The Thinker's Compass

A Guide to C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Technology

Fascination with Science

Lewis wasn't against science. He was deeply interested in it and kept up with the major scientific revolutions of his time:

- Einstein's Theory of Relativity
- Niels Bohr's Quantum Theory
- Hubble's Big Bang Theory
- Revisions to Natural Selection

He believed science was a helpful tool for understanding the physical and spiritual world, often using scientific concepts to illustrate theological ideas.

Science in His Writings

Lewis incorporated scientific ideas into both his fiction and non-fiction works:

- **Apologetics (e.g., Mere Christianity):** Used concepts like multiple dimensions and the relativity of time to explain theological ideas like the Trinity and eternity.
- **Science Fiction (Ransom Trilogy):** Explored moral, ethical, and theological questions through the lens of fictional science and space travel.
- **Fantasy (Narnia):** Employed the concept of relative time between our world and Narnia, inspired by Einstein's theories.

✕ Critique of "Scientism"

Lewis's main objection was not with science itself, but with **Scientism**—the confusion of science with a materialistic philosophy. He defined it as:

> *"...the belief that the supreme moral end is the perpetuation of our own species... even if... our species has to be stripped of all those things for which we value it—of pity, of happiness, and of freedom."*

He argued that philosophies like Materialism and Naturalism don't arise from science, but are imposed upon it.

Science vs. Technology

Science: The Pursuit of Knowledge

Lewis saw science as a descriptive discipline. Its job is to observe and describe the behavior of the physical world—what he considered God's laws of nature. For Lewis, true science describes what God has done in creation and is therefore consistent with faith.

Technology: The Application of Knowledge

He viewed technology (machines, inventions) as the practical application of scientific knowledge. While science is a discovery, technology is a human creation. Because it is a human creation, technology is subject to human fallibility and must be guided by ethics and moral values.

Dangers of Unchecked Technology

Lewis was deeply concerned about technology's impact when unhindered by moral values. He warned against:

- **"Value-Free" Innovation:** Technological development without ethical constraints could have dangerous implications for what it means to be human.
- **The Conquest of Nature:** He argued that "Man's conquest of Nature" ultimately means the power of a few men over many others.
- **Loss of Wisdom:** A culture that values "new" over "old" risks discarding the accumulated moral wisdom of the past.
- **The Abolition of Man:** His ultimate fear was that a purely materialistic, technology-driven society could destroy the very essence of humanity.

The Core Distinction

For C.S. Lewis, there could be **no conflict between true science and Christian faith** because both explore aspects of God's reality. The conflict arises when a materialistic philosophy (Scientism) corrupts science, and when technology is developed without the guidance of a moral framework.

His warning was not to reject science, but to ensure that ethics and a recognition of transcendent values have a central place in the entire scientific and technological enterprise.