

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE STUDY GUIDE

A Study Guide on The Abolition of Man by C.S. Lewis

by Joseph A. Kohm & Joel Woodruff
Including A Five-Part Video Series
with Bryan Hollon



**A C.S. Lewis Institute Study Guide to
The Abolition of Man by C.S. Lewis**

©2023

A CSLI Press Publication



C.S. Lewis Institute
8001 Braddock Road, Suite 301
Springfield, VA 22151
All rights reserved

The Abolition of Man,
Copyright ©1944, 1947 C.S. Lewis Pt. Ltd.
Copyright restored ©1971, 1974, C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd.

All rights reserved.
Harper Collins Publishers
195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.
ESV® Text Edition: 2016.
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles,
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
Used by permission.
All rights reserved.

The Holy Bible, New International Version.
Copyright © 1984 by Zondervan Publishing House
Used by permission.
All rights reserved.

Contents

How to Use This CSLI Study Guide	6
1 Introduction to The Abolition of Man	9
2 Chapter 1: Men Without Chests	12
3 Chapter 2: The Way	17
4 Chapter 3: The Abolition of Man	22
5 Conclusion: Illustrations of the Tao and Hope for the Future	28



Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

— 1 Corinthians 15:47-49 (New Living Translation)

Study Guide Authors:

JOSEPH A. KOHM, JR., M.Div.

CSLI Vice President for Development and City Director for Virginia Beach – Joe is an attorney and formerly worked as a Certified Major League Baseball Player Agent. He earned his Master’s in Management Science from the State University of New York at Oswego and both his J.D. and M.Div. from Regent University. Joe is the author of *The Unknown Garden of Another’s Heart: The Surprising Friendship between C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves* (Wipf & Stock, 2022).

JOEL S. WOODRUFF, Ed.D.

President of CSLI – Joel has worked in higher education, “tent-making,” nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership team of European Bible Institute and Oakwood Services International. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a Doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University. As a Parish-Pulpit Fellow, he studied Biblical Backgrounds & Archaeology in Israel for a year. He is the author of *Discipleship with C.S. Lewis: A Guide to Mere Christianity for Small Groups and Mentoring Relationships*.

Video Lecturer:

BRYAN C. HOLLON, Ph.D.

Bryan is Dean, President, and Professor of Theology of Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Previously he served as the City Director of the C.S. Lewis Institute of Northeast Ohio and as a Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Christian Faith & Culture at Malone University. As a scholar, Dr. Hollon specializes in ressourcement theology, which is best exemplified in the work of Henri de Lubac. In 2017 he planted and pastored St. John’s Anglican Church in Canton, Ohio, until a full-time rector was called in 2021. He is always interested in the ways that Christians and Christian churches engage contemporary culture and struggle to remain faithful to the gospel in different contexts. Dr. Hollon is a proponent of the great consensual tradition that C.S. Lewis referred to as “Mere Christianity.”

HOW TO USE THIS CSLI STUDY GUIDE

1: PERSONAL STUDY

When C.S. Lewis gave his lectures which became the book *The Abolition of Man*, he was not trying to present a biblical argument against moral relativism. Instead, he sought to point to the logical inconsistencies and dangers of a worldview that doesn't hold to the idea of absolute truth. He did this in part by highlighting the natural law or moral law which is visible in all civilizations and written on the consciences of all human beings as an argument for his thesis. In other words, he focused on what theologians would call "natural revelation" to make his point to the academics he was encountering who might have been agnostic, atheist, humanist or theist in their worldviews.

While this study guide seeks to glean all we can from Lewis's arguments, we have added a layer of argument against moral relativism that comes out of "special revelation" or the Scriptures so that Christians and non-Christians alike can see at least some of the biblical reasons why moral relativism is bankrupt. For this reason, the C.S. Lewis Institute study guide intentionally begins each study with a short **Bible study** of God's Word, as revealed in the Scriptures. For it is our belief that this the most important way to address any serious question we may have, especially difficult ones. For this reason, it is important to read the biblical passage, meditate on it, and allow it to be your guide as you dive into the study.

The Bible study is followed by **readings from Lewis's book, *The Abolition of Man***. Because the book deals with difficult topics, it is advised to read through each chapter slowly and take notes.

This is followed by engaging **video lectures by Dr. Bryan Hollon**, a professor and Dean President of Trinity School for Ministry. Having expertise in theology, philosophy, and the writings of C.S. Lewis, his insights into the issues addressed in this philosophical work of Lewis will help bring many of the lofty ideas down to earth. You can access these videos by clicking on the links in the C.S. Lewis Institute's web version of the course or typing in the

website URLs (addresses) for the video lectures.

Questions are provided to help you process the videos and readings and as discussed below, to aid in group discussion so that you can better learn from one another and reflect upon these issues. You may want to write down your own answers to the questions before you meet together with others to help frame your thoughts.

Finally, in an effort to help you process the material and make this more than just an academic exercise, a **Make It Personal** action step will be suggested so that you can incorporate some of what you've reflected upon into your everyday life.

Our hope at the C.S. Lewis Institute is that not only will you develop some good approaches to dealing with the prevalent cultural ideas of our day, such as moral relativism, but that you will gain a deeper appreciation for the absolute truths or moral laws that God has revealed through both natural revelation and the Scriptures.

2: DISCUSSING THE ABOLITION OF MAN IN A SMALL GROUP

Having gained a detailed understanding of *The Abolition of Man* through your personal reading and use of the study guide, you can go even deeper by studying in community. We encourage you to go through this study guide with a small group.

When your group meets to discuss the book, you can use the study questions you've previously worked through to facilitate discussion. You might also share what the Lord has taught you personally through the study and ways that you are praying, living, and sharing your faith differently because of the study.

At the beginning of each study, we encourage you to remember John 8:31b–32:

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (NIV)

At the end of each session, take time to pray for one another as you go out into the world to love and serve the Lord.

One approach for organizing your small group study would be to divide it into five weekly sessions:

- 1) **Introductory Meeting:** Hand out books and study guides or arrange for participants to obtain these items in advance of the introductory meeting.
 - Introduce yourselves to one another.
 - Read aloud the Introduction to *The Abolition of Man* from the Study Guide.
 - Watch the first Video with Dr. Bryan Hollon: “Introduction to *The Abolition of Man*”
 - Have a short discussion on the video introduction.
 - Pray for one another and agree to do your homework prior to the next meeting by completing the assignments for Chapter 1, “Men Without Chests.”
- 2) **Meeting 2:** Discussion of Chapter 1, “Men Without Chests.” You may use the questions from the Bible study, readings, video, and “Make It Personal” section to guide your meeting.
- 3) **Meeting 3:** Discussion of Chapter 2, “The Way.” You may use the questions from the Bible study, readings, video, and “Make It Personal” section to guide your meeting.
- 4) **Meeting 4:** Discussion of Chapter 3, “The Abolition of Man.” You may use the questions from the Bible study, readings, video, and “Make It Personal” section to guide your meeting.
- 5) **Meeting 5:** Discussion of Conclusion, “Illustrations of the Tao and Hope for the Future.” You may use the questions from the Bible study, readings, video, and “Make It Personal” section to guide your meeting.



1

**Introduction to
the *Abolition of Man***

The task of the modern educator
is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.

—CHAPTER 1, “MEN WITHOUT CHESTS,” *THE ABOLITION OF MAN*

In February 1943, C.S. Lewis and his brother, Warnie, took the train from their home just outside of Oxford to the University of Durham, where Lewis spoke at the fiftieth annual Riddell Memorial Lectures, whose purpose was to focus on “the relation between religion and contemporary thought.” The academic audience heard Lewis deliver a series of three lectures on three successive nights. Each lecture was followed by a period of question and answer.

Later that year, the three lectures were published together under the title *The Abolition of Man*. Knowing that this book came out of a high-level academic conference can help us be less hard on ourselves as readers if we run into passing allusions to figures or academic works unfamiliar to us. This guide may be of help to you as you wrestle with what many believe to be Lewis’s most philosophical book. Fortunately, you’ll also experience “aha” moments as he breaks down complex ideas into “plain English” and the power of his argument becomes clear.

Twelve years after the book’s first publication, in a letter to his American friend Mary Willis Shelburne, Lewis bemoaned that though it was one of his favorite books, *The Abolition of Man* had been, “almost totally ignored by the public.” Today we ignore it at our peril.

The most important reason to read and study *The Abolition of Man* is Lewis’s prescience about where the culture was heading. He foresaw our current cultural moment when the elevation and primacy of the emotive self has married an ideologically driven science. This ideological union, when used by the state to secure the obedience and the conscience of men, results in the eventual abolition of mankind or the dehumanization of humanity.

In other words, Lewis’s analysis and warnings spoken eight decades ago about the dangers of a culture that pushes moral relativism over moral absolutes and emotion over reason appear profoundly prophetic as we witness the rise of the “cultural elite” who seek to impose their “enlightened” worldview on those with “traditional” or “antiquated” values.

Perhaps there has been no better time than the present to reread Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man*, identify the dangers and the purveyors of moral relativism, consider the logical arguments that point to the reality of absolute truth, and seek the author of Truth Himself.

Owen Barfield once said of C.S. Lewis, “Somehow, what he thought about everything was secretly present in what he said about anything.”¹ If you are intrigued by the ideas found in *The Abolition of Man* and would like to read more about them, many of the same themes can be found in some of his other works, including the papers “The Poison of Subjectivism” and “If We Have Christ’s Ethics Does the Rest of the Christian Faith Matter?”; Chapter 3 from his book *Miracles*, titled, “The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism”; and the third book in Lewis’s Space Trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*. We have also included at the end of this study guide Lewis’s poem “Evolutionary Hymn,” which also tracks foundationally with *The Abolition of Man* but in poetic form.

In evaluating the writing of *The Abolition of Man*, Owen Barfield also stated, “It is a real triumph. There may be a piece of contemporary writing in which precision of thought, liveliness of expression and depth of meaning unite with the same felicity, but I have not come across it.”²

¹ G.B. Tennyson, Owen Barfield on C.S. Lewis, (Barfield Press UK, 2011), 122.

² Back Cover of *The Abolition of Man* (Fount paperback, 1986).

2. Watch Video #1 with Dr. Bryan Hollon: Introduction to *The Abolition of Man*

Learning Goal:

At the end of this short video, you will know that many people consider *The Abolition of Man* to be C.S. Lewis’s most important nonfiction book, and you will begin to understand why.

QR CODE

LINK TO Video



2

Chapter One

Men Without Chests

We make men without chests
and expect of them virtue and enterprise.
We laugh at honour and are shocked
to find traitors in our midst. We castrate
and bid the geldings be fruitful.

—CHAPTER 1, “MEN WITHOUT CHESTS,” THE ABOLITION OF MAN

1. Bible Study: Read Colossians 2:1–8 and then reflect on the following questions.

Colossians 2:1–8

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. (NIV)

- (1) What does Paul mean when he states that he is “contending” for the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea? Is there a need to be “contending” for fellow believers in today’s culture? If so, why?
- (2) What is Paul’s goal for the people he’s writing to? How might you restate Paul’s goal for Christian’s living in today’s world?
- (3) What are some of the dangers Paul warns the believers about?
- (4) What are some of the fine-sounding arguments, hollow and deceptive philosophies, human traditions, and spiritual forces of this world that you can identify in our world today?
- (5) How does Paul recommend Christians combat these “enemies” of Christ and Christianity? What strategies can you use in your life today to combat these enemies of the faith?

2. Read The Abolition of Man, Chapter 1, “Men Without Chests.”

Chapter Summary: In the first lecture, “Men Without Chests,” Lewis deconstructs an educational model being imposed on children via a textbook Lewis calls, under a pseudonym, *The Green Book*. The unstated worldview behind *The Green Book* seeks to inculcate young minds against any objective values by cocooning them solely within their feelings and emotions.

Conversely, Lewis believes educators are to help students understand right from wrong and plant “just sentiments” in the fertile minds of their students allowing the students to repel propaganda through objective truth. In Lewis’s template of “The head rules the belly through the chest,” the chest is the mediator between our animal urges and minds, with the chest being the mechanism for training and tempering the belly. Without the chest, our disordered loves run wild.

KEY QUOTES TO LOOK FOR:

“The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.”

“No emotion is, in itself, a judgment; in that sense all emotions and sentiments are alogical. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should obey.”

“Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”

“The head rules the belly through the chest.”

“We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”

3. Watch Video #2 with Dr. Bryan Hollon: Men Without Chests: A Guided Reading of Chapter 1.

Learning Goal:

Your learning goal for this lecture is simple: when we are done,

you should understand why the rejection of objective moral value—or what we might call classical realism—relativizes our understanding of human affections and undermines our approach to education and ethical formation.

QR CODE and Video link

4. QUESTIONS:

- (1) What, according to Lewis, have Gaius and Titius done wrong in *The Green Book*?
- (2) Lewis writes that the task of the modern educator “is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.” What does he mean by this?
- (3) Lewis also writes, “Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.” What are some of the ways followers of Christ might train their emotions?
- (4) What does Lewis mean by “the chest”?
- (5) How does Gaius and Titius’s *The Green Book* produce “men without chests”?

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL

- (1) Why is the statement “truth is relative” an absolute statement? How would you explain this idea to someone who states that “truth is relative”?
- (2) Read and meditate upon Romans 12:1–2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

Make a list of habits you might implement in your daily life

to renew your mind according to Christ's truth rather than the pattern of this world. Then try practicing these habits daily for the next two weeks.



3

Chapter Two

The Way

A great many of those who ‘debunk’ traditional or (as they say) ‘sentimental’ values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process.

—CHAPTER 2, “THE WAY,” *THE ABOLITION OF MAN*

1. Bible Study: Read Psalm 19:1–14 and then reflect on the following questions.

Psalm 19

- The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
- 3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
- 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
- In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
- 5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
- 6 It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.
- 7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
- 8 The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
- 10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

- 11 By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
- 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
- 14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my
heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (NIV)

- (1) What is David's main point in verses 1–6 of Psalm 19?
How does this impact your worldview?
- (2) What are the character traits of God's law as expressed by
David in verses 7–10?
- (3) What benefits come from God's law or commands to the
person who heeds them?
- (4) How does David pray in response to his personal encounter
with God's laws? How do you respond to the commands of
God when confronted by them?
- (5) What daily practices or habits can we implement in our
lives to remind ourselves of the goodness of God and His
laws?

2. Read *The Abolition of Man*, Chapter 2, "The Way."

Chapter Summary: In the second chapter, "The Way," Lewis begins with the assertion, "The practical result of education in the spirit of *The Green Book* must be the destruction of the society which accepts it." This happens when societies become unmoored from objective standards, whether they be "Natural Law," "Traditional Morality," or, as Lewis cites throughout *The Abolition of Man*, the Tao. The Tao is a term Lewis uses broadly to describe

all forms of moral law including Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Asian.

KEY QUOTES TO LOOK FOR:

“The practical result of education in the spirit of *The Green Book* must be the destruction of the society which accepts it.”

“A great many of those who ‘debunk’ traditional or (as they say) ‘sentimental’ values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process.”

“Each instinct, if you listen to it, will claim to be gratified at the expense of all the rest.”

“The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in.”

3. Watch Video 3 with Dr. Bryan Hollon: The Way: A Guided Reading of Chapter 2.

Learning Goal

At the end of this video, you should be able to offer a rational defense of objective moral value.

QR CODE and Video link

4. QUESTIONS:

- (1) On what ethics do “Innovators” want to base ethics? What does Lewis say will be the result if the Innovators get their way?
- (2) What role does the use of language and specific words, such as “necessary,” “progressive,” or “efficient,” play in determining objective value?
- (3) Why does Lewis use the term Tao as his standard for objective morality instead of “Natural Law” or “Traditional Morality” when the terms generally mean the same thing?

What can we learn from Lewis's use of language in regard to how we communicate ideas to our generation?

- (4) Is it possible to make moral progress outside of the Tao? Why, or why not?
- (5) Lewis writes that he is not making "any indirect argument for Theism." Do you believe him? Why, or why not?

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL

- (1) In what ways do you see today's culture turning against or even negating biblical morality? How does this impact the ways you approach your moral behavior?
- (2) Read and meditate on the Great Commandment from Matthew 22:36–40:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (NIV)





Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

—Ephesians 6:11-12

4

Chapter Three
The Abolition of Man

I am very doubtful whether history shows us
one example of a man who, having stepped outside
traditional morality and attained power,
has used that power benevolently.

—CHAPTER 3, “THE ABOLITION OF MAN,” *THE ABOLITION OF MAN*

1. Bible Study: Read Romans 1:18–32 and then reflect on the following questions.

Romans 1:18–32

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant

and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (NIV)

- (1) According to Paul, why is God's wrath against the godlessness and wickedness of people being revealed?
- (2) Why are all people on earth accountable for knowing the truth about God?
- (3) What happens to people who exchange the truth of God for a lie?
- (4) What does the fact that God gives people the freedom to choose to do good or evil say about God's character and the ways in which He relates to human beings?
- (5) Describe the process by which the mind of a human being becomes depraved.
- (6) In what ways does our culture today approve of people who disregard and even act to counter God's moral laws?

2. Read *The Abolition of Man*, Chapter 3, "The Abolition of Man."

Chapter Summary: Lewis's concluding chapter, "The Abolition of Man," describes what happens when his first two chapters meet means, motive, and opportunity. "Conditioners" will arise to craft values and shape emotions outside the *Tao*, and they "will be armed with the power of an omniscient state and an irresistible scientific technique: we shall at last get a race of conditioners who really can cut out all posterity in what shape they please."

In fact, it would be safe to say that today the Conditioners have already arrived. A fully formed Christian worldview now requires followers of Christ to wrestle with emerging issues such as eugenics, artificial intelligence, and transhumanism. Lewis, of course, was thinking about these issues long before most people.

It was the issue of transhumanism, the belief that through technology human

beings might live forever, that compelled Lewis to write his Space Trilogy. In an August 9, 1939, letter to his friend Sister Penelope Lawson, Lewis wrote to express his concern regarding a former student who took “interplanetary colonization quite seriously, the realization that thousands of people, in one form or another depend on some hope of perpetuating and improving the human species for the whole meaning of the universe—that a ‘scientific’ hope of defeating death is a real rival to Christianity.”

Who, exactly, gets to play the role of “Conditioner” in our modern world? Lewis warns us, “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.” There is a transactional element associated with being a Conditioner wielding this power. Lewis calls it “the magician’s bargain,” where one exchanges his or her soul to gain power. Once consummated, the effect of this bargain is “de-humanized Conditioners.” When men step outside the Tao, “They are not men at all.”

The fallout from the magician’s bargain doesn’t stop with the dehumanization of the Conditioners. Once dehumanized, the magician’s bargain clouds their vision and forces them to see others such as perhaps the sick or the elderly as less than human. As Lewis was delivering these lectures, England was in the throes of the Second World War, where he, along with the rest of the world, watched with horror as the Nazis systematically eliminated those they considered unfit under their eugenic creed of “Life unworthy of life.” Instead of dehumanization, to be truly human, Lewis points out that in previous ages conforming the soul to reality was accomplished via knowledge, wisdom, and virtue. Now Conditioners discard humanity by subduing “reality to the wishes of men,” so that “the solution is a technique,” whether it’s rewriting the circuitry of our cells through eugenics or providing teenagers with puberty blockers.

Lewis’s final warning in *The Abolition of Man* goes beyond the casualty of clouded vision associated with the magician’s bargain. In their arrogance, Conditioners assume they can “see through” the dying wick of the Tao and objective value. Instead, the magician’s bargain only leads to blindness because, “To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see” and the whole world will become invisible.

KEY QUOTES TO LOOK FOR:

“From this point of view, 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.”

“For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please.”

“When all that says ‘it is good’ has been debunked, what says ‘I want’ remains.”

“I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently.”

“Man’s conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man.”

“It is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return.”

“For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious—such as digging up and mutilating the dead.”

3. Watch Video 4 with Dr. Bryan Hollon: A Guided Reading of Chapter Three.

Learning Goal:

You will understand Lewis’s argument that discarding realism—The Tao or Objective Moral Values—and embracing relativism in favor of unrestrained scientific progress leads necessarily to self-destruction.

QR CODE and Video link

4. QUESTIONS:

- (1) According to Lewis, what will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man?
- (2) What does “the power of Man to make himself what he pleases” mean for the rest of humanity?
- (3) Is Lewis “anti-science”?
- (4) What does Lewis say magic and science have in common? Do you agree?
- (5) Have Lewis’s predictions come true in the West? If so, to what extent?

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL:

- (1) Name three people, movements, or groups that are intentionally attacking or running counter to God’s moral law as revealed in Scripture. Reflect upon your responses to these types of people, movements, or groups in the past. What actions could you take in the future to respond to these groups with truth and grace?
- (2) In the midst of an evil world, what brings you hope? Make a list of ways in which you can remind yourself daily of the hope we have in Christ, even as the world is seeking to counter the truth of Christ.



5

Conclusion

Illustrations of the Tao and Hope for the Future

It is at least arguable that every civilization we find has been derived from another civilization and, in the last resort, from a single centre—‘carried’ like an infectious disease or like the Apostolical succession.”

—APPENDIX, “ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE TAO,” *THE ABOLITION OF MAN*

1. Bible Study: Read Romans 2:12–16; 6:8–14 and then reflect on the following questions.

Romans 2:12–16

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. 14 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (NIV)

Romans 6:8–14

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (NIV)

(1) According to Paul in Romans 2, how do the “Gentiles,” the non-Jewish people who didn’t grow up with the law of Moses, demonstrate that they still are aware of moral laws?

(2) In what ways do you see that people in our world today have a

conscience, knowing that some things are morally wrong, and some things are morally right?

- (3) According to Paul in Romans 6, what were some of the results of Christ's death and resurrection?
- (4) Describe how the Christian can count him- or herself as "dead to sin but alive in Christ Jesus"?
- (5) Why is the Christian no longer under the law, but under grace? What does this mean?

2. Read *The Abolition of Man*, Appendix: "Illustrations of the Tao."

- (1) How does the "Appendix: Illustrations of the Tao" support Lewis's argument that truth is absolute and is not relative?
- (2) How many cultures does Lewis draw upon in the Appendix to come up with his list of moral laws?
- (3) Can you think of any other examples of moral laws being repeated in various cultures that further support Lewis's thesis? If so, name the cultures and the examples of their laws.

3. Read the poem "Evolutionary Hymn" by C.S. Lewis.

Evolutionary Hymn can be found by doing an online search by typing in the search bar "Evolutionary Hymn + C.S. Lewis." The poem was originally written by C.S. Lewis in a letter to Dorothy Sayers dated March 4, 1954. Interestingly, the poem can be sung to the tune of "Angels from the Realms of Glory."

- (1) In what ways does Lewis's poem bring out the arguments that he made in his book, *The Abolition of Man*?
- (2) Is there a line in the poem that especially strikes you or brings home one of Lewis's main points from his book *The Abolition of Man*?
- (3) How do the arts (poetry, music, theater, dance, visual arts) help support some of the ideas expressed in *The Abolition of Man*?

4. Watch Video 5 with Dr. Bryan Hollon: Illustrations of the Tao and a Message of Hope

QR CODE and Video link

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL:

- (1) Reflect upon the readings, lectures, and questions addressed in this study of Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. Make a list of three primary insights that you've gained.
- (2) In what ways will you share what you've learned in this study with others?
- (3) Read the following article and consider how it might be helpful for you, and/or for people you know:

The Invitation C.S. Lewis Accepted—And One You, Too, Can Accept by Randy Newman

I've read enough of C.S. Lewis's delightful writings to know that he'd be amazed that anyone would be interested in his life and writings and that there would even be websites like this one named after him. He suspected that he and all his work would be forgotten within five years of his death. He could not have been more wrong.

But once he got past the shock of organizations, books, and websites with the name C.S. Lewis, he would express deep concern and exhort people to look past him and consider seriously the person, teaching, and work of Jesus. He would be appalled if people settled for Mere C.S. Lewis instead of Mere Christianity.

If you've heard the story of Lewis's life, you know that the gospel of Jesus Christ dramatically changed him. Lewis would want you to experience that same kind of transformation and connect with a local church that believed the Bible as he did.

Lewis regularly called people to make a decision for Christ before it's too late. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*,

It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time

when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last for ever. We must take it or leave it.

Would you like to make a decision to follow Jesus? He would be overjoyed if you did. In fact, you can talk to Him right now through prayer. The Scriptures tell us that if we repent of our sins (are truly sorry for our sin and desire to change) and truly believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, that you can be forgiven and begin a new journey as a disciple of Jesus. As you consider this life-changing (eternity-changing!) decision, reflect on these words that Lewis wrote at the very end of his classic book *Mere Christianity*.

...there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away 'blindly' so to speak ... The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes everyday and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

A PRAYER TO FOLLOW JESUS

“Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner. I know that my sin deserves the punishment of death. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for my sins, was buried, and rose again from the dead. I want to turn from my sins and trust Jesus Christ alone as my Savior. Thank You for the forgiveness of my sins and the gift of eternal life that I can now receive through faith in Jesus’s name. Amen.”

If you have made a decision to give yourself to Jesus or if you would like to ask more questions about what it means to be a follower of Christ, we here at the C.S. Lewis Institute would be happy to talk with you. You may contact us at staff@cslewisinstitute.org.



Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

—Ephesians 6:11-12



The C.S. Lewis Institute was founded in 1976 and endeavors, in the legacy of C.S. Lewis, to develop disciples who will articulate, defend, share, and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life. From its inception, the Institute has been inter-denominational, has worked closely with a variety of churches and sees itself as a servant ministry, assisting churches and pastors in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This takes the form of discipleship programs, area-wide conferences/seminars, pastor fellowships and resources in print and on the web.

For more information on the C.S. Lewis Institute please go to www.cslewisinstitute.org.

8001 Braddock Road, Suite 301
Springfield, VA 22151-2110
Phone: 703.914.5602
Fax 703.894.1072



“We make men without chests and expect of them
virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are
shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and
bid the geldings be fruitful.”

—C.S. Lewis
The Abolition of Man

