

# KNOWING & DOING

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## C.S. Lewis and How Christians Should Think about Science

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Readers of the Chronicles of Narnia series will remember Uncle Andrew from the book *The Magician's Nephew*. Uncle Andrew dabbled in science and magic to create rings that sent people into different worlds. Though he could not control it, that magic culminated at book's end with the eventual creation of Narnia (with a little help from Aslan).

In our world, Christians concerned with the direction of culture need to possess some basic level of scientific literacy. Colossians 1:16 tells us that, "by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth."<sup>1</sup> For Christians, to be studying God's creation via science is to be studying the ways of God. Fortunately for us, C.S. Lewis has written extensively on science or specifically on how believers should think about science. Lewis himself was not antisience. But he had grave concerns about the use of science to either manipulate nature or validate worldviews based on reductionism or naturalism.

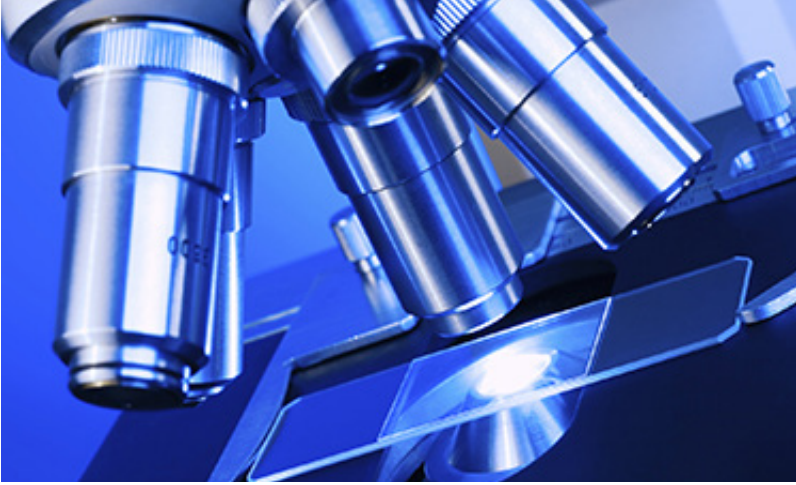
I thought of Uncle Andrew, and C.S. Lewis, while reading a recent news article about a woman who had three sons and desperately wanted to be a "girl-mommy." After spending \$40,000 on preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), she finally gave birth to a daughter.

PGD was designed originally to identify genetic diseases or chromosomal disorders such as cystic fibrosis or sickle cell anemia in embryos prior to being implanted into a woman's uterus. The embryos are created through the process of in vitro fertilization (IVF). IVF is designed to manifest a pregnancy while PGD sorts for preferable embryos and, in some cases, enhances the embryos. After her daughter's birth, the woman said, "She was worth every cent. Better than a new car, or kitchen reno."

Fertility doctors in the United States have found an expanding and profitable market using PGD to assist couples seeking to determine the gender of their child (Canada, Australia, and the UK prohibit the use of PGD for gender selection). Employing PGD for the purpose of gender selection is a particularly frightening cultural barometer. It combines selfishness, one of our worst human traits, with consumerism and our relentless quest to conquer nature using technology. That we've reached the point of being able to technologically determine gender is not surprising. Since the Enlightenment, scientific advancement has shifted its focus from revelation to conquest. It was Descartes who said man would become "like masters and possessors of nature."

For believers who are monitoring the culture, it is particularly troubling to see that scientific advancements are quickly racing past existing laws. Enchantment with PGD and certain other scientific processes is, at the core, only a secondary symptom arising from the original illness of our sin nature. Society's relentless pursuit to master science finds its inception from what Keats called the "habitual self." Lewis wrote about the "habitual self" in *The Problem of Pain*. The self is concerned with its own wants and desires and sets itself apart from, or even above, God. The lure of the promise to "be like God" (Gen. 3:5) was at the heart of the Fall. Our society is so focused on self that we are bordering on collective and individual solipsism. Thus it would seem natural for those using PGD to see the decision to determine the sex of their child as a mere personal preference based solely on individual desire.

The forces of consumerism help make this possible. Wants and desires are seduced by materialism's promises of happiness and fulfillment based on the next acquisition or purchase. Consumerism inflames covetousness and attempts to offer each person the opportunity to live outside his or her current reality with the aid of easy credit. Choosing the gender of your child becomes another purchasing decision. Coke or Pepsi? Boy or girl?



Whether PGD (or any scientific advancement) is “good” is largely the function of the inquisitor’s worldview. To the world, the ability to select the gender of a child is evidence of increased individual freedom. Instinctively, a quantitative increase in choice also seems to equate to an increase in freedom. Yet, in this case, correlation does not imply causation because, if freedom is not restrained, it eventually results in anarchy. The consequences of our increased freedom are all around us. At no time in history has a people group had more quantitative choices affecting lifestyle, and yet depression, brokenness, and addiction on both collective and individual levels are rampant. We are like the Israelites in Judges 21:25: “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

For Christians wanting to influence the world at large, it is not so much *what* we think about science

specifically; after all, there are divisions among believers on a range of topics, from the age of the earth to the evolutionary process. What really matters is *how* we think about science. In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means . . . the power of some men to make other men what *they* please.”<sup>2</sup> Rightly understood, science is about process. Christians have a duty to monitor its purpose. Science is meant to explain things, not explain them away. This is how we are to frame our dialogue with culture.

Last, when considering science, it is imperative that Christians remember the concept of image. Genesis 1:27 tells us, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” A biblical worldview that realizes humanity contains the spark of the Eternal stands in stark contrast to a purely scientific worldview that sees humanity as the physical product of strict naturalism combined with a bundle of Freudian complexes. As Christians, we must be ever vigilant to guard against a concept of science that fails to recognize the eternal worth of each individual. Uncle Andrew was ultimately confined to a big house in the country where he never attempted magic again. The rest of us will not be so lucky. ❖

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Supposing science ever became complete so that it knew every single thing in the whole universe. Is it not plain that the questions, ‘Why is there a universe?’ ‘Why does it go on as it does?’ ‘Has it any meaning?’ would remain just as they were?

*C.S. Lewis*

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#### Notes:

1. Scripture quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version.
2. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 72.



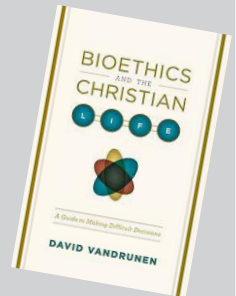
**Joseph A. Kohm, Jr.**, founded Kohm Associates, Inc. in 1996, which provides multilateral services to professional athletes. Joe is a Certified Major League Baseball Agent and currently represents more than a dozen professional players. He is the author of *Baseball's Antitrust Exemption: It's Going, Going... Gone!*, published by the *Nova University Law Review*, and co-author of *The Family Advisor: The New Trend for Athletes with Family Values*, published by the *University of Miami Sports and Entertainment Law Review*. Prior to receiving his Juris Doctorate degree from Regent University School of Law, he earned his MBA from the State University of New York. While earning his undergraduate degree from Syracuse University, Joe was a member of the basketball team that participated in the 1987 Final Four. Joe and his wife Lynne have been married for 17 years and have 2 children and make their home in Virginia Beach, VA.

## RECOMMENDED READING

### *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions*, by David VanDruen, Crossway

Just about everyone will face a difficult bioethics decision at some point. In this book a theologian, ethicist, and lawyer equips Christians to make such decisions based on biblical truth, wisdom, and virtue.

Though a relatively new discipline, bioethics has generated extraordinary interest due to a number of socially pressing issues. *Bioethics and the Christian Life* places bioethics within the holistic context of the Christian life, both developing a general Christian approach to making bioethics decisions and addressing a number of specific, controversial areas of bioethics.



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