

Title – The Myth of Progress in C.S. Lewis and Jonathan Swift

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Abstract: This paper compares Jonathan Swift and C.S. Lewis’s mutual critique of “the myth of progress,” or the idea that humans are continually advancing—whether in moral, scientific, or spiritual realms. In the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the doctrine of progress claimed the focus of upper class intellectuals in Britain. It was in this context that Swift criticized their optimism, claiming that a false belief in the ability of man to continually improve actually distracted people from helping those who suffered right in front of them. His Struldbruggs are an example of Swift “literalizing the metaphor” to make his critique—these creatures live eternally, yet do not improve; so Swift claims that just because time passes, progress is not inevitable. In the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis decried the myth of progress in a society whose convictions of improvement ironically preceded a tide of eugenics and the worst war Europe had yet seen. He also discouraged from “chronological snobbery,” or the belief that writings are inherently more valuable because they are new. An in-depth look at Swift’s Third Voyage of *Gulliver’s Travels* as well as a broader look at several of Lewis’s nonfiction works inform this paper. A deeper understanding of one allows for a greater understanding and appreciation of the other. Each author’s fiction and non-fiction reveals his disbelief in the myth of progress and reveals his Christian faith—a faith that affirms human fallenness while offering hope and a belief in the innate value of human life.