

2018

Minds of Metal and Wheels: Tolkien and Lewis on Science and Faith

Mike Kugler

Northwestern College - Orange City, kugler@nwcsiowa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nwcsiowa.edu/northwesternreview>

Recommended Citation

Kugler, Mike (2018) "Minds of Metal and Wheels: Tolkien and Lewis on Science and Faith," *Northwestern Review*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://nwcsiowa.edu/northwesternreview/vol3/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Northwestern Review by an authorized editor of NWCommons. For more information, please contact ggrond@nwcsiowa.edu.

Minds of Metal and Wheels: Tolkien and Lewis on Science and Faith

Abstract

J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis expressed a view of science in relation to religion that resonates with the views of many conservative Christians today: an association of modern science with anti-humanist convictions and totalitarian control of nature and human life. However, Kugler argues that Tolkien and Lewis's view was rooted in personal and scholarly commitments to pre-modern literary worldviews. These were then confirmed by their experience of two world wars, the rise of the welfare state, and the threat of totalitarian barbarism in the first half of the twentieth century. If their world is arguably not ours, need we share their understanding of science and religion?

About the Author

Dr. Mike Kugler primarily teaches European history from the Reformation through the modern era. His research and writing include the Enlightenment era, particularly in Scotland; historical narrative in a variety of forms, including formal history but also film and graphic novels; and more recently, the history of incarnational theology. He has presented papers at a wide variety of conferences and has published reviews and essays in *Fides et Historia*, *The Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, and *Scotia*.

Minds of Metal and Wheels: Tolkien and Lewis on Science and Faith¹

by Mike Kugler, Ph.D.

He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels;
and he does not care for growing things, as far as they serve him for the moment.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

Introduction

If men can be known by their opponents as well as their friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis can be understood by their cultural and intellectual challengers.² From somewhat different starting points, and along different paths, Tolkien and Lewis found common ground associating modern science with anti-humanist convictions and totalitarian control of nature and human life.

Long before Tolkien began writing *The Lord of the Rings* and Lewis converted to “mere Christianity,” their suspicions of modern science, the heart of the modern worldview, and anxiety about Europe’s future were latent. The Great War illustrated terribly how well-grounded were their concerns. Later, in the 1930s, Europeans watched creeping authoritarian and fascist movements, further illustrating the danger from the Europe-wide threat of totalitarianism.

Tolkien entertained these suspicions earlier through the fertile interactions of his theological,

¹ I want to thank my colleagues Bob Winn, Randy Jensen, Don Wacome, and Joel Westerholm for their helpful conversation on this topic. Anything objectionable is my responsibility, even if I’ve tried to pawn it off on my friends.

² Adapted from John David Burton, “G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis: The Men and Their Times,” in *G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, eds. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 161.

literary, and political convictions. Lewis came to similar conclusions later, first as he worked out the philosophical implications of his scholarship in medieval and renaissance literature, then in his Christian theological convictions and apologetic writing. It is typical to see Lewis as a defender of science in its proper place, i.e., not distorted into some kind of political ideology, educational program, or moral system. Fair enough. But, briefly, I want to suggest that as members of a particular generation of educated Europeans who lived through two wars, the rise of the welfare state, and the threat of totalitarian barbarism, they worried deeply about the consequences of science for human and natural integrity under the sovereign authority of God. Knowing their setting, their world, is a first priority before accepting their authority on similar matters for Christians today.

Tolkien and Lewis were part of a “Generation of 1890.” Europeans and Americans born around that year grew up in the Second Industrial Revolution, the high water level of imperial expansion, an age of mass production, labor, agitation, socialism, mass information, and urbanization. As young adults they confronted the first mechanized, fully mobilized “total war.” Many educated people found traditional religion, including Christianity, challenged by dynamic transformation easily associated with science and technology. “Progressive” accounts of scientific achievement threatened to desacralize nature and humanity, to reduce the spiritual and transcendent to primitive, ill-educated, or childlike responses to mystery. Science from this perspective promised scales of social transformation that threatened individual liberty and traditional accounts of human dignity.

Typically, scholars have arrayed the critics of religious belief and institutions, secularists committed to the “desacralization” of nature and human character, over against traditional religious leaders and the emerging elites of the spiritualist and occultist orders of fin de siècle Europe.³ Recent revisions of this history emphasize how it is just as likely that Europeans were returning to the Christian faith from secular skepticism.⁴ Or, complementary arguments emphasize how the “new” occultists sought a rational if not empirical, even “scientific” system of transcendental knowledge.⁵ In other words, they were not retreating from or reacting against modern science and rational understanding, but recalibrating their spiritualism and knowledge as adepts to the systematic demands of modern empiricism.⁶ Still, many people held moderate or even grave suspicions of modern society and culture. Members of this group—spiritualist Madam Blavatsky (a generation earlier, 1831-91), seminal horror writer and atheist HP Lovecraft (1890-1931), Christian mystic author Charles Williams (1886-1945), poet and Irish nationalist William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), sex magic Satanist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), eccentric

³ For a few examples, see Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); A.N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993); and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007).

⁴ Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004) and *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵ Even Owen Barfield and Charles Williams, two especially self-conscious Christian intellectuals, sought spiritual transcendence and understanding through ancient cult practices like Morris dancing, anthroposophy, or mystical communion under spiritual disciplines including something like sex magic. See Phillip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 102-3, 246-7, 280-2.

⁶ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Catholic scholar Montague Summers (1880-1948), soldier and author Ernst Jünger (1895-1998), and the novelist Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), just to name a small number—were born after the mid-nineteenth century, like Lewis (1898) and Tolkien (1892). Many of them concentrated on responses to the grave implications of a Designer-less, materialist explanation for life on Earth. In particular, what meaning and purpose could humans claim for themselves with some confidence in facing such a cosmos? The early social sciences promised to explain religion, morals, and even aesthetics in empirical accounts that appeared to some intellectuals to be brutally reductive. This modern science of human nature might well serve the state by managing humans like any other mammalian population.

Members of this generation found some of these fears realized in the Great War, where European industrial, bureaucratic states proved they could destroy landscapes and humans on a



British infantry during the Battle of Morval, September 1916.

Image from Wikimedia.

god-like scale. For Tolkien and Lewis, how could humans recover the authority, the commanding experience, of the transcendent? Such a goal was shared by people so apparently different as the anti-modern Christian Summers, the sex Satanist Crowley, perhaps

including the neo-Nietzschean Jünger. But you don't have to have been a member of that

Copyright Mike Kugler. Readers of this item may copy it without the copyright owner's permission as long as the author and publisher (NWCommons) are acknowledged in the copy and the copy is used for educational, not-for-profit purposes.

generation to share a deep, more or less self-conscious sensibility that life in the modern world has its share of peculiar challenges, dilemmas, and anxieties. For many Christians the published work of Tolkien and Lewis continues to explain why and offers a compelling alternative to the secular modern outlook.⁷ I briefly want to discuss some of the key themes in Tolkien’s and Lewis’ portrait of modern science in relation to their Christian faith.

Tolkien and Lewis

Tolkien and Lewis were products of the Edwardian public school system in England and Ulster respectively. Later they became scholars of medieval and renaissance literature. The scholarly investment in subjects like ethics and philosophy encouraged reflection on how to live one’s life. Such a “way,” a worldview perhaps, encouraged in turn literary aspirations as the means of expressing that worldview, encouraging their fascination with mythopoetic creativity, “world creation.”⁸

Tolkien was a Roman Catholic whose convictions even in his teen years, shared by his closest friends, reflected deep distrust of modern society and culture.⁹ His distaste for industrial ugliness, urban squalor, and the destruction of nature remained sharp for most of his life. As a young man his Christian faith and his romantic aesthetic shaped one another into what seems to have been a consistent outlook onto the world. Tolkien was also taken by writers such as the arts

⁷ For only two examples of contemporary Christians tapping into Lewis and Tolkien for defense of theology and the Christian worldview, see the work of philosophers Peter Kreeft and Victor Reppert.

⁸ John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle Earth* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2003), 113; Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), ch. 7; Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, ch. 11; A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 222, 227-8.

⁹ For Tolkien and his closest friends, their romantic and mythopoetic poetry as discomfort with modern society and culture, see Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War*, Part One.

and crafts reformer William Morris (1834-96), and perhaps Yeats. His aspirations to invent languages that seemed lost or ancient, along with the worlds embedded in them--not unlike Macpherson's *Ossian* or the Grimm brothers--evoked a satisfyingly different world than the urban, industrial, and liberal one in which he lived. While Lewis had abandoned religion at 15, he remained unconvinced by the attempts to draw implications from Darwinian evolution into accounts of human ethics and psychology. By the end of his military service he was drawn to Henri Bergson's alternative to Darwin, a philosophical account of spiritualized evolution.¹⁰

These basic principles were in place for each before they found themselves in 1916 uniformed and bound for the Western Front. Both men were shocked and shaken by the massive, overwhelming, and ugly cruelty of combat at the Western Front. It haunted them for the rest of their lives. The war, as much as anything, confirmed their convictions about the arrogant aspirations and utter emptiness of modern wisdom, the face of secular arrogance.

Tolkien

The Western Front magnified the anti-modern fears of the young poet and linguist.¹¹ His first prose version of what would become the Middle Earth mythos, “The Fall of Gondolin,” written in 1919 from a military hospital back home, described dive-bombing dragons and huge brass snakes breaking city walls, opening their belly doors to disgorge swarms of Orcs.

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), ch.13.

¹¹ For Tolkien's war experience, and its impact on his mythologizing, see J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 7-8; John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War*; Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 68-71. For the contrast of Lewis' combat experience, see *ibid*, 79-89.

Then on a time Melko (Morgoth, the original fallen Vala) assembled all his most cunning smiths and sorcerers, and of iron and flame they wrought a host of monsters such as have only at that time been seen and shall not again till the Great End. Some were all of iron so cunningly linked that they might flow like slow rivers of metal or coil themselves around and above all obstacles before them, and these were filled in their innermost depths with the grimmest of the Orcs with scimitars and spears; others of bronze and copper were given hearts and spirits of blazing fire, and they blasted all that stood before them with the terror of their snorting or trampled whatso escaped the ardour of their breath; yet others were creatures of pure flame that writhed like ropes of molten metal, and they brought to ruin whatever fabric they came nigh, and iron and stone melted before them and became as water. . . . and by reason of the vast heaviness of their bodies those gates fell. . . . and their hollow bellies . . . opened about their middles, and an innumerable host of the Orcs, the goblins of hatred, poured therefrom into the breach¹²

Tolkien’s development and revision of what would become the *Silmarilion* led him eventually to minimize the expressions of his Catholic faith in *The Lord of the Rings*; his guiding principle was that less became more. The obviously contemporary images in the early drafts also fell out, while the distinctively anti-modern convictions remained.

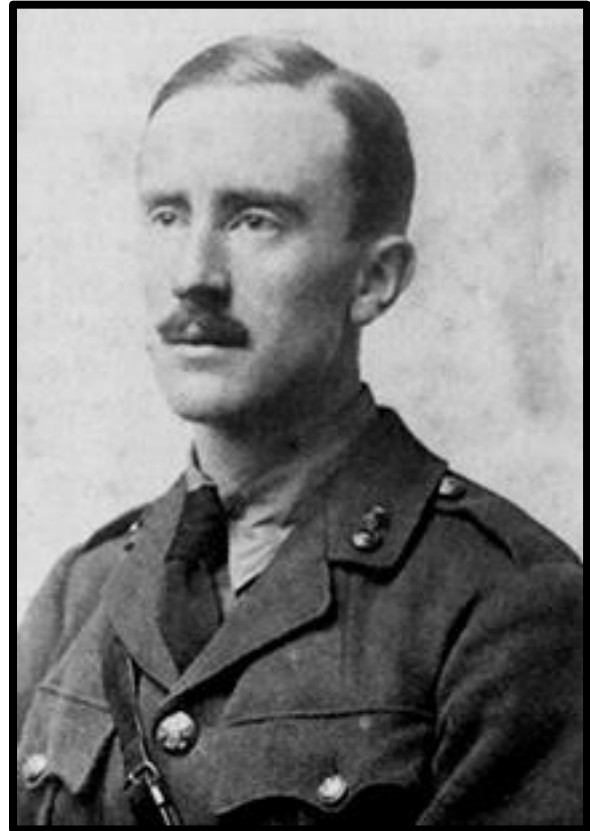
Tolkien’s goal for the Middle Earth tales—a mythic cycle for England—clearly idealized that country’s rural village landscape and society he loved.¹³ His heroic races, the Elves and the

¹² J.R.R. Tolkien, *Book of Lost Tales: Part 2* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 171, 177.

¹³ Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 89-90.

Númenóreans, shared a fundamental conviction about nature. They were bound to honor the integrity and value of the landscape and all living creatures. Technology and innovation must humbly cooperate with that integrity. Why? It seems that Tolkien’s Elves considered nature sacred, but also recognized that as a beautiful, complex and diverse creation, it had an integrity which demanded deep respect. This borrows from the classical conviction that proper art imitates nature. They were stewards, not property owners; they were bound to obey the divine author, and not their possibly bent will to power.

Further, this principle among the Elder Races and the first Men paralleled Tolkien’s own literary goal of “subcreation.”¹⁴ His fiction



J.R.R. Tolkien, 1916.
Image from Wikimedia.

participated in the divine creation by imitation of the Creator. To build an imaginative mythopoetic world was to honor God with one’s own act.¹⁵ What looked like Elvish “magic”

¹⁴ Tolkien resisted suggestions that his Middle Earth cycle, especially *The Lord of the Rings*, was inspired by his experience of combat in the Great War or more so, the rise of totalitarian rulers and World War II. He wrote the oldest part of *The Lord of the Rings*, “The Shadow of the Past,” long before 1939. But this admission supports my claim that Tolkien’s deeply anxious suspicions if not animosity towards the industrial statism of the modern world came quite early to him. For this discussion, see his introduction to *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 6-8.

¹⁵ For “subcreation,” see Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1966); Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 190-1. The principle is perhaps most poignantly illustrated in the opening of *The Silmarillion*, in

was actually the consequence of intimate knowledge of and unwavering respect for lives unlike their own. Elvish achievements in everything from their homes to their weapons and art represent the artisan’s “working with the grain” of nature.¹⁶

In *The Two Towers*, Faramir, son of Denethor the Steward and brother of Boromir, expressed the convictions of the Wise, the ancient leaders of Middle Earth. He explained to Frodo that he did not want Sauron’s Ring:

For myself, I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Arnor again as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens; not a mistress of many slaves, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves. War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend: the city of the men of Númenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancientry, her beauty, and her present wisdom. Not feared, save as men may fear the dignity of a man, old and wise.¹⁷

which one of the Vala, Aulë, imitates Eru by creating his own living race, the Dwarves. Discovered and chastised for doing so without divine permission, he prepares to destroy his newly created beings. But Eru pities them, and sees in Aulë’s act one of innocence and love. He spares them. Tolkien contrasts this, later, against Melkor’s grotesque Frankenstein act of torturing and mutilating Elves into his own race of slaves, the Orcs. This is as close as Tolkien came, it seems, to an open attack on medical engineering of humanity. *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 43-4, 50, 93-4.

¹⁶ For this notion of working “with the grain” of Creation, see Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005). As you read on, you will probably see how my sense of a theological response to natural law theory is quite different than Hauerwas’.

¹⁷ *The Two Towers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 280.

Copyright Mike Kugler. Readers of this item may copy it without the copyright owner’s permission as long as the author and publisher (NWCommons) are acknowledged in the copy and the copy is used for educational, not-for-profit purposes.

Tolkien’s language is larded with chivalric ideals. Faramir, we are told, is far more a descendant of the Númenor long past than his brother. He therefore speaks for that lost, noble heroic race.¹⁸ Yet through him Tolkien expresses his modern revision of that tradition, steeped in his memory of the cruelty of combat and the shocking destruction of warfare. He rejects the glory of combat, insisting instead on the limited goals of warfare. The best of the chivalric tradition—protecting the innocent and defenseless, even with one’s life—Tolkien expands into the protection of civilization itself, its ancient traditions and its inherited moral and spiritual wisdom. This, as well as the people who thrive within its gentle rule, are worth the cost of one’s life.¹⁹

No artisanship should “bend” or “break” nature, violating its fundamental integrity. Only conquest tries to justify this. The results are ugliness, cruelty, and death. The enemies of Middle Earth, Sauron first and later the traitorous wizard Saruman, were committed to what Tolkien later called “the Machine.”²⁰ They pursued a ruthless rationalized, systematic organization of creatures and nature for the purposes of conquest and absolute, unquestioned authority.²¹ Seeking order through predictable outcomes, these rulers augment their own powers with technical instruments to extend their reach, speed, and control.²²

¹⁸ *The Return of the King* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 31.

¹⁹ Any reader of Tolkien’s epics recognizes, still, that he took great pleasure in depicting battle, and his characters often expressed their “joy” in combat. In his Narnia series Lewis seemed to qualify even less the nature and, perhaps, even the joy of combat, and in later letters would defend, as a Christian, going to war for just causes.

²⁰ Tolkien’s letter to Milton Waldman, c. late 1951, in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), Letter 131.

²¹ It is interesting to compare these kinds of suspicions of a worldview such as “the Machine” to the attempts by a later contemporary, also Catholic in upbringing, the French philosopher Michel Foucault. For his interrogation of “the carceral system” as a wide spread, insidious discourse of modern society, see *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995). Closer in time to Tolkien’s exposition was the foundational critique of modernity, Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

²² I have a strong sense that behind Tolkien’s convictions (possibly Lewis’, too) was a pre-quantum sense of material existence. The notion of the integrity of the created order, of individual creatures and objects, must have

The most powerful, terrible “machine” in Tolkien’s universe was Sauron’s Ring. He designed it to dominate the minds of the free creatures of Middle Earth. Saruman explained to Gandalf why they must recover the Ring: “The time of Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see.” The Age of Men will be a machine age, marked by cruel domination.²³ Sauron’s victory appeared inevitable; the Wise must form a temporary alliance with him. Saruman appeals to Gandalf as a member of a carefully trained, noble elite whose magic is a kind of technique. Saruman speaks for members of an elite who hide their contempt for their subjects. If patient and clever, Saruman and the wizards can guide, even eventually control Sauron’s forces:

We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things we have so far striven in vain to accomplish. . . . There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means.²⁴

meant something different c.1800 than it does c.2017. Once we realize that all material existence is atoms and space, and the quite counter-intuitive quantum understanding of physics, the possibility of breaking it down to its constituent parts and possibly re-building it seems a quite distinctive act from what that might have meant 300 years ago. The question is how much of Tolkien and Lewis’ metaphysics were pre-modern, inherited from a much older, perhaps even ancient, physics. For Lewis, see his letter to his father, August, 1925, in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), v.1, 649; compared to his published views years later: *The Abolition of Man* (1947; New York: Harper Collins, 1978), ch.3. Alister E. McGrath suggests Lewis’ attempt to defend science and criticize the modern metaphysical worldview of the same began in the 1920s, culminating in the 1940s; *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 46-8. John Beversluis claimed Lewis could not decide if he was a Platonist or Occamist; cited in Lyle W. Dorset, “C.S. Lewis: Some Keys to His Effectiveness”, in *G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis*, 222.

²³ For Augustine’s portrait of the unquenchable urge of fallen humans to impose their will upon others, the *libido dominandi*, see *The City of God*, Book 1; and Peter Brown, “Saint Augustine” in *Trends in Medieval Political Thought*, ed. Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Blackwell & Mott, 1965), 10.

²⁴ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 272-3.

Saruman imitated Sauron’s ruthless imperialism by building blacksmith works, ruining the lands around Isengard by strip mining and logging, committing even the Frankensteinian “black evil” of breeding the Uruk-hai from Orcs and men. Such works terrorize their opponents and serve wars of conquest.

Gandalf refused to compromise on means to serve noble ends, to tolerate cruel evil for the sake of progress towards virtue. The other Wise—Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel, Faramir—refuse the offer of Sauron’s “machine” to gain victory over him, to do good of any kind. Such efforts will require conquest of other peoples; an authoritarian if not totalitarian rule. No “machine” is tolerable as a means. “Machines” by definition are wielded to impose strong wills over others, to dominate them. It is a fundamental evil. Tolkien is clear in his Augustinian portrait of evil as distorted, twisted original good. But the portrait of the Ring of course raises questions about a Manichean strain in Tolkien’s mythological world.²⁵ Literal machines in the modern world express an idea, a worldview. They make achieving the idea of conquest and brutal rule possible, at the cost of dignity of nature and humanity, beauty, humility, and virtue.

²⁵ Throughout Tolkien’s narratives creatures of originally good intentions and noble character are seduced into evil. For instance, Fëanor and Melkor/Morgoth in the *Silmarillion*, and in *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum, Boramir, Denathor, even hobbits like Frodo and back in the Shire, Ted Sandyman. This implies a strong commitment by Tolkien to refuse to dismiss anyone as fundamentally evil and therefore earning the contempt of their enemies. Perhaps the way to look at Sauron’s Ring is to consider how the fallen Vala had infused his own cruelty and lust for domination into the object, and no one in Middle Earth had the power or will to turn the tool to purposes that would not eventually be marred by cruelty or wickedness. The Ring gives power according to the status of the wearer, and no one in Middle Earth was of the power of Sauron. A more disturbing aspect of Tolkien’s moral ontology is the status of the Orcs. While dwarves, men, and Elves who might be seduced by Sauron or Saruman can be redeemed, no Orc is offered reconciliation. They are killed, and the most noble of creatures, the Elves, express a disgust for Orcs that is simply the expression of revulsion at pollution and foulness.

Lewis

Lewis’ conversion to Christianity was the conclusion to a slow process, from the later 1920s to his confession of faith in 1931. His first book after that conversion, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933), was a philosophical and literary allegory of the intellectual journey away from faith, via the abandonment of the medieval and renaissance account of the cosmos, towards atheistic materialist naturalism and moral relativism.²⁶ It is Lewis’ biography of an entire civilization abandoning its fundamental principles in exchange for cleverness, facile status, and power over nature and others. As the book’s pilgrim flees his home, Puritania, and journeys as far away as possible, his path to truth ironically brings him back home. Some of this path was prefigured by Lewis’ philosophical struggles with the idealism of T.H. Green and F.H. Bradley over against the pessimistic materialism he believed any honest empiricist must adopt.²⁷ But his dissatisfaction with what he understood as modern empiricism left him brooding over an alternative, driving him to idealism and finally into the arms of his Christian academic friends, Hugo Dyson and Tolkien.²⁸

Through the 1940s Lewis’ association of Darwinian evolution and science augmenting human power and arrogance deepened. His greatest concern was not evolution alone; I don’t know of evidence that Lewis dismissed Darwin’s argument or conclusions. Lewis’ concern, I think, was that the Darwinian account afforded rational permission to “Progressives” to oppose

²⁶ For a compelling account of Lewis’ use of medieval cosmology as the ordering principle in his children’s fantasy series, see Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁷ See Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 161; *Surprised by Joy*, 170-9, 209-10.

²⁸ Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 187-9.

the Christian faith, its rich history and tradition, including the medieval and renaissance account of nature and humanity. H.R. Haldane, Julian Huxley (Aldous' brother), Bertrand Russell, and others saw science as the only source of truth; further, they argued it was a source of power to improve human life.²⁹ They gave real credibility to the social science reform speculations of Comte, Marx, and by the 20th century, many others. Such social sciences promised to transform the human condition, achieved through eugenics and euthanasia. For Lewis this led directly to the race wars and the extermination of unwanted populations first tested on late imperial populations and culminating in the Nazi's Final Solution.³⁰

Modern science for Lewis was a path to knowledge in which God is “an unnecessary hypothesis,” an approach which flatters human pride and independent ambition. The resulting technologies accelerate and augment human power. So armed, we make ourselves gods, acting on wills and desire independent of God, lusting for dominion. Against this, Lewis championed (against those who traced modern secular arrogance back to the Renaissance) the Christian philosophical tradition rooted in the medieval and renaissance synthesis of Greek and Roman

²⁹For examples, see H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (1919); Bertrand Russell, *The Scientific Outlook* (1931); J.B. Haldane, *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (1924), which helped shape Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931); Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (1942); Huxley was also a leader and spokesperson for the British Eugenics Society. For Lewis' confrontation with the scientism of his age, see Sanford Schwartz, *C.S. Lewis on the Final Frontier: Science and the Supernatural in the Space Trilogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and, Michael L. Peterson, “C.S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design,” *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* 62, 4 (December, 2010), 253-66.

³⁰ On eugenics and euthanasia programs in Britain, the US and Germany, see Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012); Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany, 1900-1945* (London: Pan Books, 2002).

philosophy—the heirs of Aristotle and Plato—that valued nature and the human individual.³¹

Perhaps a typically tidy summary of his position comes from *Miracles* (1947):

Only Supernaturalists really see Nature. You must go a little away from her, and then turn round, and look back. Then at last the true landscape will become visible. You must have tasted, however briefly, the pure water from beyond the world before you can be distinctly conscious of the hot, salty tang of Nature’s current. To treat her as God, or as Everything, is to lose the whole pith and pleasure of her. Come out, look back, and then you will see.³²

Despite claims that Lewis carefully distinguished scientists from scientism, here he claimed that only a conviction of transcendent, spiritual, and metaphysical truths permitted the observer to have a proper respect for the natural world. By implication, the Darwinian scientist looking into the night sky saw a cold and silent cosmos, while around him was an Earth empty of divine design or love, throbbing only with ruthlessly competitive life selected just for survival.

Sitting together, drinks in hand, at Oxford’s Eagle and Child pub, Lewis and the other Inklings heard Tolkien read the working pages of the *Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Lewis adored Tolkien’s achievement. Tolkien was sure that without his friend’s ceaseless

³¹ Lewis would eventually express suspicion of the enterprise of Christian apologetics for similar reasons. Rational proofs of God’s existence or the principles of Christian faith overthrew the tradition of mystery in the faith, in fact the necessity of faith or trust itself. Hubris was a real danger in Christian engagement with its secular opponents. Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 364.

³² C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2015), 104-105. On the teleology of the medieval/renaissance synthesis: why created things move, divine love, Augustine’s role in developing the basics of the synthesis in which natural truths—which are part of a changeable fallen world—are subservient to rational eternal truths, see *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

encouragement he would not have completed the fantasy epic.³³ Perhaps Lewis loved the books partly because they helped him recognize and crystalize his own growing sense of the implications of modern science and technology. More than at any time previous, the applied sciences could make real and lasting the totalitarian shadow hanging over Europe throughout the 1930s and well after the crushing of Nazism in 1945. Lewis wrote his critique of modern educational theory, *The Abolition of Man* (1943), in the midst of the war. His educational critique grew out of his loathing of modern scientism; both, he believed, were the abhorrent partners in service to a totalitarian future being played out in Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia.³⁴



The Eagle & Child, Oxford.

Image from Wikimedia.

The final novel of Lewis’ Space

Trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, appeared the same year as Hitler’s defeat. There is good reason to consider Lewis’ Space Trilogy—including *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*—as an extended analysis and critique of totalitarian ideology and brutality. Though A.N. Wilson has

³³ Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 169-70, 196.

³⁴ Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 198-200.

cautioned readers against the collapsing of the novel as a narrative version of the *Abolition of Man*, there’s no question that similar fears and revulsion animated both works.³⁵ Lewis took the novel’s title from a little-known renaissance Scottish poem on the Tower of Babel; this book perhaps comes closest to expressing Lewis’ shared anxiety with Tolkien about the likely service of modern science and technology to the ideological goals of anti-human totalitarianism. This is the highest expression to date of human independence, of lust for god-like power.

The oddity is that Lewis expressed these shared convictions in a story Tolkien deeply disliked. Tolkien stiff-armed Lewis’ attempted imitation of the “Gothic spiritual thrillers” of Charles Williams.³⁶ The N.I.C.E. organization’s combination of magic and technological power in service to eugenics and totalitarian mirrors Tolkien’s own discussion of magic broadly. This portrait of magic as a technique, of technology as a kind of magic, illustrates Lewis’ Augustinian conviction that for all their claims to have grown up and moved on, modern men and woman have merely shifted their worship of God and religious rituals to the modernist worship of themselves.³⁷ Early in the novel, Lord Feverstone, the industrialist-investor Devine of the earlier books, lays out this repulsive agenda to an ambitious young recruit:

³⁵ Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 197.

³⁶ On Lewis’ admiration of Williams and intentions to write a spiritual thriller, see Zarelski and Zarelski, *The Fellowship*, 282-3, 426-7.

³⁷ Lewis claimed that since childhood he had been fascinated with the occult, and only with some difficulty overcame that. Yet it clearly continued to hold an imaginative fascination for him; *Surprised by Joy*, 170-9. On magic and science as twins, seeing power through technique, see Lewis’ letter to Douglas Bush, March 28, 1941, in *Letters*, v.2, 475. This was an age of renewed elite fascination with the occult and spiritualism; see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, and generally, Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), ch. 7.

If science is given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal . . . [T]he question of what humanity is to be is going to be decided in the next sixty years . . . Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest . . . You and I want to be the people who do the taking charge, not the ones who are taken charge of.³⁸

Feverstone’s brutal honesty mirrors the conversation of Saruman and Gandalf. Tolkien and Lewis shared an Augustinian account of human nature, the Fall prompting the twisted condition of human desire and ambition. The African bishop considered *scientia*, “knowledge” and roughly “natural philosophy,” to have a lesser status as truth to the clear teaching of Scripture.³⁹ Fallen selves, even seeking to do good, in effect “weaponize” human truth-seeking and technical ability (to borrow our contemporary term) and in doing so violate the integrity of nature and other living creatures, including people. Even if moved by the desire to help others, such increased power also augments our pride and shifts us from our creaturely place within the defining limits of the created order. Tolkien outlined this in a letter to his editor where he argued that “Mortality,” the fear of death which in fact is a fundamental part of God’s design, drives us towards “becoming like God” as Genesis put it. We create “Machines” to extend our life spans

³⁸ *That Hideous Strength*, 39-40. For Lewis on the will and sin, see Evan K. Gibson, “The Centrality of *Perelandra* to Lewis’ Theology,” in *Chesterton and Lewis*, 130-1.

³⁹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 2, and *The Confessions*, Books 5, 7.

as well as our authoritarian reach.⁴⁰ Lewis explored a similar theme at length in his second sci-fi novel, *Perelandra*, published the same year as *The Abolition of Man*.⁴¹

Lewis considered his acceptance of evolutionary science to be entirely consistent with his understanding of Christian orthodoxy. Peter Harrison, a historian of science, argues this idea:

From [Lewis'] perspective, the evolutionary character of the universe can be seen as physical nature's exploration of contingent possibilities within lawful structure, but still as having a divinely willed trajectory leading to a creature who could relate to God.

Classical Christian theology does not entail that either the natural world or the human enterprise was created without chanciness and contingency, without the potential for development along alternative possible routes, and therefore strictly determined.

Evolution in the physical realm and free will in the moral realm mutually attest to the significant degree of openness in God's creation.⁴²

As I wrote earlier, I'm going to make a perhaps subtly different claim. Lewis especially found modern science in error for its abandonment of the kind of intellectual humility he associated with the Christian/pagan synthesis of medieval/renaissance natural philosophy. In Lewis' account, European defenders of the modern Promethean tendency expressed in late

Enlightenment and Romantic thought would find support in Darwin's explanation of a universe

⁴⁰ Tolkien, letter to Waldman, in *Letters*.

⁴¹ Lewis attacked eugenics in *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*; for Tolkien's horror about the atomic destruction of Japanese cities, see his letter to Christopher Tolkien 9 August 1945, in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Letter 102.

⁴²Peter Harrison, "C.S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design," part 6, <http://biologos.org/blogs/archive/c-s-lewis-on-evolution-and-intelligent-design-part-6>.

entirely reasonable, without a divine Designer—a cosmos of terrifying silence and a nature characterized only by relentless, brutal, and wasteful struggle for survival. Humanity in this scheme has no *telos*, no innate dignity. It therefore became an object of scientific investigation, subjected to the goal of manipulating human nature towards improvement and perfection.

Writing to the scientist and novelist Arthur C. Clarke late in 1943, Lewis tried to explain how moral assumptions at work in contemporary science fiction were important symptoms of a wider set of cultural convictions. He then defended his own portrait of contemporary science.

I don't of course think that at the moment many scientists are budding Westons [Lewis' villain in the Space Trilogy]: but I do think (hang it all, I *live* among scientists!) that a point of view not unlike Weston's is on the way I agree Technology is *per se* neutral: but a race devoted to the increase of its own power by technology with complete indifference to ethics *does* seem to be a cancer in the universe. Certainly if he goes on his present course much further man can *not* be trusted with knowledge.⁴³

Lewis tries here to maintain the distinction between science and scientism scholars have since suggested he carefully held. Still, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he considered sinful, immoral humans incapable of exercising moral integrity and self-discipline over the technological consequences of their scientific research. There is really an air of inevitability to his accounting.

⁴³ Lewis mentions Olaf Stapledon, Haldane, and Conrad Hal Waddington as his main targets; *Letters*, v.2, 593-4.

No other consequences of modern science seemed to provoke Lewis' fears more than their application in the fields of the social sciences. Upon taking a professorship at Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1954, he argued in his inaugural lecture:

The sciences long remained like a lion-cub whose gambols delighted its master in private; it had not yet tasted man's blood. All through the eighteenth century . . . science was not the business of Man because Man had not yet become the business of science. It dealt chiefly with the inanimate; and it threw off few technological byproducts. When Watt makes his engine, Darwin starts monkeying with the ancestry of Man, and Freud with his soul, then indeed the lion will have got out of its cage.⁴⁴

All the hallmarks of Lewis' charming and pugnacious style are on display: clever word play, the police court tone (to borrow from A.N. Wilson), even images from the animal kingdom. He plainly states that, once philosophical materialism (which Lewis considered not the consequence of modern scientific investigation but an old pagan claim and not intellectually convincing) joined the mix, this modern ideological synthesis provided the perfect inspiration and justification for the totalitarian cruelties of the twentieth century. This age had only confirmed the Christian theological conviction of the Fall and human sinfulness. Technological aspirations and power over nature, to manipulate humans themselves, had reached a critical stage. At no other time had humans proven themselves so capable, so committed, to absolute independence from God's authority and life-giving will for creation and humanity.

⁴⁴"*De Descriptione Temporum*," in *The Essential C.S. Lewis*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett (New York: Scribner, 1996), 476. An early version of this claim is in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 21; and a subdued account can be found in *The Discarded Image*, 74-5.

Conclusion

In the Victorian era the ideological conflict between theology and science was largely led by non-believers. Orthodox Christians did not take up their side of the conflict until the early 20th century.⁴⁵ Tolkien was neither trained in nor interested enough to work through metaphysics, epistemology, or the philosophy of science. Better trained in philosophy, Lewis still dismissed or ignored the kind of analytic philosophy that came to dominate the subject, including philosophy of science, after Wittgenstein.⁴⁶ Even so, Tolkien armed himself with similar literary affections and intuited a distrust of modern society and technology sooner than Lewis. By World War II, both men had reached the same place, fearing a common enemy in the scientific materialism which rendered nature and humanity as more or less organic machines suitable for manipulation or improvement. Technology gives totalitarian engineering its leverage against nature and

⁴⁵ For Christianity and science in the modern Atlantic world, see James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987); and more broadly, John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On this topic specifically, see Timothy Larsen, “‘War Is Over, If You Want It’: Beyond the Conflict between Faith and Science,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60, no. 3 (September 2008), 147-155.

⁴⁶ As a young man he did read widely enough in early-modern and 19th century philosophy to consider tutoring in it. Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 158-62; *Surprised by Joy*, 212. For Lewis' limited knowledge of contemporary philosophy, see Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 214. The famous Socratic Club debate of February, 1948, with Elizabeth Anscombe, a Wittgenstein student and Catholic, remains a historical controversy about Lewis' precise reaction. But it did expose how little he knew about the issues at stake in metaphysics, in the wake of logical positivism, and Wittgenstein's later work. See Wilson, *C.S. Lewis*, 211; Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, 362-4. It does appear that the debate convinced Lewis to put less store in the argumentative power of apologetics, or at least to tone down his confidence in it.

humanity. In this outlook a natural machine is, however complex, simply another object, whose transcendent spiritual essence has proved itself vestigial.⁴⁷

The enduring power of Lewis and Tolkien for educated Christians is often the shared anxiety over a materialist naturalism—defined typically as the political and ethical ideology of scientific work, or scientism.⁴⁸ No evidence of a benevolent divine Designer; no evidence of an immaterial soul; no good reason to hold onto the conviction of the Creator’s transcendent love for creation. Lewis and Tolkien shared such suspicions with English friends we often associate as the Inklings, some of whom—Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, and Dorothy Sayers—were respected writers and scholars in their own rights.⁴⁹ How are ethics, let alone the creature’s duty to honor the Creator and accept her designed limits on ambition and arrogant overreach, possible in a modern world dominated by the scientific ideology? When we augment our sinful desires and ambitions with astonishing technology, we effectively usurp God’s place as Creator and

⁴⁷ I therefore part company slightly from Timothy Larsen, who argues against the claim “that it was something intrinsic to the nature of modern discoveries that caused the perception that faith and learning were at odds. To continue with our case study, I am suspicious, specifically, of the assumption that the advance of scientific knowledge in the last one hundred fifty to two hundred years has created an unprecedented problem for the reconciliation of faith and learning.” It appears that Lewis and Tolkien, in their maturity, did find intrinsic disagreements between modern science, its technological consequences, and faith. “War is Over if You Want It,” 151-2.

⁴⁸ The biggest press has been for bold arguments like Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008). Far more humble definitions can be found among philosophical atheists like Erik J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); see also Jerry Fodor’s arguments on non-reductive physicalism.

⁴⁹ On Sayers’ own celebration of the medieval worldview and shared distrust of modernity, see her 1947 “The Lost Tools of Learning,” <http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html>; and her letter to L.T. Duff, 2 April, 1943, in *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, v.II: 1937-1943: From Novelist to Playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 402-3. On Barfield and Williams, see Zaleski and Zaleski, *The Fellowship*, throughout.

Lord and abandon our created role for something god-like which, like Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, only results in moral violations, cruel rebellion, and murder.⁵⁰

Tolkien and Lewis have come in for their share of criticism by other writers and critics for their anti-modern suspicions and the perceived insensitive traditionalisms associated with them.⁵¹ Despite Lewis’ objections, I have suggested that he considered the modern scientist, when her research moves from lab to application, to lead to human domination over nature. That power will therefore be turned on humans themselves.⁵² But you do not have to be Christian to wonder over this question. It is a staple of contemporary fiction. I mentioned Aldous Huxley earlier; *Brave New World* (1931) has remarkably similar themes to those Lewis would express in his later fiction and apologetics. Other portraits of abuse of modern education and bureaucratic power, such as George Orwell’s *1984* (1948) and William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), were hardly more optimistic about human nature in the modern world than Lewis. A sign of the widespread power and conviction of this anxiety, evolved into a kind of modern mythos, is how widespread it has become in popular culture. For instance, many horror movies animate

⁵⁰ For a thought-provoking argument about the history of technological transformation as in and of itself a religious aspiration to achieve transcendence, see David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin, 1999)

⁵¹ Edmund Wilson’s review of Tolkien is one of the earliest and best known: “Oo, THOSE AWFUL ORCS!,” *The Nation*, April 14, 1956. Just as famous is novelist Michael Moorcock’s “Epic Pooh”, <http://www.revolutionsf.com/article.php?id=953>. More recently scientist and sci-fi novelist David Brinn took on Tolkien’s antimodernism in “JRR Tolkien: Enemy of Progress,” http://www.salon.com/2002/12/17/tolkien_brin/. Lewis received a fascinating response from Neil Gaiman, “The Problem of Susan,” in *Fragile Things: Short Fiction and Wonders* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). But for Gaiman’s generous expression of debt owed to the works of Lewis, Tolkien and C.K. Chesterton, see “Mythcon 35 Guest of Honor Speech,” <http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2012/01/speech-i-once-gave-on-lewis-tolkien-and.html>. For scholarly accounts of Tolkien’s modern medievalism, see *Tolkien’s Modern Middle Ages*, eds. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵² *The Abolition of Man*, 67-9, 86-7. Imagining a new science, Lewis insists on calling it by its medieval name, “Natural Philosophy”; *ibid*, 89-91.

some version of the *Frankenstein* myth of grossly ambitious science and its terrifying unintended consequences (there is a whole sub-genre you can call “Mad Nazi sci-fi/horror”). In Christopher Nolan’s movie *The Prestige* (2006; screenplay by his brother Jonathan) two magicians combat one another to present the most mystifying, astonishing stage show. In their sorcery arms race one, Robert Angier, seeks a way to accomplish the disappearing man trick. He finally buys a Nikola Tesla device which duplicates him elsewhere in the theater, requiring that in each performance he commit suicide. The final scene, in a basement full of his replicated corpses, illustrates the lengths these men will go. But why? Angier explains to his opponent:

You never understood . . . why we did this? The audience knows the truth—the world is simple . . . and miserable . . . solid all the way through. But if you could fool them, even for a second, then you make them wonder. And then you . . . then you got to see something very special. You really don’t know? It was . . . it was the look on their faces.

This movie, set in 1899, on the eve of the bloody 20th century, suggests the machine-produced piles of corpses we know to associate with two world wars and genocide. Angier states that “we” know there is no God; we are alone. The magic tricks, the modern entertainment spectacle (including movies like Nolan’s), seem to revive a now-lost hope of something transcendent but abandoned in the modern world of science, machines, and “solid” material with neither soul nor spiritual reality. Without God or a transcendent reality to provoke wonder, all that is left to us is technological wizardry.

Nic Pizzolatto, writer and creator of the first season of HBO’s *True Detective* (2014), gave this soliloquy to his main character, Rust Cohle:

Copyright Mike Kugler. Readers of this item may copy it without the copyright owner’s permission as long as the author and publisher (NWCommons) are acknowledged in the copy and the copy is used for educational, not-for-profit purposes.

I'd consider myself a realist, alright? But in philosophical terms I'm what's called a pessimist. . . . I think human consciousness is a tragic misstep in evolution. We became too self-aware. Nature created an aspect of nature separate from itself - we are creatures that should not exist by natural law . . . We are things that labor under the illusion of having a self, that accretion of sensory experience and feelings, programmed with total assurance that we are each somebody, when in fact everybody's nobody . . . I think the honorable thing for our species to do is to deny our programming. Stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction - one last midnight, brothers and sisters opting out of a raw deal.

Pizzolatto, a self-confessed lapsed charismatic Southern Catholic, built this dialogue from the pre-Lovecraftian fiction of Robert W. Chambers and the philosophical speculations of horror writer Thomas Ligotti, among others.⁵³ Is some version of these claims, between their Christian and nihilist extremes, compelling? What purpose, what ethical constraints, can we defend in a meaningless cosmos? Does the naturalist, materialist account of the world really demand an atheistic conclusion, and politically and ethically therefore a kind of world more like Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia than one we hope is true?

⁵³ Pizzolatto's screenplays are filled with references to Chambers, Lovecraft, and other modern horror writers in the nihilistic or pessimistic strain. On Pizzolatto and Chambers' *The King in Yellow* (1895), see Michael W. Hughes, "The One Literary Reference You Must Know to Appreciate *True Detective*," January 14, 2014, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/the-one-literary-reference-you-must-know-to-appreciate-1523076497>; and Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus, 2011). But I feel obligated to mention this subject's controversial side: see Mike Davis, "Did the Writer of *True Detective* Plagiarize Thomas Ligotti and Others?" August 4, 2014, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2014/08/04/did-the-writer-of-true-detective-plagiarize-thomas-ligotti-and-others/>.

The challenge Tolkien and Lewis offer is therefore powerfully convincing to many. It isn't clear that Christian orthodoxy *requires* metaphysical dualism or that Scripture and creeds express and encourage a *weighty defense* of the spiritual integrity of the natural world and earthly life. However enchanting as political philosophy and epic fable, I do not find Tolkien's expressed distrust of technology convincing if it is formed into an argument. What would have been his preferred alternative? Lewis worked in a different way to turn his suspicions into serious apologetics, but I do not find some of his most significant conclusions much more compelling.⁵⁴ Tolkien and Lewis lived through one of the most rapid and challenging transformations in human history. They witnessed two world wars and state-led genocide. Like another contemporary, the French director Alain Resnais, they feared 1945 only marked a lull in such terrifying destruction.⁵⁵ Yet before we adopt Tolkien and Lewis' anxieties for our own, we must make some clear sense of their distinctive circumstances. It is not obvious that their world remains largely ours.

⁵⁴ Yet such anti-Enlightenment or anti-modernist strains, at least deep suspicions of modernity as a philosophical project or secular worldview, animate a great deal of self-consciously Christian scholarship. For more on this, see my “The Faun Beneath the Lamppost: When Christian Scholars Talk About the Enlightenment,” *Christian Scholars Review* 46 (Summer 2017): 363-384.

⁵⁵ See his conclusion to the 1956 documentary on the Shoah, *Nuit et brouillard (Night and Fog)*.