
The Intellectual Kinship of Irving Babbitt and C. S. Lewis: Will and Imagination in That Hideous Strength

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Introduction

Interest in literature and the imaginative dimensions of politics has been stimulated in previous decades by the inability of positivism fully to account for the experience of human beings amidst the political and cultural changes of the 1960s. Aspects of important social movements such as the civil rights movement defied the strictures of positivist social science. In the generation that followed, the study of literature grew in prominence along with recognition of the importance of the imagination for a fuller understanding of politics.

In 1993, the American Political Science Association (APSA) added an organized section on "Politics and Literature."¹ The turn within the discipline to the study of "politics and literature" was attributed to literature's ability to express and explore dimensions of human existence that precede or are implicit in political engagement as well as its capacity to explore the ramifications of politics for other aspects of human existence. In an article describing the reasons for founding the

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¹ This section is now titled "Politics, Literature, and Film." <http://www.apsanet.org/sections/sectionDetail.cfm?section=Sec30>.

APSA section, Catherine Zuckert writes,

The questions that led political scientists to look to works of art for enlightenment concern the aspects of human life that are most difficult, if not impossible, to study and observe externally or objectively—the attitudes, emotions, and opinions that shape and are shaped by people’s circumstances, especially their political circumstances.²

Recognition that these imaginative intuitions are shaped by literature and its derivatives has produced a plethora of books and articles over the past few decades,³ as well as a notion that there may be depths to which even philosophy, let alone positivist social science, cannot reach.⁴ On occasion, even political philosophy may need to turn to literature for enlightenment.

This interest in literature as an influence on thought and conduct is not new but is the rediscovery of connections that have long been studied by others and that were explored in depth by the Harvard Professor Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). Babbitt wrote at great length about the role of literature and the arts in shaping human life, for good or ill. In a series of major works, he demonstrated how qualities of the imagination relate to moral, political, and other social phenomena.⁵ A similar interest and emphasis, though differently applied, is discernible in another titan of twentieth-century literary

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² Catherine Zuckert, “Why Political Scientists Want to Study Literature,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 28:2 (June 1995): 189. Dr. Zuckert here opens a symposium which includes articles by Werner J. Dannhauser, Paul A. Cantor, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Wilson Carey McWilliams.

³ For example, Leonidas Donskis, *Power and Imagination: Studies in Politics and Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), Raymond Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2010), John Dyck, Paul Rowe, and Jens Zimmermann, editors *Politics and the Religious Imagination* (London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), and Catherine Zuckert, *Natural Right and the American Imagination: Political Philosophy in Novel Form* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990).

⁴ Werner J. Dannhauser, “Poetry vs. Philosophy,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 28:2 (June 1995): 190-192. Dannhauser discusses the “power of literature to affect one’s political views,” and, more importantly, that “poetry can teach us things beyond the reach of philosophy.” According to this view, poetry—and other literature—can reach the imaginative dimensions of the soul beyond even the reach of reason.

⁵ Babbitt’s central ideas in ethics, aesthetics and logic are explained and analyzed and used to reconstitute the epistemology of the humanities and social sciences in Claes G. Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason: Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality*, 2nd exp. ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1997).

thought: the Oxford don and popular author C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). While they represent different genres and scholarly styles and are not often compared, Babbitt's and Lewis's understanding of the person and the imaginative dimensions of life and literature are remarkably similar. Moreover, their concerns, along with those of a number of related thinkers, may be seen as anticipating the above-mentioned study of politics and literature at the end of the twentieth century. This article will argue that Lewis shared Babbitt's understanding of the imagination and its relation to will and reason as well as Babbitt's dichotomous conception of the idyllic and moral imaginations. To demonstrate this commonality, we will explore strikingly Babbittian ideas in Lewis's dystopian science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength* and discuss the implications of this understanding of the imagination for politics and human life generally.

Babbitt's and Lewis's understanding of the imaginative dimensions of life and literature remarkably similar.

Irving Babbitt

Irving Babbitt pioneered the study of comparative literature at Harvard in the early twentieth century. He was significantly influential during his own lifetime, was widely discussed, engaged in spirited public debates, and delivered distinguished lectures at several universities in the U.S. and abroad. Babbitt exerted a major influence on a variety of American authors and thinkers including T. S. Eliot, Russell Kirk, Walter Lippmann, and Peter Viereck.⁶ He was highly controversial and was criticized by literary luminaries such as Ernest Hemingway and Sinclair Lewis. In 1960, Harvard University established the Irving Babbitt Chair in Comparative Literature.

Babbitt opposed what he called sentimental humanitarianism, the unleashing of egalitarian and maudlin emotion and enthusiasm as a replacement for morality as understood in the classical and Christian traditions. He argued that sentimental humanitarianism was rampant in modernity, often in cooperation, somewhat paradoxically, with a new faith in science. He detected two forms of naturalism that, though superficially dissimilar, came together in one destructive historical force: a Baconian scientific naturalism that seeks to control society and

⁶ Claes G. Ryn, introduction to Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), x.

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a Rousseauian romanticism that finds the highest virtue in universal empathy or love of mankind. Babbitt believed that scientific naturalism and sentimentalism were intimately connected in that they ignored the need for moral character, shared a dreamy imaginative framework, and had a grasping, expansive quality that made for conformity. As the proper antidote against these twin threats he advocated a modernized form of humanism, which others dubbed the “new humanism” or “American humanism.” Babbitt’s humanism held that man’s primary need is a morally integrated, disciplined soul. This state of character he contrasted with the sentimental humanitarian emphasis on the unleashing of emotion and gratification of appetite and with reliance on science to promote a better human race.⁷

Babbitt and Lewis

At first blush, a comparison between Babbitt and Lewis might seem odd considering that Babbitt was not an orthodox religious believer and Lewis was famous from at least the early 1940s for his public defense of Christian doctrines. Babbitt considered it a mistake for Christianity in the intellectual circumstances of the modern world to take its stand primarily on particular creedal formulations rather than on the experiential evidence for spiritual and moral truth. The modern skeptical mind demands evidence for beliefs, and there is, Babbitt insisted, plentiful experiential evidence for the honest skeptic to consider. Among intellectuals especially, religion and morality are not well served by simply reasserting dogmas. Once in a conversation with his close friend and fellow “new humanist” Paul Elmer More, who would in time write as a kind of Anglican theologian, Babbitt exclaimed: “Great God, man, are you a Jesuit in disguise?”⁸ He was criticized by some of his Christian admirers, T. S. Eliot prominent among them, for not making explicitly Christian creedal affirmations and for his emphasis-

⁷ The book in which Babbitt first explained the close connection and interplay of scientific and sentimental humanitarianism was *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Washington, D.C. National Humanities Institute, 1986; first published in 1908). Here he also contrasted humanitarianism and humanism.

⁸ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1985; first published in 1953), 432.

ing spiritual experience over formal belief.⁹ Lewis agreed with Eliot's criticism of Babbitt's humanism for assuming, as it appeared to them, that an ethical basis could arise from art alone.¹⁰ Whether Eliot and other Christian critics of Babbitt really understood the basis of Babbitt's religious and moral ecumenism and of his resistance to dogmatism is an open question.¹¹

To the consternation of some Christian critics, Babbitt wrote admiringly of elements of Buddhism, especially of the Hinayana (Small Vehicle) variety. He praised its understanding of right willing as central to ethical and religious discipline and its relative lack of casuistry and obscurantism. He made a translation of the *Dhamapada*, the holy text attributed, at least in general spirit, to the Buddha, which was published, along with a lengthy essay by Babbitt on Buddhism, after his death.¹² Although Babbitt's ecumenical, non-dogmatic approach to spiritual matters irritated some of his Christian readers, "his notion of ethical self-discipline had much in common with historical Christianity . . . [even though] he did not identify the source of moral order with a personal God."¹³

The purpose of these remarks is not to demonstrate that Babbitt's distinctive ideas directly influenced Lewis, but to show that there is a close similarity in their understanding of the imagination and the dangers inherent in particular types of imaginative paradigms.¹⁴ Furthermore, it is to show that these thinkers also share a view of the human being that is

Though Babbitt emphasized spiritual experience over formal religious belief, his notion of ethical self-discipline paralleled that of historical Christianity.

⁹ Ryn, introduction to *Romanticism*, xxviii.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Lewis's opposition to the "religion of culture," which included criticism of Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis as well as Babbitt, see Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 65-8.

¹¹ For a discussion of this issue, see Ryn, *Will*, esp. Ch. 1. Ryn argues that Eliot has a confused, rather strained notion of Babbitt's idea of "the inner check," which is not a substitute for what is highest in the moral and religious life but is a non-confessional, ecumenical way of referring to that experiential reality.

¹² Irving Babbitt, *The Dhammapada: Translated from the Pali with an Essay on Buddha and the Occident* (New York, NY: New Directions Publishing, 1965).

¹³ Ryn, introduction to *Romanticism*, xi. For a discussion of Babbitt's nuanced understanding of religion, see George Panichas, *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999).

¹⁴ The author did not find a direct attribution or citation of Babbitt in either Lewis's writings or letters, other than what is cited in fn 15.

ultimately tripartite in nature, comprised not only of imagination but of will and reason as well. While Lewis did not have a copy of any of Babbitt's books in his library,¹⁵ his close relationship with Paul Elmer More, Babbitt's friend and fellow "new humanist," is but one clear indication that he was familiar with Babbitt. In an October 1934 letter to Paul Elmer More, Lewis thanked More for sending him Babbitt's obituary after his death the previous year.¹⁶ There has been speculation on the basis of a limited understanding of Babbitt that Lewis may have been criticizing Babbitt's and More's "new humanism" in the character of Mr. Humanist or Mr. Neo-Classical in *The Pilgrim's Regress* published in 1933.¹⁷

Lewis referred to Babbitt's intellectual ally Paul Elmer More as a "spiritual uncle."

Lewis's disagreement with aspects of the "new humanism" does not rule out the possibility of Babbitt's influence on Lewis any more than it would rule out Babbitt's obvious influence on More or Eliot, each of whom had disagreements with Babbitt on various points, including religion. While there seems to be no clear proof that Babbitt directly and specifically influenced Lewis, it is evident that Lewis knew the work of More well. More had been deeply influenced by Babbitt and the two had become with regard to central beliefs virtually indistinguishable. Lewis's admiration for More went so far that Lewis referred to him as a "spiritual uncle."¹⁸ More's book *The Skeptical*

¹⁵ See the collection in Lewis' personal library in the Wade Center at Wheaton College: http://www.wheaton.edu/wadecenter/Collections-and-services/Collection%20Listings/~//media/Files/Centers-and-institutes/Wade-Center/rr-docs/non-archive%20Listings/Lewis_Public_shelf.pdf.

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 146.

¹⁷ Mr. Angular, Mr. Neo-Classical, and Mr. Humanist are three figures that distort art through rigidly clinging to religion, classical standards, and humanist ideas. A number of scholars see the American Humanists as one of these three figures, although they disagree about whether Lewis was placing them in the figure of Mr. Humanist or Mr. Neo-Classical. For the case that Babbitt is Mr. Humanist see Doris Meyers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH & London, UK: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 19, and Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 130. For the case that Babbitt is Mr. Neo-Classical, see Chad Walsh, *The Literary Legacy of C. S. Lewis* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 68. Also see Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 49. Mr. Angular is thought by these authors to be a reference to T.S. Eliot.

¹⁸ "I once told Paul Elmer More that while it would be an exaggeration

Approach to Religion can be seen as a more philosophical and academic forerunner of Lewis's popular religious advocacy, as in *Mere Christianity*. Lewis was explicit that he could not refer to More as a "spiritual father," which would have indicated fuller agreement with his views, but he had for More's "new humanism" and, by implication, Babbitt's, a strong spiritual and intellectual affinity. Considering the fame of Babbitt, the controversies surrounding his ideas, and More's partial disagreement with his friend in an area of special interest to Lewis, Babbitt must have been a subject of conversation between the two.

Lewis had for More's "new humanism" and, by implication, Babbitt's a strong affinity.

That Lewis was familiar with Babbitt, at minimum through More, does not prove that Babbitt directly influenced Lewis's writing of *That Hideous Strength* in 1945, but, according to Lewis scholar Alister McGrath, "From about 1937, Lewis seems to have appreciated that the imagination is the gatekeeper of the human soul."¹⁹ And what is argued here is that Lewis conceived of the role of the imagination in a manner similar to Babbitt's, whether he acquired it from Babbitt or not.

Importance for Lewis Scholarship

The benefit of raising these questions is that in addition to suggesting an intellectual kinship between these thinkers, it points toward the possibility of using Babbitt's ideas as an interpretive lens to provide insight into Lewis's thinking. The results of this inquiry fit in well with recent scholarship on Lewis's understanding of the imagination, which has challenged a previous scholarly paradigm. The latter juxtaposed Lewis's early faith in reason with his flight to the imagination later in life, at which point he abandoned Christian apologetics and wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

It can be demonstrated that Lewis had a well-developed and sophisticated notion of the imagination long before he wrote the Narnia books. One version of Lewis's intellectual development holds that early in life he valued reason as the sole

to call him my spiritual father, I might call him my spiritual uncle." See C. S. Lewis to Mr. Dakin, August 3, 1941, V. A. H. Dakin Letters, More Papers. Quoted in Bradley Birzer, *Russell Kirk, American Conservative* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 83.

¹⁹ Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis, A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 233.

key to Christianity and that his apologetic works throughout the 1940s were in this vein, until he was substantially challenged by Cambridge philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe in an Oxford Socratic Club debate in 1948. That challenge pertained to an argument regarding “naturalism” put forth in chapter 3 of Lewis’s book *Miracles*. After the supposed trauma of his defeat, Lewis retreated from his previous intellectual engagement with critics of religion into the imagination and the fantasy of Narnia. According to this view, Lewis’s subsequent writings focus on the imaginative dimensions of religion, because he is convinced that Christianity could not be defended on rationalistic grounds.²⁰

The substance of *That Hideous Strength* and the two earlier installments of the Ransom trilogy belie this claim. By the time he wrote them, Lewis scholar Alister McGrath writes, “Lewis was . . . already persuaded of the importance of the use of narrative and the appeal to the imagination in apologetics.”²¹ McGrath argues that Lewis did not flee rational thought after his defeat in the debate against Anscombe.²² Rather, at least by 1945 when he published *That Hideous Strength*, he had a

²⁰ A. N. Wilson holds this position in *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1990) as does George Sayer in *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988). However, Anscombe herself denied this effect on Lewis. “My own recollection is that it was an occasion of sober discussion of certain quite definite criticisms, which Lewis’s rethinking and rewriting showed he thought were accurate.” Quoted in Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 232-33.

²¹ McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 255.

²² See McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 253-60, and Jacobs, *The Narnian*, 232-36. Both provide accounts of the debate and its effect on Lewis. Lewis was an accomplished academic and used to giving and receiving criticism. He substantially revised the chapter in question for the next edition of *Miracles* published in 1960. However, he did express distaste over the public nature of the encounter. It did not take place in a pub between colleagues or in the normal channels between fellow academics, but in front of an audience of dozens of undergraduate students.

Lewis’s apologetic output, while never very large, did decrease after the debate. According to McGrath, Lewis realized that there were suitable thinkers who knew a great deal more than he about the intricacies of modern analytical philosophy to take up the cause of Christianity and he, as a scholar of literature, could best contribute through literary endeavors. Later, in the mid-1950s, Lewis recommended Anscombe, a devout Roman Catholic, as his top pick for replacing him as president of the Socratic Club when he left Oxford for Cambridge. As McGrath and Jacobs indicate, such a gesture hardly corresponds to a traumatized Lewis fleeing the realm of reason.

sophisticated understanding of the imagination that greatly resembles Babbitt's from a generation earlier. There is strong evidence for McGrath's position: Lewis valued the imagination prior to his debate with Anscombe, not in opposition to reason, but as a faculty as important as reason to the person's grasp of reality. Lewis held throughout his life that one can access truth both through the imagination and through reason. They are not incompatible means of inquiry, but equally valid and often complementary avenues to truth.

Lewis viewed imagination and reason as not incompatible, but equally valid means of inquiry.

C. S. Lewis and Scientism

That Hideous Strength is the third installment of C. S. Lewis's science fiction Ransom Trilogy. In the novel, Lewis satirizes scientism and the idyllic dream of progress. He finds the alliance between them to be dangerous but inevitable. The phrase "that hideous strength" is taken from Sir David Lyndsay's epic poem "Ane Dialog." It refers to the biblical image of the tower of Babel, a symbol for men's effort to rise to the status of gods through their own technological prowess and to dominate nature and their fellow men.

Lewis associates the diabolical nature of magic with science. Science had arisen historically not in opposition to magic, but alongside it. Both were birthed by the *libido dominandi* characteristic of Renaissance thinking, the pursuit of power over nature and other men in a rejection of the old medieval order. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man*:

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.²³

For the wise men of old, the problem had been how to conform the soul to reality; for magic and applied science alike it is to subdue reality to human wishes.

The Abolition of Man was prepared as the 1943 Riddell Memorial Lectures at the University of Durham.²⁴ Lewis was writing *That Hideous Strength* at the same time. Writing the first as treatise and the second as satire, Lewis makes the same

²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1974), 77.

²⁴ Bruce L. Edwards, *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport, CT & London, UK: Praeger Perspectives, 2007), 107.

Science coupled with the idyllic dream is not the mere investigation of nature, but scientism.

point, that the pursuit of power underlies both Renaissance magic and progressive science. In the novel, he brings them together to demonstrate more clearly to the modern mind how science can be controlled by an idealistic dream of human progress in a manner similar to that of magic.

Science coupled with the idyllic dream is not the mere investigation of nature, but *scientism*: “the bad metaphysic of reductive materialism and the accompanying hubris”²⁵ that emerges when the pursuit of knowledge is subject to the *libido dominandi*. What calls itself “naturalism” at the heart of scientism is really a particular *supernatural* view of the world, resting on an idyllic dream of human progress. Lewis believed that the idyllic dream was ultimately diabolical because it emerges necessarily from a corrupted will given over to the lust for power.

In the novel, the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) acquires property in a small English college town. The N.I.C.E. is a quasi-government agency that is championing the scientific pursuit of human progress. It embodies the progressive dream of a better world and a perfected humanity. But behind this idyllic façade a diabolical force is at work. Demons (“macrobes” is the term of scientific jargon the N.I.C.E. scientists use to describe them) are working to subvert and destroy mankind. The N.I.C.E. leaders have made a magician’s bargain with these creatures, exchanging their souls for the ability to control mankind. But against them is a small rag-tag band of individuals endowed with moral imagination, both religious and humanistic.

Lewis focuses his novel on a young married couple, Mark and Jane Studdock. Both are petty, selfish creatures. Jane’s role is essential to the novel. She ends up serving as a seer for the small band of the faithful assembled to oppose the N.I.C.E. and the dark powers it represents. Mark spends most of the novel at the N.I.C.E. headquarters. For the present purpose, we shall focus on the will and imagination of Mark and the characters in the N.I.C.E. with whom he interacts. His personality demonstrates how the idyllic imagination is connected to the

²⁵ Aeschliman, *Restitution*, 49. Aeschliman provides the most thorough comparisons of Babbitt’s and Lewis’s thought, but his analysis takes only a few pages. Yet his account of the similarity in their understanding of scientism is helpful to comprehending the broader linkage between their thought.

pursuit of power as manifested in scientism. The imaginative impulses of the characters who are drawn to the N.I.C.E. as well as those who are repulsed by its aims provide concrete illustration of Babbitt's ideas on romanticism and the interactions of will, imagination, and reason.

In addition to Mark, we shall examine five figures who are especially important to Mark's experience at the N.I.C.E., four of whom reflect the dehumanizing effect of the loss of the moral center and its ramifications for politics, and one of whom demonstrates what Babbitt terms the moral imagination, which exposes idyllic chimeras and the will to power. Lord Feverstone exhibits a corrupted will, imagination, and reason and the way they work together. The clergyman, Mr. Straik, can be seen as embodying Rousseauian romanticism, and the scientist, Professor Filostrato, exhibits qualities of Baconian romanticism. Mark interacts with both of these characters together, which illustrates how the two types of romanticism cooperate in the corrupted soul. "Fairy" Hardcastle, chief of the N.I.C.E. police, reveals the consequences for politics of a corrupted will, imagination, and reason. However, the chemist, William Hingest, serves as a stark contrast to the other characters by exhibiting an ethical will and moral imagination, together with a reason consonant with these faculties. After examining Mark's interactions with these characters, we will turn to Mark's own transformation from being subservient to the lower will—egotism, self-aggrandizement, and the fantasies of the idyllic imagination—to one who begins to nourish a higher will, an ethical purpose, and the attendant moral imagination.

Before showing that the characters and the action in the novel are portrayed in characteristically Babbittian ways, more should be said about how Babbitt understands will, imagination, and reason and how he thinks that they become corrupted.²⁶ Emphasis is placed upon elements of Babbittian thought that are particularly prominent in Lewis's novel.

²⁶ Although will, imagination, and reason are central to Babbitt's understanding of the self, his definitions of them and accounts of their interaction are sometimes lacking in philosophical precision and in need of systematic elaboration. For an in-depth critical examination of his meaning and an attempt to clarify, supplement, and revise his thinking, see Ryn, *Will*.

*Babbitt's Conception of the Soul:
Will, Imagination, and Reason*

Babbitt contends that the imagination is “the true driving power in human nature.”²⁷ It is the capacity that gives concrete meaning and coherence to phenomena. The imagination makes sense of impressions by fashioning them into a meaningful whole. If reason can be described as the means through which man perceives the world and the will as the means whereby man discriminates between choices, the imagination is the means whereby he conceives the world.²⁸

According to Babbitt, prior to the Renaissance man conceived of himself as fundamentally flawed. He knew that his impulses strained toward a dangerous infinite. His tendency toward unlimited expansion affected his reason, will, and imagination in different ways. Babbitt writes, “Perhaps as good a classification as any . . . is that of the three lusts distinguished by traditional Christianity—the lust of knowledge, the lust of sensation, and the lust of power,”²⁹ *libido sciendi*, *libido sentiendi*, and *libido dominandi*. Traditional religion and humanism urged that these lusts be contained through self-restraint.

As for reason, knowledge had its limits, and it should have humane goals. Man is *homo sapiens*, “the moral and philosophical knower.” He is not *homo sciens*, an acquirer of knowledge for its own sake. “[W]isdom—*sapientia*—is a specific mode of knowing.”³⁰ *Scientia*, empirical knowledge of the natural world, depends upon a framework of wisdom for guidance.³¹ By itself it is inherently amoral. To make sense knowledge must be informed by moral vision. Reason must be circumscribed and directed by an imaginative framework infused with humane purpose.

According to this view, the imagination should have moral vision grounded in and restrained by reality. This older view envisioned modest goals because it understood human be-

²⁷ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 21.

²⁸ Babbitt, *Democracy*, 36.

²⁹ Babbitt, *Democracy*, 162-63.

³⁰ Aeschliman, *Restitution*, 6, 20. Aeschliman’s description of Lewis’s views on scientism cohere with Babbitt’s understanding and provide a helpful explanation of the core issues involved with the corruption of imagination, will, and reason.

³¹ Aeschliman, *Restitution*, 26.

ings as having limited powers of reason and partly dubious qualities of will. The moral imagination “gives man a sense of the very essence of life, most importantly the moral order of existence.”³² Since imagination is the means of conceiving the world, it is the quality of the imagination that determines how a person will view the world and whether that view will be accurate or illusory. Reasoning is filtered through and colored by imaginative patterns already in place. For Babbitt, the imagination can be a source of depth and wisdom, which he calls the “moral imagination,” or can produce illusion, which, in one prominent form, he dubs the “idyllic imagination.”³³

In the well-ordered soul, will is constrained by cultivating its own higher moral potentiality. A higher will censures a lower will, which is what Babbitt calls “the inner check.” Will is also constrained by a morally grounded imagination and a chastened, realistic reason. Will, the power to make choices, is closely connected with the imagination for good or ill. In the morally healthy person the imagination is bounded in part by a sense of the imperfection of what actually exists and by a reason that perceives reality in a corresponding manner. The older Western civilization encouraged man to make his will cohere with the moral path intuited through the higher form of imagination.

In the well-ordered soul, will is constrained by a morally grounded imagination and a chastened, realistic reason.

In a sense, the will is prior to imagination and reason because “the moral will is the center of the personality.”³⁴ It determines the fundamental direction of the self. It has to exist as a moral force in order for immoral vision to be blocked

³² Ryn, *Will*, 152.

³³ In 1940, Lewis described a similar demarcation between what he called “imaginary” and “imaginative,” see C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 147. McGrath explains,

The ‘imaginary’ is something that has been falsely imagined, having no counterpart in reality. Lewis regards such an invented reality as opening the way to delusion. The ‘imaginative’ is something produced by the human mind as it tries to respond to something greater than itself, struggling to find images adequate to the reality. (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 263)

Lewis’s ideas of the “imaginary” and the “imaginative” are close corollaries of Babbitt’s idyllic and moral imaginations. For further discussion of Lewis’s conception of “imaginary” and “imaginative” see Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2014), 139.

³⁴ Aeschliman, *Restitution*, 4.

and defused or for moral action to be inspired. A corrupt will bereft of an ethical center seeks infinite self-gratification. "The lower self needs to be inhibited by the higher self. 'The inner check' refers to the negative function of the universal moral authority experienced by man."³⁵

The imagination, when captured by the lower will, flatters the lower will into believing itself selfless.

The self without the higher moral discipline seeks only its base passions, and these passions often take the form of a desire for domination, libido dominandi. As it follows the expansive lust for power of the lower will reason becomes endless knowledge acquisition, libido sciendi. The imagination is captured by the lower will and casts a putatively moral vision as the inspiration for the will. The imagination flatters the lower will into believing itself selfless. In its own eyes the will to power becomes a desire to make a better world for human beings. It becomes a desire to create an idyllic world where the self is flawless and can pursue its every whim, exercising libido sentiendi. It aspires to the infinite, though in a purely fictional form, imagining that infinite pleasure and infinite happiness are possible, which is to ignore the reality of imperfect human beings with selves badly in need of discipline and moral effort.

The corruption of reason and imagination in the complex and many-sided Renaissance came as an unleashing of restraint. This corruption was not just a matter of pursuing pleasing illusions or knowledge for their own sake, but a belief that they ought to be pursued without limit. However, reason and imagination pointing in this direction did not come out of nowhere; they were rooted in a particular quality of will. Will can produce or be restrained by ethical vision, but it can also be grasping, wishing to dominate everything it can conceive or perceive.

"Reasoning that builds on distorted imagination may be formally brilliant but will present illusions."

Scientific knowledge does not have any inherent value and must inevitably serve some end. It cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it is not cast into a moral vision by a higher will and moral imagination but unleashed by an idyllic vision, it is prostituted to the corrupted will and the lust for power or desire-satisfaction. The same is true of humanistic knowledge. Reason does not operate independently of will and imagination. "Reasoning that builds on distorted imagination may be formally brilliant but will present illusions."³⁶

³⁵ Ryn, introduction to *Romanticism*, xxxv.

³⁶ Ryn, *Will*, 222.

Francis Bacon's dictum "knowledge is power" becomes particularly poignant for modern man with his heavy reliance on science. Knowledge acquisition is always subject to will and molded by imagination, and in the modern world this means that science serves the lust for power or sensation. The latter justifies itself by means of a dream of human happiness brought about by scientific progress. The idyllic dream is a self-deluding projection of the lower will. It serves the person's expansive appetites, orienting reason accordingly.

Man, unshackled by the restraints of tradition and morality, disillusioned with the present state of man, and committed to a pseudo-religious imaginative vision of an idyllic world in his future, turns to totalitarian methods to enact his desires. With complete faith that reason and knowledge are the keys to achieving his dream, man turns to the manipulation of man. "It is this religion and this historical concentration of amoral knowledge and power of the few over the many and over nature itself that Lewis called 'that hideous strength.'"³⁷ We turn now to a discussion of these themes in the novel.

That Hideous Strength

Mark Studdard is a sociologist and a fellow at Bracton College in Edgetow University in a small town of the same name. He is desperate to join the Progressive Element at Bracton, the "inner ring" that is the real center of the college. He meets and is befriended by Lord Feverstone, known as the villain Richard Divine in previous installments of the Ransom Trilogy. The town of Bracton is considering selling Bragdon Wood near the college to the N.I.C.E., which would be "the first-fruits of that constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world."³⁸

Leaders in the college support the acquisition by the N.I.C.E. on the grounds that the organization is "the greatest triumph of practical idealism that this century has yet seen."³⁹ One member of the Progressive Element comments, "The N.I.C.E. marks

³⁷ Aeschliman, *Restitution*, 27.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1965), 23.

³⁹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 37.

the beginning of a new era—the really scientific era. Up to now, everything has been haphazard. This is going to put science itself on a scientific basis.”⁴⁰ Mark agrees with the goals of the N.I.C.E. and with Bracton College’s role in aiding the organization. He tells his progressive colleagues at the college, “The real thing is that this time we’re going to get science applied to social problems and backed by the whole force of the state One hopes, of course, that it’ll find out more than the old free-lance science did; but what’s certain is that it can *do* more.”⁴¹

Lord Feverstone, who is intimately connected with the N.I.C.E., invites Mark to apply for a position there. He explains to Mark that all the progressive talk about applied science and social problems is nice and quite true, but that behind it all is the fact that “Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest—which is another reason for cashing in on it as soon as one can.”⁴² Feverstone appeals to Mark’s self-interest and to his pride. Not only will Mark be one of those who take charge, but he is one of those who *should* take charge.

Mark’s academic endeavor is inextricably bound to his lust for domination. Feverstone, whose soul is similarly ordered, effectively appeals to Mark on this basis, explaining the scientific work of the N.I.C.E. as serving human progress and how it must be coupled with efforts to “take charge,” to control the human race.

Feverstone connects the role of science in reconditioning mankind to the very “preservation of the human race . . . a pretty rock-bottom obligation.”⁴³ Given the importance of the N.I.C.E.’s mission and the fact that scientific work can be unpleasant to those lacking specialized training, scientism must use the rhetoric of sentimental idealism and its idyllic dream. The pursuit of power becomes more palatable to common people when draped in sentimental rhetoric. For example, Feverstone notes, the N.I.C.E. wants the ability to experiment on criminals, a notion opposed by most people, but the N.I.C.E. cannot be completely candid about its methods. It must speak

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Hideous*, 38.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 38.

⁴² Lewis, *Hideous*, 42.

⁴³ Lewis, *Hideous*, 43.

in sentimental terms about aiding the downtrodden. Otherwise, Feverstone explains,

[Y]ou'd have all the old women of both sexes up in arms and yapping about humanity. Call it re-education of the mal-adjusted, and you have all slobbering with delight that the brutal era of retributive punishment has at last come to an end You mustn't experiment on children; but offer the dear little kiddies free education in an experimental school attached to the N.I.C.E. and it's all correct!⁴⁴

An idyllic mentality underlies both the experiments and the criticism. However, only the former will assure that the agenda of the N.I.C.E. continues apace. Feverstone therefore expresses Lewis's belief that the scientific pursuit of power is effectively championed by or married to the rhetoric of idealism. In such instances, scientism claims to mold the human race into something far better. But behind it is the will to power. In this scheme of conditioning, it is necessary that some do the conditioning and that some be conditioned.

Two Types of Naturalism

After his conversation with Feverstone, Mark travels to N.I.C.E. headquarters and meets with the N.I.C.E. Deputy Director John Wither to discuss a job. Two characters he meets, Mr. Straik and Professor Filostrato, provide a side-by-side comparison of Babbitt's idea of the two types of romanticism, sentimental idealism and scientific idealism. They are two manifestations of corrupted will, imagination, and reason. Just as Feverstone demonstrates how sentimental rhetoric accompanies scientific policies, Straik and Filostrato show the two types of humanitarianism working together to advance an idyllic dream of progress.

Scientific pursuit of power effectively championed by the rhetoric of idealism.

Before discussing the characters of Straik and Filostrato, more should be said about how Babbitt lets the two types of naturalism be symbolized by Francis Bacon and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁴⁵ Both emerged from developments during the

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Hideous*, 43.

⁴⁵ Babbitt uses Rousseau and Bacon as representing these two types of naturalism, but his discussion of these two figures does not necessarily assume that those who were influenced by the two currents in question were directly influenced by or accurately appropriated the thought of either man. The views that Babbitt dubs "Baconian" and "Rousseauist" are not intended as precise

Renaissance and share key assumptions. Naturalism was an outgrowth of Renaissance science. Scientific discovery upon scientific discovery increased the prestige of science and gave man confidence that nature could be known in full. Empirical Baconianism in England and metaphysical, abstractionist Cartesianism in France both resulted in a belief in human perfectibility.⁴⁶ They assumed that nature could be known and improved and that man was a part of nature; ergo, man could be known and improved.

The old order's reliance on tradition and self-restraint to mold the imagination and constrain the will fell victim to scientism's conception of the world as constituted by natural processes.

The old order relied on tradition and emphasized self-restraint to mold the imagination and to constrain the will. Under the onslaught of scientism the constraints of traditional religion and culture fell away, and man was liberated from the dead hand of the past. Increasingly, all of man's endeavors became understood in a naturalistic way. Politics, too, was conceived in terms of natural processes and struggles, human beings as acting under naturalistic imperatives. The imagination of Europe was deeply affected by this trend to conceive of the world as constituted by natural processes. This new view of the world dismissed previous supernatural explanations of the world and human beings as superstitious nonsense.⁴⁷ To the extent that virtues were praised, they were understood to be products of nature. Within the new imaginative framework, it was not conceivable that existing virtues may actually have their source in a long historical process in which hard moral work and a culture of self-restraint played central roles.

Another set of naturalists who were not as fond of science, the sentimental idealists, took note of the imperfection of the existing world and projected an imagined golden age into the distant past. That happy past had been destroyed by civilization, which explained how nature, which to them seemed full of glorious goodness, could have been replaced by the present corrupt state of society. This notion is epitomized in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In 1755, Rousseau published his

depictions of the views of Bacon and Rousseau but as shorthand for large, connected movements that reflected their influence. For the purposes of this article, which is to compare Babbitt and Lewis, it is not necessary to analyze Babbitt's discussion of Rousseau and Bacon in the context of the academic literature on the two thinkers.

⁴⁶ Babbitt, *Democracy*, 89.

⁴⁷ Babbitt, *Democracy*, 93.

Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. He describes a past unsullied by culture and the conventions of civilization. In a pre-civil state of nature, man has all that he needs. Rousseau wrote about “natural man”: “I see him satisfying his hunger under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal; and thus all his needs are satisfied.”⁴⁸ The life of man in the state of nature is simple and happy. He lives out his natural goodness, uncorrupted by society.

Virtue for Rousseau is not the product of self-control and restraint. Rather, it arises from natural impulses within man, that is, from man unrestrained by social convention. All he need do is “commune with [himself] and, in the silence of the passions, to listen to the voice of [his own] conscience.”⁴⁹ All civilized conventions and manners are but “garlands of flowers over the iron chains . . . [that] stifle in them the sense of that original liberty of which they seem to have been born.”⁵⁰ If each man can but turn to himself alone, to his natural self, virtue will gush out of his own good, overflowing heart. In a letter written several years later Rousseau described the purpose of his project: “I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is by his institutions alone that men become evil.”⁵¹ Whatever suffering mankind faces, it does not come from within man. It is ever due only to social institutions outside of him. Wars and crime do not arise from man’s truly unrestrained passions, from his real nature, but from artificial institutions. Man in existing society is only what society has made him, which prevents man from being a creator or maker of himself.

Rousseau’s remedy is a return to nature as he imagines it. Sentimental, idyllic dreaming is the heart of his religion.⁵² Man need only be what he feels himself to be, what he is in his own idyllic imagination, and fully give himself over to the libido sentiendi, and human suffering will cease. Throughout his writing Rousseau insists that civilized man “is so corrupt and

Virtue for Rousseau is not the product of self-control but of man’s truly unrestrained passions.

⁴⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, Second Edition (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 47.

⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 21.

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 3.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Political Writings*, xi.

⁵² Babbitt, *Democracy*, 116.

so unnatural that only a fundamental upheaval in the formation of human beings can make man truly human.”⁵³ A fundamental change in man’s social and political circumstances is the only means whereby he can transcend his present predicament. Though it is not possible to return to the primitive state of nature, the health of uninhibited nature must guide a transformation of life.

For the Baconian naturalist, what good there can be in the world will result not from moral effort and accumulated wisdom but from technical perfection.

Rather than projecting an idyllic dream of man into the past, the other set of naturalists, the Baconians, project it into the future. Through science man can make his world a better place. Like the Rousseauist, the Baconian does not give credence to any hitherto practiced virtue of self-restraint. What good there can be in the world will not be the result of moral effort and accumulated wisdom but of technical perfection. Man has no need of traditional restraints or prejudices. These stand in the way of scientific discovery. Baconians saw what science could do to manipulate and improve nature and imagined that man was a part of nature and nothing more. They concluded that man’s state and man himself could be infinitely improved. Babbitt writes:

In the new movement, at the same time that reason was being encouraged by scientific method to rise up in revolt against tradition, imagination was being fascinated and drawn to the naturalistic level by scientific discovery and the vista of an endless advance that it opened up.⁵⁴

Both emotional and scientific naturalism “look upon man as being made by natural forces and not as making himself.”

The Baconian conceives of man as the product of his environment. Like the Rousseauist, he disdains traditions for impeding man. Babbitt writes, “In this exaltation of environmental influences one should note again the cooperation of Rousseauist and Baconian, of emotional and scientific naturalism. Both are prone to look upon man as being made by natural forces and not as making himself.”⁵⁵

Rousseau and Bacon in That Hideous Strength

The Rousseauian in the Lewis novel, Mr. Straik, is an Anglican parson who supports the N.I.C.E. because it is an attempt to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. He is the liberal

⁵³ Peter Gay, introduction to Rousseau, *Political Writings*, xiii.

⁵⁴ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 40.

⁵⁵ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 163.

theologian given to sentimental idealism and is an example of how the humanitarian impulse under the sway of the idyllic imagination is a shallow cover for the pursuit of power. Straik tells Mark that he rejects the belief in an afterlife as a cover for “priestcraft and mysticism.” This belief conceals the fact that “the Kingdom of God is to be realized here—in this world.”⁵⁶ He rejects organized religion in favor of sentimental feelings and argues that God’s Kingdom will arrive on the wings of science. In the grip of idyllic vision he finds perfect harmony between the progressive claims of scientism and the sentimental claims of liberal theology.

The humanitarian impulse under the sway of the idyllic imagination a shallow cover for the pursuit of power.

Straik’s religion is a romantic dream. It requires a complete reordering of society to end human misery, a stripping away of traditional institutions, especially organized religious institutions, and replacing them with a planned society. He tells Mark, “The Son of Man—that is, Man himself, full grown—has power to judge the world—to distribute life without end, and punishment without end.”⁵⁷ But this is not to come in the life hereafter, but “here and now,” in the planned society established on the basis of his idyllic vision. He identifies himself as “the only prophet left” for the true Kingdom of God.⁵⁸

Professor Filostrato, an Italian physiologist, plays the role of a natural scientist with a romantic imagination. Upon seeing Mark at the N.I.C.E. he insists that Mark recognize the importance of the work of the N.I.C.E. “The first thing to realize is that the N.I.C.E. is serious. It is nothing less than the existence of the human race that depends on our work: our real work, you comprehend?”⁵⁹ Filostrato knows about the N.I.C.E.’s “real” work. He has developed the scientific techniques that he believes will inaugurate a new human race.

Mark meets and converses with Straik and Filostrato at the same time. While sentimental naturalism and scientific naturalism appear to be opposites, one emphasizing emotion and the other reason, they are but different manifestations of a single movement of the soul. Both opt for the ideal, a romantic imaginary construct, over the real.⁶⁰ For the Rousseauist, the

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Hideous*, 128.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Hideous*, 128.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *Hideous*, 78-9.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 60.

⁶⁰ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 81.

While sentimental and scientific naturalism appear to be opposites, both are inspired by an idyllic dream of human progress.

ideal to be employed as a standard is an idyllic past in which man lived only by his natural impulses. The Baconian places the ideal, a world materially transformed through science, in the future. In both cases the present state of man is deemed unendurable. Both reach for the unlimited. The Rousseauist longs for a lost Arcadia, and the Baconian strives for limitless utility gains. Both understand man as purely a product of his environment. Both believe that circumstances can be manipulated to create a vastly better world. Both are inspired by an idyllic dream of human progress.

The Narcissism of Naturalism

The progressive dream as reflected in the two types of naturalism demonstrates a profound narcissism. Corrupted will, imagination, and reason give the dreamer a highly favorable view of self as a benefactor of humanity. Lewis demonstrates such narcissism in the characters of Feverstone, Straik, and Filostrato, while illustrating the different forms this pathology assumes in Rousseauists and Baconians. The Rousseauist emphasizes the intensity of his sentimentalizing as the mark of his goodness. What is important to the sentimental idealist is not that his vision be true and realistic, but merely that it “be rich and radiant.”⁶¹ He believes that all wrongs will be righted if only the spirit of brotherhood that he feels will permeate mankind. Rather than simply relying on the goodness of natural impulse, the Baconian believes that people like himself can make a better world by controlling nature. The scientific idealist “hopes to achieve the same end [as the Rousseauist] by perfecting [society’s] machinery.”⁶² While the Rousseauist worships man in his imagined natural past, the Baconian worships “man in his future material advance.” In both cases, it is society and the world around man that must be changed in order for life to improve. The Rousseauist provides a radiant, emotionally charged dream, and the Baconian provides means for attaining it. The Arcadian dreamer becomes the Utopist.⁶³ The narcissism of this outlook on life is in the self-glorification

⁶¹ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 102.

⁶² Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 138.

⁶³ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 137.

that is implied in the vision of society transformed.

The image of inherent human goodness is not based on what is known about real men, but on the idealist's projecting a conceited self-image onto other men. Babbitt writes, "The nature over which the Rousseauist is bent in such rapt contemplation plays the part of the pool in the legend of Narcissus. It renders back to him his own image. He sees in nature what he himself has put there."⁶⁴ The idealist considers men to be naturally good because he imagines himself to be naturally good. The Rousseauist calls for universal brotherhood based upon an unleashing of impulse and appetite because he conceives of his own impulses and appetites as good and projects his own supposed goodness on those around him.⁶⁵

The Rousseauian naturalist considers men to be naturally good because he considers himself to be naturally good.

The belief in science that led to the casting off of traditional societal restraints and gave rise to the dream of limitless human progress did not also provide a means of limiting the ambitions of the idealist of either stripe. The Rousseauian longing for an Arcadian paradise resulted in practice in the violence of the French Revolution. The Baconian naturalism that placed its hope in science disciplined man only insofar as it made him better at pursuing scientific discovery. Babbitt writes, "Science does not even set right limits to the faculty that it chiefly exercises—the intellect. In itself it stimulates rather than curbs one of the three main lusts to which human nature is subject—the lust of knowledge."⁶⁶

This vision of narcissistic naturalism is fundamentally shared and echoed by Lewis. Freed from traditional restraint and enamored of the idea of his own goodness, the scientific idealist is seen by Lewis as disciplined only in pursuing his methodology and his progressive dream of a better humanity. Such is the case with Feverstone, Straik, Filostrato, and the other characters of the N.I.C.E. in *That Hideous Strength*. Babbitt refers to this character type as the "efficient megalomaniac."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 302.

⁶⁵ Babbitt, *Democracy*, 26.

⁶⁶ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 344.

⁶⁷ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 346, 366.

Romantic Disillusion and the Lust for Power

The characters Straik and Filostrato in Lewis's novel thus demonstrate Babbitt's point that Prometheus is the great symbol for the idealists.⁶⁸ Babbitt writes, "Prometheus was at once a rebel, a lover of man and a promoter of man's material progress."⁶⁹ The idealists break with tradition and superstition and bring light and hope to mankind. Constraint on the part of individuals was considered a necessity under the old order given man's imperfections, but naturalists have broken with this view of life and now demand, as champions of humanity, the best for man. If man is good and the society around him bad, the only possible response is rebellion under their leadership.

Both the Rousseauist and the Baconian are inspired by a Promethean dream, striving for infinite progress, "reaching out for more and ever for more."⁷⁰ However, "the humanity of the Baconian is only an intellectual abstraction just as the humanity of the Rousseauist is only an emotional dream."⁷¹ When their dream inevitably falls short of reality, they become increasingly frustrated. Rousseau constructed a state of nature in which he could deposit or from which he could derive his dreams of a better world. However, unanchored in reality as this vision was, it had to lead to disillusion.

When the Promethean idealist sees what mankind has done with the freedom he has imagined, his sympathy turns to disgust.⁷² Babbitt writes:

[Rousseau] had hoped at first to find the equivalent of these dreams among actual men, but after painful disillusion he had come to look with disdain on his age and his contemporaries. 'I withdrew more and more from human society and created for myself a society in my imagination, a society that charmed me all the more in that I could cultivate it without peril or effort and that it was always at my call and such as I required it.'⁷³

The Rousseauian idealist comes to hate the man he thought so good. The reality of man does not live up to the ideal. The

⁶⁸ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 139.

⁶⁹ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 139.

⁷⁰ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 193.

⁷¹ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 344.

⁷² Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 197.

⁷³ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 84.

result is resentment, even hatred of men. “[I]nstead of exaggerating the loveliness [he] exaggerates the ugliness of human nature.”⁷⁴ The French revolutionaries, Rousseauian idealists to the core, slaughtered those who stood in the way of their dreams because the men they actually met did not match the chimeras in their minds. But in accordance with their conception of themselves as good, idealists cannot fault their own lack of discernment as they foolishly indulge sham vision. Rather, they regard their flight from reality as the height of nobility, as the pursuit of a grand vision, all the more grand because it pays no heed to the world as it is.⁷⁵

When the reality of man does not live up to the Rousseauian-idealist's ideal, the result is resentment, even hatred, of men.

The Baconian idealist shares the Rousseauian disillusionment with man. He too examines man according to his vision and finds him wanting. But he posits perfection in the future. He sets out to make man perfect, to transform him according to his vision of what he thinks man ought to be. His vision, too, is grand because it is not true to the actual world. But he believes it a sign of the nobility of his character that he works to make it true.

Man's apparent ability to conquer nature gave rise to his conceited assessment that there was nothing that he could not do. Babbitt writes, “This transformation of the Arcadian dreamer into the Utopist is due in part . . . to the intoxication produced in the human spirit by the conquests of science.”⁷⁶ Rousseauian and Baconian, united in a dream of a better world, pursue scientific materialism as a means of achieving their dream. Straik, the Rousseauian idealist, has made this transformation. He does not pine for an Arcadian past, but a Utopian future.

Lewis demonstrated this union of the types of naturalism as Filostrato and Straik take Mark to meet the “Head” of the N.I.C.E. Before they meet him, they explain the prospect of non-organic life, pure intellect, as it exists in a superhuman race. Filostrato describes it as “Intelligent life. Under the surface. A great race, further advanced than we. An inspiration. A pure race. They have cleaned their world, broken free (almost)

⁷⁴ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 105.

⁷⁵ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 84.

⁷⁶ Babbitt, *Romanticism*, 137.

from the organic.”⁷⁷ The naturalists’ obsession with the workings of nature turns out to be an effort to transcend nature. Filostrato says, “Nature is the ladder we have climbed up by, now we kick her away.”⁷⁸ The disillusion with the world as it is, even in its biological nature, and the potential for destructiveness in the idyllic vision come into focus.

Straik, Lewis’s Rousseauian naturalist, explains that previous religious talk of the resurrection was a symbol aiming at Man’s eventual transcendence of death and “the conquest of organic life . . . [which] are the same thing.” A conception of man as purely physical, a mere specimen to be intellectually examined, leads to a view of man as non-material and all intellect. The “head” of the N.I.C.E. is the severed head of a guillotined criminal named Francois Alcasan. To Mark’s dismay, Straik assures him that, “It is the beginning of Man Immortal and Man Ubiquitous. Man on the throne of the universe. It is what all the prophecies really meant.”⁷⁹

“Man’s power over Nature means the power of some men over other men with Nature as the instrument.”

Filostrato, Lewis’s Baconian naturalist, explains, “Man’s power over Nature means the power of some men over other men with Nature as the instrument . . . There is no such thing as Man . . . only men. No! It is not Man who will be omnipotent, it is some one man, some immortal man.” Straik puts the naturalistic statement of power in sentimental religious terms, “A king cometh who shall rule the universe with righteousness and the heavens with judgment . . . the phrase, ‘Son of Man,’ [means] that Man would . . . really have a son who will wield all power.”

To Mark, Straik says, “We are offering you the unspeakable glory of being present at the creation of God Almighty. Here, in this house, you shall meet the first sketch of the real God. It is a man—or a being made by man—who will finally ascend the throne of the universe. And rule forever.”⁸⁰ Straik’s statements reflect the perennial romantic temptation symbolized in the temptation of the serpent, *ye shall be as gods*. Man is the architect of his future, to make man what he ought to be and to rule over him with divine authority. For Lewis, Straik and

⁷⁷ Lewis, *Hideous*, 176.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Hideous*, 177.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 178.

⁸⁰ Lewis, *Hideous*, 179.

Filostrato are “pawns, not wholly demonic, but deluded by pride and self-love into thinking their cause a purely scientific or righteous one.”⁸¹

The idealistic belief in infinite progress through science and in a need to transform man according to a preconceived image of what he ought to be expresses a lust for power. To create a better world, the idealist must create new men. Since men are a part of nature, they can be reduced to natural things, which other men equipped with scientific knowledge can manipulate. Science as they understand it makes mankind grow in power, but they do not realize that it impedes mankind’s ability to grow in wisdom. It is a science that produces “a hideous strength” in that it produces power unbound by ethical vision.

Science as understood by scientific idealists makes mankind grow in power, but they do not realize that it impedes mankind’s ability to grow in wisdom.

Political Tyranny and Violence

In connection with these dispositions, Lewis portrays Feverstone, Straik, and Filostrato as exhibiting the *libido dominandi* in their advocacy of science preserving and controlling the human race. But it is “Fairy” Hardcastle, chief of the N.I.C.E. police, who most directly depicts the constitutional and political ramifications of the *libido dominandi* of the idyllic vision of scientific idealism. She scorns the presence of red tape and restrictions on police power. For there to be true efficiency, old notions of due process, individual rights, and limited state power must be stripped away. To perfect humanity, remedial treatment should take the place of deserved punishment. Punishment was previously carried out according to certain established terms, Hardcastle explains: “[R]emedial treatment, on the other hand, need have no fixed limit; it could go on till it had effected a cure, and those who were carrying it out would decide when *that* was. And if cure were humane and desirable, how much more prevention?”⁸² Upon explaining this to Mark, Hardcastle notes, “There’s no distinction in the long run between police work and sociology. You and I’ve got to work hand in hand.”⁸³ In other words, there is no distinc-

⁸¹ Donald E. Glover, *C. S. Lewis: The Art of Enchantment* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981), 112.

⁸² Lewis, *Hideous*, 69.

⁸³ Lewis, *Hideous*, 70.

tion between the assertion of power and a particular pursuit of knowledge; they are bound together by the idyllic dream of creating a perfected humanity.

The threat to humane political order in *Hardcastle's* character is not politically partisan. In a later conversation with Mark, *Hardcastle*, the Chief of the N.I.C.E. police, makes it clear that the nature of the N.I.C.E. is non-political, or rather, pre-political. It transcends partisan divides by framing the larger imaginative framework in which partisans may haggle.

Isn't it absolutely essential to keep a fierce Left and a fierce Right, both on their toes and each terrified of the other? That's how we get things done. Any opposition to the N.I.C.E. is represented as a Left racket in the Right papers and a Right racket in the Left papers. If it's properly done, you get each side outbidding the other in support of us—to refute the enemy slanders. Of course we're non-political. The real power always is.⁸⁴

The idealistic vision provides the intellectual and imaginative boundaries within which permitted partisan politics takes place.

The progressive idealism of Rousseauians and Baconians is predicated upon the egotistical, narcissistic nature of the lower will. Idyllic imagination and expansive reason function accordingly. Lewis's novel depicts the demonic direction of this naturalistic orientation. The novel ends with the destruction of the N.I.C.E. and its hideous strength by angelic powers. That is to say, the world is preserved by an act of divine grace.

The closing scene of destruction takes place at a banquet celebrating the work of the N.I.C.E.⁸⁵ Guests and staff are struck with the curse of Babel. Nothing they say or write makes any sense. Animals released from cages where they were kept for experiments trample people, and an earthquake eventually destroys the N.I.C.E. headquarters and whomever survived the massacre at the banquet.

Wither, the deputy director of N.I.C.E., a wounded *Filostato*, and *Straik* escape from the banquet into the basement. So long given over to perverted reason that he had even ceased to believe in it, *Wither* has transitioned from "logical Positivism,

⁸⁴ Lewis, *Hideous*, 99.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *Hideous*, Ch. 16. "Banquet at Belbury."

and out at last into the complete void.”⁸⁶ He and Straik, fanatic devotees of Man’s progress, seize the wounded Filostrato. After bowing before the Head, they sacrifice Filostrato in the decapitation machine that he had designed for the creation of more of the likes of the bodyless Alcasan.⁸⁷ Wither and Straik realize that the Head will want another sacrifice, and they turn on each other. In their struggle, Wither kills Straik only to then be mauled by an escaped bear.

When the novel was published, Lewis was criticized for depicting in unrealistically exaggerated and barbaric imagery the possible direction of scientific, romantic idealism. It was like a gorier version of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. However, Lewis had fought and been wounded in the First World War and witnessed at close range the destruction of the second. He knew progressive idealism’s penchant for control. It was manifested in wide academic support for eugenics, large-scale mechanized warfare, and the central planning of the welfare state. The satirical depiction of scientism in *That Hideous Strength* captures the barbaric potential of the idyllic dream and its primary drive, the will to power. Compared to some of the practical manifestations of the idyllic dream as in Auschwitz, the Gulags, and various Communist Cultural Revolutions, the depictions in Lewis’s book are rather tame. They only seem shocking because they are cast in the banal, seemingly non-threatening setting of academia.

Compared to some real-world manifestations of the idyllic dream, as in Auschwitz and the Gulags, the depictions in Lewis’s novel are rather tame.

Antidote to the Hideous Dream: Toward an Ethical Will

The person needs the higher will to act as a check on the expansive and egotistical nature of the lower will. The pursuit of knowledge can be humane if it is directed by an ethical will and imagination. Two characters from the novel represent this possibility. The first is William Hingest, a scientist at Bracton College. The second is Mark after his rejection of the N.I.C.E. Both illustrate how an ethical will and moral imagination may guide reason toward a humane science.

Lewis did not oppose science. The scientist Hingest em-

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Hideous*, 353.

⁸⁷ The depiction here is of the sentimental idealist sacrificing the scientific idealist, perhaps reflecting which wing of romantic idealism Lewis believed to be more dangerous.

bodies the best that natural science can be. A famous chemist at Bracton and its only internationally renowned figure, he is decidedly outside the Progressive Element. Whatever his genius and real scientific accomplishments, he finds his pride in his family name, a family “of almost mythical antiquity, ‘never contaminated,’ as its Nineteenth-Century historian had said, ‘by traitor, placeman or baronetcy.’”⁸⁸ While not religious, he values classical humanist virtues. To the progressives “he was that hateful anomaly, the wrong sort of scientist.”⁸⁹

Unlike Mark or anyone else at the N.I.C.E., Hingest rejects the idea of a science of society, which he sees as acquisition of knowledge for the sake of power. Asked to join the N.I.C.E., he refuses because he finds little of actual science in the organization. When Mark asks why he objects to the work of the N.I.C.E. since it can do so much obvious good through “sciences like Sociology,” Hingest responds,

There are no sciences like Sociology. And if I found chemistry beginning to fit in with a secret police . . . and a scheme for taking away his farm and his shop and his children from every Englishman, I’d let chemistry go to the devil and take up gardening again.⁹⁰

Their exchange reveals much about the proper role of science as a pursuit of humane knowledge or facts, as opposed to science in service to the will to power. Mark says, “I think I do understand the sentiment that still attaches to the small man, but when you come to study the reality as I have to do—,”

Hingest interrupts:

I should want to pull it to bits and put something else in its place. Of course. That’s what happens when you study men: you find mare’s nests. I happen to believe that you can’t study men: you can only get to know them, which is quite a different thing. Because you study them you want to make lower orders govern the country and listen to classical music, which is balderdash. You also want to take away from them everything which makes life worth living and not only from them but from everyone except a parcel of prigs and professors.⁹¹

Conceiving of man as a *thing*, a mere part of nature, leads inevitably to the desire to remold him after the fashion of the

⁸⁸ Lewis, *Hideous*, 57.

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 70.

⁹⁰ Lewis, *Hideous*, 70.

⁹¹ Lewis, *Hideous*, 70-1.

Science as pursuit of humane knowledge or facts, as distinguished from science in service to the will to power, exemplified.

scientific manipulator. However, Hingest notes, that whole conception rests on a wrong-headed view of what man is. He is not a *thing* to be manipulated. He is what he is. And what makes his life worth living cannot be scientifically examined. Any effort to do so only leads to control by some men over others. Feverstone, Straik, Filostrato, and Hardcastle had praised this development, but the humane scientific mind of Hingest rejected it.

Mark thoroughly disagrees with Hingest when he first meets him, but later in the novel, as he encounters the horrors of the N.I.C.E., he comes to accept Hingest's understanding of the wrongheadedness of the type of science that is imbued with idyllic imagination.

Mark is depicted throughout the novel as having a shallow and egotistical will, given to indulging in progressive fantasies and covering such fantasies with scientific jargon. His imagination had been shaped by shallow education and he, guided by the lower will, never sought anything above it.

[I]n Mark's mind hardly one rag of noble thought, either Christian or Pagan, had a secure lodging. His education had been neither scientific nor classical—merely "Modern." The severities both of abstraction and of high human tradition had passed him by: and he had neither peasant shrewdness nor aristocratic honour to help him.⁹²

Mark's whole life was an endless chase after the "inner ring," the elusive group that would give him power in whatever institution with which he became associated. He thought that group was the Progressive Element at Bracton and then the N.I.C.E., but he had thought it was a particular group in grammar school, another in his teens, and so on. He had abandoned every friend who failed to offer anything to aid his voracious search. The search had robbed him of real joy in life.⁹³

At the end of the novel, he experiences a conversion, a change of will. It begins while he is being told about the highest race, the macrobes, who control most of what happens to human beings. In fact, he is told, the head of Alcasan is not alive in the biological sense of the term, but is controlled by these beings.⁹⁴

⁹² Lewis, *Hideous*, 185.

⁹³ Lewis, *Hideous*, 246-7.

⁹⁴ Lewis, *Hideous*, 257.

A struggle takes place inside Mark. On the one hand he has experienced the personal cruelty of the members of the N.I.C.E., but on the other hand he is being offered all that he had ever dreamed of: “[T]he true inner circle of all, the circle whose centre was outside the human race—the ultimate secret, the supreme power, the last initiation. The fact that it was completely horrible did not in the least diminish its attraction.”⁹⁵ Mark realizes that the dream is hideous, but the dream of having the power to transcend human limitations and to transform the world is at the same time greatly alluring. The dream of having the ultimate power appeals to and boosts his lower will and suppresses his qualms. He realizes that the N.I.C.E. knows about this inner struggle and counts on the dream’s allure to overpower his anemic inner check.

Mark’s change takes place in stages. The final break with N.I.C.E. comes when he is asked to stamp on the face of a crucifix. He is told that to become truly rational, he must make a willful act to physically stamp on the ultimate symbol of the higher will. The crucifix represents the subjection of oneself to a moral reality. The notion of “bearing the cross” has long represented subjection of self to a higher will. Since the crucifix represents only superstition, he should not hesitate to oblige. Mark refuses. He doesn’t know why. He doesn’t believe in Christianity and never has, but he refuses on the grounds that there is something “Straight” and “Normal” in the crucifix and something “Crooked” and “Bent” in Feverstone, Straik, Filostrato, Hardcastle, and the rest of the N.I.C.E.⁹⁶

Mark’s change is in a way inexplicable. While he has been treated shabbily by figures in the N.I.C.E. (he was arrested by institute police and framed for murder prior to his conversion), they have offered him what he always dreamed of—power. Yet even a weak inner check and a starved imagination may strengthen and find nourishment in the strangest of circumstances. Mark experiences a struggle within throughout the book, his lower will triumphing over the higher on every occasion. However, the religious imagery he is expected to desecrate stirs a latent imaginative response and strengthens his higher will.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *Hideous*, 259-60.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *Hideous*, 337.

Conclusion

Babbitt's conception of the central role of the imagination in governing human thought and conduct correlates with Lewis's depiction in *That Hideous Strength* of the role of the imagination in shaping the use of knowledge and reason in a science of society. Babbitt and Lewis agree that *libido sciendi* is indistinguishable from *libido dominandi*; the unchecked will produces an unleashed reason. But the hideous strength sought by scientific power is inscrutable without the context of the hideous dream of progressive idealism. Science claimed to be a rejection of Renaissance magic, but for many a new kind of magic actually became a part of the impetus for science and the way in which a lust for power entered science. The belief in man as simply material defined morality as a byproduct of natural processes and not as the center of man's humanity. Scientific knowledge, now disconnected from the humane purposes previously associated with knowledge and now subtly linked with a desire for power, fed dreams of a world where man ruled as God. The success of science presented the possibility "for fallen Man to shake off that limitation of his powers which mercy had imposed upon him as a protection from the full results of his fall."⁹⁷

The advances of science gave credence to the idyllic dream of perpetual progress that is a projection of the narcissism of the lower will. But the dream is at odds with the real world. As it runs into the facts of life and shows its true face, it brings disappointment. The drive to improve and perfect the world inevitably takes the form of control, with some men controlling others under the guise of improving and perfecting. Lewis writes, "Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument."⁹⁸ The enticing dream stands revealed as a cover for the will to power.

The remedy for this self-deluding orientation of imagination and reason is a change of will. To make himself understood by Christians on this score, Babbitt describes the needed turning from the lower to the higher will, assisted by moral imagination, as tantamount to what Christians call grace.

Scientific advances gave credence to the idyllic dream of perpetual progress that is a projection of the lower will's narcissism.

⁹⁷ Lewis, *Hideous*, 204.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Abolition*, 55.

Lewis depicts the working of grace as being an enlivening of what Babbitt termed the higher imagination and the higher will.

Babbitt explains that “the inner check” or “higher will” are his terms for the special kind of saving act to which the Christian doctrine of grace refers.⁹⁹ It is telling that Mark’s change of will described above is triggered by a demand that he attack a powerful symbol of the Western moral tradition, a crucifix. Lewis depicts the working of grace as being precisely an enlivening of the higher imagination and the higher will. Just as Babbitt’s idea of the higher will is similar to the Christian concept of grace, so is his notion of the lower will analogous to the Christian notion of original sin infecting the human will. The struggle between the two types of will that Babbitt sees as the crux of man’s moral predicament he regards as identical to the experience that St. Paul describes as a struggle between “flesh” and “spirit.” Lewis embraced the crucifix as a symbol of the Christian faith and as a symbol of the inexplicable working of divine grace. Here he went beyond but did not contradict Babbitt’s more ecumenical, experientially based account of the higher will.

It is unclear why some people seem predisposed to favor the higher will and some to favor the lower and why, if there is a change, the change takes place. As long as Mark remained under the control of the *libido dominandi* he was enthralled by the idyllic progressive dream which justified his desire for power. This statement could just as well be written the other way: as long as Mark remained enthralled by the idyllic progressive dream he remained under the control of the *libido dominandi*. The hold was shattered only when Mark’s latent, imminent inner check was strengthened by moral-religious imagery and he saw the diabolical reality behind the idyllic façade that had held him captive for so long. That statement, too, could just as well be written the other way around.

The person must move toward his ethical center, which means the higher will checking the lower and the morally grounded imagination defusing and replacing the idyllic. The

⁹⁹ Babbitt discusses the close connection between what he calls “the higher will” or “inner check” and the Christian doctrine of grace in the Introduction to his *On Being Creative* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1968; first published in 1932.) The same introduction warns of the “serious evil” of science “overstepping its due boundaries” and turning into “pseudo-science.” It is not far-fetched to speculate that Lewis was exposed to these ideas, whether studied in Babbitt’s writing or More’s. See also Babbitt, *Democracy*, 202.

movement of will is decisive but indistinguishable from a transformation of the imagination. A proper imagination expresses and reinforces a proper orientation of will, and a hideous imagination expresses and reinforces a will that seeks the hideous strength of narcissistic power.

Lewis explicitly affirmed and defended specifically Christian beliefs, including beliefs resting partly on revelation, whereas Babbitt deliberately took a non-dogmatic, ecumenical approach to moral and religious questions, preferring to base his claims on experiential evidence. In their understanding of man's moral and spiritual condition and of how human beings become who they are, the two men are nevertheless in deep and far-reaching agreement. What is particularly noteworthy in the context of this article is that Lewis embraces ideas that are not only central to Babbitt but markedly and distinctively Babbittian. Although Babbitt had a deep interest in religion and defended basic religious tenets, he was trying to persuade modern skeptics not willing to accept ideas on authority. It is hardly a coincidence that in his Christian advocacy Lewis, too, often framed his arguments in concrete, experiential ways that did not presuppose dogmatic belief.

Lewis affirmed specifically Christian beliefs, including ones resting partly on revelation, whereas Babbitt took a non-dogmatic, experiential approach to moral and religious questions.

A few words should be said in conclusion about the political ramifications of the Lewis-Babbitt consensus regarding will, imagination, and reason. A political society that is dominated by individuals attracted to the twin forces of idyllic imagination and scientific progressivism will neglect issues of moral character and pursue schemes of social engineering like those of the N.I.C.E. Leaders will assume that they have the complete knowledge necessary to make massive and beneficial social change and that human beings are malleable. In such a society, conflict will be perceived not as part and parcel of political struggle and compromise but as an indication that opponents of the reigning schemes must be "forced to be free."

In contrast, a political society composed of individuals guided by the higher imagination and the higher will has a built-in check upon appetite and ambition. People in such a society will pursue schemes of improvement that are tempered by an awareness of their own flaws and those of others, including flaws of knowledge and intention. Political conflict

In a society of individuals guided by the higher imagination and will, ideological polarization will be avoided or tempered.

can then be perceived as a necessary part of discovering solutions to social problems and not as a hindrance to progress to be forcibly circumvented. That Babbitt and Lewis should have arrived at very similar conclusions regarding politics confirms their very similar assumptions about human nature, specifically about how will and imagination interact to man's detriment or benefit.

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