

An Introduction to
The Abolition of Man

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Lecture One: Men Without Chests

1. Terms and Phrases

- a. The Green Book – *The Control of Language: A critical approach to reading and writing*, by Alec King and Martin Ketley (1939).
- b. *Pons asinorum* – “bridge of asses” refers to the 5th proposition of Euclid’s first book which presents a difficult logical step in Euclid’s geometry that if mastered allows one to proceed with the rest of the text.
- c. *Obiter dicta* – refers to a thing said incidentally or an unofficial expression of opinion.
- d. *Secundum litteram* – following the word or quote according to the rules of art.
- e. *Ordo amoris* – proper or ordered love, used by Augustine and the rest of the Christian intellectual tradition to refer to the correct orientation or ordering of life including commitments according to what is the most important reality (God) and descending to what is least important.
- f. *Dulce* – sweet
- g. *Decorum* – appropriate or proper manners or behavior
- h. Sentiment – this term is used by Lewis in a medieval sense as “intellectual or emotional perception” that is exercised with a “right mental attitude of approval or disapproval” (see OED, Vol. XIV). In this understanding, sentiment is a reference to the virtues (hence its linkage with Magnanimity) and the role of the virtues in curbing the power of the passions and properly directing the reason toward that which leads to flourishing.

2. People (notes from – *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* by Michael Ward)

- a. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834): poet, philosopher, and theologian
- b. Drake of Devon: Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596): circumnavigator of the globe
- c. Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, (1775), lexicographer, essayist, and critic. Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English*

Language (1755) is one of the most distinguished dictionaries of the English language.

- d. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), romantic poet, *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical Poem (1799, 1805, and 1850)*
- e. Margate: a seacoast town in the county of Kent, hardly an exotic location
- f. Charles Lamb (1775-1834)
- g. Virgil (70-19BC)
- h. Thomas Browne (1605-1682): In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) the word "electricity" first appears in print.
- i. Walter de la Mare (1873-1956)
- j. "Orbilius" – Lewis made up this name for Ernest Gordon Biaggini (1889-1978) the author of *The Reading and Writing of English*, (1936) by
- k. Ruksh: from Matthew Arnold's poem *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853) is the name of a horse that is compared to "a faithful hound."
- l. Sleipnir: the "eight-legged grey steed of Odin in Norse mythology."
- m. I. A. Richards (1893-1979), literary critic, advocated subjectivism, and in some cases emotivism, in value theory and, for a time, logical positivism in epistemology. In the final analysis, Richards is an early 20th Century thinker who accepts Nietzsche's critique of Kant. Everything is constructed, everything is relative, and thus everything is an expression of power. In many respects, Richards is the principle literary spokesperson for the position that Lewis critiqued in the first chapter.
- n. Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792-1822), romantic poet
- o. Thomas Traherne (1636-1674), poet, priest, and theologian
- p. Horace (65-8BC), Roman poet, who wrote in the *Odes* (2.2.13), "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*" "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." This line is used by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) in a poem entitled, "*Dulce et Decorum est,*" one of the most famous poems to emerge from WWI. The last two lines are: "*The old Lie: Dulce et decorum et/Pro patria mori.*"
- q. Alanus ab Insulis (pseudonym for Alain de Lille) (c.1128-c.1202) French theologian and poet

3. Outline of the Lecture

- a. Introduction: The Problem posed by *The Green Book*
- b. The Philosophical Issue: The Language of Virtue and Value reduced to the emotional state of the speaker and hence expressions of virtue are meaningless statements.
- c. Three reasons why The Green Book makes these philosophical mistakes with the third reason the most serious: the problem of moral subjectivism.
- d. The doctrine of Objective Value or the "Tao"
 - 1) Universal
 - 2) Example of Patriotism

- e. Conclusion: A culture that purposely or inadvertently destroys the formation and empowerment of virtue will produce people unable to control their passions or properly direct their reason to good ends – it will produce persons without Chests.

4. Philosophical Background

- a. David Hume (d. 1776) is the first Western thinker to separate Fact and Value. Values are only emotional expressions of approval or disapproval and are literally “senseless,” neither true or false, and do not reflect reality in any way.
- b. Mid-20th Century this position about moral values was reasserted by the Vienna Circle and by the Oxford philosopher A. J. Ayer in a system he called Logical Positivism.
- c. Ethics is reduced to utilitarian judgments based upon a calculation designed to produce the greatest amount of personal pleasure – a philosophical combination of John Stuart Mill’s utilitarianism and value emotivism endorsed by Ayer.

5. Major Theme(s)

- a. Fact vs. Value – Logical Positivism and value subjectivism (and its subset Emotivism) asserts that all facts and values are fundamentally separated, and all value language is only emotional utterances that reflect the internal feelings of the speaker (the subject) giving emotional approval to the “thing” to which the language refers, or (the object).
- b. If all language of value is reduced to emotional utterance, then all values are subjective – self-referential, interior, reflective of the subject only, separated from reality – and, as a result, provide no insight into the shape of reality outside the enclosed self.

6. Questions for Discussion

- a. What is the significance of the story about Coleridge?
- b. What meaning does Lewis give to the word, “sublime?”
- c. How are proper valuations of reality learned?
- d. What is the role of the teacher in the inculcation of virtues?
- e. Discuss this central assertion by Lewis: “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.”
- f. Discuss the difference between “propagation” and “propaganda.”

This following two critical passages are presented by Michael Ward in *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's The Abolition of Man, 50-51*.

King, Alec and Martin Ketley, *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing, 1939*, (The Green Book).

"This is a story told by Coleridge: he was standing with a group of tourists beside a waterfall, and, after a silence, one of the men in the party said, "That is sublime." Coleridge felt that "sublime" was exactly the right word. And then one of the women in the party added "Yes, it is pretty," and Coleridge turned away in disgust, feeling that "pretty" was exactly the wrong word. Why did Coleridge think the one word was exactly right, and the other exactly wrong? Obviously not because the one adjective described correctly, as we say, a quality of the water or the rocks or the landscape, and the other adjective described this quality incorrectly. It is not as if the man had said "That is brown" (referring, say, to the water) and the woman (also referring to the water) had added, "Yes, it is green." No, Coleridge thought "sublime" exactly the right word, because it was associated in his mind with the emotion he was himself feeling as he looked at the waterfall in its setting of rock and landscape; and he thought "pretty" exactly the wrong word, because it was associated with feelings quite different from those he was actually feeling at the time and with feelings that, to his way of thinking, no sensitive person would ever have while looking at such a sight.

Now let us look at these four adjectives, "brown," "blue," [sic] "sublime," and "pretty." The first two say something about the waterfall, they describe its colour (one rightly, the other wrongly); that is to say, both these words have a reference, they refer our minds to a quality of the water. As to the second pair of adjectives the man's remark, "That is sublime," did not refer the tourists' minds to anything in the water or the rocks or the landscape, or to any shape or colour or texture; nor did the women's remark, "Yes, it is pretty," refer the tourists' minds to anything. In fact, these two adjectives, as they were used, had no reference. They were associated, however, with certain emotions; "sublime," let us say, with feelings of awe, deeply held pleasure, and a kind of profound and calm excitement; "pretty" with feelings of a more superficial and transitory delight. These adjectives have no reference, but both have emotive meaning. We can realize why Coleridge turned away in disgust. The emotive meaning of "sublime" was the feeling that he had; the emotive meaning of "pretty" was the feeling he had not."

Wordsworth, Dorothy. *Recollections of a Tour in Scotland, A.D. 1803*. (A tour with her brother William and their friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge along the River Clyde in Lanarkshire to see the falls there.)

"The waterfall Cora Linn is composed of two falls, with a sloping space, which *appears* to be about twenty yards between, but is much more. The basin which receives the fall is enclosed by noble rocks, with trees, chiefly hazels, birch, and ash growing out of their sides whenever there is any hold for them; and a magnificent resting-place it is for such a river; I think more grand than the Falls themselves.

After having stayed some time, we returned . . . and soon came upon . . . different views of the Linn. We sat upon a bench, placed for the sake of one of these views, whence we looked down upon the waterfall. . . . A lady and gentleman, more expeditious tourists than ourselves, came to the spot; they left us at the seat, and we found them again at another station above the Falls. Coleridge, who is always good-natured enough to enter into conversation with anybody whom he meets in his way, began to talk with the gentleman, who observed that it was a *majestic* waterfall. Coleridge was delighted with the accuracy of the epithet, particularly as he had been settling in his own mind the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic, sublime, etc., and had discussed the subject with William at some length the day before. 'Yes, sir,' says Coleridge, 'it is a majestic waterfall.' 'Sublime and beautiful,' replied his friend. Poor Coleridge could make no answer, and, not very desirous to continue the conversation, came to us and related the story, laughing heartily."

Lecture Two: The Way

1. Terms and Phrases

- a. *En de phaei kai dlessou* – “And in the Daylight destroy us, if to destroy us be now your pleasure.” This is part of a larger section in the Iliad (17:644-647) which is a prayer to Zeus: “Father Zeus, draw free from the mist the sons of the Achaians, make bright the air, and give sight to our eyes; and in shining daylight destroy us, if to destroy us be now your pleasure.”
- b. *Experimentum cruces* – “the crucial experiment” or the test case that reveals the crux of the matter.
- c. *Dulce et decorum* – “sweet and appropriate” This is a reference back to the first address and to the lines from Horace, “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.” This line is used by Wilfred Owen in his famous poem written during WWI.
- d. *Humani nihil a me alienum puto* – “I am a man; nothing human is alien to me.” Terence (195/185 – 159? BC) Roman playwright.
- e. *Cuor gentil* – “noble heart” it is a possible reference to Dante, Inferno V, 100.

2. People (notes from – *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man by Michael Ward*)

- a. Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950), philosopher and science-fiction writer
- b. Andrew Marvell (1661-1678), poet, “To His Coy Mistress” contains a line: “Deserts of vast eternity” that Lewis renders as “Deserts of vast futurity.”
- c. John Locke (1632-1704), philosopher
- d. John Keats (1795-1821), poet, wrote the line in “*The Fall of Hyperion*.”
- e. William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
- f. C. K. Ogden (1889-1957) developed “Basic English” by reducing the vocabulary of English to 850 words to make it easier to learn as a second language.
- g. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), philosopher, ultimately, all moral systems originate in envy and are subsumed in the “Will to Power.”

3. Outline of the Lecture

- a. Philosophical problems of Value Subjectivism (the position of Gaius and Titius)
 - 1) Gaius and Titius must have had some value rooted goal in writing the book.
 - 2) So, the reduction of all values to subjective emotion did not apply to the value that they placed on their own work.
 - 3) The rejection of the Tao means that Gaius and Titius must “innovate” a new more “real” or “basic” foundation for value judgements. The innovator roots a new ethic in the foundation provided by “instinct.”
- b. Philosophical problems of building a value system on Instinct

- 1) What does the “Innovator” do with the notion of dying for another?
(Remember, this address is given during the darkest days of WWII prior to D-Day.)
 - 2) Innovator’s Argument: First, the Innovator suggests that the sacrifice of oneself is for the utility of the community; secondly, neither altruism nor selfishness is more rational because the “is” cannot lead to the “ought;” and lastly, the innovator is driven to “instinct” as the only basis for dying for another person.
 - 3) The nature of “Instinct” – it is the nature of instincts that we have no power over them, that they war against one another, and that there is an “infinite regress” of instincts such that instincts cannot provide a basis for moral judgment.
- c. Natural Law as the Sole Source of Value Judgments
- 1) Tao = Natural Law (in the classical/medieval sense), Traditional Morality, or First Principles
 - 2) Given, and not invented, thus the Tao is the “is” that provides the basis for the “ought.”
 - 3) Tao allows development from “within” but the effort to invent values outside of the Tao is doomed to failure because there is no basis upon which any judgments can be made (or, in my words, any basis on which one can answer the question: “Why be moral?”)

4. Philosophical Background

- a. The division of Fact from value or the “Is” from the “Ought” is first articulated in the thought of David Hume (d. 1776). It is a logical result of reducing all values to the expression of emotion and limiting all knowledge to “relations of ideas” (logic) and “matters of fact” (empirical experience). A fact is limited to what an individual can know through sense experience alone. Hume argues that one cannot move from a “matter of fact” determined by sense experience (indicative mood) to an imperative command which is non-sensical and an expression of emotion.
 - 1) Imperative Mood: “Shut the door!”
 - 2) Indicative Mood: “The door is shut.”
 - 3) Logically, one cannot move from the indicative mood (The door is shut) directly to the imperative mood (Shut the door!) without an intervening step that demonstrates a value-based reason why that should be: “The door ought to be shut to keep the bears outside.” This is called by Lewis “Practical Reason” or *Phronesis*. Practical Reason is a virtue. Virtue is the connective link from the indicative to the imperative. Virtue properly shapes or informs the “Chest.” It is the argument of this text that virtue is rooted in and acquired from the Tao or Natural Law or General Revelation that is the “self-evident” (not in a simplistic sense) or the foundational “given” of moral discourse. This “given” forms the

language of moral discourse and must be carefully learned if the “Chest” is to serve as a guide to a flourishing way of life.

- 4) Lewis wrote: “Your surprise is itself one result of that subjectivism I am discussing. Until modern times no thinker of the first rank ever doubted that our judgments of value were rational judgments or that what they discovered was objective. It was taken for granted that in temptation passion was opposed, not to some sentiment, but to reason” (“*Poison of Subjectivism*,” [1943] C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces, 657-665, cited by Ward, 93-94).
- b. “Infinite regress of Instincts” is a reference to two arguments in Aristotle’s metaphysics. The first is called the “Third Man” argument and the second is problem of “infinite regress.” In the first, if two ideas must be held together by a third idea then, what holds those three ideas together, a fourth? This leads to the second argument. There cannot be an infinite regress of causes. At some point, one must come to an originating cause, or the very notion of “cause” is meaningless.

5. Major Theme(s)

- a. Truth and Meaning – The major underlying argument in this lecture concerns the relationship between truth and meaning. If truth is narrowed to only those statements that can be empirically verified, then two things result. First, the range of possible areas of meaning is severely limited and, secondly, if the meaningfulness of anything is limited to its utility in the service of sense experience, then, ultimately, the connection between truth and meaning is severed.
- b. If what is meaningful is considered meaningful only because it has utility as an explanation for sense experience, then it becomes impossible to assert that one experience is more meaningful than another. Everything is reduced to a constant atomistic flow of subjective experiences with each experience neither more nor less valuable than the next. In this situation, truth loses all meaning. This is the crisis of our age.

6. Questions for Discussion

- a. Lewis argues that each effort to find a new basis for moral judgment outside of the Natural Law is either derived from the Natural Law or rooted in a claim about one or more instincts over which we have no control. This makes moral judgment impossible. What are some examples of this in our contemporary setting?
- b. Discuss the concept of the “War of instincts.” If everything is instinctual then how do, we decide which instinct to follow?
- c. If there are no viable claims that can support assertions of value (good over evil, right over wrong) then, what remains? How are decisions to be made? Can we make moral decisions at all?

Lecture Three: The Abolition of Man

1. Terms and Phrases

- a. *Chotho* – the youngest of the three fates who is the spinner of the thread of human life in Greek mythology.
- b. *Petitio* – short for *Petitio Principii* which is an informal fallacy in logic that assumes the conclusion as one of the premises. It is often called, “Begging the Question.”
- c. *Sic volo, sic jubeo* – “as I will so I command.” The full Latin phrase from Juvenalis (AD 55-127) is translated as “This I will so I command; let my will take the place of reason (VI, 223). Satire VI also contains this question: “Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”, “Who will control the controllers?”
- d. *Ferum victorem cepit* – “The defeated conquered its uncivilized vanquisher.”
- e. *Ule* – the Greek word, “Fuel.”
- f. *H. C. F.* – A British expression: Highest Common Factor. Ward explains: The “factors” of a number are any numbers that divide into it exactly. For example, the factors of 12 are 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12, while the factors of 18 are 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 18. The factors held in common by both 12 and 18 are 1, 2, 3, and 6; they are the “common factors” of 12 and 18. The “highest common factor” (H.C.F) of 12 and 18 is 6” (174).
- g. *Inter alia* – Latin: among other things
- h. *Paracelsus* – Renaissance physician and alchemist who died in 1541.
- i. *Basilisk* – a legendary reptile with a fatal breath and glance.
- j. *Sui generis* – Latin, of its own kind, unique

2. People (Notes from *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis' Abolition of Man* by Michael Ward)

- a. John Bunyan (1628-1688), pastor and author. The “he” in the epigraph is the “old Adam.” If we do not join with God, in His grace, by faith and reason in a process of sanctification by the Spirit unto Glorification in Christ, then we are going to remain enslaved by the “Old Adam” who disobeyed God in the Garden. “Christian” uses his mind as well as his faith in his journey to the Celestial City.
- b. Sir Thomas Elyot (c.1490-1546), diplomat, MP, author of *The Book of the Governour* (1531) of which Lewis wrote: “by no means contemptible for its content; at the same time there is nothing in it which suggests a mind of the first order” (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 273-276).
- c. John Milton (1608-1674), poet, quoted by Lewis on page 64 from *Lycidas*, line 72: “To scorn delights and live laborious days.”
- d. Dryads, in Greek mythology, dryads were tree nymphs or tree-spirits.
- e. Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), poet, author of *The Faerie Queen*
- f. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) early modern astronomer
- g. Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), philosopher, statesman, and scientist
- h. Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), dramatist and poet

- i. Paracelsus the pseudonym of Philip von Hohenheim (1493-1541), philosopher, physician, and occultist
- j. Martin Buber (1878-1965), philosopher and Torah scholar

3. Outline of the Lecture

- a. Introductory Question: In what sense is Man the possessor of increasing power over Nature? “. . . what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.”
- b. The role of Power
 - a. Power will be enormously increased: “an omniscient state and an irresistible scientific technique.”
 - b. Teachers of old initiated the young into life under and consistent with the Tao but conditioners seek to condition the young to values as “mere natural phenomena” to which the conditioners are not subject.
- c. The Problem of Conditioners and Conditioning
 - a. We don’t all like the same things
 - b. Conditioners stand outside the Tao.
 - c. What about the future and the life of future generations
 - d. Driven by power and separated from any objective moral order, “The Conditioners, therefore, must come to be motivated simply by their own pleasure.”
- d. Man’s conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man.” (Nature as instinctual pleasure) See the attached chart.
- e. Magic and Science
- f. Toward a New Natural Philosophy

4. Philosophical Background

- a. This chapter is a perceptive analysis of Behaviorism (B. F. Skinner attacked Lewis in Skinner’s final book, “Beyond Freedom and Dignity” in which he argued for a total determinism without human freedom or dignity and the conditioning process turned over to behavioral scientists who, due to their knowledge of operate conditioning, stand outside of the closed system of conditioning and insure that the right kinds of persons are produced by the process).
- b. This is the logical result of the reduction of the human to the material and inorganic forces of a blind natural process. Scientism and materialistic naturalism are the parents of this philosophical system.
- c. An older movement is also central to this last lecture. The modern period (beginning in 1600) is marked by a growing rejection (at first, philosophically, and gradually, in social ethos) of the relationship of Universals and Particulars. In Modernity the individual becomes predominate and the Universal is minimized. In our Post-Modern world, the Universal no longer exists in any meaningful way – only the “me”

matters. This could be called: radical nominalism. Nominalism refers to the position that universals, like “humankind,” are only linguistic shorthand indicating an assembly of individual humans, but the word does not refer, in any way, to something ontologically real. Filostrato, in *That Hideous Strength* says: “All the talk about the power of Man over Nature – Man in the abstract – is only for the *canaglia* (scoundrel or swindler). You know as well as I do that Man’s power over Nature means the power of some men over other men with Nature as the instrument. There is no such thing as Man – it is a word. There are only men” (175). Lewis following Aristotle and Thomas argues here and elsewhere that a full understanding of what it means to be human requires that we understand the Universal “Humanity” and the Particular “Me.” It is only from within the Tao that we can find the resources to hold these two realities together in meaningful ways.

5. Major Theme(s)

- a. Reason and Imagination – Undergirding this analysis is the recognition that Modernity has separated reason and imagination. Lewis argues in an essay entitled, “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare” that “. . . reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.”
- b. Imagination provides the “field” (my word) of possible truths upon which reason works to find truth. If the field is reduced to brute matter with no purpose, then there are no truths to discover, and all facts are reduced to meaningless flickers of neurological activity in a meaningless universe.
- c. Goodness and Power: In the Appendix, Lewis’s eighth law is “The Law of Magnanimity.” The third portion of that section is entitled by Michael Ward as “Magnanimity in order to transcend oneself in self-sacrifice.” Lewis’s inclusion of this final section in the Appendix to *The Abolition of Man* serves to raise the question of the relationship of Goodness and Power. Is “might” always “right?” Is power the only reality? The ethic of the Conditioners (living outside of the Tao) is based solely on the personal pursuit of pleasure and by exercising power over other people. The ethic of “reasoned self-sacrifice” cannot be envisioned within subjectivism because: “reasoned self-sacrifice – a purposeful, generous, self-abandoned laying down of one’s life for the good of others as others – is impossible” (Ward, 196).

6. Questions for Discussion

- a. On what basis can a “conditioner” assume the moral standpoint by which to assert that this or that behavior is good or bad?
- b. What are some of the ways in which behaviorism has deeply shaped and reshaped American educational practice?
- c. What does it mean when Lewis argues that the conditioning programs of today reduce the freedom that could potentially be exercised by subsequent generations?

- d. What do you think are central features of a new Natural Philosophy (here Lewis is using the old term for science) that would avoid the reductionism of contemporary concepts?

A Chart of Lewis' Argument in *The Abolition of Man* (68-69)

Nature	[Artificial], the Civil, the Human, the Spiritual, the Supernatural
Spatial	Multi-dimensional
Temporal	Eternal and "the less fully so," or "not at all"
Quantity	Quality
Objects	Consciousness
Bound	Wholly or Partially Autonomous
Knows no Values	Both has and Perceives Values
Efficient Cause	Final Cause
Nature: as the name given to what we think we have analyzed, reduced to a 'tool' to use, about which we suspend judgments of value, manipulated it, and seek to conquer it	The Tao or the Objective Moral Law
"Every conquest over Nature increases her domain." (71)	"But you cannot go on 'explaining away' for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles. 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." (81)