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### C.S. Lewis and Animal Rights

#### Abstract

Contents that Lewis's stance on animal rights owed "a great deal to his interest in evolutionary theory." Notes that Lewis did not reject evolution as a scientific theory when he became a Christian; but he did reject the philosophical position of evolutionism.

#### Additional Keywords

Animals—Ethical aspects; Evolution (scientific theory); Evolutionism/developmentalism (philosophical concepts); Lewis, C.S.—Attitude toward animals; Lewis, C.S.—Attitude toward evolution; Lewis, C.S.—Attitude toward science

# C.S. Lewis and Animal Rights

John Laurent

C.S. Lewis' concern for the abuse of animals in scientific experimentation, as treated in *That Hideous Strength*, will be familiar to many readers of this journal. What some readers will not be so sure about though, I suspect, will be the proposition that this concern of Lewis' can be seen to owe a great deal to his interest in evolutionary theory. It is my intention in this article to substantiate this proposition, utilizing both Lewis' writing and that of authors to whom he acknowledges an intellectual debt. I will also refer to some of the more recent scholarship on Lewis and the views of some other writers concerning vivisection.

In *That Hideous Strength*, the third volume in Lewis' science fiction trilogy, readers will know, the N.I.C.E. — the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments — were engaged in "an immense programme of vivisection, freed at last from Red Tape and from nagging economy" (THS, 102). Mark Studdock became aware of this when he happened to wander into the vicinity of some new buildings at the back of the Belbury mansion, from which emanated "a mixture of animal and chemical smells":

As he stood there a loud melancholy howl arose and then, as if it had set the key, all manner of trumpeting, baying, screams, laughter even, which shuddered and protested for a moment and then died away into mutterings and moans.... There were all sorts of things in there: thousands of pounds worth of living animality, which the Institute could afford to cut up like paper on the mere chance of some interesting discovery (THS, 102, 162).

Interestingly, it is precisely this last point — experimentation on animals simply out of curiosity, or perhaps primarily to satisfy the self-serving interests of experimenters — that animal welfare groups such as the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) currently find most objectionable, as was expressed last year by Dr. Hugh Worth, President of the RSPCA in Victoria, Australia:

[Worth says] the RSPCA draws the line at pure research, the "what if? stuff," where procedures are carried out without definite conclusions: "We immediately clash with pure scientists or those psychologists, who are worse, designing these little experiments that have no obvious end point, no obvious expected retrieval of information.... All these clowns get all sorts of Ph.D. titles. You wonder why they even want to do it. It's all bull-dust stuff."<sup>1</sup>

As an example of the kind of thing Lewis perhaps had in mind in his day, one could cite Lancelot Hogben's *Science for the Citizen*, originally published in the 1940s, which, in a section titled "The Conquest of Behaviour,"

describes experiments which can be carried out on various species to demonstrate "reactivity." Thus "suitable stimulation" of the "anal orifice.... by a succession of electric shocks" will cause changes in a chameleon's coloration; snipping the spinal cord with a pair of dissecting scissors, however, will result in the animal only showing these changes in the part of the body posterior to the cut (extraordinary!). This experiment is described as an illustration of what is involved in "controlling" an animal.<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of *Science for the Citizen* is neatly summarized in the opening paragraph of a chapter toward the end of the book titled "A Planned Ecology of Human Life":

Evolution unfolds a new horizon of human destiny. Man has it in his power to become an active and intelligent directive agent in the evolutionary process, using his knowledge of the diversity of living creatures to decide which are essential to his own welfare as objects of use... and using his knowledge of the properties of living matter to adjust the environment of the species he chooses as members of a rationally planned ecological system.<sup>3</sup>

All this sounds very like Lord Feverstone's explanation of the N.I.C.E.'s objectives to Mark Studdock:

The second problem is our rivals on this planet. I don't mean only insects and bacteria. There's far too much life of every kind about, animal and vegetable. We haven't really cleared the place yet. First we couldn't; and then we had aesthetic and humanitarian scruples; and we still haven't short-circuited the question of the balance of nature. All that is to be gone into (THS, 42).

Or, as neatly encapsulated in Cosser's remark to Studdock as they arrived at the village of Cure Hardy for Cosser's (for whom "statistics about agricultural labourers were the substance; any real ditcher, ploughman, or farmer's boy the shadow") sociological investigations: "Bloody awful noise those birds make" (THS, 87).

Yet, as I've indicated, it can be argued that it was Lewis' interest in evolution that can partly account for his objections to animal experimentation. How can this be?

To begin with, a widely held misconception about Lewis — repeated, unfortunately, in A.N. Wilson's recent biography — needs to be dispelled; and that is the notion that Lewis, once he became a Christian, rejected evolution. In his essay "The Funeral of a Great Myth," written about 1945 (that is, a number of years after his conversion to Christianity), Lewis says quite unambiguously:

I do not mean that the doctrine of Evolution as held by practising biologists is a myth. It may be shown by later biologists to be a less satisfying hypothesis than

we hoped fifty years ago. But that does not amount to being a Myth. It is a genuine scientific hypothesis. But we must sharply distinguish between Evolution as a biological theorem and popular Evolutionism or Developmentalism, which is certainly a Myth (CR, 83).

By "Evolutionism," Lewis goes on to explain, he meant not a scientific theory but a philosophical position, as represented in the writings of Henri Bergson for example, and which held that the cosmos was inevitably moving "onwards and upwards" to some kind of perfect state — an idea that no evolutionary scientist would subscribe to. (There is no certain direction in Darwinian evolution, environmental changes are just as random and unpredictable as the genetic mutations which have been favored by them; degeneracy can be a feature of biological change just as increasing complexity — in the Tielhardian sense — can be.) Lewis goes on to say:

Popular evolutionism or Developmentalism differs in content [Lewis' emphasis] from the Evolution of real biologists. To the biologist Evolution is a hypothesis at present on the market and is therefore to be accepted unless, or until, some new supposal can be shown to cover still more facts with even fewer assumptions (CR, 85).

That is about as admirable a summary of the currently most widely accepted working philosophy of science — that of Sir Karl Popper — as one could wish for: the idea that any scientific theory is always open to question in the light of new evidence, and no genuine scientist interested in such matters (which of course is by no means all) would ask for more. Again, in "Modern Man and his Categories of Thought," written in 1946, Lewis says: "With Darwinianism as the theorem in Biology I do not think a Christian need have any quarrel" (PC, 63).

Someone as intelligent as Lewis, and with the wide interests he had, could not but help take the findings of science seriously. That he was interested in science is evident enough not only in the knowledge of science he displays in his science fiction trilogy (as well as in such collections of essays as *Of This and Other Worlds* and *Present Concerns*), but it is also apparent in the numerous references that Lewis makes to his scientific reading in his now published *Diary* and *Letters*, and also in *Surprised by Joy*. As one of Lewis' biographers, A.N. Wilson, quotes William Epsom, who knew Lewis, Lewis was one who "read everything and remembered everything he read."<sup>4</sup> Among the authors whose works Lewis indicated he had read were Darwin and the other Nineteenth-century scientists T.H. Huxley, William Clifford and Sir John Lubbock (SBJ, 43; *Letters*, 227), Sir James Frazer (*The Golden Bough* — an anthropological work [Diary, 351]), S.H. Rivers (*Instincts and the Unconscious*, which Lewis read with "great interest" [Diary, 67], J.B.S. Haldane (CR, 85), and L.T. Hobhouse, author of *Mind in Evolution*, and who Lewis described in 1926 as "a man after my own heart" [Diary, 354]. Lewis was also, of course, very aware of the second-hand versions of science in writers like Wells, Bergson, and to a lesser extent, Shaw.

But Lewis did not just read books. If there was one thing he enjoyed even more than sitting around in a smoke-filled pub with his brother Warnie, it was rambling in the surrounding countryside. Moreover he was a keen and careful observer of nature. An entry in his *Diary* for 27 June 1923, for instance, reads:

I walked nearly to Dorset Hill by the field path and then turned into the road and left it again at the stile on my right beyond the turn to Forest Hill.... then up by the side of a spinney through a field alive with rabbits, most of them mere babies who let me get quite close to them. Of the full grown ones I was amused to notice how some would always sit out and face me a good minute after the commonality had galloped into the spinney.... (Diary, 248).

There is good evidence, too, that these observations were through Darwinian spectacles. In 1925, during a ramble on Exmoor with Maureen Moore (who was a child at the time, living with her mother and Lewis) Lewis recorded the following:

We.... struck left till we reached a green gully about four feet deep and running quite straight down the hillside. After a few yards descent it developed, as I had expected, into a stream, where we picked our way from stone to stone laboriously. We found plenty of frog spawn and some red mosses....

Maureen, apropos of something, asked me if the evolutionary theory meant that we had come from monkeys. I explained what it really meant. She asked me where Adam and Eve came in. I explained the Biblical and scientific accounts were alternatives. She asked me which I believed. I said the scientific (Diary, 361).

And that this interest in science, nature and evolution was not restricted to his pre-Christian period (i.e. pre-1929) is clear also from, for example, a letter he wrote to Dom Bede Griffiths in 1952:

By the way do read K.Z. Lorenz [sic] *King Solomon's Ring* on animal — especially bird — behaviour. There are instincts I never dreamed of: big with promise of real morality. The wolf is a v. different creature from what we imagine (*Letters*, 422).

In C.S. Lewis: *A Biography*, A.N. Wilson writes at one point that the "crude Darwinian view of human consciousness.... was that it had somehow or other" evolved "from a succession of increasingly intelligent apes, beginning with a creature who little thought beyond where his next banana was coming from, and culminating in the President of the Royal Society," and that "This was only a theory and not, on the face of it, a particularly probable one."<sup>5</sup> Wilson implies that Lewis would have rejected any such idea out of hand (presented in this caricature form he very likely would have), but Wilson nowhere cites Lewis in writing as definitely having done so, and as we will see, Lewis remained at least equivocal on the subject. More than this, it was Lewis' interest in the evolution of consciousness, specifically, that partly explains his strong feelings about experimentation with animals. To see how this

was so, it is worth looking for a moment at this book, *King Solomon's Ring*, that Lewis commended to Bede Griffiths.

What Lewis is referring to in wolves is presumably those qualities of co-operative behavior and mutual assistance in the pack that Lorenz describes in some detail (albeit in populist, anthropomorphic language):

In the life of a wolf, the community of the pack plays a vastly more important role than in that of the jackal. While the latter is essentially a solitary hunter and confines himself to a limited territory, the wolf packs roam far and wide through the forests of the North as a sworn and very exclusive band which sticks together through thick and thin and whose members will defend each other to the very death.<sup>6</sup>

Although Lorenz does not fully spell out a Darwinian explanation for this kind of behavior in the volume in question (he does so elsewhere<sup>7</sup>), Lewis was certainly aware of such an explanation, as will be demonstrated shortly in another extract from *That Hideous Strength*. An explanation is provided by Hobhouse — the author Lewis described as “as man after my own heart” — in *Mind in Evolution*:

The higher animals lead a social life, not only in the sense that they congregate together like swarms of gnats or shoals of fish, but in the sense that they have social or family relations with one another. In these relations, acts of mutual help or forbearance are involved, and it is out of acts of mutual help and forbearance that morality as we know it among men is built up.<sup>8</sup>

What Hobhouse is saying, first of all, is that such behaviors would be *selected for* (in natural selection terms) in so far as they increased the survival prospects of the group (e.g. a wolf pack) as a whole. A social species whose members came to one another's aid (or distracted attention from vulnerable members of the group, such as juveniles, as Lewis observed with the rabbits) would be at an advantage in the struggle for existence. Such behavior, in turn, Hobhouse argued, probably depends upon feelings of “affinity” for other members of a troop, pack or whatever, and it is these feelings (or instincts) which lay at the basis of moral behavior — concern for the welfare of our fellows — in humans. Hobhouse goes on to express this concept in *Mind in Evolution* in these terms:

What is clear is that in following out these instincts the animal is acting as part of a whole, as a member of a species. He is stimulated by his affinity to another individual, and his actions are of service to individuals that come after him.... Human morality rests on the same fundamental conditions at a higher stage of development. Our common human nature is the ultimate basis of moral conceptions.<sup>9</sup>

Hobhouse's idea that such instincts lie at the basis of human morality sound very much like Lewis' remark to Dom Bede Griffiths about certain instincts in social animals like wolves and some birds being “big with a promise of real morality.” But whether Lewis would have

so easily made the quantum leap from these species to humans that Hobhouse makes is quite another matter; one would surely have to say probably not (especially when one considers Lewis' discussion of “instinct” in *The Abolition of Man* [24-6]). There is a vast difference between human reasoning capacity and that of any other species we know of that the traditional separation of the “humanities” from natural science is, at least in terms of our present state of knowledge, fully justified, as Allan Bloom has so forcefully argued.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there have been variously cogent attempts to incorporate human reason into naturalistic explanations, and of these perhaps the most persuasive have been those of Charles Darwin himself. In a chapter on “The Moral Sense” in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin discusses the concept of the evolution of human morality from the social instincts of “lower” (from the Victorian *scala natura* idea) animals; but where his discussion differs from Hobhouse's is in the much greater place that Darwin allows for the role of human reason. Darwin writes as follows:

The social animals which stand at the bottom of the scale are guided almost exclusively, and those which stand higher in the scale are largely guided, by special instincts in the aid which they give to the members of the same community; but they are likewise in part impelled by mutual love and sympathy, assisted apparently by some amount of reason. Although man... has no special instincts to tell him *how* to aid his fellow men, he still has the impulse, and with his improved intellectual faculties would naturally be much guided in this respect by reason and experience [my emphasis].<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, for Darwin, it is our reason that makes it possible for our natural, instinctive feelings of “sympathy” towards members of our own immediate social groups to be extended towards ever-widening groups of our own species, and ultimately toward *other* species:

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races....

Sympathy beyond the confines of man, this is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions [the RSPCA and Anti-Vivisectionist Society had only been recently founded in England at Darwin's time of writing]... This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arrive incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.<sup>12</sup>

Here, then, is a powerful argument upon which Lewis could base his case for objection to animal experimentation: the fact that other animals are in some sense like *us*, and are therefore at least entitled to our sympathies on that account — an argument based on reason as much as

feeling, but in which fellow-feeling, a *product of evolution*, nevertheless plays a major part.

This last element, the evolutionary factor which expresses itself in "sympathy," and to which Hobhouse considers the origins of human morality can be traced, may also be sometimes visible, according to Darwin, in *non-human* animals exhibiting these feelings towards members of other than their own species. In his chapter on "The Moral Sense," Darwin has this story:

Several years ago a keeper at the Zoological Gardens showed me some deep and scarcely healed wounds on the nape of his own neck, inflicted on him, whilst kneeling on the floor, by a fierce baboon. The little American monkey, who was a warm friend of the keeper, lived in the same large compartment, and was dreadfully afraid of the great baboon. Nevertheless, as soon as he saw his friend in peril, he rushed to the rescue, and by screams and bites so distracted the baboon that the man was able to escape, after, as the surgeon thought, running great risk to his life.<sup>13</sup>

Darwin's story was enthusiastically repeated by Hobhouse, and also by Rev. Charles Kingsley, author of *The Water Babies* ("on the strength of that same element of self-sacrifice, I will not grudge the epithet 'heroic', which my reverend friend Mr. Darwin justly applied to [that] poor little monkey"<sup>14</sup>), and it is fair to assume that Lewis would have read it in at least one of these authors (we know he read Kingsley [*Letters*, 504]), if not in Darwin. But there is good reason to think that Lewis also read the story first-hand in Darwin. On the same page in *Descent of Man* on which he has the story, Darwin also says: "I have myself seen a dog, who never passed a cat who lay sick in a basket, and was a great friend of his, without giving her a few licks with his tongue, the surest sign of kind feeling in a dog."<sup>15</sup> This sounds something like the following episode in *That Hideous Strength*, where Lewis describes the relationship of Mr. Bultitude and Pinch:

'What friends those two are!' said Ivy Maggs. She was referring to Pinch the cat and Mr. Bultitude the bear. The latter was sitting up with his back against the warm wall by the kitchen fire....

The cat, after walking to and fro with erect tail and rubbing herself against his belly, had finally curled up and gone to sleep between his legs....

'When we use the word, Friends, of those two creatures', said MacPhee, 'I doubt we are being merely anthropomorphic. It is difficult to avoid the illusion that they have personalities in the human sense. But there's no evidence for it'....

What do you think, Sir?' said Ivy, looking at the Director.

'Me?' said Ransom. 'I think MacPhee is introducing into animal life a distinction that doesn't exist there, and then trying to determine on which side of that distinction the feeling of Pinch and Bultitude fall. You've got to become human before the physical cravings are distinguishable from affections.... What is going on in the cat

and the bear isn't one or other of those two things: it is a single undifferentiated thing in which you can find the germ of what we call friendship and of what we call physical need' (*THS*, 260-1).

This "germ of what we call friendship" is presumably meant in some kind of evolutionary sense, and it is easy to see how Lewis could conceive of this being connected with the question of kindliness of one species toward another: the very antithesis of self-centeredness, and surely having something to do with morality. The role of feeling, of sentiment, in the repugnance that Lewis felt towards animal experimentation was well expressed in his *Diary*, where he recorded how his Aunt Lily, an anti-vivisectionist (who was also interested in Mendelian theory), in November 1922

Told me a very disgusting story of how medical students here in Oxford, who she had seen dragging off a dog into the laboratories [and who] were laughing together as they talked of the old man who had sold it making them promise to give it a good home and be kind to it (*Diary*, 143).

Lewis added, presumably at a later date: "after that I no longer defended Oxford again or ever shall."

But the importance of reasoned argument — of which humans, unlike other species, are also capable — in our relationship with the other creatures was also recognized by Lewis. And it is interesting to see that Lewis based such arguments on a Darwinian understanding of the relative development of "consciousness" in various species also, especially in his essay "Vivisection" and in the chapter "Animal Pain" in *The Problem of Pain* — both written long after Lewis' conversion to Christianity. Kath Filmer has recently argued that the consistency of themes and images in Lewis' work reveals no marked change or repudiation by the later Lewis of his early world view,<sup>16</sup> and she specifically takes this back to his Oxford student years. However this may be in other areas of Lewis' thinking, it would certainly seem to apply in his attitude toward evolution. Whatever his Christian convictions in the matter, Lewis' objections to animal suffering at the hands of humans were at least reinforced by persuasive evolutionary arguments, as is clear in this passage from *The Problem of Pain*:

Clearly in some way the ape and man are much more like each other than either is like a worm. At the lower end of the animal realm we need not assume anything we could not recognize as sentience. Biologists in distinguishing animal from vegetable do not make use of sentience or locomotion or other such characteristics as a layman would naturally fix upon. At some point, however (though where, we cannot say), sentience almost certainly comes in, for the high animals have nervous systems very like our own (*PP*, 119).

And Lewis did not balk at taking such observations to their logical conclusion:

It is certainly difficult to suppose that the apes, the

elephant, and the higher domestic animals have not, in some degree, a self or soul which connects experiences and gives rise to rudimentary individuality (PP, 121).

Darwin's *scala natura* idea strongly informs both these excerpts: animals "higher" in the scale of being are more like us, and therefore presumably more likely to feel pain in something approaching the way we do. The same concept lies behind Lewis' account, in *Perelandra*, of Ransom's discovery of a frog-like creature that had been mutilated by the depraved scientist, Professor Weston:

The thing itself was an intolerable obscenity. It would have been better, or so he thought at the moment, for the whole universe never to have existed than for this one thing to have happened. Then he decided, in spite of his theoretical belief that it was an organism too low for much pain, that it better be killed. He had neither boots nor stone nor stick. The frog proved remarkably hard to kill. When it was far too late to desist he saw clearly that he had been a fool to make the attempt. Whatever its sufferings might be he had to go through with it. The job seemed to take nearly an hour. And when at last the mangled result was quite still and he went down to the water's edge to wash, he was sick and shaken (*Perelandra*, 109).

So, if non-human animals feel pain something like we do because they have nervous systems like ours, and this is because they are *related* to us in the evolutionary sense, then it is only reasonable that we should consider their feelings just as we believe we should consider the feelings of other humans in accordance with the Golden Rule — Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.<sup>17</sup> As the case was admirably put in a recent letter to *New Scientist* in connection with an on-going debate in that journal on animal experimentation:

An ethics based on kinship with other animals assumes nothing more than the unemotional, rational realization that many species suffer pain. If it was wrong to inflict pain on humans whatever their mental abilities, then it must be wrong to inflict pain on non-human animals.<sup>18</sup>

This was precisely the argument used by Lewis in "Vivisection":

The very same people who will most contemptuously brush aside any consideration of animal suffering if it stands in the way of 'research' will also, in another context, most vehemently deny that there is any radical difference between man and the other animals.... If we cut up beasts simply because they cannot prevent us and because we are backing our own side in the struggle for existence, it is only logical to cut up imbeciles, criminals, enemies .... for the same reasons (GTD, 226-7).

If it is wrong to experiment on the latter, so it is with the former.

Lewis was not anti-science. As I have tried to show, it can be argued that it was partly his interest in science which accounts for his objection to animal experimentation. Michael Aeschliman has argued that for Lewis nature was "both real and good,"<sup>19</sup> and indeed, in *That Hideous Strength* Lewis, as narrator, reassures readers that "the physical sciences" were both "good and innocent in themselves" (THS, 203). Science, ideally, is motivated by a love of truth, and about this Lewis could have had no complaint. Trouble enters in however when, as Kathryn Lindskoog and Gracia Fay Ellwood so well explain, science becomes merely a tool in the hands of self-serving practitioners motivated primarily by love of power.<sup>20</sup> To Lewis such a misuse is a distortion of truth, a perversion of (as Aeschliman puts it) "The elementary 'natural' tendency with which every human creature [is] endowed — to live happily and considerably — happily because considerably — in community with its fellows."<sup>21</sup> But the last word on the subject should be by Lewis:

The regenerate science which I have in mind would not do even to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of the parts it would remember the whole. While studying the *It* it would remember what Martin Buber calls the *Thou*-situation. The analogy between the *Tao* of Man and the instincts of an animal species would mean for it new light cast on the unknown thing. Instinct, by the only known reality of conscience (AOM, 47).

✠

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## ✠ The Dorothy L. Sayers ✠

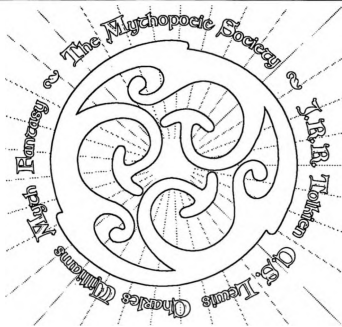
### ✠ 1993 Centenary ✠

Joe Christopher has called me to note that 1993 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dorothy L. Sayers. He suggests that there be a special issue of *Mythlore* later in 1993 to honor her. Due to her friendship with the Inklings and the affinity of her world-view with theirs, I would be most pleased to see such an issue, featuring several articles in her honor, provided they are submitted. — Glen GoodKnight

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