

C. S. Lewis' Critique of  
Naturalism in That  
Hideous Strength

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## PREFACE

C. S. Lewis was a prolific and versatile author who wrote popular theology, literary criticism, and children's books, as well as science fiction. As a young man he was a professed atheist, but was challenged in his non-belief by reading George MacDonald's Phantastes, G. K. Chesterton's The Everlasting Man, and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Lewis became interested in Christianity through his association with J. R. R. Tolkien and his own study of St. Augustine, The Imitation of Christ, and Luther's Theologica Germanica. Later he was profoundly influenced by Aquinas' Summa and came to admire the works of Buber, Marcel, Maritain, and Berdyaev, along with Rudolf Otto's The Idea of the Holy.

Though he was a committed rationalist he believed that the highest theological truths could only be understood imaginatively, not rationally. And so he exploited literature's capacity to accomplish that undertaking. Because Lewis became convinced of the philosophically untenable nature of atheism and was sickened by the direction of modernity he attempted to provide an alternative vision through his imaginative literature. This effort is nowhere more evident than in That Hideous Strength, a visionary, apocalyptic novel, written during World War II. It is perhaps

Lewis' most forceful attack on the abuses of modernism and the philosophical bulwark of naturalism that sustains it. This doctrine holds, in Lewis' view, "that only nature--the whole interlocked system--exists,"<sup>1</sup> and it is the operative underlying belief of the evil forces centered in Belbury, hell bent on the perversion of Nature. Only the small band of Christians clustered at St. Anne's can stop them. That confrontation constitutes the structural drama of the work.

Lewis held that good literature must perform as a spiritual aid or tool for saying what needed to be said, and that it should always be committed to the pursuit of moral truth. For him imaginative writings serve not only as a creative outlet but also bring home to the reader inner truths in a much more forceful way than can either philosophical or historical forms. Today That Hideous Strength can still be enjoyed and contemplated for its revelations about the nature of man and the inexplicable ways in which the powers of good and evil work through him. The kind of characters who inhabit Belbury, their intentions, and the dramatic situations which arise all serve to underscore the meaning of naturalism and the implications of its long-term use.

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C. S. Lewis' Critique of  
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"For philosophy to rule," wrote Ortega y Gasset, "it is sufficient for it to exist; that is to say, for the philosophers to be philosophers. For nearly a century past, philosophers have been everything but that--politicians, pedagogues, men of letters, and men of science."<sup>2</sup> The abdication by philosophers of their traditional teaching role has been a product of, and a contribution to, the general state of disarray in contemporary society. They no longer profess to have any insight into the timeless questions which have always confronted and confounded humanity. What has specifically been abandoned is the traditional philosophy of Western Europe which was rooted in the belief in a transcendent order of reality which contained the pre-eminent values of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty mediated to us through ethics, logic and aesthetics. According to C. E. M. Joad it is because

the universe is--or contains--a moral order that some things are right and some wrong; true and false; beautiful and ugly. Most philosophers would have added that there is a deity and that



deity is the source of value--Goodness, Truth, and Beauty being the modes of God's revelation of Himself to man. Metaphysics, being the study of the reality which underlies and transcends the familiar world, is, therefore, in part, the study of those values and of God.<sup>3</sup>

In other words this view provided both a principle to live by and a purpose to live for--for over two thousand years. Morality is the principle, and the increase of what is good, beautiful, and true is the purpose. However, this is no longer the lesson being taught and the result, according to most Christian philosophers, has been disastrous.

The Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel reflected that

It can never be too strongly emphasized that the crisis which Western man is undergoing today is a metaphysical one; there is probably no more dangerous illusion than that of imagining that some readjustment of social or institutional conditions could suffice of itself to appease a contemporary sense of disquiet which rises, in fact, from the very depths of man's being.<sup>4</sup>

Humankind has fallen; triviality has triumphed. There are no challengers in sight. Today philosophy is, by and large, an academic, professionalized discipline entrenched in

political and sociological thought. It apes the sciences in its focus on rigor and precision and in its specialization. The major schools of thought either deny or are deeply suspicious of traditional philosophy and the questions it examined, opting instead for the study of logical constructions, the activities of science, and interesting esoteric problems in mathematics.<sup>5</sup> If something cannot be verified or measured it does not exist. To a large extent the discipline of theology has also succumbed to the scientific method--leaving many believers puzzled or indignant. Inevitably these doctrines are expressed in public policy. As a result, Christian thinkers like C. S. Lewis are alarmed at the moral crisis facing contemporary Western civilization--evidenced by its subjective nihilism and technocratic barbarism.

It was Lewis' deep conviction that a sound political order must be based on a very definite view of human destiny: the Christian view. And since Christianity was being discarded, the proper basis of politics was being undermined. Lewis nowhere demonstrates this belief more forcefully than in his realistic/fantasy novel, That Hideous Strength. In it he fearlessly confronts the tragedy that awaits humanity if it does not return to his natural recognition of his dependency on God. Lewis believed that this self-imposed estrangement led to the fragmentation of society and the individual persons, leaving them vulnerable to the whims of mass society's growing dependence on the state and its scientific techniques. The first tendency he perceived was a

growing exaltation of the collective coupled with a growing indifference to persons. The second tendency was the notion of remaking humanity in the name of science, which seems to offer freedom, but will only bring bondage. In his "Reply to Professor Haldane," Lewis said that "under modern conditions any effective invitation to hell will certainly appear in the guise of scientific planning--as Hitler's regime in fact did."<sup>6</sup> This is precisely what takes place in the novel--the tension focusing on the N.I.C.E.'s (National Institute for Coordinated Experiment's) diabolical plot to enslave both Nature and mankind, eradicate belief in God and an ordered universe, and elevate a selected few individuals to the throne of the universe. Its members, however, are merely Satan's unwitting dupes and because their treachery is of cosmic proportions, the Powers, representing God and Maleldil must intervene via the human forces at St. Anne's, who are devoted to goodness in their battle to overthrow Satan. Wither, Feverstone, Frost, Straik, and Hardcastle constitute the high command at the N.I.C.E. who seek the clairvoyant powers of Jane Studdock to assist them in their search for Merlin, the druidical wizard of Logres, whose by now neutral "dark powers" may be of some use to them. To get Jane, however, they entice and entrap her gullible, ambitious husband, Mark. Jane, in the meantime, has been welcomed into the household at St. Anne's, headed by Elwin Ransom, the philologist/space traveler of Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra, who now directs the household's

counterattack on Belbury. Grace Ironwood leads Jane to the Head, Dr. Ransom, and hence to her salvation. Ivy Maggs, the Dimbles, the Dennistons, and MacPhee round out the group. They, too, are very interested in finding Merlin, whose pivotal role in the drama constitutes the mythical aspect of the story.

The novel is also realistic in its psychological approach to Mark and Jane Studdock, both disgruntled young people in search of fulfillment. But while Jane is fortunate enough to place herself on the path to wisdom and truth early on, her fatuous husband Mark seeks admittance into the inner rings of the Progressive Element at Bracton College and the N.I.C.E. It takes Mark an almost interminable amount of time to discover the cynical depravity of Belbury and extricate himself from it in the nick of time. His confusion, however, appears to be a widespread condition today, in Lewis' view.

The novel testifies that on the surface level of human life exist two essential factors which are mutually influential--ideology and technique. Each person confronts life with certain basic convictions about what the world and each person's place in it are. Additionally, each person finds himself in surroundings which include more or less technical skill or control over the material environment. The scientifically oriented doctrine of naturalism has had a major effect on people's lives today and Lewis fears for the future because of its growing acceptance. Many critics

recognize the expression of those fears in Lewis' devastating critique of naturalism which permeates That Hideous Strength.<sup>7</sup> No one, however, has adequately examined the structure of his critique. With this paper I intend to define naturalism in Lewis' terms, and then show how he confronted it. Because he believed this philosophy to be bankrupt both intellectually and morally he labored to expose its inconsistencies as well as its fearful implications. How he accomplishes this project will be the subject of my paper.

To begin with, naturalism is the product of various other "isms," some of which are quite old: materialism, mechanism, and empiricism (called positivism today). Materialism considers the basic things in space and time to be micro-entities or a combination of micro-entities; every event or occurrence is either the movement of a micro-entity or some combination of them. It is pluralistic in that it denies that these entities are parts of some more basic reality. According to materialists human beings are aggregates of those micro-entities, so that in theory a person lacks substantial unity or self-hood. Reality is materiality and nothing else. Hence the reductive nature of materialism denies the reality of a spiritual nature in humanity and holds that consciousness is simply a brain process, completely material, or at best, a non-material activity of the body. Mind, then, is only the latest product of the evolution of matter. In the eyes of the N.I.C.E. that process

must continue indefinitely--for them the mind is immanent. According to their delusion the "chosen Heads" are the "next step in evolution."<sup>8</sup> Obviously, though, the N.I.C.E. is not restricted simply to this materialistic conception of power. It must be bolstered by a doctrine of determinism, which, if applied universally, people cannot be held morally responsible for their actions--if people are merely the product of an endless chain of causes and conditions, such things as praise or punishment would be meaningless.

This belief is enthusiastically embraced by mechanism, which holds that all natural processes are solely the result of purposeless causes and do not tend toward goals or ends. The denial of teleology, then, is the cornerstone of mechanism. It is the equivalent of denying that there are agents in nature--a canard that Professor Frost was fond of reciting to Mark Studdock as he underwent his "training" in objectivity. The notion is to distrust thinking--only seeing and measuring can provide undeniable truth.

This distrust of thought by mechanists is shared by the advocates of logical positivism. This philosophy, according to Professor Joad, "denies the existence of first principles, repudiates metaphysics, and holds that all of our knowledge comes to us through experience, by which it means sense--experience."<sup>9</sup> Obviously, then, there can be no transcendent reality--at least if there is, we can have no knowledge of it. Because all metaphysical assertions are deemed meaningless, any ethical judgments are seen to be merely emotive--

they are used to express feelings about certain objects but not to make any assertion about them. As Frost explains it: "Resentment and fear are both chemical phenomena. Our reactions to one another are chemical phenomena. Social relations are chemical relations. You must observe these feelings in yourself in an objective manner" (p. 313). For the positivist all propositions are either empirical or tautologous. The implication is that values cannot be known--cruelty is, theoretically, just as acceptable as benevolence. This theory induces a thoroughgoing scepticism which Lewis attacked in The Abolition of Man--the book that laid the groundwork for That Hideous Strength. In it he wrote, "if nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved; similarly, if nothing is obligatory for its own sake, nothing is obligatory at all."<sup>10</sup> From the innocence of subjectivism will come the disease that "will certainly end our species (and in my view, damn our souls) if it is not crushed."<sup>11</sup> For according to traditional realistic philosophy the notion that humanity can create their own system of values is absurd. Yet that is what we are left with according to this doctrine; we see the attempt being made by the N.I.C.E. to realize that their goal, and their employment of any and all theories to justify it.

One of their favorites, though somewhat underplayed by Lewis, is the quasi-religious philosophy that has been entertained over the past two hundred years known as Vitalism or emergent evolutionism. Its advocate in the novel is

Reverend Straik, who stresses the real teaching of the "here and now Jesus." Cast by Lewis as a bitter apostate Straik posits finality without final causes--maintaining that nature by some immanent power, force, or élan tends toward certain ends, but that no external cause directs or moves it. Thus, he, like all vitalists, is committed to the proposition that the total cause of the dynamics of nature is to be found within nature itself. This concept can be exploited by naturalism to legitimate its own ends because, as Lewis writes in Miracles,

Such a God would not stand outside Nature or the total system, would not be existing "on his own." It would still be "the whole show" which was the basic Fact, and such a God would merely be one of the things (even if he were the most interesting) which the basic Fact contained. What Naturalism cannot accept is the idea of a God who stands outside Nature and made it.<sup>12</sup>

This type of nature-religion also exploits the concept of development--takes the increasing complexity of organic, social, and industrial life--and makes it a god. Lewis argues that it is essentially atheistic.

In its purest form naturalism embodies all of the preceding dogmas. Its essential feature is the proposition that all natural processes are to be explained only by natural processes. In other words, it takes nature to be the



whole of reality with all things and occurrences completely interconnected within the total system. There is no room for the concept of free will under those conditions, as Lewis points out, because

free will would mean that human beings have the power of independent action, the power of doing something more or other than what was involved by the total series of events. And any such separate power of originating events is what the Naturalist denies. Spontaneity, originality, action "on its own," is a privilege reserved for "the whole show," which he calls Nature.<sup>13</sup>

What bolsters this exclusivity is the notion that if something cannot be studied by science it does not exist. Consequently, it would be irrational to believe in a supernatural reality. Lewis, on the other hand, argues that our rationality is, itself, beyond nature because nature is powerless to produce rational thought. For Lewis every human mind has its taproot in an infinite, all-knowing being we call God, who is also the source of all value. But for the naturalist, value is a natural phenomenon and not something that can exist apart from the natural, or human, situation. This is to deny the absoluteness of values. The terms "good" and "bad" would apply only in specific situations, which is to say that they are without general application.

The relativity of values grows out of naturalism's

pragmatic interpretation of knowledge which holds that the truth of a belief is not based on a correspondence between that belief and reality, but on the fruitfulness that the belief produces when used as a principle of action. Thus an idea is true when the thinker acts and attains the desired result, and false when the action is not followed by the desired result.

Phenomenologist Walter Stace accurately describes the worldview which begins to emerge from the preceding:

The world, according to this new picture, is purposeless, senseless, meaningless. Nature is nothing but matter in motion. The motions of matter are governed, not by any purpose, but by blind forces and laws. It is this which has killed religion. . . . If the scheme of things is purposeless and meaningless, then the life of man is purposeless and meaningless too. Everything is futile, all effort is in the end worthless. Hence the dissatisfied, disillusioned, restless, spirit of modern man.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis believed that this loss of faith would inevitably lead to a grossly mutilated and distorted view of humankind's true nature. Only by rediscovering our absolute dependency on God can we regain our equilibrium. Lewis was fond of saying that he recommended Christianity not because it was good for people, but because it was true. In it he saw the best, most

consistent explanation for reality. He attacked naturalism because it was both pernicious and false. Next I will examine his exposure of naturalism's inconsistencies--a strategy which he satirically employs throughout the novel to show that it is virtually impossible for the naturalist to consistently maintain his philosophy.<sup>15</sup> He accomplishes this end by his overall depiction of the ambiguous nature of Belbury and by implying the empirical, self-referential, and logical inconsistencies in its views and actions.

The appearance and structure of the N.I.C.E. ("nyce" in Middle English means "foolish") serve as a comprehensive symbol of the speciousness of naturalism. A perpetual shroud of dense fog masks the innocuous-looking buildings. Dotting the labyrinthine corridors inside are chattering, faceless androids who seem to lack any certain direction. The infrastructure of the organization exudes a tone of ambiguity, and although communications are somewhat erratic, there is a direct line of authority emanating from the Deputy Director, Wither, through Feverstone and Fairy Hardcastle, down to the amorphous glob of technocratic toadies. Above all, the organization prides itself on its "elasticity" and its "fluidity." Wither does not like to be pinned down or make things clear. The very nature of the enterprise is, on the whole, very elusive--at least superficially.

Inside the Blood Transfusion Office Lewis donates another metaphor--the Objective Room. Mark's appraisal of it suggests Lewis' view of naturalism: an empty room with no

windows, artificially lighted, giving the illusion of daylight. It was chilly and ill-proportioned; too high and too narrow, with a lopsided doorway. Lewis cleverly prolongs the analogy:

The thing was near enough to the true to deceive you for a moment and to go on teasing the mind even after the deception had been unmasked. Involuntarily one kept on shifting the head to find positions from which it would look right after all. (p. 367)

Even the pattern of spots on the ceiling suggested some kind of regularity, but the suggestion was ultimately frustrated, resulting in their peculiar ugliness. Apparently ordinary pictures on the walls revealed subtle vulgarities. The whole experience was designed for Mark's first lesson in "objectivity"--"the process whereby all specifically human reactions were killed in a man so that he might become fit for the fastidious society of the Macrobes" (p. 369). That that capacity had already been eradicated in Wither and Frost is nowhere better demonstrated than in their inability to recognize the tramp as an ordinary, common man (though a little down on his luck). Lewis had great sport with this situation as he ironically bedecked the tramp in the robes of a Doctor of Philosophy and later had him identified by Jules as a "sonambulist chimpanzee." These are just some of the obvious ways in which Lewis derides the naturalist worldview. There

are others.

In contrast with the members of St. Anne's who radiate warmth and depth the automatons at the N.I.C.E. are flat, one-dimensional caricatures. Wither, whose very name suggests decrepitude, is described as being a spectre, a "shapeless ruin," who possesses the uncanny ability to be in several different places at once. His human essence is buried somewhere inside the shell he presents to the world. But, whereas Wither enjoys a certain degree of omnipresence, Mark is primarily preoccupied with staying out of sight--and for obvious reasons. Most of the staff's existence is only implied, for they burrow themselves in their anonymous offices for the most part--their fate sealed. Mark on the other hand is grasping for some kind of identity, but invariably that gift is denied him. Lewis implies that identity is something shaped from within; it is not bestowed on an individual person by anyone else. And so we have in this theme of identity Lewis' response to the naturalist's denial of individual substantial unity, for Jane early on and eventually Mark, both assert their individuality. They both undergo material change and various hardships but they remain who they always were: somehow different, but still the same. As individuals they have persisted through the changes and their own self-directed activity and striving. This fact contradicts the naturalist's denial of substantial unity in anything except the space-time process itself.

The naturalist's denial of final causality or teleology

is also examined by Lewis and found wanting, for Lewis believed as do most people that this doctrine is inconsistent with our own intentional, purposive activity and striving--something which the N.I.C.E. is not immune from either. Belbury's existence constituted that "grave danger hanging over the human race" that Ransom speaks of (p. 137). To achieve its goal of world domination it was ready and willing to employ any means--including murder. Their continual striving is evident throughout the novel as they seek to keep Mark on board, enlist Jane's talents, and discover Merlin's tomb. In their free time their subordinate activities include ghastly experiments, massive construction projects, the manipulation of the press, and the courting of influential figures to further their cause--while denying that teleology exists in nature or in man's life. This inconsistency is masked by disguising the tendentious character of their utterances with unctuous double talk about the struggle between obscurantism and order (p. 45). That knowledge can be teleological is evident by their incessant ruminations over the best strategies to retain Mark's confidence or unlock the arsenal of powers supposedly possessed by the tramp.

Though any notion of transcendent finality would be heretical to the naturalist view (because it would conflict with its atheism), the Belbury people are forever emitting religious locutions: "Oh my God," squeaks Curry; "good Heavens," cries Filostrato; "Hell's bells," growls Fairy; and

"God bless my Soul," croaks Wither. Here Lewis chides the modern theorists--it's almost impossible to strictly abide by naturalistic axioms.

One of the major themes of the book is the question of human freedom and free will--which naturalism denies. Nevertheless the N.I.C.E. potentates are perpetually and mortally threatened by any expression of independent thought or action. One recalls Fairy's timeless advice to Mark as she gnaws on her cheroot: "The great thing is to do what you're told" (p. 118). Failure to follow this advice can come in the form of unsettling reprimands as the unfortunate Mr. Stone found out. The displeased deputy director informed him that "anything remotely resembling inquisitiveness on your part might have the most disastrous consequences" (p. 309). It becomes clear that it is far easier to deny human free will in theory than it is to suppress it in reality. It has to be recognized and dealt with appropriately. Non-recognition would be suicidal. Lewis here highlights our common experience of making and carrying out deliberate and sometimes difficult choices and of being responsible for at least some of our actions.

The novel also contains illustrations of self-referential and logical inconsistencies, which further undermine naturalism's credibility in Lewis' opinion. Lewis writes in Miracles that "Reason is given before Nature and on Reason our concept of Nature depends."<sup>16</sup> However, according to naturalist theory reason has its source in nature and in our

physical processes. But obviously physical processes cannot be true or false, correct or incorrect, valid or invalid. On what basis then could one adduce the credibility of naturalism? Lewis' main point here is that if reason is not valid then science cannot be valid either. But according to its charter the N.I.C.E. depends upon the fusion of the state with science. By exploiting the latest scientific discoveries it intends to "re-make" the human race. One of its more dreadful schemes involves the reduction of the physical aspect of people in order to make their "brains live with less and less body" (p. 211). But in their view the physical body is precisely what endows the brain with the capacity for conceptual thought. They might posit the theory of determinism as a kind of demurrer, but theories are constructed out of rational considerations not by antecedent conditions. Hence, if determinism were true, all theories (including determinism and naturalism) would be impossible.

The dialogue which takes place within Belbury invariably reflects this sort of confused thought. A salient example of this occurs when Wither gently corrects Mark's misconceptions about Fairy Hardcastle's "technique":

There are necessarily certain spheres--not sharply defined, or course, but inevitably revealing themselves in response to the environment and obedience to the indwelling ethos or dialectic of the



whole--in which a confidence that involved the verbal interchange of facts would--er--would defeat its own end. (p. 255)

Evidently the notion of truth should not be allowed to intrude into any discussion. A not unpalatable axiom for Mark whose education has conditioned him to believe that there are two views on everything. The N.I.C.E., however, is very selective in its receptiveness to more than one point of view--organized religion, for example, is viewed as being nothing more than a primitive lie, designed to inhibit humanity from realizing its full potential. Nevertheless, for them it continues to be a formidable opponent. And so it becomes necessary for Mark to repudiate any subconscious allegiance to it by stomping on a crucifix. Mark correctly reasons (using the naturalist theory of subjectivity) that such an act would be wholly gratuitous, before realizing that he has experienced ideas whose origin is not to be found inside his own body.

Finally, Lewis reveals the inconsistency between the dogmas of naturalism and its rhetoric and polemics. The frequent references made concerning "compassion" for humanity, the necessity of taking control of its destiny, and the desirability of "emancipating" it from the fetters of oppressive guilt are transparently cynical given the true nature and goals of the N.I.C.E. One need only recall Feverstone's contempt for his fellow drivers and the pedestrians while pontificating on his "concern" for humanity.

Or Jules, the literary pointman for the Belbury agenda, soliciting for the "rehabilitation" of retrogressive types and a new sexual openness. Clearly such shibboleths as the freedom and dignity of humankind and the obligation to contribute to (or at least not hinder) human progress have no legitimacy whatever under the doctrine of naturalism--even at its humanist best.

This apparent concern is strictly a sham if naturalism is true because according to that theory, persons are not individuals--possessing no substantial unity, much less a spiritual identity. Furthermore, they do not possess any freedom for this kind of humanism to defend, since every human's actions are fully determined. It is absurd for the naturalist to moralize about the rights of persons, their freedom and dignity, or their moral obligations.

In addition to the inconsistencies of naturalism Lewis also abhorred its moral implications. If it is true that humanity adapts its morality to his general conception of the universe it is clear that modern morality will be drastically different from that of the past. Lewis felt that because the modern person lacks an awareness of the natural moral order he or she becomes guilty of the sin of cosmic impiety, that is to say, of aspiring to a position in the universe which his or her status does not warrant. By rejecting all appeal to transcendence humanity accepts no model outside the human condition. Thus, in the words of Mircea Eliade,

Man makes himself, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god.<sup>17</sup>

But Lewis also believed that the accomplishment of this goal must entail the stifling of man's deepest intuitions about himself. The most integral component of humanity's self-definition--their dependency on God--must therefore be eradicated: hence, Professor Frost's endless chatter about the person becoming God and the necessity of Mark's repudiation of Christianity, even though he does not espouse it. The rejection of a creating and sustaining God, according to Philosopher Thomas Molnar, leaves "the door wide open to any substitute even if it is absurd or inhuman, but one not requiring of man to recognize a supreme and personal being."<sup>18</sup>

Lewis portrays the desacralization of nature in several scenes in the novel; for example, Filostrato's desire for a world of "perfect purity." In his view the dignity of people is affronted by "birth and breeding and death" (p. 212). By seeing these natural phenomena as unhygienic, he manages to turn human nature inside out. The New Man according to his model would be an artificial man, free from nature. Other incidents of the propensity to desacralize nature can be seen in the Institute's defilement of the

River Wynd and the conversion of the river terrace into a dump. The levelling of Cure Hardy and the smashing of stained glass all serve as metaphors for the Institute's obsession to crush the creative and spiritual essence of the world around them, in the name of secular progress. Once nature has been totally subjugated and desacralized humankind can get on with the business of achieving its own destiny.

To be sure (in the naturalist's view) there are certain aspects about humanity which are not particularly commendable--his origin (the results of blind force, chance, and emergence); his essence (basically inorganic matter); and the source of his behavior (wholly determined by the system). Nonetheless he still occupies the highest level of existence, the pinnacle of the universe. Obviously it becomes necessary for some kind of order to be imposed on the world, and this is when the Institute's doctrine of "man taking charge of man" enters the picture. A system of values must be created to justify whatever destiny they have in mind for the masses, and those values will be reflected in the various policies that are designed and implemented (either by consensus or by force). This is where Mark's talents come in handy--to manipulate public opinion. If that proves to be ineffectual then Fairy Hardcastle is waiting in the wings with her shock troops.

The individual person is caught somewhere in the middle of great expectancy and disillusionment. Lewis firmly

believed that the latter condition would ultimately prevail because mankind has only been deceived by the promises of progress. He would not deny for a second the astonishing scientific and material progress that has been made; but he knew that those advances alone would never satisfy man's deepest yearnings. They would, in the end, only render them more opaque. Adherence to the naturalist's doctrine of value founded on instinct further implies that those instincts can and should be gratified by society's material largesse. Consequently, we witness the spectacle of man submerging himself in titanic self-gratification and glorification.

One unmistakable inference that can be drawn from That Hideous Strength is that Lewis believed that the tenets of naturalism saturate the institutions of Western Society. The effects of this condition, in his view, are both subtly and overtly pernicious. Primarily they tend to have a levelling effect on society, inducing an "I'm as good as you are" syndrome. Mass education, of which Mark was a product, dictates certain "approved" ways of looking at things. Lewis charges in The Abolition of Man that its principal targets are traditional moral values and cultivated sentiment: thus duty, courage, patriotism, chastity, and shame all come under attack. Curiously, however, the carefully selected values of naturalism are immune from the debunking process. Values are no longer based on moral rightness but on utilitarian and pragmatic considerations. Nations, classes, races, and civilizations are deemed more important

than individual persons because "the individual may live only seventy odd years, but the group may last for centuries."<sup>19</sup> Education accommodates this doctrine with its underlying principle that man should be "cut out into some fresh shape at the will (which must, by hypothesis, be an arbitrary will) of some few lucky people in one lucky generation which has learned how to do it."<sup>20</sup>

The novel also implies that the success of the naturalist's campaign depends on its advocates occupying strategic positions in society, who all work in unison whether consciously or not. Selected psychologists, social scientists, lawyers, and journalists are all officially sanctioned to effect a cure for a society viewed as a sick patient: Filostrato, Mark, Straik, and Jules endeavor to apply the latest scientific techniques to social problems, and society, itself, assumes a passive role with the proliferation of expertise. Lewis particularly indicts psychology and sociology for their doctrines of repressions and inhibitions, and their lack of sensitivity to human persons. He felt that applied psychology engenders "the notion that the sense of shame is a dangerous and mischievous thing,"<sup>21</sup> and consequently discards the reality of sin and further distorts any sense of objective value. If psychology undermines the belief in objective value then those who hold objective values are mistaken and their belief has been irrational--the belief that some courses of action are better than others; that good cannot be equated with what people happen to

approve of; and that if good is equated simply with desire then people are less likely to perform their duty (particularly if it is disagreeable). Religion is then further discredited. Dr. Paul Vitz, himself a psychologist, remarked that "religion is treated as a pathetic anachronism" in most psychology circles, and that "people holding traditional religious views are considered fascist--authoritarian types."<sup>22</sup> Moral scruples can be dismissed as residue from a guilt-ridden childhood and conscience, generally, in the words of Professor Frost, "a hostile organism."

The reality today of Lewis' characterization can be seen clearly in the words of C. B. Chisholm, one of the founders of the World Health Organization, as quoted by Christopher Lasch. The sentiment is very similar to Filostrato's. What is needed Chisholm said

is the re-interpretation and eventual eradication of the concept of right and wrong, which has been the basis of child training; the substitution of intelligent and rational thinking for faith in the certainties of old people--these ought to become the goals of psychotherapy and of a psychiatrically oriented program of education. Only in this way could mental hygiene free the race from its crippling burden of good and evil.<sup>23</sup>

I use this example to illustrate Lewis' contempt for the pretensions of the State to be any more than a necessary

evil; and it is difficult to talk about Lewis apart from his conclusions. He was also infuriated at the habit of social deference toward the intellectual classes that allowed notions such as this one to hover in the air almost unchallenged, and, in time, unnoticed.

He also attacks sociologists and other ideologues who are concentrated into quasi-feudal power centers: the media, cultural pressure groups, etc. Mark, a sociologist, has acquired "no exact knowledge," and his education "had had the curious effect of making things that he read and wrote more real to him than things he saw" (p. 104). He was conditioned to see persons in the abstract terms of statistical data, preferring classes, populations, and vocational groups to individual, concrete men and women. The amorphous nature of his profession allows him the flexibility to write newspaper articles in defense of the Institute's public policies--a further insinuation that Lewis believed the proponents of modernism to be essentially identical. Their cynicism and hypocrisy Lewis exposes by having Mark manufacture "copy" in advance of the events themselves--a not very subtle indictment of the media.

The ministers of culture get their licks too. Lewis portrays them as unwitting dupes for the real evil that lies behind the naturalist's doctrine. Jules, a popular science fiction writer and influential social theorist (supposedly representing H. G. Wells), embraces the ideals of the Institute, blind to the fact that he is a mere quisling in its



eyes. He bores them with his (by now) conventional clamoring for a more "open" and "humane" morality. His brand of cerebral strategy, along with Mark's, has only limited success, because the townspeople eventually erupt in violence, illustrating Ortega y Gasset's observation "the empty space left by the absence of public opinion is filled by brute force."<sup>24</sup> This insight is borne out in the novel as Fairy's goons descend on the village and beat the people into submission. For Lewis this is the inevitable fate of modern man if the naturalist's worldview prevails. In the novel those who refuse submission are labelled as fanatics, fascist, obstructionists, and die-hards. Later they are apprehended for "treatment." An appraisal of the Institute's derisive fury indicates that it is directed at something which they recognize as good and morally elevated. It is a form of resentment, which, according to Professor James Hitchcock, "is ultimately directed at the fact of morality itself, an authority outside the self by which the self is judged and, virtually always, found wanting."<sup>25</sup>

The subject of resentment brings me to Lewis' final critique of naturalism, which concerns the types of persons who are produced in a society drenched in its dogmas. Mark and Jane Studdock are representative individuals. In terms of the story, all of their flaws and anxieties are inextricably bound with their denial or non-recognition of the ultimate reality and ground of their existence, namely, God. Perhaps their most basic fault is their inadequate response

to commitment to each other. Both view their marriage with a certain degree of detachment and regard each other with cool affection bordering on outright disdain. Ostensibly they married for love but the "feeling" quickly dissipated. Jane is bored and preoccupied with herself--though precisely what she wishes to do with her life is unclear. Nevertheless, any notion of rearing a family is out of the question. The two of them spend remarkably little time together, primarily because Mark is too busy ingratiating himself into the Progressive Element at Bracton and the Inner Ring at Belbury. He thinks of Jane only fleetingly and even then with a certain degree of ambivalence. There is no real bond in their marriage--which becomes self-evident as Jane flees to St. Anne's and Mark retires to the N.I.C.E. The break-up is beneficial, however, in that it helps them both establish their identity.

Explicit in Lewis' work is the idea that one of the worst things that can happen to a person--the most basic form of failure--is to not be himself. But to achieve self-knowledge requires a courageous act of the will. Self-deception, then, is a case of willed ignorance, due in large part to fear. Fear is the dominant emotion expressed by Mark throughout the novel, and is the efficient cause of Jane's surrender to the Company. Lewis attributes this kind of existential fear to the pervasive scepticism that has attacked and destroyed not merely the outward forms of the religious spirit, but the very essence of that spirit--belief

in a meaningful and purposeful world. In such a world the predictable human response is that of detached cynicism, resentment, and envy.

Both Mark and Jane respond to the Dimbles in this way. Mark cannot bear the accurate assessment made of him by Mr. Dimble, while Jane is outraged by Mother Dimble's "treating her like a child," and also by her piety. Mark's particular form of resentment, writes Hitchcock, is an example of "denying one's own moral culpability by calling attention to that of others, particularly one's accusers."<sup>26</sup> Jane's feelings of envy, malice, and resentment exemplify those "directed by the weak and impotent against those who appear nobler, and certainly more privileged, than themselves."<sup>27</sup> Later Jane re-evaluates her feelings and discovers that in truth the Dimbles "were the kind of people she liked" (p. 135). By casting aside her self-consciousness she was able to realize her own beauty, talents, and tastes. By the end of the novel she has progressed from a jittery, suspicious young girl, to a poised and competent young woman with a mature and realistic outlook on the world. The Company succeeds in providing a context for her life that she had previously lacked. She has claimed victory over "self."

Mark does not come around as quickly, but he has further to go. Though superficially successful, Mark wallows in self-pity and self-deception. He craves approval like a child and is willing to compromise any belief in order to gain admittance into the coteries at Bracton and Belbury.

By his relentless calculating he is programmed for disillusionment. Only after he has been repeatedly threatened and humiliated by Wither, Frost, and Fairy, realized the depth of their depravity, and resigned himself to the immanence of death, does he discover his own individual, incalculable worth.

In this paper I have tried to show why C. S. Lewis found naturalism and its components to be intellectually barren and morally repugnant. He perceived its orthodoxies becoming more and more prevalent in modern society. That Hideous Strength imaginatively catalogues the forms of abuse that he felt would result from its complete domination of society. Because he profoundly disagreed with the desired ends of modern thought it is only to be expected that he would dispute the means of attaining them.

For Lewis the purpose of man is simple: to love God and to love his fellow man. He insists on adherence to the moral law and the values which emanate from it: living our lives authentically in conformity with God's will and with a deep awareness of the universe as God's creature--imbued with his spiritual Goodness, Beauty, and Truth.

He calls for revitalizing the spiritual depth inherent in love, marriage, family, and friendships; recapturing the satisfaction of meaningful work and the respite that can be experienced all around us in God's work of art. Perhaps living more simply and less pretentiously. But most painful of all--returning to God the love and respect which is due

Him--and surrendering our will to His. We must, according to Lewis, at all costs avoid the judgment found in Paul's letter to the Romans I:20-23:

for they are without excuse, seeing that creation, although they knew God they did not glorify him as God or give thanks, but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless minds have been darkened. For while professing to be wise, they have become fools, and they have changed the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man.<sup>28</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Miracles (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 23.
- <sup>2</sup> The Revolt of the Masses (N.Y.: Norton, 1932), p. 115.
- <sup>3</sup> A Critique of Logical Positivism (London: Victor Gallanez, 1950), p. 27.
- <sup>4</sup> Man Against Mass Society (South Bend: Gateway, 1972), p. 37.
- <sup>5</sup> This view is held today by many philosophers who are concerned with metaphysical questions, including Professor David Denz, my philosophy teacher, who has given several lectures recently on the current condition of philosophy.
- <sup>6</sup> Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (N.Y.: Harcourt, 1966), p. 80.
- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, Charles Moorman, "Spaceship and Grail: The Myth of C. S. Lewis," College English 18 (May 1957), p. 402; W. D. Norwood, "Unifying Themes in C. S. Lewis' Trilogy," Critique IX (1967), p. 68; D. H. Stewart, "What Lewis Really Did in That Hideous Strength," Modern Fiction Studies 26 (1981), p. 254; Martha C. Sammons, A Guide Through C. S. Lewis' Space Trilogy (Westchester: Cornerstone, 1980), p. 74; William Luther White, The Image

of Man in C. S. Lewis (N.Y.: Abingdon, 1969), p. 103; and Leonard Bacon, "Confusion Goes to College," Saturday Review, May 25, 1946, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-ups (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1965), p. 241. All further page-references to this book will be noted parenthetically within the text.

<sup>9</sup> A Critique of Logical Positivism, pp. 72-3.

<sup>10</sup> The Abolition of Man (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1955), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," Christian Reflections, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Miracles, pp. 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Miracles, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> "Man Against Darkness," The Atlantic Monthly (Sept. 1948), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> For my understanding of the inconsistencies inherent in naturalism I am indebted to my metaphysics teacher, Mr. Gil Ring, who lectured extensively on the subject.

<sup>16</sup> Miracles, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard R. Trask (N.Y.: Harcourt, 1959), p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> Theists and Atheists: A Typology of Non-Belief (N.Y.: Mouton, 1980), p. 88.

- <sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 109-110.
- <sup>20</sup> The Abolition of Man, p. 85.
- <sup>21</sup> The Problem of Pain (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1962), p. 56.
- <sup>22</sup> Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 11.
- <sup>23</sup> Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1979), p. 99.
- <sup>24</sup> The Revolt of the Masses, p. 17.
- <sup>25</sup> "Guilt and the Moral Revolution," The Human Life Review, 7 (Fall, 1981), 83.
- <sup>26</sup> "Guilt and the Moral Revolution," p. 80.
- <sup>27</sup> "Guilt and the Moral Revolution," p. 81.
- <sup>28</sup> Quoted from the King James Version of the Bible.



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