



The Abolition of Man: *A Book Study* with Dr. Stephen Turley

Lesson 3: Chapter 1,
“Men Without Chests”

Introduction:

“I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary textbooks.” – C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

The Abolition of Man remains one of Lewis’ key texts on education. In *AOM*, Lewis recognizes that education is not merely informative—it is formative! It shapes and molds students into a cultural ideal.

The Green Book by Gaius and Titius (1:20)

- Lewis begins “Men Without Chests,” by recalling an episode he read in a high-school English textbook he refers to as “The Green Book,” by Gaius and Titius. Lewis keeps the true identities of the author and book unnamed, but proceeds to attack their arguments. We know now that the book was *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing* by Alexander King and Martin Ketley (1939).

Coleridge at the Falls: Sublime or Pretty? (2:20)

- In *The Green Book*, Gaius & Titius recount a trip that Samuel Taylor Coleridge took to the Falls of Clyde in South Lanarkshire, Scotland, in the early 1800s. At the Falls, Coleridge overheard the comments of two tourists. The first described the scene as “sublime,” (to which Coleridge agreed) and the second, “pretty.” According to 19th century aesthetic theory, a difference existed between the two adjectives. Sublime suggested a description of the aesthetic value of the falls, one that transcends the falls themselves, highlighting their vastness and greatness. Pretty, however, described a matter of taste or opinion.



Falls of Clyde, photograph from VisitLanarkshire.com

- Gaius & Titius, in *The Green Book*, explain to their readers that Coleridge’s aesthetic assessment was wrong. According to Gaius & Titius, Coleridge did not realize that both commentaries from the tourists were **subjective feelings**. Therefore, Coleridge had no basis to say that one opinion was better than another.

Lewis’ Critique (5:45)

- Lewis disagreed with Gaius & Titius’ reasoning. Lewis argued that they did not think through the technicalities of their philosophy. The tourist’s comment of “sublime” did not stem from sublime feelings; rather, it stemmed from feelings of veneration or humility. Dr. Turley provides another example: Following Gaius & Titius’ logic, if you tell someone they are contemptible, you must have contemptible feelings. This, of course, is not necessarily the case.
- **Lewis’ key point:** The qualities we ascribe to something are not necessarily what we feel when we make the ascription. Things have qualities or values beyond of our opinions of them.
- **The heart of Gaius & Titius’ argument:** Lewis writes that, whether or not G & T meant it, they were arguing that nothing in this world has value except for what we ascribe to it. An assertion or opinion of something is neither true or false—it is just personal sentiment. Objective values do not exist.

Consequences of *The Green Book* (9:25)

- Gaius & Titius, in Chapter 4 of *The Green Book*, offer an exercise for students in which they debunk a cheap advertisement offering tourists a pleasure cruise. G & T only offer strategies in skepticism, unaware that the same strategies could be used on their approaches. Lewis fears that, if students are not taught the inherent differences between great adventures promised in literary epics and cheap cruise advertisements, then it should come as no surprise when the derision evoked by cheap advertisements also extends to great literature.



- **Doubt & skepticism in the formation of modern knowledge:** (10:48) The Rise of the Enlightenment in the 18th century brought a new understanding of the world. Knowledge became limited to what was verifiable by the application of science and reason. Anything apart from science and reason was unknowable.
- Lewis argues that this orientation of doubt and skepticism is disastrous for literature, religion, poetry, music, etc. It fuels the radical relativist who sees no value apart from opinion. Eventually, these pieces of art, literature, and music will lose their ability to shape, mold, and make demands of us.

Lewis' Response to Gaius and Titius

- Lewis writes that G & T argue a philosophical position instead of a literary one. They filled *The Green Book* with “amateur philosophy,” instead of grammar, smuggling their inane philosophy into the lives of students. **Lewis' antidote to Gaius & Titius' subjective relativism is a classical education.**

The Classical World

- From a classical view, objects do not merely receive our disapproval or approval—they earn or merit it. For example, Coleridge agreed that the Falls were sublime because he believed that certain responses to inanimate nature were more just than others.
- Examples throughout history of objective values, or orders of goodness:
 - Augustine's *ordo amoris*, or the right ordering of our loves and affections, cultivates virtue.
 - In Genesis, God created the world and called it good, giving it an objective value. He called mankind “very good,” placing man in an economy of goodness.
 - Aristotle said that certain likes and dislikes would lead to a virtuous life.
 - Plato said that the well-nurtured youth would blame and hate the ugly, and praise beauty so as to be nourished by it.
- A classical vision of the world was one of *cosmic piety*.
 - Cosmic piety was universal in the Roman Greco world. In the ancient imagination, one was only human when he or she lived in harmony with the divine meaning and purpose of the cosmos.
 - The *Tao*, pronounced “dao,” a Chinese term, stood for an idea that the world is filled with divine meaning, purpose, and integrity, and that humans as a part of it are obligated to conform their lives in harmony with its cosmic purpose. (22:00)
 - The Tao, also called the doctrine of objective values, holds that the world was created with divinely ordained values, whether we recognize them or not.



- Lewis argues that the Tao, or cosmic piety, is true for all major worldviews in the classical period—Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, Asian, etc.

The Modern World (23:26)

- Lewis sees Gaius & Titius' views as an example of the modern world—one of facts without value and feelings without falsehood, justice or injustice.
- Dr. Turley provides an example of Mary Poovey's *A History of the Modern Fact* (1998). In it, Poovey recognizes that the modern fact is hardly objective; rather, it is loaded with theoretical assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge. The modern fact reduces all knowledge to scientific verification, which renders all value statements mere personal preference or opinion.
- Dr. Turley shares his personal story of using William Byrd's "Mass for Four Voices" in a class, which captures Lewis' fear. **When education is divorced from objective values, everything is reduced to pure preference or taste.**
- Lewis provides the example of Roman fathers asking their sons to die for Rome within the worldview of cosmic piety. This example falls apart for Gaius and Titius, who could not appeal to the same objective good to ask their sons to die.

The Classical vs. the Modern Education Systems:

Classical Education	Modern Education
Initiates students	Conditions students
Teachers are "old birds" helping "young birds" to fly	Teachers are "poultry keepers" handling the "young birds" for reasons unknown
Propagation of knowledge	Propaganda
Our intellect (head), morality (chest), and emotions (stomach) are balanced within the divine economy of goods	Morality is missing, separating our intellect (head) from our emotions (stomach), which leads to unbridled emotions and actions
Shapes and molds how we think	Informs what we should think (competencies, the SAT)