

## Inklings Forever

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Volume 6 A Collection of Essays Presented at the Sixth  
Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis &  
Friends

Article 14


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5-29-2008

# The Abolition of Man in Retrospect

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### Recommended Citation

Michelson, Paul E. (2008) "The Abolition of Man in Retrospect," *Inklings Forever*: Vol. 6 , Article 14.  
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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VI**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Sixth

FRANCES WHITE EW BANK COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2008

Upland, Indiana

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## **The Abolition of Man 1943-2008**

**Paul E. Michelson**

**Abstract:**

The paper reviews some of the principal contentions of C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* (1943) and assesses their status, relevance, and importance 65 years on.

# *The Abolition of Man 1943-2008*

## I. INTRODUCTORY

Sixty-five years ago, in February of 1943, C. S. Lewis delivered the Riddell Memorial Lectures at King's College of the University of Durham under the title "The Abolition of Man." The aim of the Riddell lectureship was to explore the relationship between religion and contemporary thought.<sup>1</sup> My purpose here is to assess in retrospect C. S. Lewis's success in this task.

Lewis's preoccupation with the relationship between religion and contemporary thought owed primarily to two factors: the responses to his first series of BBC broadcast lectures in August of 1941, dealing with what he called "The Law of Human Nature,"<sup>2</sup> and the fact that an increasing number of speakers at the Oxford Socratic Club seemed to question the existence of an objective moral law.<sup>3</sup> The invitation from Durham evidently furnished a welcome occasion for Lewis to concentrate his fire on this target in the lectures which became *The Abolition of Man*.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time Lewis was well along with the writing of the third volume of his science fiction trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, which he completed in December 1943

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<sup>1</sup>For a brief history, see J. R. Lucas, "Restoration of Man: A Lecture given in Durham on Thursday, October 22nd, 1992, to mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*," *Theology*, November-December 1995, p. 445-456. On line at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~jrlucas/lewis.html>.

<sup>2</sup>These lectures were published with some alterations as part of C. S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks* (London: Geoffrey Bles/The Centenary Press, 1942), and later in revised as Book I of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>On Lewis's interests at this time, see Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, revised edition (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 276. Though Lewis is often portrayed as more or less disinterested in current affairs, the essays collected by Lesley Walmsley in C. S. Lewis, *Essay Collection* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), two volumes, includes numerous substantial pieces dealing with contemporary events.

<sup>4</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943). References below are to the 2000 HarperSanFrancisco edition.

and published in 1945.<sup>5</sup> The plot of this work, in Lewis's own words, involved the conflict of "Grace against Nature and Nature against Anti-Nature modern industrialism, scientism, & totalitarian politics."<sup>6</sup> Lewis's preface to the book explicitly linked *That Hideous Strength* to *The Abolition of Man*, noting that it "has behind it a serious 'point' which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*."<sup>7</sup> What follows will draw on both books.<sup>8</sup>

## II. THE ABOLITION OF MAN IN RETROSPECT

In 1955, Lewis wrote that *The Abolition of Man* "is almost my favourite among my books, but in general has been almost totally ignored by the public."<sup>9</sup> The modern reader might find this hard to understand because the book begins with the entrancing sub-title: "Reflections on education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools"; continues on with such hypnotic, interest-grabbing lines as:

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<sup>5</sup>The preface of THS was dated "Christmas Eve, 1943," at which point the book must have been finished. He was in correspondence with E. R. Eddison in December 1942 and again in April 1943 in connection with the book, according to Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis. A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 231-232.

<sup>6</sup>C. S. Lewis to William L. Kinter, 30 July 1954, in: C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), p. 498.

<sup>7</sup>C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength, A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), paperback edition, 1965, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>However, we must avoid any confusion over Lewis's methods: in his own words "I don't of course mean that I started with these abstract 'morals' & then invented yarns to illustrate them. I could not work like that: stories begin, for me, simply with *pictures* coming into my head. But these are the *thoughts* that accompanied the writing." Put otherwise, "Behind my own stories there are no 'facts' at all, tho' I hope there are truths. That is, they may be regarded as imaginative hypotheses illustrating what I believe to be theological truths..." C. S. Lewis to Tony Pollock, 3 May 1954, in: Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, 2007, p. 465-466. On Lewis's methods of writing fiction, see C. S. Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982). Cp. Lewis's comments in the transcript of a conversation with Kingsley Amis and Brian Aldiss: "Aldiss: 'I would have thought that you constructed *Perelandra* for the didactic purpose.' Lewis: 'Yes, everyone thinks that. They are quite wrong....The story of this averted fall came in very conveniently. Of course, it wouldn't have been that particular story if I wasn't interested in those particular ideas on other grounds. But that isn't what I started from. I've never started from a message or a moral, have you?' Amis: 'No, never. You get interested in the situation.' Lewis: 'The story should force its moral upon you. You find out what the moral is by writing the story.'" Recorded 4 December 1962 and published as "Unreal Estates," in: Lewis, *On Stories*, 1982, pp. 144-145.

<sup>9</sup>C. S. Lewis to Mary Willis Shelburne, 20 February 1955 in: Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, 2007, p. 567.

"I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary text books"; and finally gallops off into classical philosophy and a defense of ethical absolutes laced with frequent untranslated quotations in Greek and Latin. Obviously a prime candidate for Oprah's Book Club and easily the favorite of students everywhere. Well, maybe not.

Let us move now to some of Lewis's principal points and see how they look from the vantage point of sixty-five years later.

1. Lewis charges that the thrust of modern education remember, this is in 1943 is to teach students that there are no objective values, thus turning them into "men without chests," people whose moral sentiments have been extinguished and are left to wander about the modern world without a moral compass.<sup>10</sup> "The practical result" of such an education "must be the destruction of the society which accepts it."<sup>11</sup> This postulates the culture wars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries long before most Christians were even vaguely aware of what was happening.

The consequences of this for everyday morality? Here's a possibly trivial but telling illustration. In *USA WEEKEND*, 8-10 February 2008, a story on actor Matthew McConaughey "Hollywood's 'Sexiest Man Alive'" goes out of its way to point out that "McConaughey has always marched to a different drummer than most celebrities. A self-described religious person who sang in the choir at his Methodist church and prays often" who "wants to hold hands and pray" with the reporter before eating, McConaughey says "If you have a good relationship with yourself and you have a good relationship with God, then you can sit happily alone and not be lonely." Heartwarming, indeed. Later in the story, we learn that McConaughey and "his girlfriend of two years are expecting a baby this summer." They plan to move into a house he recently bought in Malibu, but "as for a wedding: 'We don't have plans to get

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<sup>10</sup>An excellent treatment of these issues is Gilbert Meilaender's *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 27.

married, but I wouldn't be with Camila if I didn't love her and didn't have great dreams for the future."<sup>12</sup>

On a deeper level, Lewis stressed that the abandonment of the *Tao* objective value recognized by all civilized people would have dire consequences for knowledge, ethics, and morality. What we get is a society adrift in relativism and headed for shipwreck. Eventually man will be abolished, or will return to a Hobbesian state of nature: in the words of Lucy in *Prince Caspian*, "Wouldn't it be dreadful if someday in our own world, at home, men started going wild inside, like the animals here, and still looked like men, so that you'd never know which were which?"<sup>13</sup>

2. Secondly, Lewis argues that modern education produces two characteristic alumni: urban blockheads and trousered apes.<sup>14</sup> The former – all head, no chest – sees a horse as "merely an old-fashioned means of transport"<sup>15</sup> The latter – all stomach and no chest – appears to be human but lacks the rational control of "mere appetites" that distinguishes man from animal.<sup>16</sup> Where the urban blockhead is emotionally retarded, the trousered ape is intellectually stunted. Where the urban blockhead's imagination and aesthetic senses are woefully underdeveloped, the trousered ape is rationally dwarfed and logically-challenged. Where the urban blockhead wanders around in an affective desert, the trousered ape wallows in a swamp.

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<sup>12</sup>Mary Murphy, "I have great dreams for the future," *USA WEEKEND*, February 8-10, 2008, pp. 8-9. Compare C. S. Lewis' article "We Have No 'Right to Happiness,'" in: C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock. Essays on Theology and Ethics*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 317-322.

<sup>13</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian. The Return to Narnia* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 101.

<sup>14</sup>For detail, see my paper "Of Urban Blockheads and Trousered Apes: C. S. Lewis and the Challenge of Education," *Inklings Forever*, Vol. 4 (2004), pp. 106-113.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 11. An excellent example of the urban blockhead is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader's* Eustace Clarence Scrubb, an informed ignoramus who "had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons." This turned out to be a serious handicap when Eustace wound up in Narnia. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* New York: Macmillan, 1952, p. 71.

<sup>16</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 11-25. Lewis later illustrated this with *The Last Battle's* Shift the Ape. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* New York: Macmillan, 1956, pp. 26-29.

Education is supposed to provide for integration of the head and the stomach by fostering the sentiments of the chest, the *Tao*. "The head rules the belly through the chest...[which is] the indispensable liaison officer...between cerebral man and visceral man....it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal."<sup>17</sup> How much of this happens in much or most of higher education today. In Lewis's time, he felt that hyper-rationality was the primary problem; it is arguable that today the trousered apes have the upper hand.<sup>18</sup>

Lewis's analysis does seem to overlook the possibility of the ugly Post Modern hybrid of the two, as exemplified by Carl Sagan, who on the one hand derided Christians as obscurantists and unreasoning Neanderthals, but had an avid interest in and promoted New Age beliefs. This was made possible, I would argue, by Kant's bifurcation of the world into the physical and the metaphysical realms. Interestingly, a primary objective of science ever since has been to come up with a unified theory of knowledge.

3. The primeval platitudes are what Lewis calls the *Tao*, the Way. Lewis argues that objective values and reason were previously universally recognized; only in modern times have people come to deny them.<sup>19</sup> The philosophical problems should be apparent: the sceptics "have shown by the very act of writing...that there must be some other values about which they are not subjective at all....Their scepticism about values is on the surface: it is for use on other people's values; about the values current in their own set they are not nearly sceptical enough."<sup>20</sup> One could not hope for a clearer definition of political correctness or for a plainer identification of the inconsistency of the enemies of objective morality.

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<sup>17</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 24-25.

<sup>18</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 13-14: "For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts."

<sup>19</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 14 ff.

<sup>20</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 27-28.

The sceptic view of education, of course, leads directly to another characteristic of Post Modernism. Alan Jacobs summarizes: for the sceptics, "language is but an instrument by which some people control and others are controlled. As Humpty Dumpty once said, in a very similar context, 'The question is which is to be master, that's all.' As Lewis emphasizes with great force in *The Abolition of Man*, Humpty Dumpty's view of things is deeply embedded in all the projects and hopes of modernity, even or especially when we talk about achieving human power over Nature: '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.'<sup>21</sup>

4. Equally telling is *Abolition of Man's* critique of relativism. This was summarized in a comment Lewis later made in a letter to Corbin Scott Carnell: "If you are losing your faith in argument, why trust the arguments that lead you to do so? This scepticism about reason undercuts itself."<sup>22</sup>

This raises the question "On what ground henceforward were actions to be justified or condemned?"<sup>23</sup> "If one insists on putting the question in those terms,' said Frost [a psychologist and a central bad guy of *That Hideous Strength*], 'I think Waddington [C. H. Waddington, a contemporary of Lewis's and author of *Science and Ethics*, who is discussed in *The Abolition of Man*<sup>24</sup>] has given the best answer. Existence is its own justification....When the so-called struggle for existence is seen simply as an

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<sup>21</sup>Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), p. 185. Jacobs calls *The Abolition of Man* "the most profound of Lewis's cultural critiques." p. 174.

<sup>22</sup>C. S. Lewis to Corbin Scott Carnell, 25 June 1954, in: Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, 2007, p. 494.

<sup>23</sup>For further discussion of this strategy, see J. R. Lucas, "Restoration of Man," 1995, who remarks that the sceptic "is sawing off the branch on which he is sitting....It is the same with subjectivism. If the subjectivist opines that subjectivism is true...I rub his nose in the non-subjectivity of that utterance....The strategy of the argument is clear. Suitably modified, it would apply to any world-view that made out man to be not in any way subject to reason. Although it would not prove that such a doctrine must be false or could not be held, it would show that it could not be argued for or rationally held, and the very fact that someone argued in its favor would be strong evidence that he did not really believe it." The *locus classicus* of the argument is Lewis's *Miracles; A Preliminary Study*, revised edition (London: Collins, 1960), Ch. 3: "The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism." See also Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defence of the Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), *passim*.

<sup>24</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 109-111.



actuarial theorem...emotion disappears. With it disappears that preposterous idea of an external standard of value which the emotion produced....When you have attained real objectivity you will recognize, not *some* motives, but *all* motives as merely animal, subjective epiphenomena. You will then have no motives and you will find that you do not need them."<sup>25</sup> In other words, man is abolished.

Frost goes on to say, "that is why a systematic training in objectivity must be given to you. Its purpose is the eliminate from your mind one by one the things you have hitherto regarded as grounds for action. It is like killing a nerve. That whole system of instinctive preferences, whatever ethical, aesthetic, or logical disguise they wear, is to be simply destroyed."<sup>26</sup> This was followed by putting his protege through a series of experiences that we would today call "desensitization."<sup>26</sup> What goes on the political correctness-enforcing universities of today doesn't function very differently from this, whether we are dealing with the destruction of modesty through unisex residence halls – including showers and restrooms – to the recent "Sex Workers Art Show" at Duke University, which featured a lot of extremely vulgar performance art that can't really be described here,<sup>27</sup> to the continuing decline in the levels in decency of what one can see on a regular basis during television prime time.

And to the assertions of trousered apes and urban blockheads in our society that "ethical standards of different cultures differ so widely that there is no common tradition at all" Lewis replies: "The answer is that this is a lie--a good, solid, resounding lie . . . . [There is a] massive unanimity of the practical reason in man . . . . the pretence that we are presented with a mere chaos . . . is simply false and should be contradicted in season and out of season wherever it is met."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1965, pp. 295-296.

<sup>26</sup>Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1965, pp. 296 ff.

<sup>27</sup>Chuck Shepherd, "News of the Weird," *Huntington Herald-Press*, November 25, 2007, p. 3A.

<sup>28</sup>Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in his *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 77-78, for the quote, and Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 83 ff. for the examples. Compare William H. McNeill, *The Shape of European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974),

5. *The Abolition of Man* identified another consequence of the assumptions of rationalistic naturalism and Post Modernism: "You cannot go on 'explaining away' forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it....If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things in the same as not to see."<sup>29</sup>

6. And how, indeed, do the sceptics justify their own moral codes? Lewis points out that appeals to factual information or to "science" to provide a new morality ignore the "is/ought" problem, the reality that from "propositions about fact alone no practical conclusion can ever be drawn,"<sup>30</sup> while appeals to instincts, or pure reason or natural selection or obligations to posterity beg the question of why we ought to obey them at all and cannot to tell us what to do when they come in conflict with each other.<sup>31</sup>

The attempt to manufacture a chest in modern times i.e., create a "new" morality, a "secular" morality, or whatever is thus a failure, as Alasdair MacIntyre later argued in *After Virtue*.<sup>32</sup> The *Tao* "is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the

p. 33: "the remarkable way in which all the important moral systems of civilized mankind converge in practice toward what Christians know as the Golden Rule" is "unquestionable."

<sup>29</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 80-81. On "seeing through" v. "seeing along", cf. Lewis's essay "'Meditation in a Toolshed," in Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 1970, pp. 212-215.

<sup>30</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 30 ff. Compare "If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in preferring civilized morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality. In fact, of course, we all do believe that some moralities are better than others . . . The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard . . . admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Bk 1.2.

<sup>32</sup>MacIntyre shows how "The Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality" has "decisively failed," while the attempted "secularization of morality by the Enlightenment" has led to a situation in which "Moral judgments lose any clear status and the sentences which express them . . . lose any undebatable meaning."

sole source of all value judgements. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained."<sup>33</sup> This argument seems both sound and pertinent today. And yet critics of the Tao, such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, seem oblivious to the fatal flaws of naturalism.<sup>34</sup>

7. This leads in Lewis's view to the sole remaining option for the sceptics: "the rejection of the concept of value altogether." "Having mastered our environment, let us now master ourselves and choose our own destiny."<sup>35</sup> There may be some residual survivals of the old *Tao*, but eventually these will fade out. "Man's conquest of Nature turns out...to be Nature's conquest of Man" and results in the abolition of Man.<sup>36</sup> This results, Lewis says, in a kind of "magician's bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls."<sup>37</sup>

This brings us back to the classic problem of *hubris*. Life, according to the Greeks – and the Medieval Christians – was to be lived in the balance created by the exercise of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.

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Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 36 ff.

<sup>33</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, pp. 3943. See also C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in: C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 72-81; and C. S. Lewis, "De futillitate," in: C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 57-71, dealing with scepticism, reason, and human thought.

<sup>34</sup>For a fuller account, see C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, revised edition (London: Collins, 1960), especially Chapters III and V. For a critique, see Eric J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason*. C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 93-108. Not that the scientists have given up. See "Moral Thinking," *The Economist*, 23 February 2008, p. 98; and "Where angels no longer fear to tread," *The Economist*, 22 March 2008, pp. 89-92. Compare "Does science make belief in God obsolete?" a series of essays published at [www.templeton.org/belief](http://www.templeton.org/belief). Wielenberg thinks that recent work in evolutionary psychology undermines the theistic force of Lewis's argument, but validates Lewis's claim that there is such a thing as "human nature." pp. 119-120.

<sup>35</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 62-68.

<sup>37</sup>Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2000, p. 72.

These are virtues "which all civilized people recognize."<sup>38</sup> When human conduct went out of whack, the cause was usually *hubris*, or arrogance. For the Greeks, *hubris* "was regarded as the worst of evils, because it made chaos of all attempts to achieve balance and harmony in the self and because it scorned the social obligations on which the city-state depended."<sup>39</sup>

*That Hideous Strength* is a virtual compendium of amoral scientific *hubris*.<sup>40</sup> One of leaders of the National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments N. I. C. E. at Belbury tells Mark Studdock, the hapless social scientist, "Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have to take charge of the rest....Quite simple and obvious things at first – sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races we don't want any deadweights, selective breeding. Then real education, including pre-natal education. By real education I mean one that has no 'take-it-or-leave-it' nonsense. A real education makes the patient what it wants...whatever he or his parents try to do about it. Of course, it'll have to be mainly psychological at first. But we'll get on to biochemical conditioning in the end and direct manipulation of the brain...It's the real

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<sup>38</sup>Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), Book 3, Part 2. Compare the list in C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1959), pp. 98 ff.: wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage.

<sup>39</sup>Bowra, *Greek Experience*, 1959, pp. 101-102. Bowra writes that *hubris* "might well reflect an inner lack of courage; it certainly meant a defiance of self-control and temperance; it led inevitably to injustice in its disregard for the rights of others; it often ended in folly when its possessor thought that he could by unjust methods secure the impossible. The Greeks gave this vile eminence to arrogance because, more than anything else, it defied their ideal of a harmonious and restrained self, and their deep political distrust of it was equalled by their moral condemnation. They saw that it grows with feeding and creates other evils as great as itself...Unbridled arrogance shocked the Greeks morally, politically, and aesthetically. It was, in their view, quite different from legitimate ambition, since this was possible only with a large degree of self-control and even of self-sacrifice," and quotes Aeschylus *Agamemnon*, 763-771 "Ancient Arrogance loves to bring forth a young arrogance among the evils of men, soon or late...irresistible, unconquerable, unholy Recklessness."

<sup>40</sup>*That Hideous Strength* takes its title from David Lyndsay's 1554 description of a major *hubris* event of the Old Testament, the building of the Tower of Babel: "The Shadow of that hyddeous strength, Sax myle and more it is of length." In Genesis 11:4-9 we read: "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.'" Eventually they brought down upon themselves the wrath of God, but not, by Lyndsay's account, before they had built a monument to *hubris* that cast a six mile long shadow. Details in Hooper, C. S. *Lewis Companion and Guide*, 1996, p. 232.

thing at last. A new type of man..."<sup>41</sup>

Eventually, in *That Hideous Strength*, these people reap the whirlwind with the destruction of the N. I. C. E.'s headquarters at Belbury and the entire university town of Edgestow, including "innocent" academics. "[W]as there a single doctrine practised at Belbury which hadn't been preached by some lecturer at Edgestow? Oh, of course, they never thought anyone 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 unrecognisable, but their own....Those who call for Nonsense will find that it comes."<sup>42</sup> Peter Singer, call your office.

8. We go on from there into the realm of psychological engineering, human genetic manipulation, and cloning. Lewis seems to have anticipated the work of behaviorist psychologist B. F. Skinner. Another of *That Hideous Strength's* villains says to our gullible young social scientist "I must ask you to be strictly objective. Resentment and fear are both chemical phenomena. Our reactions to one another are chemical reactions."<sup>43</sup> Skinner wrote in 1971 "we need to make vast changes in human behavior....What we need is a technology of behavior. We could solve our problems quickly enough if we could adjust the growth of the world's population as precisely as we adjust the course of a spaceship, or improve agriculture and industry...But a behavioral technology comparable in power and precision to physical and biological technology is lacking, and those who do not find the very possibility ridiculous are more likely to be frightened by it than reassured."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1965, p. 42.

<sup>42</sup>Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1965, p. 371-372.

<sup>43</sup>Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1965, p. 255.

<sup>44</sup>B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 3-5. This is an apt illustration of Lewis' comment to a correspondent: "The trouble about writing satire is that the real world always anticipates you, and what were meant for exaggerations turn out to be nothing of the sort." C. S. Lewis to I. O. Evans, 26 September 1945, in connection with a comment by Evans on the N. I. C. E., Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Vol. II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931-1949*, edited by Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), p. 672.

9. Politics? Of course Lewis was aware in 1943 of the horrible totalitarian utopias of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. But is this all in the past? Here is what the publisher has to say about a book whose authors make "a powerful case for the view that taking environmental crisis seriously implies a radical critique of democracy itself, and a willingness to accept government by qualified expertise rather than popular election": "the authors conclude that an authoritarian form of government is necessary" but we shouldn't worry: "this will be governance by experts and not by those who seek power."<sup>45</sup> I feel better already.

On the other hand, while Lewis's Belbury apparently wants to stamp out nature, today nature is a club increasingly used to stifle dissent in the political realm.

10. Skinner later in his 1971 book comments directly on Lewis's work: "C. S. Lewis put it quite bluntly: Man is being abolished....What is being abolished is autonomous man — ...the man defended by the literatures of freedom and dignity. His abolition has long been overdue. Autonomous man is a device used to explain what we cannot explain in any other way. He has been constructed from our ignorance, and as our understanding increases, the very stuff of which he is composed vanishes....To man *qua* man we readily say good riddance."<sup>46</sup> What Lewis fears, Skinner welcomes.

### III. *Conclusion*

The Oxford philosopher J. R. Lucas, reviewing Lewis's work wrote: "The intervening fifty years have largely vindicated Lewis" in his "general attack on moral relativism....contemporary isms, which purported to replace traditional objective

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<sup>45</sup>The quotations from the Amazon.com site: [http://www.amazon.com/Climate-Challenge-Democracy-Politics-Environment/dp/031334504X/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1203537505&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Climate-Challenge-Democracy-Politics-Environment/dp/031334504X/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1203537505&sr=8-1).

<sup>46</sup>Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 1971, pp. 200-201. The publisher's dust-jacket blurb is almost a self-parody: "Will men become robots? Or victims? Or merely passive spectators? Who is to design that brave new world of the future? Can we count on his benevolence, or will a technology of behavior necessarily mean a new kind of tyranny? These and many other questions concerning so-called 'value judgments' are squarely faced. The book forces us to look afresh at ideals we have taken for granted and to consider the possibility of a scientific approach which, though it may at first seem incompatible with those ideals, will enable us to avoid the destruction toward which we are now speeding..." For anyone who doesn't think this kind of thinking is mainstream, see the work and reputation of Princeton's Peter Singer.

morality,...[and] hard-line scientific anti-humanism....Lewis was right, and has been vindicated by events. Like Hayek, he warned us of dangers ahead, and if we did not heed his warning then, we have come to realise in our subsequent troubles that he had told us so, and that what he told us was, indeed, true."<sup>47</sup>

And Peter Kreeft writes: "As our senile, toothless, and confused culture stumbles blindly toward the third millennium; as our 'century of genocide' comes to an end, having murdered more human beings born and unborn in a single century than the total of all men who lived in all previous centuries;...we wonder: "What next?' – and even whether there will be a 'next'. We look for prophets....Lewis...holds out hope, appeals to moral choice, and offers a positive alternative, though his jeremiad is no less horrific than Huxley's scenario of doom."<sup>48</sup>

The *Abolition of Man* has held up remarkably well, has proven to be prophetic in a number of key instances, and continues to be a significant guide for our troubled times. This cannot be said for most sixty-five year old books on "contemporary problems".

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<sup>47</sup>Lucas, "Restoration," 1995. For further discussion of Lewis's work, see Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Peter Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis for the Third Millennium. Six Essays on The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994); Brett Foster, "An Estimation of an Admonition: The Nature of Value, The Value of Nature, and *The Abolition of Man*," *Christian Scholar's Review*, Vol. 27 (1998), pp. 416-435; and Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea*, 2002. Also interesting is Lewis's "A Reply to Professor Haldane," in Lewis, *On Stories*, 1982, pp. 69-79. Wielenberg, while critical of Lewis, points out that Lewis's interest in the moral argument and the argument from reason are now back in the mainstream of philosophical interest as are his concerns for issues of faith, design, and truth. Wielenberg, *Reach of Reason*, 2008, pp. 120; 153-202.

<sup>48</sup>Kreeft, *Millennium*, 1994, p. 9.

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