

C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism

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FOR DECADES, many Christians and non-Christians, both “conservative” and “liberal,” have unfortunately embraced an ill-conceived, “progressive” (i.e., authoritarian) vision to wield intrusive government powers as an unquestionable and even sanctified calling for both domestic and international matters, abandoning the Judeo-Christian, natural-law tradition in moral ethics and economics. In contrast, the Oxford/Cambridge scholar and best-selling author C. S. Lewis did not suffer such delusions, despite the gigantic and deeply disturbing advances and conflicts of total war, the total state, and genocides that developed during his lifetime.

Lewis’ aversion to government was clearly revealed in 1951 when Winston Churchill, within weeks after he regained office as prime minister of Great Britain, wrote to Lewis offering to have him knighted as “Commander of the Order of the British Empire.” Lewis flatly declined the honor because he, unlike the “progressives,” was never interested in politics and was deeply skeptical of government power and politicians, as expressed in the first two lines of his poem “Lines during a General Election”: “Their threats are terrible enough, but we could bear / All that; it is their promises that bring despair.”¹

Lewis had held this view for many years. In 1940, he had written in a letter to his brother Warren, “Could one start a Stagnation Party—which at General Elections would boast that during its term of office no event of the least importance had taken place?” He further stated, “I was by nature ‘against Government.’”²

In comparison to such contemporary, “progressive” Christians as Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Ronald Sider, and Brian McLaren, who clamor for the foolish and disastrous notion of achieving “social justice” through gigantic government powers (see Robert Higgs’s book refuting the “progressive” myth in American history, *Crisis and Leviathan*),³ was Lewis just ignorant or naive about modern realities, or was he aiming at a deeper and more significant purpose? In this article, I only begin to touch on some of Lewis’ many writings pertaining to the subject of liberty and Christian teachings because any truly adequate examination would warrant at least an entire book.

Lewis was unquestionably and profoundly interested in the ideas and institutions that were the basis for free and virtuous individuals and communities, but he was not at all interested in partisanship or campaign politics. He instead focused on first principles, and public-policy matters that were of interest only as they pertained to questions of enduring value. As a result of this focus, whereas the work of most modern scholars and other writers quickly becomes dated and obsolete, Lewis’ work has achieved increasing timelessness and relevance. His books continue to sell at an astounding rate, and although Lewis is best known for his fiction, he also wrote superb books in philosophy and theology, literary history and criticism, poetry, and autobiography, as well as at last count more than fifty thousand letters to individuals worldwide.

Throughout his work, Lewis infused an interconnected worldview that championed objective truth, moral ethics, natural law, literary excellence, reason, science, individual liberty, personal responsibility and virtue, and Christian theism. In so doing, he critiqued naturalism, reductionism, nihilism, positivism, scientism, historicism, collectivism, atheism, statism, coercive egalitarianism, militarism, welfarism, and dehumanization and tyranny of all forms. Unlike “progressive” crusaders for predatory government power over the peaceful pursuits of innocent people, Lewis noted that “I do not like the pretensions of Government—the grounds on which it demands my obedience—to be pitched too high. I don’t like the medicine-man’s magical pretensions or the Bourbon’s Divine Right. This is not solely because I disbelieve in magic and in Bossuet’s *Politique*. I

believe in God, but I detest theocracy. For every Government consists of mere men and is, strictly viewed, a makeshift; if it adds to its commands 'Thus saith the Lord,' it lies, and lies dangerously."⁴

Lewis addressed not only the evils of totalitarianism as manifested in fascism and communism, but the more subtle forms that face us on a daily basis, including the welfare, therapeutic, nanny, and scientific states. "Of all tyrannies," he stated, a tyranny exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better

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to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busy-bodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience. They may be more likely to go to Heaven yet at the same time be likelier to make a Hell of earth. This very

kindness stings with intolerable insult. To be "cured" against one's will and cured of states which we may not regard as a disease is to be put on a level of those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals.⁵

Throughout his books, he defended the rights and sanctity of individuals against tyranny not just because he opposed evil, but because he considered a life in freedom—including both social and economic freedom—to be essential: "I believe a man is happier, and happy in a richer way, if he had 'the freeborn mind.' But I doubt whether he can have this without economic independence, which the new society is abolishing. For economic independence allows an education not controlled by Government; and in adult life it is the man who needs, and asks, nothing of Government who can criticize its acts and snap his fingers at its ideology."⁶

As Rodney Stark discusses in his book *The Victory of Reason*,⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero and others had contemplated the concept of

the self (individualism) and free will before the Christian era, but it was not until Jesus personally asserted in words and deeds the concept of *universal* moral equality before and responsibility to God and not until Christian theologians made it a central feature of their doctrine that the rights of *each and every individual* were championed and slavery was condemned. This bold advance in thinking arose in part from the revolutionary insight of *methodological individualism* in the study of human behavior, wherein the individual is considered primary. As Jon Elster notes, "The elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the actions and interaction of individuals. This view, often referred to as methodological individualism, is in my view trivially true."⁸ Austrian school economist Murray Rothbard similarly wrote, "The fundamental axiom, then, for the study of man is the existence of individual consciousness."⁹ Ludwig von Mises further stated that "the collective has no existence and reality but in the actions of individuals. It comes into existence by ideas that move individuals to behave as members of a definite group and goes out of existence when the persuasive power of these ideas subsides."¹⁰ And Stark has pointed out that although almost every other early culture and religion viewed human society in terms of the tribe, polis, or collective, "it is the individual who was the focus of Christian political thought, and this, in turn, explicitly shaped the views of later European political philosophers."¹¹

This focus produced a radical change in a world where, despite notable but limited exceptions of political decentralization, slavery and nearly universal and unyielding despotism had ruled,¹² where people were treated as mere members of a group without rights. With Christianity, each and every person is "a child of God" or a holy object (*res sacra homo*) who has free will and is individually responsible for the choices he or she makes. In this tradition, Thomas Aquinas stated, "A man can direct and govern his own actions also. Therefore the rational creature participates in the divine providence not only in being governed but also in governing."¹³

Working from this Christian background, Lewis stressed the importance of the natural law of moral ethics, a code of moral

conscience that is inescapable and defines each person as human. Such morality exists on its own independent of subjective choices or experiences, just as one may grasp the inherent truism of mathematics or natural physical laws such as gravity. Lewis drew on the natural-law insights of such thinkers as the apostle Paul, Augustine, Magnus, Aquinas, Cicero, Grotius, Blackstone, Acton, and Locke, and he considered modernist dismissals of such work to be fundamentally erroneous. In particular, both Aquinas's notion of "common sense" (*communis sensus*) as described in his *Summa Theologica* and the legacy of rational theism found in Jewish, Islamic, Christian, and certain pagan writers—the core philosophical system of the West—had a powerful effect on Lewis. To him, the culture of "modernism" is not just an historical aberration of this "common sense," but a profound threat to the pursuit of truth, goodness, and civilization itself.

This "common sense," or Lewis' notion of common rationality, consisted in part of each individual human being's intrinsic understanding of an objective, universal, and natural legal order of truth and morality (the "natural law," or what Lewis called the "Tao"¹⁴), upon which he or she discerns, chooses, and acts.¹⁵ For Lewis, each individual responds to and can come to know and experience this external reality of truth—it is a "common knowledge." This insight is similar to Adam Smith's view, as expressed in his 1759 book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that individuals are born with an innate moral conscience and "sympathy" for the well-being of others and can maintain them by following the natural law.¹⁶

Lewis likewise claimed that:

[i]f a man will go into a library and spend a few days with the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* he will soon discover the massive unanimity of the practical reason of man. From the Babylonian *Hymn to Samos*, from the Laws of Manu, the *Book of the Dead*, the Analects [of Confucius], the Stoics, the Platonists, from Australian aborigines and Redskins, he will collect the same triumphantly monotonous denunciations of oppression, murder, treachery and falsehood, the same injunctions of kindness to the aged, the young, and the weak, of almsgiving and impartiality and honesty. He may be a little surprised (I certainly was) to find that precepts of mercy are more frequent than precepts of justice; but he will no longer doubt that there is such a thing as *the law of nature*...[T]he pretence that we are presented with a mere chaos—though no outline of universally accepted value shows through—is simply false and should be contradicted *in* season and *out* of season wherever it

is met. Far from finding a chaos, we find exactly what we should expect if good is indeed something objective and reason the organ whereby it is apprehended—that is, a substantial agreement with considerable local differences of emphasis and, perhaps, no one code that includes everything.¹⁷

Lewis noted that what is common to all these concepts is something crucial: “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...No emotion is, in itself, a judgment; in that sense all emotions and sentiments are illogical. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should obey it.”¹⁸

As such, Lewis firmly rejected the idea that only those who are Christian can understand or be moral because *the natural law is fundamental to human existence* and serves as the basis for human choice. He noted that if only Christians were able to be moral or to understand morality, then there would exist an unworkable dilemma in which *no* one would be persuaded of being (or *ever* be able to become) moral who was not *already* a Christian, and hence no one would ever become Christian. “It is often asserted that the world must return to Christian ethics in order to preserve civilization. Though I am myself a Christian, and even a dogmatic Christian untinged with Modernist reservations and committed to supernaturalism in its full rigor, I find myself quite unable to take my place beside the upholders of [this] view. It is far from my intention to deny that we find in Christian ethics a deepening, an internalization, a few changes of emphasis in the moral code. But only serious ignorance of Jewish and Pagan culture would lead anyone to the conclusion that it is a radically new thing.”¹⁹

Lewis argued that a natural moral law is known to all, and this natural moral code is inescapable; it is the basis for all moral judgments. Its foundational truths such as “caring for others is a good thing,” “*good* should be done and *evil* avoided,” “dying for a righteous cause is a noble thing”—are understood regardless of experience, just as we know that $2 + 2 = 4$.

As Paul stated, “When Gentiles do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have

the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”²⁰

In his book *The Discarded Image*, Lewis showed that Paul’s statement completely conforms with the view that morality is determined by “right reason” or the Stoic idea of natural law: “[T]he Stoics believed in a Natural Law which all rational men, in virtue of their rationality, saw to be binding on them. St. Paul[’s] statement in Roman’s (ii 14 sq.) that there is a law ‘written in the hearts’ even of Gentiles who do not know ‘the law’ is in full conformity with the Stoic conception, and would for centuries be so understood. Nor, during those centuries, would the word ‘hearts’ have had merely emotional associations. The Hebrew word which St. Paul represents by *kardia* would be more nearly translated ‘Mind.’”²¹

Lewis posed similar arguments in his books *The Problem of Pain* and *Christian Reflections*.²² However, like all natural-law proponents, he was careful to note that natural law does not afford easy or precise solutions to all questions. Echoing Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* he noted that “moral decisions do not admit mathematical certainty.”²³

Moral Relativism and Utilitarianism

Of central importance in Lewis’ discussion of natural law is his critique of the moral relativism of utilitarianism (“the end justifies the means”) as a theory of ethics and guide to behavior. Lewis claimed that the precepts of moral ethics cannot just be innovated or improvised as we go along. Picking and choosing among the code of the *Tao* is inherently foolish and harmful. He noted, for example, that attempts to define moral ethics as the product of a physicalism of survival and instinct create a profound dilemma. On the one hand, the utilitarian (or “Innovator,” as Lewis called him) tries to make judgments of the value of human choices by claiming that one decision is good or not. But on what basis is this valuation made if the only standard that exists is instinct? Lewis shows that all such valuations necessarily must use an objective standard of the *Tao* to do so, even if only partially. As he stated,

The Innovator...rates high the claims of posterity. He cannot get any valid claim for posterity out of instinct or (in the modern sense) reason. He is really deriving

our duty to posterity from the *Tao*; our duty to do good to all men is an axiom of Practical Reason, and our duty to do good to our descendants is a clear deduction from it. But then, in every form of the *Tao* which has come down to us, side by side with the duty to children and descendants lies the duty to parents and ancestors. By what right do we reject one and accept the other?...[T]he Innovator may place economic value first. To get people fed and clothed is the great end, and in pursuit of it, scruples about justice and good faith may be set aside. The *Tao* of course agrees with him about the importance of getting the people fed and clothed. Unless the Innovator were himself using the *Tao* he could never have learned of such a duty of justice and good faith which he is ready to debunk. What is his warrant? He may be a jingoist, a racist, an extreme nationalist, who maintains that the advancement of his own people is the object to which all else ought to yield. But no kind of factual observation and no appeal to instinct will give him a ground for this opinion. Once more, he is in fact deriving it from the *Tao*: a duty to our own kin, because they are our own kin, is a part of traditional morality. But side by side with it in the *Tao*, and limiting it, lie the inflexible demands of justice, and the rule that, in the long run, all men are our brothers.²⁴

Lewis hence described the natural law as a cohesive and interconnected objective standard of right behavior:

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 judgments. If it is rejected, all values are 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. 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. If my duty to my parents is a superstition, then so is my duty to posterity. If justice is a superstition, then so is my duty to my country or my race. If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value, then so is conjugal fidelity.²⁵

Lewis then asked, if no new system of value judgment aside from natural law can be developed, does that mean "no progress in our perceptions of value can ever take place? That we are bound down for ever to an unchanging code given once and for all?...If we lump together, as I have done, the traditional moralities of East and West, the Christian, the Pagan, and the Jew, shall we not find many contradictions and some absurdities?" His simple response: "I admit all this. Some criticism, some removal of contradictions, even some real developments, is required...But 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 judgments at all...From within the *Tao* itself comes the only authority to modify the *Tao*.”²⁶

As a proponent of natural law, Lewis was a supporter of the “law of equal liberty” but a firm critic of imposed egalitarianism for *any* reason. He further understood that egalitarianism is too often a cloak for envy (the sin of coveting) and that such appeals for regimentation are tyrannical:

The demand for equality has two sources; one of them is among the noblest, the other is the basest of human emotions. The noble source is the desire for fair play. But the other source is the hatred of superiority...Equality (outside mathematics) is a purely social conception. It applies to man as a political and economic animal. It has no place in the world of the mind. Beauty is not democratic; she reveals herself more to the few than to the many, more to the persistent and disciplined seekers than to the many, more to the persistent and disciplined seekers than to the careless. Virtue is not democratic; she is achieved by those who pursue her more hotly than most men. Truth is not democratic; she demands special talents and special industry in those to whom she gives her favors. Political democracy is doomed if it tries to extend its demand for equality into these higher spheres. Ethical, intellectual, or aesthetic democracy is death. A truly democratic education—one which will preserve democracy—must be, in its own field, ruthlessly aristocratic, shamelessly “high-brow.”²⁷

He also recognized innate individual human differentiation and how each individual soul’s uniqueness is divinely ordained: “It is idle to say that men are of equal value. If value is taken in a worldly sense—if we mean that all men are equally useful, beautiful, good or entertaining—then this is nonsense...If there is equality, it is in His love, not in us...In this way then, the Christian life defends the single personality from the collective, not by isolating him but by giving him the status of an organ in the mystical Body.”²⁸

In an earlier paper,²⁹ I discussed Lewis’ rejection of the determinism of both genetic and environmental causality for mankind. In the so-called modernist perspective, man is not viewed as a moral agent but as an entity that is conditioned solely by non-rational causes, and all that counts is not “What is just?” but the utilitarian “What works?” If man has free will and is considered accountable for his actions, there are limits on the state’s power. But if individuals act out of necessity, they are *not* moral agents. In the place of punishment for “wrong” doing, preemption becomes the means of social control. As championed by authoritarians of both left and right, the

state simply eliminates the individual's choice or, more exactly, makes the choice for him or her. And this elimination is the basis for the "progressive" precautionary principle and government measures of "prior restraint" based on it. Lewis discussed this problem at length in *The Abolition of Man* as well as in various essays, including "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment."

Collectivism and Statism

Lewis consequently drew a clear distinction between the reality of the importance for individual liberty and the tendencies to fall prey to the absurdities and dangers of collectivism:

The first of these tendencies is the growing exaltation of the collective and the growing indifference to persons...if one were inventing a language for "sinless beings who loved their neighbors as themselves" it would be appropriate to have no words for "my," "I," and "other personal pronouns and inflexions." In other words...no difference between two opposite solutions of the problem of selfishness: between love (which is a relation between persons) and the abolition of persons. Nothing but a *Thou* can love and a *Thou* can exist only for an *I*. A society in which no one was conscious of himself as a person over against other persons, where none could say "I love you," would, indeed, be free from selfishness, but not through love. It would be "unselfish" as a bucket of water is unselfish...[In such a case] the individual does not matter. And therefore when we really get going...it will not matter what you do to an individual.

Secondly, we have the emergence of "the Party" in the modern sense—the Fascists, Nazis, or Communists. What distinguishes this from the political parties of the nineteenth century is the belief of its members that they are not merely trying to carry out a program, but are obeying an important force: that Nature, or Evolution, or the Dialectic, or the Race, is carrying them on. This tends to be accompanied by two beliefs...the belief that the process which the Party embodies is inevitable, and the belief that the forwarding of this process is the supreme duty and abrogates all ordinary moral laws. In this state of mind men can become devil-worshippers in the sense that they can now *honor*, as well as obey, their own vices. All men at times obey their vices: but it is when cruelty, envy, and lust of power appear as the commands of a great superpersonal force that they can be exercised with self-approval.³⁰

Lewis understood that without this necessary natural-law framing of social, legal, and political culture, mankind would no longer be recognized as worthy of rights or even common decency, but instead would be left defenseless to any and all forms of oppression:

Our courts, I agree, "have traditionally represented the common man and the common's view of morality." It is true that we must extend the term "common man" to cover Locke, Grotius, Hooker, Pynet, Aquinas, Justinian, the Stoics, and Aristotle,

but I have no objection to that; in one most important, and to me glorious, sense they were all common men. But that whole tradition is tied up with ideas of free-will, responsibility, rights, and the rule of nature. Can it survive in Courts whose penal practice daily subordinates “desert” to therapy and the protection of society?...For if I am not deceived, we are all at this moment helping to decide whether humanity shall retain all that has hitherto made humanity worth preserving, or whether we must slide down into sub-humanity imagined by Mr. Aldous Huxley and George Orwell and partially realized in Hitler’s Germany.³¹

We hence have the basis for the scientific “brave new world” in which the citizen and government become slave and master, exactly what Lewis critiqued in his essay “Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State.” And, of course, what all of this means is the elimination of what makes mankind human in the first place. As Lewis explained the problem, “The question has become whether we can discover any way of submitting to the worldwide paternalism of a technocracy without losing all personal privacy and independence. Is there any possibility of getting the super Welfare State’s honey and avoiding the sting? Let us make no mistake about the sting... To live his life in his own way, to call his house his castle, to enjoy the fruits of his own labor, to educate his children as his conscience directs, to save for their prosperity after his death—these are wishes deeply ingrained in civilized man.”³²

This theme recurs throughout Lewis’s work, including in both his fiction and his nonfiction. For example, in the third volume of his *Space Trilogy*, *That Hideous Strength*, he describes a disturbing world in which a scientific elite creates a totalitarian system in order to coercively engineer a new mankind via the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments, or N.I.C.E. for short. The bureaucrats and planners of N.I.C.E. are exactly what he earlier attacked in his masterly book *The Abolition of Man*.

And in Lewis’s novel *The Screwtape Letters*, the demonic Screwtape instructs his pupil Wormwood to mislead his human “patient” by using the convoluted “progressive” concept of “social justice” in order to twist what appears to be Good into Evil and seduce the person into sin: “On the other hand we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to social justice. The thing to do is to get a man at first

to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy [God] demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience.”³³

Scientism

For Lewis, science should be a quest for knowledge, and his concern was that in the modern era science is too often used instead as a quest by some for power over others. Lewis did not dispute that science is an immensely important tool to understand the natural world, but his larger point is that science cannot tell us anything that is ultimately important regarding what choices we *should* make. In other words, Lewis shows that “what is” does not indicate “what ought” to be. Scientists on their own are not able to address moral ethics, and all social and political questions are exclusively questions of morality. Lewis furthermore viewed as *non* science, or scientism, all those disciplines that attempt to replicate the scientific method *to analyze man*: “[T]he new oligarchy must more and more base its claim to plan us on its claim to knowledge...If we are to mothered, mother must know best...Technocracy is the form to which a planned society must tend. Now I dread specialists in power because they are specialists speaking outside their special subjects. Let scientists tell us about science. But government involves questions about the good for man, and justice, and what things are worth having at what price; and on these a scientific training gives a man’s opinion no added value.”³⁴

Lewis “dread[ed] government in the name of science” even more. For him, the connection was clear: “That is how tyrannies come in.”

In every age the men who want us under their thumb, if they have any sense, will put forward the particular pretension which the hopes and fears of that age render most potent...We must give full weight to the claim that nothing but science, and science globally applied, and therefore unprecedented Government controls, can produce full bellies and medical care for the whole human race: nothing, in short, but a world Welfare State. It is a full admission of these truths which impresses upon me the extreme peril of humanity at present. We have on the one hand a desperate need: hunger, sickness, and dread of war. We have, on the other, the conception of something that might meet it: omnipotent global technocracy. Are not these the ideal opportunity for enslavement?...The question about progress has become the

question whether we can discover any way of submitting to the worldwide paternalism of a technocracy without losing all personal privacy and independence... All that can really happen is that some men will take charge of the destiny of the others. They will be simply men; none perfect, some greedy, cruel and dishonest. The more completely we are planned the more powerful they will be. Have we discovered some new reason why, this time, power should not corrupt as it had done before?³⁵

When Marxist biologist J.B.S. Haldane in his article “Auld Horney, F.R.S.” questioned Lewis for being anti-science and against a “planned world” in his *Space Trilogy* (“Mr. Lewis’s idea is clear enough. The application of science to human affairs can only lead to hell.”), Lewis wrote the following in “A Reply to Professor Haldane”:

It certainly is an attack, if not on scientists, yet on something which might be called “scientism”—a certain outlook on the world which is casually connected with the popularization of the sciences, though it is much less common among real scientists than among their readers. It is, in a word, the belief that the supreme moral end is the perpetuation of our own species, and that this is to be pursued even if, in the process of being fitted for survival, our species has to be stripped of all those things for which we value it—of pity, of happiness, and of freedom...Under modern conditions any effective invitation to Hell will certainly appear in the guise of scientific planning—as Hitler’s regime in fact did. Every tyrant must begin by claiming to have what his victims respect and to give what they want. The majority in most countries respect science and want to be planned. And, therefore, almost by definition, if any man or group wishes to enslave us it will of course describe itself as “scientific planned democracy.” All the more reason to look very carefully at anything which bears that label.

My fears of such a tyranny will seem to the Professor either insincere or pusillanimous. For him the danger is all in the opposite direction, in the chaotic selfishness of individualism. I must try to explain why I fear more the disciplined cruelty of some ideological oligarchy. The Professor has his own explanation of this; he thinks I am unconsciously motivated by the fact that I “stand to lose by social change.” And indeed it would be hard for me to welcome a change which might well consign me to a concentration camp.³⁶

As the form of government most consistent with his study of natural law and the nature of man, Lewis settled on democracy (not majoritarianism, but self-government as in Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*), considering it the least bad political structure. It should be established only in order to *limit* centralized political power, however: “I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man”—or more precisely that man is free to choose good or evil. He

realized, though, that most people are democrats for the opposite reason. A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they're not true. And whenever their weakness is exposed, the people who prefer tyranny make capital out of the exposure. I find that they're not true without looking further than myself. I don't deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. Nor do most people—all the people who believe advertisement, and think in catchwords and spread rumors. The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Man is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.³⁷

In his book *The Weight of Glory*, he similarly noted the need to radically constrain the powers of government, paraphrasing Lord Acton's axiom on the corrupting influence of power:

I believe in political equality. But there are two opposite reasons for being a democrat. You may think all men so good that they deserve a share in the government of the commonwealth, and so wise that the commonwealth needs their advice. That is, in my opinion, the false, romantic doctrine of democracy. On the other hand, you may believe fallen men to be so wicked that not one of them can be trusted with any irresponsible power over his fellows. That I believe to be the true ground of democracy. I do not believe that God created an egalitarian world...[S]ince we have sin, we have found, as Lord Acton says, that "all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The only remedy has been to take away the powers and substitute a legal fiction of equality...Theocracy has been rightly abolished not because it is bad that priests should govern ignorant laymen, but because priests are wicked men like the rest of us.³⁸

And he went even further in his condemnation of theocracy, stating, "I detest every kind of religious compulsion: only the other day I was writing an angry letter to *The Spectator* about Church Parades in the Home Guard!"³⁹

For Lewis, legal equality under democracy enriches each individual's unique, spiritual life: "Under the necessary outer covering of legal equality, the whole hierarchical dance and harmony of our deep and joyously accepted spiritual inequalities should be alive. It is there, of course, in our life as Christians: there, as laymen, we can

obey—all the more because the priest has no authority over us on the political level.”⁴⁰

But Lewis fully understood that democracy, if unchecked, becomes egalitarianism and will trample on liberty as a collectivist force for evil by celebrating pride and envy as it fosters tyranny. Lewis’ demonic Screwtape, this time in “Screwtape Proposes a Toast,” once again explains quite eloquently how this very thing has happened historically, even in the supposed pursuit of liberty:

Hidden in the heart of this striving for Liberty there was also a deep hatred of personal freedom. That invaluable man Rousseau first revealed it. In his perfect democracy, only the state religion is permitted, slavery is restored, and the individual is told that he has really willed (though he didn’t know it) whatever the Government tells him to do. From that starting point, via Hegel (another indispensable propagandist on our side), we easily contrived both the Nazi and the Communist state. Even in England we were pretty successful. I heard the other day that in that country a man could not, without a permit, cut down his own tree with his own axe, make it into planks with his own saw, and use the planks to build a tool shed in his own garden.

At the root of the developing tyranny are the things many people may least expect—democracy and egalitarianism:

Democracy is the word with which you must lead them by the nose...And of course it is connected with the political ideal that men should be equally treated. You then make a stealthy transition in their minds from this political ideal to a factual belief that all men *are* equal. Especially the man you are working on. As a result you can use the word *democracy* to sanction in his thought the most degrading (and also the least enjoyable) of human feelings. You can get him to practice, not only without shame but with a positive glow of self-approval, conduct which, if undefended by the magic word, would be universally derided...[D]unces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious pupils. That would be “undemocratic.”...And anyway the teachers—or should I say, nurses?—will be far too busy reassuring the dunces and patting them on the back to waste any time on real teaching...this would not follow unless all education became state education... Penal taxes, designed for that purpose, are liquidating the Middle Class, the class who were prepared to save and spend and make sacrifices in order to have their children privately educated.⁴¹

Those who, like Screwtape, wish to establish their own rule and extirpate freedom must realize...that “democracy” in the diabolical sense (*I’m as good as you*, Being Like Folks, Togetherness) is the fittest instrument we could possibly have for extirpating political democracies from the face of the earth...It is our function to encourage the behavior, the manners, the whole attitude of mind,

which democracies naturally like and enjoy, because these are the very things which, if unchecked, will destroy democracy...The overthrow of free peoples and the multiplication of slave states are for us a means (besides, of course, being fun); but the real end is the destruction of individuals...*I'm as good as you* is a useful means for the destruction of democratic societies. But it has a far deeper value as an end in itself, as a state of mind which, necessarily excluding humility, charity, contentment, and all the pleasures of gratitude or admiration, turns a human being away from almost every road which might finally lead him to Heaven.⁴²

Above all, Lewis was a keen observer of the world he lived in, consistently recognizing the implications of every development in the galloping socialism of post-World War II England:

[T]he political philosophy implicit in most modern communities...has stolen on us unawares. Two wars necessitated vast curtailments of liberty, and we have grown, though grumblingly, accustomed to our chains. The increasing complexity and precariousness of our economic life have forced Government to take over many spheres of activity once left to choice or chance. Our intellectuals have surrendered first to the slave-philosophy of Hegel, then to Marx, finally to the linguistic analysts. As a result, classical political theory, with its Stoic, Christian, and juristic key-conceptions (natural law, the value of the individual, the rights of man), has died. The modern State exists not to protect our rights but to do us good or make us good—anyway, to do something to us or to make us something. Hence the new name “leaders” for those who were once “rulers”...We are less their subjects than their wards, pupils, or domestic animals. There is nothing left of which we can say to them, “Mind your own business.” Our whole lives *are* their business.⁴³

In direct contrast to the moral relativism, utilitarianism, collectivism, and authoritarianism of the “progressives,” the profound lessons from Lewis’ extensive writings pertaining to liberty are absolutely clear and of the upmost importance to every modern man and woman:

It is in Man’s power to treat himself as a mere “natural object” and his judgments of value as raw material for scientific manipulation to alter at will...The real objection is that 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... Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the *Tao* [natural law], 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. Only the *Tao* provides a common human law of action which can over-arch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is neces-

sary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery...The process which, if not checked, will abolish Man goes on apace among Communists and Democrats no less than among Fascists. The methods may (at first) differ in brutality. But many a mild-eyed scientist in pince-nez, many a popular dramatist, many an amateur philosopher in our midst, means in the long run just the same as the Nazi rulers of Germany.⁴⁴

In Lewis' book series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the land of Narnia is held in place by the sacred Deep Magic (or natural law), and to transgress this moral code is to do evil. Toward the end of the first book in the series, *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe* (which was made into the highly successful 2005 film), the children Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy assume their rightful thrones as kings and queens of Narnia. Lewis describes how they govern during the Golden Age of Narnia and their most important accomplishments: "And they made good laws and kept the peace and saved good trees from being cut down and liberated young dwarfs and young satyrs from being sent to school and generally stopped busybodies and interferers and encouraged ordinary people who wanted *to live and let live*."⁴⁵

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, "Lines during a General Election," in *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1964), 62.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Warren H. Lewis (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 179.
3. Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Also see his book on the disastrous myth of the "progressive" state in America since 1930, *Depression, War, and Cold War: Challenging the Myths of Conflict and Prosperity* (New York: Oxford University Press for the Independent Institute, 2009) as well as Arthur A. Ekirch Jr., *The Decline of American Liberalism* (Oakland, Calif.: Independent Institute, 2009), and Jonathan Bean, ed., *Race and Liberty in America: The Essential Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky for The Independent Institute, 2009).
4. C. S. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State," in C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays in Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 315.
5. C. S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," in *God in the Dock*, 292.
6. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible?" 314.
7. Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).
8. Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13.

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9. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Mantle of Science," in *Scientism and Values*, ed. Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1960), 177.
10. Ludwig von Mises, *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science: An Essay on Method* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2006), 80.
11. Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 23.
12. See, for example, Thomas J. Thompson, "An Ancient Stateless Civilization: Bronze Age India and the State in History," *Independent Review* (Winter 2005): 365–84; Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); David Friedman, "Private Creation and Enforcement of Law: A Historical Case," *Journal of Legal Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979): 399–415; Joseph R. Peden, "Property Rights in Ancient Celtic Law," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 1, no. 2 (1977): 81–95; and Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
13. Quoted in Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 25.
14. Lewis's use of the term *Tao* (literally meaning the "way" or "path") to describe natural moral law should not be confused with the Chinese naturalist philosophy of Taoism (Daoism), the various forms of which uphold nihilism, ethical skepticism, relativism, mysticism, intuitionism, and primitivism.
15. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 18–19, 83–101. Also see C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1952), and Lewis, *God in the Dock*.
16. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 1976), 47–48.
17. C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 77–78, emphasis in original.
18. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 19.
19. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 44, 46.
20. Paul, Romans 2:14–15 [NIV].
21. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 160.
22. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 39; C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in *Christian Reflections*, 78–80.
23. C. S. Lewis, "A Reply to Professor Haldane," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 80.
24. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 43.
25. *Ibid.*, 44.
26. *Ibid.*, 50.
27. C. S. Lewis, *Present Concerns* (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), 34.
28. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 170–71.
29. David J. Theroux, *Mere Economic Science: C. S. Lewis and the Poverty of Naturalism*, Working Paper no. 67 (Oakland, Calif.: The Independent Institute, 2007), excerpted as the article "Economic Science and the Poverty of Naturalism: C. S. Lewis's 'Argument from Reason,'" *Journal of Private Enterprise* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 95–112.
30. Lewis, "A Reply to Professor Haldane," 78–79.
31. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," 299–300.

32. "Is Progress Possible?" 316.
33. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 108–9.
34. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible?" 314–15.
35. *Ibid.*, 315–16.
36. Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, 71–72, 74–75.
37. C. S. Lewis, "Equality," in *Present Concerns*, 17.
38. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, 168–69.
39. C. S. Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity," in *God in the Dock*, 61.
40. Lewis, *Present Concerns*, 19.
41. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 197, 203–205.
42. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 205–207.
43. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible?" 313–14.
44. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 72–74.
45. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 183, emphasis added.

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