

## C.S. Lewis and the Objectivity of Art

C. S. Lewis was an objectivist. His objectivism is not to be confused with Enlightenment Rationalism. Lewis's objectivist commitments are tethered to Revelation, both General (revealed in Nature) and Special (revealed in Scripture). Lewis makes his most substantive case for objectivity in *The Abolition of Man*, and gives evidence for his objectivity in many of his other books. He applies this objectivity to intellectual and moral judgment and also to judgments of Beauty and Art. He was aware that knowing about objectivity conceptually is only part of the process to making good judgments; consequently there is a need for epistemological verification and skill in the application of principle. This seminar sets forth Lewis's thoughts in matters of objectivity in aesthetic judgment.

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- I. **Introduction:** One cannot separate C. S. Lewis's Judgments of the Objectivity of Art from his views about Objectivity, generally. These ideas are set forth in his book, *The Abolition of Man*. The argument of the book runs along these lines:
  - a. Chapter One—reality exists independent of my thoughts about it. What I think is true when it corresponds with reality. This is the basis of objective values.
  - b. Chapter Two—Those who deny objective values substitute arbitrary values in the place of objectivity. These arbitrary values are drawn from: Utility; Instinct; Economics.
  - c. Chapter Three—When objective value dies, man dies. The will to power becomes all important and tyranny follows.
- II. **The Abolition of Man, an evaluation of its argument: Evaluation of the argument of *The Abolition of Man* with help from Richard Weaver's *The Ethics of Rhetoric*.**
  - a. The Argument from Definition.
  - b. The Argument from Similitude.

- c. The Argument from Consequence.
- d. The Argument from Authority.

### III. Application of the Doctrine of Objective Value to Art

- a. Can I say Prague is the most beautiful city in the world?
- b. Can anyone make an objective claim about beauty? See Lewis's explanation of the objective and subjective distinctions in beauty:
  - 1) Admirable Beauty (Objective: intrinsic to the object whether or not we perceive it it).
  - 2) Enjoyable Beauty (Subjective: the perceiver's capacity—whether natural or trained—to see and enjoy the beauty intrinsic to an object).
  - 3) Standards of Objectivity in Beauty as defined by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. [Below are three standards. The list is not exhaustive; if there are three standards there can be 1,003. The eye trained to see some elements can be either blinded by what they do see, or open and more likely to see more].
    - a) Integrity.
    - b) Proportion.
    - c) Clarity.

### IV. Application of the Doctrine of Objective Value to Morality with help from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. (Also see Lewis's *Mere Christianity*). Virtue must also be considered in judgments of Beauty

- a. See Plato's *Theaetetus*: The Mind is like a block of wax. (explain)
- b. Impurity of life affects judgment
- c. Aristotle's Ethics: virtue as a tool of good judgment

- 1) The end to which we do things is to live a happy life.
- 2) A happy life is measured when all of our basic needs are met.
- 3) Our needs are determined by our nature.
- 4) Can we want more than we need? If so then we need virtue:
  - a) Courage is the *habitual* ability to suffer pain and hardship; it is endurance, fortitude, and staying power.
  - b) Temperance is the *habitual* ability to resist the enticement of immediate pleasure in order to gain the greater though more remote good.
  - c) Justice is the *habit* of being concerned for the general welfare of one's society: it secures and protects natural rights; it is fair; it renders to others their due. [making good judgments in matters of beauty becomes a concern for justice: have I rendered to a thing its due?]
  - d) Wisdom is the *habit* of being careful about the decisions one makes: it seeks council and advice.

## **V. Conclusion**

### ***Suggested Readings:***

Lewis, C. S., 1947. *The Abolition of Man: Or, Reflections on Education, with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*. New York: Macmillan.

Miller, Rod, ed., 2013. *C. S. Lewis and the Arts: Creativity in the Shadowlands*. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books.

Reppert, Victor, 2003. *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: A Philosophical Defense of Lewis's Argument from Reason*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press.