

THE ABOLITION OF MAN: Terms and Key Issues

1. **The *Tao* or “Way.”** The key idea of the *Tao* is that certain human responses and emotions are appropriate and others inappropriate to the way the Universe is. It is (Chapter 1, p. 29) “the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.” Lewis argued that the *Tao* is a common core of values to be found in the Ethical teachings of all major cultures throughout history.

2. **Subjectivism.** This is the idea, attacked by Lewis, that all statements of aesthetic or moral value are really only reports of the speaker’s emotional state.

3. **Scientism.** Scientism is the view that only what can be observed and measured by scientific methods is really objective or “valid.” It is prevalent among those ignorant of real science who have an almost religious veneration for science and scientists. Scientism is not the same as science. *Science* is simply the attempt to understand and describe nature. Many great scientists have also believed in reality beyond nature e.g. Newton and Einstein. *Scientism* is an attitude toward science, the view that science is the sole source of knowledge relevant to human experience. It therefore assumes Naturalism, the thesis that nature is everything, contrary to many scientists.

One version of scientism was Verificationism, which claimed that a statement was literally meaningful only if it can be verified (or refuted) by some possible observation. According to this view, religious or ethical statements are literally meaningless, and if they are meaningful at all, it is only as indirect statements of our own emotion. Thus Scientism leads to Subjectivism.

4. **The Abolition of Man.** Lewis thought that the *Tao* is what makes humans human. Scientism threatens to exclude the *Tao* on the grounds that value judgments are not “scientific.” When that is done, humans will come to regard themselves as no more than another piece of nature. Without any ethical guidelines, humans thus become the objects of all sorts of experimentation and eugenics, as suggested by *That Hideous Strength*. The human conquest of nature now becomes the human conquest of humanity itself. While other conquests of nature have given humans more power, this threatens to enslave us.

5. **Men Without Chests.** Following Plato, Lewis argued that there are three elements significant for human motivation, The Intellect or Reason (the “head”), the Appetite or Desire (the “belly”) and the Affections or Heart (the “chest”). As Plato said, the head rules the belly through the chest. The problem with scientism, Lewis thinks, is that it has no room for the Heart or, as we would now call it, the affective dimension. Since it denies that our valuations are ever valid, all we are left with is reason and desire, which leads to all kinds of selfishness and the destruction of community. Lewis followed Aristotle in thinking that we can and should educate people not merely to think, but also to have appropriate attitudes, to care about what is really valuable: in other words, he thought we had a responsibility to create people with well-developed hearts.