



James C. Peterson

The Power to Give Power

At the ASA annual meeting this last July, two of the first three plenary speakers featured the same quote from C.S. Lewis in his essay *The Abolition of Man*.

What we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.¹

Here are further quotes in the case Lewis builds.

In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for while we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them ...

There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won by man is a power over man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car ...

At the moment, then, of Man's victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men ...²

Lewis is eloquently stating here an important caution. At the risk of tampering with Saint Clive, to whom I am forever grateful, I want to note that this caution is not necessarily a prohibition. Lewis is concerned that human beings will use shaping powers such as "eugenics and scientific education" to manipulate and predestine, to decide and settle who future people will be and how they will desire to live. While this warning is an important one, to a significant degree we cannot avoid deeply shaping our children. My wife and I chose for our children what language is their native tongue and what place their native land. Such choices are formative, but we can wield such power in a way that gives future generations more choice, not less. There are advances that can make people in the future more able to pursue whatever they choose. Welcoming the next generation does not have to be a zero-sum game in which our use of power requires their proportional loss.

Ms. Taubert used her considerable power over her first-grade students, to teach me to read. That opened up new worlds for me, giving me freedom to explore wherever I wished. She used her shaping power to give me power. Dr. Olson gave me, I am told, a DTP vaccination that altered my body to increase my health, and hence my choices. These are both expressions of power of one person over another, to serve, not to control. The purpose and accomplishment of their decisions was to increase mine. It was not predestination, but rather empowerment.

We make decisions that deeply affect others. The question is whether we will be conscious and conscientious in doing so. We can disperse such formative decisions for children to their parents lest any one group use such power against another, and we can agree, even require, that choices on behalf of others should increase their choices, not decrease them. That would not mean a few individual men dictating life to anyone, let alone all who follow. Power to shape others can be used to give power.

In the first article of this reader-empowering issue, Walter Bradley increases our knowledge and wonder at how astoundingly fine tuned our physical world is. That is evidence that we are not the only conscious power in this world. The second article by Chris Barrigar describes God, the involved Creator, sovereignly sharing power by creating a world of chance and choice. Alan Dickin then makes a case for when and where our choices early led to disaster, yet also led to God's redemptive intervention. As Hal Poe then describes, God is pervasively active in the world he has entrusted to us. Insightful book reviews and spirited letters round out the issue. ✦

Notes

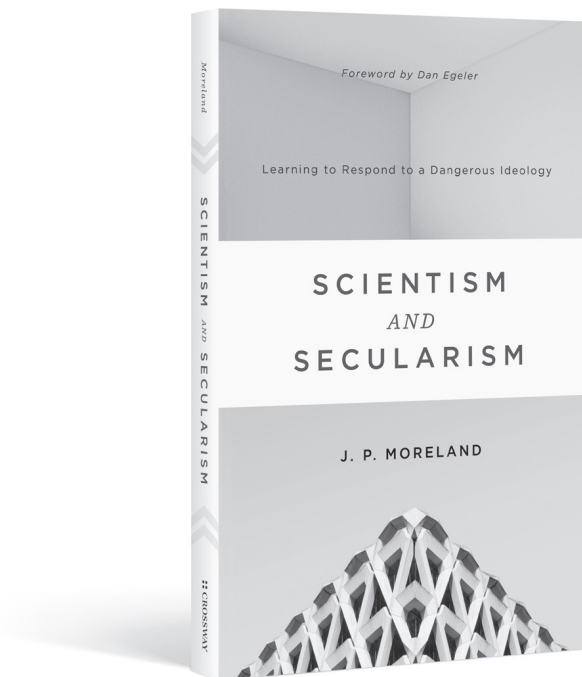
¹C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944), 56.

²*Ibid.*, 58, 59, 68.

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