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ARTICLES

Three Rival Versions of Education: An Update to *The Abolition of Man*

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In *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis draws attention to a particular English textbook, exposes the philosophy behind it, warns of the consequences for moral and political life, and reminds us of an alternative. This article updates *The Abolition of Man*. Following Lewis's pattern, I begin by drawing attention to the content and pedagogy of an unidentified Christian school English program. Using Alasdair MacIntyre's framework, I argue that the philosophy behind it can be traced to the contemporary encyclopaedic projects of Rawls and Kohlberg and the genealogical projects of Foucault and Gee, which have produced a dichotomy between justice and virtue and a problem of authority with significant consequences. The two projects converge making each internally inconsistent. Tradition provides a way out, but an encounter with these other projects should lead tradition to find its own language and resources for progress in areas like diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; learning disabilities; and the classical canon.

Another *Green Book*

"I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary text books." Thus C. S. Lewis began his 1943 Riddell Memorial Lectures, which would later become *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis 1947, 1). He could have begun instead with "ideas have legs,"[1] for Lewis makes the case that moral subjectivism, embedded in a particular English textbook he calls "The Green Book," is an idea with long legs—legs that will carry human beings to places we should not wish to go. This article provides an update to *The Abolition of Man*. I should say at the outset that my intended audience consists of those concerned with Christian education specifically and religious education more generally and, while this is a cautionary tale, it is also intended to be one of humility and hope. As Lewis did, I begin with a real but unidentified example. What follow are descriptions of several classes from a Christian high school English program that, taken together, I will call "The English Course."[2]

Media Studies is a required course situated at the intersection of moral formation and the daily lives of teenagers. A stated objective is to teach discernment as part of a "restorative Christian worldview." Lecture slides emphasize that discernment is "different for every person"; it concerns what individuals "decide is valuable for them."

1 The expression comes from Al Wolters's speech, "Ideas Have Legs": "Ideas have legs in the sense that they are not the disembodied abstractions of some ivory-tower academic, but are real spiritual forces that go somewhere, that are on the march in somebody's army, and that have a widespread effect on our practical, everyday lives" (Wolters 1975, 2).

2 Descriptions come from lecture slides, assignments, and conversations with teachers and administrators over several years.

As one exercise in discernment, the class is asked to consider the lyrics of a Katy Perry song about an evening spent maxing out credit cards, getting drunk, streaking, engaging in a *ménage à trois*, and ending in a blacked-out blur. The song concludes, "But this Friday night, do it all again." When the question is asked whether a Christian should listen to this song or not, the lecture slide has this statement: "Discernment is a personal process, so each person might have a different answer here," and, "You listen to the song and it has a great beat and is good for dancing. You hear the words and know that they're promoting bad life choices, but you think you are mature enough to handle it and are able to ignore the messages. You don't think the song will cause you to do these things."

The American literature course is organized around the topic of the American dream. It contains a multiweek project in which students research and write about an influential figure who fought against barriers to the American dream. Students choose from the following list of obstacles: unequal access to quality education, poverty, physical and cognitive differences, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual/gender identification. Research figures are chosen from a teacher-compiled list including Margaret Sanger, Malcolm X, Bill Ayers, Ellen DeGeneres, and Beyoncé. In the two advanced placement courses, students spend significant class time discussing race, mispronunciation of names as microagressions, personal linguistic experiences, and a feminist classic in which the young heroine is trapped in a dull marriage until she chooses art, an adulterous affair, the abandonment of her children, and suicide. Students can pursue justice themes further in a course entitled Literature and Social Justice.

The young adult fiction course includes a unit on banned books in which students choose from five controversial titles: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *The Hate U Give*, *Looking for Alaska*, *Eleanor and Park*, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The last of these, *Perks*, is organized as a series of letters written to an unnamed friend by an adolescent boy, Charlie. It includes references to teen suicide, child molestation (including incest), bullying, teen sex (hetero and same-sex), beatings by a parent, beatings by a boyfriend, dating behind a girl's parents' backs, teen drinking and drug use (including marijuana and LSD), reckless driving, oral sex (consensual and forced), anal sex, sex with a sandwich bag used as a condom, a drunk teen attempting sex with a dog, teen pregnancy, abortion without parental knowledge, underage trips to gay bars and parks, and masturbation (private, public, and with a hot dog). The unit is structured to promote "student-led analysis." After group discussions, students ultimately use "discernment" to make a recommendation to an imaginary school board about whether the book they read should be taught in a Christian high school classroom.

In the world literature course, students read two books for the semester, both contemporary, both by authors from the same country, both about abusive fathers. Class time is spent in peer-to-peer discussions of varying formats,

including inner and outer circles where members of the inner circle vocally express their opinions while members of the outer circle chat on their laptops. Students write a total of around five pages.

A Lewisian Evaluation of The English Course

In these classes two themes emerge. First, there is a dichotomy between justice and virtue. While justice is treated as objective (i.e., something everyone does or should value), the rest of the virtues are treated as subjective (i.e., things people may or may not value).[3] Second, there seems to be an underlying problem of authority that not only impacts the teacher-student relationship but also extends to the nature of assignments. Like Lewis, I do not wish to pillory any teachers or administrators, but "I cannot be silent about what I think the actual tendency of their work" (Lewis 1947, 1–2). I think the main complaints he makes against *The Green Book* can be made against The English Course as well.

The Justice/Virtue Dichotomy and "Men without Chests"

In his first chapter, Lewis exposes the moral subjectivism embedded in *The Green Book*. The schoolboy who reads the book, he says, will come to believe that all statements of value are statements merely about the emotional state of a speaker. Here Lewis is referring to the particular philosophical theory of emotivism, according to which to say something is good is equivalent to saying "yay!" To say something is bad is equivalent to saying "boo!" Furthermore, one can say "yay!" or "boo!" to whatever one wants, and no one can tell the speaker otherwise. Reason can offer no judgment in the matter: all emotions are irrational. The authors of *The Green Book* (Lewis calls them "Gaius and Titius") think the pressing educational need of the day is to equip students to resist the sway of emotional propaganda, and the best strategy for doing this is to teach them to put aside all emotions in order to think "rationally."

Lewis points out that both moral subjectivism and this mode of defense against propaganda are historical anomalies. "Until quite modern times," Lewis argues, moral judgments were considered to be objective: persons' attitudes could be determined to be appropriate or not, true or false "to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are." In other words, reason was thought to be able to judge whether a person says "yay!" or "boo!" to the right things. For Lewis and Plato and most moral philosophers in between, moral formation was a matter of coming to love and hate the right sorts of things. And so, says Lewis, contra Gaius and Titius, "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

3 Throughout this article, "justice" refers to a standard contemporary liberal conception. "Virtue" refers to a fairly comprehensive list shared by ancient philosophers and various world religions, e.g., what Lewis calls "the *Tao*."

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" (Lewis 1947, 13–14, 18).

The inculcation of just sentiments occurs when persons bring their emotional states into harmony with reason, when "the head rules the belly through the chest." Lewis continues, "The Chest–Magnanimity–Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal." The problem with *The Green Book*, Lewis argues, is that it produces "Men without Chests" (Lewis 1947, 24–25). The English Course tends to do the same.

Over the years, media studies students have been taught to assess their personal values and comfort levels in order to make "discerning" media choices. This subjectivist view of discernment fails to recognize, as Lewis observed, that one may be comfortable (or uncomfortable) with the wrong things. Readers may point out that subjectivism about media consumption is not the same thing as subjectivism about what one *does*. They may assume the teachers are not saying it is fine for students to spend their Friday nights as Katy Perry or Charlie's friends do, but merely that it is fine for students to listen to songs about maxing out credit cards, getting drunk, and having a *ménage à trois*, and that it is fine to read and discuss books for school assignments about illicit sex, substance abuse, and masturbating with a hot dog, provided students feel comfortable and are not tempted to do those things themselves. While this is a fair theoretical distinction, the effect of consumption subjectivism on moral formation is greatly concerning.

It is worth noting that the tendency to think of morality as exclusively about actions, and typically only those actions which impact other people, is, like subjectivism, a relatively modern phenomenon. It is unique to the late modern mind to ignore the categories of sins against God (or the gods) and the self, including sins of thought. The psalmists, Saint Paul, and Jesus all warned against sins of thought not only, I think, because they may lead to some immoral action against another person, but also because they separate us from God, from others, and even from ourselves by disordering our souls.

Think for a moment about how many of the stories around us—in literature, music, film, advertising, social media, and the news—display, encourage, and even celebrate the seven deadly sins or capital vices: envy, sloth, greed, wrath, gluttony, lust, and pride. Now think about unprecedented, uninterrupted access to these stories and about what frequent exposure does to the soul. Such exposure is likely to produce fragmented, disordered, and anemic souls: fragmented, if emotions regularly run contrary to what reason knows to be good; disordered, if emotions have clouded reason so it no longer recognizes what is good; and anemic, if the soul simply becomes desensitized. In Lewisian terms, such exposure weakens chests.

Here is a simple truth: stories are powerful. They engage the imagination, arouse emotions, direct passions, shape beliefs. In short, they form us. In promoting consumption subjectivism, the authors of The English Course must either embrace moral subjectivism or deny the power of story—an odd denial for English teachers to make. In either case, they neglect the essential formation of the chest; they lose opportunities to help students not only recognize but also love what is good and true and beautiful. With some material they do not merely neglect the formation of the chest, they oppose it.

Lewis concludes his first chapter with these now famous words about the impact of subjectivism on moral formation: "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 1947, 26). To this, we might add: We are entertained by greed, substance abuse, promiscuity, and violence, and are dismayed to find the same in our midst. We consume ugliness and are distressed by the increase in anxiety and depression. We objectify others and ourselves and wish for respect.[4]

The Justice/Virtue Dichotomy and Myopic Minds

Lewis's second complaint is that *The Green Book* indoctrinates students into a particular philosophy under the guise of teaching English composition:

> The very power of Gaius and Titius depends on the fact that they are dealing with a boy: a boy who thinks he is "doing" his "English prep" and has no notion that ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake. It is not a theory they put into his mind, but an assumption, which ten years hence, its origin forgotten and its presence unconscious, will condition him to take one side in a controversy which he has never recognized as a controversy at all. The authors themselves, I suspect, hardly know what they are doing to the boy, and he cannot know what is being done to him. (Lewis 1947, 5)

A similar critique could apply to The English Course: a particular philosophical conception of justice is being taught under the guise of English literature and composition. There is a tendency to treat this conception of justice as objective, something about which we all agree or should agree. And so the aforementioned American literature or American dream class restricts student research papers to a now familiar set of problems (education, poverty, difference, race, gender, sex/gender identification) along with a narrow set of

4 As mentioned above, media studies articulates a concept of discernment as part of a "restorative Christian worldview." Such a view is often thought to require Christians to be "in the world, but not of it." Without adequate formation, however, this principle may quickly become a mere license to consume and turn into a practice of deformation. It should also be admitted that, as a largely passive practice, media consumption has little to do with "restoring" the world. What, for example, is one restoring by watching *Game of Thrones* or playing *Grand Theft Auto*?

accepted solutions to those problems. The tendency to make justice a central part of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction is perhaps not noticeable until one thinks about what is *not* being offered—namely, a whole range of topics, authors, and books that one would have encountered in literature and composition classes even just fifteen years ago.

In that short time, students have grown so used to the centrality and dominance of this particular conception of justice that they might not think to ask, for example, what other obstacles and solutions may be associated with the American dream; how many from this list of historical figures, activists, and celebrities could be considered "heroes" in the context of Christian education; or what Margaret Sanger, Malcolm X, Bill Ayers, Ellen DeGeneres, and Beyoncé have to do with American literature in the first place. Students may not notice that the young adult fiction list of banned books contains only those books banned by the Right and none of those banned by the Left. And they might not think to ask what they could be reading and discussing in their advanced placement classes instead of articles about mispronunciation of names as microaggressions and books about society's oppression of women who leave dull marriages. Students may not question the assumptions beneath their English classes; they likely do not even recognize the controversies of which they are a part.

The Problem of Authority

Lewis's third complaint in *Abolition* is a pedagogical one: while *The Green Book* purports to be a text for the art of English composition, students will learn very little of the sort. He notes the authors' time spent critiquing poorly written advertisements, and he contrasts this with the work of teachers who lead their students through examples of good writing found in classic texts. In the latter case, both the teacher and the text are viewed as authoritative, and the student learns how to read and write well from a position of apprenticeship. Teacher and textual authority in The English Course has diminished in recent years. Students are spending more time in peer-to-peer discussion and less time with teacher-directed learning. Students are writing less and reading less, and the texts they do read mostly tend to be contemporary. These pedagogical trends have been promoted as ways to be "relevant" and to "go deeper," but they may be neither.

I think it is fair to assume that Lewis preferred teacher-directed to peer-led learning for the simple fact that the teacher knows (or should know) far more about the subject than the students. In "On the Reading of Old Books," he is quite clear about the importance of reading texts that have established their authority by standing the test of time. Against the view that students find only contemporary works relevant to their lives, Lewis argues that classic works serve as an antidote to a kind of temporal provincialism that is antithetical to diversity of thought and deeper understanding: "Every age has its own outlook," he writes. "It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially

liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books" (Lewis 1944, 4–5). And in "The Parthenon and the Optative," Lewis argues that real relevance, depth, and appreciation cannot be had apart from rigorous reading and writing assignments ([1966] 2017a).

Perhaps a thought experiment would help to further the point: What would happen if these pedagogical trends found their way into sports, music, or STEM? What if the rigor of basketball practices and choir rehearsals and chemistry labs significantly decreased? What if they were peer led?[5] While the consequences in these areas may be more immediately evident, the consequences for ELA are no less real.

The Ideas: A Very Short History

How did we get here? Where did the dichotomy between justice and virtue come from, and why these pedagogical trends? As a framework for this short history, I refer to Alasdair MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*.[6] I refer to MacIntyre's analysis not only because it provides a helpful picture of relevant parts of the philosophical landscape since Lewis's time but also because it offers a way for thinking about the possibility of rational discourse in the face of the conflicts that surround us—conflicts in which disputing parties seem only to be able to talk past (or shout at) one another. Against the view that all such debate must be interminable, MacIntyre argues that it is possible to determine that one standpoint is rationally superior to another, that is, if one of the standpoints fails by its own internal standards (MacIntyre 1990, 5). In what follows, I argue that contemporary encyclopaedic and genealogical approaches to education provide paths to The English Course. I also argue that each fails by its own standards and that tradition provides a way out. In the postscript, I ask what more we can learn from these encounters.

Encyclopaedia: Impartial Reason and the Justice/Virtue Dichotomy

One of the defining characteristics of the encyclopaedic approach to moral inquiry is confidence in the ability of human reason to provide rational justification for objective moral truths—truths that apply at all times and in all places and can be accepted by all rational persons. This rational justification requires that reason be impartial: persons must put aside all historical and local contingencies in order to avoid biased subjectivity in their moral deliberations. Human autonomy, on the encylopaedic view, consists in acting in accordance with and from a commitment to the moral principles grounded by impartial

5 This is not a mere thought experiment. For similar trends in STEM, see Conrad (2023).

6 MacIntyre takes the name of the first approach from the ninth edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, twenty-five volumes published between 1875 and 1889; he takes the name of the second aproach from Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887).

reason. This "view from nowhere" in the early work of John Rawls and Lawrence Kohlberg has had a significant impact on the current justice/virtue dichotomy.

Returning for a moment to *Abolition*, Lewis observes that despite their professed subjectivism, Gaius and Titius have in the background values they treat as objective: "They claim to be cutting away the parasitic growth of emotion, religious sanction, and inherited taboos, in order that 'real' or 'basic' values may emerge" (Lewis 1947, 29). Similarly, in *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls, one of the most influential political philosophers of the twentieth century, claims that if rational persons remove such irrelevant, arbitrary, and contingent factors from their moral deliberations, objective universal values will emerge. He calls this perspective for choosing moral principles "the original position."

In the original position, parties know general facts about human society, political and economic theory, and human psychology, but they do not know their place in society, their natural assets and abilities, the historical period to which they belong, their conception of the good, or their plan of life. Persons should deliberate behind this "veil of ignorance," says Rawls, because "it seems reasonable and generally acceptable that no one should be advantaged or disadvantaged by natural fortune or social circumstances in the choice of principles. It also seems widely agreed that it should be impossible to tailor principles to the circumstances of one's own case" (Rawls 1971, 18). According to Rawls, the same universal principles of "justice as fairness" would always be chosen no matter who takes up the perspective of the original position.

For this article, the most interesting part of *A Theory of Justice* is what happens to the rest of the virtues. According to Rawls, virtue is simply the desire to act on principles of right. His list of principles of right includes the principles of justice and efficiency applied to social systems and institutions and the following requirements of individuals: obligations of fairness and fidelity; the natural positive duties of upholding justice, mutual aid, and mutual respect; and the natural negative duties not to injure and not to harm the innocent (1971, 109). Readers might notice that this is a fairly short list. Moral prohibitions against suicide, pride, greed, gluttony, and envy do not make the list of requirements of right. And Rawls does not include principles of right that would correspond to many of the standard virtues, for example, the remaining cardinal virtues of wisdom, temperance, and courage, as well chastity, integrity, honor, gratitude, service, patience, sympathy, mercy, cultivating one's talents, engaging in meaningful work, and beneficence. One of the claims of Lewis's *Abolition* is that philosophical and religious traditions throughout history and around the world have thought these virtues are required for human flourishing. Rawls's theory makes them optional.

Although Rawls may not be the originator of the dichotomy between justice and the virtues evident in The English Course, *A Theory of Justice* did much to promote it. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg did his part as well.

In the eighth chapter of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls briefly suggests a philosophy of moral education that demonstrates the way a sense of justice is acquired by members in a well-ordered society. Lawrence Kohlberg, one of the most frequently cited psychologists of the twentieth century, further developed Rawls's theory. In *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*, Kohlberg articulates three levels of moral development: preconventional (morality of authority), conventional (morality of association), and postconventional (morality of principles). He subdivides these into six stages. At the highest stage, persons understand the principles of justice as those that would be chosen in an original position to adjudicate competing interests, and they are motivated by commitment to the principles themselves as expressing one's nature as a free and equal rational being. Kohlberg is even more explicit than Rawls that persons at the highest stage of development recognize that morality is all about justice, and more specifically, it is about justice *reasoning*: "The basic referent of the term *moral*," writes Kohlberg, "is a type of *judgment* or a type of *decision-making process*, not a type of behavior, emotion, or social institution" (Kohlberg 1981, 169, italics in original).

Kohlberg rejects what he refers to as the "bag of virtues" approach to moral education. The problem, he claims, is that there are many bags. Aristotle's bag, for example, includes temperance, liberality, pride, good temper, truthfulness, and justice while the Boy Scout bag includes honesty, loyalty, reverence, cleanliness, and bravery. Because there is no objective set of virtues to be inculcated, the teacher must finally impose his or her own personal values, or those of the group or society, on the students. In other words, education for virtues other than justice is indoctrination. Since indoctrination is incompatible with the civil liberties central to American democracy and any just social system, moral education must focus exclusively on justice.

Rawls's and Kohlberg's ideas have traveled far in education and in the culture at large. It may seem unsurprising, then, that justice is a preeminent topic in The English Course and that there exists a dichotomy between justice and virtue such that justice is treated as objective and the other virtues as subjective. But if the basis for this dichotomy lies in the conditions for moral rationality given by the original position, we might ask, Why should we put ourselves in that position in the first place?

In answer to that question, Rawls claimed that "the conditions embodied in the description of the original position are ones that we do, in fact, accept. Or, if we do not, then perhaps we can be persuaded to do so by philosophical reflection" (Rawls 1971, 21). Relatedly, Kohlberg claimed to have "firmly established a culturally universal invariant sequence of stages of moral

judgment" with deliberations from the original position at the top (Kohlberg 1973, 630). It turns out, however, that many do not, and cannot be persuaded to, accept the original position as the conditions for moral rationality. And data showed that only a small percentage of adults reach Kohlberg's highest stage of moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1980; Crain 1985).[7] Given the encyclopaedic view that all rational persons accept, or can accept, objective moral principles, Rawls and Kohlberg would either need to claim that most people are not fully rational or look for another way to ground the principles of justice as fairness. They opted for the second strategy.

Instead of basing justice as fairness in an account of human reason, in their later work, Rawls and Kohlberg base it in an account of shared public reason, in an overlapping consensus about what democracy and democratic citizenship require (Rawls 1993; Kohlberg 1980; Kohlberg, Higgins, and Power 1989). But the existence and nature of such a consensus is also a matter for dispute, and so justice seems to have lost its rational grounding entirely.[8] Richard Rorty, extending Rawls's later work, looks around at all the intractable disagreements, shrugs, and says we can get along fine without philosophical justifications for justice and democracy. It is enough that we like them, he says, and he encourages everyone to continue to stand for them "unflinchingly" (Rorty 1989, 1990). While a refusal to flinch provides justice with a lingering veneer of objectivity, the virtues continue to be viewed as subjective—mere options in a long string of possibilities for autonomous self-creation.

Absent the universal agreement or public consensus the encyclopaedic project requires, it looks as though the justice/virtue dichotomy is unjustified. The project fails by its own standards. So, like Gaius and Titius, Rawls and Kohlberg seem simply to pick the subset of values they like from a much larger set Lewis refers to as "the *Tao.*" Lewis uses the term as shorthand for belief in objective moral value and a list of virtues largely shared by Egyptian, Babylonian, Hindu, Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Greek, Roman, Christian, Norse, Anglo-Saxon, and Native American traditions throughout history. In the appendix to *Abolition*, Lewis collects examples of these, including justice and beneficence; duties to parents, elders and ancestors; duties to children and posterity; justice; chastity; honesty; faithfulness; mercy; magnanimity; courage; honor; and humility. Throughout *Abolition*, he contends that the *Tao* must be taken as a whole and that the parts gain their justification from belonging to the whole. Persons are not free to pick and choose: "If my duty to my parents is a superstition, then so is my duty to posterity. . . . If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value, then so is conjugal fidelity. The rebellion of new ideologies against the *Tao* is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the

7 Critics have further pointed out that Kohlberg's stages exhibit biases of both sex and culture. See Gilligan (1982) and Crain (1985).

8 The liberal conception of justice as both necessary and sufficient for democracy runs contrary to the view that the other virtues are also necessary and that without virtuous citizens, pathologies will develop which threaten a free society. See, e.g., the work of Plato, Alexis de Tocqueville, Edmund Burke, Lewis, and Michael Novak.

rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves." On this account, it seems clear that Lewis would characterize the liberal theory of justice as mere "fragments of 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" (Lewis 1947, 44).

Lewis notes that one response to the exposure of self-contradiction in trying to hold on to only part of the *Tao* is to reject all of it. He imagines someone saying to him, "You say we shall have no values at all if we step outside the *Tao.* Very well: we shall probably find that we can get on quite comfortably without them. Let us regard all ideas of what we *ought* to do simply as an interesting psychological survival: let us step right out of all that and start on what we like. Let us decide for ourselves what man is to be and make him into that: not on any ground of imagined value, but because we want him to be such. . . . This is the rejection of the concept of value altogether" (Lewis 1947, 51, emphasis in original). This is the view MacIntyre calls "genealogy."

Genealogy: Contingent "Reason" and the Problem of Authority

One of the defining characteristics of genealogy is the denial of the ability of human reason to provide rational justifications for objective moral truths. Reason is at all times and in all places utterly contingent. There is no possibility of impartial reason, no single "view from nowhere" from which to deliberate and make judgments. There is only a multiplicity of viewpoints. The contingency and plurality of reasons means moral truths are radically subjective. Further, if there are only subjective truths, then there is no such thing as legitimate authority. Authority is only the exercise of power, and power always and everywhere seeks to control and dominate.

From the genealogical perspective, history is the uncovering of the ideas and people that have been subjugated and the ways those have been hidden by masks or games of various power structures. While one's situation is determined by contingencies, that is not something to lament; it is rather an opportunity to be grasped. After uncovering the "will to power," our response should be to resist and dismantle. Human autonomy consists, first, in breaking with claims to truth and their associated power structures and, ultimately, in self-creation.

Michel Foucault and James Paul Gee follow the genealogical path. Foucault's primary areas of study were madness, health, knowledge, crime, sexuality, and identity. He extrapolated from these to education. Scholars in the field of education have taken his ideas and developed them, seeing, as Dan Butin writes, "a seemingly natural affinity between Foucault's insights—into, for example, power, knowledge, resistance, subjectification—and educational research and practice" (Butin 2006, 371). Gee's primary interests are language and literacy; he is a highly influential contributor to the New Literacies and Discourses movements. Citations to Foucault and Gee are nearly ubiquitous in contemporary education theory and policy. A brief introduction to their

work can shed more light on the role of the teacher and on student assignments in the context of the larger problem of power and authority as well as on the justice/virtue dichotomy.

For Foucault, and more specifically for those furthering his work, education begins with the recognition of contingency. The teacher must become aware and help the students to become aware of how various historical and cultural factors define and construct their current conditions. Education begins not as a search for truth but as a recognition of the contingency of all truth. The recognition of contingency is followed by critique and curiosity. Critique is a permanent orientation of skepticism that challenges what is normative. Curiosity is "a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought . . . a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental" (Foucault [1980] 2003, 328). Critique and curiosity are put into action by resisting and refusing, disrupting and dismantling.

The replacement of instruction in the traditional three R's with "experiments in the ethico-politico pedagogy" of resistance, refusal, and radical self-creation brings with it a certain "problem of the teacher." The very authority by which the teacher directs learning is called into question. In order to avoid being complicit in the insidious transmission of society's values and to respect the freedom of the student, the teacher must step to the side. As internationally renowned sociologist and education scholar Stephen Ball writes, "Teaching here becomes a process of asking questions without providing answers; the goal is to explore 'to what extent it might be possible to think differently (*penser autrement*).' . . . It is education as epistemological suspicion" (Ball 2019, 140, quoting Foucault 1992, 2:9). Ball paints this picture: "The 'classroom' is reconceived as a space of freedom, the 'curriculum' as curiosity, and 'pedagogy' as a parrhesiastic encounter [i.e., bold speech against a dominant force]" (2019, 137). The problem of the teacher and a blueprint for a pedagogy of critique and peer-to-peer discussion is evident throughout genealogical approaches to education theory and policy.

The problem of authority extends beyond the teacher to the authority of standards and practices in education, including use of terms like *literate* and *illiterate* and what constitutes good versus bad writing. When it is argued that such standards and practices are used to exclude or oppress and to perpetuate inequalities, the genealogical standpoint, along with a commitment to justice, demands their disruption and dismantling.

In *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*, a highly influential work now in its fifth edition, Gee takes a genealogical approach to language, emphasizing its fundamental social and political nature. According to Gee, "All texts [including even warnings on aspirin bottles] are fully implicated in values and relations" (Gee 2015, 52). Teachers and students need to be aware of the embeddedness of what he calls "Discourses." They need to understand

that meaning is determined in social contexts, that these contexts overlap and may be in conflict with each other, and that what is valuable in one context may not be valuable in another. So, for example, in the now-classic study by Shirley Heath, it was found that students may be prepared well for the secondary Discourses of school if their primary Discourses at home align with the expectations of attitudes, behaviors, and practices in school (e.g., reading storybooks in the home in a certain way tended to prepare those students well). In contrast, some students may find the Discourses of their home in conflict with those of the school and so be deemed "illiterate" or "less literate" or excluded from success in various other ways (Heath 1983).

In response to such examples, Gee's genealogical posture of critique, paired with a mandate to combat injustice, leads him to challenge the authority and dismantle the meaning of literacy as abilities to read and write. Literacy is seen instead as abilities to display various social identities. The mandate to disrupt and dismantle power structures of the dominant Discourses further calls teachers to cease unduly privileging traditional modes of language arts. In a recent position statement, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) makes the case that media education is fundamental to teaching and learning in K–12 ELA education, stating, "It behooves our profession, as stewards of the communication arts, to confront and challenge the tacit and implicit ways in which print media is valorized above the full range of literacy competencies students should master." And, in what may seem surprising from language arts educators, "The time has come to decenter book reading and essay writing as the pinnacles of English language arts education" (Hobbs et al. 2022).[9]

While Lewis could not have anticipated the environment of our digital world, in "On Stories" he had this to say about reading compared to screens: "Nothing can be more disastrous than the view that the cinema can and should replace popular written fiction. The elements which it excludes are precisely those which give the untrained mind its only access to the imaginative world. There is death in the camera" (Lewis [1966] 2017b, 22). Whether one agrees with Lewis on this particular point or not, the decentering of books from ELA curricula takes from them one of the last homes they have in our current culture. It is as though K–12 ELA teachers have said, "Students are reading fewer books so we must give them fewer books to read."

The Justice/Virtue Dichotomy Continued

In the statement mentioned above, the NCTE provides three core professional development themes that further entrench the centrality of justice topics in ELA instruction: (1) exploring representation and power with critical reading, listening, and viewing; (2) empowering voice with writing, speaking, and self-

9 Some of Gee's more recent work is in the new literacy of video gaming.

expression; and (3) increasing relevance by critically examining digital media and popular culture. It is an overarching goal of such instruction that "students begin to deepen sociopolitical consciousness as they recognize how power relationships structure the narratives that surround us" (Hobbs et al. 2022). The Michigan K–12 standards for social studies promote a similar goal of critical literacy: "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experiences as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Michigan Department of Education 2019, 3).

The genealogical approach to education also further entrenches the subjectivist view of virtue. The recognition of contingency, the posture of critique, and the exercise of dismantling serve the purpose of making space for radical self-creation. Under the heading "Genealogy as curriculum/curriculum as curiosity," Ball discusses Nader Chokr's concept of "unlearning" in the context of autonomy or self-governance. He writes,

> Unlearning "should encourage students to think deeply and critically about the illusory world of all the ideas, notions, and beliefs that hem, jostle, whirl, confuse and oppress them" and "requires of them a reversal of standpoint." . . . This would involve a view of knowledge as games of truth and, in relation to this, "the collapse of objective meaning leaving us free to create our own lives and ourselves." . . . This is a form of "combative" or "guerrilla" pluralism, in which there is no *epistemic innocence*. . . . "What the *guerrilla* pluralism of the Foucaultian genealogical method can help produce is *epistemic insurrections* that have to be constantly renewed and remain always ongoing in order to keep producing epistemic friction." (Ball 2019, 137–38, italics in original)[10]

Under the heading "Authoring one's ethical self," Ball writes, "To sum up, what is involved here is a creative and aesthetic politics that is not reliant on the pre-given, tainted, moral principles that we take to define humanity, or which require us to search for and link our essential qualities to inherent abstract principles. Instead, one is set the challenge 'of creatively and courageously authoring one's ethical self'" (Ball 2019, 136, quoting Foucault 1977, 154). From the genealogical standpoint, traditional virtues are not merely subjective but are often oppressive, and autonomy is conceived of primarily as an act of "breaking with."[11]

10 In addition to Chokr (2009), Ball is also quoting Kenneth Wain and José Medina.

11 While I do not have space to discuss it, there is a pressing concern that needs addressing: the dramatic increase in anxiety, depression, and loneliness, and, perhaps related to these, a culture of inattentiveness and absence. I think the encyclopaedic/genealogic approach to education is exacerbating the crisis. Simply put, "breaking with" is painful, and human beings, children least of all, are not up to the task of self-creation *ex nihilo*. Educators need to question the wisdom of putting Nietzsche and Foucault in charge of children.

Two Roads Converge

This genealogical step into the void should allow one to create any self, to break with anything. It should be evident from the discussion above, however, that genealogical educators do not wish to go there. While the virtues remain fair game for critique, one cannot go so far in self-creation that one violates principles of justice, and it is justice that specifies which power structures need dismantling. Once again, justice is treated like a collection of objective requirements while the other virtues are treated as subjective options. But, from the genealogical standpoint, this can only be a veneer or a mask; justice is no more objective than the other virtues. We can have no reason to adopt principles of justice beyond perhaps simply liking them. But this, it seems, is enough for education theorists to hold them unflinchingly, which looks like the place where we left the encyclopaedists.

That is because the paths of the contemporary encyclopaedic and genealogical projects converge. Impartial reason and radically contingent reasons maintain the same dichotomy so that human autonomy consists in the self-creation of a free will constrained only by the (groundless) principles of justice. In holding this ideal, each approach is guilty of inconsistency according to their own criteria: the encyclopaedists because they hold unflinchingly to groundless principles, the genealogists because they hold to any principles at all.

In his final chapter, Lewis argues that the rejection of the concept of value ends with "The Abolition of Man." This, he says, means the rule of some men by other men who are in turn ruled by their appetites. In other words, genealogy ends in tyranny. I suspect genealogist educators would respond that we have no reason to fear tyranny since their version of education holds unflinchingly to principles of justice. And yet, the dominant Discourses' control over courses and publications in the field of education exercises a kind of tyranny in suppressing alternative topics and views. As just one example, consider the preeminent publisher of educational materials, Columbia University Teachers College Press. Its spring 2023 catalog contains eighty-three titles; nearly two thirds can be classified under topics of justice. In the classroom, peer-to-peer discussions, presumed to respect the freedom of students, often create a tyranny of the majority or the loudest. And the picture for moral and intellectual formation is concerning: peers "educating" peers who are in turn formed largely by the tyranny of their media consumption. To paraphrase Lewis, I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of education textbooks.[12]

12 In "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," Lewis addresses similar themes, arguing that a certain "democratic" attitude would level educational standards and have a tyrannical effect on democratic society as a whole and on the spiritual formation of individuals (Lewis [1960] 2017).

Postscript: Tradition—a Middle Way

Tradition's view of reason can be thought of as a middle way between that of the encyclopaedists and the genealogists. Moral principles are not justified by perfectly impartial reason but neither are they radically contingent. They are starting points accepted by individuals as members of a tradition. As Lewis puts it, they are "to the world of action what axioms are to the world of theory. . . . You cannot reach them as conclusions: they are premisses" (Lewis 1947, 40). They are objective insofar as they are a standard outside oneself and a standard by which the tradition measures itself, and yet our understanding and application of them is not immutable.[13]

According to tradition, human autonomy consists neither in acting only from universal principles of justice nor in breaking with contingent truths and power structures in acts of self-creation. There is no dichotomy between justice and virtue. Human autonomy, as Lewis points out, is exercised in the habits of ordering one's soul to moral truth beyond oneself, in making the *Tao*, in all its fullness, one's own. The authority of the teacher and the authority of certain texts play an important role in this formation.

Admittedly, this very brief description paints a too tidy picture. What happens when things don't go well? Humility requires us to admit when they don't. And a project that only critiques encyclopaedia and genealogy fails to ask a very important question: What have they gotten right? Simply put, they have been right to draw attention to the problem of exclusion, to voices that have not been heard. Tradition needs to listen. Three areas for further work toward real advance within tradition are diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB); learning disabilities (LD); and the classical canon. But acknowledging the encyclopaedic and genealogic diagnoses of a problem does not mean we should adopt their proposed remedies. This article has shown the consequences of adopting some of them. So, how might we proceed?

In *Abolition*, Lewis discusses three modes of change: change from outside the tradition, change against the spirit of the tradition, and change from within in accordance with the spirit of the tradition. If remedies for a problem come from outside of the tradition, there is danger, says Lewis, that one "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" (1947, 47). This seems to be the kind of change that encyclopaedia has made in The English Course. With its hyperfocus on the one precept of justice, more robust conceptions of ELA instruction and moral and spiritual formation are lost.

13 We might think of reason as "embodied," which seems particularly appropriate for the Christian tradition that holds that the *Logos* took on flesh. He, of course, is the perfect incarnation; our reason and that of our tradition are part of "the already but not yet."

If remedies run against the spirit of the tradition, the change may be so great as to render elements of the tradition unrecognizable. Lewis provides the following comparison between a man who, in the spirit of the tradition, says, "You like your vegetables moderately fresh; why not grow your own and have them perfectly fresh?" and a man who, against the spirit of the tradition, says, "Throw away that loaf and try eating bricks and centipedes instead" (1947, 46). The genealogical approach to ELA as primarily a sociopolitical enterprise of critique requiring radical self-creation and the decentering of reading and writing looks like throwing away the loaf.[14]

In contrast to both of these—modification from the outside and modification done against the spirit of a tradition—change can develop from within in accordance with the spirit of that tradition: "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" (1947, 48). This approach, says Lewis, allows for the possibility of real advance. The Christian tradition has the resources to respond to the three areas of exclusion mentioned above, and I encourage educators in that and other religious traditions to find the vocabulary and practices from within to do so.

In DEIB efforts especially, Christian educators have often adopted the language and practices of encyclopaedia and genealogy in ways that run contrary to the spirit of the tradition and further polarize their communities. Jettisoning secular terms and using terms like *imago Dei*, "sin," "repentance," "reconciliation," "body of Christ," "for the least of these," "hope," and "from every nation" would be the place to start for Christian DEIB initiatives.

Followers of both Foucault and Gee have drawn attention to gaps between the "normal" and "abnormal" that have tended to blame and stigmatize the child, and they have raised related questions about who counts as an "expert" and about a culture of practices that has sometimes failed to consider the child in all his or her contexts and that has kept parents isolated from the educational process. The remedy, however, is not to radically tear down and redefine. Christianity is equipped to recognize the dignity of the whole person (mind, body, and spirit), the sacramental view of the family, the missional goal of the school (and the essential partnership between them), and the communal nature of personhood in order to establish holistic student support and learning disabilities practices.

14 Some theorists go so far as to suggest teachers ask their students to "write opaque prose once in a while," engage in "exercises in plagiarism and misreading," and use language of "incoherence" in order to threaten essayistic practices and "bring to light the amount of repression involved in doctoring one's writing to suit a thesis" (Ristoff 1993, 154–55).

Finally, disputes over the classical canon range from preserving a reified list of books mostly by dead white men to calls for action to dismantle it completely. Being people of the Living Word should inspire Christians to read with wisdom and charity and to work with a living canon that expands to include all of God's children throughout history and around the world.[15] If we are paying sufficient attention to the importance of both elementary and education textbooks, there will be space for conversations like these and the possibility of moving forward in the spirit of a capacious tradition.

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15 On reading with wisdom and charity and expanding the canon, see, e.g., the work of Mitali Perkins (2021), Anika Prather and Angel Adams Parham (2022), and Nyansa Classical Community (https://nyansaclassicalcommunity.org).

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