

MERE CHRISTIANITY (BOOK 1)

Chapter 1: “The Law of Human Nature”

- “Law of Human Nature”
 - Expectation of “fair play” or “morality”
 - How does this ‘law’ differ from
 - a speed limit, etc or
 - law of gravity, etc.
- Human quarreling indicates that all people carry this “law”
 - criticizing others for acting wrongly
 - defending their own wrong actions with excuses, but not denying that some rules exist.

- What about moral relativism?
 - ultimately, the differences between cultural moral norms are very small
 - “Think of a country where people are admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him.”
 - “Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you want.”
 - The moral relativist: “He may break his promise to you, but if you try to break on to him he will be complaining ‘It’s not fair’ before you can say jack Robinson.”
- Finally, we see that none of us can live up to the moral standards that we find internally encoded.

Chapter 2: “Some Objections”

- Objection: “The moral law is just herd instinct”
 - Morality will compel people to what is not for their best interest.
 - Morality will compel people to choose a weaker instinct over a stronger one, or suppress an instinctive response all together
 - example: Mother love vs. Patriotism
 - example: suppression of fighting instinct or sexual desire for the good of community.


- **Objection: “Morality is just social convention”**
 - **We find that we can compare cultures as “better” and “worse,” which implies some kind of standard morality, some standard ‘yardstick.’**
 - **We find that we can compare the morality of one people as “better” or “worse” than another people, which also indicates a ‘standard morality.’**
 - **We find that we can compare laws over time (example: slavery, race laws) as “better” or “worse.”**
 - **“It may be a great advance in knowledge not to believe in witches: there is no moral advance in not executing them when you do not think they are there. You would not call a man humane for ceasing to set mousetraps if he did so because he believed there were no mice in the house.”**

Chapter 3: “The Reality of the Law”


- “The law of gravity tells you what stones do if you drop them; but the Law of Human Nature tells you what human beings ought to do and do not do. In other words, when you are dealing with humans, something else comes in above and beyond the actual facts. You have the facts (how men do behave) and you also have something else (how they ought to behave).



- This cannot easily be explained away. It is not true that right and wrong are what is convenient or inconvenient for me
 - “A man occupying the corner seat on the train because he got there first, and a man who slipped into it while my back was turned and removed my bag, are both equally inconvenient. But I blame the second man and do not blame the first.”
 - “I am not angry – except perhaps for a moment before I come to my senses – with a man who trips me up by accident; I am angry with a man who tries to trip me up even if he does not succeed. Yet the first man hurt me and the second has not.”
 - “Sometimes the behavior which I call bad is not inconvenient to me at all, but the very opposite. In war, each side may find a traitor on the other side very useful. But though they use him and pay him they regard him as human vermin.”

- What about decent behavior in ourselves? “It means things like....
 - “being content with thirty [dollars] when you might have got [three hundred],”
 - “doing school work honestly when it would be easy to cheat,”
 - “staying in dangerous places when you would rather go somewhere safer,”
 - “keeping promises you would rather not keep, and”
 - “telling the truth even when it makes you look a fool.”
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- Some people say that there is no mystery in decent conduct because it's good for the human race as a whole, so it's a reasonable byproduct of evolution. This leads into a circular and meaningless argument. "if we ask: 'Why ought I to be unselfish?' and you reply 'Because it is good for society,' we may then ask, 'Why should I care what's good for society except when it happens to pay me personally?' and then you will have to say, 'Because you ought to be unselfish' – which simply brings you back to where we started."

- Football example: (modified for American football)
 - “What’s the point in playing football?”
 - “To score touchdowns (and hit and tackle people)!”
 - Scoring touchdowns, hitting and tackling people is football, it is not a reason for playing football.
 - You’ve said that playing football is playing football, which while it is true is not worth saying.
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TIMED WRITING (10 MINUTES)


How is the Law of Human Nature/Moral Law distinguished from other laws?



CHAPTER 4: “WHAT LIES BEYOND THE LAW”

Summary to this point: “The so-called law may not be anything real – anything above and beyond the actual facts which we observe...

In [the case of Man], besides the actual facts, you have something else – a real law which we did not invent and which we ought to obey.”



CONSIDER WHAT THIS TELLS US ABOUT THE UNIVERSE WE LIVE IN:

Men have always wondered what the universe really is and where it came from.

There have been two predominant views:

Materialist view: “People who take this view think that matter and space [and time] just happen to exist, and always have existed, nobody knows why; and that the matter, behaving in certain fixed ways, has just happened, by sort of fluke, to produce creatures like ourselves who are able to think.”

“Religious View”: “According to [the religious view], what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is to say, it is conscious, and has purpose, and prefers one thing to another.

“And on this view it made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, and partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself – I mean, like itself to the extent of having minds.”

“Wherever there have been thinking men both views turn up.”

Science cannot tell which is the correct view. “But why anything comes to be there at all, and whether there is anything behind the things science observes – something of a different kind – this is not a scientific question. If there is ‘Something Behind’, then either it will have to remain altogether unknown to men or else make itself known in some different way. The statement that there is any such thing, and the statement that there is no such thing, are neither of them statements that science can make.”



At this point, things seem hopeless, except: “There is one thing, and only one, in the whole universe which we know more about than we could learn from external observation. that one thing is Man.”

We are men, so this gives us “inside information.”

Here we find the moral law – which we didn’t make, can’t forget, and know we ought to obey.

An outside observer, unable to communicate with us, would never know that this moral law exists.



IF WE WERE CREATED BY SOME “OUTSIDE POWER,” HOW CAN WE LEARN ABOUT “IT?”


“If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe – no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or a staircase or fireplace in that house.”

It could show itself “as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way.”

We do find this, and the fact of it (the moral law) ought to make us suspicious.

Example: Mail carrier -> packets -> letters -> assumption that other packets to other houses also contain letters => expectation of finding “a sender of letters... a Power behind the facts, a Director, a Guide.”

Conclusion so far: Not Christianity (yet), but “All I have got to is a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong. I think we have to assume it is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know – because after all the only other thing we know is matter and you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions.”



CHAPTER 5: “WE HAVE CAUSE TO BE UNEASY”

Summary to this point: You may be annoyed with Lewis’ conclusion that something or someone from beyond the universe is “getting at us.” “You may have felt you were ready to listen to me as long as you thought I had anything to say; but it turns out to be only religion, well, the world has tried that and you cannot put the clocks back.”

“PUTTING THE CLOCK BACK:”

if the clock is wrong, “putting it back” is the only sensible thing to do.

“progress” means movement toward where you want to be. If you’ve taken a wrong turn, the first one to turn back (and return to the right road) first is the most progressive.

In mathematics, if you’ve started the wrong way, the sooner you admit the mistake and start again, the sooner you’ll get the problem done.

In computers, it is the same. If you’ve used the wrong algorithm or programming language, or database, or file structure or whatever, the sooner to admit the mistake and go back, the sooner you’ll get good results.

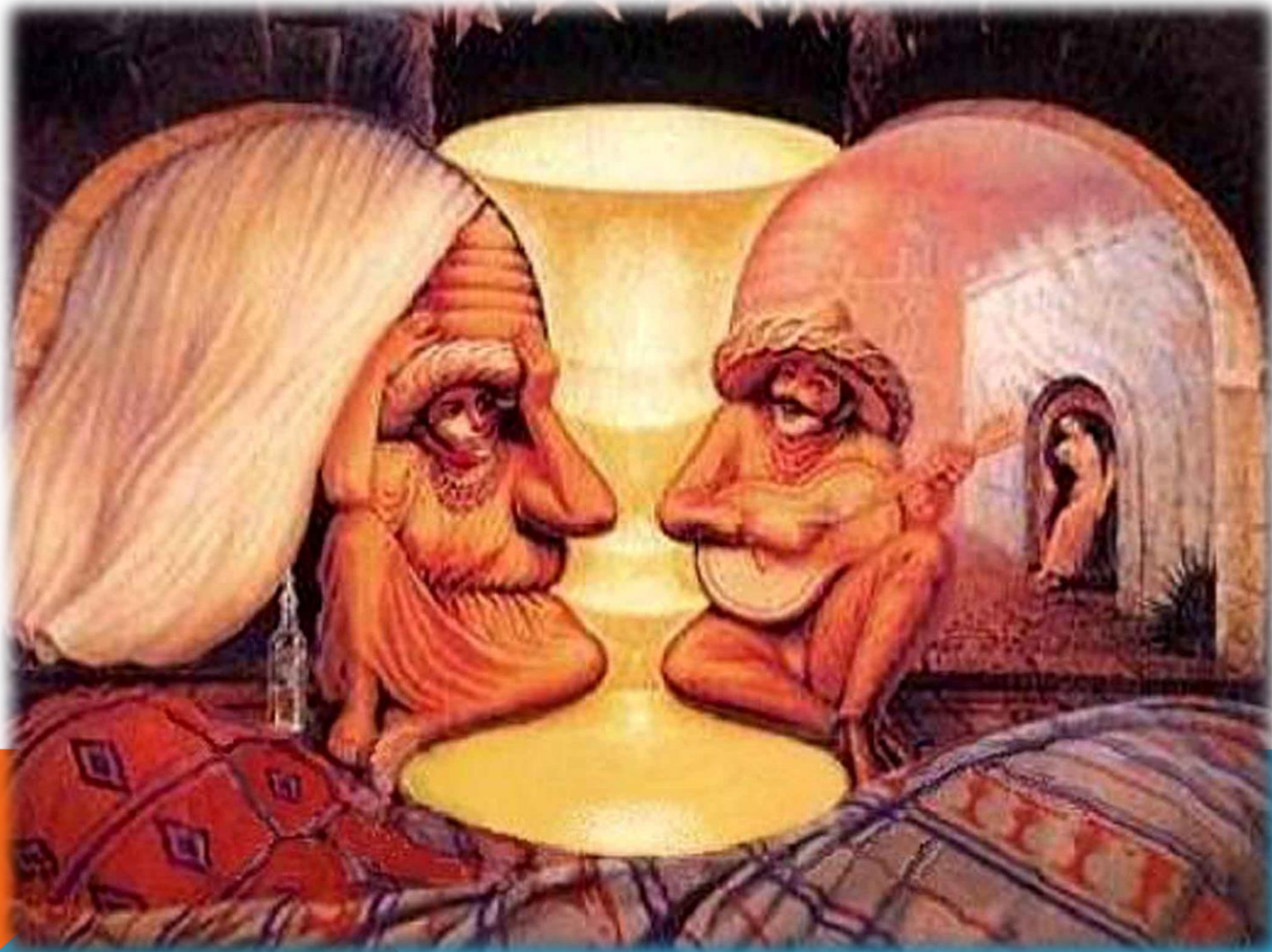
“There is nothing progressive about being pigheaded and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world, it is pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake. We are on the wrong road. And if that is so, we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.”

This is not “religion.” “We have only got as far as Somebody or Something behind the Moral Law.”

We’re not taking anything from any religion or church or holy book, “we are trying to see what we can find out about this Somebody on our own steam.”



A PICTURE IS WORTH A 1000 WORDS





WHAT WE FIND IS QUITE SHOCKING:

We find the universe this Somebody has made:

He is a great artist (the beauty of the universe)

He is merciless and “no friend to man.” (The universe is an extremely dangerous and “terrifying” place.)

more dangerous that even Lewis knew at his time.



The Moral Law, which we find encoded in our minds. Inside information.

“You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about a man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he has built.”

We learn that his being is “intensely interested in right conduct – in fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith, honesty and truthfulness.

So far, we have found things that agree with Christianity, but let’s not get in a hurry here...

“The Moral Law does not give us any grounds for thinking that God is ‘good’ in the sense of being indulgent, or soft, or sympathetic. There is nothing indulgent about the Moral Law. It is hard as nails. It tells you to do the straight thing and it does not seem to care how painful, or dangerous, or difficult it is to do.”



Do you agree with Lewis that we
can all appeal to an objective
sense of what is right and wrong
– a God-given conception of the
Moral Law?



Discussion: Our terrifying situation:

If this power is perfectly good, it can ONLY hate the less than perfect things we do.

If it accepts any of our failures, it is not good.

We can't help but be imperfect.

“If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day, and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again.”



We cannot do without it, and we cannot do with it. God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies.”

“Some people talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again. They are still only playing with religion. Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger – according to the way you react to it. And we have reacted the wrong way.”

“Christianity simply does not make sense until you have faced the sort of facts...”
listed in the first two points.

We’ve taken a round-about path to get to this point in the discussion, but it was not as a trick, it was a means to make us think clearly about those things.

The moral law are the keys of the piano, they are the tools of comparison. But there must be a musical composition to play the keys. If there is right and wrong there must be a third thing that has set the rules.