

## C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

### Small Group Participant Guide

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*"This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace."*

## SET 3 - Session 3 – Postmodernism

### Introduction (from CSLI)

#### Can You Really Know Anything?

The cultural change from modernism to post-modernism has been the occasion of much discussion and writing. Even though the extent of this change can be questioned, there is no doubt that there have been profound shifts. Those of a post-modern persuasion have come to question whether we can have an objective or true view of reality at all. They are suspicious of any account of the world that would claim to be all-encompassing (or absolute or “totalizing”). Since believers maintain that the gospel is “true,” what can be said to the post-modern school of thought? Since this is such a massive topic with many complexities, this lecture attempts to narrow the field by looking at some ways C.S. Lewis might agree or disagree with this philosophy.

## Lecture Synopsis

### Synopsis: Lecture III – Postmodernism: Can You Really Know Anything?

This lecture explores the rise and challenges of postmodernism, particularly its deep skepticism toward objective truth, reason, and grand narratives. The speaker likens postmodernism to a cultural version of Freudian suspicion—deeply distrustful of motives, language, and claims of truth. Jean-François Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives,” meaning a distrust of overarching truth claims like those found in Christianity, science, or historical ideologies. This suspicion, however, ironically assumes the evil of oppression without providing a moral basis for condemning it—revealing internal contradictions in postmodern thought.

Key thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty are introduced. Foucault viewed knowledge as power and history as fiction. Derrida championed deconstruction, denying any fixed meaning or transcendent truth. Rorty dismissed ethical claims as mere sentiment. These positions lead to a world where rhetoric triumphs over reality (“whoever spins best wins”), and where any claim to truth is viewed as a grasp for power.

C.S. Lewis, though not alive during postmodernism’s height, is brought in as a thoughtful voice both affirming and critiquing aspects of it. Lewis acknowledged that all knowledge is perspectival and that reality is “iconoclastic”—constantly shattering our illusions. Yet he firmly believed in objective truth, the limits of relativism, and the dangers of abandoning reason.

The lecture concludes that while postmodernism raises valid concerns about cultural biases and the limits of knowledge, it overcorrects—undermining truth, ethics, and communication itself. It warns against tying one’s beliefs to fleeting cultural fashions and encourages a reasoned yet humble engagement with others, using stories, questions, and imagination to challenge inconsistent views and open doors to the gospel.

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## Ten Life Applications

### 1. Affirm Truth Even in a Culture of Doubt

Application: In a world that questions everything, confidently affirm that objective truth exists and is found in Christ.

Example: When a friend says, “Truth is just a matter of perspective,” you can respond, “Some things may be subjective, but not everything—some truths, like love and justice, must be real to mean anything.”

Exercise: Make a list of 3 objective truths you hold as a Christian (e.g., God exists, Christ rose from the dead, all people have value). Reflect on why each one matters to your daily decisions.

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### 2. Ask Disarming Questions Instead of Giving Quick Answers

Application: Use thoughtful, open-ended questions to help others reflect more deeply rather than trying to win arguments.

Example: Instead of saying, “Your worldview is self-refuting,” ask, “If all truths are relative, should I take that statement as

absolutely true?"

Exercise: Write down 3 common objections to Christianity and draft a sincere question you could ask in response to each.

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### **3. Recognize the Power of Perspective**

Application: Be aware that your culture, upbringing, and personal story shape how you see the world.

Example: A friend from another country interprets a passage of Scripture differently than you. Rather than correcting them immediately, you listen to understand.

Exercise: Journal about one spiritual truth or Bible verse that has taken on deeper meaning because of your life experience.

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### **4. Resist the Temptation to “Chase Trends” in Belief**

Application: Don't tie your faith to what's popular or fashionable. Truth doesn't expire.

Example: When the latest book or podcast questions historic Christianity, you evaluate its claims critically instead of jumping on the bandwagon.

Exercise: Look up a Christian teaching that has endured for centuries. Study why it has remained vital over time.

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### **5. Use Story and Imagination to Communicate Truth**

Application: Since postmodern people often respond more to stories than propositions, learn to share the gospel through narrative.

Example: Instead of leading with a list of doctrines, you tell how God changed your life during a time of doubt.

Exercise: Write a short testimony or parable that communicates a truth about God's love or redemption in your life.

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### **6. Appreciate Truths Found in Other Perspectives—But Test Them**

Application: Acknowledge insights from other worldviews without compromising biblical truth.

Example: A postmodern thinker may rightly say history is shaped by the storyteller. You can affirm that, while also saying God is the Author of the true story.

Exercise: Choose one idea you've encountered in culture or literature that challenges your faith. Explore what part of it contains truth, and what must be corrected biblically.

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### **7. Pursue Humble Confidence, Not Arrogant Certainty**

Application: Stand firm in your beliefs, but remain teachable and aware of your limitations.

Example: You admit you don't have all the answers, but you trust in the One who does.

Exercise: Reflect on a time when you were wrong about something you believed strongly. How did God use it to humble and grow you?

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## 8. Engage with Culture through the Lens of Scripture

Application: Instead of retreating from culture or blindly accepting it, examine trends and ideas through God's Word.

Example: After watching a movie that denies moral absolutes, you discuss with a friend how the story reflects a hunger for justice that only makes sense if good and evil are real.

Exercise: Pick a popular book, film, or song. Ask: What worldview does it express? What truth or lie does it promote?

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## 9. Read Old Books to Broaden Your Perspective

Application: Combat "chronological snobbery" by learning from voices outside your time and culture.

Example: You read Augustine or C.S. Lewis and find wisdom more grounded than the latest viral article.

Exercise: Choose a classic Christian book this month and note three ways it challenges your modern assumptions.

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## 10. Share Christ with Both Reason and Relationship

Application: Postmodern listeners are drawn to authenticity—live the truth and explain it.

Example: A coworker is more moved by how you handle suffering than by your theological arguments, but your reasoning confirms what they see in your life.

Exercise: Pray for one person who needs both your friendship and your testimony. Commit to showing both over the next 30 days.

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**STUDY QUESTIONS (from CSLI)**

1 | How does postmodernism view faith and reason?

2 | How can you describe postmodernism in a nutshell?

3 | What are some of the secondary themes associated with this view?

4 | How might C.S. Lewis agree with some of these ideas?

5 | How might C.S. Lewis disagree with this approach?

6 | Do you have to give up reason when talking to a postmodernist?

7 | How can stories help in this debate?

**BUILDING FAITH CONVERSATIONS**

1 | Is Radical Suspicion a Livable Way to See the World?

2 | Can a Worldview That Rejects Metanarratives Still Critique Injustice?

3	<b>What Does It Mean to Say “All Reality Is Iconoclastic”?</b>
4	<b>How Does Cultural Perspective Clarify—and Distort—Truth?</b>
5	<b>Are Self-Refuting Ideas Always Obvious to Those Who Hold Them?</b>
6	<b>What Are the Risks of Replacing Truth with Power?</b>
7	<b>Why Might the Church Be Especially Vulnerable to Cultural Fashions?</b>
8	<b>How Does Chronological Snobbery Shape Modern Faith Doubts?</b>
9	<b>Can We Critique Our Own Culture from Within It?</b>
10	<b>Why Might Questions Be More Effective Than Arguments Today?</b>



## SAMPLE ARGUMENTS FROM THIS LECTURE

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- **5C Framework #1 — “Suspicion of Truth”**

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### 1. Context

Our culture is deeply suspicious of truth claims, assuming they are driven by hidden motives or power. Statements like “That’s just your truth” are common.

### 2. Conflict

If all truth claims are merely expressions of power or perspective, then no belief—including the claim that “all truth is relative”—can be trusted. Radical suspicion undermines itself.

### 3. Clarification

As C.S. Lewis observed, denying objective truth requires using reason to argue against reason. The postmodern critique rightly exposes arrogance, but it overcorrects by denying the possibility of knowing anything at all.

### 4. Christ-Centered Response

Jesus does not impose truth through coercion but invites trust through self-giving love. At the cross, truth and humility meet—God reveals Himself not through domination, but sacrifice.

### 5. Call

Instead of rejecting truth claims outright, consider Jesus’ invitation: “*Come and see.*” Test His life, words, and resurrection as a truth meant to heal, not control.

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- **5C Framework #2 — “Incredulity Toward Metanarratives”**

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### 1. Context

Postmodernism resists grand stories that explain all of reality, viewing them as oppressive and totalizing.

### 2. Conflict

Ironically, rejecting all metanarratives becomes a metanarrative itself—one that cannot explain why oppression is truly wrong or justice truly good.

### 3. Clarification

The lecture shows that while some grand stories have been abused, the problem lies not in having a story, but in having a false one. Humans inevitably live by some overarching narrative.

### 4. Christ-Centered Response

The gospel is a metanarrative, but unlike others, it centers on a God who enters suffering, bears injustice, and redeems rather than dominates. Jesus’ story explains both the brokenness we see and the hope we long for.

### 5. Call

Ask not whether you live by a story—but which story you trust to define reality, meaning, and hope.

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- **5C Framework #3 — “Perspective Without Relativism”**

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### 1. Context

Postmodern thought emphasizes that all people see reality through cultural and personal perspectives.

### 2. Conflict

If perspective eliminates objectivity entirely, then learning, correction, and moral progress become impossible.

### 3. Clarification

The lecture (drawing on Lewis' *toolshed* analogy) shows that different perspectives can reveal different aspects of the same reality. Perspective does not cancel truth—it can deepen understanding.

### 4. Christ-Centered Response

In Christ, God enters human perspective without being limited by it. Jesus reveals truth from within history, culture, and relationship—making truth knowable, not abstract.

### 5. Call

Rather than choosing between certainty and humility, follow Christ, who invites us into growing understanding grounded in truth and love.

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Note: C.S. Lewis Institute provides this course at no charge. They are supported by faithful friends who give of their time, expertise, prayers, and finances to further the work of the institute. You can partner with CSLI through this link: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/give/>

## Set 3 - Lecture 3

(0:17 - 6:33) We're ready to address another session that's very much related to the last. We looked at the idea of wish fulfillment or the more Freudian new atheist critique of religion as some kind of psychological construct, some kind of mild dementia or whatever they would want to call it. It's very much along the lines of Freud's suspicion of any religious belief.

He's suspicious of any of our thoughts, like the Freudian slip often gives people an insight as to what's going on inside them. So he's very suspicious of a lot of the motives and words and thoughts and motives that we have. That's why you undergo exhaustive psychotherapy to find out all the deep-rooted things that come from your unconscious.

Well, I would suggest that the postmodernism, which is the subject we're going to address in this session, is also a Freudianism, this Freudian suspicion only raised to the level of the culture. In fact, I think the central definition as we'll see of postmodernism might be really rooted in this kind of suspicion at its very root. And what I'd like to do, I mean, it's a massive subject.

Many people think that right now postmodernism can't even be defined. And I'm going to at least try to give you some thoughts about a definition or definitions from some of the leading advocates. It's not going to be at all exhaustive.

There are major books, obviously, to go back and read the primary texts of a lot of the postmodern leaders or thinkers, such as Michel Foucault or Richard Rorty or Jacques Derrida or others, would be a good exercise. Plus, you'll see a list at the end of your outline of books that could be read on this subject. There are a lot of magnificent books that both lay out the history of this and how it came to be and define some of the characteristics.

So I can't do all of that here, but I still think that what I can give you might be helpful. The angle through which I'm going to come to it is through C.S. Lewis on postmodernism. And that's in many ways anachronistic, because C.S. Lewis did not live during the full flowering of postmodernism, although what I argue is a lot of the roots were there.

And I'm going to speculate about how he might respond to this new movement. So before we begin this, let's offer this to the Lord in prayer.

Lord, thank you for this time.

Thank you for the minds that you've given us. You've called us to love you with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. You've called us to take every thought captive to Christ.

You've called us to have the mind of Christ. And we pray that we might come to love you with our hearts and also with our minds. I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Amen.

Well, postmodernism, what we're going to look at today is that minus faith, minus reason equals postmodernism. It's not that postmodernism doesn't have a place for faith and reason, but it does deny that there is any objective truth to faith or any objective ability of reason to know truth.

So that is minus any objective faith or objective reason. Although C.S. Lewis lived before the full flowering of postmodernism, he certainly would be an opponent of its denial of objective truth. Yet at main points he would agree with or make observations similar to what postmodernism says.

So we're going to give a quick sketch that will be not fully adequate. What I've found is that all conceptualization involves oversimplification. All conceptualization involves oversimplification.

If you start with all the complexity, things become incoherent. If you start with at least very simple ideas, you can always graduate to more and more complexity. So this would be an introduction to some of the main ideas associated with postmodernism and some of the lines along which you could respond to it.

So what I want to look at first is what is postmodernism, and secondly, where would C.S. Lewis agree with some aspects and where might we agree with certain truths that are present there and where might he also, where might we also disagree with some of these ideas. So that's going to be where we're going to head in this time. Well, what is postmodernism? I want to start first of all with a playful definition of it.

There's a book by David Leman called Signs of the Times. One of the methodologies of postmodernism, deconstruction, which is to get down beneath text, to read against the grain, to get down to the motives of the writer, whether those motives might be racist, sexist, ethnocentric, whatever. And so you try to go first to be suspicious of the writer and go down and try to find what are the driving motifs of that person's thought.

So that's the deconstructionist methodology. But basically what Leman does is playfully to look at that and say, well, how could we define this central methodology of postmodernism and postmodernism itself? Well, he says, well, we could eliminate the con and just call it destructionism. It's essentially a destruction of any kind of objective truth about anything, of morality, of reason, and even of science, which has been the most resistant area to this postmodern philosophy.

(6:33 - 14:19) Or he said, this is the playful part, you could put the accent on the con and say that any attempt to put forward a purportedly objective account of morality or reason is actually a con. It's in the interest of that person's power or their group's power. So you ought to be suspicious of anybody that tries to pass off on you any kind of truth.

In fact, Léotard, who's an advocate of postmodernism, defines postmodernism in a phrase. At least he thinks this is at the very root. And if you get this idea, you'll at least get a central motif of postmodernism.

It's right along these lines. And he defines postmodernism as an incredulity towards metanarratives. An incredulity towards metanarratives.

If you're able to understand this idea, you'll get the main thought. Incredulity means suspicion. So that you're very suspicious about what? Very suspicious when anybody gives you a metanarrative.

Now what's a metanarrative? A metanarrative is a story. A metanarrative is a grand story. It's a story that claims to be all-encompassing in terms of its view of reality.

Like Christianity is a metanarrative. A grand story that covers everything from beginning to end. Islam or Judaism incorporate that kind of story.

Maybe even Marxism can be thought to be a grand metanarrative. And why are postmodernists suspicious or incredulous towards metanarratives? Well, I think the problem is because these metanarratives end up being oppressive. End up oppressing people because they're all-encompassing.

They're totalizing. They're totalitarian, you might say, in their perspective. And notice the implicit assumption there that the problem with these metanarratives is that they're oppressive.

And that would seem to lead to the implication that oppression is bad or evil. And of course that would be a problem since postmodernism denies that there's anything objectively wrong or evil or bad about the world. So there may even be at the very beginning here a contradiction that makes it self-refuting.

Somehow oppression is a bad thing. But yet there's no basis on which a postmodernist can say really that anything is bad. Well, there are various ways that we could address this idea.

We could address some of the, say, grandfathers or more distant ancestors of this movement, such as Marx in his social analysis. Provide some of the foundations for this postmodern perspective. Nietzsche has certain ideas that in many ways it's a very Nietzschean way of looking at reality with a little twist.

Wittgenstein's a father of logical positivism that in the end, through all of his analysis of language, ends up doing away with the classical quest of philosophy in order to reduce philosophy to talk about talk. It's essentially all we have left to do, because we can't discover the more ultimate answers to the philosophical questions, is to analyze our language. And some of the more contemporary modern-day advocates of this perspective were rooted in this background, like Michel Foucault, came up in Paris and was, say, influenced by Sartre and by many others in his perspective.

And he maintained that history is fiction and knowledge is power, and we'll come back to that in a second. Jacques Derrida was anti-logocentrism, meaning not words itself, but meaning. He didn't believe that there was meaning or that there was any such thing, he would say, as a transcendent signifier.

There wasn't any kind of reference point by which we can judge anything to be meaningful. So I suppose that leads to the implication that life is meaningless, as some of the existentialists such as Sartre and Camus actually put forward, or we have to just make up our own meaning. But then we can't take our meaning and impose that meaning upon someone else.

So that's Derrida. He does maintain, interestingly, that he does put forward this deconstructionism as his philosophy, that we need to get down under these philosophies because we can see that they are oppressive. And he said deconstructionism is justice, that the reason that we pursue this deconstructing of texts and narratives is in the interest of justice, but he's just denied that there's any transcendent signifier by which we can objectively judge whether there's anything really good or evil, just or unjust.

So anyway, Derrida was one of the more immediate founders of postmodernism. Richard Rorty taught for a number of years at the University of Virginia and then later at Stanford. And he was the father of a new kind of pragmatism.

And we'll mention him at various points along the way. I just wanted you to at least have an awareness quickly of some of the cast of characters that are part of this discussion. Here are some of the tenets of this postmodern perspective in a quick review.

There's no objective view of reality. We are shaped by our culture. We can have objectivity, in quotes, by our own cultural standards, however we define it, but there's no transcultural or supercultural objectivity.

We can't somehow or another get above our culture, since we're determined by it, and be able to see objectively or make objective judgments about any other culture, or perhaps even about our own culture, because we come out of it. We're determined by it. Because we're culturally determined, we can't judge another culture.

Nietzsche contributed this among many other things, that there are no facts, only interpretations. That there are no facts, only interpretations. Pretty radical view.

Or Foucault says, history is fiction. History is written from the perspective of the culture, race, or gender of the writer. What is historic is totally subjective.

It depends upon the bias of the writer. That, say, people of color have been ignored by people that are white and western. So that often people of color are not included in the accounts of what's historic.

Many feminist departments have rightly pointed out that sometimes women are neglected in the whole history and the writing of history. So there's a certain truth that your perspective does influence what you see. So there's certainly truth all along the way here.

(14:23 - 19:13) We could also say with Foucault, Foucault says this, that knowledge is power. He maintains we ought to be suspicious of anybody who claims to give us truth. They're out to further their own and their group's vested interests.

Rorty maintains that ethical claims are mere sentiment. There are, for instance, he says, no neutral grounds on which we can condemn the Holocaust. And we'll come back and address that a little bit later.

This is just a sampling, a little spread of some of the ideas that are part of this. Derrida, as I mentioned, says that deconstruction is justice. We ought to explore and find the contradictions in every piece of literature so we can uphold justice and avoid injustice.

But again, there's no basis to really judge what's just or unjust. And he says the one thing that we cannot deconstruct is deconstructionism. Somehow exempts his view from that same methodology, which you might wonder why.

Can't we turn deconstruction, deconstructionism on the deconstructionists who wonder what their motives are. Can't we be suspicious of what their motives are since they're being suspicious of everybody else's motives. Another author, Stanley Fish, wrote a classic essay where he essentially argues that whoever spins best wins.

Since there's no objective truth, all we have is rhetoric. So we need to put our own spin upon things. And make sure you do a good job, Fish says.

Whoever spins best wins. Make sure it's you. So that whoever is able to use rhetoric most effectively can win the most adherence.

Perhaps the illustration that would be of interest here is the illustration of a tree. This tree is the full development of faith and reason. Now you might come along and dwarf the tree and say, well, faith and reason have some place but very little.

Or you could hack off certain branches and say, I like certain arguments but not others. Or you could chop the tree off at its trunk and say, well, let's do away with this all these apologetic type arguments. Or you could dig up the roots.

Let's get rid of foundational assumptions. This is what many people in the postmodern and post-liberal and the emerging church are doing. Let's get rid of some of these foundational assumptions.

But postmodernism comes along and not only digs up the roots but cements the whole so that nothing can ever grow there again. And there's at least good reason to wonder whether since this is the end of philosophy and since there are so many tensions and I think actual contradictions as we'll see within their system, whether this position is stable. And I don't think in the end that it is.

In fact, there's reason to think that postmodernism is on the wane. I had a friend that I knew from Oxford, spent months with him over there a couple of years ago that just studied for four years philosophy in Paris at a secular school. He said they don't even use the word postmodern there anymore even though Foucault and Derrida came from there.

They're just talking about contemporary philosophy. The fashion is not any longer postmodern. It's not the new kid on the block.

It's not the fashionable thing to hold. Another friend went to a philosophy conference over in Europe and they didn't use the word postmodern once. Yet the fashion in America is to use that word, especially within the Christian church, especially within the emerging church.

One noted scholar said that perhaps postmodernism has its last bastion in the evangelical church. Schaefer says perhaps the church is the last to pick up the cultural trends and the last to hold on to them well into their own demise. So the real question is whether postmodernism has a limited shelf life, whether it will pass by the scene.

And I think it will. It's certainly with us in some forms or another for a while, at least for this next generation. But I think there's good reason to think that there's that which is post postmodern, that which will come out of the postmodern perspective.

(19:13 - 27:09) One interesting thing that we've looked at already is the new atheism is the revenge of modernism. They are disdainful of the postmodern perspective and they think there is objective truth and reason and science that can prove that atheism is true and religion is false. So they're very consciously rationalist or they're into scientism, that science is our main idea of truth.

And they know all about the postmodern and they've rejected it and moved beyond it. So the question is, where's the culture headed? There is for instance atheist camps for kids, high school kids, to train them in atheism where you go away for a week or two weeks in the summer. You can find that on the internet, go into atheist camps and you'll find that all over the place.

Or on college campuses, there are rites and rituals where this new atheism is encouraging people to be de-baptized. So if they've been baptized in the past, they will actually blow off the waters of baptism. They'll take a hair dryer and actually use it as part of their ritual.

I got this from the Coalition for Christian Outreach newspaper. And basically the air that blows the water off is reason, which is interesting because the postmodern has a disdain for reason and any kind of objective reason. Yet reason is coming back in fashion even on college campuses right now.

So there's at least a reason to think that it's more complex than we think it is. So certainly you have that new age and neo-paganism and many other things that are out there as well. So it's becoming a more complex situation.

Certainly the whole culture is not monolithically postmodern. And postmodernism, since it's the end of philosophy in some ways, I think is very unsatisfying. It doesn't allow you a basis to provide an ethical critique of society.

Like for instance, radical feminists have been upset at postmodernists because it will not allow them to say that the oppression of women is wrong, among other things. It doesn't allow you to give a critique of anything with any kind of objective meaning to your statement. Alright, well where might C.S. Lewis agree with postmodernism and where might he disagree? I think with any particular philosophy that gains a wide number of adherents, there has to be a significant amount of truth that's there in order to give it plausibility.

And I would say that there is both honey and hemlock in a lot of cultural writing and even within Christian writing. The honey is God's truth. Hemlock is that which is poisonous or twisted or distorted.

And we need to have discernment to be able to sort out the honey from the hemlock, the truth from the error in some of these different perspectives. But there are truths in all these perspectives. The more you read other philosophies, especially philosophies that have gained a lot of followers, you'll find certain truths that make it appealing.

You need to be able to understand what those truths are in order to be able to effectively address questions to the overall system itself. So, C.S. Lewis might agree at various points with this perspective. And where might he agree? Well, Lewis would first of all agree that there are limits to knowledge.

And this perhaps is one of the important things that postmodernism underlines. He says, reality is very odd. Ultimate truth must have the characteristic of strangeness.

We're finite people. We don't have a God's eye perspective on reality ourselves. Although revelation can give us something of that.

Although not perfectly, we don't become God. We certainly can see through glasses that God gives us. In any case, there are limits to knowledge and it's important to realize that.

Lewis also argues that there's a truth to perspectivalism. Another way to talk about postmodernism is that it views things through perspectives, your own cultural perspective. And there are different perspectives on which we can view life.

In fact, Lewis has a great illustration of what he calls the meditation on a toolshed. It's a great little, it's one of these little essays again that's very memorable because it creates a picture in your mind that you can't forget. And the picture is he went out on a sunny day and walked out to a toolshed.

And he opened the door and he saw in that toolshed a shaft of sunlight that came through a crack in the ceiling. And you can imagine that shaft of light that came out and it kind of gets larger as it goes down and there's dust in it coming down. He says that's one perspective of the way you can view the world.

You can look at that shaft of light. I suppose you could analyze it. You could draw it.

You could measure it. You could analyze it in terms of laws of physics. You could do all kinds of objective studies of what you see within that toolshed.

You can look at that shaft of light and everything there. But then he said there's another perspective on that shaft of light. And that is by looking along the shaft of light.

And that happens when you come in to the toolshed, go up to the crack and look along the shaft of light. And you see outside the sun, the trees, the birds, the clouds. And you see things along that shaft of light.

And that was a very important idea for C.S. Lewis. This difference between looking at which is the preferred form of analysis in much of secular culture is analyzing, objective analysis of things. But then there's this other perspective of looking along, actually participating in life and enjoying it.

And that's the looking along aspect of life. So there are different perspectives. And he even argues, interestingly, that there are times where it's difficult to both look at and look along at the same time.

For instance, if you're in a romantic relationship, you can look along and participate and get in the flow of it. But if you start analyzing it, look at it, you have to detach yourself a little bit from it. So it's hard to both be in it and be looking at it at the same time.

And perhaps that problem's there with regard to other things in life as well, as we could look at if we had time to discuss it. In any case, there are different perspectives through which we can see things. And that's a valuable insight of postmodern ideas.

There's perspective with regard to history, as we also already mentioned. For instance, Lewis writes a book called *The Discarded Image*, which is about the medieval worldview. And what he says is that the medieval worldview was coherent and splendid.

Its only defect, he said, is that it's not true. And here's what he says. He says, no model is a catalog of ultimate realities, and none is mere fantasy.

(27:10 - 28:36) Each reflects the prevalent psychology of an age, almost as much as it reflects the state of that age's knowledge. It's not impossible that our own model will die a violent death. Then he uses what, for Lewis, as we mentioned, usually has great pictures or metaphors they can look at in terms of your imagination.

He uses the analogy of a good lawyer in a courtroom. A good cross-examiner, he says, can do wonders. He will not elicit falsehoods from an honest witness, but in relation to the total truth in the witness's mind, the structure of examination is like a stencil.

It determines how much of the total truth will appear and what pattern it will suggest. So that you have a stencil that you place over a picture, over reality, but the shape of your stencil, the structure of your cross-examination, the types of questions you ask, will determine what you see, such as the prosecution could take a witness, we'll just assume the witness is always telling the truth, and pick out certain aspects of his case by asking certain questions of the witness. We'll

assume the witness is telling the truth here, but the defense could come along and ask another set of questions and draw other sets of truth so you get a fuller picture of what's going on.

(28:37 - 31:43) So the structure of examination, the questions you bring to it, the stencil that you place over history or over reality determines what you see, and that's very helpful. And that's where postmodernism really does understand that your perspective and the kinds of questions you ask and the kind of attitudes you have does determine something of what you see. He also adds another problem with history.

Lewis says, all lines of demarcation between what we call periods should be subject to constant revision. Unlike dates, periods are not facts. Change is never complete and change never ceases.

Nothing is ever quite finished with. It may always begin over again and nothing is quite new. All divisions will falsify material to some extent.

The best one can do is to choose those which will falsify at least. In fact, C.S. Lewis argued, interestingly, when he was, he moved from Oxford to Cambridge at one point in his career and he had, he was given, finally, a full chair in the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Studies there at Cambridge. In his inaugural address he argued, among other things, that the Renaissance didn't happen, or if it did happen, it didn't happen in England, you know, or at least that was the thesis that he put forward, that in many ways that the idea that the Renaissance was something new contradicted what he knew in studying the Middle Ages, that many of the characteristics of the Renaissance were also there in the Middle Ages.

So that the lines, the line of demarcation was not quite as clear as people would have you think. I suppose for convenience you can talk about an increased emphasis on these things, perhaps, but sometimes your lines of demarcation falsify as well as clarify. And I would suggest, by the way, that the line between modernism and postmodernism does the same.

I mean, some people even divide ages this way, like one Thomas Oden says, well, for convenience, he's not saying that this is absolutely the case, for convenience you could say that modernism reigned from 1789 till 1989, till the fall of the Berlin Wall. But then postmodernism has come about from 1989 afterwards. Now, in many ways the roots of postmodernism are a lot earlier.

The first use of postmodern was in the 50s and 60s with regard to architecture, and then developed in other ways along the way. And a lot of the roots were way before that in various philosophical schools that are there. And even then, the postmodern may not be a new era.

In fact, Oden suggests that you might even call postmodernism ultramodernism. It might be the last dying breaths of modernism itself rather than any kind of new era, and then something else will come out of it. So it's not like that the next 200 years are going to be determined by the postmodern necessarily.

(31:44 - 33:15) We don't know what will come about. But to superficially right now define the eras that way may be helpful as far as getting at a new movement, but can too solidify in our mind something that may not be actually true, maybe too simple. Lewis also maintained that we always have to realize that even say with respect to ideas about God, that we need to realize that my God, my idea of God is not a divine idea.

It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it himself. He's the great iconoclast.

God is the great idol smasher. He smashes our more inadequate ideas of himself so we might gain a larger perspective on who he is. There's an old book by J.B. Phillips that was *Your God is Too Small*, and that's certainly true.

Sometimes we have a too small picture of God, and God shatters those ideas. He's the great idol smasher, the great iconoclast. But Lewis goes a step beyond that and says this, this is a very interesting idea, that all reality is iconoclastic.

All reality is iconoclastic. That our ideas about reality and our statements don't quite correspond to the reality itself. And what we need to do is continually be questioning our ideas.

(33:15 - 46:05) For instance, there's a difference between my idea of my wife and my wife. I need to continually stretch my ideas so that I better understand her, or perhaps even better, although I'm sure that that's a quite adequate illustration, even more so as my boys are growing up. What I have is my idea of my boys, but then there's also my boys.

As they're growing older and they're gaining great maturity, I hear statements from them that surprise me. I mean, they continue to grow up and making a whole lot more and more mature statements than I expected out of them. In other words, I can have them in a previous box of where they were at, now they're 15 and 17, of where they were at 9, 10, 11, 12, but each year I need to continue to expand my horizons to better understand who they are.

And that's true with regard to all of reality. I know when I came back from college, my parents still had me in a box of where I was before I went. But we can also have our parents in a box that we had them in when we were little as well, and not expand our perspective about who they are in light of our greater maturity, and so on and so on with regard to lots of aspects of reality.

All reality is iconoclastic. We need to continue to stretch and question our ideas so we come to a more accurate understanding of reality itself. Not that we'll ever have a total grasp, but we can come to increasing approximation of that reality.

I think that one of the things we can do to correct this perspectival problem is to expose ourselves to people from other cultures, for instance, that don't assume the things we assume. I've been involved a lot with people internationally in these last months, and it's very interesting just to see the world through their eyes, or to see America through their eyes. If you live in another country, you realize that they don't think of America perhaps the same way that you do or we do.

And it helps you, and it's not always totally accurate, but it gives you another perspective on things that you say, you know, there's some real truth to what they're saying. So it enables you to see more clearly your own culture by seeing it through other people's eyes. C.S. Lewis said that one of the ways you can correct this cultural blindness is through reading old books.

And he said that one of the things he had to overcome most in order to come to a faith in Christ was his chronological snobbery. He called this chronological snobbery the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age, and the assumption that whatever's gone out of date is on that count discredited. So that was his objection at one point to the faith.

How can I have anything to do with this 2,000-year-old faith? But he came to see that he needed to ask why did it go out of date? Was it ever refuted? If so, by whom, where, and how conclusively? He came to realize that our own age is a mere period which has its own characteristic illusions. And he said we need to let the breezes of the centuries blow through our minds so we can get a perspective on the blind spots we have in our own culture and in our own thinking. So there's a way to correct our perspectives, at least to allow them to be challenged or questioned by earlier perspectives.

In fact, in *God and the Dock*, he says this. It's a good rule after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one until you've read an old one in between. And that's a pretty high standard, you know, one for one.

But he said if that's too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones. Each age has its own outlook. It's especially good at seeing certain truths and especially liable to make certain mistakes.

We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it and weaken our guard against it if we read only modern books. The only palliative or cure is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds.

And this can be done only by reading old books. So he gives us not only the problem of perspective, but a way to begin to cure it, at least to stretch our perspective so we can see things in a broader way. Now, Lewis certainly would disagree with many aspects of postmodernism as well.

He would certainly believe that objective knowledge was possible. In fact, it's worth looking in depth at his book *Abolition of Man* or his essay *The Poison of Subjectivism* or the various other works where he develops this. In fact, his novelized or his fictionalized perspective on this was *That Hideous Strength*, where he looks somewhat at this problem as well.

But Lewis might ask these kinds of questions of the postmodern. How can you really say that it's objective? Are you really saying that it's objectively true to say that there are no truths? If we're all captive to our perspectives, isn't that also a perspective itself? In fact, he might say that you're sawing off the branch on which you're sitting. That in really questioning the objectivity of all knowledge, you're also questioning your own account and whether that's objective as well or whether that just comes out of your own perspective.

So there's a kind of self-refuting quality that they're sawing off the branch on which they're sitting. Interestingly, one postmodern writer says, we are sawing off the branch on which we're sitting, but there's no ground to fall on. And my comment is, well, at least you ought to call the paramedics just in case.

But in any case, that Lewis I think would raise something along these lines. If all reality is a historical social construct, then would not also the postmodern views be a historical social construct? Have they somehow gotten outside on Mount Olympus and somehow gotten above this cultural determination of ideas? And how are they able to give unculturally determined perspective on reality if all ideas are culturally or historically determined? So it doesn't seem that they can really on their own grounds get outside of that determination. So in many ways, it's self-refuting at that level as well.

To come back to another idea, if all metanarratives or all totalitarian or totalizing narratives are suspect because of a will to power, that kind of con that I mentioned earlier, should we not also suspect postmodernism for that same desire for power? In other words, if they paint all other views as out to perpetuate their own power, would that not also be true of their view as well? I mean, postmodernism does have a pretty coherent account for the way things got to be this way. And it does seem to argue that it is oppressive. But you might also wonder whether it's in accordance with their own will to power.

And Stanley Fish, as I say earlier, actually admits that that's so. Very few times you see people be honest enough to admit it. But he does.

There's something of a self-refuting quality there as well. Lewis also might ask, is there any basis in postmodernism to condemn the worst abuses? And I think the greatest problem is, no, that there's not. So there are many more problems that we could point out, but there are some profound tensions in the postmodern perspective.

I think postmodernism in its most innocent form is the attempt to deal with a finitude of knowledge, as I pointed out earlier, and can point us to the complexity of reality itself. And we do need to acknowledge that. We can't think too simplistically about it.

In the end, though, its denial of objective reason is based on reason. Kind of contradiction there. There is a profound influence of culture upon us, but I think it exaggerates the influence of culture.

Is it possible for us to ever get above culture and critique it? They would say no. I'd say it is possible for us to critique our culture. It exaggerates the problem of objectivity.

Objectivity is certainly a problem in all disciplines. Say in science, they have ways of checking objectivity using blind and double-blind experiments and so on and so on to make correction for the kind of subjective judgments we might make. And so it exaggerates the problem of objectivity.

It is possible to make some objective statements. Like we've been objective enough, D. A. Carson points out in his book, *Gagging of God*, to send a man to the moon. It's objectively true, I think we could say, that smoking causes cancer and so on and so on in many other arenas.

So even though there's a difficulty of objectivity, certainly there are many things that we can say are objectively true and many facts about history that I think we can maintain are true. It exaggerates the difficulty of interpretation. Certainly interpretation is a treacherous thing and we can impose our own interpretation on text, but does it mean that no interpretation is any better than any other? Surely that's not the case.

I think we know better than that. It exaggerates the difficulty of cross-cultural communication. Certainly there are difficulties there in language and in different understandings of things, but does that mean we can't have any common ground with people from other cultures? I think not.

Particularly as I'm meeting with a lot of these internationals, there's a common love for Jesus and understanding of who he is and a foundation of scripture that binds us together despite our cultural differences. Even the denial of the meaningfulness of language and words is based upon words and language. The claim to absolute certainly can be oppressive and has been sometimes in history, but the denial of absolutes, which is what postmodernism does, could cause even worse abuses because there's no basis, no strong basis on which you can condemn anything as objectively wrong or evil.

The substitution of power for truth is what postmodernism is advocating, but that can be very dangerous. The substitution of power for truth can be dangerous and could even lead to a loss of freedom. So there's some very severe problems there.

What would Lewis say in the end to postmodernism or those who want to jump on the bandwagon of postmodernism? Here's what he might say, what he does say at one point. He says, if you take your stand on the prevalent view, how long do you suppose it will prevail? All you can say about my taste is that it is old-fashioned. Yours will soon be the same.

You tie your star to the bandwagon of postmodernism and it's going to be passe sooner or later, and maybe sooner rather than later. So it's a problem with following or absolutizing the latest cultural trend. I've seen that a number of different times throughout my life, how one topics the rage and then another and another.

(46:05 - 47:46) Right now the rage is postmodern, but very soon it's going to shift. How soon? Is that going to be a prevalent philosophy? It'd be worth a lot of discussion. So what would Lewis do in responding to the postmodern perspective? Well, I think that you can still reason firmly and gently believing that some of the denials are forced and temporary.

Like get people to explain their perspective and ask intelligent questions. I don't think I would throw syllogisms in their face or give a lot of detailed arguments, but I would get them to understand or feel some of the tensions that are part of their position as you come to understand. And you could just do that through questions.

Sometimes a question will rattle around in people's brain longer than an answer. So you ask questions about some of these contradictions, some of these tensions, without even necessarily putting it as a contradiction. Just say, well, I don't quite see Columbus.

I don't quite see how this fits with that. I don't quite see how you can say that. It seems to me that this is what would follow.

You do it in a less obtrusive way. Don't throw reason in their face, but just ask them to explain what they're talking about. And I think they do wish to be coherent.

If you put the principle of non-contradiction in their face, they might want to walk away from it, but they do think their view is coherent. And they want to put it forward in, I think, a non-contradictory way, even though they wouldn't put it that way. And I think another thing you can do is tell stories, use metaphors.

(47:47 - 49:54) Remember what I said earlier about Lewis. Lewis said, reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning. So that perhaps if you tell good stories or parables, you can get people to think about different aspects of their philosophy in a meaningful way.

Perhaps even reading some novels like Narnia or something else. Some of C.S. Lewis's other works might be a thought-provoking way to do it. Or look at movies and then discuss what the meaning of those movies are.

An interesting one most recently that both deals with a Freudian perspective and somewhat of the postmodern is *The Invention of Lying*. And it is a particular, it's funny in the beginning part because it's in a culture where nobody lies, where people always tell the truth, and this one person learns how to lie. But then he makes up a lie on his mother's deathbed that there is really a life after death and that there is a place where she's going to meet her husband and there's going to be no pain or no difficulty and so on and so on.

And then people find out that this is the case. And of course they assume he's got a revelation and he's always telling the truth. So he has to invent a religion.

He has to invent all this religious system and all these people are listening to him with rapture on their faces and asking him all kinds of questions where he invents all these religious things. It's in many ways a direct assault I'd say on Christianity all along the way. But it's a practical way where you see this wish fulfillment idea put forward in a very blatantly Freudian fashion.

Or maybe postmodern fashion as well. So it's not something that's going to go away and it's something we have to learn to be able to address. Well let's take a break and deal with questions at this point.