

cs lewis abolition of man

The Enduring Relevance of C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man"

In a world increasingly grappling with the erosion of objective truth and the rise of relativism, the prescient insights of C.S. Lewis in "The Abolition of Man" resonate with unparalleled urgency. This seminal work, originally delivered as a series of lectures in 1943, offers a profound critique of modern educational philosophies and their potential to fundamentally alter human nature, leading to a terrifying future where humanity becomes its own destroyer. Lewis argues that the rejection of universal moral truths, the very "Tao" or Natural Law, leads to a society governed by the will of the powerful, devoid of inherent meaning or value. This article will delve into the core arguments of "The Abolition of Man," exploring Lewis's definition of the Tao, his critique of "men without chests," and the chilling implications of his vision for the future of humanity, demonstrating why C.S. Lewis and the abolition of man remain critically important topics for contemporary discussion.

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Understanding C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man"

C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man" is not merely a philosophical treatise; it is a profound warning. Lewis, a renowned scholar, theologian, and author, penned this work as a response to the prevailing

trends in educational and philosophical thought of his time, which he saw as dangerously undermining the foundations of morality and human dignity. The core of his argument lies in the recognition that a shared, objective moral framework is essential for the survival and flourishing of humanity. Without it, Lewis contends, we risk a future where human beings are engineered, controlled, and ultimately stripped of their very humanity, becoming mere instruments of power.

The book is divided into three essays, each building upon the previous to construct a compelling case against a worldview that discards universal moral truths. Lewis meticulously examines how certain educational practices, particularly those that instill radical subjectivism and relativism, can lead to the "abolition of man" – the eradication of our innate moral compass and the capacity for genuine human judgment. The keywords "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" are central to understanding his critique of a society that willingly abandons its moral inheritance.

The Foundation of Morality: C.S. Lewis and the Tao

Defining the Tao: Universal Moral Intuition

At the heart of Lewis's argument in "The Abolition of Man" lies his concept of the "Tao." This term, borrowed from Chinese philosophy, refers to the objective, inherent moral order of the universe, the fundamental truths about right and wrong that are intuitively understood by all healthy-minded people, regardless of culture or historical period. Lewis asserts that the Tao is not a religious doctrine, but a recognition of universal moral laws that are discoverable through reason and conscience.

He illustrates the Tao through numerous examples drawn from diverse cultures and historical eras, demonstrating a remarkable consensus on basic moral principles. These include the importance of justice, kindness, honesty, courage, and the condemnation of cruelty, treachery, and injustice. For Lewis, these shared moral sentiments are not mere social conventions but reflections of a deeper, objective reality. The keywords "C.S. Lewis Tao" are crucial for grasping this foundational element of his philosophy.

The Universal Consent of Mankind

Lewis emphasizes that the Tao is not imposed by any single authority but is rather the "universal consent of mankind." This consent is evident in the common moral judgments we make, the stories we tell, and the way we react to injustice. Even those who claim to reject objective morality often do so in ways that betray their underlying adherence to it. For instance, a radical relativist who claims "there are no absolute truths" may still protest vehemently against a perceived injustice, implicitly appealing to a standard of right and wrong.

This universal moral intuition, for Lewis, serves as the bedrock of all ethical systems and the very definition of what it means to be human. Any attempt to dismantle this foundation, he warns, will inevitably lead to the erosion of human values and the potential for a far more sinister form of

control. The discussion of "universal consent" directly supports the central theme of C.S. Lewis and the abolition of man.

Critiquing the Modern Educational System: The Dangers of Relativism

The Rejection of Objective Values in Education

Lewis directs significant criticism towards the prevailing educational philosophies of his era, which he observed were increasingly promoting radical subjectivism and moral relativism. He saw a dangerous trend where education was moving away from instilling a shared understanding of moral truths and instead fostering a mindset where all values are seen as arbitrary, personal preferences. This, Lewis argued, was a direct assault on the Tao.

He explains how the modern educational system, in its attempt to liberate students from what it perceives as outdated moral dogma, inadvertently strips them of the very tools needed to make sound moral judgments. By teaching that all values are relative, education can lead to a state where students are unable to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation and ultimately unprepared for the responsibilities of citizenship and moral agency.

The Role of "Conditioning" in Education

A key concern for Lewis is the shift from education as the cultivation of virtue and reason to education as "conditioning." He uses the example of English teachers who, in an effort to teach students how to appreciate poetry, focus on the emotions evoked by the poem rather than its intrinsic qualities or its place within a tradition of literary excellence. This, for Lewis, is akin to teaching a student to appreciate the taste of a strawberry without explaining what a strawberry is.

This conditioning, Lewis fears, produces individuals who are skilled at manipulating feelings and impressions but lack genuine understanding or moral discernment. These "conditioned" individuals are thus more susceptible to the influence of those who hold power, as they lack the internal framework to resist or critically evaluate persuasive narratives. This aspect of his critique is vital to understanding the "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" argument regarding manufactured consent.

Men Without Chests: The Loss of Objective Value

The "Chest" as the Seat of Moral Affections

Lewis famously uses the metaphor of the "chest" to represent the seat of our moral affections and our capacity for reason and judgment. The "chest" is where we feel admiration for virtue, indignation at vice, and where our emotions align with what is objectively good. It is the faculty that allows us to respond appropriately to moral truths, to feel what we ought to feel.

In "The Abolition of Man," Lewis argues that the modern educational and philosophical trends are creating "men without chests." These are individuals who have been trained to disassociate their emotions from their intellect, to view moral feelings as mere subjective reactions rather than responses to objective reality. Such individuals are incapable of genuine moral understanding or commitment, as their emotional responses are either suppressed or manipulated.

The Consequences of Emotional Detachment

The consequence of being "men without chests" is profound. Without the guidance of well-ordered affections, these individuals become susceptible to the will of others, particularly those who understand how to manipulate emotions. They are unable to feel disgust at cruelty or admiration for nobility, rendering them passive and compliant. Lewis paints a chilling picture of a future society populated by such individuals, devoid of the very qualities that make us truly human.

The "abolition of man," in this context, is not a literal physical annihilation but a spiritual and moral one. It is the reduction of humanity to a state of being utterly controllable, where our deepest instincts and affections are neutralized or perverted. This is a central and deeply unsettling theme in C.S. Lewis's exploration of the abolition of man.

The Power of the Innovators: Controlling Humanity

The Rise of the "Innovators"

Lewis identifies a group he calls the "Innovators." These are individuals who, having themselves embraced a relativistic worldview and divested themselves of the Tao, gain power over those who remain subject to it. Because the Innovators no longer believe in any objective moral law, they are free to do whatever they please with the external world and with other people, including the fundamental alteration of human nature itself.

The Innovators, in Lewis's view, are not necessarily malicious in the traditional sense. They may genuinely believe they are improving humanity by removing what they see as outdated moral constraints. However, their actions are driven by a god-like ambition to reshape humanity according to their own designs, a dangerous ambition that stems from their rejection of the very laws they seek to transcend.

The Control of Nature and Human Nature

Lewis's most startling prophecy concerns the Innovators' ability to control not just the external environment but human nature itself. By understanding the mechanisms of psychology and behavior, and by conditioning future generations from birth, they can effectively engineer humans to conform to their desired societal norms. This control extends to manipulating desires, beliefs, and even the very capacity for moral judgment.

This is the ultimate "abolition of man." It is a future where humanity is no longer guided by divine or natural law but by the will of a select few "experts" or "scientists" who have effectively become gods. The keywords "C.S. Lewis control of human nature" highlight this most disturbing aspect of his thesis.

The Abolition of Man: A Chilling Prophecy

The Process of Dehumanization

Lewis's prophecy of the "abolition of man" is a gradual process of dehumanization. It begins with the subtle erosion of moral absolutes in education, progresses to the creation of "men without chests," and culminates in the absolute control of human nature by a powerful elite. Each stage removes a layer of what makes us essentially human, leaving behind a more pliable and less resistant creature.

The chilling aspect of Lewis's argument is its plausibility. He does not describe a fantastical future but extrapolates from trends already visible in his own time. The book serves as a stark warning against complacency in the face of intellectual and cultural shifts that undermine our moral foundations. The repeated emphasis on "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" underscores the gravity of his prediction.

The Loss of True Freedom

Ultimately, the abolition of man is the abolition of true freedom. When human nature is engineered and controlled, the capacity for genuine choice and moral responsibility is extinguished. The "freedom" that remains is merely the freedom to conform to the predetermined path set by the Innovators. Lewis argues that this is not freedom at all, but a sophisticated form of slavery.

The true tragedy, for Lewis, is that in their pursuit of a supposedly rational and ordered society, the Innovators destroy the very essence of what it means to be a person. They create a world that is efficient and controlled but devoid of love, beauty, and the spontaneous goodness that flows from adherence to the Tao. This profound loss is central to the message of "The Abolition of Man."

The Last Sorts: Humanity's Last Stand

The Conditioned vs. The Natural Man

Lewis contrasts the "conditioned" men produced by the Innovators with the "natural" man who still adheres to the Tao. The conditioned man, having had his moral affections systematically dismantled, is unable to understand or appreciate the value of the natural man's inner moral compass. He sees the natural man's moral judgments as mere arbitrary preferences, just as his own are.

This creates a fundamental divide. The conditioned man, controlled by the Innovators, sees the natural man as an anachronism, a relic of a past that has been overcome. He is unable to engage with the natural man on the level of shared moral truth because that level has been deliberately erased from his own consciousness. This scenario highlights the deep chasm created by the "abolition of man."

The Final Power Grab

The climax of Lewis's argument is the final power grab by the Innovators. Having created a generation of men without chests, they then use their control over human nature to impose their will absolutely. They become the "gods" of their own creation, determining what is good, true, and beautiful for all time. This is the ultimate and terrifying consequence of abandoning the Tao.

Lewis suggests that in this final state, there are no longer any men who can effectively oppose the Innovators because the very capacity for resistance has been engineered out of humanity. The "abolition of man" is complete when humanity itself becomes the passive recipient of whatever the ruling powers decree. The persistent reference to "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" emphasizes this ultimate subjugation.

Reclaiming the Tao: Solutions and Hope

The Importance of Education in Moral Formation

While Lewis is critical of modern educational trends, he does not despair. He firmly believes that education has a crucial role to play in the formation of virtuous individuals. The solution, for Lewis, lies in returning to an education that recognizes and instills the Tao – that cultivates not just knowledge but also wisdom, character, and the proper ordering of affections.

He advocates for an education that teaches students to discern between good and evil, to appreciate beauty and truth, and to develop the moral courage to act on those principles. This requires a re-emphasis on classical education, the study of great literature, and a commitment to transmitting

universal moral values from one generation to the next. The hope lies in a renewed understanding of "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" as a call to action.

Preserving and Transmitting Moral Truths

Lewis's work is an impassioned plea to preserve and transmit the moral truths that have guided humanity for millennia. He encourages individuals to recognize the value of the Tao in their own lives and to actively resist the forces that seek to erode it. This involves critical thinking, a commitment to objective truth, and a willingness to engage in moral discourse based on shared principles.

The ultimate message of "The Abolition of Man" is one of profound hope, provided we heed its warnings. By understanding Lewis's critique and recommitting ourselves to the foundational truths of morality, we can prevent the dystopian future he so vividly describes and ensure that humanity remains, in its true and noble sense, human. The keywords "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" serve as a reminder of the vital task of safeguarding our shared moral inheritance.

The Enduring Legacy of C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man"

C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man" remains a cornerstone of moral and philosophical thought, its relevance only increasing in our increasingly complex and often morally ambiguous world. Lewis's prescient analysis of how relativism and subjectivism can lead to the systematic dismantling of human nature offers a critical lens through which to examine contemporary educational, political, and social trends. His identification of the "Tao" as the bedrock of universal morality provides a powerful counterpoint to prevailing trends that seek to reduce all value to mere personal opinion or social construct.

The concept of "men without chests" serves as a potent metaphor for the dangers of emotional detachment and the potential for manipulation when our innate moral affections are suppressed or disregarded. Furthermore, Lewis's warning about the "Innovators" and their potential to control human nature through sophisticated conditioning techniques is a chilling prophecy that demands our serious consideration in an age of advancing bio-technology and pervasive digital influence. The keywords "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" continue to be vital in understanding his enduring contribution to discussions on human dignity, morality, and the future of civilization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, C.S. Lewis's "The Abolition of Man" is a vital and enduring work that serves as a crucial bulwark against the tide of moral relativism and the potential for the dehumanization of humanity. By articulating the concept of the Tao, critiquing educational trends that foster "men without chests," and exposing the dangers of those who seek to control human nature, Lewis

provides a powerful framework for understanding and resisting forces that threaten our very essence. The persistent relevance of "C.S. Lewis abolition of man" underscores the timeless importance of upholding objective moral truths and cultivating virtuous citizens capable of discerning right from wrong. The book is not merely a warning but a call to action, urging us to reclaim our moral inheritance and safeguard the future of what it truly means to be human.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central argument C.S. Lewis makes in 'The Abolition of Man'?

Lewis's central argument is a warning against a specific type of educational and philosophical trend he calls 'The Abolition of Man.' This trend, he argues, seeks to remove objective morality and human nature from education, ultimately leading to the dehumanization and control of humanity by a 'new man' who is devoid of natural sentiment and objective values.

What are the 'three addresses' that make up 'The Abolition of Man'?

'The Abolition of Man' is composed of three distinct essays or addresses: 'Men Without Chests,' 'The Unscientific Naturalism,' and 'The Abolition of Man.' Each addresses a different facet of the perceived intellectual and moral decay Lewis was critiquing.

What does Lewis mean by 'Men Without Chests'?

In 'Men Without Chests,' Lewis refers to individuals who have had their 'chests' – their capacity for emotion, sentiment, and moral judgment – surgically removed. These are people who have been conditioned to be intellectually adept but emotionally stunted, unable to access or respond to the natural affections and values that underpin morality.

How does Lewis connect 'The Abolition of Man' to science and scientism?

Lewis critiques 'unscientific naturalism,' which he sees as a consequence of scientism. He argues that when science is elevated to the sole source of truth and meaning, it leads to a reductionist view of reality that ignores or dismisses human values and objective morality. This leaves humanity vulnerable to those who wield scientific knowledge without moral grounding.

What are 'The Tao' according to Lewis in this work?

Lewis uses 'The Tao' (borrowed from Chinese philosophy) to refer to the fundamental, objective, and universally recognized moral principles and values that are common to most cultures and religions throughout history. He argues that these are not mere opinions but are the bedrock of human flourishing.

What is Lewis's concern about the 'new man' who would abolish man?

Lewis's fear is that a future ruled by a 'new man' – a technocratic elite who have been systematically stripped of natural affections and objective moral understanding – would lead to a form of tyranny. This new man would have power over nature and human beings but would lack the wisdom and moral compass to use it for good.

What is the enduring relevance of 'The Abolition of Man' today?

The book remains highly relevant as it addresses ongoing debates about the role of values in education, the influence of scientism, the nature of human dignity, and the potential for technology and ideology to erode essential human qualities. Lewis's critique of relativism and his defense of objective morality resonate with contemporary concerns about cultural fragmentation and the loss of shared values.

Additional Resources

Here is a numbered list of 9 book titles related to C.S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*, with short descriptions:

1. *The Great Divorce*

C.S. Lewis uses a dream-like journey from Hell to Heaven to explore the nature of free will, choice, and the destructive power of pride. The book illustrates how individuals, by clinging to their sins and vices, ultimately alienate themselves from joy and connection. It emphasizes that true freedom lies in choosing love and surrender, rather than self-will.

2. *Mere Christianity*

In this seminal work, Lewis outlines the core doctrines of Christianity in a clear and accessible manner, arguing for a unified, objective moral law. He discusses concepts like natural law, sin, and redemption, demonstrating how Christian beliefs offer a coherent worldview. The book serves as a defense of traditional morality against relativistic viewpoints.

3. *Surprised by Joy*

This autobiography details C.S. Lewis's spiritual and intellectual journey from atheism to Christianity. He reflects on his early life, his encounters with various philosophies, and the role of "joy" or *Sehnsucht* (longing) in his conversion. The narrative highlights the search for something beyond the material world.

4. *The Weight of Glory*

A collection of sermons, this book delves into the profound Christian hope for eternal life and the nature of our present existence. Lewis argues that our deepest desires are reflections of a reality far greater than our current experience. He stresses that embracing suffering and self-denial is essential for experiencing true fulfillment.

5. *Orthodoxy* by G.K. Chesterton

Chesterton's classic philosophical and theological defense of Christianity argues that its seemingly

paradoxical doctrines are in fact the most rational and comprehensive explanation of reality. He contrasts Christian thought with contemporary philosophical trends, showcasing its capacity to make sense of the human condition. The book champions the idea that faith, when truly understood, is a liberation of the mind.

6. A History of Western Philosophy by Bertrand Russell

While a different perspective, Russell's work provides a historical overview of philosophical thought that highlights the evolution of ideas about ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. By examining different philosophical systems, it implicitly shows the foundations upon which Lewis builds his critique of certain modern philosophies that erode objective morality. Understanding these historical currents helps contextualize Lewis's arguments.

7. The Republic by Plato

This foundational text in Western philosophy explores justice, the ideal state, and the nature of knowledge, including the famous Allegory of the Cave. Plato's emphasis on reason and the existence of objective Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, resonates with Lewis's argument for an objective moral order that can be apprehended by the intellect. The pursuit of truth and virtue is central to both works.

8. The Abolition of Man: Notes Towards a Definition of Culture by Roger Scruton

Scruton, a prominent conservative philosopher, engages with the themes of Lewis's work, discussing the importance of tradition, civility, and shared cultural values in maintaining a stable and meaningful society. He argues against relativism and for the preservation of inherited wisdom and aesthetic standards. The book explores how a decline in cultural understanding can lead to a loss of shared moral grounding.

9. Illuminations: Essays and Reflections of Walter Benjamin

This collection offers diverse reflections on art, history, and culture. While Benjamin's own philosophical outlook differs significantly from Lewis's, his critical examination of modernity, technology, and the fragmentation of experience can be seen as a counterpart to Lewis's concern about the dehumanizing effects of certain modern intellectual trends. His analysis of cultural decay offers a different lens on similar societal anxieties.

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