

# *The* TELLER REVIEW *of* BOOKS

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Nadine L. Jackson, Editor-in-Chief

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THE ABOLITION OF MAN

C. S. Lewis

COMMON TRUTHS

Edward B. McLean

WHAT WE CAN'T NOT KNOW: A GUIDE

J. Budziszewski

WRITTEN ON THE HEART: THE CASE FOR NATURAL LAW

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## **THE TELLER REVIEW OF BOOKS™**

Nadine L. Jackson, Editor-in-Chief

The Teller Review of Books™ (Editor-in-Chief: Nadine L. Jackson) provides succinct overviews and critical reviews of the seminal books shaping contemporary culture in the areas of law, faith, society and public policy. Milestones in political, cultural and religious thought, whether contemporary publications or the classics, form part of the corpus of reviewed works.

Each Volume of the Teller Review of Books™ consists of concise reviews of books that follow specific themes, including: Christianity, Culture & the State; Political Science and Public Policy; and Natural Law Thinking.



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## I. The Abolition of Man (C. S. Lewis)

### “Prophetic”

Lewis begins his book with an anecdote from an elementary textbook that he calls *The Green Book*, written by two authors that he calls “Gaius” and “Titius,” who recount the story of Coleridge at the waterfall, where “there were two tourists present: ... one called it ‘sublime’ and the other ‘pretty’: and ... Coleridge mentally endorsed the first judgment and rejected the second with disgust.” Gaius and Titus comment that Coleridge actually was not making a statement about the waterfall, but rather, about his own feelings towards the waterfall. Lewis uses the distinction that this anecdote demonstrates between the inherent, unchanging qualities of a thing, as what Lewis would call the sublimity of the waterfall, and the view that the perception of such qualities by any person is nothing more than the subjective feelings of that person towards the object as a starting point to which he continually returns throughout the book.

Lewis writes that “Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it--believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence, or our contempt. The reason why Coleridge agreed with the tourist who called the cataract sublime and disagreed with the one who called it pretty was of course that he believed inanimate nature to be such that certain responses could be more ‘just’ or ‘ordinate’ or ‘appropriate’ to it than others.”

It is the role of education to train students in recognizing and appreciating the just, the ordinate, and the appropriate. Lewis quotes Aristotle, who says that “the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought.” When students are trained in just sentiments, they are easily able to find first principles in ethics. Yet public schools have rejected moral education decades ago. Students will thus be left blind in discerning between ordinate and inordinate affections and between just and false sentiments.

The role of the chest in this process of discernment is then discussed. Just as the head is the seat of reason, and the belly is the seat of visceral emotions, the chest is “the seat of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments.” The chest is the will that subdues emotion to reason and turns out just sentiments that properly perceive what ought to be loved, appreciated, and admired. The problem of modern education,

however, is that it churns out “Men without Chests” who lack the tools necessary to property discern goodness, truth, and beauty.

Lewis discusses the Chinese concept of the Tao, which is the “reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar.” He dismisses the doctrine that no aesthetic theory can be superior to any other, as expressed in *The Green Book*. Lewis undermines this doctrine by pointing to a consistent canon of laws of human nature that has existed throughout history and across cultures. He calls this universal law “The Way.”

The final chapter of the book has proven itself to be prophetic in some ways. In somewhat hysterical language, Lewis envisions a world that is run by technocrats and that has in the absence of moral absolutes opened the doors for gene manipulation and other developments in biotechnology. Lewis expresses concern at where moral relativism was going, specifically, that it would open the doors to eugenics by a future generation that would decide who man is and what he should look like. In this way, man will be robbed of his heart and essence.

The book concludes with a compilation of texts that serve to illustrate the existence of a universal law common to all cultures. Among the values inherent in this universal law are: (i) the law of general beneficence; (ii) the law of special beneficence; (iii) duties to parents, elders, ancestors; (iv) duties to children and posterity; (v) the law of justice; (vi) the law of good faith and veracity; (vii) the law of mercy; and (viii) the law of magnanimity.