



# The Abolition of Man: A Book Study with Dr. Stephen Turley

## Lesson 1: Introduction

### Course Introduction:

Introductions to *The Abolition of Man (AOM)*

- AOM began as a series of three lectures delivered by C. S. Lewis at the University of Durham, February 24-26, 1943, as part of the Riddell Memorial Lectures.
- Lewis gave these lectures in the midst of World War II.
- These lectures came at a time of prolific scholarship and writing for Lewis. For example, Lewis published *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942, *Perelandra* in 1943, and *That Hideous Strength* in 1945, the latter two a part of his Space Trilogy.

Why study *The Abolition of Man*?

- These lectures explore the interface between religion and contemporary thought.
- The Riddell Memorial Lectures, of which *AOM* is a part, are one of the most important lecture series delivered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Several Thoughts on *The Abolition of Man*

- Lewis said that *AOM* “...is almost my favorite among my books, but in general has been almost totally ignored by the public.”
- Walter Hooper, C. S. Lewis’ literary executor, said of *AOM* that it is “an all but indispensable introduction to the entire corpus of Lewis’ writings.”
- Peter Kreeft, a scholar of Lewis and a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College and The Kings College, wrote that *AOM* is “a terrifying prophecy of mortality, not just the mortality of modern western civilization...but the mortality of human nature itself...”

### Lecture 1: Men Without Chests (5:08)

Head	Intellectual capacities
Chest	Moral capacities
Stomach	Emotional/aesthetic capacities

Classical Image and Understanding of the Human Person



- The classical imagination and humanity stems from the chest, which mediates between the intellect and the appetites.
- In Lecture 1, Lewis observes that modern education (mid 20th cent.) pulls the head apart from the stomach by redefining knowledge solely on terms of scientific facts. For example, the equation  $2 + 2 = 4$  is a scientific fact, and therefore value free, with no moral significance, objective meaning or purpose.
- Lewis was concerned that the world taught as inherently meaningless would hurt children's formation of virtue in their education.

## Virtue—Ordering Our Loves to the Value System God Gave Us

- Dr. Turley asks: What if teachers taught that the world has no purpose or order? How would you teach virtue? How does one order their loves without objective value?
  - Example: You can love ham sandwiches, and you can love a baby. But if both drop from a high height at the same time, which do you lunge for?
- C. S. Lewis cautioned against a world with no proposed purpose or order. If education presented the world as one without virtue or morality, then an entire generation of young people would be unable to reconcile their stomachs (emotions/aesthetics) to their heads (intellects)—they would be “men without chests,” or, without morals.

## Lecture 2: The Way (9:20)

### Lewis' Use of *Tao*

- The Chinese term *Tao* signifies a way, path, or route, which Lewis uses as a symbol for natural law, or the doctrine of objective values embedded in the world around us.
- In this lecture, Lewis examines three ethical theories considered alternatives (in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) to the classical notion of the divine economy of goods: utilitarianism, evolutionary instinct, and economic value. To examine these theories, Lewis adopts the attitude and reasoning of a skeptic.
  - “Lewis relativizes the relativizer. He calls out modern skeptics for being selective in their skepticism.” – Dr. Turley
- Lewis finds that those skeptical of objective values cannot justify their own ethical systems once they've rejected the notion of objective values themselves. At every ethical system's basic level, there must be an ethical system already in place. This is not a problem for the *Tao*, which does not define moral obligations—rather, it recognizes the ones already put in place by God, waiting to be discovered.



## Lecture 3: *The Abolition of Man* (12:05)

### The Classical vs. Modern Worlds

- In Lewis' third lecture, he paints an image of the world devoid of the Tao, or objective values, and instead governed by scientific facts.
- A classical man asks, "How do I conform my soul to the divine reality around me?" and turns to virtue, prayer, and contemplation.
- A modern man asks, "How do I conform the meaningless purposeless world around me to my own desires and ambitions?" and turns to science, technology, and the state.
- Lewis carries the notion of the modern man to a bleak end: First, two classes will emerge—the Conditioners and the Conditioned.
  - The Conditioners, a class of intelligent technicians, shape a world in which humanity is reduced to mere nature. This leaves humans vulnerable to manipulation by the technological elite. Nature conquers man, and man ceases to exist. Impersonal nature redefines humanity as inherently meaningless.

## Peter Kreeft's Helpful Overview of the Chapters (15:30)

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Lewis claims that the education system produces men without chests—without operating organs that recognize objective values (truth, goodness, and beauty).	Lewis defines and defends the Tao.	Lewis argues that the education of moral subjectivism is supported by a society with a new "summum bonum" or highest good, i.e. man's conquest over nature.
A negative image	A positive image	A prophetic image
The present	The past	The future if actions continue

### Dr. Turley's Reasons for Why Lewis' Arguments are Essential (for modern citizens and contemporary Christians)

- *AOM* provides us with an understanding of traditional versus modern societies.
- *AOM* calls us to re-embrace the classical virtues of truth, goodness and beauty, the true endeavor of education.



- *AOM* acquaints us with Natural Law Theory, which recognizes that to be human means we are endowed with a moral conscience that recognizes the moral order of the universe put in place by God. As the world denies objective order, it becomes more unnatural.
- *AOM* reminds us of the terrible price of idolatry—that we become our idols and our sins. If we reduce the world to mere nature and biology, then the human race becomes nothing more than these processes.

#### Dr. Turley's Final Thoughts

- Lewis' biggest call is to understand the challenges and darkness in the world, but to "persevere through this secular winter," and thrive in faith, hope, and humanity.