout Lewis’ novel. It is wrapped up in the justification that the Progressive Element uses for bringing the NICE to Edgestowe. There will be more jobs, though exactly what kind of jobs is not specified. Things will be more efficient, more orderly, though at what cost this efficiency and order, no one asks. In the end, the jobs are given to outsiders, and Edgestowe residents lose most of their freedoms in the name of order and finally are very efficiently removed from their homes. Lewis drives home his point that the notion of progress that is determined by “better than” is a dangerous idea because “better than” tends ultimately to be defined by a very few for the very many.

Finally, Lewis introduces still a third definition of progress in That Hideous Strength that is an offshoot of the idea of progress being movement from A to B. I think this idea probably best defines the notion of progress in the Twenty-First Century: that is, progress is merely going somewhere. In a conversation among the leaders of the Progressive Element, Professor Curry

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5 That Hideous Strength, 371.
says, "That's the worst of the whole system... In a place like this you've either got to be content to let everything go to pieces--I mean become stagnant--or else to sacrifice your own career as a scholar to all these infernal college politics." Progress, then, becomes the opposite of stagnation where the value is no longer to be found in the goal but rather the motion itself.

Within the earlier definitions of progress resides the idea that progress is generally good because the end goal is good. If we follow this idea further back into history, we find that progress linked with virtue. Virtue, it should be understood, is good. So to the extent the individual or society moved toward virtue, it was progressive. Should it move in the opposite direction, it was considered regressive or barbaric. However, with the advent of Weber's Fact/Value distinction, we have tried to decouple progress from moral judgments. Thus progress has come to mean nothing more than “change in the status quo.” The fact we are moving is more important than the destination to which we are going. And while we still see progress as “good,” we have largely lost the ability to define “good.” Indeed we find ourselves in the ontological conundrum of defining progress as good and good as progress.

This loss of value is one of the ideas that Lewis addresses through his discussion on progressive education and applied sciences, and the Tao in Abolition of Man. And it is to this discussion we now turn.

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6 That Hideous Strength, 36. Emphasis mine.
7 Lewis, a scholar of the classics, philosophy and medieval literature, was very familiar with this link.
8 Emerson wrote, “life is a journey, not a destination.” Somehow this idea has morphed into “the journey matters, not the destination.” And yet one is left to ask, does not the destination determine the journey?
According to Lewis, educators contribute to the abolition of Man on two fronts. The first, which he discusses in *The Abolition of Man*, has to do with values and the second with conditioning.

Lewis begins his lectures that comprise *The Abolition of Man* with a critique of English grammar textbooks that are written by progressive educators. Lewis is concerned with these texts for two reasons. First, they do not actually teach schoolboys English grammar. But secondly, and to Lewis, more importantly, they are tools that subtly but effectively introduce the schoolboy to the assumption that values are nothing more than sentiment, that sentiment (emotions and feelings) are subjective, and that, ergo, values are also subjective. In short, the authors of these texts slowly but effectively begin to carve the heart out of the chest of the modern pupil. The heart is mediator between the head (intellect) and the belly (appetite). It is the heart that is trained to have stable, reasonable sentiments. Says Lewis:

The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle

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9 Lewis refers to the text as *The Green Book*, and the authors as Gaius and Titius. The actual book is *The Control of Language* (1940) by Alex King and Martin Ketley. He also addresses arguments to another author whom he calls Orbilius. In this case, his arguments are directed at E.G. Biaggini and his book *The Reading and Writing of English* (1936).
element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.\textsuperscript{10}

To lose the heart, then is to lose one's humanness. To lose one's heart is to be subject to one's base intellect or appetite. In short, it is to be subject to, not master of, Nature.

Lewis argues that sentiment is not about judgment, but reasonableness. Harkening back to Aristotle and Socrates, Lewis notes that, traditionally, education has been about teaching pupils to have the right sentiment toward things—that is, to love what ought to be loved and hate what ought to be hated. This was very definition of Virtue. St. Augustine called it: \textit{ordo amoris}, “…the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it.” Aristotle summed it up as liking or disliking what one ought. In the Republic, Plato notes that a well-educated youth is the one

...who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distastes would blame and hate the ugly even from his earliest years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart. All of this before he is of an age to reason; so that when Reason at length comes to hem, then bred as he has been, he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her.\textsuperscript{11}

Lewis himself states in \textit{The Abolition of Man}:

Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{The Abolition of Man}, 704.
\textsuperscript{11} For more discussion on these three philosophers, see \textit{The Abolition of Man}, 704.
incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt.\textsuperscript{12}

The truly virtuous person is the one that employs her reason to train her sentiments to be correct. In her heart, she values valor and freedom and beauty, because they are in themselves valuable. Her head and her belly may argue for cowardice or slavery or attempt to define the base and ugly as beautiful, but they will not succeed in convincing her for the virtuous person listens to the mediation of the heart.

Many scholars would not completely disagree with Lewis, and would be happy to affirm valor and freedom and, perhaps, beauty; however, they would argue that these things are not intrinsically valuable or good. The virtuous person honors them because she is conditioned by society to honor them. In fact, the argument continues, there is no good except that which we label as good, and there is no evil at all, merely the unknown or misunderstood. This was the kind of argument that Lewis knew would be employed by Men Without Chests—of which Lewis writes the following:

It is an outrage that [Men Without Chests] should be commonly spoken of as Intellectuals. This gives them the chance to say that he who attacks them attacks Intelligence. It is not so. They are not distinguished from other men by any unusual skill in finding truth nor any virginal ardor to pursue her.... It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are not bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} The Abolition of Man, 699.
\textsuperscript{13} The Abolition of Man, 704.
Lewis argues that once values become subjective, we no longer have the ability to discern reasonable behavior. We are at the mercy of the baser Nature, which is not in itself merciful. We take what is human out of the Man and then expect him to be humane. Says Lewis,

In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.\textsuperscript{14}

So then, once we have removed their heart, how is the pupil to be properly conditioned?\textsuperscript{15} Lewis addresses this in his article, “Democratic Education.”\textsuperscript{16} At issue, he says, is the idea of equality in education. This is not to be confused with equal opportunity. That everyone should have an opportunity to be educated, Lewis would agree. However, that everyone should be held to the same level of education—that is, that education should be focused on the least common denominator among pupils—was an idea that Lewis considered absurd and dangerous.\textsuperscript{17} At the time of his writing, Britain was abolishing compulsory Latin from its curricula, with other subjects, including mathematics, were on the block as well. It was not the removal of Latin and the other courses \textit{per se} that Lewis was writing against but rather the motive for its removal. It was being abolished because it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid.}{\textsuperscript{14}}
\footnote{Ibid., 721-723.}{\textsuperscript{15}}
\footnote{“Democratic Education,” in \textit{Present Concerns} (32-36).}{\textsuperscript{16}}
\footnote{This debate is gaining currency in the American Public School system once again as charter and magnet schools have begun to attract more and more students and parents who reject the least common denominator method of teaching and seek higher standards of learning.}{\textsuperscript{17}}
\end{footnotes}
gave an “unfair advantage’ to boys of a certain type.” Progressive education was concerned that Johnny might feel inferior because he could not conjugate his Latin verbs as well as Charlie, and if Johnny felt inferior, so might Johnny’s parents. However, worse than Johnny feeling inferior was the possibility that Charlie might actually be superior. Therefore, in the name of democracy erroneously equated with egalitarianism, education should do away with all compulsory courses that might make a boy feel inferior to his peers.

Abolishing all requirements, posited Lewis, would certainly please the democratic feelings. Everyone would be on par with everyone else. No one (and no parents) would feel inferior. But could such an educational system sustain a democratic nation? Lewis writes that,

The demand for equality has two sources; one of them is among the noblest, the other is the basest of human emotions. The noble source is the desire for fair play. But the other source is the hatred of superiority....There is in all men a tendency (only corrigible by good training from without and persistent moral effort from within) to resent the existence of what is stronger, subtler or better than themselves. In uncorrected brutal men this hardens into an implacable disinterested hatred for every kind of excellence.

Lewis saw this type of equality as an anathema to democracy. Equality under the law is a must in democracy, indeed, it should be a hallmark thereof. However, equality in the spheres of mind is something that cannot be achieved, nor should it be aspired to, in a democracy. There is not, nor can there be, equality in beauty, truth, or virtue. These are not

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18 “Democratic Education,” 32.
playing fields that the state can level. Echoing Alexis de Tocqueville, Lewis states: “Political democracy is doomed if it tries to extend its demand for equality into these higher spheres. Ethical, intellectual, or aesthetic democracy is death.”

As an Oxbridge Don, Lewis was not shy about differentiating among intellectual talent. However, for him, he was not making a moral judgment, but rather an observation. Some people were intellectually talented and some were not. To treat all the same would be unfair to both sides. The boy with an aptitude for Latin should not be denied Latin because of that aptitude anymore than a boy with little aptitude for Latin should be excused from it simply because it will be more difficult for him. With characteristic humor, Lewis explains that the education that the boy who has little aptitude for Latin receives during his Latin class will be invaluable later in life—that is, as he sits in the back of the room and whittles boats from wood under his desk, he is practicing a resistance to authority, which is “a pleasure without which no true democracy can exist.” For it is imperative to the sustainment of democracy that its citizens learn the value of checking the power of the government. By being required to take classes that do not suit his character, the boy learns to resist authority in little ways, like whittling boats from wood, or even staring out the window. These little behaviors when they are fully grown, give the Man the ability and confidence to check the ever-encroaching power of the government, and consequently democracy is sustained. Lewis explains this idea, saying:

20 Ibid., 34.
21 Ibid., 36.
A mild pleasure in ragging, a determination not to be much interfered with, is a valuable brake on reckless planning and a valuable curb on the meddlesomeness of minor officials: envy, bleating “I’m as good as you”, is the hotbed of Fascism. You are going about to take away the one and foment the other. Democracy demands that little men should not take big ones too seriously; it dies when it is full of little men who think they are big themselves.\textsuperscript{22}

For the proponent of progressive or democratic education, the conditioning of pupils then, is not about making them better citizens for democracy, but rather about making them better participants in social experiments. It is to make them into followers who will be incapable of critiquing the system because the system has conditioned them to believe that it is their best option. It seeks to make its pupils takers, not givers; bleating sheep who believe they are entitled to what their neighbor has because he has it and they want it, not because they have worked hard or put in the effort to get it themselves.

This leads us back to \textit{That Hideous Strength} and the programmatic goal of the NICE: the conquering of Nature by Man. It also introduces Applied Science into the equation. Lewis was, and continues to be, accused of being anti-Science. He was not. What Lewis thought abominable was something he called “Scientism,” which he defines in “A Reply to Professor Haldane” as

\begin{quote}
...[T]he belief that the supreme moral end is the perpetuation of our own species, and that this is to be pursued even if, in the process of being fitted for survival, our species has to be stripped of all those things for which we value it—of pity, of happiness, and of freedom.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” loc.1168.
Lewis explains that scientists themselves rarely fall into the trap of Scientism, but that it is the readers of popular science and the practitioners of the Applied Sciences—what we more commonly refer to as “social science” today—who generally propound this ideology. It is no coincidence that the antihero in *That Hideous Strength*, Mark Studdock, is a sociologist. It is those who are not scientists who try to use science in a way that it is ill equipped to be used. The one scientist that NICE does bring in from Bracton College, a chemist by the name of William Hingst, recognizes the scientism driving the scheme and resigns, saying to Studdock, “I came here because I thought it had something to do with science. Now that I find it’s something more like a political conspiracy, I shall go home.”

24 After Studdock tries to rationalize his own decision to stay with an appeal to sociology, Hingst, replies:

> There are no sciences like Sociology. And if I found chemistry beginning to fit in with a secret police...and a scheme for taking away his farm and his shop and his children from every Englishman, I'd let chemistry go to the devil and take up gardening again. .... That's what happens when you study men: you find mare's nests. I happen to believe that you can't study men; you can only get to know them, which is quite a different thing. Because you study them, you want to make the lower orders govern the country and listen to classical music, which is balderdash. You also want to take away from them everything which makes life worth living and not only from them but from everyone except a parcel of prigs and professors. 25

Through Hingst, Lewis underscores the fact he is not concerned about science, but he is very concerned about applying scientific method to the study of human behavior. One

24 *That Hideous Strength*, 70.
simply cannot understand human beings in abstraction. The Human Being is not a petri dish. One cannot study the human being or the human heart in the same way one might study a virus in a biology laboratory. The human being is something more than Nature, something more than a collection of atoms. To apply science to the human being reduces her to mere nature and leaves her little option but to submit to nature. Says Lewis,

As soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same...The real objection is that if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be: not raw material to be manipulated, as he fondly imagined, by himself, but by mere appetite, that is, mere Nature....


With each advance in technology, humankind is convinced that it is one step closer to conquering nature. And yet, Lewis points out, each advance potentially moves power from the many to the few. To illustrate his point, he uses the airplane, the radio, and contraception. The key with each of these, as with technological progress in general, is that apart from the invention being my own, I am unable to benefit from them without in some way limiting my own freedom. In most cases, that limitation comes through economics. I can use the radio or the airplane as long as I can pay for them, and I can pay for them as long as I choose not to spend my money elsewhere. Should I not be able to afford to take advantage of these advances, I am then reduced to relying on my own legs and ears, which are, by nature limited, in how far they can go and what they can hear. When all is said and

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26 *The Abolition of Man*, 726.
done, “[w]hat we call Man’s power is...a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by...Man is as much the patient or subject as the possessor [of these powers].”27

Contraception was a slightly different case, according to Lewis, because it not only exercised power over Man in the present, but through its use as a means of eugenics, it gives to one generation the power to exercise over the next. The same is true today in terms of genetic engineering. Through this a very small group of people are given power to determine the future of the next generation—whether it be that they have no future at all or that they have a future with specific hair and eye colors, or without potential difficulties. Ultimately, says Lewis, from this perspective, “...what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.”28

The only way out of this paradox, argues Lewis, is to remain within the Tao. And so it is to the Tao we now turn.

**The Tao**

There are ethical presuppositions that transcend time and culture: the value of life, that underlies prohibitions against murder or the admonition of good will to all; the value of parents, kinship and the aged; duties to posterity; the laws of justice; the value of honesty—all of these and more are represented in what is referred to as Natural Law,

27 *The Abolition of Man*, 719.
28 Ibid.
Traditional Morality, First Principles of Practical Reason, or, for Lewis, the *Tao.* It is “…the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others are really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.”29 In the appendix to *The Abolition of Man,* Lewis provides eight categories of ethics that show up in civilizations throughout history. They are: the law of general beneficence; the law of special beneficence; duties to parents, elders, ancestors; duties to children and posterity; the law of justice; the law of good faith and veracity; the law of mercy; and, the law of magnanimity. Each of these categories is subcategorized, as well. They are not offered as proof of the validity of the *Tao,* but rather to show the common ethical threads that run through civilizations throughout history.30

Lewis uses the term *Tao* to underscore the universal nature of these ideas—that is, they were not unique to a particular culture or religion. It is the True North, if you will, by which we can recognize the truth or falsity of what is around us. Lewis is not trying to argue for Universalism as an ideology or religion here. That is an argument that can be taken up only in the discussion of First Causes. Lewis notes:

> I am simply arguing that if we are to have values at all we must accept the ultimate platitudes of Practical Reason as having absolute validity: that any attempt, having become skeptical about these, to reintroduce value lower down on some supposedly more ‘realistic’ basis, is doomed. Whether this position implies a supernatural origin for the *Tao* is a question I am not here concerned with.31

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29 *The Abolition of Man,* 701.
30 *The Abolition of Man,* 731-738.
31 Ibid., 716.
Lewis is using the term *Tao* as a shorthand for those things that have, for time immemorial, pricked our consciences when we have transgressed them or lifted our spirits when we have followed them in practice.

It is from within the *Tao* that we can discern between good and evil. When we step outside of the *Tao*, we step into what Lewis refers to as a void, a place where value judgments cannot be made precisely because there are no values at all. Yet this is not a place where human beings can actually live for we are everyday making value judgments—even if we fundamentally disagree with the *Tao*, we cannot truly exit it. Such is the nature of objective truth and value that it will continue to exist whether or not we believe in it. To agree with the *Tao* is to stand inside it, to apply the truth to our life, to deepen that which is good in Man. To stand outside the *Tao* is to try to deny its existence and still justify our own.

The *Tao*, says Lewis, can be developed from within, but he cautions, “There is a difference between a real moral advance and a mere innovation.”32 A moral advance within the *Tao* is one that extends the previous principle so as to allow a person to accept or reject the idea as either a deepening of the old maxim or as a superfluous idea that was unnecessary or went too far.33 A moral advance creates a richer understanding of the *Tao*

32 Ibid., 714.
33 Lewis exemplifies moral advance by comparing the Confucian admonition ‘Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you’ to the Jesus’ admonition ‘Do as you would be done by.’ The advance comes not at the expense of the first but rather the first is deepened. Not only are should one refrain from what is bad, but one should actively do what is good.
that is reflected in all of our relationships, but particularly in the Man v. Man relationship, which Lewis defines as “politics.”\textsuperscript{34}

While a moral advance deepens the \textit{Tao}, a mere innovation requires the denial of the \textit{Tao} altogether. This, says Lewis, is at the heart of Nietzsche’s morality. To hold to Nietzschean Ethics, one would be in the valueless void that is untenable for human beings. Lewis offers a vivid picture of this difference between advance from within the \textit{Tao} and mere innovation:

It is the difference between a man who says to us: ‘You like your vegetables moderately fresh; why not grow your own and have them perfectly fresh?’ and a man who says, ‘Throw away that loaf and try eating bricks and centipedes instead.’\textsuperscript{35}

A man who wishes to place himself outside of the \textit{Tao} can be hostile toward the \textit{Tao}, but he cannot criticize it because he has no place from which to start his critique. To what will he compare the \textit{Tao}? Nietzsche wished to be an innovator, maybe even the Grand Innovator.\textsuperscript{36}

But alas, he could not pull it off. Nietzsche’s own genealogy of morals makes sense only if you accept the starting point of the \textit{Tao}: that there is good and there is evil. To turn morality on its head as Nietzsche tries to do can only happen by starting with the understanding that there is some universal morality.\textsuperscript{37} Though he vehemently tried to deny its existence, Nietzsche the Grand Innovator could not free himself from the \textit{Tao} for “[t]he

\textsuperscript{34} “A Response to Professor Haldane,” loc.1227.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{The Abolition of Man}, 715.
\textsuperscript{36} Think of Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor—two sides of the same coin in some respects. However, that is an idea to pursue at another time.
\textsuperscript{37} I apologize to Nietzsche scholars for glossing over the fine points. The comparison of Nietzsche and Lewis is a book waiting to be written, and I do not have room here to expand the idea properly.
human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary color, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in.”

It is the *Tao*, then, to which we look for guidance in our relationships, particularly in the relationship we have with other human beings. It is to principles of the *Tao* that we hold our government responsible—principles of justice, mercy, freedom, and protection. Ironically, it is the *Tao* that progressive education, with the help of scientism, most ardently wants to remove from the hearts of their pupils.

*The Dangers of Progress for Mere Politics*

As we return to the discussion of Mere Politics, Lewis presents us with an interesting theory: without objective value, there can be no progress, only meaningless activity—motion for motion’s sake. As we have stripped our actions of meaning, we have fallen into the downward spiral of scientism that would induce us to turn on our own humanness and reduce ourselves to an object of study. We seek to conquer Nature and are held captive by the unintended consequences of our own decisions. Most alarmingly, we have denied ourselves access to the one thing that allows us to maintain our humanity: the *Tao*.

We have essentially thrown out the idea of normative value and have landed on the vague notions of preference and choice, even while we slowly strip the population of

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38 *The Abolition of Man*, 714
choices to be made. Jean Bethke Elshtain writes of an encounter she had with a young man who was giving a job talk for a Political Science position at a university. He confidently declared that all of life could be reduced to preferences, to which Elshtain asked, essentially, if this is so, why did Martin Luther King, Jr. declare “I have a dream...” and not "I have a preference...” The professorial hopeful responded that indeed the two were really the same and “no different in principle from, say, debating marginal alterations in the price of commodities.” In short, there is no fundamental difference between freedom and equal justice under the law and the price of pork bellies. Absurd? Yes, patently absurd. But this is where we are.

The denial of the Tao leads us to complete subjectivity. We are left to our basest, most animal selves. Lewis wrote of the abolition of Man not in the sense of war or of genocide or of nuclear holocaust—all things with which his contemporaries were concerned. No, said Lewis, Man will abolish himself by giving up all that makes him human, by reducing himself to the object of study, the “raw material.” When he has finally surrendered his humanness, then Man will find himself at the mercy of the few that remain Conditioners who have long since scrapped mercy along with the rest of the Normative Values. In his bid at last to conquer himself, Man will find that he has been conquered by

39 At the risk of opening a can of worms that I will regret later, I cannot help but to call attention to the health care debate. The propagandists for both sides went to work very quickly: healthcare is a right, big government is bad. But isn’t choice also a right? This is what the argument for abortion is predicated on, is it not? I can do with my body what I choose? Then why cannot I choose to leave my body uninsured? And if I cannot make that choice, by what right do I make the other? Food for thought.
40 Elshtain, 90.
Nature and will be controlled by the few who can wield power. Like Nietzsche's *übermensch*, these few will not be bound by the ideas of mercy, justice, and fairness, nor even by duty to parents or children. They will stand outside the Tao and try to justify their own existence, their own place in the world in terms that are more palatable than mere power. They will try and they will fail.

We have reached a point in history where we can genetically engineer our food, our livestock, and even our offspring, giving us the illusion of power over nature. And yet just because we can do these things, does it necessarily follow that we should? We are at another critical juncture in history—not unlike the advent of modern warfare, the American and French Revolutions, the Reformation, the Copernican Revolution and so many others—a pivotal point in the history of the human race where we can choose to progress, stagnate, or regress. For the first time in history, however, we are now facing this juncture without an ethical compass, without the guidance of the *Tao*. Our future is to be determined solely by the preferences of our leaders or the polls of the masses. There is nothing substantial, nothing transcendent to which we can appeal. *Logres* has been overwhelmed by Britain. This is where we are. Can our abolition be anything but immanent?
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