

Dear fellow pilgrims,

Last week we did a deep dive into Chapter 2, "The Way," in our continuing study of Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. We took a look at how some of Lewis's predictions in "Men Without Chests" about the results of the loss of objective value were fulfilled in the 20th century by the works of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, which have spawned a cultural revolution in academia. We also journeyed through Lewis's reasoning about the framework and role of the *Tao*, his shorthand for the Law of Human Nature or Natural Law.

At the end of this email is an outline of what we covered last week, along with links to video and audio recordings of the class, the PowerPoint, and the handouts.

*Just a reminder that this week, Wednesday, November 3, we will NOT have class. Instead, I encourage you to go see the marvelous new movie on C.S. Lewis entitled "The Most Reluctant Convert," which is playing across the country for that one night. You can find information and tickets here: <https://www.cslewismovie.com/home/>*

I look forward to seeing you at the movie tomorrow at 7 p.m. For next week, November 10, please read Chapter 3 of *The Abolition of Man*--we will meet that week in the Parish Hall at St. Philip's for class as usual--come join us and bring a friend!

Further up and further in,  
Brian+

Not as Unwise but as Wise: Reflections from C.S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength* on Living Christianly in a Post-Christian World

#### Philosophers and Ideologues Opposed to Lewis's Idea of Objective Value

**Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** (1844-1900) German philosopher who is known as the father of Nihilism. Nietzsche sought to free human beings from their false consciousness about Morality (their false belief that morality is good for them). "Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy. While few philosophers would claim to be nihilists, nihilism is most often associated with Nietzsche, who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greatest crisis in human history. Since the 20th century, nihilistic themes—epistemological failure, value destruction, and cosmic purposelessness—have preoccupied artists, social critics, and philosophers."—Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

**Jacques Derrida** (1930-2004) French philosopher influenced by Nietzsche, known for his theory of Deconstruction.

--Western thought and language have always had a fixed centre in absolute truth, which limits what it is possible to think or believe. Absolute Truth provides certainties, a foundation for being (what we are) and for knowing (how we think).  
--Derrida's underlying assumption is that there is no God in the equation to guarantee such absolutes, and hence ideas about certainty are now ruptured. The idea of a fixed centre was only a structure of power imposed on us by our past or by institutions of society, but in reality such a fixed centre does not exist at all.  
--Therefore, there is no ultimate reality, no God outside the system to which everyone and everything relates. Instead the only relationships that we can know are within the system of the world which Derrida calls discourses. For him ultimate reality is only a series of these discourses.  
--Because there is no fixed centre, there should no longer be any limits on what it is possible to think or believe. "Truth" and "falsehood" are simply wrong distinctions to make. Indeed they are just a destructive and harmful manifestation of that power structure. Therefore we must stop considering everything in life, culture and thought in relation to absolute truth, because to do so is, for Derrida, oppressive and immoral.—adapted from English scholar Marcus Honeysett

**Michel Foucault** (1926-1984) French philosopher and public intellectual. Foucault argued that knowledge and power are intimately connected. So much so, that he coined the term "power/knowledge" to point out that one is not separate from the other. Every exercise of power depends on a scaffold of knowledge that supports it. Claims to knowledge advance the interests and power of certain groups while marginalising others. In practice, this often legitimises the mistreatment of these others in the name of correcting and helping them. Where there is power, there is also always resistance: "sites of resistance" that hold out the promise for a reconfiguring of power relations in a way that might redress oppressive institutions and practices. Foucault's beliefs are founded on Nietzsche's premise that "...there are no moral facts whatever...Moral judgement has this in common with religious judgement - that it believes in realities which do not exist." Foucault also argued for the concept of self-creation. In this view, the self is no longer considered as the passive product of an external system of constraint and prescriptions, but as the active agent of its own formation: we can be freer by creating ourselves anew.—adapted from Dr. John Coffey, Cambridge University

*Note that later in the 20th century Derrida and Foucault write and argue for exactly the positions that Lewis anticipates in The Abolition of Man, which was written in 1943, decades before Derrida and Foucault became known. Through their theories, Derrida and Foucault have transformed virtually every discipline in the academic world, fulfilling Lewis's prophecies.*

Through its vehement opposition to *logocentrism* (the belief that there is a realm of truth that exists prior to and independently of its representation by linguistic and other signs), Deconstructionism robs the world of meaning and wonder. Lewis foresaw this possibility and was appalled by it, as shown in this poignant passage from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when Eustace Scrubb talks with Ramandu, a star from the heavens:

"In our world," said Eustace, "a star is a huge ball of flaming gas."  
--"Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of."

Solar system analogy from Lewis scholar Dr. Joe Rigney

**Chapter 2: The Way "It is upon the trunk that a gentleman works"-Confucius**

"By working on the trunk, the chest, the liaison officer between our heads and our bellies we become integrated wholes and so learn the wholesome way of being human in the world. Lewis uses the Tao not because he wants to single out Chinese philosophy as uniquely insightful but in order to de-emphasize Western categories and to remind his readers that moral reality is universal."—Rev. Dr. Michael Ward, *After Humanity*

**Not No Values but Whose Values?** "The practical result of education in the spirit of The Green Book must be the destruction of the society which accepts it." .... 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. ..

**The Innovator** "The Innovator is trying to get a conclusion in the imperative mood out of premisses in the indicative mood: and though he continues trying to all eternity he cannot succeed, for the thing is impossible."

**Argument from Instinct:** "The preservation of society, and of the species itself, are ends ...given by Instinct."

**Lewis's Response:** "I will not insist on the point that Instinct is a name for we know not what (to say that migratory birds find their way by instinct is only to say that we do not know how migratory birds find their way), for I think it is here being used in a fairly definite sense, to mean an unreflective or spontaneous impulse widely felt by the members of a given species. ...But the very question we are considering was that of facing death which (so far as the Innovator knows) cuts off every possible satisfaction [because he does not believe in an afterlife]: and if we have an instinctive desire for the good of posterity then this desire, by the very nature of the case, can never be satisfied, since its aim is achieved, if at all, when we are dead. It looks very much as if the Innovator would have to say not that we must obey Instinct, nor that it will satisfy us to do so, but that we ought to obey it. From the statement about psychological fact 'I have an impulse to do so and so' we cannot by any ingenuity derive the practical principle 'I ought to obey this impulse'."

**The Inexorable Tao:** "None of the principles he requires are to be found there: but they are all to be found somewhere else. 'All within the four seas are his brothers' (xii. 5) says Confucius of the Chün-tzu, the cuor gentil or gentleman. *Humani nihil a me alienum puto* [I am a human: I regard nothing human as foreign to me] says the Stoic. 'Do as you would be done by,' says Jesus. 'Humanity is to be preserved,' says Locke. All the practical principles behind the Innovator's case for posterity, or society, or the species, are there from time immemorial in the Tao. But they are nowhere else....

**Conclusions:** "Since I can see no answer to these questions, I draw the following conclusions. 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 judgement of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) 'ideologies', all consist of fragments from the Tao itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the Tao and to it alone such validity as they possess. ...The rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves.

**New Values?** "The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in...A theorist about language may approach his native tongue, as it were from outside, regarding its genius as a thing that has no claim on him and advocating wholesale alterations of its idiom and spelling in the interests of commercial convenience or scientific accuracy. That is one thing. A great poet, who has 'loved, and been well nurtured in, his mother tongue', may also make great alterations in it, but his changes of the language are made in the spirit of the language itself: he works from within. The language which suffers, has also inspired the changes. That is a different thing—as different as the works of Shakespeare are from Basic English. It is the difference between alteration from within and alteration from without: between the

organic and the surgical.

**Within or Without the Tao:** “In the same way, the Tao admits development from within. There is a difference between a real moral advance and a mere innovation. From the Confucian ‘Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you’ to the Christian ‘Do as you would be done by’ is a real advance. 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.

**The End:** “Let us regard all ideas of what we ought to do simply as an interesting psychological survival: let us step right out of all that and start doing what we like. Let us decide for ourselves what man is to be and make him into that: not on any ground of imagined value, but because we want him to be such. Having mastered our environment, let us now master ourselves and choose our own destiny ...This is a very possible position: and those who hold it cannot be accused of self-contradiction like the half-hearted sceptics who still hope to find ‘real’ values when they have debunked the traditional ones. This is the rejection of the concept of value altogether.”

### Practices of Hope and of Wisdom

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.—Philippians 4:8-9*

1. Go for a slow walk somewhere beautiful and consider the beauty of nature, noticing the light and the breeze and the scents, and spend some time in a prayer of thanksgiving
2. Meditate on Psalm 8 and Psalm 19, and consider memorizing parts of the text
3. Listen to podcast on Tolkien’s poem “Mythopoeia” and read the poem aloud (if you are a scuba diver, also read Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy Stories”)
4. Listen to Bainton’s “And I Saw a New Heaven” while reading the text from Revelation 21 and be encouraged about our final destiny in Christ
5. Contemplate the last stanzas of T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” (or read the whole poem if you are a scuba diver)

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, unremembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree

Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always--  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

Music link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lyy7RWXAV9Q>

Mythopoeia link:

<https://www.stphilipschurchsc.org/mediaPlayer/#/episodeaudio/73>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/c-s-lewis-and-the-christian-life-ep-3/id1468973286?i=1000473168041>

10/27 class video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3cmz2Rw-UE>

10/27 class audio and podcast links: <https://www.stphilipschurchsc.org/not-as-unwise-but-as-wise/episode/2021-10-27/episode-6>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-6/id1587350461?i=1000540077503>