

Second Place
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A Higher Calling: Pursuing Truth, Beauty, and Goodness in Education

C.S Lewis's timeless work, *The Abolition of Man*, incisively exposes the perilous trends overtaking modern education. His analysis starts with the assertion that the "*Tao*," a set of self-evident precepts transcending time and culture, guides mankind. This Tao, which entails the distinctive marvel that there *are* correct sentiments at all, is what separates man from beast. But a quandary ensues. Despite the Tao's universality, correct sentiments do not develop naturally within the human mind. They must be taught. However, in most schools, educators defy the Tao by "debunking" the concept of objective value. They indoctrinate students by establishing a distinction between empirical facts and subjective opinions about value.

Lewis vigorously warns against this assumption. For, appallingly, man enthrones science as not only the sole path to objectivity, but also as a tool with which to procure power and, ultimately, to conquer Nature. Emotions, meanwhile, which resist the scientific method, are dismissed as subjective and insignificant, thus instilling in students disdain and disregard towards sentiment. If left unchecked, ambitious men will employ this pernicious philosophy to achieve permanent mastery over Nature, having transcended the Tao. What then? The world will be ruled by men actuated solely, in the absence of the Tao, by brute impulse. This ruling clique (whom Lewis labels the "Conditioners") will dictate the morals and the fate of their fellow humans. Having renounced any objective moral bounds upon their behavior, the Conditioners will not only obliterate good and evil, but will extinguish truth as well. Moreover, they will then dissect Nature and study it as an object for mere use. Similarly, the Conditioners will treat their fellow man as a subject to be analyzed, experimented upon, and discarded if needed.

When they have debunked the Tao, the Conditioners will have renounced all truth and value, eradicating that which Lewis believes separates man from beast. Then men will no longer be recognizably human, but instead become animals, buffeted mindlessly by passion and instinct. Intending the conquest of Nature, they will have effected the “Abolition of Man.”

In contrast to the diminished view of sentiment with which modern textbooks inculcate students, Lewis emphasizes the primacy of objective value: just as a waterfall *is* objectively beautiful, Lewis argues, so also objective good and evil exist. While science is a worthy pursuit when it seeks *truth* rather than *power*, modern educators’ empiricism neglects the critical task of training the heart and the emotions. Parents and teachers must labor to teach children not merely how to apply the scientific method, but instead both how to identify what is right, good, and beautiful and how to live out the Tao’s precepts. This instruction rightly disciplines the emotions to conform to reason and the heart to obey the head, all without excising the heart. What a worthy pursuit - for a man’s guiding principles to derive from an objective standard, rather than from the animal instinct to satiate momentary desires. With this objective standard, man’s moral impulses will be well-ordered and virtuous, cultivated like a well-pruned vine upon the trellis of the Tao.