



How to Develop and Maintain a Christian Worldview through C.S. Lewis's Essay: *"The Poison of Subjectivism"*

by Joseph A. Kohm, Jr.

Founder of Kohm Associates, Inc.

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It can be difficult for serious readers of C.S. Lewis to pick out that one favorite book, poem, essay, or letter. Lewis's writing is magnificent in both its depth and scope. Are you looking for adventure? Try the Chronicles of Narnia or the Space Trilogy. Are you looking for solace? Try *A Grief Observed*. Do you wonder what he thought of Jane Austen? See a 1952 letter to his friend Bede Griffiths. (Lewis liked her, by the way.)

For me, and I suspect for many people, the writings of C.S. Lewis have become an important supplement in my daily walk with God. Lewis himself knew the importance of reading God's Word daily and spending time in prayer and reflection. These are hallmarks of the mature believer. Followers of Christ also need to be equipped to navigate and live out their faith in a culture that is increasingly secularized. Many have argued that we are living in a post-Christian era. It is critical, therefore, to develop and maintain a Christian worldview where, with the help of the Holy Spirit, believers put every thought through the independent filter of our Christian faith.

My favorite Lewis piece is the essay, "The Poison of Subjectivism," which can readily be found in *Christian Reflections*. I've read and reread it dozens of times, and it has done more to shape my worldview than anything else save God's Word. Though published almost seventy years ago, here Lewis warns us of the "apparently innocent idea . . . that will certainly end our species (and, in my view, damn our souls) if it is not crushed; that fatal supposition that men can create values, that a community can choose its 'ideology' as men choose their clothes."¹ Today we've been told

by professional moralists like Dr. Phil and Oprah that we can look within ourselves to find the values necessary to make the right decisions. Good, or God, can be found within each person based on his or her own individual feelings or preferences. But by reading "The Poison of Subjectivism," believers can understand the fallacy of this thinking and lay a foundation for a solid Christian worldview.



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Prophetically, Lewis begins by warning us to beware of those who want to overthrow "traditional judgement of value" in the hope of finding something more "real or solid on which to base a new scheme of values."² Just in the past twenty years there have been seismic shifts within society at large on issues such as marriage, sexuality, and the role of government. Shifts are not limited to secular society; churches and denominations struggle with doctrinal purity while fighting off the influences of relativism, individualism, and pluralism.

Lewis further warns that we can be conditioned to approve what reformers want society to believe is "good." This can be done through "psychological manipulation of infants, state education and mass propaganda."³ Today we can see this happening by the almost irresistible forces of technology, both visual and audible. According to a recent study cited in *Charisma* magazine, the average seventeen-year-old has spent 63,835 hours either watching movies, videos, and television programs or playing video games, com-

pared to only two thousand hours spent with parents. The average person sees three thousand advertisements a day! With so many forces trying to shape and mold our minds and appeal to our senses, it is critical that believers have a Christian worldview. Lewis says in *The Abolition of Man* that “without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”⁴ Reading God’s Word daily, personal prayer time, and interaction and accountability with and from other mature believers is the best way to train our emotions and develop and maintain a Christian worldview.

Those who push back against subjectivism are told that progress is not possible if we maintain a permanent moral standard. To continue with “an immutable moral code is to cut off all progress and acquiesce in ‘stagnation.’”⁵ As the shadows grow longer over our world, objective observers can see that society is always seeking to remove the nearest restraint, in the name of fairness, freedom, or individual liberty. Once a barrier has been eradicated, the collective forces of popular culture seem to set their sights on the next barrier. Lewis, however, reminds us that “except on the supposition of a changeless standard, progress is impossible.”⁶ Or, as he says, if the train station is as mobile as the train, how can the train make any progress toward it? This is why a Christian worldview is critical; it is our train station, our independent, immutable measuring stick, without which we can do no measuring.

Where can believers and society at large go to find that changeless, immutable standard on which to base worldview? This question has already been asked and answered. Two thousand years ago, Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). It is a question many are still asking today, including many who claim to believe in and follow Jesus yet live in a way that seems diametrically opposed to what He teaches. Fortunately Jesus has told us what truth is. In John 14:6 He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” In the introduction to the Gospel of John we are told that “truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17 (NIV)). Jesus is who we are to base our worldview on.

But what does this mean specifically? If society and culture are anchored to a permanent moral standard, isn’t progress impossible? Perhaps the most important lesson from “The Poison of Subjectivism” is that “real moral advances . . . are made *from within* the existing moral tradition.”⁷ Once we understand that Jesus is our standard, our mission is to ensure that our thoughts, views, and beliefs (our worldview) come nearer and nearer to him. This is real progress. It in-

volves more than asking, “What would Jesus do?” It means going deeper by putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27) and letting Him live within and through us (Gal. 2:20) with the help of the Holy Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis.

“The Poison of Subjectivism” is both a challenge and a comfort. It is a challenge in that we are warned about the direction society and individuals will take when theoretical errors remove ordinary checks to evil. Readers will be amazed at Lewis’s foresight as he accurately peers into the future and diagnoses our current condition with laser-like precision. And yet there is also comfort. We are reminded that “what lends divinity to all else, what is the ground of all existence, is not simply a law but also a begetting love, a love begotten . . .”⁸ It is here that we find the Source and maintenance of our worldview.

Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 73.
2. *Ibid.*, 74.
3. *Ibid.*, 81.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 36.
5. “The Poison of Subjectivism”, p. 76.
6. *Ibid.*, 76.
7. *Ibid.*, 77.
8. *Ibid.*, 80.

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8001 Braddock Road, Suite 301 • Springfield, VA 22151
703/914-5602
www.cslewisinstitute.org

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