



The Abolition of Man: *A Book Study* with Dr. Steve Turley

Lesson 2: The Abolition of Man in Context

Course:

Timeline of Lewis' work mentioned in this lecture:

- *The Abolition of Man* (1943)
- *That Hideous Strength* (1945)
- *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964)

The Discarded Image (1:20)

- C. S. Lewis wrote *The Discarded Image* 20 years after *The Abolition of Man*.
- Lewis wanted to provide modern students with a primer of the extraordinary ways the medieval mind imagined the cosmos and a person's place within them, much different than the individualism and scientific rationalism of secular science.
- *The Discarded Image* reminds readers that fundamentally different ways of imagining and understanding the world exist besides scientific rationalism—ways more beautiful, wonderful, and realistic.

The Grand Cathedral of the Medieval World (2:46)

- Augustine's (354-430 AD) understanding of the medieval world (3:22):
 - The world operates on the divine economy of goods, with God as the "Summum bonum," or the supreme goodness in a divine hierarchy. This hierarchy consists of God, angelic beings and saints, then stars, planets, the earth, and a world filled with divine purpose.
- Dionysius the Areopagite's model of the medieval world (4:25):
 - Dionysius laid out a celestial model consisting of three hierarchies, with 3 species in each.

<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>3 Species</i>
Those in direct service to God	Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
Those who mediate between God and creation	Dominations, Powers, Virtues



Those who direct services in the affairs of men	Principalities, Archangels, Angels
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- After the three hierarchies came the Stars and Planets, which revolved around the earth and held spiritual significance (5:00).

<i>Planet</i>	<i>Spiritual Significance</i>
Jupiter	Kings, prosperity
Mars	Warriors, bravery + gentleness = chivalry
The Sun	Noble metal gold, eye and mind of the universe
Luna, or the Moon	Silver, the great frontier dividing the heavens from the earth, transience and ambiguity representing instability
Mercury	Hermes the messenger God, language, interpretation, order
Venus	Morning star, matriarchal presence, beauty, birth, healing
Saturn	Sickness, old age, endings

Boethius' Quadrivium, or Four Ways (6:28):

- The medieval person understood the stars, planets, and world through the Quadrivium, or four areas of study.
 - Arithmetic = Number in itself
 - Geometry = Number in space
 - Music = Number in time
 - Astronomy = Number in space and time
- The Quadrivium, combined with the Trivium (Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric), comprised the Seven Liberal Arts, or Seven Virtues (Wisdom, Justice, Moderation, Courage, Faith, Hope, Love). By fostering the Seven Virtues, the medieval person learned to "rightly order their loves," according to God's hierarchy of goods.

Calcidius' triadic pattern of the human soul (7:35):

- The triadic pattern of the human soul described man as having rationality in the head, a warrior-like energy in the chest, and an instinctive appetite in the abdomen. Lewis used this model in *The Abolition of Man* to describe "men without chests."

Which Model is Accurate: Medieval or Modern? (8:35)

- In the Epilogue of *The Discarded Image*, Lewis writes that the beautiful, medieval understanding of the universe has one weakness—it isn't true! However, our modern understanding of the universe is just as tenuous. (8:35) Because of this, we must be wary of chronological snobbery, or a belief that something is wrong because it is outdated. Chronological snobbery implies that the present is inherently right, but in a matter of time our present will also be the past.



That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown Ups (12:10)

- Lewis wrote *That Hideous Strength* as a fictional depiction of the ideas developed in *The Abolition of Man*. It was published in 1945 as the last of the Space Trilogy. The novel explores what the world would be like if it were ruled by a technocratic elite unrestrained by tradition values.

Plot Summary (13:00)

- After WWII, the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments, or N.I.C.E., works towards solving social and genetic problems in post-war Europe. Mark and Jane Studdock are a young academic couple of Bracton College at the University Edgestow, near Bragdon Wood, where many N.I.C.E. members are faculty. Lord Feverstone hires Mark to work at N.I.C.E., where they use autocratic tactics to coerce the wider population to comply with their scientific, technological state. Jane, who has special visionary powers, joins the nearby community of St. Anne's. St. Anne's is a community of person-affirming love and mutuality, while N.I.C.E. is bureaucratic, cold, and rationalistic.
- N.I.C.E. invades the town of St. Anne's and arrests Jane, wanting to exploit her gifts. Mark, meanwhile, meets the head of N.I.C.E., Francois Alcasan, a decapitated head celebrated as the beginning of man's immortality and an example of resurrection. N.I.C.E. plans to offer this new immortality to the scientific elite. Meanwhile, Dr. Elwin Ransom (the protagonist of the earlier Space Trilogy novels) now leads the community of St. Anne's. Dr. Ransom is the heir of King Arthur, communing with angelic beings to resist N.I.C.E., revealed to actually be a demonic corporation seeking the body of Merlin buried in Bragdon Wood.
- Jane uses her gifts, alongside St. Anne's, to find Merlin before N.I.C.E. N.I.C.E. arrests Mark, hoping to initiate him and train him in absolute scientific objectivity, but Mark resists this, secretly despising the N.I.C.E. technocrats. St. Anne's reanimates Merlin, who unleashes the Curse of Babel upon N.I.C.E. members at a banquet. Animals previously experimented on, released by Merlin, kill the members of N.I.C.E., who now speak gibberish. In the end, Mark and Jane are reunited.

Key Themes in *That Hideous Strength* that informs our understanding of *AOM* (18:20)

- In N.I.C.E.'s world, all notions of religion and virtue disappear.
- Humans transform science from a means of understanding the world into a means of controlling the world. Science becomes a master, not a servant, leading to a powerful scientific elite and a vulnerable majority.
- Lewis interprets the overthrow of religion and virtue by the N.I.C.E. technocracy as a spiritual battle—one between angels and demons, or truth and deception.



- Finally, Dr. Turley highlights the irony in Lewis' book. N.I.C.E., a bastion of modern technology and science, is defeated by King Arthur's heir and Merlin—significant characters of the medieval world. *That Hideous Strength* answers the concerns of *The Abolition of Man*.