

## The Abolition of Man

The entire text of the Abolition of Man can be found on-line at the following address:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/lewis/abolition1.htm>

1. The entire book begins with a quote from Confucius:” The Master said, He who sets to work on a different strand destroys the whole fabric.” What does this mean? Does it bother you that he is quoting a non-Christian teacher?

### CHAPTER ONE

2. At the beginning of the first Chapter, Lewis makes an interesting observation. He says, “I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary text books.” In saying this, Lewis is leading to a very important point that is the purpose of the lecture: the world view behind the teaching does not need to be \_\_\_\_\_ before it effects the children in a profound way.
3. The story of poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge at the waterfall: “...there were two tourists present: [] one called [the waterfall] 'sublime' and the other 'pretty'; and that Coleridge mentally endorsed the first judgement and rejected the second with disgust.” Do you know why Coleridge endorsed the first and rejected the second?
4. Gaius and Titius [G&T], the authors of a high school textbook on English comment about the Coleridge statement: “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. What he was saying was really *I have feelings associated in my mind with the word "Sublime"*, or shortly, *I have sublime 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.”
  - a. What does sublime mean?
  - b. If I say something is sublime, am I having sublime feelings?
5. Lewis says that the student who reads G&T’s comment will come to two conclusions. What are they?
  - a. Statements with predicates of value are really \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. As a result, such statements are \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Re-read final sentence by Gaius and Titius – what is stressed?

6. Lewis goes to a second example to expand on the practical effect of G&T's teaching. "In their fourth chapter they quote a silly advertisement of a pleasure cruise and proceed to inoculate their pupils against the sort of writing it exhibits.<sup>2</sup> The advertisement tells us that those who buy tickets for this cruise will go 'across the Western Ocean where Drake of Devon sailed', 'adventuring after the treasures of the Indies', and bringing home themselves also a 'treasure' of 'golden hours' and 'glowing colours'."
- Lewis points out that if the authors had decided to actually teach English (which is the purpose of the book) they should have \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
  - What they actually do: "...point out that the luxurious motor-vessel won't really sail where Drake did, that the tourists will not have any adventures, that the treasures they bring home will be of a purely metaphorical nature, and that a trip to Margate might provide 'all the pleasure and rest' they required."<sup>5</sup> That is, they debunk. So, what exactly is wrong with that?
  - Lewis points out what's wrong: "What they have not noticed, or not cared about, is that a very similar treatment could be applied to much good literature which treats the same emotion. \*\*\* Or, if there is indeed any obstacle which will prevent a critic from 'debunking' Johnson and Wordsworth (and Lamb, and Virgil, and Thomas Browne, and Mr de la Mare) as *The Green Book* debunks the advertisement, Gaius and Titius have given their schoolboy readers no faintest help to its discovery. From this passage the schoolboy will learn about literature precisely nothing. What he will learn quickly enough, and perhaps indelibly, is the belief that all emotions aroused by local association are in themselves contrary to reason and contemptible."
7. The two ways to be immune from sentiment: Being \_\_\_\_\_ and being \_\_\_\_\_.
- Being \_\_\_\_\_: having feelings that are truly great and noble, i.e., the one who already has feelings of the nobility of Sir Francis Drake's quest.
  - Being \_\_\_\_\_: being ignorant of the great and noble, i.e., those who can conceive of the ocean as being nothing more than millions of tons of water. [The urban blockhead or trousered ape]
  - Other examples: The patriot v. the coward; the true lover of horses v. the man who sees horses as simply a mode of transportation.
  - Here's what the authors do under the guise of teaching literature: "Gaius and Titius, while teaching him nothing about letters, have cut out of his soul, long before he is old enough to choose, the possibility of having certain experiences which thinkers of more authority than they have held to be generous, fruitful, and humane.\*\*\* Another little portion of the human heritage has been quietly taken from them before they were old enough to understand."

8. Why might the authors be inserting their philosophy into these books? Are they really trying to create the urban blockhead or the trousered ape? Lewis at first says that they may be trying to prevent students from becoming too immune to sentiment. But Lewis makes the following response: “[G&T] see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental—and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments. By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged and a hard heart is no infallible protection against a soft head.”
9. Here’s the reason that Lewis thinks most likely: G&T are trying to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
10. The key to this chapter: G&T (and other writers like them) are ignoring the historic way in which education presupposes that there are good and proper sentiments and bad sentiments. “Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could *merit*, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt.”
- Coleridge – the waterfall
  - St. Augustine—the Ordo Amoris.
  - Aristotle and Plato were of the same mind.
  - Rta
  - Lewis’ Tao – “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. Those who know the *Tao* can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which *demand*s a certain response from us whether we make it or not.”
  - It is from within the Tao that we are able to make judgments that something is good because it is in accordance with the Tao and something is bad because it is not in accordance with the Tao.
  - Natural Law – Romans 1:20.
  - Go back to the Confucius quote at the beginning of the book. Do you see why Lewis has no difficulty quoting a Chinese Eastern philosopher?

11. The idea of teaching outside of what Lewis calls the Tao has roots in Darwinism and Existentialism.
  - a. Charles Colson, How Then Shall We Live.
  - b. Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There.
12. The real problem with G&T: “the very possibility of a sentiment being reasonable—or even unreasonable—has been excluded from the outset. It can be reasonable or unreasonable only if it conforms or fails to conform to something else. To say that the cataract is sublime means saying that our emotion of humility is appropriate or ordinate to the reality, and thus to speak of something else besides the emotion; just as to say that a shoe fits is to speak not only of shoes but of feet. But this reference to something beyond the emotion is what Gaius and Titius exclude from every sentence containing a predicate of value. Such statements, for them, refer solely to the emotion. Now the emotion, thus considered by itself, cannot be either in agreement or disagreement with Reason. It is irrational not as a parallogism is irrational, but as a physical event is irrational: it does not rise even to the dignity of error. On this view, the world of facts, without one trace of value, and the world of feelings, without one trace of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, confront one another, and no *rapprochement* is possible.”
  - a. In other words, if all sentiments about what is good and bad are made outside of the context of a larger belief that feelings are appropriate or inappropriate, then there can be no statements of value. One cannot say that bravery is good and cowardice is bad. They are simply statements of feeling – no value judgment can be had. But this undermines one of the basic propositions that led Lewis to Christianity in the first place.
13. The example of the Roman soldier teaching his child “that it was a sweet and seemly thing to die for his country....” What must G&K do?
  - a. G&T, if consistent, must debunk ; or
  - b. Produce a sentiment, from outside the Tao, that they believe has no value and may cost him his life merely because it is useful to the rest of us.
  - c. Propagation v. Propoganda.
14. The need for emotion: “Let us suppose for a moment that the harder virtues could really be theoretically justified with no appeal to objective value. It still remains true that no justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous. Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”
  - a. The head, the chest and the stomach.
  - b. Men without chests.
  - c. The demand remains for the sentiment when we have removed the organ.

## CHAPTER TWO

1. Chapter 2 begins with the statement, “The practical result of education in the spirit of *The Green Book* must be the destruction of the society which accepts it.” Do you see why?
2. What are the philosophical difficulties with the idea that no objective values exist?
  - a. Why did G&T write this book? The fact that they see an end and believe it to be desirable shows that they believe in some objective value. (The Morality Machine)
  - b. “In actual fact G&T will be found to hold, with complete uncritical dogmatism, the whole system of values which happened to be in vogue among moderately educated young men of the professional classes during the period between the two wars.<sup>1</sup> Their scepticism about values is on the surface: it is for use on other people's values; about the values current in their own set they are not nearly sceptical enough. And this phenomenon is very usual. A great many of those who 'debunk' traditional or (as they would say) 'sentimental' values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process.”
3. What could serve as the basis for values if not the Tao? Utility to the community?
  - a. Why should one man sacrifice himself for others? “Every appeal to pride, honour, shame, or love is excluded by hypothesis. To use these would be to return to sentiment and the Innovator's task is, having cut all that away, to explain to men, in terms of pure reasoning, why they will be well advised to die that others may live.”
  - b. Certainty of death? “He may say 'Unless some of us *risk* death all of us are *certain* to die.' But that will be true only in a limited number of cases; and even when it is true it provokes the very reasonable counter question 'Why should I be one of those who take the risk?’”
  - c. Why should selfishness be more basic than altruism? Why is it more rational that a person would be selfish than to show unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others? The answer: it isn't. “From propositions about fact alone no *practical* conclusion can ever be drawn.”i.e., You can never get an \_\_\_\_\_ from an \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. “The Innovator is trying to get a conclusion in the imperative mood out of premisses in the indicative mood: and though he continues trying to all eternity he cannot succeed, for the thing is impossible. We must therefore either extend the word Reason to include what our ancestors called Practical Reason and confess that judgements such as *society ought to be preserved*

(though they can support themselves by no reason of the sort that G&T demand) are not mere sentiments but are rationality itself; or else we must give up at once, and for ever, the attempt to find a core of 'rational' value behind all the sentiments we have debunked.”

4. What about instinct? Can that serve as the basis for values?
  - a. What is instinct?
  - b. If instinct is something we *must* follow, why are people encouraging us to follow their view of instinct?
  - c. Does following instinct make us happy? Not if we're dead. After all, we're looking at the question of sacrificial death – we aren't happy after we're dead.
  - d. Why follow instinct at all? Natural law is the one law we don't have to follow. Is that instinctual? Is there a higher order of instinct directing us to follow instinct? Instincts are “ises”. How do we get to the “ought” on this basis?
  - e. Instincts are not all of one voice – they tell us to do contradictory things. How do we decide which instinct takes precedence? Is that instinctual? Is it merely following the strongest instinct? “If we did not bring to the examination of our instincts a knowledge of their comparative dignity we could never learn it from them. And that knowledge cannot itself be instinctive: the judge cannot be one of the parties judged; or, if he is, the decision is worthless and there is no ground for placing the preservation of the species above self-preservation or sexual appetite.”
  - f. If we are to choose between instincts, then we either have to appeal to something besides instinct to decide between them (which brings us back to where we started) or we have to derive a rule based on an “is.”
5. Is there an instinct to preserve the species?
  - a. Certainly, there is an instinct to protect our own children and grandchildren, but the farther down the line of descendents, the harder it is to have that same instinct – to the point where we don't seem to care into untold years in the future.
  - b. “As we pass from mother love to rational planning for the future we are passing away from the realm of instinct into that of choice and reflection: and if instinct is the source of value, planning for the future ought to be less respectable and less obligatory than the baby language and cuddling of the fondest mother or the most fatuous nursery anecdotes of a doting father. If we are to base ourselves upon instinct, these things are the substance, and care for posterity the shadow—the huge, flickering shadow of the nursery happiness cast upon the screen of the unknown future.”

6. The final analysis – The Innovator cannot find the base for his new value system either in more base values or instinct.
7. The base for values is found elsewhere – the Tao itself.
  - a. “All the practical principles behind the Innovator's case for posterity, or society, or the species, are there from time immemorial in the *Tao*. But they are nowhere else. Unless you accept these without question as being to the world of action what axioms are to the world of theory, you can have no practical principles whatever. You cannot reach them as conclusions: they are premisses. You may, since they can give no 'reason' for themselves of a kind to silence G&T, regard them as sentiments: but then you must give up contrasting 'real' or 'rational' value with sentimental value. All value will be sentimental; and you must confess (on pain of abandoning every value) that all sentiment is not 'merely' subjective. You may, on the other hand, regard them as rational—nay as rationality itself—as things so obviously reasonable that they neither demand nor admit proof. But then you must allow that Reason can be practical, that an *ought* must not be dismissed because it cannot produce some *is* as its credential. If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved. Similarly if nothing is obligatory for its own sake, nothing is obligatory at all.”
  - b. The values that the Innovator advances are derived from the Tao (traditional values) and cannot be derived from elsewhere.
8. His appeal to values must be based in the Tao, so when he attacks the Tao he does so using the Tao but only by emphasizing one value over others.
  - a. Duty to posterity arises out of duty to children. But why emphasize duty to posterity and ignore duty to parents and the past? On what basis does the Innovator do such a thing? On what basis does he pick and choose some values while debunking others?
  - b. “This thing which I have called for convenience the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgements. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There has never been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) 'ideologies', all consist of fragments from the *Tao* itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the *Tao* and to it alone such validity as they possess.”

- c. “The rebellion of new ideologies against the *Tao* is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves. 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 a new sky for it to move in.”
9. Does this mean that no moral progress is possible? No, but it must come from within the *Tao*, not from the outside.
  - a. “Those who understand the spirit of the *Tao* and who have been led by that spirit can modify it in directions which that spirit itself demands. Only they can know what those directions are. The outsider knows nothing about the matter. His attempts at alteration, as we have seen, contradict themselves. So far from being able to harmonize discrepancies in its letter by penetration to its spirit, he merely snatches at some one precept, on which the accidents of time and place happen to have riveted his attention, and then rides it to death—for no reason that he can give. From within the *Tao* itself comes the only authority to modify the *Tao*.”
  - b. Meditations in a Tool Shed. The light seen from the outside and the inside.
  - c. “An open mind, in questions that are not ultimate, is useful. But an open mind about the ultimate foundations either of Theoretical or of Practical Reason is idiocy. If a man's mind is open on these things, let his mouth at least be shut. He can say nothing to the purpose. Outside the *Tao* there is no ground for criticizing either the *Tao* or anything else.”
  - d. “The legitimate reformer endeavours to show that the precept in question conflicts with some precept which its defenders allow to be more fundamental, or that it does not really embody the judgement of value it professes to embody. The direct frontal attack 'Why?'—'What good does it do?'—'Who said so?' is never permissible; not because it is harsh or offensive but because no values at all can justify themselves on that level. If you persist in *that* kind of trial you will destroy all values, and so destroy the bases of your own criticism as well as the thing criticized. You must not hold a pistol to the head of the *Tao*. Nor must we postpone obedience to a precept until its credentials have been examined. Only those who are practising the *Tao* will understand it.”

## CHAPTER 3

1. Is the Tao simply another part of nature that we can conquer? After all, we have conquered much of nature. But that raises the perfectly reasonable question: “In what sense is Man the possessor of increasing power over Nature?”
  - a. Because we have airplanes, can we fly anytime that we want? No, rather, we can fly if the owner of the plane allows us to fly. And the owner can only allow us to fly if the manufacturer makes the plane. Etc.
  - b. “What we call Man's power is, in reality, a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by.”
  - c. Airplanes can drop bombs as well as give rides. Telephones can both spread propaganda as well as information. Contraceptives give control to some to eliminate other people who have yet to be born. In sum, “Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.”
2. This means, men with wealth have control over people without. If we use the public option, it means majorities have control over minorities and that government has control over the people and the present generation over future generations.
  - a. “Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors.”
  - b. “[I]f any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them.”
  - c. There is not a gradual increase in influence through man's upcoming history. Later generations will have less influence than the generation that is able to use science and eugenics to make the future what it pleases. Assuming man's time on earth will come to an end, the last generation will not be better – it will be the weakest generation in all of history.
3. “Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car.” What does this mean?
4. If we are able to make man what we want because we have triumphed over nature, who exactly will have won?
  - a. “[T]he power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what *they* please”

- b. This is different than the past (where we tried to mold men by upbringing and education) in two major ways: first, the power will be much \_\_\_\_\_ and second, the conditioners will be unrestrained by the Tao and, in fact, will be able to \_\_\_\_\_ the Tao.
- 5. If the conditioners are able to choose the Tao, what Tao will they choose? They can choose, for example, to have us believe duty is good or bad – there is no preset course. And simply because they initially choose to say duty is good, doesn't mean later generations have to abide by that same decision.
  - a. This is much like what happens to atheists. They have no basis for a system of morals, so they simply choose to adopt the ones that they have been given by their parents and teachers.
  - b. “Why should you suppose [the conditioners] will be such bad men?’ But I am not supposing them to be bad men. They are, rather, not men (in the old sense) at all. They are, if you like, men who have sacrificed their own share in traditional humanity in order to devote themselves to the task of deciding what ‘Humanity’ shall henceforth mean. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’, applied to them, are words without content: for it is from them that the content of these words is henceforward to be derived.”
  - c. Should the conditioners simply condition us to do what we like? But why should the conditioners do that? Do they have a duty to act towards us in a way that is good? Should they instill care about posterity? On what basis would they be duty-bound to do so?
  - d. “However far they go back, or down, they can find no ground to stand on. Every motive they try to act on becomes at once *petitio*. It is not that they are bad men. They are not men at all. Stepping outside the *Tao*, they have stepped into the void. Nor are their subjects necessarily unhappy men. They are not men at all: they are artefacts. Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man.”
- 6. So, on what basis will the conditioners act? Thus I wish, (so) thus I command, i.e., their felt emotional weight at a given moment will control.
  - a. Is this subjective? Yes, but we destroyed objective good in Chapter 1.
  - b. “When all that says ‘It is good’ has been debunked, what says ‘I want’ remains. \*\*\* The Conditioners, therefore, must come to be motivated simply by their own pleasure.” That is, they will be controlled by mere appetite – the stomach.
- 7. Why assume that the conditioners will not simply choose things that we think are good?
  - a. History suggests otherwise: “I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently.”

- b. Too much left to chance – “[O]ur hope even of a ‘conditioned’ happiness rests on what is ordinarily called ‘chance’—the chance that benevolent impulses may on the whole predominate in our Conditioners. For without the judgement ‘Benevolence is good’—that is, without re-entering the *Tao*—they can have no ground for promoting or stabilizing these impulses rather than any others.”
  - c. But this brings us back to the beginning, doesn’t it? “At the moment, then, of Man’s victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely ‘natural’—to their irrational impulses. Nature, untrammelled by values, rules the Conditioners and, through them, all humanity. Man’s conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man.”
8. Looking at it another way: we seek to conquer nature, but if we take this final step, nature will conquer us because there is nothing left of us that is different from nature. As Lewis says:
- a. By identifying something as mere nature we are expanding what is part of nature. “We reduce things to mere Nature *in order that* we may ‘conquer’ them. We are always conquering Nature, *because* ‘Nature’ is the name for what we have, to some extent, conquered. The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere Nature. Every conquest over Nature increases her domain. The stars do not become Nature till we can weigh and measure them: the soul does not become Nature till we can psychoanalyse her. The wresting of powers *from* Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature.”
  - b. We can go too far. “As long as this process stops short of the final stage we may well hold that the gain outweighs the loss. But as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same.” That is, once we have reduced what it means to be human to mere nature to be sacrificed, then men become no more than a part of the nature that we are trying to conquer.
  - c. “This is one of the many instances where to carry a principle to what seems its logical conclusion produces absurdity. It is like the famous Irishman who found that a certain kind of stove reduced his fuel bill by half and thence concluded that two stoves of the same kind would enable him to warm his house with no fuel at all. It is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls. It is in Man’s power to treat himself as a mere ‘natural object’ and his own judgements of value as raw material for scientific manipulation to alter at will. \*\*\* The real objection is that if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be: not raw material to be manipulated, as he fondly imagined, by himself, but by mere appetite, that is, mere Nature, in the person of his de-humanized Conditioners.”

9. Huge point: “We have been trying, like Lear, to have it both ways: to lay down our human prerogative and yet at the same time to retain it. It is impossible. Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the *Tao*, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own `natural' impulses. Only the *Tao* provides a common human law of action which can over-arch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.” Why does he say this?