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Resisting the Totalitarian Imagination: Scientism, Natural Law, and the Eclipse of Moral Order in C. S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* serves as a multifaceted philosophical critique of the encroachment of scientism on human agency and moral reasoning, navigating the intricate terrain where epistemological overreach intersects with metaphysical nihilism. This paper advances a novel interpretation, arguing that Lewis' narrative functions as a robust counter-response to mid-20th-century technocratic rationalism, proposing not merely an allegorical denouncement of totalitarianism but a philosophical redress rooted in natural law theory, moral imagination, and the critique of epistemic objectivism. Through a rigorous analysis of the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.), the paper positions the institution as emblematic of the pernicious effects of a pure instrumentalist worldview. This worldview reduces human dignity to mere procedural and erodes the transcendence inherent in natural law. Drawing extensively from Michael Polanyi's critique of scientism, T.S. Eliot's insights on moral imagination, and the Thomistic tradition of natural law, this study situates *That Hideous Strength* within a broader epistemological and ethical framework that critiques the disembodiment of reason from the moral and metaphysical realities it must serve. Moreover, by weaving together these theoretical strands, the article offers an original contribution to the ongoing discourse on the limits of scientific authority, the fragility of the moral imagination, and the importance of recovering a transcendent moral order as a means of resisting the moral nihilism fostered by unchecked technocracy. Through this lens, Lewis emerges not only as a theologian and novelist but as a prescient philosopher whose critique remains strikingly relevant to contemporary debates surrounding the ethical boundaries of scientific and technological power.

Keywords

C.S. Lewis; *That Hideous Strength*; scientism; natural law; moral imagination; theological ethics; metaphysical nihilism

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1. Introduction

In the mid-twentieth century, as the specter of mechanized war gave way to the subtler terrors of bureaucratic coercion and psychological manipulation, C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) turned to fiction to articulate an epistemological and moral crisis that he perceived as foundational to modernity itself. *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the final volume of the Space Trilogy, is more than a narrative of spiritual warfare; it is a theologically dense, morally incisive rebuke of a rising cultural ideology—scientism—masquerading as neutral rationality. Lewis' depiction of the N.I.C.E., a putatively progressive research institution, exposes the perils of epistemic arrogance and moral abstraction, laying bare the extent to which the instrumentalization of reason can erode the intrinsic dignity of the human person when severed from metaphysical and natural law foundations. What emerges is not merely a dystopia but a philosophical indictment of disordered rationality divorced from the moral imagination.

The key objective of this study is to demonstrate how Lewis constructs a triadic ethical framework—comprising critiques of scientism, affirmations of natural law, and the rehabilitative power of moral imagination—to resist the moral nihilism of modern technocracy.

The ethical terrain Lewis charts in *That Hideous Strength* is irreducible to the categories of mere fantasy or satire. Its ideological critique resonates with the philosophical warnings of Michael Polanyi, whose rejection of objectivist detachment in the sciences complements Lewis' narrative suspicion of epistemological overreach. For Polanyi, the myth of wholly impersonal knowledge generates a dehumanizing ethos wherein moral considerations are deemed extraneous to technical "progress" (Beira, 2022). Similarly, the N.I.C.E. purports to liberate humanity through dispassionate scientific administration, yet it covertly advances a technocratic tyranny stripped of moral restraint. (Swilling, 2019). Lewis's literary imagination dramatizes the very trajectory Polanyi critiques: the usurpation of moral reasoning by a counterfeit rationality that dislocates human ends from their proper telos.

Central to Lewis' response is a retrieval of the moral architecture found in the tradition of natural law. In line with Aquinas's contention that the natural law is "nothing else than the rational creature's participation in the eternal law" (Adam, 2016), Lewis constructs characters who either align with or rebel against an objective moral order that transcends human conventions. Mark Studdock's descent into ideological captivity reflects the dissolution of moral agency when severed from that order, while his eventual awakening signals a reintegration into a cosmos ordered by more than empirical causality. Here, Lewis anticipates Finnis's later articulation that natural law is not merely about rules but about "basic goods" rooted in practical reasonableness (Finnis, 2011). The ethical chasm between the N.I.C.E. and St. Anne's thus becomes a dramatic embodiment of the clash between deformed and authentic reason—one subordinated to power, the other aligned with intrinsic goods.

However, Lewis' framework does not rest solely on philosophical deduction or theological fiat. His deployment of moral imagination—a faculty deeply indebted to the poetic tradition of T.S. Eliot—serves as both an epistemological and ethical remedy to modern disintegration. Eliot, whose *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* mourn the erosion of transcendent moral symbols in a technocratic age, insists that cultural renewal requires imaginative reorientation (Eliot, 1939; Eliot, 1948). Lewis mirrors this insight in his symbolic deployment of Logres, the mythic and sacramental counterpart to Britain, as a moral counter-narrative to the sterile empiricism of Belbury. This imaginative geography, far from escapism, anchors moral perception in a vision of reality illuminated by transcendence. Through this strategy, Lewis resists what Charles Taylor would later term the "immanent frame"—a worldview constrained by secular exclusivity (Taylor, 2023). By invoking pre-modern metaphysical categories, Lewis breaks the suffocating horizon of technocratic immanence and reopens the moral imagination to sacramental realities.

This study offers a significant contribution to both literary criticism and moral philosophy by illuminating how *That Hideous Strength* functions not merely as dystopian fiction, but as a theologically informed ethical response to the crisis of modern rationality. By integrating the frameworks of scientism, natural law, and moral imagination, the paper reveals Lewis' prescient critique of technocratic dehumanization and the erosion of transcendent moral values. It fills a critical gap in scholarship by showing how Lewis constructs a coherent philosophical resistance to modernity's ethical collapse, thereby reaffirming the enduring relevance of theological humanism in contemporary cultural discourse.

Lewis' originality, then, lies in his synthesis: he fuses the philosophical rigor of natural law theory, the cultural critique of Eliot, and the epistemological challenge posed by Polanyi into a coherent literary-theological project. This article contends that such a synthesis is not ancillary but essential to understanding *That Hideous Strength* as a

distinctively prophetic response to a specific modern pathology. While much scholarship has acknowledged the novel's anti-totalitarian ethos, there remains a critical gap in situating Lewis' narrative strategy within the philosophical genealogy of scientism and moral collapse. By drawing these threads together, the present study aims to recover the novel's profound theoretical ambition: to expose how modernity's most insidious threat is not brute force, but the soft coercion of reason divorced from virtue.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Lewis and the Critique of Technocracy: Dystopia as Ethical Warning

Most critics have regarded *That Hideous Strength* as a dystopian satire of totalitarianism and the progressive objectification of humanity by science. Ferretter (2006) contends that Lewis utilizes dystopia as an ironic critique of technocratic rationalism, whereas the N.I.C.E. is the ironic version of eschaton that corrupts transcendence as control (Ferretter, 2006). echoes this reading, identifying in the N.I.C.E. a reification of Baconian instrumental reason that reduces nature to mere manipulable matter (The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis: Jacobs, Alan, 1958- : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive, 2021). Yet such readings, while perceptive, often treat Lewis' dystopia as allegorical projection rather than as a site of theological-moral intervention. By overemphasizing its genre conventions, they risk evacuating the novel of its philosophically intricate engagement with law, conscience, and moral order. (Braidotti, 2019).

More recently, Adam (2016) positions the novel within the tradition of Christian apocalyptic fiction, suggesting that its structural resemblance to Orwell and Huxley obscures Lewis' unique emphasis on spiritual corruption rather than merely socio-political decay (Adam, 2016). This insight rightly signals that Lewis' critique transcends political ideology. However, Wolfe's theological treatment neglects the mediating ethical grammar through which Lewis critiques the desacralized epistemology of modernity. Unlike these readings, this paper argues that the novel's ethical core is best illuminated through a synthesis of natural law theory, moral imagination, and the critique of scientism, thereby offering a multidimensional account of how Lewis dramatizes the erosion of moral rationality under technocratic power.

2.2 Scientism and the Technocratic Myth: Polanyi, Taylor, and Lewis

Michael Polanyi (1958) argues that scientism, or the reduction of all knowledge to scientific methodology, leads to a dehumanizing objectivity that divorces ethics from reason (Michael Polanyi, 1958). This critique is echoed by Charles Taylor (2023), who asserts that the "disenchantment of the world" caused by scientism reduces human experience to quantifiable data. In *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis's portrayal of the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) symbolizes the moral nihilism that arises from the mechanization of human existence, wherein individuals are treated as mere cogs in a larger, rationalized machine. However, critics like Gillespie (2008) argue that scientism can coexist with ethical consideration, an argument Lewis directly challenges through his narrative.

The critique of scientism in Lewis' work has gained increasing traction among intellectual historians, particularly in relation to the Abolition of Man. However, many accounts still treat scientism as a crude anti-scientific posture rather than a philosophical anthropology. Lewis dramatizes this through the N.I.C.E., whose rhetoric of "objectivity" masks a totalitarian will-to-power that has evacuated ethical first principles.

This paper builds upon such insights by arguing that *That Hideous Strength* prefigures Polanyi's critique of "objectivism" and Taylor's account of the buffered self. Mark's epistemic disintegration is not a mere narrative device but an existential consequence of scientific formation. His progressive alienation—from conscience, from affect, from relationality—tracks precisely with Taylor's (2023) portrait of the secularized moral agent cut off from transcendence. Unlike Gillespie or even Taylor, this paper contends that Lewis advances a constructive response to this malaise, not merely a critique. He does so by integrating a theological anthropology grounded in natural law and animated by moral imagination.

2.3 Moral Imagination and Poetic Vision: The Lewis-Eliot Axis

A growing body of scholarship has recently turned to the role of imagination in Lewis' fiction, yet the category of moral imagination remains under-theorized. Downing (2005) examines Lewis' use of myth and symbol as tools of epistemic renewal, but tends to emphasize aesthetic function over ethical formation (Downing, 2005). Similarly, Jacobs (2008) notes that Lewis constructs mythic architecture to resist secular disenchantment, but stops short of linking this to character formation (OpenLibrary.org, 2010). Neither fully engages with the specific mechanism by

which imagination enables the recovery of moral insight in the novel. Jacobs revisits this idea by exploring how moral imagination can counter scientific reductionism in a contemporary context (Ratti and Graves, 2021).

T.S. Eliot's concept of moral imagination, particularly in his works *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), is crucial in understanding how Lewis combats the disempowerment caused by scientism. Eliot (1948) argues that the imagination is a moral faculty, necessary for the renewal of culture and society. Lewis, influenced by this view, uses *That Hideous Strength* to highlight the redemptive power of imagination. The novel's symbolic structures—such as the mythic landscape of Logres—serve to restore moral clarity, challenging the mechanized and reductionist worldview of the N.I.C.E. By reintroducing transcendent symbols and myth, Lewis reintegrates moral perception into the realm of practical reason. It necessitates imaginative reorientation. In *That Hideous Strength*, this reorientation occurs not through argument but through symbol and pattern: the descent of Merlin, the juxtaposition of St. Anne's and Belbury, and the cosmic liturgy that interrupts the N.I.C.E.'s mechanistic rationality.

Unlike Downing or Jacobs, this paper argues that Lewis employs moral imagination not as a literary aesthetic but as a counter-technocratic epistemology. Where Belbury embodies scientific literalism, St. Anne's performs an analogical vision that reactivates moral perception. This imaginative seeing is not escapist but corrective; it reestablishes the referential integrity of moral language, as Eliot had argued was necessary for cultural renewal (*Notes towards the Definition of Culture: T.s.eliot : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive*, 2015). Through this lens, Lewis' fiction becomes an ethical training ground—a poetic resistance to the flattening of moral vision endemic to scientism.

2.4 Lewis and Natural Law: *The Abolition of Man* Reconsidered

The concept of natural law, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas and later John Finnis, offers an ontological and ethical framework that opposes the reduction of human beings to mere objects of scientific control. Aquinas (ST, I-II, Q.91, Art.2) posits that natural law is the rational creature's participation in the eternal law, a framework through which humans can discern intrinsic goods that transcend utilitarian logic (Adam, 2016). In *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis juxtaposes the N.I.C.E.'s mechanistic view of humanity with the moral order rooted in natural law, which is embodied by the community at St. Anne's. Through characters like Jane Studdock, who gradually awakens to the reality of a divinely ordered world, Lewis reaffirms the importance of moral clarity and the inherent dignity of the human person, which scientism seeks to erode.

Several scholars have recognized the implicit continuity between *That Hideous Strength* and Lewis' earlier philosophical treatise. As Thomas (2006) has noted, the character of Mark Studdock personifies the "Conditioner" ideal Lewis warns against: a morally dislocated elite trained to manipulate human nature under the guise of objective planning (Thomas, 2006). However, the moral anthropology that undergirds this critique—namely, the conception of the Tao or natural law—is often insufficiently theorized. While Hooper (1996) acknowledges that Lewis appeals to a transcendent moral order, his account remains descriptively theological rather than jurisprudentially robust (Hooper, 1996). Similarly, Poe (2019) emphasizes Lewis' Christian Platonism but stops short of mapping this onto a Thomistic or Finnisian framework of moral objectivity and teleology (Poe, 2021).

In contrast, this paper argues that Lewis' fictional ethics are not merely illustrative of the Tao but dramatize the erosion and possible recovery of natural law as a lived reality. Where Finnis (Finnis et al., 2013) speaks of practical reasonableness as an intrinsic good, Lewis depicts its distortion in Mark's moral paralysis—his inability to recognize goods except through social validation. The N.I.C.E. thrives precisely because it operationalizes the disjunction between technical proficiency and ethical reasoning, thereby reducing law to procedure and good to utility. The moral disorder of *That Hideous Strength* thus functions as a narrativized exposition of what Aquinas (ST I-II, q. 94) (Adam, 2016) defines as the privation of natural inclination toward the good—a privation facilitated not by overt evil, but by the loss of right reason.

2.5 Literature Gap and Justification for the Present Study

Despite the considerable scholarly attention afforded to Lewis' political, theological, and literary contributions, a systematic account that synthesizes natural law, moral imagination, and the critique of scientism in *That Hideous Strength* remains notably absent. Existing interpretations often isolate one dimension—be it dystopian genre, Platonic metaphysics, or Christian theology—without examining how Lewis orchestrates these elements into a unified ethical vision. Moreover, the operative mechanisms by which moral perception is eroded and restored in the

novel remain undertheorized, particularly regarding the epistemological consequences of scientism and the recuperative power of imagination.

This paper addresses this gap by proposing a theoretical triad—natural law (Aquinas and Finnis), moral imagination (Eliot and Lewis), and scientism (Polanyi and Taylor)—as an interpretive lens through which *That Hideous Strength* is not merely explicated, but ethically actualized.

3. Theoretical Framework

The ethical, metaphysical, and narrative tensions in *That Hideous Strength* demand an interpretive framework that is simultaneously epistemological, ontological, and imaginative. To this end, the present analysis constructs a deliberately integrated triadic framework comprising scientism, natural law, and moral imagination. These are not deployed as isolated lenses but rather as an interdependent system of critique and recovery, designed to expose the novel's sophisticated diagnosis of modernity and its literary-theological response. The framework is rooted in the epistemological critique of scientism as developed by Michael Polanyi and Charles Taylor, the moral ontology of natural law as articulated by Thomas Aquinas and John Finnis, and the aesthetic-moral paradigm of the moral imagination advanced by T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis. Their convergence facilitates an interpretive architecture capable of illuminating the novel's deeper structural contest between technocratic disenchantment and metaphysical realism.

3.1 Scientism: The Epistemic Machinery of Dehumanization

Scientism, for the purpose of this analysis, is understood as the ideological absolutization of empirical science, wherein scientific methodology is mistaken for the totality of valid knowledge. This position entails a systematic rejection of moral, theological, and aesthetic forms of understanding, resulting in a truncation of human cognition and agency. Michael Polanyi, in *Personal Knowledge* (1958), identifies scientism as a form of "moral inversion"—a condition in which moral judgments are subsumed by ostensibly objective systems, thereby displacing personal responsibility and ethical discernment. Charles Taylor further develops this critique by framing scientism as a key vector of the "disenchantment of the world," reducing human subjectivity to quantifiable, manipulable data (Taylor, 2023).

In *That Hideous Strength*, the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) functions as the institutional embodiment of this epistemological pathology. Its scientific rhetoric conceals a radical voluntarism: the manipulation of biological, psychological, and social systems in pursuit of an engineered utopia. The novel meticulously depicts how scientism undermines ethical subjectivity by dislocating moral norms from their metaphysical moorings. The N.I.C.E. proposes to "cleanse" the human race through eugenics and macrobotics—strategies that are presented as neutral advances but are, in fact, expressions of nihilistic domination.

Mark Studdock's character arc exemplifies the psychological consequences of scientism's seductions. His uncritical acceptance of the N.I.C.E.'s authority is not driven by ideological conviction but by an epistemic formation that valorizes procedural control over moral clarity. Trained to distrust intuition and metaphysical reasoning, Mark becomes susceptible to the regime's totalizing rationalism. The denial of intrinsic human value under the guise of objectivity reflects Polanyi's thesis that when scientific rationality is uncoupled from personal commitment, it mutates into a moral void disguised as knowledge. The framework of scientism thus elucidates how Lewis' narrative critiques not only political tyranny but the epistemological conditions that make such tyranny appear reasonable.

3.2 Natural Law: Metaphysical Realism and Moral Ontology

In direct opposition to the anti-teleological logic of scientism, natural law is deployed in this study as a framework of metaphysical realism. Grounded in the Thomistic tradition, natural law refers to the participation of rational beings in the eternal law through their capacity to discern intrinsic goods and ordered ends (Adam, 2016). John Finnis's reformulation sharpens this principle for modern application: natural law comprises a set of basic goods—life, knowledge, friendship, play, aesthetic experience, practical reasonableness, and religion—recognized as self-evident and irreducible (Finnis, 2011). These goods resist instrumentalization and provide the moral grammar through which human flourishing is intelligible.

The N.I.C.E.'s eradication of these goods is not accidental but essential to its mechanistic vision. Life is valued only in terms of productivity or purity; reason is subordinated to efficiency; religion is dismissed as primitive superstition. This deconstruction of intrinsic goods exemplifies what Finnis terms "a rejection of reasonableness itself"—a condition in which the principles of practical reason are systematically reversed under technocratic logic. Jane

Studdock's development arc is essential for analyzing this reversal and its eventual repudiation. Initially portrayed as ambivalent toward traditional moral structures, Jane's gradual recognition of sacramental order—embodied in her vision, the community at St. Anne's, and the theology of marriage—reflects a rediscovery of natural law's binding reality.

The juxtaposition between St. Anne's and the N.I.C.E. functions as a narrative instantiation of competing ontologies. St. Anne's, in its reverence for hierarchical order, the dignity of persons, and the moral weight of symbolic actions, embodies the natural law tradition. Even the physical environment reflects this: where the N.I.C.E. enforces sterility and control, St. Anne's cultivates harmony and creaturely flourishing. Thus, natural law does not merely serve as an ethical backdrop but operates as a polemical structure within the text, guiding character transformation and institutional critique alike.

3.3 Moral Imagination: Symbolic Vision and Ontological Reenchantment

The mediating function of moral imagination is critical in this triadic framework. Neither reducible to fantasy nor confined to aesthetic appreciation, moral imagination names the faculty through which the human mind apprehends moral truths via image, symbol, and narrative analogy. For T. S. Eliot, whose *The Idea of a Christian Society* significantly influenced Lewis moral imagination was indispensable to recovering a culture attuned to the sacred. Lewis' own definition of imagination, particularly in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), insists on its epistemic seriousness: imagination shapes the moral affections by making intelligible what rational argument alone cannot secure.

In *That Hideous Strength*, imagination becomes the condition for recovering moral vision. Jane's dream experiences, initially perceived as irrational or pathological, eventually emerge as prophetic disclosures of a deeper moral structure. Her capacity to "see" metaphysical realities—often encoded in mythic or symbolic form—precedes her rational assent to moral truth. The Company's hermeneutic of dreams, symbols, and gestures is not escapist but sacramental; it affirms that moral knowledge is inseparable from the symbolic economy in which it is perceived.

Crucially, Lewis contrasts this sacramental imagination with the imageless rationalism of the N.I.C.E., whose rejection of symbol mirrors its rejection of soul. The bureaucrats of the N.I.C.E. speak in abstractions, avoid metaphor, and suppress narrative—all in the service of eliminating contingency and mystery. Merlin's reentry into the narrative landscape represents a decisive literary-theological intervention: the return of enchanted vision into the disenchanted world. He is not merely a character but a living symbol—inassimilable to modern categories—whose presence disorients the N.I.C.E.'s rationalist presumptions. The moral imagination, therefore, functions as a rehabilitative epistemology—restoring vision not through didactic instruction, but through re-symbolization of reality.

3.4 Integrated Application: Toward a Narrative-Ethical Hermeneutic

Rather than functioning in isolation, these three frameworks coalesce to form a comprehensive interpretive method. Scientism operates as the systemic disfiguration of epistemology and ethics; natural law articulates the ontological structure of goods suppressed by this disfiguration; and moral imagination restores access to these goods by disclosing them in symbolic and narrative forms. The characters in *That Hideous Strength* embody these dynamics not abstractly but existentially: Mark's epistemic captivity and eventual rupture, Jane's imaginative reawakening, and the novel's institutional counterpoint all demonstrate how the triad animates the drama of recovery.

Moreover, the narrative form itself enacts the framework's logic. Lewis' fusion of dystopian realism with mythopoeic symbolism is not stylistically ornamental but structurally essential. It demands of the reader the very moral imagination the text seeks to awaken, presenting scientism as not merely wrong but imaginatively sterile. The narrative arc is, in effect, an extended allegory of epistemic restoration and moral reorientation—a fictional anatomy of conversion not merely religious but ontological.

4. Methodology

The present study employed a rigorously interpretive, theological-ethical close reading of C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*, grounded in qualitative textual analysis and interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis. The objective is not to impose external frameworks upon the text but to excavate the latent moral, metaphysical, and epistemological architectures embedded in Lewis' narrative. The methodology privileges an integrated hermeneutical approach that unites Thomistic natural law theory (via Aquinas and Finnis), critiques of scientism (via Polanyi and Taylor), and

moral imagination (via Lewis and Eliot), applied analytically at the level of both character formation and narrative conflict. This study draws upon secondary sources published between 1939 and 2020, including works by *Aquinas* (translated editions), *Michael Polanyi* (*Personal Knowledge*, 1958; *The Study of Man*, 1959), Charles Taylor (*A Secular Age*, 2007), *John Finnis* (*Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 1980; 2011), T.S. Eliot (*The Idea of a Christian Society*, 1939; *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, 1948), *Alan Jacobs* (2008), *David Downing* (2005), and *Gillespie* (2008). This multi-pronged analytical strategy ensures that the moral phenomena under investigation are not treated abstractly but are critically located within the narrative's ethical dramaturgy.

4.1 Textual Corpus and Analytical Units

That Hideous Strength serves as the sole primary text for this inquiry, but it is treated as a deeply layered theological novel rather than a mere work of speculative fiction. The selection is deliberate: this third installment of Lewis' *Ransom Trilogy* uniquely integrates dystopian tropes with a Christian metaphysical worldview, constructing a fictional scenario in which moral agency, institutional corruption, and metaphysical resistance are thematized with philosophical intensity. Within the novel, four analytical units are selected as loci for close textual examination:

1. **The character arc of Mark Studdock** examined as a case of moral collapse and regeneration.
2. **The bureaucratic rhetoric of the N.I.C.E.** analyzed for its deployment of scientific logic and ethical obfuscation.
3. **The ethical anthropology represented by St. Anne's** treated as a literary embodiment of natural law principles and sacramental resistance.
4. **Narrative shifts in epistemic framing** used to trace how Lewis enacts a reversal of modern disenchanting reason through narratorial devices.

These units are not arbitrarily chosen but are critically justified based on their representational function: each operates as a concrete instantiation of a theoretical concept. The protagonist's moral trajectory, institutional discourses, counter-communities, and epistemic models are methodologically aligned with the three core analytical frameworks of this study.

4.2 Method of Framework Application

Each theoretical lens functions not merely as philosophical background but as an active interpretive mechanism. The following methodological strategy governs their deployment:

Aquinas and Finnis's Natural Law Theory is applied to evaluate the implicit moral ontology in the novel's ethical tensions. Rather than retrofitting Lewis' narrative into Thomistic categories, the analysis discerns the presence of natural law intuitions—such as the inherent orientation toward the good, the primacy of practical reason, and the teleological structure of human flourishing—as dramatized in character decisions, especially in Mark and Jane Studdock. For instance, Mark's gradual reorientation from self-preserving utility to the recognition of objective goods (e.g., marital fidelity, truth, and loyalty) will be analyzed using Finnis's conception of basic goods and incommensurability (Finnis, 2011).

Michael Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge and Charles Taylor's notion of the moral framework are methodologically operationalized to assess the epistemic structure of scientism in the N.I.C.E. and its dehumanizing rationality. This includes an interpretive deconstruction of N.I.C.E.'s official discourse, revealing its suppression of moral intuition and embodied knowing. Here, Polanyi's distinction between explicit systems of control and tacit forms of moral judgment (Polanyi, 1962) enables a granular reading of how Lewis critiques disembodied knowledge. Taylor's analysis of modern identity as disembedded and buffered (Taylor, 2007) provides a framework for understanding Mark's initial attraction to the N.I.C.E. and eventual disillusionment.

The moral imagination, following Lewis' and T.S. Eliot's conception is treated not as a vague literary embellishment but as an ontologically potent capacity for perceiving and aligning oneself with transcendent order. (Weber, 2014). Methodologically, this involves identifying textual moments where imaginal vision (dreams, symbols, archetypes) catalyzes ethical transformation. For example, Jane Studdock's dreams and her encounter with Ransom will be analyzed through the lens of moral imagination as a mediating faculty between perception and metaphysical reality, echoing Eliot's idea that genuine imagination "reconciles the finite and the infinite" (Eliot, 1939).

4.3 Justification of Methodological Approach

The use of theological-ethical close reading is not merely an interpretive preference but a necessity given the ontological commitments of the text itself. Lewis does not offer a flat moral allegory but stages complex ethical conflicts within a metaphysically saturated universe. A purely thematic or narratological approach would fail to apprehend the metaphysical intelligibility that grounds the characters' moral actions. As Lewis insists in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), moral reasoning cannot be divorced from ontological premises. The close reading method, when conjoined with philosophical theology, enables a precise excavation of how Lewis stages the interplay of conscience, telos, and metaphysical evil.

Furthermore, theological-ethical analysis permits an interpretive fidelity to Lewis' own intertextual method. *That Hideous Strength* is replete with allusions to biblical, classical, and medieval sources. Its narrative architecture borrows from Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and medieval cosmology—texts that were not only theological but moral-philosophical. Accordingly, the chosen method allows for these sources to be treated not as paratextual ornament but as constitutive moral grammars embedded in the narrative.

4.4 Triangulation and Analytical Validity

To ensure analytical validity, the study applies **methodological triangulation** across three dimensions:

1. Theoretical triangulation: By integrating natural law, anti-scientism epistemology, and moral imagination, the study resists the reduction of the novel to a single ethical paradigm.

2. Narrative-contextual triangulation: Ethical claims are never abstracted from narrative context; each reading is grounded in a close examination of syntax, diction, and narrative perspective.

3. Conceptual-operational triangulation: Each philosophical concept is re-articulated in narrative terms (e.g., "buffered self" → Mark's moral alienation; "practical reason" → Jane's shift from autonomy to receptivity), ensuring operational clarity.

This triangulated method secures interpretive robustness and guards against speculative overreach. It enables a critical discernment of how Lewis' narrative does more than reflect moral philosophy—it performs moral ontology through dramatized human experience.

4.5 Ethical and Epistemological Reflexivity

Finally, the methodology entails epistemological reflexivity, recognizing that the act of interpretation itself involves moral judgments. The scholar's engagement with the text is governed by the same principles under analysis: receptivity to moral order, suspicion of disembodied rationalism, and attentiveness to the imaginal-symbolic. In this sense, the methodological stance aligns with Lewis' own vision of moral inquiry—not as an external critique but as participatory perception of the real.

5. Ethical Collapse and Theological Resistance in *That Hideous Strength*

5.1 Mark Studdock – The Intellectual's Fall into Moral Nihilism

In this case, Mark Studdock's experience in *That Hideous Strength* presents one of the most philosophically complex and theologically deep views of the deterioration of modern culture. Mark is not exactly evil-boogie-man like most Oriental and Middle Eastern movies portray their villains. However, he is the product of an evil system that produces intellectually inclined men without morality. It is not simply that Pineland enters an active state of ethical wrongdoing; he slowly and gradually descends into ethical oblivion. In this case, the character's internal collapse is reminiscent of C.S. Lewis' idea of 'men without chests' from *The Abolition of Man*; it also brings the catastrophe that Max Weber identified on the process of bureaucratic rationalization as well as the 'banality of evil' (Weber, 2014) according to Hannah Arendt.

From the novel's beginning, Mark is not out to discover the truth but to gain entry into the highly coveted 'inner ring'. His goal is less intellectual than social, and his personality depends on official recognition. Lewis writes:

"He is saying that he must now be taken for a journey through all your house and shown the secrets." "Tell him," Said Wither, "that it will be a very great pleasure and privilege—" But here the tramp spoke again. "He says," translated the big man, "first that he must see the Head and the beasts and the criminals who are being tormented.

Secondly, that he will go with one of you alone. With you, Sir," and here he turned to Wither" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.395).

This impulse reflects precisely the kind of alienated intellectualism Lewis critiques in *The Abolition of Man*: intellect that is unmoored from conscience and ordered love. Mark's hunger for recognition overrides his capacity to perceive or respond to moral reality, rendering him vulnerable to the ideological capture of the N.I.C.E. His virtue is performative, not interior. He does not inquire whether actions are just, but whether they align him with power.

Hannah Arendt's insights into administrative evil illuminate this moral collapse. In Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt notes that modern atrocities are often committed not by sadists, but by those who suppress critical thought in favor of systemic obedience. Arendt writes, "It was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think" (Arendt, 2012). This becomes chillingly apparent in Mark's early exposure to the N.I.C.E.'s operations, particularly when he observes a prisoner being mistreated:

"There was in Mark's mind no plan for undermining Feverstone nor even a fully formed wish that he should be undermined; but the whole atmosphere of the discussion became somehow more agreeable to him as he began to understand the real situation. He was also pleased that he had (as he would have put it) "got to know" Frost. He knew by experience that there is in almost every organization some quiet, inconspicuous person whom the small fry supposed to be of no importance but who is really one of the mainsprings of the whole machine" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.193).

Lewis unveils the pathology of moral passivity. Mark's silence is not compelled but chosen—driven by a self-protective instinct that has already hollowed out his ethical perception. Like Eichmann, Mark defers to the structure that absolves him from judgment. This is not merely a moment of cowardice but the symptom of an ontological deformation: Mark no longer sees that the suffering of another demands his response.

Weber's theory of rationalization provides a complementary framework. For Weber, modern institutions prize procedural efficiency over ethical substance, leading to what he terms the "disenchantment of the world." This bureaucratic ethos saturates the N.I.C.E., where language is weaponized to obscure responsibility. Lewis renders this with masterful irony in the figure of Wither, whose non-language becomes a tool of obfuscation and moral anesthesia. Mark absorbs this logic quickly. Later, when confronted with a task of spiritual desecration—stamping on a crucifix—he vacillates not out of fear, but out of meaninglessness:

"The physical sciences, good a'nd innocent in themselves, had already, even in Ransom's own time, begun to be warped, had been subtly maneuvered in a certain direction. Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.234).

This line marks a critical juncture in Mark's ethical trajectory. The loss of meaning here is not ideological but affective: he is emotionally incapacitated. In Lewis' framework, such a state does not indicate freedom from superstition, but the triumph of spiritual sterility. The heart has been untrained; the moral will be dislocated.

Mark's psychological fragmentation reaches its apex during a grotesque banquet at Belbury. Reality itself seems to rupture:

"The Deputy Director was not listening. He was so far from listening that Mark felt an insane doubt whether he was there at all, whether the soul of the Deputy Director was not floating far away, spreading and dissipating itself like a gas through formless and lightless worlds, waste lands and lumber rooms of the universe. What looked out of those pale watery eyes was, in a sense, infinity—the shapeless and the interminable. The room was still and cold: there was no clock and the fire had gone out. It was impossible to speak to a face like that. Yet it seemed impossible also to get out of the room, for the man had seen him. Mark was afraid; it was so unlike any experience he had ever had before" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.216).

This is not surrealism for effect; it is moral epistemology rendered aesthetically grotesque. Mark is submerged in what Arendt calls "thoughtlessness"—a world where meaning, and thus accountability, has been surgically excised. Words continue to flow, but they no longer signify. In this moment, Lewis shows that discourse without conscience becomes ontologically toxic.

And yet, Mark's trajectory is not terminal. His crisis, while devastating, opens a narrow passage toward recovery. When he later reflects on his complicity, he feels a visceral nausea not born of shame, but of clarity: he has become a man who no longer recognizes himself. In this self-alienation, Lewis plants the seed of redemption. The narrative

never grants Mark heroic absolution, but it allows for the reemergence of moral sensation. He recoils from falsehood not because he is taught to, but because his soul has begun—dimly, painfully—to remember truth.

The irascibility of Lewis' diagnosis that Mark is a 'man without a chest' is not an insult but a metaphysical one. The location of the heart in Lewis' moral anthropology is the bifunctional organ of trained sentiment, reason/appetite and intellect/ virtue. According to Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, the new racists may be bright-headed and efficient in general, but they will not possess any ability to judge properly. Such a trend of apostasy to spiritual sloth is the natural consequence of the intellectual upbringing that fails to nurture conscience.

5.2 Jane Studdock – Prophetic Vision and the Feminine Conscience

While Mark Studdock's arc in *That Hideous Strength* traces the intellectual's descent into moral paralysis, Jane Studdock's trajectory illuminates the countervailing force of theological intuition, embodied discernment, and spiritual receptivity. Through Jane, C.S. Lewis constructs a literary theology of conscience that resists technocratic rationalism not through dialectic, but through vision, symbolic insight, and feminine integrity. Jane's transformation draws richly from Marian typology and reflects the mystical theology of figures such as Julian of Norwich, positioning her as both prophetic seer and sacramental counterweight to institutional corruption. She is, in effect, the redemptive conscience of the novel's moral cosmology.

Lewis' first introduction to Jane is marked by spiritual ambiguity and emotional disenchantment. Her initial unease is not ignorance but a kind of restless spiritual latency. Her dreams function not as psychological tropes but as theological disclosures, encoded with metaphysical significance that she does not yet comprehend. One of the most powerful early episodes unfolds when she dreams of a grotesque, sterile interrogation:

"Instead of answering, Filostrato turned sharply from him and with a great scraping movement flung back the window curtains. Then he switched off the light. The fog had all gone; the wind had risen. Small clouds were scudding across the stars and the full Moon—Mark had never seen her so bright—stared down upon them. As the clouds passed her, she looked like a ball that was rolling through them. Her bloodless light filled the room" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.200)

This is not simply a nightmare; it is a prophetic unveiling of the moral structure at Belbury. Her body's paralysis parallels the ethical paralysis Lewis sees in modernity. Yet her inner response— "This is wrong"—signals the incipient activity of theological conscience, unmediated by logic but rooted in what Lewis calls "the chest," that faculty of trained sentiment central to *The Abolition of Man*. In Jane, the chest begins to stir before the intellect catches up.

Lewis consistently contrasts Jane's interiority with Mark's detachment. Whereas Mark intellectualizes to avoid commitment, Jane's resistance is embodied, affective, and relational. She does not reason her way to moral clarity; she senses it. Later, she encounters Grace Ironwood, who introduces her to the nature of her visions:

"We've been wondering all this time exactly where the trouble is going to begin, and now your dream gives us a clue. You've seen something within a few miles of Edgestow. In fact, we are apparently in the thick of it already—whatever it is. And we can't move an inch without your help. You are our secret service, our eyes. It's all been arranged long before we were born. Don't spoil everything. Do join us" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.127).

This moment marks Jane's initiation into sacramental epistemology—a mode of knowing rooted not in empiricism but in participation. Her visions are not figments; they are real because they issue from a deeper order than rationalism can access. Here, Lewis draws from Christian mystical traditions, particularly that of Julian of Norwich, who asserts, "Truth sees God, and wisdom contemplates God, and from these comes a third: a holy, wondrous delight in God." Like Julian, Jane begins to see not through reason alone, but through an infused awareness born of purity, humility, and wonder.

One of the most striking examples of Jane's prophetic resistance occurs when she dreams of Merlin awakening in his subterranean crypt:

"He's the really interesting figure. Did the whole — thing fail because he died so soon? Has it ever struck you what — an odd creation Merlin is? He's not evil; yet he's a magician. He is obviously a druid; yet he knows all about the Grail. He's © 'the devil's son'; but then Layamon goes out of his way to tell you that the kind of being who fathered Merlin needn't have been bad after all. You remember, "There dwell in the sky many kinds of wights. Some of them are good, and some work evil" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.24)

This image collapses myth and theology into a single vision. Merlin is not just a mythic wizard but a symbolic vessel of primordial goodness—Logres incarnate. Jane's perception of him as "older than evil" is a theological judgment: goodness is not reactionary but ontologically prior. Her vision is thus not subjective intuition but participation in a divine symbolic order. This confirms what Lewis constructs throughout the novel: prophecy is not fantasy but the disclosure of spiritual reality under the guise of narrative.

The Marian resonance in Jane's arc becomes increasingly clear. Lewis is not offering Mariolatry but Marian typology: Jane's moral awakening mirrors the Virgin's fiat—not in words, but in posture. When Jane finally consents to enter the inner sanctum at St. Anne's, it is a form of annunciation. As the narrator states:

"Dimble even maintained that a good critic, by his sensibility alone, could detect the difference between the traces which the two things had left on literature. "What common measure is there," he would ask, "between ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago with their midnight studies, their forbidden books, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results simply by being Merlin?" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.231).

The language here is liturgical. Jane has moved from observer to participant. Her resistance to Belbury's logic is not accomplished through refutation but through relational submission to the good. Like Mary, who bore the Logos into the world through silence and assent, Jane becomes the spiritual midwife of Logres's restoration. Her body, her dreams, and her humility all function sacramentally—they mediate a cosmic order in microcosm.

Whereas Mark is paralyzed by abstraction, Jane is animated by intimacy. Her theological function in the novel is to restore the imagination as a site of divine encounter. She is not reduced to a moral lesson or emotional foil; she is the novel's liturgical center, around whom the spiritual architecture is silently reordered. In her, Lewis reclaims not only the feminine as a site of theological agency, but also the visionary as a bearer of moral truth. Jane is not merely a counterpoint to Mark; she is the corrective Lewis offers to the disembodied intellect of modernity.

5.3 Ransom and Merlin – Sacred Sovereignty in an Age of Disenchantment

In *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis introduces a striking counterpoint to the disenchanted rationalism of the N.I.C.E. through the reanimation of two figures of sacred authority: Ransom, the wounded Pendragon, and Merlin, the resurrected prophet-magus. Together, they constitute Lewis' literary-theological resistance to the desacralization of the modern political and metaphysical order. While the N.I.C.E. embodies Max Weber's notion of bureaucratic disenchantment—stripped of myth, spirit, and moral teleology—Ransom and Merlin represent the reentry of mythic sovereignty into a morally hollow world. Their presence is not nostalgic archaism but a mythopoetic retrieval of sacred kingship, functioning as a theological correction to secular technocracy.

Ransom, already established in Perelandra as the chosen agent of divine cosmic order, here assumes the title of Pendragon, a term resonant with both Arthurian legacy and spiritual command. Lewis constructs Ransom's leadership not as political dominion but as sacrificial kingship. His authority is marked by silence, humility, and physical suffering. When Jane first meets Ransom, she is struck not by dominance but by stillness:

"A dozen affirmatives died on Jane's lips as she looked up in answer to his question. Then suddenly, in a kind of deep calm, like the stillness at the centre of a whirlpool, she saw the truth, and ceased at last to think how her words might make him think of her, and answered, "No"" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.164)

This "older than mortality" perception signals a timeless archetype—Ransom's office draws from a spiritual lineage that transcends institutional legitimacy. He does not command by argument but by ontological gravity. In this way, Lewis aligns Ransom with the biblical archetype of the suffering servant and Tolkien's Aragorn, whose kingship is rooted in sacrifice and healing, not assertion.

Ransom's role also mirrors the Christic structure of what Hans Urs von Balthasar terms "kenotic authority"—power that is made perfect in its self-emptying. His physical wound, a mark from his battle in Perelandra, bleeds continually and silently, symbolizing the cost of bearing cosmic order in a disordered world. When Jane notices the wound:

"He is a great traveller but now an invalid. He got a wound in his foot, on his last journey, which won't heal." (p112)

This subtle allusion collapses Christology into narrative, not as allegory but as sacramental ontology. Ransom's wounded body is not illustrative; it is the locus of divine mediation in the novel. He is both a figure and a function: the visible manifestation of Logres—a transcendent polity hidden within Britain's secular frame.

Merlin, by contrast, functions as a mythic retrieval of moral equilibrium. Unlike Ransom, his presence is disruptive, archaic, and theologically volatile. His awakening signifies the return of an enchanted cosmology, where nature, spirit, and language cohere in symbolic intensity. Jane's dream of Merlin's rising offers a vivid rendering of this return:

"It must be a very large man, she thought, still groping upwards towards his head. On his chest the texture suddenly changed— as if the skin of some hairy animal had been laid over the coarse robe. So, she thought at first; then she realised that the hair really belonged to a beard, she hesitated about feeling the face; she had a fear lest the man should stir or wake or speak if she did so. She therefore became still for a moment. Jane had an impression that she ought to courtesy to this person (who never actually arrived though the impression of him lay bright and heavy on her mind), and felt great consternation on realising that some dim memories of dancing lessons at school were not sufficient to show her how to do so" (*That Hideous Strength*, p.152)

Here, Lewis draws from the deep well of Christianized mythopoeia. Merlin is not a sorcerer in the modern sense but a primordial theologos—a vessel of divine command bound to creation's original harmony. His magic is not manipulation of forces but obedience to a metaphysical order long forgotten. As Charles Williams, Lewis' Inking companion, observed, "Myth restores the theological imagination by clothing truth in the flesh of symbol."

This notion of re-enchanted sovereignty is further developed through the language of Logres, the spiritual Britain hidden within the secular. Ransom explains this to Jane:

"By intense study in collaboration with Dr. Dimble, and despite the continued scepticism of MacPhee, the Director had at last come to a certain conclusion. Dimble and he and the Dennistons shared between them a knowledge of Arthurian Britain which orthodox scholarship will probably not reach for some centuries. They knew that Edgestow lay in what had been the very heart of ancient Logres, that the village of Cure Hardy preserved the name of Ozana le Coeur Hardi, and that a historical Merlin had once worked in what was now Bragdon Wood' (*That Hideous Strength*, p.231)

Logres is not a utopia but a metaphysical substrate—a Christian vision of the nation as sacred trust, not cultural artifact. In invoking the Grail legends, Lewis reclaims the sacramental imagination that modern rationalism has suppressed. Ransom and Merlin are not escapist anachronisms; they are theological necessities—embodied resistance to the ideological machinery of the N.I.C.E.

In this context, Lewis' literary theology aligns closely with Tolkien's vision of sacrificial kingship in Aragorn. Both figures emerge not from political revolution but from invisible legitimacy—authority grounded in spiritual alignment with a divine narrative. Aragorn is "the hands of a healer," while Ransom's wounded foot is the mark of vicarious suffering. In both, kingship is dramatized not as control but as burden—carried for the sake of the world's moral restoration.

Merlin's disruptive force also bears comparison to Tolkien's Gandalf, whose authority arises from his role as the unmaking of domination. But Lewis' Merlin is more dangerous, more archaic. His presence reminds readers that pre-modernity was not merely magical—it was theologically serious. At one point, Ransom remarks:

"Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He's at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused. For him every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases. Finally, come the Belbury people, who take over that view from the modern man unaltered and simply want to increase their power by tacking onto it the aid of spirits—extra-natural, anti-natural spirits" (*That Hideous Strength*, p. 336).

This statement encapsulates Lewis' vision: that myth must be baptized, not abandoned. The restoration of sacred sovereignty does not negate modernity—it corrects its moral deformation through sacramental convergence.

5.4 The N.I.C.E. – Grotesque Allegory and the Anatomy of Evil

If C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* can be read as a theological counter-myth to modernity, then the N.I.C.E. stands as his grotesque parody of Enlightenment rationalism dismembered from virtue. The N.I.C.E. is not merely an antagonist organization; it is the embodiment of "soulless reason", the practical consequence of a culture that has severed truth from transcendence, ethics from ontology. In aesthetic terms, Lewis crafts the N.I.C.E. through the grotesque—a literary mode that exaggerates and distorts in order to reveal moral horror. Within its architecture, bureaucratic

rituals, and characters, the grotesque signals the collapse of the human into the subhuman, not via primal savagery, but via cold, technocratic sterility.

At the center of this moral disfigurement stands Miss “Fairy” Hardcastle, the head of the N.I.C.E.’s Women’s Institute Police. Her characterization is a violent inversion of femininity, truth, and justice. Lewis’ ironic naming is immediate moral satire: “Fairy” evokes gentleness, mythic enchantment, and innocence, yet Hardcastle is brutal, cynical, and sadistic. One of the earliest depictions of her reads:

“There are dozens of what look like policemen all over the place, and I didn’t like the look of them either. Swinging some kind of truncheon things, like what you’d see in an American film (*That Hideous Strength*, p.78).

The visual grotesqueness is precise: the eroticism of power, the violation of normative bodily aesthetics, and the perpetual act of consumption become signs of disordered appetites. She is not merely evil; she is morally malformed, representing what Lewis elsewhere calls “the abolition of the soul by degrees.”

The grotesque reaches further abstraction in the character of Wither, the Deputy Director. Whereas Hardcastle embodies cruelty, Wither enacts evasion—his very language is a labyrinth of moral irresponsibility. One of the novel’s most linguistically eerie passages captures Wither’s speech as a kind of anti-language:

“My conception of the personal, or even official, relations between us had always been elastic and ready for all necessary adaptations. It would be a very real grief to me if I thought you were allowing any misplaced sense of your own dignity” (*That Hideous Strength*, p.392).

Wither’s elliptical syntax, his preference for abstraction over action, creates semantic exhaustion. His speech itself is ethically anesthetizing—designed to subvert moral clarity under a veneer of professional decorum. As Lewis scholar Walter Hooper observed, Wither “speaks as if every sentence were a failed footnote in an unreadable bureaucratic treatise.” He is a symbol of procedural evil, enacting Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil” before it was even articulated. (Hooper & Internet Archive, 1996).

Lewis further escalates his grotesque aesthetic through bodily distortion. The climax of the N.I.C.E.’s collapse includes scenes of surreal transformation. The grotesque here is not mere horror, but theological allegory: the disfigured body mirrors the disfigured soul. One scene describes the experimental “Head”—a reanimated brain wired to artificial life:

“With some hesitation, Mark went into the room and walked around to the other side of the desk; but when he turned to look at Wither he caught his breath, for he thought he was looking into the face of a corpse. A moment later he recognised his mistake. In the stillness of the room, he could hear the man breathing. He was not even asleep, for his eyes were open. He was not unconscious, for his eyes rested momentarily on Mark and then looked away” (*That Hideous Strength*, p.216).

This is abomination as ontology. The Head, revered by the N.I.C.E. as a breakthrough in science, is a parody of resurrection. It enacts what Lewis condemned in *The Abolition of Man*—the attempt to master human nature without moral limits:

“When all that says “it is good” has been debunked, what says “I want” remains. It cannot be exploded or “seen through” because it never had any pretensions. The Conditioners, therefore, must come to be motivated simply by their own pleasure” (*The Abolition of Man*, p.74)

The Head, the “objectivity” of the N.I.C.E., and its command structure all collapse under the weight of their own value vacuum. Detached from the Tao—the moral law as Lewis defines it—science becomes necromancy. The N.I.C.E.’s grotesque vision of post-human evolution is not a future; it is a spiritual regression into a sterile void.

Lewis complements this moral critique with symbolic environments. Edgestow, the city where the N.I.C.E. establishes itself, becomes increasingly polluted, confused, and fragmented—a mirror of inner ethical chaos:

“The river itself which had once been brownish green and amber and smooth skinned silver, tugging at the reeds and playing with the red roots, now flowed opaque, thick with mud, sailed on by endless fleets of empty tins, sheets of paper, cigarette ends and fragments of wood, sometimes varied by rainbow patches of oil” (p.134).

6. Christian Ethical Resistance in Post-Secular Culture

In *That Hideous Strength*, C.S. Lewis crafts not only a dystopian warning but a literary-theological map for the reclamation of moral agency in an age increasingly shaped by mechanized systems, ethical relativism, and post-

metaphysical governance. At its core, the novel dramatizes a cosmic anthropology—one in which spiritual dignity and ethical discernment are not abstract ideals but embodied responses to a world imperiled by technocratic deformation. Through narrative, myth, and theological symbolism, Lewis articulates a prophetic resistance that remains urgently relevant in today's post-secular terrain.

Across the arcs of Mark and Jane Studdock, Ransom, and Merlin, Lewis constructs a moral ecology wherein conscience, sacrament, and narrative vision resist the dissolution of the human. He does not propose a simplistic binary of religion versus science; rather, he exposes the peril of disembodied reason—knowledge detached from the moral law, what Lewis called the Tao. This diagnosis, rooted in *The Abolition of Man*, is literary in form yet theological in substance. Fiction becomes the crucible through which spiritual truths are enacted, not merely asserted. In this sense, Lewis' novel performs what Stanley Hauerwas calls "theologiadramatica": theology lived through story (Hauerwas and Stanley, 2004).

Such an approach is indispensable for navigating the crises of the 21st century. The logic of the N.I.C.E.—its obsession with disembodiment, efficiency, and the conquest of nature—finds chilling echoes in contemporary bio-politics, where the body is treated as raw material for optimization, editing, or erasure. The emerging field of transhumanism, with its promises of cognitive enhancement and post-biological evolution, reproduces the very error Lewis warned against: a denial of limits, of givenness, of creatureliness. "It is not that they are bad scientists," Lewis' Ransom suggests, "but that they have forgotten to be men."

Similarly, the AI revolution confronts us with systems that simulate ethical decision-making while lacking moral subjectivity. Algorithms optimize for utility, but they do not suffer, love, or repent. Lewis' representation of the N.I.C.E.'s 'Head' – an animated brain without a soul – and abortion by putting consciousness and intellect in a place traditionally occupied by the head, where cognition is separated from morality, foreshadows the path of dehumanized artificial intelligence. Thus, literature is presented as a counter-technological practice not because it disappears the machinery but because it articulates stories where people are more important than structures (Lewis, 2017).

Thus, Lewis is in an important dialog with George Orwell, who, despite sharing the matter, presents a metaphysically somewhat different vision in 1984. Orwell's dystopia, while ethically acute, offers no eschatology. Winston's rebellion is hopeless because there is no higher order to which man can appeal to prosecute injustice. However, Lewis' Logres functions in a divine governorship manner. In the movie Kazaam, evil may have momentarily triumphed over Kazaam, but it cannot sever the existence of being. This is not optimism; it is eschatological optimism, which is the truth of the divine genius of America—in the words of Robert Green Ingersoll – "In this republic, it is not what my neighbor says or does that matters in the least, nor is it what I, myself think that is of any consequence—it is what God thinks of it."

Another theological annotation can be done with Letters from Prison of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thus, in fighting against National Socialism, Bonhoeffer defined the problem insufficiently as a political one but as an anthropological one – as the loss of what man became forgetful of in the face of God. According to Bonhoeffer, as suggested in Lewis' case, ethical convictions need ontological grounding (Berlinger, 2003). Conscience is not a cultural imperative but God's law in the human heart. The portrayal of Mark's moral transformation and Jane's visionary conversion presents this lesson to Lewis' audience: Sainthood involves the recovery of conscience and inheriting the realm of God. Jacques Ellul, writing contemporaneously with Lewis, warned in *The Technological Society* that the greatest danger was not technology per se but technological autonomy—the idea that what can be done must be done. Ellul's critique complements Lewis' vision. Both thinkers saw that the loss of theological imagination leads not to neutrality but to a new dogmatism: the worship of efficiency, control, and objectivity. Against this backdrop, Lewis' novel operates as a symbolic resistance manual, reminding readers that moral discernment is a kind of spiritual seeing—not a calculation, but a recognition (Falk et al., 1965).

Thus, *That Hideous Strength* must be read not simply as fiction, but as a theological ethics of narration. It demonstrates that stories form souls. Narrative imagination—particularly mythopoeic narrative—becomes a way of resisting disintegration. Jane's dreams, Ransom's silence, and Merlin's return are not literary ornaments but liturgical acts: they orient the reader toward truth not by argument but by beauty, terror, and awe. Lewis' contribution lies not in offering new doctrines but in re-mythologizing moral experience, giving readers a grammar for naming evil and a vision for choosing the good.

Even in a post-secular world where people's belief in metaphysics is on the decline, the strategy outlined above is crucial. He does not flee to reason but marches into cultural fantastic with literary theology, a framework that believes in virtue, requires conscience, and acknowledges the significance of the divine. His fiction thus becomes a sacramental text in the deepest and best sense of the term—that is, he is using fiction to convey moral truth.

7. Conclusion

Thus, *That Hideous Strength* emerges as C.S. Lewis's philosophical critique of modern scientism, showcasing a dystopian allegory and a profound challenge to the erosion of moral order and the transcendental anchoring of human agency. By situating the novel within the theoretical frameworks of natural law, moral imagination, and epistemic critique, this paper reveals how Lewis anticipates contemporary ethical dilemmas stemming from unchecked technocracy and the depersonalization inherent in scientism. The narrative's central conflict—juxtaposing the N.I.C.E.'s mechanistic worldview and the redemptive potential of natural law and moral imagination—is a powerful commentary on the limitations of reason divorced from ethical and metaphysical grounding. Through its exploration of human dignity, moral autonomy, and the recovery of transcendent values, Lewis' work remains a timely and prescient critique of the dangers posed by the unchecked application of scientific rationality. Thus, *That Hideous Strength* is not merely a polemic against totalitarianism but a call for a moral and intellectual reorientation that integrates reason with virtue, inviting contemporary scholars to reconsider the ethical boundaries of technological power in an increasingly rationalized world.

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