

Dear fellow pilgrims,

Despite some technical difficulties, we delved thoroughly into Chapter 2 ("Some Objections") last week and had some good discussion at the end. I apologize for our crashing internet that sent me off into the interstellar void for a while, and I appreciate your hanging in there until we could get things back up and running. I have included below a link to the Advent Carols service from Magdalen College, Oxford, as the crash made it so some of you missed that. Lewis worshipped daily in this beautiful 15th century chapel for decades; imagine starting each day with worship in that space. I am looking forward to exploring Chapter 3, "The Reality of the Law," with you tomorrow evening on Zoom. Please feel free to share the class link with any friends who may be interested.

Links to audio and video versions of last week's class, as well as the PowerPoint and Advent service, are attached at the end of this email.

Here are some of the key points from our discussion of Chapter 2 last week:

2. Some Objections

A. The Moral Law ≠ Herd Instinct

Desire to help ≠ feeling you ought to help whether you want to or not.

When you hear a cry for help, you immediately feel two competing desires: desire to help (from herd instinct) and desire to keep out of danger (instinct for self-preservation) BUT ALSO a third voice telling you to follow the impulse to help and suppress the impulse to run away. This third voice that judges between the instincts cannot itself be either of them.

Analogy: "The sheet of music telling you which note to play cannot itself be one of the notes. The Moral Law tells us the tune we have to play; our instincts are merely the keys."

B. Follow the Strongest Instinct?

If nothing is in the creature's mind but two instincts, it would have to follow the stronger. When we are most conscious of the Moral Law, it is telling us to follow the weaker instinct even though we may not want to because it is "right" to do so.

Analogy: "the thing that tells you which note on the piano needs to be played louder cannot itself be that note."

C. An Instinct Always Good?

"If the Moral Law was one of our instincts, we ought to be able to point to some one impulse inside us which was always what we call 'good', always in agreement with the rule of right behavior..."

(ex.—Love vs. Justice) BUT "There is none of our impulses which the Moral Law may not sometimes tell us to suppress, and none which it may not sometimes tell us to encourage."

Analogy: "Think once again of a piano. It has not got two kinds of notes on it, the 'right' notes and the 'wrong' notes. Every single note is right at one time and wrong at another. The Moral Law is not any one instinct or set of instincts: it is something which makes a kind of tune (the tune we call goodness or right conduct) by directing the instincts."

D. Moral Law ≠ Social Convention

Things taught us by parents and teachers are not necessarily human inventions. We are taught things like multiplication tables, which are discovered rather than invented truth.

Analogy: "Some of the things we learn are mere conventions that might have been different—we learn to keep to the left of the road, but it might just as well have been the rule to keep to the right—and others of them, like mathematics, are real truths."

E. Law of Human Nature = Truth rather than Convention

1) "Though there are differences between moral ideas of one time or country and those of another, the differences are not really very great..., and you can recognize the same law running through them all, whereas mere conventions, like the rule of the road or the kind of clothes people wear, may differ to any extent."

2) "Do you think the morality of one people is ever better or worse than that of another? ...If not, there could never be any moral progress. If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in preferring...Christian morality to Nazi morality."

"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, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, 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. Or put it this way. If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something—some Real Morality—for them to be true about." Analogy: "The reason why your idea of New York can be truer or less true than mine is that New York is a real place, existing quite apart from what either of us thinks. If when each of us said "New York" each meant merely "The town I am imagining in my own head," how could one of us have truer ideas than the other? There would be no question of truth or falsehood at all."

F. Caveat: Differences of Morality vs. Differences of Belief about Facts

Analogy: Witch trials and executions: "There is no difference of moral principle here-- the difference is simply about matter of fact. It may be a great advance in knowledge not to believe in witches: there is no moral advance in not executing them when you do not think they are there. You would not call a man humane for ceasing to set mousetraps if he did so because he believed there were no mice in the house."

G. The Moral Law/the Law of Human Nature/the Rule of Decent Behavior is Real

This law, which only affects humans and which they can choose to obey or disobey, is not an instinct but something else, and is more like the laws of mathematics (something discovered/revealed) than like a convention (something invented and preferred by a culture). Some Brilliant Analogies

Analogy: "The sheet of music telling you which note to play cannot itself be one of the notes. The Moral Law tells us the tune we have to play; our instincts are merely the keys."

The analogies Lewis uses in this chapter are brilliant and worthy of pondering. The more you lean into them, the more the points that Lewis makes here will resonate with you.

Just a reminder that tomorrow's class will be our last one for 2020, and we will pick up again, God willing, on Wednesday, January 6, 2021, with Chapter 4. Expect some Lewis tidbits via email during the Christmas break!

I look forward to "seeing" you tomorrow evening in class!

Further up and further in,
Brian+

Video recording of class and PowerPoint:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8xVqb0o8bU>

Audio recording of class:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/mere-christianity-timely-truth-for-a-hurting-world/id1537579476>

or

<https://www.stphilipschurchsc.org/mere-christianity-/episode/2020-12-09/mere-christianity:-episode-6>

Magdalen College Advent Carol Service link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-JD7GW9fy8>