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PIETAS

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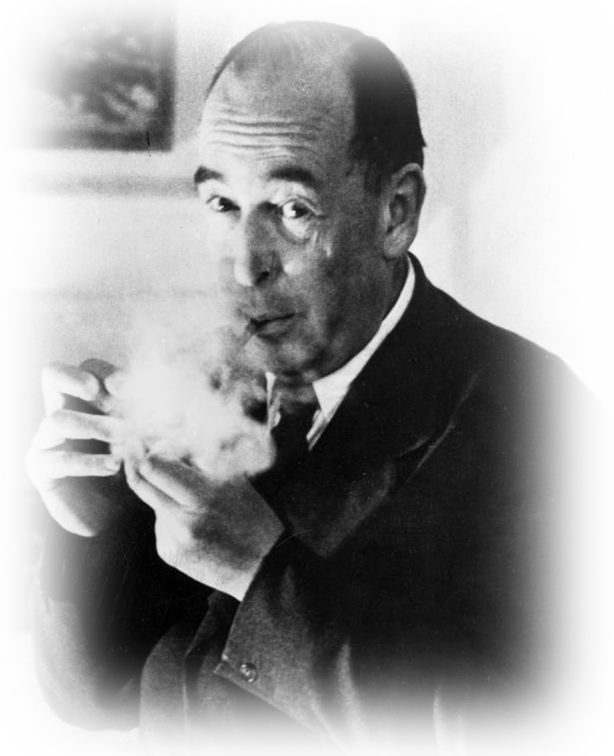
Feature Articles

Book Reviews

Letter From the Ciceronian Society



C. S. Lewis photo courtesy C. S. Lewis Foundation/Public Domain

C. S. Lewis is both the subject of one of our feature articles and one of the twentieth century's most thoughtful defenders of Christianity. In the *Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape gives advice to his nephew-apprentice Wormwood on securing souls for hell. Screwtape discusses the weakness of piety without action:

> The great thing is to prevent [man's] doing anything. As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilising the seeds which the Enemy plants in a human soul. Let him do anything but act. No amount of piety in his imagination and affections will harm us if we can keep it out of his will. As one of the humans has said, active habits are strengthened by repetition but passive ones are weakened. The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.[1]

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1942), 69–70.

Lewis's words strike a similar tone to those in David Hein's recent book, *Teaching the Virtues* (reviewed in this issue):

> Just as in the ancient world the good Roman citizen practiced *pietas*, incorporating in his life not only reverence toward the gods but also proper respect toward parents, kinsmen, country, so in the modern world, and particularly in our schools, ought we to embody dutifulness toward the natural order, practicing piety personally, civically, and even academically. (167)

In his discussion of the moral virtue of courage, Hein directs us to Lewis's explanation in *The Screwtape Letters* "for why God created 'a dangerous world'" (92):

> God made a cosmos 'in which moral issues really come to the point.' In such a world, human beings are provided with occasions of real challenge and with opportunities to grow into their full stature.
>
> In the face of these trials, 'courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.'" (92)

Lewis interwove a teaching of moral virtue, of the role of reason and pious duty to God, into a creation story. Joshua Paladino, one of our feature authors this issue, will present a provocative take on Lewis's view of natural law after a brief introduction to our feature articles.

Any serious treatment of the relationship between the virtues of contemplation and action, as well as piety in the Western tradition, must include Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204). Commonly known as Maimonides, he was both a philosopher and lawgiver of the Mishneh Torah. Our issue begins with Lewis Fallis's careful and provocative reading of book three of Maimonides's great philosophical work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Fallis teases out Maimonides's rhetorical and pedagogical aims in his account of the reasonableness of the Jewish Law (and thus between reason and revelation), as well as their implications for religious and political law. To do this he draws attention to the dialectical aspects of a discussion between Maimonides and his student or interlocutor, Joseph. "Such an analysis," writes Fallis, "can help us understand Maimonides's only apparently contradictory teaching and its ultimate degree of congruence with the teaching of the Jewish tradition."

Our second featured article moves from the Jewish to the Christian tradition. Charles C. Yost turns to the thought and writings of Demetrios Kydones and Manuel Kalekas. He

challenges the prevailing academic focus on the anti-unionist discourse following the Schism of 1054. A treatment of pro-union authors, he argues, is necessary to provide a more complete view of medieval or Byzantine realities. Their henotic ideology provided both a coherent, evolving argument for union and a balanced and conciliatory understanding of the differences between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. It was only with "the critical influence of Latin, and specifically Thomist, ecclesiology," that unionist discourse took on a distinctly pessimistic and Byzantine quality. By the fourteenth century its writers were characterized by a profound sense of alienation from their homeland.

The Christian Church's challenge to inner unity only followed its subversion of pagan codes of virtue. Aaron C. Thurow provides a scholarly and insightful, even revisionist, interpretation of the Pearl Poet's Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Using a series of dichotomies, he analyzes chivalry as a guide to virtue in a fallen world. The Pearl Poet, by revealing chinks in the armor of Sir Gawain's seeming perfection, shows the limits of the chivalric code. Moral perfectionism and the standard of honor fade in the light of certain death. This examination of the moral life, argues Thurow, leads the reader to another, more difficult code informed by a conscientious awareness of one's own past failures. Moreover, it challenges the reader to consider a distinctly Christian view of the cosmos informed by the Augustinian mystery of the incarnation.

One of the great twentieth century defenders of Christianity—who did so by radicalizing its teachings—was C. S. Lewis. Lewis is rarely regarded as a political theorist, yet in our final feature article, Joshua Paladino demonstrates how his literary works are deeply intertwined with political themes. Rather than separating morality from politics, Lewis often linked moral decay with political dysfunction—particularly warning against the rise of technocratic governance in the postwar era. Paladino reexamines Lewis's legacy through both his writings and contemporary scholarship, arguing that Lewis consistently expressed counterrevolutionary opposition to the expanding bureaucratic elite and the dominance of scientific education. His critiques extended to technocracy, the concept of the state of exception, the moral authority claimed by humanitarian justice, and evolving gender roles in both marriage and society. Advocating resistance against the modern state, Lewis envisioned a new ruling class that would reject the prevailing norms of humanitarian justice and scientific democracy in favor of retributive justice and traditional moral values.

Also in this issue, David Beer reviews Thomas P. Harmon's *The Universal Way of Salvation in the Thought of Augustine*. Allen Mendenhall reviews Bernard J. Dobski's *Mark Twain's Joan of Ark*. Kevin Slack reviews David Hein's *Teaching the Virtues*, and William Batchelder reviews David Rieff's *Desire and Fate*.

We now turn to Paladino's revisionist take on C. S. Lewis's conception of the natural law, as well as the myth, a "not unlikely tale," he introduces to convey it.

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A "NOT UNLIKELY TALE": C. S. LEWIS ON THE NATURAL LAW

C. S. Lewis presented his Creation myth, his "not unlikely tale" about man's Creation and Fall, in *The Problem of Pain*.[2] It details both man's natural condition as being in complete obedience to his will and spirit, and also his fallen state in which the natural law replaced the law of spirit. Lewis's account begins with an evolutionary phase, where:

> God perfected the animal which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself. He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, and jaws and teeth and throat capable of articulation, and a brain sufficiently complex to execute all the material motions whereby rational thought is incarnated. (65)

The pre-human creature's bodily and mental attributes developed before its spirit formed, and its "physical and psychical processes were directed to purely material and natural ends" (65). God created the true man when he filled him with "a new kind of consciousness which could say 'I' and 'me'" (65). Man could also know God, make value judgments about "truth, beauty, and goodness," and "perceive time" (65). Certain physical and mental traits, combined with the spiritual endowment, made the perfect man, who was "then all consciousness" and had under his control "those functions which to us are almost part of the external world, such as digestion and circulation" (65). Lewis summarized the first human's life: "His organic processes obeyed the law of his own will, not the law of nature" (65). These pre-Fall humans could choose their appetites, stay awake (in a sense) while they consciously enjoy sleep, repair their tissues at will, decide their lives' length, command the beasts, and

[2] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947).

otherwise exercise a mystical or magical control over their own bodies and the world around them. In addition to their perfect self-conscious control of their own bodies and minds, they existed harmoniously with God: "In perfect cyclic movement, being, power, and joy descended from God to man in the form of gift and returned from man to God in the form of obedient love and ecstatic adoration" (66). The human spirit, with God's help, controlled the human organism. Humans did not obey laws inherent in nature; they obeyed God's spiritual laws, and nature in turn obeyed them.

Lewis argued that humanity's disobedience forced God to discontinue this relationship, to stop ruling man directly, and to substitute the law of spirit for the law of nature. Formerly, God ruled man's spirit, and man's spirit ruled his body and mind, but man cannot rule his body and mind unless God empowers him to do so. Having rejected God's rule, man necessarily rejected his only power of self-rule and thus subjected himself to Nature. Lewis wrote:

> I doubt whether it would have been intrinsically possible for God to continue to rule the organism *through* the human spirit when the human spirit was in revolt against Him. At any rate He did not. He began to rule the organism in a more external way, not by the laws of spirit, but by those of nature. (69–70)

Previously governed by reason and will, man subjected himself to the environment and chance. Some descriptions of the Fall present it as a mere change in man's mental habits, as a reduction in his fortitude against sin, or as a darkening of the conscience; Lewis agreed but added the biological idea that the Fall "was a loss of status as a *species*. What man lost by the Fall was his original specific nature" (70). *Homo sapiens* did not retain their nature but became less wise, less moral, less virtuous. Instead, the original creature, *homo spiritualis*, became a lesser being, *homo sapiens*, a creature who lives between beast and spirit. It was "a radical alteration of his constitution, a disturbance of the relation between his component parts, and an internal perversion of one of them" (71). In losing his species-status, man necessarily became subject to a new, lower law.

God empowered spiritual man to obey the law proper to his nature, and this obedience originally required no struggle (except against the first temptation); now, a new law binds natural man—the law of nature—but it is not proper to his true nature, so even perfect obedience to the natural law cannot ensure his perfection and his attainment of the highest

goods. But Lewis did not believe that humans could obey even the natural law. Summarizing St. Paul, he wrote that "perfect obedience to the moral law, which we find written in our hearts and perceive to be necessary even on the biological level, is not in fact possible to men" (54). God's original Creation harmonized a perfect nature, a perfect spiritual law, and perfect obedience to that law, but humans in the fallen world have imperfect natures, know an imperfect natural law, and act out an imperfect obedience to that law. Perfect obedience to the natural law, even if theoretically possible, would still produce an imperfect creature because the natural law does not direct man to obey God as its first axiom; instead, it directs man to secondary goods—food, water, shelter, safety, procreation—that then create the conditions within which obedience to God becomes possible.

Concluding chapter 9 of *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis wrote: "The thesis of this chapter is simply that man, as a species, spoiled himself, and that good, to us in our present state, must therefore mean primarily remedial or corrective good" (76). The natural law, though deficient, aids man's restoration by making him aware of and directing him toward a higher good. For Lewis, the law of nature prepares man to acknowledge and return to the law of spirit.

Joshua Paladino

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The Ciceronian Society