

Ayn Rand's marginalia on C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

From *Ayn Rand's Marginalia: Her critical comments on the writings of over 20 authors*, edited by Robert Mayhew (Second Renaissance Books, New Milford, Conn. 1995), pp. 90-94

- » Quotations from Lewis are reproduced with underlinings, **bold type**, and Robert Mayhew's editorial insertions [in square brackets] exactly as presented in *Ayn Rand's Marginalia*. Underlinings of two editorial paraphrases and one ellipsis remain unexplained.
- » Serial numbers 1 through 21 have been added. Also added are three end notes commenting on Professor Mayhew's paraphrases.
- » Following each quotation from Lewis, page numbers in square brackets refer to three editions of *The Abolition of Man* respectively:
 1. Ayn Rand's copy, presumably the first US edition (Macmillan, New York 1947)
 2. British first edition (Oxford University Press, London 1943)
 3. Fount Paperbacks edition (Collins, London 1978)

C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

Ayn Rand's marginalia

1.

The Innovator attacks traditional values (the *Tao*) in defence of what he at first supposes to be (in some special sense) 'rational' or 'biological' values. But as we have seen, all the values which he uses in attacking the *Tao*, and even claims to be substituting for it, are themselves derived from the *Tao*. If he had really started from scratch, from right outside the human tradition of value, no jugglery could have advanced him an inch towards the conception that a man should die for the community or work for posterity.
[pp. 27/21/28]

You bet he couldn't!

2.

I am considering what the thing called 'Man's power over Nature' must always and essentially be. No doubt, the picture could be modified by public ownership of raw materials and factories and public control of scientific research. But unless we have a world state this will still mean the power of one nation over others. And even within the world state or the nation it will mean (in principle) the power of majorities over minorities, and (in the concrete) of a government over the people. And all long-term exercises of power, especially in breeding, must mean the power of earlier generations over later ones.
[pp. 35-36/28/35]

So in the pre-science age, there was no power of majorities over minorities – and the Middle Ages were a period of love and equality, and the oppression began only in the U.S.A. (!!!) The abysmal bastard!

!!

3.

[pp. T]he later a generation comes – the nearer it lives to that date at which the species becomes extinct – the less power it will have in the forward direction, because its subjects will be so few. There is therefore no question of a power vested in the race as a whole steadily growing as long as the race survives. The last men, far from being the heirs of power, will be of all men most subject to the dead hand of the great planners and conditioners and will themselves exercise least power upon the future.
[pp. 36-37/29/36]

It is unbelievable, but this monster literally thinks that to give men new knowledge is to gain power(!) over them. The cheap, awful, miserable, touchy, social-metaphysical mediocrity!

4.

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. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car.
[pp. 37/29/36]

So when you cure men of TB, syphilis, scurvy, small pox and rabies – you make them weaker!!!

5.

In the older systems both the kind of man the teachers wished to produce and their motives for producing him were prescribed by the *Tao* – a norm to which the teachers themselves were subject and from which they claimed no liberty to depart.
[pp. 38/30/37]

And which brought such great joy, peace, happiness and moral stature to men!! (The bastard!)

6.

[Those who will replace traditional values]* are ... not men (in the old sense) at all. They are, if you like, men who have sacrificed their own share in traditional humanity in order to devote themselves to the task of deciding what 'Humanity' shall henceforth mean.
[pp. 40/31/39]

So the state of being "men" is equated with tradition!(!?)

7.

[Those who reject tradition]** are not men at all: they are artefacts. Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man.
[pp. 41/32/40]

Meaning if you choose your own values and drop blind faith, you are an "artifact"!

8.

I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently. I am

inclined to think that the Conditioners will hate the conditioned. Though regarding as an illusion the artificial conscience which they produce in us their subjects, they will yet perceive that it creates in us an illusion of meaning for our lives which compares favourably with the futility of their own: and they will envy us as eunuchs envy men.
[pp. 42/33/40-41]

What a confession of his own social-metaphysical soul this all is! He knows he "can be had" by anyone, and he's scared of his non-traditional masters!

9.

Their extreme rationalism, by 'seeing through' all '**rational**' motives, leaves them creatures of wholly irrational behaviour. If you will not obey the *Tao*, or else commit suicide, obedience to impulse (and therefore, in the long run, to mere 'nature') is the only course left open.

The "rational" to him is blind faith!

!!

At the moment, then, of Man's victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely '**natural**' – **to their irrational impulses.**
[pp. 42/33/41]

So man, by nature, is irrational – but faith makes him rational!!!

10.

If the fully planned and conditioned world (with its *Tao* a mere product of the planning) comes into existence, Nature will be troubled no more by the restive species that rose in revolt against her so many millions of years ago, will be vexed no longer by its chatter of truth and mercy and beauty and happiness.
[pp. 43/34/41-42]

– all of which are unnatural!?!

11.

We do not look at trees either as Dryads or as beautiful objects while we cut them into beams: the first man who did so may have felt the price keenly, and the bleeding trees in Virgil and Spenser may be far-off echoes of that primeval sense of impiety. The stars lost their divinity as astronomy developed, and the Dying God has no place in chemical agriculture. To many, no doubt, this process is simply the gradual discovery that the real world is different from what we expected, and the old opposition to Galileo or to 'body-snatchers' is simply obscurantism. But that is not the whole story. It is not the greatest of modern scientists who feel most sure that the object, stripped of its qualitative properties and reduced to mere quantity, is wholly real. Little scientists, and little unscientific followers of science, may think so. The **great minds** know very well that the object, so treated, is an artificial abstraction, that something of its reality has been lost.
[pp. 44/35/42-43]

This is really an old fool – and nothing more!

Ad hominem!

And what does he think an abstraction is, that great "advocate of reason"? Here's where the Korzybski comes out in him.

12.

We are always conquering Nature, *because* 'Nature' is the name for what we have, to some extent, conquered. The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere Nature. Every conquest over Nature increases her domain. The stars do not become Nature till we can weigh and measure them; the soul does not become Nature till we can psychoanalyse her.
[pp. 45/35/43]

This incredible, medieval monstrosity believes that "mere Nature" is the rationally intelligible!!!!

13.

Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the Tao, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own 'natural' impulses. Only the Tao provides a common human law of action which can over-arch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.
[pp. 46/36/44]

The lousy bastard who is a pickpocket of concepts, not a thief, which is too big a word for him.

Either we are mystics of spirit or mystics of muscle – reason? who ever heard of it?

– such as in the Middle Ages?

14.

In the Tao itself, as long as we remain within it, we find the concrete reality in which to participate is to be truly human: the real common will and common reason of humanity, alive, and growing like a tree, and branching out, as the situation varies, into ever new beauties and dignities of application.
[pp. 46-47/37/45]

Such as starvation and babies dying at birth. "Unenslaved" by science!

15.

Nothing I can say will prevent some people from describing this lecture as an attack on science. I deny the charge, of course: and real Natural Philosophers (there are some now alive) will perceive that in defending value I defend *inter alia* the value of **knowledge**, which must die like every other when its roots in the Tao are cut.
[pp. 47/37/45]

And how!

What's that, brother?

16.

The serious magical endeavour and the serious scientific endeavour are twins: one was sickly and died, the other strong and thrive. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse.
[pp. 47-48/38/46]

The cheap, drivelling non-entity!

17.

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the wisdom of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to **subdue reality** to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious – such as digging up and mutilating the dead.

If we compare the chief trumpeter of the new era (Bacon) with Marlowe's Faustus, the similarity is striking. You will read in some critics that Faustus has a thirst for knowledge. In reality, he hardly mentions it. It is not truth he wants from the devils, but gold and guns and girls. 'All things that move between the quiet poles shall be at his command' and 'a sound magician is a mighty god' In the same spirit Bacon condemns those who value knowledge as an end in itself: this, for him, is to use as a mistress for pleasure what ought to be a spouse for fruit. The true object is to extend Man's power to the performance of all things possible. He rejects magic because it does not work; but his goal is that of the magician.

[pp. 48/38/46]

This is monstrous!

!!!

!!

So Bacon is a "magician" – but Christ performing miracles is, of course, a spectacle of pure, rational knowledge!!

This monstrosity is not opposed to science – oh no! – not to pure science, only to applied science, only to anything that improves man's life on earth!

!!!

18.

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.

[pp. 49/38-39/47]

!!! You bet your life, you God-damn, beaten mystic at the Renaissance!

19.

Is it, then, possible to imagine a new Natural Philosophy, continually conscious that the 'natural object' produced by analysis and abstraction is not reality but only a view, and always correcting the abstraction? I hardly know what I am asking for.

[pp. 49/39/47]

This is true – but even here he's lying. He knows what he wants: a science subservient to the Pope.

20.

[Lewis claims we must stop at tradition if we wish to avoid an infinite regress of rational explanations.]*** You cannot go on 'explaining away' for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles. If you see

The abysmal caricature who postures as a "gentleman and a scholar" treats subjects like these by means of a corner lout's equivocation on "seeing through."! By "seeing through," he means "rational understanding"!

through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see.
[pp. 50/40/48]w

Oh, BS! – and total BS!

21.

[Lewis ends his essay with the previous passage. On the next page, above the beginning of the Appendix, Ayn Rand made her last statement, apparently a summary of the essence of the whole essay.]
[pp. 51/41/49]

The bastard actually means that the more man knows, the more he is bound by reality, the more he has to comply with an “A is A” existence of absolute identity and causality – and that is what he regards as “surrender” to nature, or as nature’s “power over man.” (!) What he objects to is the power of reality. Science shrinks the realm of his whim. (!!) When he speaks of value judgements, he means values set by whim – and he knows that there is no place for that in nature, i.e. in reality. (The abysmal scum!)

Notes

* Lewis is in fact speaking of a hypothetical ‘race of conditioners who really can cut out all posterity in what shape they please’.

** While the paraphrase suggests that Lewis is still referring to ‘the Conditioners’, he is now in fact talking about ‘their subjects’ – i.e. what he envisions as the ‘conditioned’ mass of mankind.

*** This explanation seems gratuitous but is really worse. Lewis is not here advocating any external stop to rational explanation. He is denouncing what he calls ‘the fatal serialism of the modern imagination’, pointing out that ‘there are progressions in which the last step is *sui generis* – incommensurable with the others – and in which to go the whole way is to undo all the labour of your previous journey.’ [50/40/48] The general point is one Lewis expressed when he praised a modern author for grasping ‘what seems to be a hard idea to modern minds, that a certain degree of a thing might be good and a further degree of the same thing bad’ (letter of 8 March 1937, *Collected Letters* Vol. 2, p. 211). His particular concern here is with stopping reason from stopping itself.