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Irrigating Deserts: C.S. Lewis on Education

Joel D. Heck

Concordia University at Austin

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INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume II

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Second
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

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Upland, Indiana

Irrigating Deserts: C.S. Lewis on Education

Joel D. Heck

Irrigating Deserts: C.S. Lewis on Education

by Joel D. Heck

Introduction

One of the most famous quotations from the writings of C.S. Lewis is the statement of Professor Kirke early in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, "I wonder what they *do* teach them at these schools."¹ Earlier in the same book, Kirke had said, "Why don't they teach logic at these schools?"² The Professor speaks almost the same words at the end of the book, "Bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools?"³ A fourth time the Professor speaks about the inadequacy of schools near the end of *The Last Battle*, "... bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools!"⁴ Some will recall Miss Prizzle, the teacher in a modern school in *Prince Caspian*, who taught a reconstructed history that excluded the true history of Narnia.⁵ But we learn little about Lewis's views of education except that he had questions about the quality of some schools, the type of history that is taught, and that logic was a desirable subject for a curriculum.

Well known from *Surprised by Joy* are Lewis's own fond reminiscences of his time with Kirkpatrick and his horrid reminiscences of Malvern. The more than casual reader of Lewis is also aware of the alternate title to *The Abolition of Man*, namely *Reflections on*

education with special reference to the teachers of English in the upper forms of schools. In that book Lewis explains some of what is wrong with modern education. Also rather well known is the fact that the hero of the Space Trilogy was an educator, as the first page of *Out of the Silent Planet* tells us, "... he was a philologist, and fellow of a Cambridge college. His name was Ransom."⁶

But what else do people know about Lewis's views of education? This paper intends to look more closely and more systematically at the views of Lewis, expressed in various places in his writing, on education.

I. Lewis's Own Education—His Foundation

We begin with Lewis's own education, for this allows us insight into the origin of his views in his own education. His education began at home, both encouraged and modeled by his father. He writes in *Surprised by Joy*,

There were books in the study, books in the drawing room, books in the cloakroom, books (two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled as high as my shoulder in the cistern attic, books of all kinds reflecting every transient stage of my parents'

¹ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴ *The Last Battle*, p. 170.

⁵ *Prince Caspian*, pp. 194f.

⁶ *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 7.

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interest, books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not. Nothing was forbidden me.⁷

Lewis's education at the hands (or mind) of Arthur T. Kirkpatrick formed him into the logical sparring partner who would later become famous among both the Inklings and the Socratic Club at Oxford University. "If ever a man came near to being a purely logical entity," wrote Lewis, "that man was Kirk."⁸

This passage from *Surprised by Joy* summarizes the Kirkpatrick regimen for Lewis with its strong grounding in the classics:

Kirk did not, of course, make me read nothing but Homer. The Two Great Bores (Demosthenes and Cicero) could not be avoided. There were . . . Lucretius, Catullus, Tacitus, Herodotus. There was Virgil, for whom I had no true taste. There were Greek and Latin compositions. . . . There were Euripedes, Sophocles, Aeschylus. In the evenings there was French with Mrs. Kirkpatrick, treated much as her husband treated Homer. We got through a great many good novels in this way and I was soon buying French books on my own. . . . Later in my career we branched out into German and Italian. . . .

But Homer came first. Day after day and month after month we drove gloriously onward, tearing the whole Achilleid out of the Iliad and tossing the rest on one side, and then

reading the Odyssey entire, till the music of the thing and the clear, bitter brightness that lives in almost every formula had become part of me.⁹

His Oxford education at University College was a liberal arts education, including the study of the classics and philosophy and English language and literature (firsts in each of these three areas). Lewis once wrote about his education in philosophy, "To lose what I owe to Plato and Aristotle would be like the amputation of a limb."¹⁰

This is not to say that all of Lewis's education was good, at least in his own eyes. Almost legendary are his negative experiences at Wynyard School (which Lewis called Belsen after the Nazi Concentration Camp). Of his time at Wynyard, he wrote, "In the meantime, the putting on of the school clothes was, I well knew, the assumption of a prison uniform."¹¹ His time at Malvern College, though not as well appreciated by himself, was nevertheless probably a strong education, as Warnie testified.

Indeed, in general, C.S. Lewis received a marvelous education and excelled at it.

II. Lewis in Education—His Authority

Especially those in higher education can learn from an educator of such a magnitude as C.S. Lewis. Lewis himself was an educator, having spent twenty-nine years as a Fellow at Oxford University (1925-1954) and nine years as a Professor at Cambridge University (1954-

⁷ *Surprised by Joy*, p. 10.

⁸ *Surprised by Joy*, p. 135.

⁹ *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁰ "The Idea of an 'English School'," *Rehabilitations*, p. 64. See also *The Abolition of Man*, p. 10.

¹¹ *Surprised by Joy*, p. 23.

1963) until his retirement. Those thirty-three years of personal experience in higher education brought him face to face with opposing views, some of them from colleagues, some of them from students, and some of them in the writings of others. He received four honorary doctorates in recognition of his many accomplishment even though he never achieved an earned doctorate.¹²

Lewis the educator expressed himself especially in his prolific writings and in his lectures. The next section will concentrate on his writings. Here, a few words about the impact of his lectures, many of which turned into books,¹³ are in order. Numerous testimonies attest to the popularity of Lewis as a lecturer, e.g. Kathryn Linkskoog's comment regarding his time in Oxford, "The big hall in Magdalen was so full when Lewis lectured that people even sat on the window sills."¹⁴ When he gave his inaugural lecture at Cambridge "the largest lecture room in Mill Lane was packed and people coming late had to sit on the floor."¹⁵ Lewis attracted students not only because of the content of his lectures, but also because of the force of his rhetoric so that in his teaching he modeled the combination of head and heart mentioned below.

¹² Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: Companion & Guide*, pp. 124, 125, 126.

¹³ For example, his lectures at Cambridge on 'Some Difficult Words' were later published as *Studies in Words*, the Ballard Matthews Lectures in University College, North Wales, turned into *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*, and the Riddell Memorial Lectures in Newcastle-upon-Tyne were later published as *The Abolition of Man*. See *C.S. Lewis: Companion & Guide*, pp. 35 and 73.

¹⁴ Linkskoog, p. 243.

¹⁵ *C.S. Lewis: Companion & Guide*, p. 72.

III. Lewis on Education—His Views

Central to Lewis's views of education are, first, the purpose of education, secondly the importance of objective truth,¹⁶ and thirdly, the need to reach both the head and the heart.¹⁷

The Purpose of Education

First, Lewis writes about the purpose of education, which is tied closely to the liberal arts.

Schoolmasters in our time are fighting hard in defence of education against vocational training; universities, on the other hand, are fighting against education on behalf of learning.

Let me explain. The purpose of education has been described by Milton as that of fitting a man 'to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and public, of peace and war.' Provided we do not overstress 'skillfully' Aristotle would substantially agree with this, but would add the conception that it should also be a preparation for leisure, which according to him is the end of all human activity. 'We wage war in order to have peace; we work in order to have leisure.' Neither of them would dispute that the purpose of education is to produce the good man and the good citizen, though it

¹⁶ What Lewis called "the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true" (*The Abolition of Man*, p. 12).

¹⁷ "The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts" (*The Abolition of Man*, p. 9).

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must be remembered that we are not here using the word 'good' in any narrowly ethical sense. The 'good man' here means the man of good taste and good feeling, the interesting and interested man, and almost the happy man. . . . Vocational training, on the other hand, prepares the pupil not for leisure, but for work; it aims at making not a good man but a good banker, a good electrician, a good scavenger, or a good surgeon. You see at once that education is essentially for freemen and vocational training for slaves.¹⁸

That purpose is supported by an emphasis upon the liberal arts rather than vocational training. In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis writes about the emphasis upon the liberal arts among the medievals.

. . . the syllabus was regarded as immutable;* the number seven is numinous; the Liberal Arts, by long prescription, had achieved a status not unlike that of nature herself. The Arts, no less than the Virtues and Vices, were personified. Grammar, with her birth, still sits looking down on the cloisters of Magdalen. Dante in the *Convivio* most mortises the Arts into the cosmic framework. Rhetoric, for example, corresponds

¹⁸ *Rehabilitations*, "Our English Syllabus," pp. 81-82. Cf. On Aristotle's views see also *The Abolition of Man*, p. 10.

* The actual practice and history, of medieval education are a different matter. The relevant chapters of D. Knowles' *Evolution of Medieval Thought* (1962) are a good introduction.

to Venus; for one reason, because she is 'the loveliest of all other disciplines.' . . . Arithmetic is like Sol; for as he gives light to all the other stars so she gives light to all other sciences, and as our eyes are dazzled by his light so our intelligence is baffled by the infinity of numbers. And so of the rest (II, xiii).

Everyone knows that the Arts are Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, and Astronomy.¹⁹

Objective Truth

Secondly, the *Tao*, ". . . the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false. . . ."²⁰ is present in virtually every religion. Throughout *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis argues against the subjective values that are based on feelings and in favor of "the objective values that differentiate between right and wrong and thus provide the true way to assess attitudes and behavior."²¹ He argues that the head must rule the belly through the chest.²²

The purpose of education, as described above, according to Milton and Aristotle, underscores the good, whereas the writers of *The Green Book* prefer to discuss the emotional state of the speaker rather than the values of the speaker and philosophize against the dangers of emotion. The students learn nothing about English or literature in the process. "In filling their book with it they have

¹⁹ *The Discarded Image*, pp. 185f.

²⁰ *The Abolition of Man*, p. 12.

²¹ Carolyn Keefe, "Education," in *The C.S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 149.

²² *The Abolition of Man*, p. 16.

been unjust to the parent or headmaster who buys it and who has got the work of amateur philosophers where he expected the work of professional grammarians."²³ In education, "When all that says 'it is good' has been debunked, what says 'I want' remains."²⁴ "The practical result of education in the spirit of *The Green Book*," writes Lewis, "must be the destruction of the society which accepts it."²⁵

Both Head and Heart

Thirdly, Lewis was both the rationalist and the imaginative writer, and both of those sides of Lewis are amply illustrated in *Surprised by Joy* (on the one hand, Kirke and Lewis's early atheism, and on the other hand, Northernness, poetry, Wagner, Celtic and Greek mythology²⁶). The early Lewis was the student of a man who came close to being pure rational thought, even though he experienced glimpses of desire in those years, and the later Lewis, having had his imagination baptized by George MacDonald, saw imagination as one of the keys to communication. Lewis is purported to have written, "Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."²⁷ I would state it this way: the intellect speaks to the cognitive domain of human learning, while imagination speaks to the affective domain of human learning; the former speaks to the head, while the latter speaks to the heart.²⁸ D. M. Baillie, Dean of

the Faculty of Divinity, described Lewis as a man who reflected "a new kind of marriage between theological reflection and poetic imagination" in the ceremony in which Lewis received a Doctor of Divinity from the University of St Andrews.²⁹

One of Lewis's own poems speaks of reason and imagination, "Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands . . . So clear is reason. But how dark, imagining . . . Who make in me a concord of the depth and height? Who make imagination's dim exploring touch Ever report the same as intellectual sight?"³⁰

In writing against the perspective of *The Green Book*, Lewis states, ". . . Gaius and Titus . . . 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

liked best under his teaching were Horace's *Odes*, *Aeneid IV*, and Euripides' *Bacchae* . . . Now I tasted the classics as poetry, Euripides' picture of Dionysus was closely linked in my mind with the whole mood of Mr. Stephens' *Crock of Gold*, which I had lately read for the first time with great excitement. Here was something very different from the Northernness. Pan and Dionysus lacked the cold, piercing appeal of Odin and Frey. A new quality entered my imagination: something Mediterranean and volcanic, the orgiastic drum beat. Orgiastic, but not, or not strongly, erotic. It was perhaps unconsciously connected with my growing hatred of the public school orthodoxies and conventions, my desire to break and tear it all." *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 112f.

²⁹ Walter Hooper, "The Life of C.S. Lewis," in *C.S. Lewis: Companion & Guide*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, pp. 43f.

³⁰ *The C.S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*, Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West, Jr., eds., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 65.

²³ *Abolition*, p. 8.

²⁴ *Abolition*, p. 41.

²⁵ *Abolition*, p. 17.

²⁶ *Surprised by Joy*, p. 114.

²⁷ Oddly, both places where I have seen this quotation cited did not cite the actual place in Lewis's writings. Como, xxvii; *An Experiment in Criticism* or "Bluspels and Flalanferes," cited in Lindskoog, *Journey into Narnia*, p. 219.

²⁸ "Smewgy taught us Latin and Greek . . . The books I

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not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.”³¹ We must irrigate deserts by teaching an appropriate use of emotion, for emotion always aids education, functioning as a servant rather than a master.

Beyond these four key concepts, however, lie other Lewisian concerns. For example, Lewis was concerned about the negative effects of the self-esteem movement, the dumbing down of the curriculum, the rewarding of the lazy, and the holding back of the gifted (the negative side of egalitarianism), at the elementary levels as well as in higher education, is clear in the remarks of Screwtape in *Screwtape Proposes A Toast*:

In that promising land the spirit of *I'm as good as you* has already become something more than a generally social influence. It begins to work itself into their educational system The basic principle of the new education is to be that dunces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious pupils. That would be “undemocratic.” These differences between the pupils—for they are obviously and nakedly *individual* differences—must be disguised. This can be done on various levels. At universities, examinations must be framed so that nearly all the students get good marks. Entrance examinations must be framed so that all, or nearly all, citizens can go to universities, whether they have any power (or wish) to profit by higher education or not. At schools, the children who are too stupid or lazy

to learn languages and mathematics and elementary science can be set to doing the things that children used to do in their spare time. Let them, for example, make mud pies and call it modelling. But all the time there must be no faintest hint that they are inferior to the children who are at work. Whatever nonsense they are engaged in must have—I believe the English already use the phrase—“parity of esteem.” An even more drastic scheme is not impossible. Children who are fit to proceed to a higher class may be artificially kept back, because the others would get a *trauma*—Beelzebub, what a useful word!—by being left behind. The bright pupil thus remains democratically fettered to his own age group throughout his school career, and a boy who would be capable of tackling Aeschylus or Dante sits listening to his coeval’s attempts to spell out A CAT SAT ON A MAT.³²

These views will be addressed in what follows.

Model Schools

Lewis attacked the modern theory of ‘democratic’ or ‘progressive’ education in his essay “Democratic Education,” originally entitled “Notes on the Way.” Lewis reminded us that Aristotle taught that democratic education meant, not the education that most democrats like, but “the education which will

³¹ *Abolition*, pp. 8f.

³² *The Screwtape Letters & Screwtape Proposes A Toast*, New York: Macmillan, 1959 and 1961, pp. 166f.

preserve democracy.” Some want an education that is democratic only in the sense of being egalitarian—one that ignores the differences between “the able and diligent boys” and “the stupid and idle ones.” Lewis thought there were two ways of doing this: one is to abolish all compulsory subjects that show the differences between the boys, and the other is to make the curriculum so broad that every boy will succeed at something. The object is that no boy will feel inferior.³³

Model Schools, reflections of progressive ideas in education, were frequent targets in the writings of Lewis. The Narnian chronicles occasionally mentioned “. . . fat foreign children doing exercises in model schools.”³⁴ Some of the characters in the Narnian chronicles went wrong at model schools had troubles there. Of Edmund, both early and late in TLWW, Lewis writes, first in the mouth of Peter, “You’ve always liked being beastly to anyone smaller than yourself; we’ve seen that at school before now.”³⁵ Later Lewis wrote, “. . . in fact ever since his first term at that horrid school which was *where he had begun to go wrong*. He had become his real old self again and could look you in the face. And there on the field of battle Aslan made him a Knight.”³⁶ The lack of discipline in those schools was one object of Lewis’s criticism. After Reepicheep swatted Eustace with the side of his rapier, Lewis wrote, “Eustace (of course) was at a school where they didn’t have corporal punishment”³⁷

“At the end of *The Silver Chair* Aslan comes with Caspian, Eustace, and Jill into this world to visit Experiment House. ‘They shall see only my back,’ says the Lion. After he caused the wall of the school to fall down, ‘he lay down amid the gap he had made in the wall and turned his golden back to England, and his lordly face towards his own lands’ (ch. XVI). The bullies from Experiment House rush toward them, but when they see the back of the Lion and the figures in glittering clothes they are filled with terror. After they are given a sound thrashing they run and get the Head who, when she sees the Lion and the others, becomes hysterical. All this eventually results in Experiment House becoming a better school.”³⁸

Lewis’s disdain for the athletic side of schools is well known, as is the lack of a joint in his thumbs,³⁹ which made him unathletic; he was never good at games. He once wrote to his father, “. . . but if it comes to school mastering, my inability to play games will count against me.”⁴⁰ Today he would undoubtedly champion those who have challenged many large universities to place the education of their students ahead of success on the athletic fields.

³⁸ Walter Hooper, *Past Watchful Dragons*, New York: Collier Books, 1971, pp. 85f.

³⁹ “What drove me to write was the extreme manual clumsiness from which I have always suffered. I attribute it to a physical defect which my brother and I both inherit from our father; we have only one joint in the thumb.” *Surprised by Joy*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *The Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 18 May 1922, p. 161. Cf. also “My native clumsiness, combined with the lack of early training for which Belsen was responsible, had ruled out all possibility of my ever playing well enough to amuse myself, let alone to satisfy other players. I accepted games (quite a number of boys do) as one of the necessary evils of life, comparable to Income Tax or the Dentist.” *Surprised by Joy*, p. 90.

³³ “Democratic Education.” In *Present Concerns*. Edited by Walter Hooper. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986. Pages 32f.

³⁴ *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, p. 2.

³⁵ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 40.

³⁶ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 177.

³⁷ *Voyage*, p. 28.

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Furthermore, model schools were places where Christianity was discouraged. Lewis wrote in *The Silver Chair*, When I was at school one would have said, "I swear by the Bible." But Bibles were not encouraged at Experiment House.⁴¹ Elsewhere Lewis wrote of the value of a clear presentation of the Christian faith, stating that "the content of, and the case for, Christianity, are not put before most schoolboys under the present system; and secondly, that when they are so put a majority find them acceptable."⁴² He is cautious, however, that not only will Christianity not be put before most schoolboys, but that Christianity will be discriminated against, something we are seeing in our day and age.⁴³

Writing to his father in 1929, Lewis summarized his view of education in the public schools,⁴⁴ "Except for pure classics . . . I really don't know what gifts the public schools bestow on their nurslings, beyond the mere surface of good manners: unless contempt of the things of the intellect, extravagance,

insolence, self-sufficiency, and sexual perversion are to be called gifts. . . ."⁴⁵

The Curriculum

Philology, linguistic history, linguistic theory, logic, rhetoric,⁴⁶ classics, French, history,⁴⁷ philosophy, religion, literature, art, mathematics, biology—these are the subjects Lewis wanted in the curriculum, in short, the liberal arts. Sports, historicism, scientific materialism,⁴⁸ physiology—these are the

⁴⁵ *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 3 November 1929, p. 261.

⁴⁶ Rhetoric was among the subjects that young Prince Caspian was taught by Doctor Cornelius, as was history (*Prince Caspian*, p. 52f.).

⁴⁷ Some Lewis enthusiasts will recall Miss Prizzle, the teacher in a modern school in *Prince Caspian*, who taught a reconstructed history that excluded the true history of Narnia (*Prince Caspian*, p. 194). See also *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 12 December 1927, p. 249, where Lewis writes, "In Oman's *Dark Ages* I have come up against a thing I had almost forgotten since my school days—the boundless self assurance of the pure text book. 'The four brothers were all worthy sons of their wicked father—destitute of natural affection, cruel, lustful, and treacherous.' Lewis the Pious was 'a man of blameless and virtuous habits'—tho' every other sentence in the chapter makes it plain that he was a sh*t. 'Charles had one lamentable failing—he was too careless of the teaching of Christianity about the relations of the sexes.' It is so nice too, to be told without a hint of doubt who was in the right and who was in the wrong in every controversy, and exactly why every one did what he did. Yet Oman is quite right: that is the way—I suppose—to write an *introduction* to a subject . . . I am almost coming to the conclusion that all histories are bad. Whenever one turns from the historian to the writings of the people he deals with, there is always such a difference . . ."

⁴⁸ "And only the other day a lady told me that a girl to whom she had mentioned death replied 'Oh, but by the time I'm *that* age Science will have done something about it.' And then I remembered how often, in disputing before simple audiences, I had found the assured belief that whatever was wrong with man would in the long run (and not so very long a run either) be put right by 'Education' " (Revival or

⁴¹ *The Silver Chair*, p. 5.

⁴² "On the Transmission of Christianity," p. 115.

⁴³ Lewis writes, "Yes, I hear nasty rumours coming from Spain. Persecution is a temptation to which all men are exposed. I had a postcard signed 'M.D.' saying that anyone who expressed and published his belief in the Virgin Birth should be stripped and flogged. That shows you how easily persecution of Christians by the non-Christians might come back. Of course, they wouldn't call it Persecution: they'd call it 'Compulsory re-education of the ideologically unfit', or something like that. But, of course, I have to admit that Christians themselves have been persecutors in the past. It was worse of them, because *they* ought to have known better: they weren't worse in any other way. I detest every kind of religious compulsion . . ."

("Answers to Questions on Christianity," p. 61)

⁴⁴ While not exactly the same as model schools, the public schools exhibited many of the same characteristics.

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subjects which Lewis would exclude. He would prefer fewer subjects taught well rather than many subjects taught superficially.⁴⁹

“While I yet pondered,” writes Lewis, “came the news of a substantial alteration in the English Schools. That course had formerly included a great deal of philology and linguistic history and theory: these are now being thrown over and formed into a separate school, while what remains is simply literature in the ordinary sense—with the exception of learning to read a very few selected passages of Anglo-Saxon, which anyone can do in a month. In such a course, I should start knowing more of the subject than some do at the end: it ought to be a very easy proposition compared with Greats. All these considerations have tended to confirm what my tutor advised in the first place . . . but if it comes to school mastering, *my inability to play games will count against me*. Above all, I hope it is clear that in no case will Greats be wasted.”⁵⁰

In a 1922 letter to his father, Lewis spoke highly of philology, linguistic history, and theory,⁵¹ while he also includes classics and history as part of a good education when he

Decay?, p. 252).

⁴⁹ “All schools, both here and in America, ought to teach far fewer subjects and teach them far better.” *Letters to Children*, 1958, p. 83. See also *SLJ*, p. 112f., where Lewis writes, “In those days a boy on the classical side officially did almost nothing but classics. I think this was wise; the greatest service we can do to education today is to teach fewer subjects. No one has time to do more than a very few things well before he is twenty, and when we force a boy to be a mediocrity in a dozen subjects we destroy his standards, perhaps for life.”

⁵⁰ *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, to his Father from University College) [18 May 1922], p. 161.

⁵¹ *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, to his Father from University College) [18 May 1922], p. 161.

puts critical words against them into the mouth of Weston in *Out of the Silent Planet*.⁵² Through the mouth of Professor Kirke, Lewis argues also for logic when the Professor says, “Why don’t they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth.”⁵³

That Lewis is not anti-science, but opposes “scientific materialism raised to a philosophy and imposed on society and morals”⁵⁴ is clear also from Mark Studdock, of whom Lewis wrote in *That Hideous Strength*, “. . . his education has had the curious effect of making things that he read and wrote more real to him than things he saw.”⁵⁵ He was a man whose “education had been neither scientific nor classical—merely ‘Modern.’ The severities of both abstraction and of high human tradition had passed him by. . . . He was . . . a glib examinee in subjects that require no exact knowledge.”⁵⁶

⁵² “All educated opinion—for I do not call classics and history and such trash education—is entirely on my side,” says Weston. Cf. Thomas Howard, *C.S. Lewis: Man of Letters*, p. 99. Lewis also writes, “Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past.” “Learning in War-Time,” in *The Weight of Glory*, 1939, p. 28.

⁵³ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ Thomas Howard, *C.S. Lewis: Man of Letters*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Howard, p. 176.

⁵⁶ *That Hideous Strength*, p. 212. See also “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” p. 78, where Lewis writes, “That Hideous Strength he has almost completely misunderstood. The ‘good’ scientist is put in precisely to show that ‘scientists’ as such are not the target. To make the point clearer, he leaves my N.I.C.E. because he finds he was wrong in his original belief that ‘it had something to do with science’ (p. 83). To make it clearer yet, my principal character, the man almost irresistibly attracted by the N.I.C.E. is described (p. 226) as one whose ‘education had been neither

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Abstraction (logic, philosophy⁵⁷ [Plato, Aristotle]) and high human tradition (literature [Dante, Milton, Yeats, and others], classics [Greek, Latin], history, religion) are those subjects which help the individual to learn to think.

In a diary entry dated 2 November 1922, Lewis wrote, "Went to the Schools library. Here I puzzled for the best of two hours over phonetics, back voice stops, glides, glottal catches and open Lord-knows-whats. Very good stuff in its way, but why physiology should form part of the English school I really don't know . . ."⁵⁸

Writing his essay "Learning in War-Time," Lewis indirectly states the value of the study of literature, art, mathematics, and biology, "He must ask himself how it is right, or even psychologically possible, for creatures who are

scientific nor classical—merely "Modern". The severities both of abstraction and of high human tradition had passed him by . . . He was . . . a glib examinee in subjects that require no exact knowledge. To make it doubly and trebly clear the rake's progress of Wither's mind is represented (p. 438) as philosophical, not scientific at all. Lest even this should not be enough, the hero (who is, by the way, to some extent a fancy portrait of a man I know, but not of me) is made to say that the sciences are 'good and innocent in themselves' (p. 248), though evil 'scientism) is creeping into them. And finally, what we are obviously up against throughout the story is not scientists but officials. If anyone ought to feel himself libelled by this book it is not the scientist but the civil servant: and, next to the civil servant, certain philosophers. Frost is the mouthpiece of Professor Waddington's ethical theories: by which I do not, of course, mean that Professor Waddington in real life is a man like Frost."

⁵⁷"Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered."

"Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory*, 1939, p. 28.

⁵⁸*Letters of C.S. Lewis*, p. 177.

every moment advancing either to heaven or to hell, to spend any fraction of the little time allowed them in this world on such comparative trivialities as literature or art, mathematics or biology."⁵⁹

The Inner Ring

Lewis never appreciated the cliqueishness of schools, whether as a student or a professor. Lewis wrote about the various groups he faced at Malvern College as a fifteen-year-old, including the athletes, "The whole school was a great temple for the worship of these mortal gods; and no boy ever went there more prepared to worship them than I."⁶⁰

During his undergraduate days at University College Lewis wrote in his diary, "After lunch I bicycled again to Schools to seek out the library of the English school. I found it at the top of many stories, inhabited by a strange old gentleman who seems to regard it as his private property . . ."⁶¹

Then, as a tutor and later a professor, he met the same Inner Ring at Oxford and Cambridge, appreciating neither. One of the clear concerns of Lewis is reflected by the very different examples of Dr. Dimble and Mark Studdock, two professors of the University of Edgestow. Compare Dr. Dimble, a professor at Northumberland College, part of the University of Edgestow, with Dr. Curry, a professor of Bracton College, also of the University of Edgestow, and part of the Progressive Element at Bracton. Mark seeks to gain entrance into that circle. While much

⁵⁹"Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory*, 1939.

⁶⁰*Surprised by Joy*, p. 83.

⁶¹*Letters of C.S. Lewis*, from his diary: at 28 Warnford Road, 16 October 1922, pp. 173-174.

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more could be written on this topic, the point is that education of students should be the chief concern of the faculty, not jockeying for position.

Summary

While his views on education are not well known, C.S. Lewis wrote about the loss of the liberal arts, the loss of objective truth, the negative effect of democratizing the curriculum, the lack of discipline, and the problem of the Inner Ring. But he did not simply criticize; he also promoted a particular approach to education that emphasized a few subjects in depth rather than many subjects covered briefly. While he did not expect British society to champion the truths of Christianity in the classroom, he nevertheless encouraged the religious side of education as a crucial part of the moral fabric of society. He also wrote about the importance of both reason and imagination in the learning process, and he modeled that in his teaching.

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