



“A Necessary Evil”: CS Lewis and Government in a Technological Age

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Abstract

Following a long line of Christian thinkers through the centuries CS Lewis believed in the necessity of government, but he also feared the possibility that the state would infringe upon the individual and collective rights of its citizens. Such a possibility was not construed by Lewis as overtly oppressive or done with malice but, rather, something that might arise out of well-intentioned actions by leaders, politicians, and bureaucrats who abused science and technology in the furtherance of the state—democratic or otherwise. As a retrospective study viewing one individual’s concerns regarding technology, Lewis’s cautions of governmental overreach and control of citizens demonstrate the importance of understanding the increasing technological capabilities available to governments as well as the benefits and detriments of technology in civil society and the political order, today and in the future.

Keywords: democracy, government, technocracy

Introduction

Where do science, technology, religion, the humanities, and the state intersect for the benefit or detriment of citizens? When, in the early second century of the common era, the Christian apologist and theologian Tertullian asked, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” he asked a foundational question regarding the relationship between what has variously been termed the secular and the sacred, the philosophical and the theological, the political and the religious, and the state and the church (1). It is a question for any age and is one that was at the core of the first major treatise of political theology, Augustine’s fifth-century treatise *De Civitate Dei* (full title: *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos*, translated into English as *The City of God Against the Pagans*) or *The City of God*.¹ The history of Christian political theology is long and multidimensional, often touching on disciplines beyond the realm of political science and political theory. In the twentieth century, one thinks of figures such as Herbert Butter-

field (1900-1979), Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), and Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926) as thinkers who sought to integrate theological values with political theory and history. A lesser-known figure for consideration in such a pantheon is CS Lewis (1898-1963), who was both supportive of and wary of government in contemporary society, deeming it “a necessary evil” and, in so doing, echoing the words of contemporaries such as Reinhold Niebuhr and predecessors such as Thomas Paine (2). A study of how Lewis understood government and technology provides a reminder today of the importance of understanding technology’s significant capabilities, especially when deployed in the service of government, and how such usage can adversely impact human freedom.

CS Lewis (1898-1963) is well known as a professor of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature, a pioneer in the genre of science fiction, an author of children’s literature, and an apologist for the Christian faith. What

is less known are his many observations on twentieth-century culture and values in the West; values with which he often found himself at odds.ⁱⁱ

Lewis closely tied the concept of progress to contemporary advances in medicine and technology, among other subjects, and feared that these advances would be misappropriated by the state for its own purposes of control or tyranny. His fears of a technological state or a scientific state were significant, and when he spoke of such issues he did so with a detachment from the daily affairs of political life, which he detested. Having spent his first nine years in Belfast with the political and social disputes of Ireland as the subject of frequent conversations in the Lewis household, Lewis avoided any such entanglements or interests during the remainder of his life. David C. Downing observes: “Lewis grew up to be perhaps the most unpolitical person ever born in Ireland” (3). Lewis’s concern was for principles rather than promises of political solutions to current events. Summarizing Lewis’s political attitude and the many political issues he addressed, John G. West, Jr., observes:

When Lewis talked about these matters, however, it was not in the way most politicians do. He was wholly unconcerned with what political scientists today like to call “public policy”—that conglomeration of compromise, convention, and self-interest that forms the staple of much of our own political diet. If you expect to find a prescription for solving air pollution or advice on how to win an election, don’t bother reading Lewis. He has nothing to tell you. His concern was not policy but principle; political problems of the day were interesting to him only insofar as they involved matters that endured, the Permanent Things (4).

In this regard, Lewis feared the rise of an all-powerful technological and scientific state. In the face of the Nazism, Fascism, and communism present in his own day, Lewis was extremely fearful of the union of modern science and the modern state (4).ⁱⁱⁱ He addressed these fears in numerous places, privately and publicly, in fiction and in non-fiction, as well as in public lectures and sermons. Philip Vander Elst states of Lewis’s political theory in relation to events of the twentieth century:

As the record of our own century has so terribly demonstrated, Man’s increasing knowledge and dominion over Nature may have ameliorated the material lot of the hu-

man race, but it has also increased the destructiveness and horrors of war, and armed tyrannical governments with new and more potent weapons and instruments of control with which to oppress and manipulate their citizens. And it is at this point that we encounter one of the main themes of Lewis’s political writings; an insistence on the dangers and delusions inherent in all forms of utopianism—whether social, scientific or religious (5).

Lewis also feared the use of specific technologies by governments to control its citizens. This was in addition to the fear of the state as a technological system in and of itself; in his words, a technocracy. As will be seen below, he was not the first to use the term technocracy, but whereas some saw it as a positive term, he did not. Although he did teach political philosophy in his early days as an Oxford tutor, Lewis was not a political philosopher. Yet, as with other areas of social and cultural concern, what he did say about the topic in books, essays, sermons, and lectures flowed from his Christian worldview, emphasizing and illuminating the implications of such a view for his twentieth-century culture.

Foundations and limits of the state

What is the purpose of government and the state? Lewis answers this basic question in *Mere Christianity*, using the state as an illustration with regard to Christianity for arguing that it is easy to misunderstand the basic nature of each:

It is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is here for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time (6).

Lewis argued that, regrettably, governments lose their perspectives and priorities as easily as do individuals. Yet when a government does so, the result is often the enslavement of its citizens. Sometimes, according to Lewis, this enslavement is voluntary, and sometimes it is involuntary.

For Lewis, any discussions of political theory, the state, or a government's use of technology could be properly understood or evaluated only against the deeper philosophical and theological framework of the nature of human beings individually and collectively. Vander Elst writes:

To understand Lewis's political philosophy, or, as he would have rightly seen it, his interpretation of the necessary political and social implications of Christianity, we must begin with a question. What, if Christianity is true, should be our attitude to the world in which we find ourselves? How should we live and what should be our attitude to our fellow human beings and, indeed, to creation in general? Only if we know the answer to this basic question about what should be our inner orientation can we begin to think intelligently about politics and society (5).

For Lewis, this orientation was one that accepted the fact of social and cultural ramifications of the Christian doctrines of the creation of all human beings in the image of God and of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden as recorded in Genesis 3.

Because every person is God's creation and an object of God's love, dignified with the gifts of reason, conscience, and free will, they do not belong to the state in the same way as an animal belongs to a farmer. Rather, every person has the God-given right to live within a social order which respects the freedom of that person to live his or her own life and determine his or her own destiny as long as the rights of others are respected and obligations to them are upheld (5).

From Lewis's Christian worldview, the state is not to be seen as an end in itself. Rather, in a fallen world, the government and the state exist to enable people to live together in harmony and in obedience to natural law that is the moral law innate to all people. As a result, government exists so that people can use their talents, develop their relationships, and help each other to know God, enjoy creation and fulfill their potential both individually and corporately (5).

The Christian view of humanity upheld by Lewis meant that the primary cause of suffering, pain, and evil in the world was not rooted in the structures of society or government. It did not come from a particular set of laws and institutions or a specific form of government. It was rooted inescapably in human nature. To be sure, it could

be and often was aggravated by improper laws and political structures, and history had repeatedly proven that much of the evil in the world was due to such governments and their behavior. Selfishness, corruption, cruelty, incompetence, and tyranny were all part of the history of government, and no amount of social change or social engineering would completely eradicate such behavior. Old evils may mutate and take on new shapes and forms, but they will not disappear permanently, regardless of rhetoric or revolution. This recognition leads then to a second conclusion about history and politics—the notion of the inevitability of progress as set forth so emphatically in the nineteenth century, is a myth. Lewis experienced and affirmed this throughout his life and work (5).

In the midst of the Second World War, Lewis wrote an article for *The Spectator* in August 1943 entitled "Equality." In it, he gave a synopsis of his view of government and political theory, tying them to his understanding of the nature of human beings. He declared:

I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man. I think most people are democrats for the opposite reason. A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they are not true. And whenever their weakness is exposed, the people who prefer tyranny make capital out of the exposure. I find that they're not true without looking further than myself. I don't deserve a share in governing a henroost, much less a nation. Nor do most people—all the people who believe advertisements, and think in catchwords and spread rumours. The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows...

This introduces a view of equality rather different from that in which we have been trained. I do not think that equality is one of those things (like wisdom or happiness) which are good simply in themselves for their own sakes. I think it is in the same class as medicine, which is good because we are ill, or clothes, which are good because we are no longer innocent.... When equality is treated not as medicine or a safety-gadget but as an ideal, we begin to breed that stunted and envious sort of mind which hates all superiority (7).

Lewis feared that governments would accept a scientific view of individuals and create a criminal justice system on that erroneous view. Lewis called this perspective the “humanitarian theory”, yet, he wrote of those who advocated for it: “I believe that they are seriously mistaken. I believe that the ‘Humanity’ which it claims is a dangerous illusion and disguises the possibility of cruelty and injustice without end” (8).

Lewis also was concerned that totalitarian governments would use prevailing psychological models and psychiatric methods to torture religious or political dissidents. As early as 1933, he had spoken against the persecution of the Jews by Hitler, writing to his lifelong friend Arthur Greeves, “nothing can fully excuse the iniquity of Hitler’s persecution of the Jews” (9). In 1949, in the aftermath of Hitler’s defeat and in the early years of the West’s struggle against communism, Lewis wrote:

We know that one school of psychology already regards religion as a neurosis. When this particular neurosis becomes inconvenient to government, what is to hinder government from proceeding to “cure” it? Such “cure” will, of course, be compulsory; but under the Humanitarian theory it will not be called by the shocking name of Persecution (8).

Freedom and false hopes

For Lewis, it is technology and science that permit people to believe that they can create a new set of values that will be enduring in effect and broad in social application. Yet, he believes that such a belief is in reality a false hope with very detrimental consequences, especially for freedom. The danger of the scientific state is that it is built, in part, on materialistic determinism, the premise that individual actions and thought are functions of non-rational causes. It may be genetic, environmental, or otherwise, but for Lewis, such determinism destroys the possibility of true knowledge because it undermines the validity of human reason. Further, it destroys the possibility of true virtue by denying free choice, upon which all virtue depends (4). In short, the scientific state or technocracy undermines that which makes individuals human and, in the name of helping humanity from its problems, it abolishes what it means to be human and abolishes individuality. Morality become relative and individuality is eradicated. This, in part, is his argument throughout *The Abolition of Man* first published in 1943. Writing in the essay “The Poison of Subjectivism” in the summer of 1943, Lewis, stated:

Many a popular ‘planner’ on a democratic platform, many a mild-eyed scientist in a democratic laboratory means, in the last resort, just what the Fascist means. He believes that ‘good’ means whatever men are conditioned to approve. He believes that it is the function of him and his kind to condition men; to create consciences by eugenics, psychological manipulation of infants, state education and mass propaganda (10).

Every government and every generation has the potential, according to Lewis, to misuse its authority and power and to misappropriate technology as an instrument of power. He observes:

Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors. This modifies the picture which is sometimes painted of a progressive emancipation from tradition and a progressive control of natural processes resulting in a continual increase of human power. In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them (11).

Lewis was very emphatic in his belief that the consequences of moral relativism fit well with totalitarianism and that there is a logical connection between traditional morality and liberty. He further believed that the relativistic mindset of twentieth-century humanism threatened freedom and human dignity in societies that were presently free from totalitarian control (5).

Theocracy and technocracy

While it might seem logical that Lewis would advocate a uniquely Christian state or a theocracy, he did not. In fact, he was critical of such a possibility for fear that it too would be tyrannical. His awareness of, from his perspective, the fallen nature of humanity meant that Christians were not immune from the desire for power and the ability to be corrupted by it or to use whatever instruments of power might be available to maintain control. For Lewis, there were dangers in using political power to achieve religious goals and a theocracy. Lewis declared:

Theocracy is the worst of all possible governments. All political power is at best a necessary evil: but it is least evil when its sanctions are most modest and commonplace, when it claims no more than to be useful or convenient and sets itself strictly limited objectives (12).

In opposing a theocratic view of government, Lewis also rejected the position of some within Christianity that the concept of natural law was invalid (4). Lewis detested cruelty and tyranny and believed that there was a moral perspective underlying them that failed to distinguish between goodness and power, merit and success. From the Christian perspective, Lewis insisted that God should be loved and obeyed not because He is omnipotent, but because He is loving and good. To worship power for its own sake, whether human or divine is to blur the moral distinction between good and evil. That is, in part, why Lewis maintained his childhood attraction to Nordic mythology in his adult years. In it there was, he believed, a noble and heroic rejection of the doctrine that might is right. During the Second World War he drew upon his knowledge of Nordic literature to argue that the Nazis had misunderstood the moral content and grandeur of the story of Siegfried in the Nibelungs. They had especially misinterpreted Richard Wagner's version of it (even with his supremacy beliefs) with a result that their beliefs and propaganda were unfounded (4). Lewis stated:

What business have people who call might right to say they are worshippers of Odin? The whole point about Odin was that he had the right but not the might. The whole point about Norse religion was that it alone of all mythologies told men to serve gods who are admittedly fighting with their backs to the wall and would certainly be defeated in the end. "I am off to die with Odin" said the rover in [Robert Louis] Stevenson's fable, thus proving that Stevenson understood something about the Nordic spirit which Germany has never been able to understand at all. The god will fall. The wisdom of Odin, the humorous courage of Thor (Thor was something of a Yorkshireman) and the beauty of Balder will all be smashed eventually by the realpolitik of the stupid giants and mis-shapen trolls. But that does not in the least alter the allegiance of any free man. Hence, as we should expect, real Germanic poetry is all about heroic stands, and fighting against hopeless odds (13).

In the Autumn 1946 issue of *Modern Quarterly*, J. B. S. Haldane (1892-1964), a prominent theoretical biologist, Marxist, and vehement anti-Christian author, criticized Lewis's science fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*), both in content and the philosophical perspective underlying it. Haldane's own work *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* (1928) had been one of the catalysts for Lewis's literary efforts using the science fiction genre. Lewis responded to Haldane's *Modern Quarterly* article in an essay entitled "A Reply to Professor Haldane" and used much of the essay to focus on the philosophical differences between the two men. Lewis's response deals with political theory as much as literary style and he states that his political views include a fear of tyranny across the political spectrum, including those who would govern based on belief in a divine mandate. Lewis declared:

I am a democrat because I believe that no man or group of men is good enough to be trusted with uncontrolled power over others. And the higher the pretensions of such power, the more dangerous I think it both to the rulers and to the subjects. Hence Theocracy is the worst of all governments. If we must have a tyrant a robber baron is far better than an inquisitor. The baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity at some point be sated; and since he dimly knows he is doing wrong he may possibly repent. But the inquisitor who mistakes his own cruelty and lust for power and fear for the voice of Heaven will torment us infinitely because he torments us with the approval of his own conscience and his better impulses appear to him as temptations. And since Theocracy is the worst, the nearer any government approaches to Theocracy the worse it will be. A metaphysic, held by the rulers with the force of a religion, is a bad sign. It forbids them, like the inquisitor, to admit any grain of truth or good in their opponents, it abrogates the ordinary rules of morality, and it gives a seemingly high, super-personal sanction to all the very ordinary human passions by which, like other men, the rulers will frequently be actuated. In a word, it forbids wholesome doubt (14).

The despotic tendencies that Lewis saw in democratic states of his day concerned him greatly and he wrote to one individual: "But I do think the State is increasingly tyrannical and you [civil servants], inevitably, are among

the instruments of that tyranny” (15). It was not only the mixture of religion and the state that Lewis feared; it was also the mixture of technology and the state. No form of government was immune to technological and scientific encroachment. Vander Elst observes:

Although Lewis can be criticized for using the term ‘democracy’ too loosely and for failing to engage in an explicit discussion of the difference between popular government and liberty, he must have been aware of the distinction since he was alarmed by what he saw as the despotic tendencies of modern democratic states. His anxiety was primarily aroused by the dangers inherent in government economic planning and in the humanitarian desire to use the power of the State to eliminate poverty and guarantee everybody’s material welfare from the cradle to the grave. Consequently whilst accepting the (false) economic arguments for democratic socialism, which he didn’t feel qualified to criticize, Lewis warned of their likely political consequences (5).

Lewis’s concern with the far-reaching power of an absolutist state, whether religious or secular, was expressed in several of his writings. He believed that tyranny had both ideological and spiritual roots and feared the rise of a state using technology to control its citizens through scientists who served either that state or a powerful few who formed an oligarchy. Such a system would, in Lewis’s words, become a “Technocracy,” and historical forms of political theory and government would no longer exist. In the name of progress, people would be governed by technology and power rather than liberty and human rights. By 1958, he believed that the rise of such a state was already beginning in Britain. Its rise was slow but in his thought, inevitable. In his essay “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State” as part of a 1958 series in *The Observer* titled “Is Progress Possible” he wrote:

Two wars necessitated vast curtailments of liberty, and we have grown, though grumblingly, accustomed to our chains. 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. Our intellectuals have surrendered first to the slave-philosophy of Hegel, then to Marx, finally to the linguistic analysts (16).

As a result of the rise of a new type of state, Lewis believed that personal freedom and liberty were being eroded for the sake of the few who would control the masses.

As a result, classical political theory, with its Stoical, Christian, and juristic key-conceptions (natural law, the value of the individual, the rights of man), has died. The modern State exists not to protect our rights but to do us good or make us good—anyway, to do something to us, or to make us something. Hence the new name “leaders” for those who were once “rulers.” We are less their subjects than their wards, pupils, or domestic animals. There is nothing left of which we can say to them, “Mind your own business.” Our whole lives are their business (16).

The losses to individuals in such a state were enormous, materially and immaterially. They would affect both possessions and principles, and Lewis asked, “in an increasingly planned society, how much of what I value can survive?” (16).

Lewis recognized that all states consisted of a few people governing the remainder, but he was concerned about the attitudes and intentions of the few. “It seems childish not to recognize that actual government is and always must be oligarchical. Our effective masters must be more than one and fewer than all. But the oligarchs begin to regard us in a new way” (16). When this occurs, Lewis believed that a government begins to look to its intelligentsia for support and specifically to its scientific community for methods of controlling the citizens.

One of Lewis’s fears was the coupling of the scientific community with the ruling community within any state. If this happened, he believed that in time, the scientists would usurp even the rulers and become themselves the new oligarchy. At such a time, citizens would then be at the mercy of the scientists in a new state, a technocracy—a term that first appeared in his science fiction work *That Hideous Strength* (1945 UK, 1946 US), possibly drawing from the progressive engineering movement founded by Howard Scott (1890-1970) and Walter Rautenstrauch (1880-1951) and centered at Columbia University School of Engineering in the mid-1930s. Lewis wrote of technocracy:

Again, the new oligarchy must more and more base its claim to plan us on its claim to knowledge. If we are to be mothered, mother must know best. This means they must increasingly rely on the advice of scientists, till in the end the politicians proper become merely the scientists’ puppets. Technocracy is the form to which a planned society must tend (16).

On this point of scientists and society, Lewis is not advocating an anti-science position. Rather he is concerned with the abuse of scientific knowledge and technology for political gain. Science and technology easily become the instruments of power by which the masses are controlled.

Science and the state

Lewis believed that when the grounds on which any government demands obedience are “pitched too high” the state takes on an air of superiority and paternalism in which there is an attitude of divine proportion and deceitful actions. This is especially true where science has a major role in the state. He wrote:

I dread government in the name of science. That is how tyrannies come in. In every age the men who want us to be under their thumb, if they have any sense, will put forward the particular pretension which the hopes and fears of that age render most potent. They “cash in.” It has been magic, it has been Christianity. Now it will certainly be science. Perhaps the real scientists may not think much of the tyrants’ “science”—they didn’t think much of Hitler’s racial theories or Stalin’s biology. But they can be muzzled (16).

Lewis was not unaware of current events and trends that affected the views of his day. He was a political conservative, but he was also realistic about the world in which he lived. He was not writing for pure political speculation. He argued:

We must give full weight to Sir Charles’s [C. P. Snow] reminder that millions in the East are still half starved. To these my fears would seem unimportant. A hungry man thinks about food, not freedom. We must give full weight to the claim that nothing but science globally applied, and therefore unprecedented Government controls, can produce full bellies and medical care for the whole human race: nothing, in short, but a world Welfare State. It is a full admission of these truths which impresses upon me the extreme peril of humanity at present. We have on the one hand a desperate need; hunger, sickness, and the dread of war. We have, on the other, the conception of something that might meet it: omniscient global technocracy. Are not these the ideal opportunity for enslavement? (16).

The potential use and abuse of science and technology as instruments of power was not, in Lewis’s estimation, to be minimized, and it was closely tied to the concept of progress. Lewis was unsure that there could be true progress in the shadow of technological totalitarianism. He noted:

The question about progress has become the question whether we can discover any way of submitting to the world-wide paternalism of a technocracy without losing all personal privacy and independence. Is there any possibility of getting the super Welfare State’s honey and avoiding the sting? (16).

For Lewis, regardless of the apparent success of such a society or the degree to which its citizens were willing participants, the moral and philosophical results would still be disastrous. Such a state could be functionally successful and morally a failure. Lewis argued:

All this threatens us even if the form of society which our needs point to should prove an unparalleled success. But is that certain? What assurance have we that our masters will or can keep the promise which induced us to sell ourselves? Let us not be deceived by phrases about “Man taking charge of his own destiny”. All that can really happen is that some men will take charge of the destiny of others. They will be simply men; none perfect; some greedy, cruel and dishonest. The more completely we are planned the more powerful they will be. Have we discovered some new reason why, this time, power should not corrupt as it has done before? (16).

In the end, science and technology could not overcome the moral deficiencies inherent in all individuals because of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. The political strength found so often in masses or groups of individuals could not eradicate or perfect human nature. West writes of Lewis’s concerns:

The cardinal danger of depending on science for political solutions, then, is that science is divorced from those permanent principles of morality upon which all just political solutions depend. Indeed, words like “justice,” “virtue,” “mercy,” and “duty,” are terms without meaning within the scientific framework. And so while science is not necessarily tyrannical, it can easily become a tool for tyrants because it has no firm grounding

in morality. The same goes for politics: Without a firm grounding in a firm morality, politics easily slides into tyranny (4).

Lewis writes of this in the context of the humanitarian theory of punishment, stating that it “removes sentences from the hands of jurists whom the public conscience is entitled to criticize and places them in the hands of technical experts whose special sciences do not even employ such categories as rights or justice” (8).

Lewis’s most haunting portrayal of this type of state came in his science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength* (iv). In this work, the spirit of modern science is seen in the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments—NICE. In it, the social scientists are the epitome of bureaucratic manipulators controlling individuals and society in the name of progress. Such manipulation and control of the many by the few did not necessarily mean that it was done with malice. It might just as easily be accomplished through misguided good intentions. Of those who might hold to the humanitarian theory and act upon it, he wrote:

My contention is that good men (not bad men) consistently acting upon that position would act as cruelly and unjustly as the greatest tyrants. They might in some respects act even worse. Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive (8).

Lewis then illustrated this point from the recent history of the industrial age. He argued that the industrialists may exploit people but they have moments when they are troubled by their consciences. However the moralists can be just as autocratic and do so with the approval of their consciences. The industrialist exploits, knowing it is wrong, whereas the actions of the moralist are done under the guise of the best interest of the oppressed (8).

Lewis understood that his portrayals of science and technology were harsh and that some critics might claim that he believed science and technology would inevitably lead to tyranny (though he thought it likely). Lewis rejected that criticism but knew that such criticism was unavoidable (14). Nor was Lewis so naïve as to believe that scientists would not have a say in contemporary society and political thought. But for Lewis, as West observes, “political problems are preeminently moral problems, and scientists are not equipped to function as moralists” (4). Lewis wrote:

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 (16).

The use of technology and science in the realm of government and political life could bring temporary but not permanent progress. Such progress, might well exact a very high price.

In an interesting display of political and religious principles, Lewis rejected the offer of his name being forwarded by the Prime Minister to King George VI for the honor of knighthood (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) because it might weaken his opportunities to proclaim his Christian faith. This rejection demonstrates the fear that Lewis had of any government consciously or unconsciously using its citizens for political purposes. Lewis wrote to the Prime Minister’s secretary:

I feel greatly obliged to the Prime Minister, and so far as my personal feelings are concerned this honour would be highly agreeable. There are always however knaves who say, and fools who believe, that my religious writings are all covert anti-Leftist propaganda, and my appearance in the Honours List wd. [would] of course strengthen their hands. It is therefore better that I shd. [should] not appear there. I am sure the Prime Minister will understand my reason, and that my gratitude is and will be none the less cordial (17).

For Lewis, if the conferment of honors by a political entity could be misconstrued by the public as the willing acceptance of control by the individual honored, then even greater control by the state was possible through the use of science and technology.

Regarding technology, Lewis’s views became increasingly pessimistic during the course of his life. The use of technology in World War I and World War II coupled with the increased political oppression of many people in Lewis’s age, led him to focus much of his thought on the political uses of technology. Philosophically, Lewis viewed technology as an instrument of power (v). He understood it to be inherently neutral. Technology could

be used for constructive or destructive purposes. What was more significant and crucial in Lewis's thought was the human intent behind every use of technology. Lewis believed that whether an individual, an industry, or a governmental body used a particular technology, there were ethical and moral values underlying its use. In this regard, Lewis was more concerned about the ethics and implementation of technology than the application of it to particular situations.

The concept of progress and the nature of the human condition were integrally related in Lewis's thought. Lewis's theological perspective provided boundaries for human potential and for the course of human history. When he looked at human history he did so from a linear historiography rather than one that was cyclical or retrospective of a golden age. He believed that history was moving toward a climactic end. But the final manifestation of that end would be theological and not technological.

Lewis's understanding of the commingling of the physical world and the spiritual world provided him a belief that human history would end with the realization of the eternal state as taught in Christianity. Accordingly, all social, scientific, and technological progress was transitory. So too, was the state in its many forms throughout the centuries. This is not say that the state was unimportant to Lewis. It was extremely important. But its importance had limits.

In the realm of political thought, Lewis believed that the principles of democracy best fit with his understanding of the nature of humanity and the necessity of government in a world marred by the ramifications of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Lewis abhorred the tyrannies of Nazism, fascism, and communism and feared the use of technology and science within these systems because of the potential uses of them by a few people to control many people.

In both his life and his thought, he was often out of step with the prevailing ideas of his age. Yet he did not disdain the world or retreat from it. Rather, he remained engaged, accepting and appreciating what he believed to be the good qualities of western civilization and criticizing those qualities or trends he considered bad.

Lewis upheld reason and faith as two of the most important qualities for any person in any age. These two components of his life enabled him to engage the tem-

poral while longing for the eternal. In so doing, his life and thought provide a model for all who seriously seek to understand technology, the state, and their influences in the modern world.

Conclusion

It has now been fifty years since the death of CS Lewis on November 22, 1963. His death, as well as the death of Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) on the same day was overshadowed by the assassination of John F. Kennedy, also on November 22, 1963. Yet, both Lewis and Huxley expressed concern regarding the potential of uncontrolled employment of technology by the state. Though far apart in their worldviews, Huxley and Lewis shared concerns regarding the liabilities of technology for human freedom. Huxley argued that "the growth of technology and what may be called the technicization of every aspect of human life" should not be minimized because it was "the most profoundly important sociological factor of modern times" (18). Although it is unlikely that Lewis would have considered technology to be the most important sociological factor of his age, he did place it high on his list, and, was he writing today, it might well be first. His ideas regarding technology and government provide a useful retrospective point of entry for contemporary reflection on technology with respect to the relationship between the citizen and the state. Although Lewis did not and could not foresee such things such as the Internet, cyberwar, and cybersecurity, he understood that any technology is simply an instrument of power that can be used for the benefit or detriment of the citizen and the state.

How a state uses technology to govern at home and establish influence abroad will become more complex as new technologies emerge. The fundamental principles of politics, international relations, human rights, human security, law, and economics will not change but the application of those principles will increase significantly in the real world and the virtual world (vi). Though Lewis's era was different from the present, the ideas he espoused remain relevant. He did not embrace partisan politics but he did look for principles in the political actions of individuals, groups, and nations. He was a staunch defender of limited government and feared government overreach into the lives of its citizens. He believed that although governments might increasingly have the ability through technology to control individuals, no government or state could produce virtuous citizens and virtue stemming from freedom was necessary for the continuation of civil soci-

ety. Without virtue the use of technology risks the likelihood of becoming vice. Using the metaphor of the human chest as the locus of virtue, Lewis warned of his age: “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” (11).

In an increasingly technological age in which governments have far greater technological capabilities than previously, the desire to use those capabilities is understandable and valuable when used ethically and legally. Lewis’ warning is to not to avoid technology, but to understand it as a tool, and more importantly, to understand the human desire to control things and people. Lewis was concerned about technology’s allure and how unscrupulous individuals or governments might use technology to control people and inhibit freedom. He feared neither technology nor science, but cautioned regarding the misuse of both. With respect to governmental abuse, he saw in both science and technology the potential of a few people controlling many people. Powerful technological capabilities and powerful governmental structures are not inherently bad, but they require exceptional oversight. Lewis cautioned against undue optimism in science, technology, and the idea of progress because he believed that the human condition was such that it would always interfere with unbounded progress. He understood that the challenge in any age is for individuals and governments to use science and technology to the benefit rather than detriment of all concerned. As such, his words echo to the present and will continue to do so in the future.

Disclaimer

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Competing Interests

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Notes

i. For further elaboration on this topic, see EM Atkins and RJ Dodaro, eds. *Augustine: Political Writings. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- ii. See for example Lewis’s 1954 inaugural lecture *De Descriptione Temporum* as newly appointed Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature at the University of Cambridge.
- iii. On Lewis and science, see Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: CS Lewis and the Case against Scientism.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983 and John G. West, ed. *The Magician’s Twin: CS Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society.* Seattle: Discovery Institute, 2012.
- iv. Interestingly, the book was reviewed by George Orwell under the heading “The Scientists Take Over” in the 16 August 1945 edition of the *Manchester Evening News.* Orwell considered the book “worth reading” but flawed because, “unfortunately, the supernatural keeps breaking in, and it does so in rather confusing, undisciplined ways.”
- v. See Timothy J. Demy, “Technology, Progress, and the Human Condition in the Life and Thought of CS Lewis,” Unpublished PhD dissertation, Salve Regina University, 2004 available through UMI Microfilm no. 3146404.
- vi. For examples of how this may play out, see Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

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