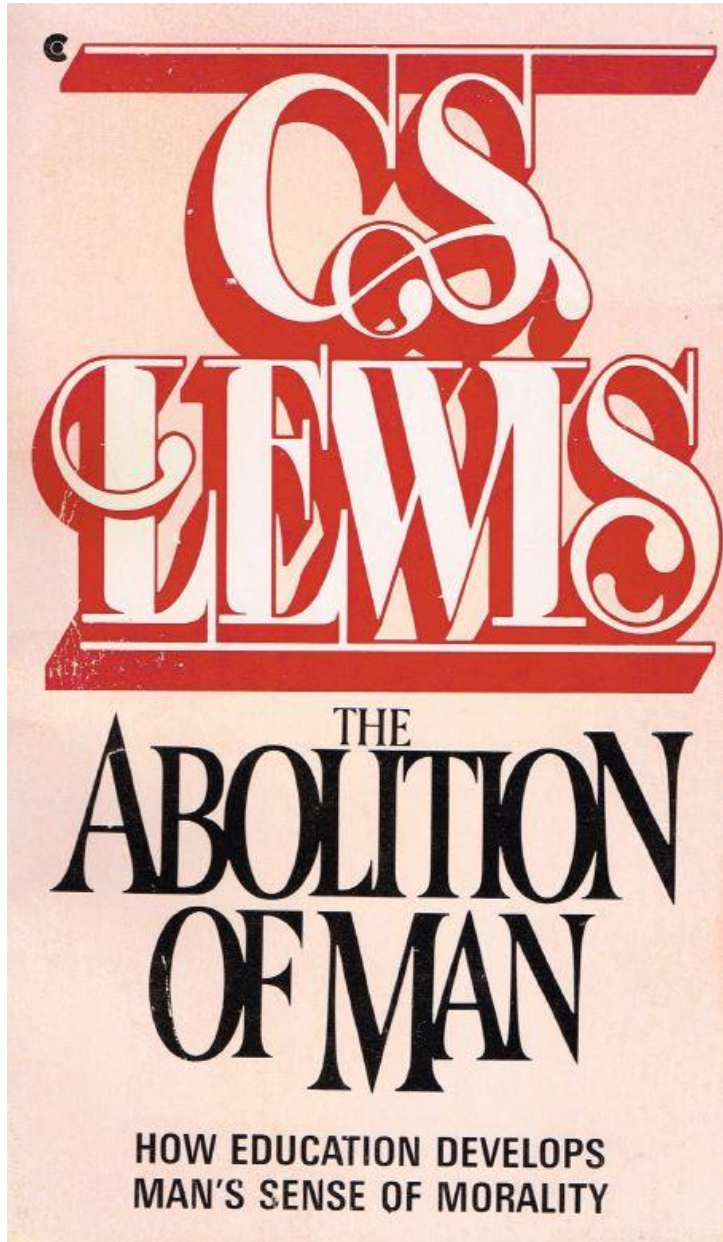


Session 8: “Men Without Chests”: *C. S. Lewis on Education*



“In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”

--C. S. Lewis “Men Without Chests” in
The Abolition of Man (1942)

Elevenses with C. S. Lewis

**“Men Without Chests”:
*C. S. Lewis on Education***

Session 8

November 19, 2017

A quarter century after its publication, Lewis' *Abolition of Man: Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* is singled out for attack in a book by someone who at the time was the best known scientist in the U.S.



**BEYOND
FREEDOM
&
DIGNITY
B.F.
SKINNER**

- “‘What is now under attack,’ said Maslow, ‘is the “being” of man.’ **C. S. Lewis put it quite bluntly: Man is being abolished.**”
“What is being abolished is autonomous man - the inner man, the homunculus, the possessing demon, the man defended by the literatures of freedom and dignity. **“His abolition has long been overdue.”** (pp. 195-196)
- “C. S. Lewis protested : ‘ . . . the power of man to make himself what he pleases means . . . **the power of some men to make other men what they please**’.
This is inevitable in the nature of cultural evolution.” (pp. 201-202)
- “**Environmental contingencies now take over** functions once attributed to autonomous man, and certain questions arise. Is man then ‘abolished’ ? Certainly not as a species or as an individual achiever. It is the autonomous inner man who is abolished, and that is a step forward. **A scientific view of man offers exciting possibilities. We have not yet seen what man can make of man.**” (p. 210)

Plan for the day

- Reaction of a behaviorist to *Abolition of Man*
- Introduction to the book
- Contemporary public education: A discussion with two commentators
- Lewis' educational career
- A summary of Lewis' philosophy of education
- "The Poison of Subjectivism"
- "Men Without Chests"

Introduction to *Abolition of Man*: Why did Lewis' book provoke such a reaction from Skinner decades later, especially given the rather boring subtitle "Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools"?

- "This work seethes with anger. A barely controlled rage permeates its pages." (Alister McGrath)
 - *Why is Lewis so disturbed?*
 - The question of the purpose of education has a profound impact on our lives and our societies.
- The book was written in the midst of World War II.
 - *Why write about education at such a time?*
 - To resist the evils of Naziism one needed a firm grasp of what is right and what is wrong.
 - Education is not just about achieving certain "instrumentalist" purposes like teaching certain skills.
 - Lewis' central concern is with an educational philosophy that debunks traditional values but uncritically adopts whatever values are fashionable at the time.
- Was the book prophetic? Is it relevant today?

Contemporary public education

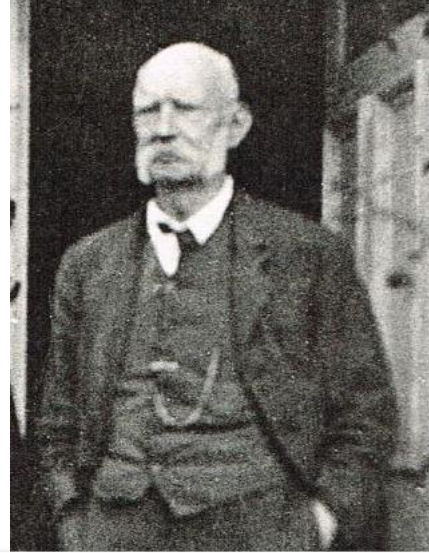
- Our commentators:
 - Bryan Charlton
 - Jerome Evans

Lewis' educational career

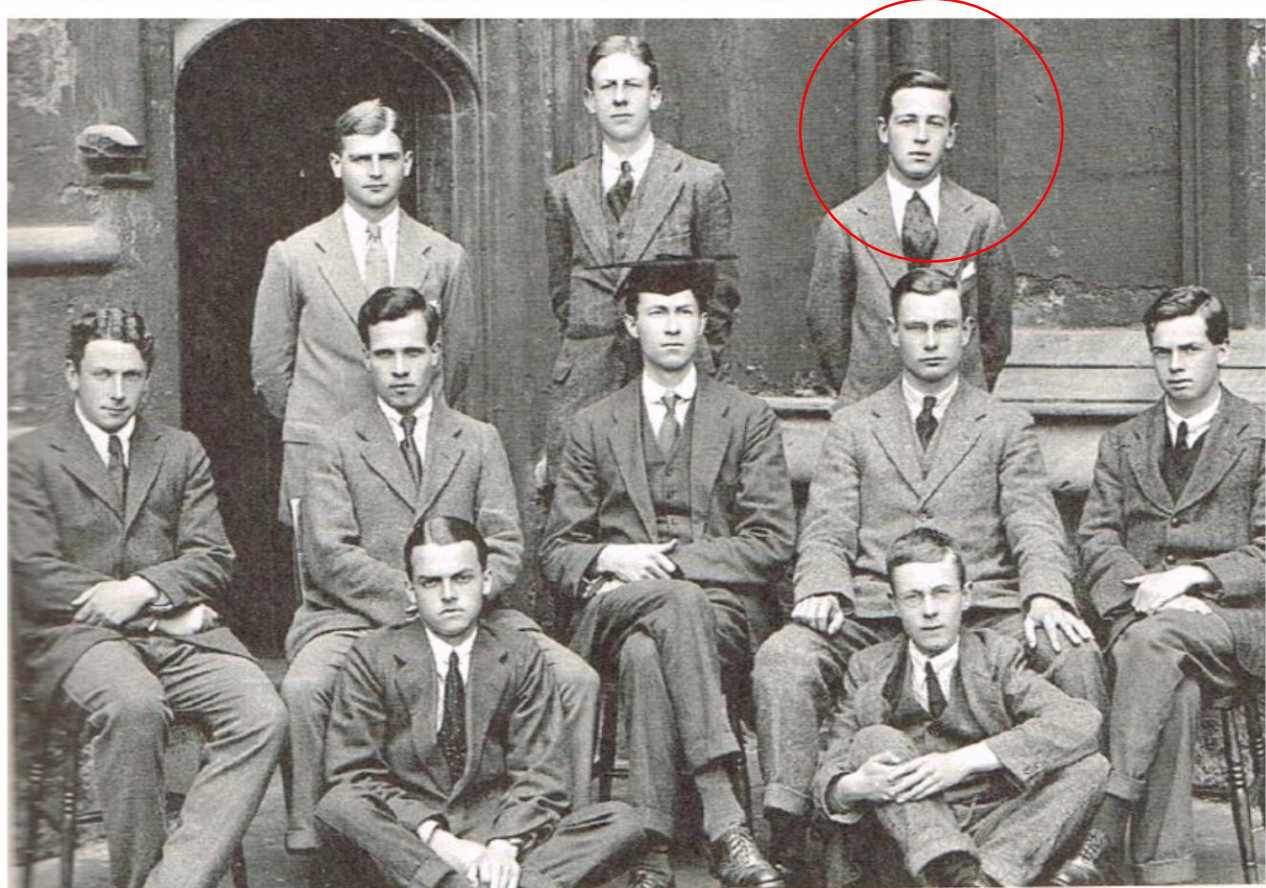


Boarding schools for 5 years, ages 10-15.

Student at Oxford University, 1917, 1919-23. Achieved rare “triple first,” i.e. first class honors in classics, philosophy, and English.



Lived with William Kirkpatrick, “The Great Knock”, as his private tutor, 2 and a half years, ages 16-18.



Lewis' educational career: Lecturer and tutor in English, Magdalen College, Oxford, 1925-1954



Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English, Magdalene College, Cambridge University, 1954-1963.

Scholarly books: *An Allegory of Love*, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, *English Literature in the 16th Century*, *An Experiment in Criticism*, *The Discarded Image*

Lewis' philosophy of education

- Avoid chronological snobbery, i.e. “uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited”.
 - “ It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.” (Lewis, “On the reading of old books” in *God in the Dock*, p. 201)
 - *Why would Lewis recommend such a rule?*
 - It helps prevent you from being a captive to the current age, by keeping “the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds” (“Old books”, p. 202)
 - It helps one see “the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective.” (“Old books”, p. 202)
 - A new book is still on trial, the classics have endured the test of time.
 - Reading Christian classics lets one see what is central to Christianity: “mere Christianity.”
 - This may even help one appreciate the judgment the future will make about us.

Lewis' philosophy of education (cont.)

- Expand your vision.
 - “My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others... In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see” (Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 140)
 - Reading enables us “to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own” (*Experiment in Criticism*, p. 137)
 - *Your experience?*
 - Education for Lewis is not just about becoming familiar with other ways of thinking, but experiencing another way of thinking.
 - Education is about *changing* us.
 - The “values assimilation effect.”

Lewis on learning and the Christian life

- Connect with the “Deep Church” (Lewis, letter of Feb. 1952)
 - For Lewis, Christianity is at its best when it is rooted in the past and engaged in the present.
 - By “Deep Church” Lewis means the basic consensual orthodoxy of mere Christianity held at all times and in all places.
 - Think of church history as a long conversation about how best to understand and apply Biblical teaching.
 - If reading Augustine and Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Wesley seems too intimidating, one can use writers like Lewis as a gateway, as someone who makes the riches of the “Deep Church” more accessible.

The Poison of Subjectivism: How a purely philosophical or theoretical error may remove ordinary checks to evil.

- Man has begun to study himself and...
 - Human reason seems to some just a by-product of ‘chemical or electrical events in the cortex.’
- “Theoretical reason”
 - “There are modern scientists, I am told, who have dropped the word truth... out of their vocabulary.”
 - One example of this: “We may have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth” (Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 170)
 - Lewis: “But, in the main, subjectivism is such an uncomfortable yokefellow that the danger, in this quarter, is continually counteracted.”

The Poison of Subjectivism (cont.)

- “Practical reason”—i.e., our judgment of good and evil.
- Rational judgment should lead to objective knowledge of real values.
- “Thus Plato taught, thus Aristotle, thus Hooker, Butler and Doctor Johnson.”
 - Plato—Gyges’ ring: not being caught for wrongdoing doesn’t mean there are no costs. The well nurtured youth from his earliest years is taught to give praise to beauty, so that when reason comes he will recognize and salute his friend (*The Republic*, II, III).
 - Aristotle—“We ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.” (Nicomachean Ethics)
 - Richard Hooker (1553-1600)—His *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* held natural law is eternal and immutable, and was the basis of Locke’s *Treatise of Civil Government*.
 - Joseph Butler (1692-1752)—Both the dictates of conscience and revelation come from God.
 - Samuel Johnson (1707-1784)—Learning how to do good and avoid evil is more important than learning merely physical laws.

The Poison of Subjectivism (cont.)

- The modern view: value judgments just reflect our community and environment.
 - To say a thing is good is merely to express our feeling about it.
- But, then one could not say it would be “better” to be conditioned to like something else, such as “preservation of the species” or “the good of the community”.
- Objections to the idea of an unchanging moral law:
 - 1. Morality differs in different times and places
 - 2. To endorse an immutable moral code is to stop progress.
 - But without a changeless standard progress is impossible.

The Poison of Subjectivism (cont.)

- In fact, there is considerable similarity across cultures and times regarding fundamental moral principles. A few of the many examples in the 25-page Appendix of *Abolition*:
 - Babylonian Hymn to Samos (or Shumash):
 - Speak kindness, slander not; make intercession for the weak.
 - Egyptian Books of the Dead:
 - Avoid uttering lies, stealing, stirring up strife, being angry without cause.
 - Analects of Confucius
 - Be faithful, keep promises, never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.
 - Stoics
 - Care for parents (Epictetus); do one another good (Cicero).
- “Far from finding a chaos, we find exactly what we should expect if good is indeed something objective and reason the organ whereby it is apprehended.”

The Poison of Subjectivism (cont.)

Objections/questions from Christians

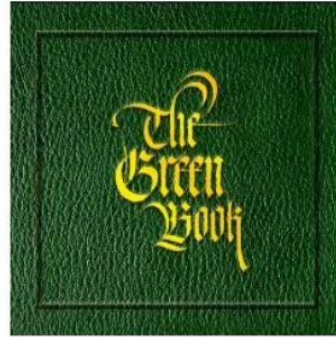
- Reason vs. the Fall: If practical reason is sufficient to detect right and wrong, are we ignoring the Fall?
 - Scripture indicates our knowledge of the law is not so depraved as our power to fulfill it.
 - We may have imperfect sight, but we're not blind.

- ~~God vs. the good~~: How are we to understand the relation of God and the moral law?

God \equiv the good

- “We, favored beyond the wisest pagans, know what lies beyond existence, what admits no contingency, what is the ground of all existence, is not simply a law but also a begetting love... God is not merely good, but goodness; goodness is not merely divine, but God.”

The Abolition of Man: Ch. 1 “Men Without Chests”



vs. 道

- “When the man said *That 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.”
- “This confusion is continually present in language as we use it. We *appear* to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are *only* saying something about our own feelings.”
- The moral the student will grasp:
 - All sentences containing a predicated of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker.
 - All such statements are unimportant.

The Abolition of Man: Ch. 1 “Men Without Chests” (cont.)

- Possible goals of authors of *The Green Book*
 - 1. Produce a “trousered ape” or an “urban blockhead”.
 - 2. Fortify the young against emotions.
- To realize what is at stake, one must recognize that in previous generations everyone understood some things *merited* certain evaluations.
 - Augustine: virtue is *ordo amoris*, ordinate affections
 - If *within* this tradition, the educational problem is to train emotional states to be in harmony with reason.
 - “The heart never takes the place of the head, but it can, and should, obey it.”
 - 3. If *outside* this tradition, one can only encourage sentiments for reasons that have nothing to do with their ordinacy or justness.
- The head rules the belly through the chest.
 - The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment—“these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man; it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.”