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Learning in the Shadowlands *The Educational Vision of C.S. Lewis*

Brian Hudson

C.S. Lewis is considered by many as one of the great thinkers and apologists of the twentieth century. His writings have touched and encouraged millions of individuals over the last seven decades. Lewis's writings cover a wide range of topics but at his core he was a teacher. Even in his children's literature, readers can clearly perceive that Lewis was always concerned with human growth and flourishing. He was concerned with how people learn and what inspires them to pursue a clear knowledge of God in the world they live. Today's culture is marked with a loss of true education. Each generation becomes less connected with its history and is steadily sliding into moral bankruptcy. As readers reflect upon the writings of C.S. Lewis, one is struck by his vision of what it means to be a true learner, as well as his clear perspective on what education is meant to be. It is Lewis's vision of learning and the nature of the learner that offers one of the best critiques to the modern educational culture, as well as, one of the clearest paths to developing a strong philosophy of learning.

Learning In The Shadowlands: The Educational Vision of C.S. Lewis

Brian Hudson, Covenant Christian High School

“...such is the tragi-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. ...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 honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful. (Lewis 36-37).

C.S. Lewis penned these words in the middle of the twentieth century as a reaction to a contemporary English book, which he had read, that promoted new theories in education. Though his words were published in 1947, they seem almost prophetic to our present cultural and educational situation. It is difficult to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television without being bombarded by stories bemoaning the present state of education. Low test scores, overcrowded classrooms, falling matriculation rates, school violence and rising illiteracy are only a few of the difficulties facing educators. Even worse is the moral ambiguity and lack of purpose that seems to pervade the teenage consciousness today. The problems have not come about because of a lack of research. There are a plethora of journals filled with new curriculum theories, character development and brain-based research, and thousands of articles on “best practice,” relating to classroom discipline or instructional techniques. Library shelves are filled with books on innovative teaching ideas and classroom management skills. The dilemma in today’s educational system is not due to a lack of ideas but a lack of “big ideas”. It is not caused by a loss of vision but a loss of “fixed vision”, one that is grounded on a solid foundation and has a clear end in mind.

In short, the crisis in education stems from the postmodern belief that there are no absolutes. There is no meta-narrative or “Big Story” to explain the world as it exists. We are driven by experience as opposed to reason or truth. Science and the modern pursuit of progress, rather than giving ultimate answers to the questions of life, have become paths to the dehumanization of mankind. Without the anchor of moral absolutes or transcendent values, education is set adrift in a sea of relativity. In the middle of the last century, it was C.S. Lewis who warned the coming generations about the shift in modern thinking and finally the total “abolition of man.”

Lewis’s prophetic vision concerning the abolition of man was centered in his understanding and insight about education and learning. He was first and foremost an educator. He spent his life as a tutor, lecturer and academician. Although few of his books focus directly on education, his writings can never be separated from his pervasive thoughtfulness about the subject. His essays, apologetics, fiction, and children’s stories overflow with his philosophy of learning and educational insight. It is Lewis’s vision of learning and the nature of the learner that offers one of best critiques to the modern educational culture, as well as, one of the clearest paths to developing a strong educational philosophy

Early Education

As we establish an educational vision from the writings of C.S. Lewis, it is important to begin with Lewis’s personal schooling. An interest in learning was modeled from the time that Lewis (or Jack, as he was called) was a young child. He grew up in a home where books and reading were important. His parents were lifelong readers; Lewis described them as ‘bookish’ (4). Jack’s mother earned a degree in mathematics and logic, and his father was a lawyer who loved oratory. With his brother Warren, Jack’s life was spent reading and creating imaginative worlds. He describes himself as being, “a product of a childhood... filled with long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs silences, attics explored in solitude...and endless books” (Lewis 10). After the death of his mother when Jack was nine, his journey into the educational world began. “It is interesting to note that Lewis did not have a fondness for most of his educational experiences. Jack’s personal contact with schools as he grew up were rarely good ones. Late in his life Lewis wrote a letter to a child who had written him about the Narnia books. In the letter Lewis recalled, “I was at three schools (all boarding schools) of which two were very horrid. I never hated anything so much, not even the front line trenches in

World War I.” (Jacobs 20)

The first school that Jack attended was Wynyard. It was a boarding school for about eight or nine students. His brother had attended there for three years. The schoolmaster was a man named Robert Capron (nicknamed “Oldie”). Jack describes Oldie as “living in the solitude of power.” Boys were often beaten for insignificant things like getting the wrong answer to a math question. Oldie had been brought up on charges for cruelty to students and in a few short years would be declared insane. Jack describes his time at Wynyard as almost entirely wasted. His studies, he remembered as, “...a jungle of dates, battles, exports, imports and the like, forgotten as soon as learned and perfectly useless had they been remembered” (Lewis 34). He was removed from Wynyard and sent to Campbell College in Ireland where he resided for just a little over a month, and then removed because he had developed a bad cough.

In 1911, his father sent Jack to Cherbourg House, a preparatory school for Malvern. There he earned a scholarship to attend Malvern College (“The Coll”). It was here that he experienced some of his most difficult times as a student. Malvern was a school, which had a classical focus. Jack, as well as other students, were subjected to, what Lewis calls “Bloodery.” This was a system of school aristocracy where certain boys of social standing were given reign to exploit other boys into a state of almost complete servitude. This included polishing shoes, cleaning, and even for some unlucky few, performing sexual favors. This exploitation was called “fagging” and was exhausting for all those who weren’t ‘bloods’. Jack was also required to participate in athletic events, which he hated almost as much as ‘fagging’. Lewis describes the impact of his school experience as he tried to fit in, “Spiritually speaking, the deadly thing was that school life was a life almost wholly dominated by the social struggle; to get on, to arrive, or, having reached the top, to remain there, was the absorbing preoccupation.” (108). This ‘fagging’ system, “bloodery,” and his hatred of athletic participation, caused him to plead incessantly with his father to be removed from the school.

These experiences often made school a burden for Lewis. During his time at “The Coll” the library became Jack’s one true sanctuary; if he was fortunate enough to make it there. It became to him a paradise where he was protected from “fagging” and he could read and use his imagination without interruption. He longed for the holidays and the end of each term. This dislike of school often found its way into many of his Narnia stories. Almost every one of the tales describe the schools the children were attending in a negative light. It is telling that in *The Last Battle*, as the children are ushered into Aslan’s country (heaven), Aslan describes their entrance into eternal bliss this way, “The term is over: the holidays have begun.” (Lewis 210). In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis looked upon these difficult school days by stating, “Life at a vile boarding school is in a way a good preparation for the Christian life, that it teaches one to live by hope. Even, in a sense, by faith; for at the beginning of each term, home and the holidays are so far off that it is as hard to realize them as to realize heaven.” (36)

Although his school experience was often painful, Lewis studied under teachers, and had experiences that would impact his life forever. During his time at Malvern, he was introduced to the music of Wagner. Wagner’s music intensified his enjoyment of Norse mythology, a subject that Lewis relished from his childhood. He also studied under a teacher he called “Smugy,” who helped him to fall in love with poetry. “He (Smugy) first taught me the right sensuality of poetry, how it should be savored and mouthed in solitude” (Lewis 111). In 1914 Lewis was sent to Great Bookham to study under William Kirkpatrick or “The Old Knock” as Lewis would call him. Kirkpatrick was a masterful logician. Lewis would say of Kirkpatrick, “If ever a man came near to being a purely logical entity, that man was Kirk” (Heck 71). From the moment they met, ‘The Knock’ challenged Jack to reason everything out. Lewis said that, “Some boys would not have liked it; to me it was red beef and strong beer.” (136). It was under ‘The Old Knock’s’ tutelage that Jack became a convinced atheist. His propensity toward logic would later become an important instrument to Jack’s conversion and a powerful weapon in his work as a Christian apologist.

Along with some excellent teachers, Lewis would discover books and authors that would shape his life in powerful ways. Under ‘Old Knock’ Lewis would study Homer, Demosthenes, Cicero and Virgil. At ‘The Coll,’ he would be introduced to Milton, Yeats and G.K. Chesterton. These authors excited and inflamed Jack’s imagination. While at Bookham, he struck up a friendship with Arthur Greeves. He and Lewis shared a love for Norse mythology, spending hours talking over books and learning from one another. One other book must be mentioned. On a cold October morning in 1916, Lewis was book hunting as he waited for a train at Leatherhead station. Here Lewis discovered *Phantastes, a faerie Romance* by George MacDonald; it would forever change his life. Jack recalls his reaction. “It was as though the voice which had called to me from the

world's end were now speaking...I saw the bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged." (Lewis 181). He found that all these experiences led him into existing in two contrary worlds. The first of these worlds was shaped by myth and poetry, the other by a shallow rationalism. To him the rational world was godless, prosaic and logical. The other inflamed his imagination and sparked what Lewis would describe throughout his life as pangs of longing or what he also called, "Joy." He wrote, "Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless." (Jacobs 49) During his early schooling, the lessons he learned, both harsh and enjoyable, would become a part of Lewis's vision of learning.

The Foundation: Reading and Rereading

In attempting to establish a vision for education in the mind of C.S. Lewis, it is important to ask the question, "Where would Lewis begin?" It seems clear that Lewis would begin where he himself began, reading and rereading old books. Jack was a voracious reader from his early childhood. Joe Walsh, a Magdalene College historian stated, "He was the best-read man I have ever met, almost too well read" (Heck 18). According to Jack's diary, during his first years as an Oxford Don, he read over 400 volumes, approximately a book every two days (Heck 146). The scope of his reading was also amazing. He read in multiple genres including prose, poetry, philosophy, novels, drama, opera and history.

Lewis believed that reading great books (especially old ones) was the foundation for any meaningful learning and human growth. Lewis was frustrated by the modern belief that old books should be read only by professionals. He had a special dislike for professional critics and was convinced that a student would always learn more by going straight to the source rather than reading what the critics have written about them. "It has always therefore been one of my main endeavours as a teacher to persuade the young that first-hand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than second-hand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful." (Lewis 200). For Lewis, if a reader had a choice between an old book and a new one, he should always choose the old. The reason is that old books help to correct the mistakes that humans make in their modern culture. He believed that every age has its own particular blind spots. "None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books" (Lewis 203). He was convinced that modern writings were still on trial and had not been given enough time to stand under the scrutiny of the great tradition of Christian thought. His encouragement to readers was that, after finishing a modern book, they should not read another until they have read an old one (Lewis 201).

Another reason why Lewis believed in reading old books was to confirm what he called "Mere Christianity." It is easy for modern man to be discouraged with the divisions that seem to permeate the modern church. What old books do is help the reader to see that over the many centuries there has been a consistent and unmoving set of beliefs that all Christians believe to be true. Though we may be dispirited by the divisions that are present, the great writings of the past unfold for us a faith of an, "immensely formidable unity" (Lewis 204). Lewis was convinced that the truly educated man or woman, could only be so by entering into the 'Great Conversation' which has been going on for centuries.

For Lewis, it is not only important to read old books but to read them again and again. As he discovered books that made an impact on him, he would read them multiple times. Dante, MacDonald, Milton, and Virgil were among his favorites. Lewis believed that re-reading books was one sign of a truly literary person. In his book *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis compares the literary person with the unliterary:

"The sure mark of an unliterary man is that he considers 'I've read it already' to be a conclusive argument against reading a work. We have known women who remembered a novel so dimly that they had to stand for half an hour in the library skimming through it before they were certain they had once read it. But the moment they became certain, they rejected it immediately. It was for them dead, like a burnt-out match, an old railway ticket, or yesterday's paper; they had already used it. Those who read great works, on the other hand, will read the same work ten, twenty or thirty times during the course of their life" (2).

The great books according to Lewis were those that would not release the reader after they were finished with them. Each time a person rereads a great book they are moved and educated in new and fresh ways. He likens the literary person's reading experience as a momentous event, to be compared with love, religion or grief

(Lewis 3). For Lewis, reading, reading well, reading great books and rereading them again and again, was the first step in the life of a true learner.

The Importance of History

Lewis's love of old books was a consequence of his belief in the importance of history. For Lewis, "The educated man habitually, almost without noticing it, sees the present as something that grows out of a long perspective of centuries" (241). Lewis believed that knowledge of history was a vital need in education. He taught that humans need something to set beside the present to compare and contrast ideas and assumptions. It is impossible to know the future and individuals are unaware of their present blind spots. We need something to help us evaluate our present beliefs and see if they have merit. He states, "A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age" (Lewis 59).

Lewis was concerned that the more a culture became disconnected from its past, the more susceptible it was to being deceived. This is the point that Lewis clearly makes in *The Last Battle*. In this story the Narnians are deceived that Aslan (the great lion king) has returned to Narnia. The Ape called Shift has perpetrated this deception by dressing Puzzle the donkey in a Lion's skin. The Narnians are exploited, enslaved and some even killed. They were deceived, not because the deception was well perpetrated. It was because they had forgotten the stories of Aslan and his true nature. Often the Narnians justified the evil being done by quoting the old saying "He's not a tame Lion." What they had forgotten is that he was also good. Generations had passed since Aslan had appeared and their history was the only possible defense against the rising evil.

Lewis was opposed to historicism, the practice of drawing metaphysical or theological conclusions from the past. The result of this practice is to revise history in the image of present beliefs. Lewis believed that history was objective; it could reveal truth and correct present misunderstandings. In *The Pilgrims Regress*, the pilgrim John finally finds his way to the hermit. The hermit is the personification of history in the story and through him John finally is helped to see that Mother Kirk (the Gospel) is the way across the chasm and the true fulfillment of John's longing. It is history that finally brings John to the place he needed to be to fulfill his deepest desire. For Lewis, Christianity is a story rooted in history. The importance of teaching students to think historically cannot be overstated. The truly educated person understands and studies the past. They are able to evaluate the present and make decisions for the future. Without it there is no true learning.

Receptivity

Lewis was convinced that there was something that preceded history or the love of great books. He believed that the primary approach to a work of great literature or a piece of art or to any true learning was the quality of receptivity in the heart of the learner. It is only the person who is receptive to truth who will ultimately find it. This quality of openness finds its way into almost all of Lewis's writings. He felt that this was the key to truth, education and the whole of life. It is not the critical reader whom he identifies as the literary person, but the receptive one. It is not the cynical person, who discovers fairylands, but those exhibiting a childlike character to receive what is there. Concerning the reading of books, Lewis felt that a "critical" approach to reading had, "prevented many a happy unions of a good reader with a good book." He described it as "a dragon watch with unenchanted eye" (Lewis 127-128). He believed the preeminent mark of a literary person was his ability to receive what the author was trying to say. His concern was that, "We are breeding up a race of young people who are as solemn as the brutes...they have not fairly and squarely laid their minds open, without preconception, to the works they read" (Lewis 12). The first demand of a literary and educated person is surrender. We must look, listen and receive what is there. It must be made clear that Lewis is not saying that receptivity is a passive activity; in fact it is the opposite. The person who is surrendered is using his imagination to its fullest extent. Surrender is not inactivity but obedience to what is being received (19).

Receptivity is one of crucial themes in Lewis's fiction, especially in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. From the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are open to adventures. Due to the dangers of World War II, the children are sent by their parents to live with their uncle Kirk in a large old house in the country. From the moment they arrive, the children begin to explore and talk about all the adventures they will have. Before they even discover the Narnian world they are receptive to the world they are in.

It is Lucy, the youngest, whose openness is rewarded again and again. Lucy is the first to find her way into Narnia. It is Lucy who is the first to see Aslan in the story of *Prince Caspian*. Lucy often sees what others can't because she is open to what may come. Others also (mostly children), have this same openness and are rewarded for their receptivity. Caspian's openness and belief in the old stories of Narnia is rewarded by being crowned the king of Narnia. Digory and Polly in *The Magician's Nephew*, are also rewarded for their receptive hearts. Both are given the opportunity to see Narnia created by the song of Aslan. There are many other examples, but it is Reepicheep, the talking mouse, who exhibits this quality more than all others. He is open to all that Aslan has for him, whatever the cost might be. In his infancy he is given a prophecy that he will see his heart's desire. His deepest longing is to see and enter into Aslan's country. He is afraid of nothing and is the only character in all the stories who is allowed to enter Aslan's country without tasting death.

Lewis not only describes receptivity in a positive light but also reveals the stories of those who are unreceptive. These people are unable to see what is before them. They are often limited in their vision and frustrated with their circumstances. Edmund's sin, in *The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe*, fills him with dread at the mention of Aslan. His vision is hindered by his selfishness and lustful desire for Turkish Delight. Peter, Trumpkin and Susan's refusal to believe that Lucy has seen Aslan in the story of *Prince Caspian* causes the children to wander aimlessly and suffer unneeded hardships. Eustace's lack of openness makes his journey miserable when he is magically transported to Narnia with Edmond and Lucy in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Uncle Andrew is blind to the beauty of Narnia's creation because his mind is filled with exploitation and power. Rather than hearing Aslan's song, he only hears a deafening roar.

The most telling example of the refusal to be receptive are the dwarves in *The Last Battle*. The dwarves are described as an untrusting race. They are unwilling to take sides in the last great battle for Narnia. They continually proclaim, "The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs." In the end, their critical and untrusting natures make them unable to see that they have passed into the paradise of Aslan's country, full of beauty and abundance. Even when Aslan places before them a feast fit for a king, they only see hay, dirt and darkness. For Lewis there is no learning apart from surrender. Openness equals learning. To be closed is to remain in a small world, cold and dead. In *The Great Divorce*, the damned are described this way, "Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut...they cannot open their hands for gifts, or their mouth for food, or their eyes to see" (Lewis 139).

Without a receptive heart, learning becomes an impossibility. No amount of modern pedagogy or new classroom management techniques can force a student to learn. Only through openness and surrender can true education take place. In the classroom, receptivity begins with the teacher. Teachers who don't exhibit this quality should never expect to make any true impact on their students. The best teachers are always learners first. In *Irrigating Deserts*, Joel Heck notes, "...the students who came to learn, who came to be challenged and to grow, with some notable exceptions, soon discovered flowers blooming in the deserts of their minds" (131). For Lewis, enchantment is the first responsibility of a teacher.

Myth and Story

This leads us to Lewis's belief in the importance of myth and story as a basis for human growth and learning. For C.S. Lewis, story and myth were the keys that could unlock the deep magic of life. It was his love for myth that both hindered his acceptance of Christianity, and in the end was the cause of his acceptance. His love for mythology ignited in him pangs of longing for another world. Before his conversion Lewis had trouble reconciling his love of myth and his materialist philosophy of life. It was through the help of two friends, Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien, that Lewis overcame his last hurdle to Christian faith. Though Lewis loved myth he believed that they were, "'lies'--even if they were beautiful, 'breathed through silver'" (Jacobs, 143). Lewis believed that myths were nothing but 'Christina dreams and wish-fulfillment fantasies' (Jacobs 145). What Tolkien and Dyson challenged Lewis to consider was that if myths were just dreams and desires in the human heart, where did these dreams originate? If the materialist is right in his view of the world, why do all humans have these same desires? Why are they moved by the same transcendent stories?

Jack began to contemplate the possibility that myth had the capacity of revealing and communicating truths that are part of our deep human longing. In fact they have the ability to communicate these truths in ways that are unique only to itself. Lewis writes, "It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely...What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always

about something, but reality is that *about which truth is*)...myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to” (Lewis 66). This became a foundational presupposition in his defense of the Christian faith. Concerning the importance of myth as it relates to human longing, Lewis writes,

Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. But is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any satisfaction to it? Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread. But I think it may be urged that this misses the point. A man’s physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man’s hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating, and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist (pg. 32).

Lewis realized that in a profound sense, Christianity was a myth. It was a story that both explains and connects us to our deepest desires. The difference between Christianity and all other myths is that it is also fact. “The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens--at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences” (66). He goes on to say that in this myth that became fact, “God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less. We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology” (Lewis 67). It was this insight that finally toppled his last arguments against the Christian faith. Alan Jacob comments, “He (Lewis) became a Christian not through accepting a particular set of arguments but through learning to read a story the right way.”

The importance of myth to education is inseparably linked to Lewis’s understanding of the overarching importance of story. In the epilogue of *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis poses this question. “What then is the good of--what is even the defense for --occupying our hearts with stories of what never happened and entering vicariously into feelings which we should try to avoid having in our own person” (137)? Lewis’s answer is that story and myth help us to be more than ourselves. All humans see the world through their individual point of view. What story does is enlarge our nature. It allows us to see with other eyes. Our imagination is enlarged by experiencing the imagination of another. We can feel, taste and touch, while still remaining ourselves. Story and myth have the ability to correct our “provincialism” and heal the “loneliness” of our hearts (Lewis 138). He states, “...the specific value or good of literature considered as Logos,” is that, “it admits us to experiences other than our own.” In myth, it strikes to the very core of human desire. It grabs us and never lets us go. He concludes by saying,

My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough...Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality...But 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. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do” (Lewis 140-141).

For C.S. Lewis, story and myth were foundational in teaching students not only how to read correctly but how to understand what it means to be human. This is one reason why his fiction is so popular. Readers fall in love with Jesus as they fall in love with the lion Aslan. They realize that they themselves are dragons because they see their own dragon nature in Eustace’s transformation into one. They are taught that childlike receptivity often opens a doorway into another world outside their own. Talking animals give them insight into what it means to be a talking human being. They realize through reading *That Hideous Strength* that man’s desire to control nature will ultimately turn on humanity and devour those seeking its control. In *Till We Have Faces* (Lewis, 1956), we are given an unforgettable lesson that selfish love first becomes a god and finally a demon.

The Search for Joy

“...there came to him from beyond the wood a sweetness and a pang so piercing that instantly he forgot his father’s house, and his mother, and the fear of the landlord, and the burden of the rules” (Lewis 8).

This is the reaction to John's first vision of the island in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis's allegory about his conversion to Christianity. Jack's vision of education would be incomplete without discussing his understanding of joy. For him, it was the beginning of the journey. Without it there would have been no need to start. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis reveals that his journey through education, great books, friendships and finally, Christianity, was driven by his search for this one thing called "joy." C.S. Lewis defines "joy" as, "...an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction" (18). His first experience with this pang of longing was when his brother Warren made for Jack a miniature garden composed of the lid of biscuit tin, with twigs, moss and flowers. He states that this, "was the first beauty I ever knew" (Lewis 7). This artificial garden awakened something in the heart of Lewis that would remain with him for the rest of his life. The experience was deepened one day when Jack was outside and looked at a bush in bloom. He recalled, "...there suddenly arose without warning, ...the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House...It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me...It was a sensation, of course of desire; but desire for "what" (Lewis 16)? This pang of joy happened many other times in the life of Lewis and became, in some ways, the pursuit of his life.

But what is the nature of this 'joy' and what does it have to do with education? Joy, for Lewis is the driving force in a human's life. As a Christian he believed that eternity was etched into the heart of man. We were made for pleasure and fulfillment of all our desire. The problem is not that our desire is too strong but that it is too weak. In his sermon "The Weight of Glory," Lewis states, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased" (26).

It is this longing that entices us to begin the journey. Lewis believed that if human beings were made for eternal glory then the desire for heaven is already in us. If the learner ultimately trusts in something other than the real end for which he was made, then life will end in disappointment. The true learner must understand that the beauty and joy that he seeks is not in the things he learns. It only comes through them. It is not truth we seek but a person. It is not the knowledge of a subject that fulfills our deepest desires but the knowledge of God. If the world around us is mistaken for the thing itself, Lewis says, "they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers" (Lewis 31). For Lewis, all things we pursue in life, especially in learning are only the 'scent' of what we seek. There is, "an echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited" (31). He laments over education by stating, "...our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth" (Lewis 31).

Lewis again teases out this idea in his works of fiction. As was stated earlier, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, is the story about a man name John who is seeking to recapture his vision of the island. The stab of joy that he is given by its sight inspires him to seek his vision through different lands, ideas, sufferings and even lust. What John finds is that his desire wasn't for the island but for the landlord himself, *The Chronicles of Narnia* are filled with longing. Ultimately, Aslan himself fulfills longing as the children are finally ushered into Aslan's country. In *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis relates this experience when Mr. Beaver tells them that Aslan is on the move. "...At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the felling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer" (68). The reaction of the four children at the name of Aslan was the very feelings that Lewis had lived with all his life. To Jack, joy is just a pointer, valuable as it is, to something "other" and something "outer" (Jacobs 238). Education in the mind of Lewis was always one of enchantment. His hope in his books and the classroom was to incite this desire in his students. His goal was to set them on the path to fill the ache of their hearts.

The Abolition of Man

C.S. Lewis's clearest and most prophetic statements about education are found in his book, *The Abolition of Man*. In these essays he describes the trajectory of modern education, and there describes the dangers to learning and finally the complete abolition of mankind. *The Abolition of Man* was a response that Lewis made to a book that was given to him as a gift by its publisher. The book was written by Alec King and Martin

Ketley. Its title was *The Control of Language*. Lewis refers to this book as “The Green Book,” so not to embarrass the authors.

Lewis attacks the book and contends that it not only undermines true learning but ultimately dehumanizes the learner. In the first chapter, “Men without Chests,” Lewis is troubled by the authors’ intent to teach children that when they read sentences containing a “predicate of value” it is really only speaking about the emotional state of the speaker, and statements of value are ultimately unimportant. Lewis believes that this teaching undermines the very nature of learning. He states, “...a boy thinks he is “doing” his “English prep” and has no notion that ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake.” (18).

His contention is that it places an assumption in the mind of the student who unknowingly begins to apply it to all of life. It is the assumption that there is no objective value in the world, and truth ultimately depends upon our emotions. For Lewis this teaching cuts out the soul of the learner. If there is no objective truth or value in the world, then there is ultimately nothing to have sentiments about. The goal of modern education is to protect the learner from false sentiments, but for Lewis, true education is the inculcation of right sentiments. In his famous line he states, “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” (Lewis 27).

Educators must teach students that truth is transcendent and unchangeable. There is value that exists outside of human sentiment. The role of the true educator is to help the student connect the right sentiment with the right truth. He utilizes the teaching of St. Augustine to prove his point. Augustine believed in an “ordered love,” “in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it” (Lewis 29). He uses Aristotle as an example, “The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likable, disgusting, and hateful.” He then quotes Plato stating that the true student is one,

...who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distaste would blame and hate the ugly even from the earliest of years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart. All this before he is of an age to reason; so that when Reason at length comes to him, then, bred as he has been, he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her (Lewis 29).

The right education upholds the doctrine of objective value and teaches the learner to respond with sentiments, which are in harmony to that value. He calls this objective truth the *tao* and uses this term through the rest of the book. For Lewis the good teacher trains the student to think, feel and act in accordance with truth. He comments, “The head rules the belly through the chest ...of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man” (35-36).

Without this training Lewis believes that human beings will be sucked into a world of relativism. They will have no anchor or foundation to make any significant decisions. There will be nothing to die for, and more importantly, nothing to live for. He concludes his chapter by saying,

And all the time—such is the tragic-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more “drive,” or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or “creativity.” 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. (Lewis 36-37)

In the next stage of his argument, Lewis contends that the teaching of the “Green Book” will end in the destruction of the society that propagates it. The goal of modern education is to debunk and deconstruct traditional values. In the absence of transcendent values, society and those who live in it are left with no consistent means of decision-making. Society is bereft of any moral imperatives, only individual feelings toward decisions. He rejects the idea that this can come from human instinct. Instincts are often in conflict

with one another. It is an argument that always turns in on itself, and ends again in relativism. This leaves society with the impossible task of creating its own moral code. Lewis states, "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" (Lewis 56).

Unless education begins with the concept of objective value, something 'outside' and 'other,' students can learn no sense of honor or sacrifice. Unless there is something good worth dying for, there can be no good worth living for. For Lewis, as long as transcendent values exist then an open mind is a good thing, but openness about ultimate foundations is "idiocy" (59). He states, "Outside the *tao* there is no ground for criticizing either the *tao* or anything else" (59).

Without the *tao*, and the values it promotes, society must jettison it completely and create its own system. This leads Lewis to discuss man's conquest of nature. He believed that mankind's power over nature always leads toward a minority of men having power over the majority. All technology is an exhibition of human power over nature. The inventions of airplanes, telephones and contraceptives are examples. These inventions, by their nature, exhibit the power of some people over others. People become limited by the decisions of others. Contraceptives are a good example. Future generations are subject to the decisions of those who use them today. One generation's power over nature will dictate the freedom, capacity and decisions of future generations (Lewis 67). Lewis writes, "In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it please, all men who live after it are the patients of that power" (68).

For Lewis, man's desire to conquer nature through scientific materialism will ultimately mean that the billions of people who will follow in future generations are subject to a small minority. Lewis declares, "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" (69). This minority become 'man-moulders,' shaping future generations in the way they please (71). Lewis argues that the first step is to control nature but this will lead to the inevitable conclusion of controlling human nature.

Lewis reveals this process, again and again in his works of fiction. In *That Hideous Strength*, the N.I.C.E. organization has decided to create society in its own image. The desire for power ends in the control of all mankind. Beauty, virtue, community and humanity itself become expendable in the process of controlling nature. In the end those who attempted to control nature were devoured by the nature they tried to control. In *The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe*, Jadis's lust for control, results in enslavement of Narnia. Her rule, rather than creating good, makes it winter all the time (with no Christmas). Her lust for power manifests itself in taking away life by turning creatures into stone. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Uncle Andrew rejects traditional morality because, as a scientist, he should not be bound by such conventions. He sees only the exploitation of nature to gain further power and ultimately is willing to sacrifice Digory and Polly for that power. The land of Charn is another good example. When Digory and Polly are transported to this world they find that is completely destroyed. No life exists. It is a world that Jadis destroys by uttering 'the deplorable word.' Her desire for power and control was more important than life itself. She was willing to annihilate all life to maintain her authority.

Education that refuses to maintain a belief in objective value will train a generation of people who will never ask, "what is good?" but only, "what do I want?" They will be motivated by their pleasure. Lewis states, "...those who stand outside all judgments of value cannot have any ground for preferring one of their own impulses to another except the emotional strength of that impulse" (75). Students will treat all things as mere nature, to be controlled and exploited. This will continue to devolve until humans must be reduced and controlled just as nature is. It is, as Lewis says, "...the magician's bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls...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" (80). In his book *The Narnian*, Alan Jacobs sums up Lewis's concern this way:

Our model of modernity—makes the universe silent and vague, so we come to resemble it. It shrinks the scope of human action, mistrusting or debunking the heroic and the noble; we shrink correspondingly. Yes, we project forward a great image of Progress to console ourselves, but it is only an image. Nevertheless, by investing so much in it and so little ourselves, we make it more and more real, ourselves

less and less until we confront the possibility that, in the end, it will replace us: all that will be left is a fiction, and though human beings will physically continue, humanity itself will have been abolished (174).

The Purpose of Education

So what is the purpose of education in the mind of Lewis? What is the goal of true learning? I believe that Lewis would answer this question by saying, “The purpose and goal of education is to discover and grow in our humanity. Lewis believed that human beings were on a trajectory, either growing toward an ever-increasing glory or an ever-increasing misery. Lewis was convinced that human beings were not mere mortals. In *The Weight of Glory*, He states, “There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations--these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit--immortal horrors or everlasting splendours” (Lewis 46). In Lewis mind, we were made for more than this world has to offer.

Unfortunately, we are not what we should be. Like Eustace, we find that we are dragons and that it is impossible to “undragon” ourselves. We must come to the one who can pierce the dragon skin, wash us clean and clothe us with a new humanity. Education for Lewis cannot be separated from this journey. Our learning must be a journey to fulfill the longing in our hearts. He says, “...our longing to be reunited with something in the universe which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside...To be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache” (Lewis 42).

He also believed that the Christian faith or Christian worldview was the best matrix for understanding truth. In his essay, “Is Theology Poetry,” Lewis writes, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun is risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (140). The student who has the right worldview is able to learn from the world and correctly interpret it. It allows the student to enjoy the natural world without losing the world that exists outside of it. For Lewis, Christian belief didn’t deny scientific knowledge. Though there might arise difficulties in what science theorized and Christianity taught, the student was still much better off holding this worldview as opposed to scientific materialism.

Lewis taught that the first role of education was not to train students vocationally, rather it was meant to teach them how to think correctly. He believed that schools should help students think and utilize their imaginations. He was concerned about the lack of teaching critical thinking skills in schools. This is revealed in professor Kirk’s question at the beginning and end of the Narnia Chronicles. After helping Peter and Susan reason through Lucy’s story about Narnia, he states, “I wonder what they do teach them at these schools” (Lewis 50). Lewis didn’t deny the importance of vocational training, but for him it was more important what kind of person a student would become than what vocation they would choose to pursue.

Lewis was convinced that education must support learning. Education, to him, was a context where learning could take place but it was not a guarantee. Schools must establish a culture where true learning can flourish. He believed that teachers had the power to either be a detriment to learning or a facilitator of it. His experiences as a student and a teacher remain a good example of this.

Many other conclusions could be drawn from studying the life and writings of C.S. Lewis. The importance of friends, imagination, poetry, mentors and the Medieval worldview are all subjects that Lewis would add to his educational approach. The writing and thought of C.S. Lewis has impacted the Christian faith for over seven decades. His fiction, poetry and apologetics are an invitation to all who care about learning and life. As a student, he learned how to think, read, imagine and write. As a teacher, he inspired others to receive what God was offering through the abundance of life. As a writer he allowed us to see with “other eyes,” what the world and God was about. He was convinced that his role was to weave a spell that would open his students’ and readers’ eyes to a world beyond their own. In the end, the goal of learning is in finding ourselves as we come to know the one who our longing seeks. “Overcome us that, so overcome, we may be ourselves...” (Lewis 113).

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