

## Notes from *The Abolition of Man*

C.S. Lewis

**Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000.**

“The Master said, He who sets to work on a different strand destroys the whole fabric.”<sup>1</sup> – Confucius, *Analects* II. 16

“I think Gaius and Titius may have honestly misunderstood the pressing educational needs of the moment. They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda – they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental – and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion.”<sup>2</sup>

“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.”<sup>3</sup>

“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 incongruous to it- believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt.”<sup>4</sup>

“It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.”<sup>5</sup>

“And because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order, therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it).”<sup>6</sup>

“No emotion is, in itself, a judgment; in that sense all emotions and sentiments are alogical. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform.”<sup>7</sup>

“The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should, obey it.”<sup>8</sup>

“Now the emotion, thus considered by itself, cannot be either in agreement or disagreement with Reason. It is irrational not as a parallogism is irrational, but as a physical event is irrational: it does not rise even to the dignity of error. On this view, the world of facts, without one trace of

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), Title Page.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 13.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 13.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 18.

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 19.

<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 19.

<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 19.

value, and the world of feelings, without one trace of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, confront one another, and no *rapprochement* is possible.”<sup>9</sup>

“...the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in making which the very nature of man consists.”<sup>10</sup>

“Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”<sup>11</sup>

“The head rules the belly through the chest.”<sup>12</sup>

“The operation of...its kind is to produce what may be called Men without Chests.”<sup>13</sup>

“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.”<sup>14</sup>

“We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”<sup>15</sup>

“A great many of those who ‘debunk’ traditional or (as they would say) ‘sentimental’ values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process. They claim to be cutting away the parasitic growth of emotion, religious sanction, and inherited taboos, in order that ‘real’ or ‘basic’ values may emerge.”<sup>16</sup>

“Instinct is a name for we know not what...”<sup>17</sup>

“Each instinct, if you listen to it, will claim to be gratified at the expense of the rest. By the very act of listening to one rather than to others we have already prejudged the case.”<sup>18</sup>

“If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved.”<sup>19</sup>

“This thing which I have called for convenience the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgements. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There has never been, and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world.”<sup>20</sup>

“If justice is a superstition, then so is my duty to my country or my race.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 20.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 21.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 24.

<sup>12</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 24.

<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 25.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 26.

<sup>15</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 26.

<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 29.

<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 34.

<sup>18</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 36.

<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 40.

<sup>20</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 43.

<sup>21</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 44.

“The morality of Nietzsche is a mere innovation...the Nietzschean ethic can be accepted only if we are ready to scrap traditional morals as a mere error and then to put ourselves in a position where we can find no ground for any value judgements at all.”<sup>22</sup>

“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.”<sup>23</sup>

“...while we did not know how minds were made, we accepted this mental furniture as a datum, even as a master.”<sup>24</sup>

“Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors. This modifies the picture which is sometimes painted of a progressive emancipation from tradition and a progressive control of natural processes resulting in a continual increase of human power. In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have preordained how they are to use them.”<sup>25</sup>

“Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man...the battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it?”<sup>26</sup>

“For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please.”<sup>27</sup>

“It was but old birds teaching young birds to fly. This will be changed. Values are now mere natural phenomena.”<sup>28</sup>

“Judgements of value are to be produced in the pupil as part of the conditioning.”<sup>29</sup>

“The conditioners have been emancipated from all that. It is one more part of Nature which they have conquered. The ultimate springs of human action are no longer, for them, something given... They know how to *produce* conscience and decide what kind of conscience they will produce”<sup>30</sup>

“Conditioners...But I am not supposing them to be bad men. They are, rather, not men (in the old sense) at all. They are, if you like, men who have sacrificed their own share in traditional humanity in order to devote themselves to the task of deciding what ‘Humanity’ shall henceforth

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<sup>22</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 46.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 49.

<sup>24</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 50.

<sup>25</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 57.

<sup>26</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 59.

<sup>27</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 59.

<sup>28</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 61.

<sup>29</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 61.

<sup>30</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 61.

mean. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’, applied to them, are words without content: for it is from them that the content of these words is henceforward to be derived.”<sup>31</sup>

“Man’s final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man.”<sup>32</sup>

“...those who stand outside all judgements of value cannot have any ground preferring one of their own impulses to another except the emotional strength of that impulse.”<sup>33</sup>

“We may legitimately hope that among the impulses which arise in minds thus emptied of all ‘rational’ or ‘spiritual’ motives, some will be benevolent. I am very doubtful myself whether the benevolent impulses, stripped of that preference and encouragement which the *Tao* teaches us to give them and left to their merely natural strength and frequency as psychological events, will have much influence.”<sup>34</sup>

“I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently.”<sup>35</sup>

“I am inclined to think that the Conditioners will hate the conditioned.”<sup>36</sup>

“At the moment, then, of Man’s victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely ‘natural’ – to their irrational impulses.”<sup>37</sup>

“The Natural is the opposite of the Artificial, the Civil, the Human, the Spiritual, and the Supernatural.”<sup>38</sup>

“...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, in the person of his de-humanized Conditioners.”<sup>39</sup>

“Either we are rational spirits obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the *Tao*, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own ‘natural’ impulses.”<sup>40</sup>

“...many an amateur philosopher in our midst, means in the long run just the same as the Nazi rulers of Germany. Traditional values are to be ‘debunked’ and mankind to be cut out into some fresh shape at the will (which must, by hypothesis, be an arbitrary will) of some few lucky people in one lucky generation which has learned how to do it.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 63.

<sup>32</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 64.

<sup>33</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 65-55.

<sup>34</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 66.

<sup>35</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 66.

<sup>36</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 66.

<sup>37</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 67.

<sup>38</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 69.

<sup>39</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 73.

<sup>41</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 74.

“The fact that the scientist has succeeded where the magician failed has put such a wide contrast between them in popular thought that the real story of the birth of Science is misunderstood. You will even find people who write about the sixteenth century as if Magic were a medieval survival and Science the new thing that came in to sweep it away. Those who have studied the period know better. There was very little magic in the Middle ages: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the high noon of magic. The serious magical endeavor and the serious scientific endeavor are twins: one was sickly and died, the other strong and throve. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse.”<sup>42</sup>

“But if the scientists themselves cannot arrest this process before it reaches the common Reason and kills that too, then someone else must arrest it.”<sup>43</sup>

“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 is the same as not to see.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 76.

<sup>43</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 80.

<sup>44</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 81.