



The Abolition of Man

with Dr. Steve Turley

Lesson 5: The Abolition of Man

Outline:

Review:

- Take some time to recall C. S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image* (a look at the imagination of those living in the Medieval world—one of divine meaning and purpose) and *That Hideous Strength* (a futuristic novel highlighting Lewis' concerns for a technological society that rejects objective values).

Focus Questions:

- What would happen if we turned our backs on the Tao?
- If we conformed the world to our desires, instead of conforming our desires to the objective values embedded in the world, what civilization would emerge?
- What does a world without the Tao look like?

Lewis Looks to the Future

- **Summum bonum:**
 - In Chapter 3, Lewis draws the modern world's premises out to their logical ends. He begins by pinpointing the modern world's "greatest good," or what Augustine called the *summum bonum*. The *summum bonum* is the ultimate goal or highest good according to which values and priorities are established in an ethical system.
 - The modern world's *summum bonum* is scientific control over nature. Our greatest objective imaginable is to conform nature to our own wants, needs, and desires.
- Distribution of power:
 - Lewis notices a discrepancy of power over nature among the population.
 - Dr. Turley's example: We may use modern air travel, but that doesn't mean we know how to operate the power of aviation. Instead, we pay someone else who has that power and benefit from their knowledge.
 - Man's *power over nature* is in fact only power possessed by some men, which they may or may not extend to the majority of the population.
- The world as an object of manipulation:
 - Lewis does not only look at abuses of power. He is also concerned about the world, or nature, used as a tool of manipulation.
 - In a technological world, some inevitably find themselves dependent on skilled and knowledgeable technicians or experts.
- Man becomes nature:
 - Lewis argues that if the ultimate aim is to conquer the Tao, then mankind can only be understood as a product of nature. And if nature can be manipulated, then man as nature will also be manipulated.



- The Tao alone sets mankind apart from nature as uniquely endowed with moral, intellectual, and emotional capacities, created to conform to divine obligations.
- With the Tao gone, however, and a new *summum bonum* (control over nature) in place, man is a byproduct of nature capable of being controlled by the most powerful.
 - Lewis uses **contraception** to show how earlier generations exercise control over later ones. Contraception is a microcosm of what can happen on a larger scale.

Conditioners and Conditioned (6:36)

- If the doctrine of objective values ceases to exist, the conquest over nature will grow to be a conquest over human nature. Two classes of people will rise in a world governed by manipulation, control, and domination—the Conditioners and the Conditioned. The Conditioners will have the power of technical competency, while the Conditioned will benefit from that technology while also becoming objects of control.
- If anyone age can use science or eugenics to create descendants it desires, then all who live after are descendants of that power—weaker, not stronger.

The Hundredth Century AD

- Lewis, writing from the 20th century, takes readers forward several centuries into the Hundred Century AD, painting for us a picture of a nihilistic, highly technological society that has rejected the doctrine of objective values. In this society, the powerful who control nature are a small minority, while the majority are weak and controlled by others.
- (10:10) For Lewis, if humans only know the universe by what they learn from science, then science will eventually overshadow humanity. The final stage of man’s conquest over nature, whether by eugenics, pre-natal conditioning, or education replaced by psychological conditioning, will be full control over human nature. But who will have this control? The Conditioners, or the elite, aided by a powerful state and scientific technology, will shape others as they please.

Past Conditioners vs. Modern Conditioners (12:05)

- Lewis points out that despite all ages having some exercising power over others, there are distinct differences between those seeking power in the past and today.

Conditioners of Today	Conditioners of the Past
Access to tools & technology unlike anything seen before	Access to tools & technology of the past
Values based on scientific rationalism	Values defined and set up by the Tao
Conditioners work outside/above objective values & morals	Both Conditioners and Conditioned are subject to objective values & morals

- **An objection to Lewis:** Why must we assume the worst of the men of the future? (14:45)
- Lewis' Answer:
 - This objection doesn't follow the argument. Lewis is not assuming or speculating—he is taking a world without the Tao to its natural conclusion.
 - Lewis also argues that he isn't supposing men of the future to be bad men. Rather, they are not men in the old sense at all.
 - For example, Dr. Turley addresses how we tend to think that the only difference between us and the men of old is our clothes and electricity. We know, of course, that this is not the case—our imagination and understanding of the world is quite different, too.

Dr. Turley: **“The only difference between me and Alexander is his toga.”**



Figure 1: Marble statue of a togatus, 1st cent. A.D., Rome; Courtesy of the Met

Science, Technology, Magic & Religion (18:15)

- Lewis argues that those in the modern world assume we use science and technology, while medieval persons used magic and religion. Lewis, a medieval scholar, reminds us that is not true. **Modern science was forged in the medieval world.** Magic entered the



picture after the age of science began. In fact, modern science and magic come from the same impulse.

- **Modern understanding:**

Science & Technology	Religion & Magic
Facts, reason, experimentation	Faith, belief, illusion

- **Medieval understanding:**

Science & Religion	Technology & Magic
Mutual ways of contemplating and understanding the world	Mutual ways of controlling or manipulating reality

- While magic manipulated reality for a time, eventually science proved more effective. Science replaced magic, but was then grouped with technology. Magic and religion were left behind.

Post-Humanity (20:45)

- Because humans have self-consciously left the world of values and virtues behind in favor of science and technology, they have taken on a new definition of what it means to be human. Lewis calls this post-humanity. For Lewis, these men are not necessarily bad men. Rather, they have stepped outside the morality of the Tao and into the void. They are no longer men at all.
- In an era of post-humanity, one motive beyond morality will remain: what one wills. The Conditioners will be motivated by their own pleasure, desires, or impulses. Lewis hopes that Conditioners will use their powers benevolently, but no historical examples exist of someone acting benevolently outside traditional morals.
- Lewis ends Abolition of Man by exposing the irony of humanity's obsession with conquering nature. For in the end humanity, too, is reduced to mere nature. Humans, now natural bi-products, can only make decisions by nature-driven impulses. In man's attempt to conquer nature, nature has conquered man. In a world without the Tao, nature wins.

Lewis' Call

- Lewis reminds us that we as humans are either rational spirits forever obliged to obey the absolute values of the Tao, or we are mere nature able to be primed and shaped by masters with no motive but their natural impulses.
- We must learn to give up scientific rationalism and become like little children born anew, ready to embrace the Tao (the only source of our true humanity).