



## Teaching All of the Facts, but None of the Truth

While dining one evening in NYC with a brilliant man I once knew, we couldn't help overhearing some moderns espousing progressive ideas at a nearby table. Seeming like typical Manhattanites, they were well spoken, likely had some higher degrees among them, and would have appeared to many to possess good command of the issues. My friend, though, unimpressed, simply said: "It's amazing how you can know all of the facts but none of the Truth."



Recently I had a conversation with another smart fellow who made the case that the way to minimize evil in the world was through education. This is a common idea. As we struggle to explain man's condition, we sometimes fall back on the belief, "Knowledge is power." Yet even if true, note that power can be misused. Moreover, even if true, it certainly isn't absolute power.

How often do we see people who know they're smoking, drinking, or eating themselves to death but yet can't stop? Of course, we can be slaves to any kind of passion, from sex to spending money to the attainment of power, and the chains bind the smart and wise along with the simple and foolish. Why, great Chinese sage Confucius himself said, "It is not that I do not know what to do; it is that I do not do what I know."

A modern-day Confucius, C.S. Lewis, explained this phenomenon well when he wrote, "No justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous. Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism." And this simply addresses the matter of willing spirit but weak flesh — that of wicked spirit is something else again.

But whether wickedness or weakness, the reality is that anecdotal evidence doesn't show much correlation between education, at least as it's commonly conceived, and morality. Osama bin Laden was a university educated multi-millionaire. Nazi "Angel of Death" Josef Mengele was a doctor. Zimbabwean tyrant Robert Mugabe was an avid student who earned five undergraduate degrees and two graduate degrees. Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and Moammar Gadhafi's murderous son Saif al-Islam were both educated in Britain, with the latter holding a Ph.D. in economics. And when the Nazis rose to power in 1933, the Germans were likely the most educated nationality in the world.

This may sound like an argument for blissful ignorance, but my point is different. If I said that auto mechanics are educated in mechanics but yet may cheat you, you might counter that mechanics has nothing to do with morality. If I pointed out that lawyers have an equally bad reputation, you might say that law often seems less acquainted with morality than mechanics does. And those answers provide the answer: If morality is the issue, that's what we should be talking about, not "education." For if at issue



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isn't an education in what is true or good — which is the correct definition of “wisdom” — then it may teach us how to crack a murder case, but not why we shouldn't crack our neighbor's skull.

That allusion to criminology brings us to the problem of science and, in fact, the problem with all of modern education. Note here that, as famous “monkey trial” attorney Clarence Darrow asserted in a 1931 debate with G.K. Chesterton, some have thought that science could supplant religion as society's civilizing force. But while science tells us what we can do, it's wholly incapable of telling us what we should do. You cannot prove a moral principle in the laboratory; it cannot be seen through an electron microscope. “Should” is the realm of philosophy and theology.

So while science is wonderful, a strictly scientific mindset that recognizes only what can be observed — the material world — ignores the “should” and the good. This is one problem with modern education. It has an inordinate focus on the physical world, on how to make a car or medicine work better; on how to grow food more efficiently; on how to build a better computer, airplane, cellphone, washing machine, and, increasingly a (physically) better person. But where is the teaching of virtue? Largely absent, as virtue is defined as a “good habit,” and we can't even know what such a thing is unless we know what “good” is in the first place.

But discussing this would spoil our fun, as knowledge of good is awareness of boundaries; it means realizing that what lies beyond those boundaries really is sin — not just choice or preference — no matter how attached (or addicted) to it we may be. Thus do we hear, when a person dares speak of morality or Truth, already stale dodges such as the utterances, “Whose truth?” “Who is to judge?” “It's all a matter of perspective” or “Don't impose your values on me!” Or we simply direct our focus onto concepts sufficiently vague to allow for convenient personal interpretations and widespread agreement. Chesterton addressed this in his 1905 book *Heretics*, [writing](#):

Every one of the popular modern phrases and ideals is a dodge in order to shirk the problem of what is good. We are fond of talking about “liberty”; that, as we talk of it, is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about “progress”; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about “education”; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. The modern man says, “Let us leave all these arbitrary standards and embrace liberty.” This is, logically rendered, “Let us not decide what is good, but let it be considered good not to decide it.” He says, “Away with your old moral formulae; I am for progress.” This, logically stated, means, “Let us not settle what is good; but let us settle whether we are getting more of it.” He says, “Neither in religion nor morality, my friend, lie the hopes of the race, but in education.” This, clearly expressed, means, “We cannot decide what is good, but let us give it to our children.”

Putting this in simple terms, it's silly to expect “education” to serve as a brake on doing what is bad if it doesn't teach what is good. And it can't teach what is good unless we know what good is.

There was a man named Saloth Sar who went to France in 1949 for an education. He returned to his native Cambodia with Marxist ideas four years later. He would become known as Pol Pot, and his Khmer Rouge communists would go on to exterminate one-quarter to one-third of his nation's population. Maybe now we know why Jesus chose 12 “uneducated” men as His apostles.

So “Whose truth?” “Who is to judge?” A mature civilization that wants to be around tomorrow doesn't just ask these questions. It actually seeks to answer them.



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