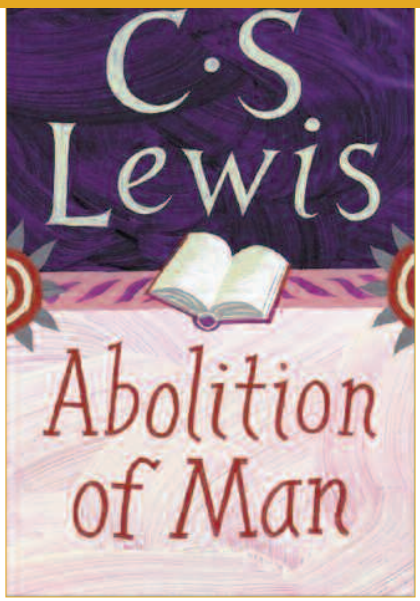
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# C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2001.




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In the context of present-day economic, political, informational and demographic dynamics, few still have the disposition – and even fewer the time – to raise the issue of human rights and duties with respect to the preservation of the global cultural heritage. Two questions arise at a first glance. One is about the very definition of culture, or, rather, the ideas about what culture is. The other concerns the possibility of distinguishing, beyond the models and fashions propagated at one time or another, a primordial nucleus of values whose destruction would mean the destruction of the human species itself.

An indirect – and partial – answer to the first question is given by Dan Sperber (*Explaining Culture*, Blackwell, 1996, p. 1), who states that

"... an idea, born in the brain of an individual, may have, in the brain of other individuals, descendents that resemble it. Ideas can be transmitted, and, by being transmitted from one person to another, they may even propagate. Some ideas – religious beliefs, cooking recipes, or scientific hypotheses, for instance – propagate so effectively that, in different versions, they may end up durably invading whole populations. Culture is made up, first and foremost, of such contageous ideas. it is made up also of all the productions (writings, artworks, tools, etc.) the presence of which in the shared environment of a human group permits the propagation of ideas."

To explain culture, then, is to explain why and how some ideas happen to be contagious. This calls for the development of a true *epidemiology of representations*.

The second question starts from the fact that, at present, cultural fashions succeed each other at a stunning speed, directed by forces that are involved in acts of cultural policy, whether they are aware of that or not. Under these circumstances, there is an obvious risk that the abolition of traditional values may annihilate the very ability of human beings to distinguish values from non-values and that the very concept of *value*[1]

may disappear from the vocabulary of the international jargon. This will be preserved as a "heritage object", that is, a piece in a museum, lacking that spirit that animates active concepts and representations.

I would like to bring back to public attention a set of three academic lectures delivered by the English professor C. S. Lewis, known to the Romanian reader through the translations that have come out in the last few years[2]. Lewis's writings, pervaded by what Clad Walsh would call "classical Christianity", that is, neither fundamentalist nor modernist, operate with three major concepts: (1) that of *nature*, that is, the system of all phenomena in time and space; (2) *God*, the creator, the saviour and the supporter of nature and humankind; and (3) *man*[3], in his relationship with nature, with God and with other human beings. The three lectures I mentioned above were delivered at Oxford during the Second World War and were published in 1943 as an essay in three parts entitled *The Abolition of Man*.

The three lectures that were delivered in the midst of war and that sprang out of a consciousness marked by responsibility to the human species are highly topical since they raise the issues of human affections, values, cultural policies and of the overall risk of moving away from the very essence of human nature. The lectures deal with all these aspects in a way that makes them be contemporary with our own times.[4]

The first lecture is entitled *Men without Chests* and starts from a school manual of English language and literature and from the tripartite structure of man, which includes a cerebral component, a visceral component and, between the two, the affective component, which unites and harmonizes the first two. The author demonstrates how contemporary[5] education (at school level but not only) creates imbalance in the tripartite structure of man by manipulating the school child in the direction of ignoring – or even annihilating – the connection between the "cerebral man" and the "visceral man", that is the very core of the human being, the "Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment" By drying out the sensibility of our students we turn them into easy prey in the hands of the propagandist when this comes out – says Lewis. Through currently "demythicising" and levelling the worth of a piece of art and of a piece of advertising, for instance, one comes to annihilate traditional hierarchies of values. This "levelling" of values through demythicising does not need to spring out of an evil spirit. It may be a way of fortifying the minds of the students confronted with emotions. Lewis's belief is, however, that the only form of defence against false feelings is the very cultivation of feelings. through educating the affective centre of the human being[6] (*Inklings* 2004: 92) in the direction of acknowledging the existence of certain objective values, with the firm belief that some attitudes are really true and others are really false, with respect to what is universal and to what we are (Lewis 1999: 95). Lewis believes that emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we perceive pleasure as something that ought to be approved of) or out of this harmony. Our approvals and disapprovals thus represent ways of acknowledging certain objective values and ways of responding to an objective order. In support of this ideas the author invokes Plato, Artistotle or St. Augustin, Indian, Chinese or ancient Jewish wisdom on equal terms. They speak of "the way of the universe" (*Tao*), the true Law (ancient Jewish tradition), harmony with nature (Confucius) or *ordo amoris* (St. Augustin).

The second lecture, *The Way*, is a demonstration with logical instruments of the fact that the upper part, that part within us that can be called "the cerebral man", is more and more often set to work with a view to satisfying the lower, visceral, part. This is done by directly encouraging this type of approach or by launching incentive slogans,

slogans that take one away from what has been called Traditional Morality, Natural Law, Primordial Principles or, with a term that Lewis finds most convenient, Tao. That is the only source of value judgements and subsumes written and unwritten laws, (still) present with all peoples, such as the duty of children and descendants to parents and ancestors, and that of duties to children and posterity, good faith and respect of what is true (veracity), the law of justice, the law of general beneficience and the law of special beneficience, the law of mercy and the law of magnanimity.

The lack of education in the sense of observing these fundamental laws for the human species turns against the human species itself. "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." (Lewis 1999: 17)

If the Innovator (a generic name which in 1942-43 could be associated with Hitler but which can refer to a certain aspect within each human being), in his otherwise praiseworthy concern with Posterity, aims at getting "people fed and clothed" this could be a great end, but if he places economic value first and sets aside any scruples about justice and good faith, then he no longer acts from within the Law. Thus any conceivable aspect conceptually marked by value is rejected, the great purpose and the great triumph being the "conquest of Nature". What is forgotten in this process is the fact that Nature also includes "that final and toughest bit of 'nature' which has hitherto been called the conscience of man" (Lewis 1999:31).

The third part, *The Abolition of Man*, starts from "Man's Conquest of Nature", "an expression often used to describe the progress of applied science", and demonstrates the real possibility that power may be exercised by a minority of fewer and fewer individuals, and that each power that is won by man can be – and actually is – a power over and against man. "And all long-term exercises of power, especially in breeding, must mean the power of earlier generations over later ones." (Lewis 1999: 35). Thus with each victorious battle, man is both "the general who triumphs" and "the prisoner who follows the triumphal car" (Lewis 1999: 36).

The de-humanizing process begins to affect human language as well. Lewis remarks that "once we killed men; now we liquidate antisocial elements. Virtue has become *integration* and diligence *dynamism*, and boys likely to be worthy of commission are 'potential officer material'. Most wonderful of all, the virtues of thrift and temperance, and even ordinary intelligence are *sales-resistance*." (Lewis 1999: 46). "Man's conquest of himself means simply the rule of Conditioners over the conditioned human material, the world of post-humanity which, some knowingly and some unknowingly, nearly all men in all nations are at present labouring to produce." (*Ibid.*) said and wrote Lewis sixty years ago – speaking to our age as well.

It has been normal in all times for food and education to be means of exercising power. But the situation that Lewis anticipated is new in two respects. First, power has increased and will increase enormously. However, "the plans of educationalists have achieved very little" and we still may have to thank every true mother and true nurse for "preserving the human race in such sanity as it still possesses" (Lewis 1999: 37). Second, in the older systems "both the kind of man teachers wished to produce and their motives for producing him were prescribed by the *Tao* – a norm to which teachers them-

selves were subject to and from which they claimed no liberty to depart. [...] They handed on what they had received: they initiated the young neophyte into the mystery of humanity which over-arched him and them alike. *It was but old birds teaching young birds to fly.*" (Lewis 1999: 37-8; emphasis added – R.A.) Now Conditioners "know how to *produce* conscience and decide what kind of conscience they will produce." So they are to choose "what kind of artificial *Tao* they will, for their own good reasons, produce in the Human race". (*Ibid.*) They know how to produce a variety of different conceptions of good in us. "The question is which, if any, they should produce. No conception of good can help them to decide." (Lewis 1999: 39)

We live in a world in which "stars lost their divinity as astronomy has developed and the Dying God has no place in chemical agriculture" (Lewis 199: 43) The progress rate is so high that "the final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. *Human* nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. [...] But who, precisely, will have won it?" (Lewis 1999: 36-7). Stepping outside the Tao, the Conditioners have stepped into a void. "Nor are their subjects necessarily unhappy men. They are not men at all: they are artefacts. Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man." (Lewis 1999: 40) And if the new technology (to which cloning has now been added) proves efficient enough, there will be no rebellions any longer and Earth's inhabitants will place themselves comfortably in the shadow of their Conditioners until the life cycle of this planet is concluded.

In his successful attempt to conquer Nature man has tried to see 'through' things, forgetting that the joy of seeing 'through', through a window, for instance, is that of seeing the garden... "The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it." (Lewis 1999: 50) But if everything becomes transparent, everything turns invisible. "To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see." (Ibid.) This will include losing trace of the First Principles.

Actually Lewis does not try to support *Tao* with arguments, because *the validity of the Law cannot be demonstrated in a deductive manner*. But he cannot refrain from noticing that civilizations took shape in different parts of the planet, seemingly independently of each other, and are marked by distinct religious beliefs. However, they do acknowledge the same fundamental moral principles, which may – primarily, ultimately and eternally – have risen from a single centre and have been propagated "like an infectious disease[7] or like the Apostolic succession." (Lewis 1999: 52) To prove this, Lewis adds an appendix with "Illustrations of the *Tao*", a collection of instances of the Natural Law from "such sources as come readily at hand": writers like Locke and Hooker, who wrote within the Christian tradition, the New Testament, the ancient Jewish tradition of the Old Testament, the sapiential tradition of the Ancient Chinese, Roman, Egyptian, Greek, Indian and Babylonian, of the old Germanic peoples and of the Australian Aborigines.

This demonstration and warning is not necessarily pessimistic. If it were so, it would be superfluous. Lewis's core 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." (Lewis 1999: 45) The English sage reminds his readers that the purpose of education – and of human existence – is the harmonious development of the physical, emotional and spiritual components, without neglecting any of them.

As for Lewis's view of the creative act as a value-generating act, it is explained and illustrated in such writings as *The Allegory of Love*[8] and *The Discarded Image*, which suggest his option for a "religious" theory of creation, opposing the Narcissistic cult of the "genius". Lewis believes that an author does not give birth to such an embodiment of beauty or wisdom as has never existed before. What he does is an attempt at using the means of his art to reflect a glimpse of Eternal Beauty and Eternal Wisdom. Therefore, a Christian theory of literary imagination would have affinities with the ancient theory according to which the Poet is just the Muses' fancy man. That can also be placed in relation to Plato's theory of transcendental forms, partly reflected in the material world on Earth, which could have no connection with the idea that literature or any other form of art may be a modality of expression of the individual genius.

By creative activities, human essence is objectified in various artefacts or products, whether cultural (in the narrow sense of the term), material or spiritual. If patterns are created which block the activation of the Law (for which Lewis uses the term Tao) within man and which, at the same time, activate negative attitudes, that jams the access to the fundamental moral values inscribed within ourselves, to the Primordial Principles and orients mankind towards an artificial, inevitably destructive kind of *Tao*. Lewis also states that "in defending value I defend *inter alia* the value of knowledge, which must die like every other when its roots in the *Tao* are cut."

Re-discovering the "middle element"[9], the moral-affective centre of the human being ("Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment"), in its correct relation to reason, means re-creating the balance between the "visceral man" and the "cerebral man" and, hence, reactivating the ability to intuitively establish the best hierarchies and priorities of values. This involves the full recognition of the fact that natural existence is holy and that free will is a universal right which involves immense responsibilities regarding the preservation of fundamental values. Thus, the itinerary of the human being in this world can be described as optimum as long as it evolves in harmony with the Natural Law, which Lewis concisely refers to as *Tao*, and not in accordance with the slogan "man defeats Nature", which involves self-destruction. "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. 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." (Lewis 1999: 17) This message, launched as a warning during the great world-wide conflagration in the early forties, has preserved its validity untouched.

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Heenan, John, 2000. "Making Sense of Values", http://www.teachingvalues.com/valuesense.html,

Sperber, Dan, 1996. *Explaining Culture. A Naturalist Approach*, Oxford: Blackwell

## Notes:

1"Had we lived one hundred and twenty years ago we would not have heard the plural noun "values," meaning the moral beliefs and attitudes of a society. Until then the word "value" was used only as a verb meaning to value or esteem something or as a singular noun, meaning the measure of a thing, for example, the economic value of money, labour or property" writes John Heenan. "Values, as we now know them, can be either preferences or principles, which represent the opposite ends of the moral spectrum." (http://www.teachingvalues.com/valuesense.html)

2 These are:

Lewis, C.S., *Creştinismul redus la esențe*, Societatea Misionară Română, Wheaton, Illinois, 1987.

Lewis, C.S., *Leul, vrăjitoarea şi garderoba*, traducere de Rodica Albu, copertă şi ilustrații de Val Munteanu, Ed. Junimea, Iaşi – Ed. Hyperion, Chişinău, 1993 (din ciclul Cronicilor din Narnia).

Lewis, C.S., *Scrisorile lui Zgîndărilă. Scrisorile unui drac bătrîn către un drac tînăr*, traducere de Mirela Rădoi, Ed. Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 1993.

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3 Lewis naturally uses the term man as the generic archlexeme for the "human species" – his writings were produced long before the restrictions required by political correctness...

4 Lewis's secretary and editor Walter Hooper enthusiastically commented on the published set of lectures: "If someone were to come to me and say that, excepting the *Bible*, everyone on earth was going to be required to read one and the same book, and then ask what it should be, I would with no hesitation say *The Abolition of Man*. It is the most perfectly reasoned defence of Natural Law (Morality) I have ever seen, or believe to exist. If any book is able to save us from future excesses of folly and evil, it is this book." Owen Barfield considered the publication of the book "a real triumph. There may be a piece of contemporary writing in which precision of thought, liveliness of expression and depth of meaning unite with the same felicity, but I have not come across it." (Lewis 1999, back cover)

5 Related to his time.

An operation performed by school books and the like is that of producing "what may be called *Men without Chests*. It is an outrage that they should be commonly spoken of as Intellectuals. This gives them the chance to say that he who attacks them

attacks Intelligence. It is not so. They are not distinguished from other men by any unusual skill in finding truth nor any virginal ardour to pursue her. Indeed it would be strange if they were: a persevering devotion to truth, a nice sense of intellectual honour, cannot be long maintained without the aid of a sentiment which Gaius and Titius could debunk as easily as any other. It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so.

And all the time—such is the tragi-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more 'drive', or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or 'creativity'. In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful. (Lewis 1999: 15)

6 The importance of this centre of the human being is rediscovered by our contemporaries, who are beginning to speak not only of an intelligence quotient (IQ) but also of an emotional quotient (EQ) (See Daniel Golemann *Emotional Intelligence*).

7 Through this statement Lewis anticipates Dan Sperber's epidemiological model of cultural representations (cf. Sperber 1996).

8 *The Allegory of Love* – a substantial study of medieval literature from the 11th century (Languedoc) to the English 15th century, with particular insistence on *Roman de la Rose* and *The Fairie Queene* and on the work of poets like Chaucer, Gower and Thomas Usk.

9 According to Lewis, "it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal. (Lewis 1999: 15)"