

1. Character Education

Learning for Life

[A] man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character.

C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*¹

Of Good Character

Most parents, teachers and school leaders recognize that they are responsible for much more than helping children and young people to acquire skills and knowledge. We understand that a good education concerns more than passing exams and getting grades, although that is important. A good education concerns the cultivation of good character. We do not want children and young people to pass exams and then 'flunk' life; we want them to achieve a personal best in both. A good parent helps their child to become a good person and teachers are *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent) when the child is at school. When teachers and parents teach honesty, justice, kindness, forgiveness, self-discipline, respect, civility, courtesy, responsibility, or determination, they are fostering the sorts of values that form the basis of good character.

When a parent, teacher or school leader encourages a young person to achieve a personal best, to behave kindly and generously, to work well and not to give up when things are difficult, he or she is engaging in character education which enables academic progress to be achieved. It is important to emphasize that character is cultivated in and through schoolwork as well as in other aspects of school life. It is not separate from the rest of the curriculum. The two are mutually dependent. Just as a good builder displays his good character by serving a client well, arriving on time and using his craft skills to build a wall to the best of his ability, so students develop character through their studies, their relationships and their behaviour at school. No right-minded person

wants children and young people to be selfish, arrogant, disrespectful or lazy. We want children to grow up into adults who are the best they can be. A good school seeks to cultivate good character which has been defined as the 'constellation of virtues possessed by a person'. Character education is simply 'the deliberate attempt to cultivate virtue' in students.² But do many schools have character education as a priority? And how do we cultivate good character? Lewis offers penetrating insights with regard to both questions.

The system of schooling Lewis observed was one in which the head, or the brain, was educated for academic success but scant attention was paid to moral and character education. The first chapter of *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis's book on education and schooling, which was originally a series of lectures given to teachers, is entitled 'Men without Chests' because the heads (the intellect) of the students look bigger than their chests (their character). Much current schooling results in the 'atrophy of the chest'³ where character is under-developed through lack of exercise. Fifty years after the death of Lewis, we are currently seeing a resurgence of commitment to character education.⁴ Serious questions are being asked about whether the 'chest', our moral sense, is being educated well. After all, each of us is more than an intellect (a head) and more than an animal with appetite (a stomach) for we have a moral sense and character (a chest). For Lewis, it is our moral character and 'just sentiments' that make us fully human; anything less will lead to the 'abolition of man', the termination of our humanity.

Lewis illustrates the serious points he makes about human nature and schooling in *The Abolition of Man*⁵ in his science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength*⁶. Those with a firm constitution may wish to read a literal description of 'men without chests' in this novel where a severed head is bracketed to a wall and fed by pumps and tubes to keep it 'alive'. The chest and anything else from the neck down have been dispensed with. It is a grotesque and disturbing image. As we are more than a 'brain' or a 'head', education and schooling that only focuses on these will do a disservice to its students, their families and communities. In this book we look at the education of the whole person, understood as spirit, soul and body, and not only what is 'from the neck up'.

The 'Hinge' of the Wardrobe Door: Cardinal Virtues in Character Education

Lewis is best known for the seven novels that make up the *Chronicles of Narnia* for children and the image of Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy entering the world of Narnia through the wardrobe in

Professor Digory Kirk's house in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* is one of the most memorable and lasting images in all of children's literature.⁷ Being in Narnia and accepting the challenge to fight for what is right is a character-building experience for the Pevensie children. Peter and Susan begin by thinking only about themselves and then their need to rescue their brother Edmund from the White Witch; they end up accepting the challenge to battle against injustice and liberate the inhabitants of the land from oppressive rule and tyranny. They develop courage and show determination as they pursue the honourable purpose of freeing the Narnians so they can thrive and prosper rather than live in fear. The right values underpin the educational experience of the Pevensie children in Narnia and as a result they develop virtue and good character. They have to work well together, face their fears and show considerable courage.

The children do not just acquire skills and knowledge in Narnia, they develop good *character*. In Narnia, the children meet Aslan the great lion, the Christ-figure, who saves the traitor Edmund by dying in his place and the Christian message of the tale is well known. Yet the readers of the Narnia novels are not exclusively Christian.⁸ Equally, this book is not exclusively for Christians. It recognizes the importance of the Christian faith to Lewis but much of his contribution to education and schooling will make a great deal of sense to many people. Character education is not just for Christians. After stepping through the wardrobe door and finding themselves in Narnia, the Pevensie children grow in virtue and develop good character but how they get there in the first place is far from a coincidence. The wardrobe is part of the furniture of a Professor's house. Professor Digory Kirk is an expert teacher who 'professes' the right beliefs about children and how they learn best. The children's learning begins in his house. Good homes and good schools should have such excellent teachers and leaders (teaching and school leadership is addressed further in Part 4).

We derive the word 'cardinal' from the Latin word 'cardo' that means 'hinge' and the door to the world of Narnia opens on the hinge of 'cardinal virtues', which are 'pivotal' for everyone. Everything 'hangs' on these virtues; our moral life 'hinges' on them. For Lewis the 'cardinal' virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude are fundamental to good character and he is down to earth and matter of fact in the way he describes them. He explains that Prudence means common sense or right thinking where we use our intelligence and wisdom in the right way. Temperance means doing things to the right degree and he reminds us that people who put clothes or golf or a motorcycle or a dog at the centre of their lives might be just as intemperate as someone who gets drunk.

Justice is summed up by words like 'fairness' and 'honesty' and 'truthfulness' and 'promise-keeping'. Fortitude is 'guts' in the sense of moral strength. Lewis realistically notes that you cannot practice any of the other virtues for very long before you need this last one.⁹

For Lewis, 'the same indispensable platitudes will meet us in culture after culture'.¹⁰ For instance, selfishness tends not to be admired wherever you are in the world. Even when a child says 'It's not fair' he or she is appealing to an innate sense of justice. He asks us to imagine a completely different sort of morality 'where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him'.¹¹ The fact that we do not approve of such behaviour is taken as evidence that we have a shared and innate sense of right and wrong. Giving an example from football (soccer), Lewis argues that 'there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football'.¹² In the 'game' of life we instinctively recognize a 'foul' when we see one. Memorably, Lewis declares: 'The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed of creating a new sun and new sky for it to move in'.¹³

Lewis has recourse to Natural Law (or Moral Law) as the basis for character and moral education.¹⁴ It is this concept, whether Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian or Oriental that Lewis refers to as 'the *Tao*' because it is the Chinese term for the greatest thing or reality: 'It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road'.¹⁵ Choosing a traditional Chinese term signals that Moral Law is not exclusively Christian but universal to humanity (Chapter 2 addresses how Christians see it as God's laws 'written on their hearts'). This is not to be confused with the truth claims and beliefs of different faiths. The lessons we learn from the Narnia novels are 'part of the great moral tradition of humankind, that Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* calls the *Tao*'.¹⁶ Lewis uses terms such as 'righteousness', 'correctness', 'order' and 'truth' to denote the *Tao* and uses the term the 'Law of Nature' to indicate that everyone knows it 'by nature'.¹⁷ It is innate and universal and as such can provide the foundations for moral education in all schools. It is a law like gravity in the physical sciences but with one important difference: we have a choice as to whether we obey it or not. Lewis comments in *Mere Christianity* that, 'We have never followed the advice of the great teachers . . . There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years'.¹⁸

The *Tao* is a law in the sense that certain actions 'merit, our approval or disapproval'.¹⁹ Although 'we learn the rule of Decent Behaviour from parents and teachers, and friends and books' the Law of Human Nature or Natural Law is a real truth that has objective reality.²⁰ Lewis

compares Natural Law to New York City existing quite independently of what people happen to believe about it.²¹ Whether we love the Big Apple or hate it, whether we are attracted to it or repelled by it, it is still there. This is important given the context of schooling. In the U.S.A., the image in the political rhetoric is of the country being a 'patchwork' rather than a 'melting pot' (Obama, 2009).²² In Britain, as in much of the world, 'values appear to be constantly changing' so that 'children are presented with and exposed to all kinds of opinions about right and wrong'²³. When questions are raised about which values it is legitimate for schools to teach when children come from so many different homes and communities, the objective reality of Natural Law is of fundamental importance. Lewis offers us a foundation for moral education upon which different communities can agree. As an Appendix to *The Abolition of Man*, he gives 'Illustrations of the *Tao*' (Natural or Moral Law), eight examples common to different cultures and traditions such as the ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Old Norse, Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Roman, Greek and Native American Indian. A brief summary will help us see the Natural Law upon which moral and character education may be based.

A Summary of the *Tao*

1. The Law of General Beneficence
In negative form, this includes refraining from murder or bringing any sort of misery and suffering upon one's fellows. It includes not being greedy, cruel or telling lies. Keeping this law requires honesty, not hating and not causing hunger or weeping. In positive form, this includes showing kindness and goodwill, doing one another good not evil, enjoying society and human companionship and loving others as oneself.
2. The Law of Special Beneficence
While similar to the first law, this second law is 'special' as it refers to the duties of brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, children as well as rulers. As human beings we have special obligations and owe particular duties of care to those of our closer and wider family.
3. Duties to Parents, Elders, Ancestors
Here good relations between parents and children are described. Honouring one's father and mother by supporting them, caring for them and fulfilling one's obligations to them by showing proper respect, even when they are dead, is prescribed.

4. Duties to Children and Posterity
Here the duties of marrying and having children are given. Providing for the education of the young and respecting children are key requirements.
5. The Law of Justice
Honesty and justice in relationships are singled out here. One must be faithful to one's spouse and not commit adultery. One should not steal and should render to each person his or her rights. Private property is to be respected as such. One should not take bribes or 'bear false witness'; the legal system should not be partial and treat the poor worse than the rich.
6. The Law of Good Faith and Veracity
Fraud, lying and falsehoods are prohibited. Perjury is condemned as is saying one thing and doing another. Keeping good faith and keeping promises are essential elements of this law.
7. The Law of Mercy
The poor, the sick, the disabled, the weak should be cared for. It should be possible for a prisoner to be set free. One should never hit or beat a woman. Widows, orphans and the elderly should be looked after. We must always be tender enough to weep.
8. The Law of Magnanimity
Not only should we not injure, but we should protect others from being injured. We should be valiant rather than cowardly and should defend ourselves against attack – we should fight for our country; if attacked, death is not to be feared.

Teaching the *Tao*

The closest we might get to 'Teaching the *Tao*' is the approach that characterizes the work of Professor Thomas Lickona, for many years Director of the Centre for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) at Cortland, part of the State University of New York. Like Lewis's *Tao*, Lickona's 'Ten Essential Virtues' are 'found in cultures and religions around the world'.²⁴

Lickona's Ten Essential Virtues Summarized from *Character Matters*

1. Wisdom or Good Judgement: knowing when to act, how to act and how to balance the virtues when they conflict – like telling the truth when it will cause hurt.

2. Justice: includes interpersonal virtues such as civility, honesty, respect, responsibility and tolerance – moral indignation in the face of injustice.
3. Fortitude: this is because the right decision is often the hard one – courage, resilience, patience, perseverance, endurance and self confidence are part of fortitude – we develop our character more through sufferings than successes – setbacks make us stronger, as long as we do not feel sorry for ourselves.
4. Temperance: self control and the ability to govern ourselves, to regulate our sensual appetites – pursue legitimate pleasures even in moderation – the power to resist temptation.
5. Love: this goes beyond fairness and justice – love is selfless – willingness to sacrifice oneself, for the sake of another – best summed up in ‘love your neighbour as yourself’.
6. A positive attitude: our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances – we are as happy as we decide to be.
7. Hard work: includes initiative, diligence, goal setting and resourcefulness – an old-fashioned virtue.
8. Integrity: being faithful to moral conscience, keeping our word, standing up for what we believe – to have integrity is to be ‘whole’ so that what we say and do in different situations is consistent.
9. Gratitude: choosing to be thankful is the secret of a happy life – we all drink from wells we did not dig – counting our everyday blessings.
10. Humility: avoiding pride, taking responsibility, apologizing, making amends – not causing harm because we want to feel important.

These essential virtues have much in common with the *Tao* and are important as a basis for moral and character education in a plural society. Books such as *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (1991) and *Character Matters* (2004) by Professor Thomas Lickona are of considerable importance to schools and families.²⁵ It is important to know what can be agreed upon when we live in increasingly plural societies. Arguably:

Despite this diversity, we can identify basic, shared values that allow us to engage in public moral education in a pluralistic society. Indeed, pluralism itself is not possible without agreement on values such as justice, honesty, civility, democratic process, and a respect for truth.²⁶

For Lewis, the entire educational project is fundamentally altered by one's beliefs about the *Tao* or the existence of an objective Moral Law that compels our allegiance:

Hence the educational problem is wholly different according as you stand within or without the *Tao*. For those within, the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in making which the very nature of man consists.²⁷

For Lewis, schooling often fails to nurture the moral character of students or the 'chest', which is the seat 'of emotions organized by *trained habit* into stable sentiments'.²⁸ These 'sentiments' are important to moral education in the virtues and Lewis emphasizes the 'Aristotelian principle that character is formed in large part through habitual behaviour that eventually becomes internalized into virtues (character)'.²⁹

Indoctrination

As soon as 'training' children is mentioned, concerns about indoctrination are often raised in a liberal society. Some teachers seem concerned of being accused of gross professional misconduct and Karen Bohlin makes an important point in this vein:

Our temptation as educators of adolescents in an increasingly pluralistic society is to remain hands-off and assume a non-interference policy when it comes to the topic of moral choices and commitments. We are sometimes inclined to leave older students free to discover for themselves what is best and right and to avoid "indoctrinating" young people with certain moral values. Indoctrination is precisely what many educators fear falling into.³⁰

Too many teachers feel forced to adopt a 'hands off' approach to moral and character education. We need to be aware that when educators decide that morality should be relegated to the private realm and say it is none of their business, that the 'pushers of pornography' and other anti-social vices 'proselytize them in a much larger, much more pervasive scale' and businesses that exploit young people 'are unrelenting in their efforts to pump their messages into the mainstream via internet, billboards and television'.³¹ Of course, children and young people make their own choices but parents and teachers have a moral responsibility to work to cultivate a range of virtues in the children they teach. Aptly, Bohlin quotes a Head teacher who makes the case passionately and with eloquence:

Is it a crime for us to try to influence or persuade them that love is better than violence, gentleness better than force, that it is better to love someone wholly than to use his or her body selfishly. In a society in which rock stars and professional athletes purvey their existential and ethical views, shall educators keep silence?³²

Parenting, teaching and schooling can never be neutral in terms of values; either by commission or omission, values are transmitted in homes and schools and classrooms. Children are always 'trained'. Yet character education, whereby children are taught with the intention that they should acquire certain values and virtues, tends to be viewed with suspicion, and even alarm, by those who emphasize the autonomy of children as the aim of education. In fact, in some quarters, character education is even regarded as an infringement of children's rights. If one of the reasons for the reluctance to teach specific values is that teachers do not want to be accused of indoctrination then we need to appreciate that, taken literally, a 'doctrine' is a 'teaching' and an 'occupational hazard' of school teaching is that one leads learners into particular 'teachings' or 'doctrines'. Schooling is an instrumental practice that seeks to change children in particular ways and to alter the way they think and behave. It seeks to form their opinions and to change their minds on many matters. According to Professor James Arthur, Head of the School of Education at Birmingham University and Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, 'every teacher indoctrinates to some extent, as children do not always understand the reasons why they should believe and act in certain ways even while teachers insist that they should do so'.³³

Cultivating good character takes time as 'certain qualities come very slowly and eventually become either virtues or vices' and Paul L. Holmer explained:

knowing how these virtues (think of them again as habitual ways of being disposed) make a life is to understand that life . . . everyday factors, longings, appetites, aversions, expectations, trusts, confidences, which if they are put together very well, make the person reliable, whole, and a living synthesis.³⁴

Holmer observed that, for Lewis, 'character is a quiet consequence of what we think'³⁵ and the importance of having 'virtuous minds' has been articulated by Philip E. Dow.³⁶

Yet many teachers 'have found subscribing to any set of values

deeply problematic in a pluralistic society' and they often 'commit themselves to nothing in particular – or to a sort of undefined humanism where the only question is one of personal feeling'.³⁷ This is precisely the issue Lewis addresses when he shows that education is not to be derived from subjective, personal feelings but objective truth.

The Non-Neutrality of Schooling

Lewis saw the danger of schooling working to persuade children that morality is subjective and just a matter of taste or opinion. In *The Abolition of Man*, he reviewed an English textbook for secondary (high) schools, which he calls *The Green Book* to preserve its authors' anonymity. It had a green cover and we now know it is *The Study of Language* (1939) by King and Ketley. Lewis showed that even though the student is not overtly or explicitly taught a theory about life or the nature of the world, certain world-view assumptions implicit in this book exert an unseen but profound influence. He argued that the values in the text are so potent precisely because they are latent. The influence of this textbook is immensely subtle and yet clear 'Disapprovals' and 'Approvals' are discerned in the 'real (perhaps unconscious) philosophy' of the authors who reflect 'the whole system of values which happened to be in vogue' in their circles at the time of writing.³⁸ The student who thinks he or she is doing a straightforward English 'prep' or as we might say 'assignment' or 'homework' has no notion that 'ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake'.³⁹ For Lewis the abuse of power by the authors of *The Green Book* rests upon the disturbing truth that 'they are dealing with a boy' who 'cannot know what is being done to him'.⁴⁰ If ever there was a description of indoctrination this is it.

All too often students are unaware of the influence their schooling is having upon them. What Lewis objected to in *The Green Book* is that statements 'of value' are reduced to 'statements about the emotional state of the speaker' or subjectivity.⁴¹ His verdict, with regard to the impact on the student, is that the book's authors, 'while teaching him nothing about letters, have cut out his soul, long before he is old enough to choose'.⁴² The key phrase here is 'before he is old enough to choose' or before he has the maturity to make a conscious choice. Cutting out the soul results in the atrophy of the chest. The student reading *The Green Book* and doing its exercises becomes sceptical about certain traditional values while not being guided to any that are better.

Subjectivism is encouraged rather than the acknowledgment that certain values are objectively good. This is still routinely happening in schools. Jean Bethke Elshtain recalls her daughter being taught, in the fifth grade, in a school in a New England college town, that values were simply 'subjective opinions'; one can see the problem because when she asked her daughter if slavery was 'wrong' the response was 'I think slavery is wrong . . . but that is just my opinion'.⁴³ It is a serious matter 'in an age of human rights *par excellence*' that there are such 'forces at work in our world that undermine the ontological claims of human dignity'.⁴⁴ (Chapter 7 examines the source of 'inalienable' rights).

A further conversation in the home was to be had and it is apt to quote a mother here because Lewis hopes that 'real mothers' and 'real children' will preserve the sanity of the human race.⁴⁵ When children and young people learn about the differences between 'facts' and 'opinions' (or about 'tolerance', for instance) at school, parents should be aware that attitudes are being moulded. Lewis explains that many years after leaving school a person will take one view rather than another as a result of lessons like this. Such a child may be unaware when reading that a theory about life is being taught and yet certain assumptions implicit in texts or teaching can be profoundly influential. Lewis argued that an 'assumption' planted in person's mind when reading a text while at school can 'condition' behaviour 'ten years later' and cause the individual to 'take one side in a controversy' rather than another even though the 'presence' and 'origin' of the assumption is 'unconscious' and 'forgotten'.⁴⁶ The contrast between the subjectivism of King and Ketley and objective truth could not be clearer. Even if we do not focus on value-laden textbooks, the lessons, the curriculum, the processes and procedures of schools, as well as the attitudes and interactions of people within them, all communicate powerful messages to children about what is worth 'worshipping' and what is 'worthless', what is more valuable and what is less valuable. The question is not *whether* homes and schools teach children how to live but *how* they do so and *what* they teach.

Today, school texts still offer a 'portrayal of the world from a mainstream perspective'⁴⁷ and Western culture has its own (increasingly digital) texts that promote and perpetuate specific values. In our time 'a deluge of texts now claim the authority to instruct children on how to participate in childhood and consumer culture'.⁴⁸ These transmit messages about how children and young people should behave, what they should like, what they should

dislike, what is normal and acceptable and what is not. Whereas home and church were once the places where children learned to read and write, now popular culture instructs our children; indeed 'where earlier generations of children were socialized primarily within the boundaries of family, school, religious organization and community, consumer and popular culture is now the principal mode of early childhood socialization'.⁴⁹

If 'the very premise of the modern textbook' is that it should only be 'designed on the basis of psychological theories of instruction', then such a premise might betray the assumption that modern textbooks are somehow neutral.⁵⁰ We should remember that many, in Lewis's day, would have regarded *The Green Book* as 'neutral' and that he had to labour to show how value-laden it was. Today, it is asserted that 'the designers of modern textbooks' focus on instruction 'qua scientific method rather than ideological and moral training',⁵¹ yet what appears to be a 'neutral' focus on skills is the result of specific beliefs about the nature and purpose of schooling.

Evidently, 'no knowledge is neutral but rather is always based on some group's perception of reality and on some group's perspective of what is important to know'.⁵² To those who see schooling as the provision of skills or tools, it might be pointed out that 'embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another'.⁵³ The view of textbooks as a neutral, skills-based and value-free area of education rather than a value-laden and deeply ideological intervention in children's lives may be a symptom of our time. It would seem to parallel views of education which see the function of schooling itself in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than character and values.

The Waterfall

At the beginning of *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis comments upon the incident in literary history of the poet Coleridge at the waterfall, Cora Linn, recounted by Dorothy Wordsworth in her *Recollections of a Tour in Scotland* (1897). It is quoted in *The Control of Language* (1944) by King and Ketley and is worth recounting here:

The waterfall Cora Linn is composed of two falls, with a sloping space, which appears to be about twenty yards

between . . . A lady and gentleman, more expeditious tourists than ourselves, came to the spot . . . Coleridge, who is always good-natured enough to enter into conversation with anybody whom he meets in his way, began to talk with the gentleman, who observed that it was a *majestic* waterfall. Coleridge was delighted with the accuracy of the epithet, particularly as he had been settling in his own mind the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic, sublime, etc., and had discussed the subject with William at some length the day before. "Yes, sir," says Coleridge, "it is a majestic waterfall". 'Sublime and beautiful,' replied his friend. Poor Coleridge could make no answer, and, not very desirous to continue the conversation, came to us and related the story, laughing heartily.⁵⁴

Lewis points out that Coleridge endorses the judgement that the waterfall is 'sublime' but not that it is 'beautiful'. A brief explanation at this point is required. The 'sublime' and 'beautiful' are not the same. According to Longinus,⁵⁵ the 'sublime' is generally regarded as that which inspires awe; for Burke, the sublime is likely to inspire terror as well as awe.⁵⁶ For Kant, what is so terrifying about the 'sublime' is that it has no boundaries.⁵⁷ The waterfall really is sublime and this is not simply a result of the projection of the perceiver's views. Lewis explained:

The reason why Coleridge agreed with the tourist who called the cataract sublime and disagreed with the one who called it pretty was of course that he believed inanimate nature to be such that certain responses could be more 'just' or 'ordinate' or 'appropriate' to it than others.⁵⁸

Our response matters and Lewis declares that 'emotions and sentiments . . . can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform'.⁵⁹ What made Lewis so concerned about *The Green Book* was the emphasis upon the subjectivity of the reader. According to King and Ketley's book: 'When the man said *This is sublime*, he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall . . . Actually . . . he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings'.⁶⁰ Lewis countered the position of King and Ketley and argued:

The man who called the cataract sublime was not intending simply to describe his own emotions about it: he was also claiming that the object was one which *merited* those emotions.⁶¹

What Lewis objects to so strongly is a textbook for schools promoting the general philosophical theory that all values are subjective. What he defends can be summed up as follows:

It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.⁶²

Certain responses really are better than others. In a similar vein, Charles Taylor reminds us that for the ancients, 'the good we love is in the order of things, as well as in the wise soul, aligned with nature'.⁶³ Chris Higgins refers to the gulf between this ancient view and modern values talk:

We moderns are apt to say that something is good because we value it, a crucial and highly problematic reversal of the idea found in the ancients that we cherish something because of its goodness. *In classical ethics, the good is importantly outside and independent of our will, and it is this very independence that compels our allegiance and helps shape our lives.*⁶⁴

Lewis recalls that 'only those who have been *well brought up* can usefully study ethics: to the corrupted man, the man who stands outside *The Tao*, the very starting point for this science is invisible'⁶⁵ and he approvingly refers to Aristotle's view that 'the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought'.⁶⁶

The Tennis Player Analogy

In Latin, education signifies 'bringing up' children and education should be a co-operative venture. Any 'training' in a classroom should be seen in terms of young players needing a coach to develop their talents and bring out the best in them. The best progress is made in character education when children and young people co-operate with trusted adults who have their best interests at heart and act as expert trainers:

What you mean by a good tennis player is the man whose eye and muscles and nerves have been so *trained* by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied on.⁶⁷

When our eldest son, Luke, was ten-years-old, he wanted me to teach him to play tennis. After school we would go to the park near our home and practice. Quite soon he could hit some good

shots. In fact, if we had filmed all of Luke's best shots (and deleted the worst) you would have thought from the footage that he was already a good tennis player. But consistency was the issue. At that stage, Luke could not be *depended upon* to serve well. The difference between ten-year-old Luke and the champion of Wimbledon or the U.S. Open is that the champion, had he come to our tennis court, could have been *depended upon* to get the ball over the net and to have made it land in the right place on the other side. He could be *relied upon* to get it right. Wimbledon champions do not play the odd good shot: they *are* good tennis players. Now Luke plays for his school tennis team because, through training, he has become consistent.

There is much talk in education about enabling students to 'fulfil their potential' but we need to think about the sort of character a young person needs to develop in order to fulfil their potential in life. How a child or young person might be supported and enabled to develop the range of virtues that constitute good character is of critical importance. Holmer explains that developing in this way enables a person to do what he or she could not have attempted previously; it opens up new possibilities:

When courageousness and fortitude become a habit – and all virtues have to be customary rather than single occurrences – the individual becomes strengthened and qualified to do all sorts of things that were otherwise inconceivable. An entire range of behaviour becomes open to such a person, and so too, with the other virtues.⁶⁸

Consistency is the issue. It is possible that a bad tennis player could hit the ball in anger when he has lost his temper and that this shot might even by chance actually cause him to win the game 'but it will not be helping him to become a reliable player'.⁶⁹ Lewis made this clear:

right actions done for the wrong reason do not help to build the internal quality or character called a 'virtue' and it is this quality or character that really matters.⁷⁰

Of course everyone's 'best shots' have at some time or other fallen short. We can help children and young people strive towards consistency but we can guarantee that they will not act virtuously all the time, however good our character education might be. How we offer opportunities for restoration and forgiveness when students do not achieve their potential, often provides invaluable opportunities for character education.

Chapter 1 Study Guide
Tasks and Questions for Discussion

1. What does character have to do with academic success?
2. How helpful is Lewis's tennis player analogy?
3. How does the example from soccer that Lewis uses illustrate Natural Law?
4. Why is the 'atrophy of the chest' such a chronic ailment?
5. Why are the cardinal virtues so important?
6. What is the *Tao* and why is it foundational for character education in all schools?
7. What are the similarities and differences between Lewis's *Tao* and Lickona's 'essential virtues'?
8. How will you seek to cultivate essential virtues with a particular child or group of children over the next year?
9. Why are some people suspicious of character education?
10. How does Lewis use *The Green Book* to demonstrate the non-neutrality of schooling? Can you find an equivalent of *The Green Book* being used today?
11. How does Lewis use the incident at the waterfall to illustrate the importance of objective truth?
12. Which aspects of Lewis's thinking in this chapter will inform your practice?