

MEN WITHOUT CHESTS

So he sent the word to slay
And slew the little childer.

Carol

I DOUBT whether we

THE ABOLITION OF MAN

Dr. Bryan C. Hollon

... language for send... and I owe th... (there were
... At the same ti...

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

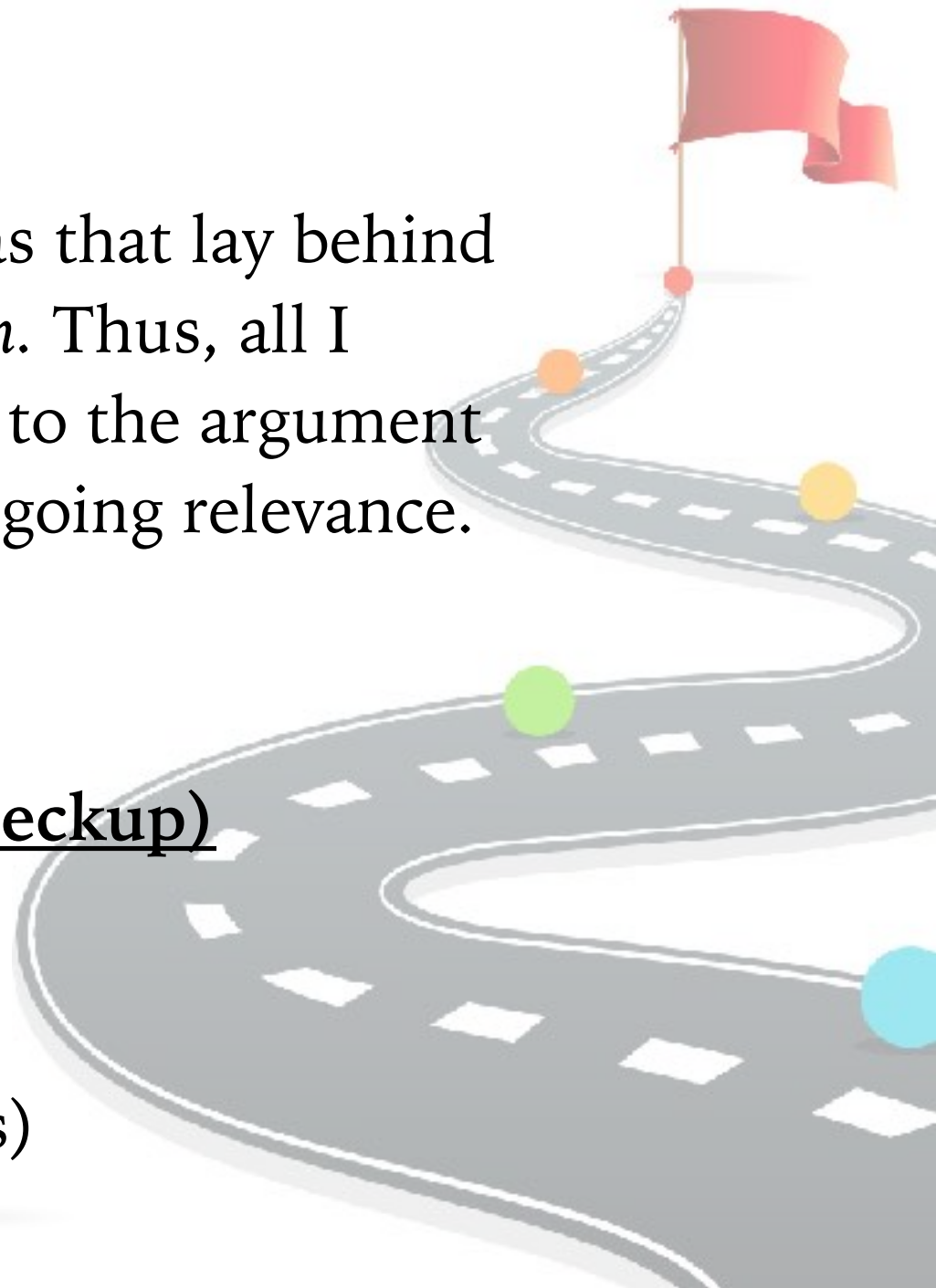
Joel Woodruff asked me to talk about the ideas that lay behind C.S. Lewis's famous book, *The Abolition of Man*. Thus, all I want to do this morning is bring more clarity to the argument itself so that you can better understand its ongoing relevance.

The Chapters

✓ Chapter 1: Men Without Chests (The Checkup)

✓ Chapter 2: The Way (Diagnosis)

✓ Chapter 3: The Abolition of Man (Prognosis)



INTRODUCTION

In Late February of 1943, C.S. Lewis traveled with his brother from Oxford to Durham where he was scheduled to deliver the Riddle Memorial Lectures. His three talks were soon published in a little book, titled *The Abolition of Man*.

The Abolition of Man is now widely considered Lewis's most important non-fiction work.

- ▶ #7 on National Review's top 100 non-fiction works of the 20th century
- ▶ #2 on ISI's (Intercollegiate Studies Institute) top 100 list.
- ▶ Widely praised by members of the Inklings, Lewis scholars, and virtually everyone advocating for classical education today.



INTRODUCTION

Why is this book so widely praised?

- Perhaps because the work truly is prophetic.
- In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis identifies the philosophical sources of relativism with penetrating insight....
- He describes relativism's contradictions with clear and unassailable logic....
- And he warns of what is to come for the society who embraces relativism with frightening accuracy.

The Abolition of Man is a dark book meant to be taken seriously. In Lewis's own estimation, it was his most important non-fiction work.

Nota Bene - Although *The Abolition's* prognosis is very negative, its fictional twin - *That Hideous Strength* - offers a more hopeful outlook as it contrasts the two societies surrounding Belberry and St. Anne's.



THE ABOLITION OF MAN

INTRODUCTION

The Abolition of Man in the Mid-20th century

- ▶ Lewis fought in the Great War (WWI) where more than 20 million were killed
- ▶ And he witnessed WWII where an estimated 60 million were killed
- ▶ He saw the rise of scientism, secularism, communism and fascism, each representing a clear rejection of ancient wisdom and an almost utopian confidence in the future.
- ▶ Lewis lived through, what is indisputably, the most violent century in human history. More people were killed by violent means than in all previous centuries combined.

Lewis was concerned that rapid technological advance was taking place just as the West was rejecting the traditional restraints (objective morality) necessary to keep civilization from destroying itself.



INTRODUCTION

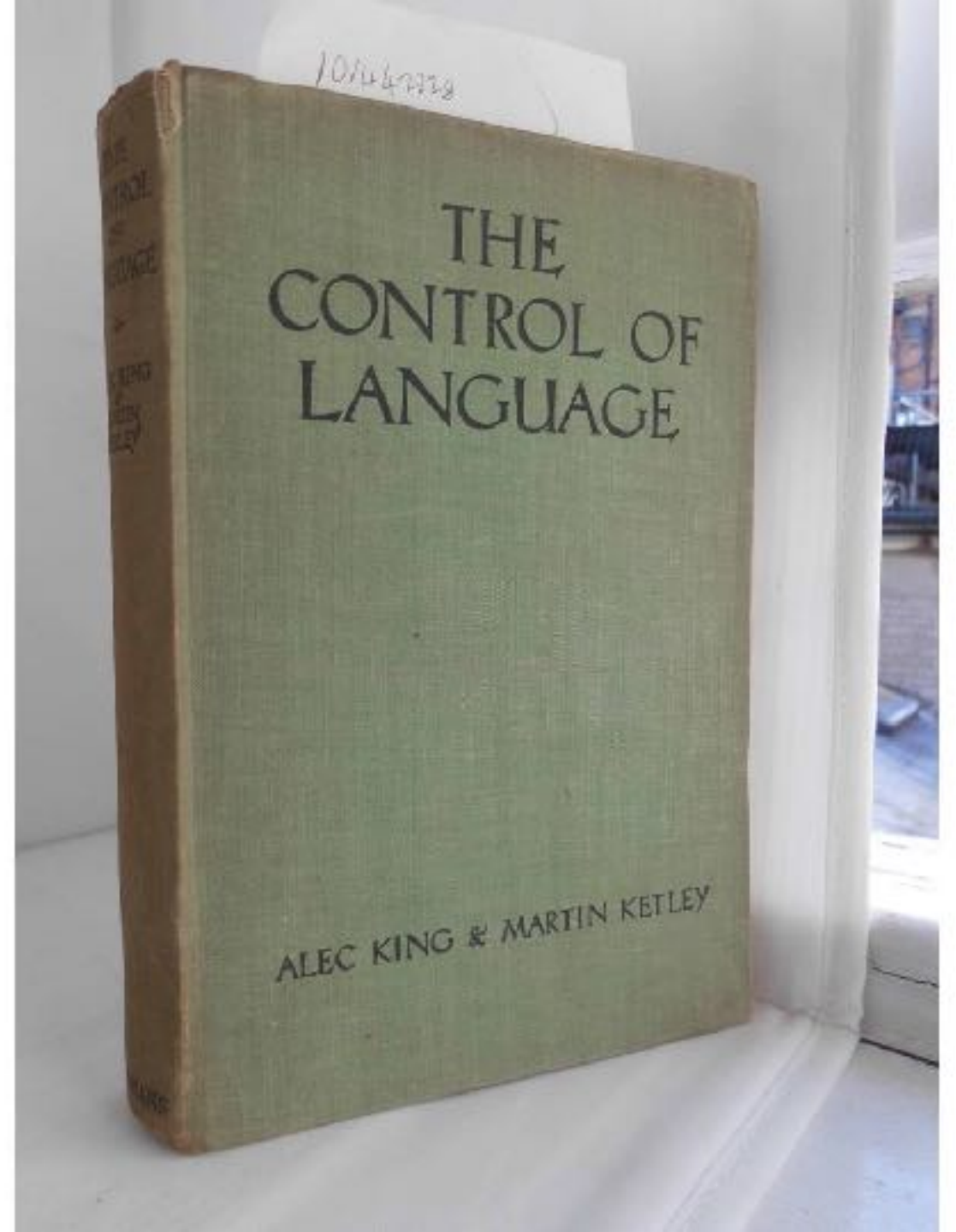
A Summary of Lewis's Argument

- ▶ *The Abolition of Man* is what we can expect when a civilization rejects the reality of objective truth and morality.
- ▶ This Abolition progresses with (1) Man's emancipation from the Tao, (2) the reduction of the Tao to a mere natural product, (3) being supposedly freed from the Tao, certain men will gain the power to subject all other men to their irrational impulses, (4) obedience to these irrational impulses and, finally, and as a result (5) Nature's conquest of man.
- ▶ The outcome of this progression is that what we once called men have been reduced to beasts, motivated by animal instinct, the basest of appetites (for food and pleasure) and the will to survive. (You do You).



WHAT'S UP WITH GAIUS AND TITIUS?

- ▶ “I have chosen as the starting-point for these lectures a little book on english intended for ‘boys and girls in the upper forms of schools.’”
- ▶ “In their second chapter Gaius and Titius quote the well-known story of Coleridge at the waterfall. You remember that there were two tourists present: that one called it ‘sublime’ and the other ‘pretty’; and that Coleridge mentally endorsed the first judgement and rejected the second with disgust. Gaius and Titius comment as follows: ‘When the man said This is sublime, he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall... **Actually... he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings....** This confusion is continually present in language as we use it. We appear to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are only saying something about our own feelings.’” (Abolition, pgs. 1-2)
- ▶ In Lewis’s mind, this distinction is cause for concern - something like a lump found in the breast. It calls for a through examination.



THE FACT/VALUE DISTINCTION

Gaius & Titius have endorsed what philosophers call “the fact-value” distinction....

Which claims that you cannot get an “ought” from an “is,” since we can differentiate:

- Statements of fact, which can be based upon natural or empirical observation... and
- Statements of value, which encompass ethics or aesthetics

From this perspective, questions of objective moral goodness and beauty are relegated to the realm of subjectivity.

We may only use the word “truth” in relation to those matters of fact, which can be proven by empirical methods of observation.



“Beauty is no quality in things, themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.” *David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748)*

THE FACT/VALUE DISTINCTION

Consider the following logic:

1. A mother cannot survive without a transfusion of her son's rare blood type. (what *is*)
2. Most people would agree that, it is only right for the son to help his dying mother. (what *ought* to be)
3. Giving blood involves no risk whatsoever. (what *is*)
4. The son ought to donate blood to his mother. (what *ought* to be)

If we accept the fact/value distinction, then the argument above is deficient, since we cannot claim that the son “ought” to help his mother. This is merely a “subjective” value judgment.

Any sense of “obligation” or “duty” exists only in the mind of the son. There is no universal principle governing the relationship between a mother and son, which determines the goodness or badness of his response.

Are these two s identical

- ★ Torture is immoral.
- ★ Torture is any act by which suffering – whether physical or mental – is intentionally inflicted on a person for the purpose of obtaining information or a confession, punishing a person for an act he or she has committed or is suspected of having committed, or coercing a person, when suffering is inflicted by or a superior, or with the consent or acquiescence of a superior official.

(paraphased Geneva Convention, Part I,

LEWIS' CRITIQUE OF THE FACT/VALUE DISTINCTION AS FOUND IN THE GREEN BOOK

1. Critique 1 - "If This is sublime is to be reduced at all to a statement about the speaker's feelings, the proper translation would be I have humble feelings. **If the view held by Gaius and Titius were consistently applied it would lead to obvious absurdities.**" (Abolition, pg. 3)

Michael Ward writes that if "Gaius and Titus.... really believed that words do nothing more than express people's feelings, they would have to conclude that The Green Book itself is only the expression of their personal feelings" and therefore should not be taken seriously. (After Humanity, pg. 13).

2. Critique 2 - "The schoolboy who reads this passage in The Green Book will believe two propositions: firstly, that all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, and secondly, **that all such statements are unimportant.**" (Abolition, pg. 4)

"What he will learn quickly enough, and perhaps indelibly, is the belief that all emotions aroused by local association are in themselves contrary to reason and contemptible." (Abolition, pg. 8-9)

***Consider This:** should we love our families, homes, neighborhoods, cities, countries? Should we love our pets? Is there a right way to love them, and a wrong way? Should people be trained to love them in the right way? How might we discern what is the right way to love, and how that love should be taught or trained?*

***Consider This:** Do our educational and other institutions attempt to train affections? Do they teach values? How are those values discovered and justified? What makes them truly correspondent to the reality of things?*

LEWIS' CRITIQUE OF THE FACT/VALUE DISTINCTION

3. Critique 3 - Though the schoolboy has been taught that feelings are unimportant, he will still have feelings. However, he will have missed an opportunity to have those feelings properly trained and ordered.

“Some pleasure in their own ponies and dogs they will have lost; some incentive to cruelty or neglect they will have received.” (Abolition, pg. 11)

4. Critique 4 - Gaius and Titius are not making a literary argument at all. They are making a bad philosophical argument.

“I must, for the moment, content myself with pointing out that it [Gaius and Titius’ argument] is a philosophical and not a literary position.” (Abolition, pg. 12)

“They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda — they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental — and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.” (Abolition, pg. 13)

In other words, the goal of education should not be so-called “critical thinking” but sound reasoning, which will always entail the proper ordering of intellect, affections and will.

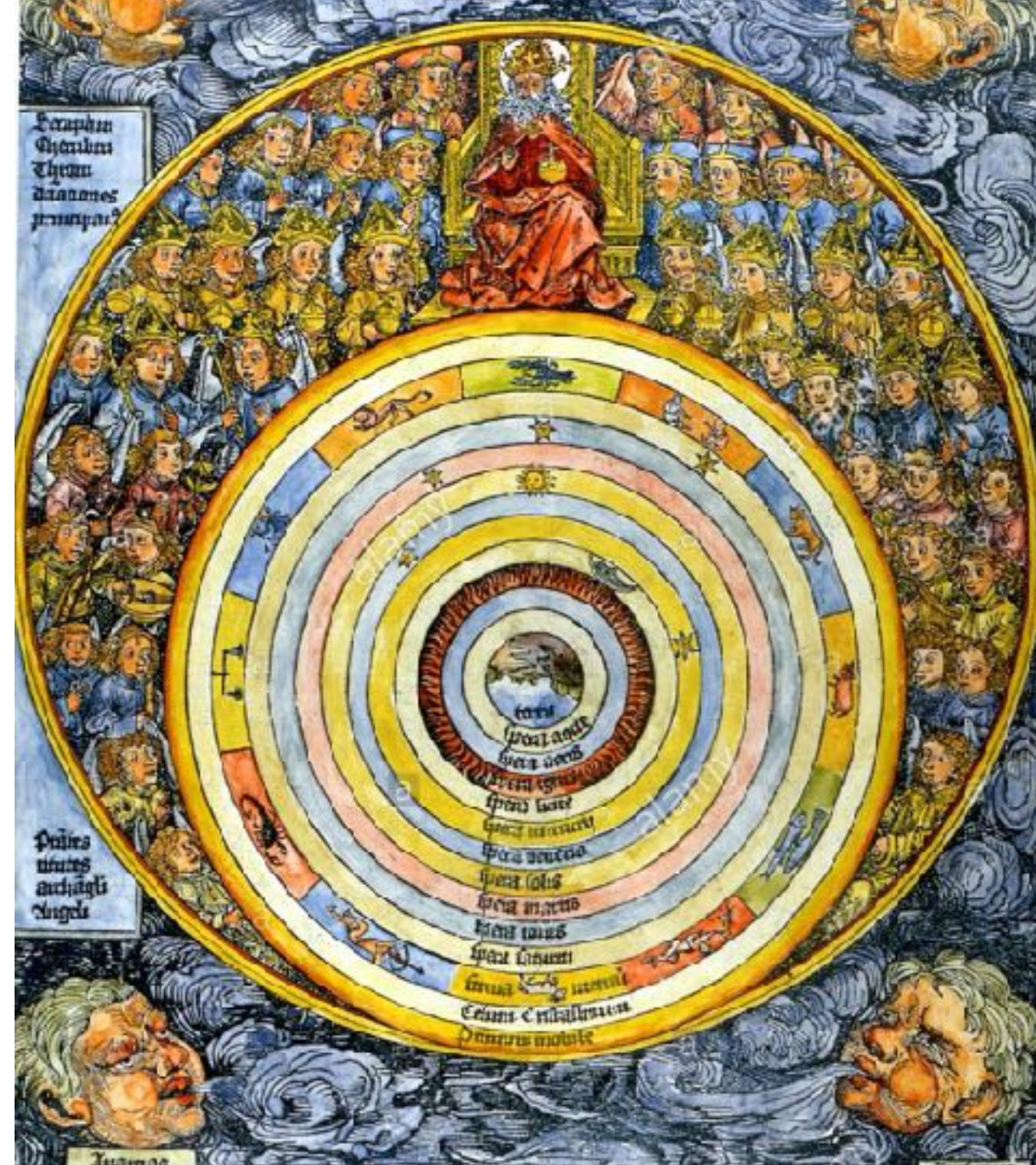
THE CLASSICAL SYNTHESIS

Notice that the fact/value distinction isolates a person. The fact of his existence (the observable *is*) is not accompanied by any obligation (the indemonstrable *ought*) to his environment.

- A person, in this view, is detached, autonomous, unburdened by obligations to others.
- The proper education of such a person claims to be concerned only with helping him/her to acquire knowledge of observable facts. Of course, education could never be concerned only with facts, as Lewis understood well and discusses in chapter 2.

Key Question: How does education work according to the “classical view, which Lewis embraces?”

- According to the classical view, a human person (intellect, emotions, will, body, etc.) is a small part of an “ordered” web of relations, so that a proper understanding of a person necessarily conceives him or her in ordered relation to all else that exists.



THE CLASSICAL SYNTHESIS

“The ancient view of the world is that it is a cosmos. A cosmos is not simply everything that is. **It is an ordered whole.** The difference perhaps between a ‘cosmos’ and a ‘universe’ is that while a ‘universe’ is everything, a ‘cosmos’ is also everything, but there is an order to it. There is something normative to the order of the world. In the ancient Greek view, of course, the divine was included in the cosmos: the divine, human and physical were all an ordered part of this world, and all had different parts to play. Here, **the cosmos is a very reasonable, intelligible reality....**” (Ben Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology*, pg. 13).

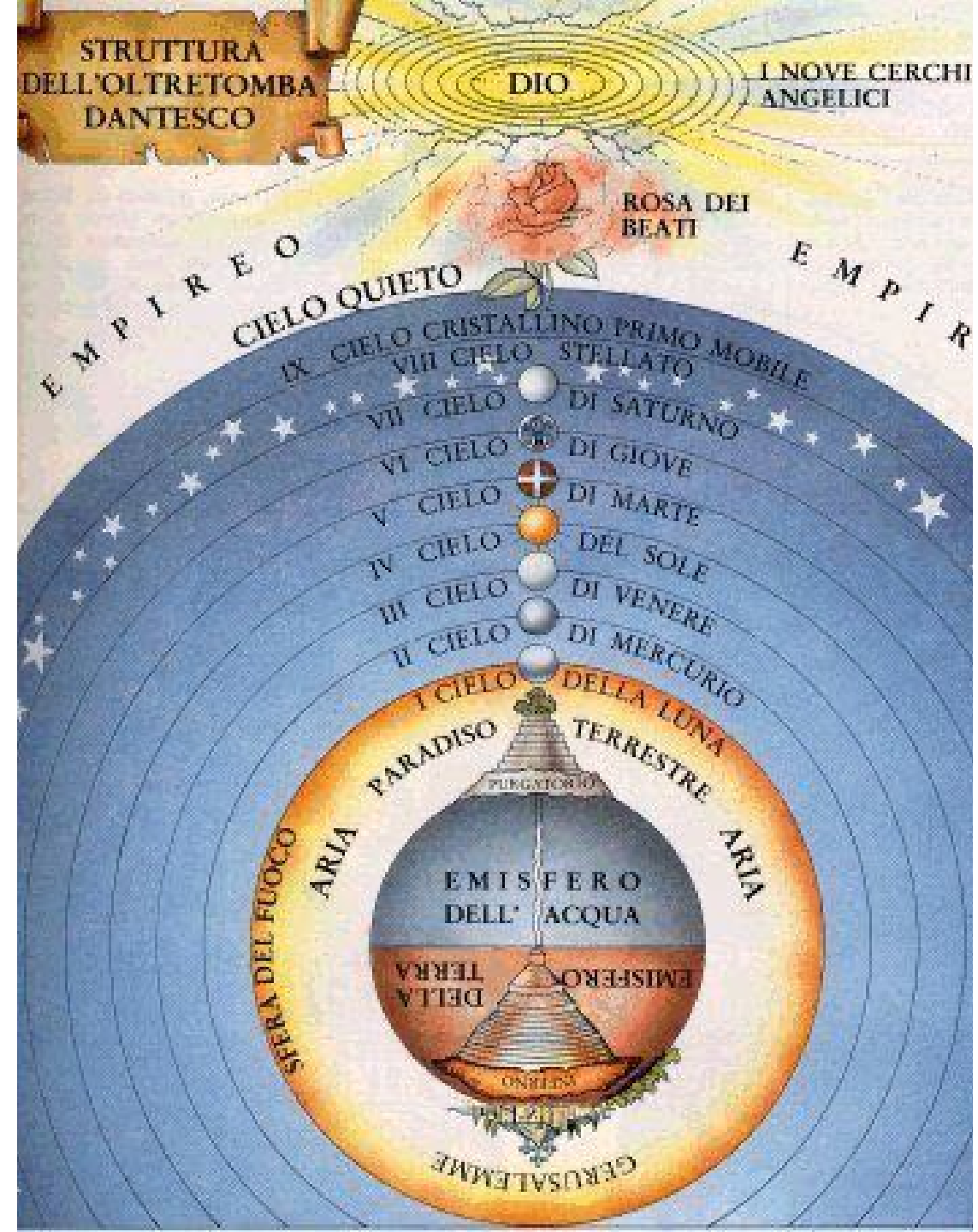
- ▶ *Nota Bene*: the idea of reality as a “cosmos” is absolutely central to Lewis’s entire corpus. See Michael Ward’s book, *Planet Narnia* for the best treatment of this issue.
- ▶ *Nota Bene*: Jesus as Logos. “John uses the term *logos*, familiar in Greek philosophy for the abstract principle of reason exhibited by an orderly universe, itself the source of the reason innate in man. By using this term, John relates Jesus to the culture prevailing beyond Jewry, to the popular cosmology current at the end of the 1st century. R.E.O. White, [“Word,”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2160.

Lewis Describes what education, according to the classical synthesis, had always been when he writes on pg. 16:

- ▶ “Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in ‘ordinate affections’ or ‘just sentiments’ will easily find the first principles in Ethics; but to the corrupt man they will never be visible at all and he can make no progress in that science. 13 Plato before him had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. it must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful. 14 in the Republic, the well-nurtured youth is one ‘who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distaste would blame and hate the ugly even from his earliest years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart.” (Abolition, Pg. 16).

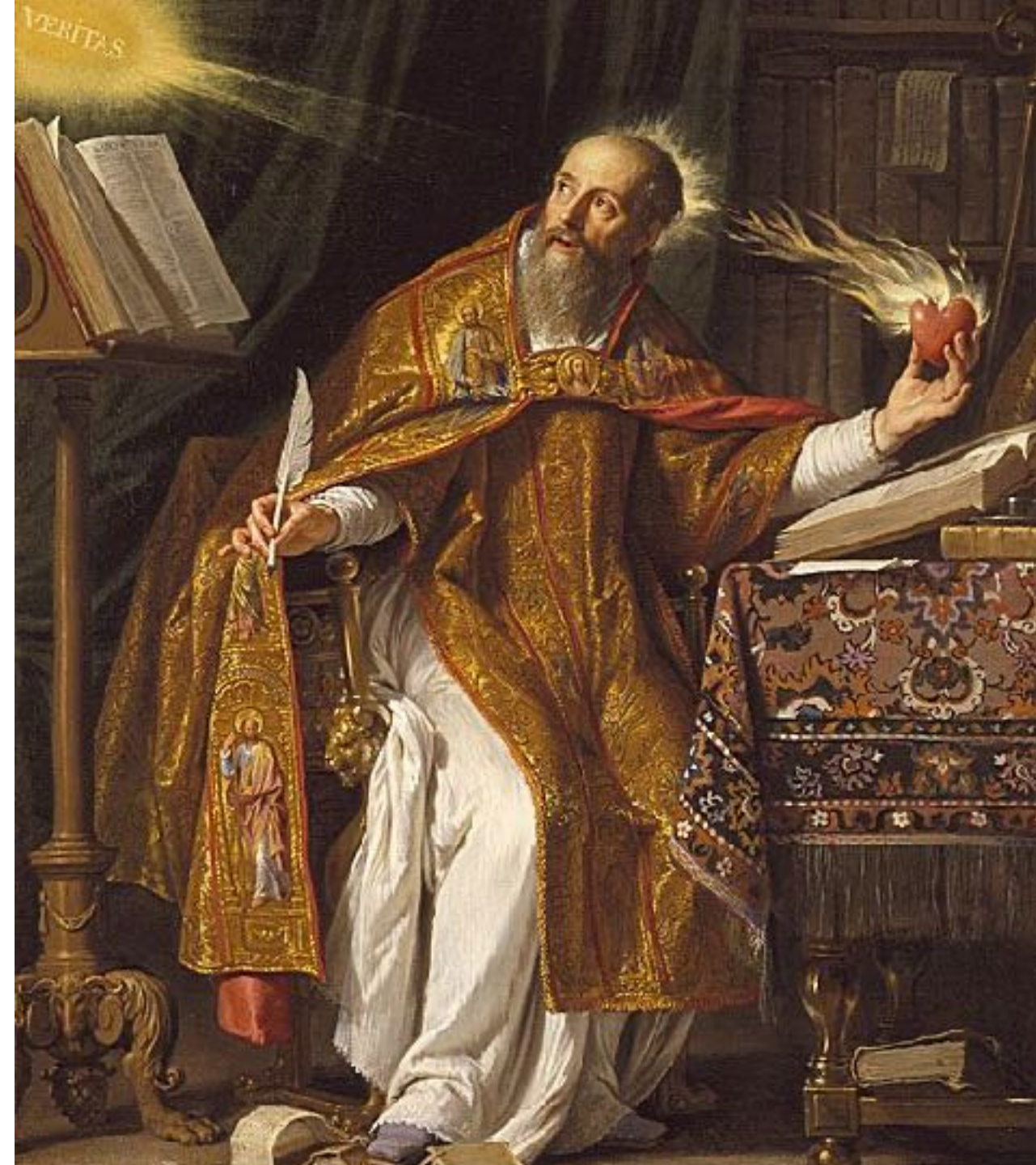
THE CLASSICAL SYNTHESIS

- ▶ Lewis believes, like Paul, that God is the one “in whom we live and breathe and have our being,” (Acts 17:28) and that Jesus is the eternal Logos (John 1:1) and the image of the invisible God [in whom] all things hold together. (Col. 1)
- ▶ Lewis believed with the Psalmist that “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork,” (Psalm 19:1)
- ▶ For this reason, Lewis insists on pg. 14-15 that.... “Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it — believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt. The reason why Coleridge agreed with the tourist who called the cataract sublime and disagreed with the one who called it pretty was of course that he believed inanimate nature to be such that certain responses could be more ‘just’ or ‘ordinate’ or ‘appropriate’ to it than others.”



THE CLASSICAL SYNTHESIS

- ▶ Thus, the Christian Traherne could ask, “Can you be righteous, unless you be just in rendering to things their due esteem? (Abolition, pg. 16).
- ▶ And Augustine of Hippo “defines virtue as *order amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it,” (Abolition, pg. 16).
- ▶ And Thomas Aquinas could claim that “all true knowledge is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known, so that assimilation is said to be the cause of knowledge.”
- ▶ In the classical perspective, all of the disciplines - whether mathematics, art, literature, philosophy, the sciences, etc. have their place in the “right ordering” of humans in relation to God and all that God has made.



THE CLASSICAL SYNTHESIS

- ▶ Accordingly, Lewis insists that “for every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments,” Abolition, pg. 13-14).
- ▶ But how can we “inculcate just sentiments” when we do not believe in an objective standard by which to judge sentiments?
- ▶ For Lewis’s we must acknowledge - as all people have traditionally done - that there is a natural law or, what He calls “The Tao.”



WHAT IS THE TAO & WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

- The Tao “is the reality beyond all predicates... It is nature, it is the Way, the Road.... It is... the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar....” It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are” (Abolition, 18).
- *Nota Bene* - Jesus is the eternal logos - the reality found only in partial or “shadow” form in non christian cultures and religions. Jesus, in other words, is the Tao, though Lewis never makes this point in *The Abolition of Man*, which is a strictly philosophical text.
- *Nota Bene* - Thus we should be careful not to assume that the Tao is something to be mastered. Jesus Christ is Lord - the key is to recognize His reality and to be mastered by Him. The Tao requires of us the posture of a disciple.

“Law is twofold -- natural and written. The natural law is in the heart, the written law on tables. All men are under the natural law” St. Ambrose of Milan

THE TAO AND EDUCATION

- “For those within [the Tao] the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate.... Those without, if they are logical, must regard all sentiments as equally non-rational, as mere mists between us and the real objects” (Abolition, pg. 21).

And here is the danger....

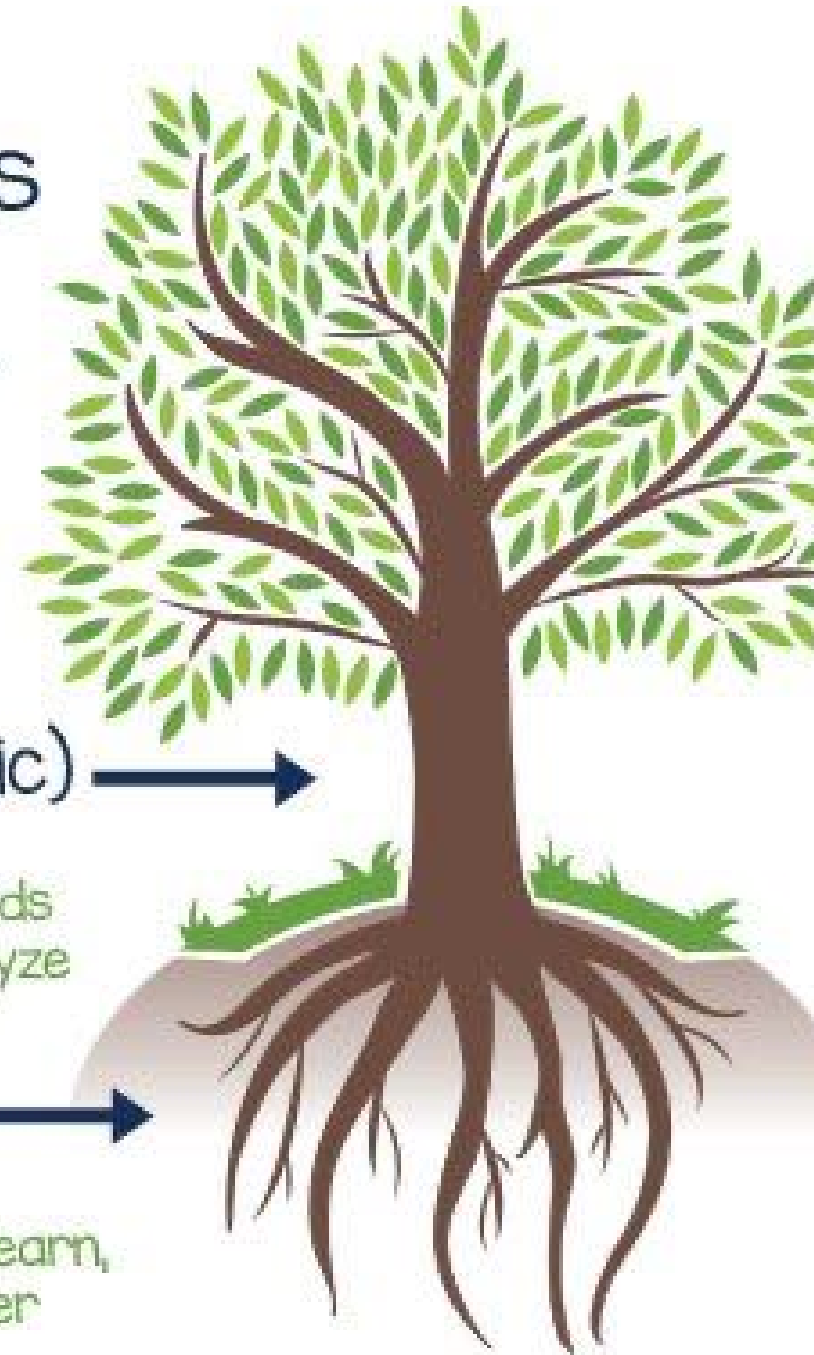
- **We cannot help but teach and form sentiments. The question is - what sentiments are we teaching, and why? And are we sneaking sentiments without inviting reflection on the ‘justness’ or ‘ordinancy’ of those sentiments?**

Trivium Stages

rhetoric →
A time to grow in wisdom – kids apply, express, persuade

dialectic (logic) →
A time to grow in understanding – kids think, reason, analyze

grammar →
A time to grow in knowledge – kids learn, observe, remember



MEN WITHOUT CHESTS

- ▶ What is worthy of our love? Without asking this question, we become subject to the basest of appetites (for food and pleasure) and the will to survive.
- ▶ Lewis reminds us that “the head rules the belly through the chest - the seat ... of magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments,” (pg. 24-25).

✓Head = Intellect

✓Chest = Virtues

✓Stomach = Emotions/Sensibilities

- ▶ “The operation of the Green Book and its kind is to produce what may be called Men Without Chests” (Abolition, pg. 25).
- ▶ “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,**” (Abolition, pg. 26)



CONCLUSION

Lewis's Argument in the Abolition of Man Restated

- *The Abolition of Man* is what we can expect when a civilization rejects the objective reality of truth and falsehood, right and wrong affirmed by all great peoples of the past.
- In Chapter 1, which we have explored today, Lewis describes the nature and implications of our emancipation from the Tao. Rejecting the Tao, as our culture has done, renders the very idea of virtue incoherent.
- In Chapter 2, Lewis shows how intellectuals fail when they explain away the Tao as a mere natural product like instinct,.
- And in Chapter 3 he suggests that, being supposedly freed from the Tao, certain men (the conditioners) gain the power to subject all other men to their irrational impulses. People will then offer obedience to these irrational impulses, and as a result, we have the abolition of man. What we once called men have been reduced to beasts, motivated by animal instinct, the basest of appetites (for food and pleasure) and the will to survive. (You do You).