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ARTICLES

Lewis and Liberty: Reflections on a Pandemic

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In *The Abolition of Man* and "Is Progress Possible?," C. S. Lewis reflects on the nature of the human person, science, liberty, and the role of government. These topics were also debated during the 2019–2022 coronavirus pandemic. This article reflects upon the lessons we might learn from Lewis in respect of those aspects of the pandemic, especially as found in the United Kingdom and United States. In considering Lewis's approach we find a depth of wisdom in balancing liberty, scientific expertise, social and economic concerns, and the role of government.

Introduction

The coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic, which stretched from late 2019 into 2022 and beyond, was characterized by unprecedented restrictions on personal liberty, government interventions in the economy, and an unusual degree of prominence afforded to science in the public domain.

The purpose of this article is to reflect upon the lessons we might learn from C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) in respect of those particular aspects of the pandemic, especially as manifested in the United Kingdom and United States. This essay does not take any view on the merits or demerits of any specific policy decision of either government, nor does it underestimate the sheer complexity and challenges facing governments in the midst of novel global health challenges. Rather, the concern here is with an approach to decision-making and the extent to which Lewis's thought and writing provide insight into challenges that arose more than half a century after his death. In that respect this article is, at least in part, methodological, though that perhaps inevitably leads to reflections also on some matters of substance.

Among the many themes in Lewis's writings, the nature of the human person, science, liberty, and the role of government feature prominently. Two principal works are relevant for this discussion: *The Abolition of Man* (1943)[1] and "Is Progress Possible?" (1958).[2] The former considers the wholeness of the human person, the framework of moral decision-making, and the place of science. Wilson ([1990] 2005, 197) commented that the book was "nothing less than

1 The text of *The Abolition of Man* was originally prepared for three lectures comprising the Riddell Memorial Lectures at the University of Durham in 1943. The subtitle, "Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools," reflected Lewis's method of commenting on a recent education book and its authors, which enabled him to discuss principles of more universal implications. References herein are to the 1947 American 2nd edition.

2 "Is Progress Possible?" was originally published in *The Observer* on July 13, 1958, as part of a series of articles responding to the questions, "Is man progressing today? Is progress even possible?," and in reply to an opening article by C. P. Snow, "Man in Society." The essay was later published in a series of Lewis's collected works in 1970 entitled *God in the Dock*. References herein are to the 1970 publication.

an analysis of where and how the modern world has gone wrong." The latter, subtitled "Willing Slaves of the Welfare State," places the debate in the context of progress and considers the appropriate roles of government and science. The interaction of the two works lies at the heart of this article. In considering Lewis's approach, we find a depth of wisdom in balancing liberty, scientific expertise, social and economic concerns, and the role of government that may have been lacking in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Setting the Scene

The COVID-19 pandemic had modest beginnings that quickly escalated into global implications. The key early milestones are as follows. On January 5, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), in its Disease Outbreak News, issued its first notice of what would become the global coronavirus pandemic, reporting a pneumonia outbreak of unknown cause with forty-four cases in Wuhan City in the Hubei province of China. The WHO noted that contact tracing was underway but recommended no restrictions on any travel or other liberties, including travel to and from China (WHO 2020a). On January 9 the outbreak was confirmed as novel coronavirus, which was subsequently labeled SARS-CoV-2, and the disease was later commonly called COVID-19. The first death was reported on January 11. Then the virus began to spread, with the first incidence outside China reported on January 13. The United States registered its first case on January 21. This was followed by cases in France on January 24, the first in Europe, and in the United Kingdom on January 29. On January 30 the WHO declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. As developments continued and the world pivoted toward the provision of protective equipment, implementation of quarantine requirements, and efforts at contact tracing, the WHO declared a formal pandemic on March 11 (WHO 2020b, n.d.).

Three significant aspects of the pandemic are relevant for our discussion. First, there was the widespread use of "lockdown laws," legal restrictions on people's movements, public gatherings, and the operation of business. The United Kingdom experienced three national lockdowns between March 2020 and July 2021. The initial regulations imposed a stay-at-home order, which permitted only four reasons for leaving home: essential shopping, one form of exercise per day, medical needs, and travel to work, but *only* if work from home was not possible. In addition, gatherings of more than two people were banned with limited exceptions. A wide range of retail, hotel, hospitality, and leisure businesses were closed, as were places of worship. These regulations were backed by powers of dispersal orders, arrest, and increasing fines. As time went on the details varied considerably regarding the myriad restrictions on international travel, the provisions for weddings and funerals, the number of people permitted to gather and in what form (whether indoors or outdoors), and the precise requirements on the hospitality industry (Brown et al. 2021). In addition, there were policies implemented by government separate from the formal legal requirements, such as the closure of schools from late March

2020. From June 15, 2020, masks were compulsory for passengers on public transportation, and the mandate was extended to cover shops and supermarkets on July 24.

The position in the United States was more complicated due to the federal nature of government, with different states and counties pursuing a variety of policies, and hence there was less uniformity. In February 2020 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began to restrict air travel, and a public health emergency was declared. In March 2020 further travel restrictions on non-US citizens were imposed. Decisions on lockdowns, restrictions on business, school closures, public gatherings, and mask mandates were the responsibility of state (and other local) governments. New York City became the first municipality, on March 15, 2020, to close all its schools. On March 19 California became the first state to issue stay-at-home orders. The overwhelming majority of states issued some form of stay-at-home orders, while policy on masks (where there had been a shift in policy in both the UK and the US) was more varied. Following executive orders signed by President Biden on his first two days in office (January 20 and 21, 2021), the CDC imposed a federal mask mandate on transportation and travel effective February 1 of that year, although this order was subsequently struck down by the courts (CDC 2021). In the United States there was a greater variety of responses by states and more legal challenges, but the principal means used were very similar to the United Kingdom.

Second, the economic impact and response was unprecedented. With large-scale shutdowns affecting much of the economy, direct government interventions were probably inevitable. There was a wide variety of governmental economic measures, including loans and grants for businesses and direct support for both employers and individuals. In the US a $2 trillion package was passed (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act 2020), including direct government payments to US citizens. Over the course of the pandemic these payments totaled $3,200 per individual (US Treasury n.d.-a). In the United Kingdom the government undertook to pay 80 percent of the salaries of employees placed on furlough from their employment. These arrangements varied slightly as time went on.

This level of economic intervention had a consequential long-term impact on government borrowing and debt. In 2020–2021 in the United Kingdom, government borrowing rose from 2.7 percent of GDP to 15 percent of GDP, while net debt reached 97.5 percent of GDP from 85 percent the previous year (Keep 2023). In the United States, in fiscal year 2020, borrowing also reached 15 percent of GDP compared to 4.7 percent the previous year, while in fiscal year 2021, net debt rose to 128 percent of GDP, up from 107 percent the previous year (US Treasury n.d.-b). National debt in both countries has remained stubbornly high.

The third significant impact of the pandemic was the way in which scientists of international renown became household names. Whether they were prepared and ready for the scrutiny is another matter. In the United States, Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases from 1984 to 2022 and Chief Medical Adviser to the President from 2021 to 2022 was the leading scientific face of the pandemic as a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force. He would often appear alongside the president (which for him was not always a comfortable experience). In the United Kingdom, Chris Whitty is the government's Chief Medical Officer, head of the public health profession, and represents the UK on the executive board of the WHO. Sir Patrick Vallance is the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, whose role is, *inter alia*, to provide scientific advice to members of the cabinet, the prime minister, and to the government more generally. These two figures, and others deputizing, featured regularly alongside the prime minister at press conferences and briefings. They were also significant players in the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

These three observations reveal several moral questions with which C. S. Lewis might help us. First, we can consider the management of trade-offs between competing policy implications. The balance of liberty, economics, and scientific advice was not properly discussed or appreciated during the pandemic. There are moral questions from the intergenerational implications of a rising national debt as well as health consequences from a pandemic. Second, and following from the first, we might examine the proper role of scientific expertise and government responsibility. The UK health secretary, Matt Hancock, said in a statement to Parliament, "We will be guided by the science," and on another occasion, that the plan was "driven by the science" (Hancock 2020a, 732; 2020b, 760). Science is inherently uncertain, yet it was often, at least in the media, presented with certainty. Government officials in both countries seemed unable to fully comprehend the proper role of expert science and the proper role of government. As Lewis said in "Is Progress Possible?," "Let the doctor tell me I shall die unless I do so-and-so; but whether life is worth having on those terms is no more a question for him than for any other man" (Lewis 1970, 315).

The Nature of the Human Person

The Abolition of Man is widely regarded as one of the least theological or religious writings in Lewis's corpus. This view is mistaken. The reader may be disappointed after engaging with Lewis's more explicitly Christian or theological writings, whether apologetic, ethical, or even fictional. Michael Ward argues that Lewis viewed *Abolition* as entirely compatible with the Christian faith. Nevertheless, Ward suggests, *Abolition* "is not in the ordinary sense of the word a 'religious' work," noting the incongruity of the statement with the stated purpose of the Riddell Lectures (Ward 2021, 21). Lewis himself makes clear in *Abolition* that he is not making an argument for theism. In one sense this approach is that of negative assurance; there is nothing in *Abolition*

that contradicts Christian theology. The appendix contains an explicit list of moral principles consistent with, but not unique to, the biblical moral law. (Lewis 1947, 49–50, 83–101).

However, there is a deeper level of relevance to our discussion, which sees this nonreligious work as, in fact, a profound work of theology. This is not simply an argument about the *Tao* and natural law, relevant though that is, but more an argument that underlying the whole premise of *Abolition* is the deeply theological concept of the nature of the human person. The point is more obvious than usually credited. According to Lewis, what truly constitutes the human person is not only a unity of the person but also the idea of the trained sentiments, for that is the locus of moral decision-making without which we end up ultimately with the abolition of man himself. The nature of this unity in particular shapes our reflections on liberty, science, and political policy and choices.

Lewis's basic proposition in *Abolition* is well-known. The human person is an integrated whole in which the rational (represented by the head) and the sensual (the belly) are linked by the sentiments (the chest). Lewis set out his overall position in this way: "The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest–Magnanimity–Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal" (Lewis 1947, 24–25). The idea of the sentiments requires further explanation. The terminology is not always straightforward, as in the distracting use of the term *magnanimity*. The key concept is that in the chest the emotions are trained, formed, and shaped into what Lewis calls here "stable sentiments," or we might say, moral values in accordance with the *Tao*. The chest equips the human being for moral decision-making and acts as a counter to any attempt to live a civilized life based only on reason or the intellect. The chest is the seat of character and moral sense (Pike 2017, 48). Lewis is certainly clear on the importance of this idea of the trained emotion: "Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism" (Lewis 1947, 24). We should not confuse sentiment with sentimentality. To the contrary, these are the traditional values of the *Tao* essential to any attempt at holding to objective values that inform our moral decisions.

Indeed, the problem which has arisen is that we are now producing people who have lost the capacity for making moral decisions in accordance with those values and trained sentiments. That is the product of the education system, *The Green Book*, and the framework espoused, even if unwittingly, by Gaius and Titius. We lose the capacity for moral decisions, ruled either by an unbridled rationality or unrestrained feelings: "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise" (Lewis 1947, 26). Standing

outside the *Tao,* trying to occupy morally neutral ground, as contemporary educationalists, philosophers, and scientists seek to do, makes it impossible to formulate, generate, or come to any moral reasoning at all. Hence, "moral insight . . . is not a matter for reason alone; it requires trained emotions and moral habits of behaviour inculcated even before we reach an age of reason" (Meilaender 2010, 124). Lewis describes, by way of analogy, the training of the sentiments within the *Tao*. In this case it is rather like how grown birds deal with young birds, teaching them to fly. By contrast, seeking to operate outside of the *Tao* is like the way a poultry-keeper deals with young birds, making them ready for a purpose of which the young birds know nothing. Consequently, operating outside of the *Tao* removes all just sentiments and moral character formed by values, and that contradicts the true nature of human beings, leading ultimately to abolition. Ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake. Thus, "it is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so." This is what Lewis meant in *Abolition* when he said that the task of the educator is to irrigate deserts and that the "right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments" (Lewis 1947, 23, 25, 13–14). Mark Pike notes of Lewis, "His assessment was not that schooling had educated the head (the intellect) too much but that it had educated the chest (character) too little" (Pike 2017, 48). Human beings are endowed with the capacity of discernment; it is the inability to make objective moral judgments that is contrary to the true nature and dignity of the human person. The cutting out of the soul of the person leads to the atrophy of the chest that Lewis describes.

Lewis is also clear about the wide-ranging implications of his own position. In a simple sentence he sets out his contention that ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake: "The very power of Gaius and Titius depends on the fact that they are dealing with a boy: a boy who thinks he is 'doing' his 'English prep' and has no notion that ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake" (Lewis 1947, 5). An integrated human person produces an integrated approach to the range of disciplines and policies that are relevant for human flourishing. No one discipline—whether science, education, or any other—can stand alone.

This is why the *Tao* sets limits to the search for the pot of gold at the rainbow's end or to the quest for the elixir of life. Consequently, within the *Tao*, how we live counts for more than mere longevity (Meilaender 2010, 129), a point which Lewis himself explicitly makes in "Is Progress Possible?": "Now I care far more how humanity lives than how long. . . . For the species, as for each man, mere longevity seems to me a contemptible ideal" (Lewis 1970, 311). In a sense these issues raised by Lewis, longevity and flourishing, were central questions in the course of the pandemic that were not fully or even properly debated. What were the respective priorities relevant to life, death, and human flourishing?

One might be tempted to think that the idea of avoiding death was the single priority. On the basis of the proper nature of the human person, Lewis would dissent.

Lewis does not in *Abolition* describe what a flourishing human life looks like. There is not a clear description of precisely how we are to apply the natural law to real-life political and moral dilemmas (Watson 2017, 31). Rather it is more of a shaping, a moral education, a handing down in the *Tao*—effectively the equipping of the human person to make the moral decisions which seemed not be addressed in the pandemic.

The Place of Science

The role and place of science is contested territory in Lewis's thought. He was well aware, not least in *Abolition*, that many would view his position as highly negative toward science and the scientific enterprise: "Nothing I can say will prevent some people from describing this lecture as an attack on science. I deny the charge, of course." The natural inclination is to defend Lewis from the charge. However, Lewis clearly displayed a degree of antipathy toward science, and it cannot be denied that there is, at times, heavy criticism. He can be brutal: "It might be going too far to say that the modern scientific movement was tainted from its birth: but I think it would be true to say that it was born in an unhealthy neighbourhood and at an inauspicious hour. Its triumphs may have been too rapid and purchased at too high a price: reconsideration, and something like repentance, may be required" (Lewis 1947, 75, 78). How might we explain this?

The criticism here is, at least partly, methodological; his objection is to the failure to understand both the benefits and limits of science. His complaint is as much about scientific method as science itself. The reference to "tainted from . . . birth," "unhealthy neighbourhood," and "inauspicious hour" are all ways in which Lewis critiques the Enlightenment and the manner in which human rationality (the head and not the chest) moved center stage and scientific method crowded out other disciplines. All of this is highly relevant to assessing how Lewis would have viewed the approaches during the pandemic.

Yet at the same time Lewis is at pains to affirm the proper role and purpose of science and to acknowledge and welcome the benefits which accrue to humanity. He makes clear that he does "not wish to disparage all that is really beneficial" in the scientific process, though even here it is presented in terms of a negative assurance (Lewis 1947, 53–54). David Ussery argues that Lewis draws a distinction between the hard sciences, which he affirms, and the soft sciences, about which he is more skeptical. Ussery refers to Lewis's fictional parallel to *Abolition*, namely, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), where the scientific discipline of Mark, the main character, is sociology, and there is a debate between him and a chemist over the nature of science (Ussery 2017, 114–15). Lewis offers several examples of scientific and technological developments—the plane, the wireless radio, and contraceptives—and

manages, in a number of ways, to tie himself in knots. Actually, what Lewis critiques is not so much the innovations themselves, but the implications for the nature of human power and control to which we will turn subsequently. Nevertheless, Lewis is more persuasive at the conceptual level; the examples simply reveal him to be a child of his times.

There are three specific points in respect of science in *Abolition* which form and shape Lewis's perspective and are highly relevant for our reflections.

First, *Abolition* objects to placing science center stage. This is the objection to the influence of the Enlightenment. His objection was not to science but to scientific reductionism, a methodology which saw science as the supreme conqueror of nature, which, unsurprisingly in the light of our previous discussion concerning the nature of the human person, is what ultimately leads to man's abolition—no chest, but also no head and no stomach, but only scientific methodology. In assessing Lewis's approach to science we should note that he would, of course, take aim at any form of reductionism. Lewis would proffer the same objection to educationalists and philosophers—indeed, educationalist reductionism is a key target of *Abolition*. That is rather his whole point: not an attack on science as such, but the central importance of both a moral framework and moral decision-making within such a framework rather than the centrality of any one discipline. His argument is that science tends to reduce a person to an object of nature, and that is what leads to the suspension of moral judgment. Science alone is insufficient.

Second, Lewis observes the inherent uncertainty of science, which is often presented with a degree of objective certainty that it cannot bear. Or, to put it another way, the problem lies not with science itself but the manner in which science is perceived and received in the public understanding. Science may have become less certain, but in reality, it is more dominant in the public discourse. As Ussery notes, "Now most people assume that science can be the judge of all truth" (Ussery 2017, 118). Lewis objects in "Is Progress Possible?" that while magic and faith have both been presented as the most potent solution to solve humanity's problems, now "it will certainly be science" (Lewis 1970, 315). Lewis argues that there are limits to reason and its efficacy (Watson 2017, 26), and he approaches science in exactly the same manner. The inherent uncertainties mean that there are limits to what science can teach, and these limits and uncertainties take us to the heart of moral decision-making. The behaviorist B. F. Skinner directly attacked Lewis's approach. He not only argued for the need to move away from any idea of the miraculous in order to make scientific progress, but that science demanded a sweeping away of the traditional approaches (Pike 2017, 56). This overconfidence in the scientific method and the certainties of science is what infuriated Lewis.

Third, *Abolition* reflects upon the manner in which science exerts power and the particular danger when science combines with the power of the state. It is this inherent danger which produces the Conditioners: "But the man-

moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omnicompetent state and an irresistible scientific technique" (Lewis 1947, 60). The fear for Lewis was that science, or indeed science alongside government, provided the opportunity for enslavement. We have, in essence, lost the power to think for ourselves, which is an essential element of what it means to be human. The issue is one of destiny and purpose, and Lewis is fearful of the implications. The nature of science and its dominance means that we think we are in charge of our own destiny, whereas in fact nothing could be further from the truth, and the reality is that "some men will take charge of the destiny of others" (Lewis 1970, 316). For Lewis such an oligopolistic dominance is a fundamental problem: "Man's conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men. There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger" (Lewis 1947, 58, emphasis in original).

It is easy to see how this takes us to our next area of investigation: the role, or once again, the *proper* role, of politics and the state. We should though, first of all, reflect on the implications of Lewis's view of science for the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a very real sense each of the three elements noted above—the moving of science to the center of the stage, the inherent uncertainties of science presented with certainty, and the power of science (or the scientific establishment alongside government)—illustrate very real complexities in the management of the pandemic.

Scientists at press conferences were simply unable to explain the limits of modeling and the uncertainties of science. They were not equipped to do so. Possible scenarios were presented, not least by the media, as certain or at least highly likely outcomes. We were experiencing the consequences of creating men without chests. The public was incapable of properly assessing the scientific evidence placed before them.

We can, however, illustrate the limits of science and scientific method by reference to the decision to lockdown the United Kingdom for a second time in October 2020, and then as the country emerged from restrictions in July 2021 following a third lockdown. As restrictions were eased after July 2021, Neil Ferguson, a prominent epidemiologist and member of SAGE, admitted that his prediction of up to two hundred thousand cases per day was well wide of the mark (Ferguson 2021). Indeed, Ferguson had a history of overestimating the impact of other infectious disease outbreaks, with excess weight being given to worst-case scenarios (St. Onge 2020). Similarly, with COVID-19 Ferguson set out an estimate of deaths in the UK and US of startling proportions, which turned out to be in the region of double the reality (Magness 2021).

Was the modeling flawed? Why was Ferguson so influential? What were the consequences for public policy? Although the model has been both challenged and defended (see, for example, critics: Winsberg, Brennan, and Surprenant 2020; Magness 2021; St. Onge 2020; and defenders: White and van Basshuysen 2021), many of the predictions and their interpretations were clearly misaligned with reality. In particular, even defenders of the data show Ferguson predicting infection fatality rates considerably higher than others, especially among older age groups. Ferguson's reputation derived, in part at least, from his post at Imperial College, London, one of the world's leading universities. The modeling, and the policy proposals that accompanied the model, were given such weight that policymakers abdicated their own responsibilities in the face of the restrictive, even oppressive, policy recommendations. This is where Lewis would object. There were several problems with the model. There were problems with the data, and the model was not properly presented and explained. Consequently, public understanding was poor. The modelers exceeded their remit and the policymakers failed in theirs.

Carl Heneghan, an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford, writing in 2023 in respect of the October 2020 lockdown, said, "I work with a great team, who forensically look at the data and notice details that most overlook. We met daily, and it had become clear that the slides leaked to the BBC on estimated Covid deaths and that would later be presented at the government press conference were out of date and the reported deaths were way too high" (Heneghan 2023).

The issues are well summarised by Bob Seely, MP, in a debate in Parliament in January 2022 on the place of forecasting and modeling:

> I speak not to bury science, but to praise it. During the covid pandemic, there has been some remarkable, wonderful science; I just question to what extent that includes the modelling and forecasts that have come from it. Thanks to some questionable modelling that was poorly presented and often misrepresented, never before has so much harm been done to so many by so few based on so little questionable and potentially flawed data.
>
> I believe that the use of modelling is pretty much getting to be a national scandal. That is not just the fault of the modellers; it is how their work was interpreted by public health officials and the media—and yes, by politicians, including the Government. (Seely 2022, 67)

Lewis would wholeheartedly agree with the concerns regarding the abuse of modeling. The point is uncertainty, overconfidence, the power of science, and the atrophy of the chest! At the heart of Lewis's response is human dignity, a proper telos or purpose, and our ability to make choices based on our moral sense and character. Human understanding is not simply a matter of scientific

analysis or the application of scientific method, but universal moral principles that lead to good moral decisions. Ethical decisions may be informed by science, but they need an ethical code, which naturally takes us back to the *Tao*.

The Role of Politics and the State

Lewis was, as will already be clear from this article, deeply skeptical of the power of the state. It is telling that even though Lewis does not extensively discuss the economic implications of freedom and liberty, he fully recognizes the link between political and economic freedom and the true nature of man. He argues in "Is Progress Possible?" that it is not possible for a man to be richer, happier, or more free (one might even say, to flourish) without economic independence and that this requires an education that is not controlled by the state. He spells it out in this way: "The increasing complexity and precariousness of our economic life have forced Government to take over many spheres of activity once left to choice or chance." This is yet a further link between Lewis's thinking in *Abolition* and his later thought. The target is an overpowerful elite, and the combination of the state and the scientific establishment (or the educational establishment, for that matter) is deeply dangerous for humanity. The consequence is that "rulers have become owners" and "we have grown . . . accustomed to our chains" (Lewis 1970, 313).

The third of Lewis's lectures, chapter 3 of *Abolition*, carrying the same title as the book as a whole, introduces us to the Conditioners. These figures represent an elite that exerts control over the population and as a result curtails freedom. The conquest of nature may indeed bring gains for humanity, but in the final step, in the last analysis, "the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same." Ultimately we surrender ourselves, our souls, and we find ourselves manipulated and controlled, not as we imagined, by ourselves, but "in the person of [our] de-humanized Conditioners." Lewis summarizes: "Man's conquest of himself means simply the rule of the Conditioners over the conditioned human material, the world of post-humanity which, some knowingly and some unknowingly, nearly all men in all nations are at present labouring to produce" (Lewis 1947, 71, 73, 75). Lewis's concern is as much with the emaciation of the true human being as with the threat of oligarchic rule, but the threat of both is very real. This is what leads to the omnicompetent state, the power of majorities over minorities, of government over people, the power of the expert. Lewis's essential objection is that moral character cannot simply come from professional or expert groups or even from lawmakers (Pike 2017, 57–59).

The power, or at least the potential power, is frightening. The power of the elite is not associated only with the clear dangers of fascism and communism; it is alive within democracy as well. Humanity becomes a specimen. As Lewis puts it, once "we killed bad men: now we liquidate unsocial elements" (Lewis 1947, 74).

This is part of Lewis's objection to the dominance of science. The new oligarchy, as he terms it, bases its claims on knowledge—expert knowledge that then renders useless and ineffective any man without a chest. In the face of an expert, man is paralyzed. Thus, "they must increasingly rely on the advice of scientists, till in the end the politicians proper become merely the scientists' puppets" (Lewis 1970, 314).

What then is the proper role of government? If government is not to be a mere puppet, then it must have a role wider than the mere mouthpiece of the Conditioners. Lewis, in the same essay, clearly delineates the respective roles of experts and government: "Now I dread specialists in power because they are specialists speaking outside their special subjects. Let scientists tell us about sciences. But government involves questions about the good for man, and justice, and what things are worth having at what price; and on these a scientific training gives a man's opinion no added value. Let the doctor tell me I shall die unless I do so-and-so; but whether life is worth having on those terms is no more a question for him than for any other man" (Lewis 1970, 315).

In other words, the proper role of government is to assess, evaluate, and consider the expert advice, but also to place that advice in proper context, to consider the overall good and flourishing of man, to bring to the table moral values and decisions, justice and well-being, and to assess the trade-offs. As Lewis puts it, the doctor may warn of the consequences of certain actions, but the value judgment, the moral assessment, lies not with the scientist or doctor. That is precisely why Lewis states, "I dread government in the name of science. That is how tyrannies come in" (Lewis 1970, 315). These are strong words. The question that was raised during the course of the pandemic, certainly in the United Kingdom, was whether government was exercising its proper role. Did government abdicate its responsibility to offer a vision for well-being and flourishing that took into account economic perspectives, mental and health welfare, and the importance of individual freedom? Or did government collude with the triumph of science over humanity, adopting the role of the dehumanizing Conditioners, trapped in a vision of nature that reduced humanity to objects, without any proper appreciation of the true nature of the human person endowed with a moral sense and a zest for a life worth living? Lewis would certainly have wanted to ask these questions.

Conclusions

How then are we to assess Lewis's view in *Abolition* and how that relates to his wider claims about science and government? What are the implications of this for considering how he might respond to the issues of policy and liberty in the pandemic? This article is not about an assessment of governmental policies at that time. The contention, however, is that at least some of the policy outcomes and methodological approaches that we saw brought to the fore during the pandemic reflect several of the points of principle that Lewis articulated more than half a century earlier.

There are two main points we should draw attention to in conclusion. The first is the crucial understanding set out by Lewis of the nature of the human person. Much else flows from this point. Lewis wants to leave us with a picture of a truly human person. This person is a moral being and not merely an object of nature. Indeed, as such, we cannot suspend our value judgments. As a moral being the individual is capable of moral decision-making. It was precisely this type of moral decision-making, formed and shaped by a character, that was not at the forefront of the national consciousness during the pandemic. Where does this moral capacity derive from? Unsurprisingly, it derives from the *Tao*. As Micah Watson sets out, Lewis's "defense of natural law is intended to expose rather than bridge the chasm between a humane moral realism and a post-human vision of brute power, directionless progress, and reductionist appropriation" (Watson 2017, 27).

Second, therefore, there is a clear plea for freedom in the face of an all-powerful state. This is not simply a libertarian argument. This in itself presumes the *Tao*. "The very idea of freedom presupposes some objective moral law which overarches rulers and ruled alike. . . . But if there is no Law of Nature, the *ethos* of any society is the creation of its rulers, educators and conditioners" (Lewis 1967, 100). Lewis's resistance to the growing and expanding role of the state flows naturally from his idea of the human person. With the pandemic, irrespective of the merits or demerits of, for example, the economic policy provisions of the US and UK governments, the reality was a significant growth in the size, power, and influence of the state, which Lewis would have found disturbing.

The problem for Lewis with science and scientific method revolves around the elevation not just of the expert, but of all the presumptions around the idea of expertise. This is relevant not just for science. These men without chests cannot be truly considered intellectuals. Lewis is concerned with present duty in the light of uncertainty, not simply the quest for long life in the face of scientific certainty which, of course, is not really certain at all. Surrendering to experts—scientific, philosophical, or educational—involves the ultimate abolition of man and the loss of fundamental concepts around natural law, the value of the individual, and the liberty and rights of man. The pandemic simply exposed all of these things for us to see.

The Abolition of Man is, for all these reasons, a profoundly theological work.

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