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Not Story *or* Essay, but Story *with* Essay

Story and essay are like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: alone, they reveal only a part of the idea they are trying to communicate, but when joined, they form a complete picture of the concept being taught. While some think that stories can teach virtue much better than essay, or vice versa, stories and essays, when used together, teach virtue in a more complete way than either one of these components on its own. Essentially, people learn through both their intellect and their hearts. Since essays and stories primarily appeal to distinct areas of people – mind and emotions – these two forms of communication should be used together to teach a complete picture of virtue that reaches the entire person. Although many believe that either essays or stories alone are sufficient to explain virtue, stories and essays must both be used to teach virtue because together, they give understanding to both the mind and the emotions, the two areas that all learn through.

Before describing how to teach virtue, it is essential to define virtue by looking at its basis in morality. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis describes morality as being essentially concerned with bringing harmony to both men and the world. Morality not only helps one live at peace with others and become a better person, but also orders the entire purpose of men's lives (69-72). Later on in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis makes an interesting observation on morality and virtue, saying, "Here I want to give some idea of another way in which [morality] has been divided by old writers... a very good one. According to this... scheme there are seven 'virtues' "

(76). By presenting the idea that morality subsumes virtue, Lewis shows that morality and virtue are essentially concerned with the same overall purpose of bringing harmony through principles. Thus, virtue as a whole is concerned with directing and ordering the lives of all into harmony.

With a proper understanding of virtue in place, it is now important to examine how virtue is best taught by looking at how people actually learn a concept. When teaching, one must first give the explanation of an idea directed towards the mind of the student. In her essay “The Lost Tools of Learning”, Dorothy Sayers presents a medieval system of education that she believes to be superior to modern education because it can truly teach students to think and grasp complicated ideas (6-11). By looking at the system Sayers suggests, it is clear that its style of teaching is tailored specifically to give a student the ability to understand complex concepts. Its primary goal is to teach students to grasp ideas and truly learn; Sayers proposes accomplishing this by first providing the explanation of concepts to a student’s reason (1-3, 8-12). Thus, one can conclude from Sayers’ essay that, in order to be able to grasp an idea when learning, one must be first given its basic explanation.

To give an explanation of virtue to the mind, essays are ideal because they present information in a logical, straightforward manner, giving a clear definition of a concept. Consider how Sayers clearly structures an argument in her essay “The Dogma is the Drama”: Sayers states that, in order to properly worship God, Christians must understand their dogma, yet many Christians do not know the basic truths of their own faith and thus cannot defend it when unbelievers attack it. In order to show real Christianity to the world, Christians must bring back their true dogma (15-21). In just seven pages, Sayers is able to concisely lay down clear reasons why Christians need to teach the basics of their faith. “The Dogma is the Drama” is a model example of how an essay functions: it takes complex ideas and presents them with ease and

clarity. Because essays appeal to the mind and present information with reason, they are ideal for laying down a basic explanation of virtue.

However, those who believe that essays should not be used to teach virtue argue that the very structured, analytical arguments of an essay can detrimentally foster an unhealthy reliance on reason. While reason in itself is not wrong, an excess of it is harmful. In *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton writes, “Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason” (10). Men were not made to understand everything through reason and let reason control them, but instead to use reason as a tool, balancing it with imagination and wonder. Chesterton later writes, “The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits” (11). Pure dependence on reason gives the desire to have everything explained through reason, which is unhealthy for one’s mind. Essays should be used to state a firm explanation of virtue, but since they can give way to an excess of inimical reason, they should not be all one relies on to learn virtue. Instead of focusing wholly on the mind, an appeal to one’s emotions is critical in teaching virtue.

Yet why must there be an appeal to the emotions in order to teach virtue? Those who believe that virtue can be taught through reason alone could argue that there is no need; that in teaching, it is enough to simply give out information. However, in *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis says, “When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has... ‘ordinate affections’ or ‘just sentiments’ will easily find the first principles in Ethics” (16). Lewis says that students will learn virtue without difficulty only if they first have the right emotions towards what is right and what is wrong. Instead of merely having knowledge of what virtue is conceptually in explanation, one will be able to expand his understanding of virtue as one feels from his emotions what is right and wrong. Those who say emotions are unnecessary in learning

virtue may argue that simply feeling that something is right or wrong is not reliable since one's affections could be misled. However, Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity* that, "we feel [morality] pressing on us... [ancient thinkers] thought that the human idea of decent behavior was obvious to every one. And I believe they were right" (3-8). Here, Lewis explains that all know right from wrong in the most basic sense - all instinctively know when something is right or wrong.

Therefore, the argument that the emotions cannot distinguish basic good and evil collapses: since all share an inherent knowledge of good and evil, one cannot mistakenly sympathize with evil, thinking it is good. By feeling correctly towards what is good, one will be able to embrace virtue when the time comes.

All the knowledge of virtue in the world is meaningless if one's emotions do not sympathize with that virtue. One must actively use his emotions or affections in the pursuit of virtue. As C.S. Lewis says, "a persevering devotion to truth, a nice sense of intellectual honor, cannot be long maintained without the aid of a sentiment" (*Abolition* 25). Without emotion, apathy towards virtue ensues. If one's emotions respond positively to virtue, loving it, then one will truly understand it because the virtue will actually impact the heart. Lewis, who refers to those who suppress emotion as men without chests, says, "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue" (*Abolition* 26). Lewis is clear that it is only those whose emotions are trained to love what is good who can learn virtue and thus be virtuous. If emotion is not encouraged in oneself, then one will not be able to truly understand virtue.

Emotions can relate and respond to virtue by seeing it in the form of the example. In his spiritual autobiography *A Severe Mercy*, Sheldon Vanauken recalls how his preconceived notions of Christianity were turned upside down when he saw examples of real Christianity in action (77). Though Vanauken admits he had typically labeled Christians as uninformed and ignorant,

he comes to realize that Christians are in fact some of the most well-educated, knowledgeable, and most enjoyable people he has ever encountered. Through the example of true Christianity, Vanauken's viewpoint changes so radically that he becomes a Christian (99). Although his reason told him that Christianity was merely an obtuse religion, Vanauken's heart realized that Christianity was in fact something wonderful. How does Vanauken come to realize this? By seeing the lives of true Christians. It was Vanauken's affections towards Christianity that began to draw him to Christ. Thus, seeing the example of an idea plays a significant role in giving one true understanding of it.

Examples that appeal to the emotions are ideal to teach virtue, and this exact style is found in the form of stories. However, those who believe stories should not be used to teach virtue could argue that whatever stories might teach about virtue is not as clear and straight forward as in an essay. This is true – essays are typically written with logical brevity, while stories communicate through examples and images. Essays tell, stories imply. But what's wrong with that? Stories present examples that appeal to the emotions, thus teaching virtue through impact. In the story *The Return of the King*, J.R.R. Tolkien creates characters that readers are quick to sympathize with. Yet it is not just the characters that touch one, it is how they make their choices based on virtue and then struggle through the result that truly impacts the readers. The reader feels Eowyn's pain as she struggles to give up her initial dreams, cheers on Aragorn and the rest of Middle Earth's free forces as they fight what would seem to be a losing battle to preserve what is good, and sympathizes with Frodo and Sam as they struggle through Mordor on a seemingly hopeless quest to destroy evil (114-118, 161-163, 223-245, 254-262). By empathizing with characters' virtuous choices and actions one learns what virtue truly is in a way that cannot be found through essay.

Essays provide the explanation of virtue to the mind, while stories connect to the emotions with their portrayals of virtue. Together, story and essay complement each other to present a more complete picture of virtue. In his essay *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis structures a wonderful argument for the existence of universal morality. However, Lewis writes in the preface to his novel *That Hideous Strength*, “This is a ‘tall story’ about devilry, though it has behind it a serious ‘point’ which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*” (7). Lewis takes many of his ideas about virtue from *The Abolition of Man* and weaves them into *That Hideous Strength*. Lewis uses his novel to illustrate and explore in depth the points he has made in *The Abolition of Man* and shows how his ideas from *The Abolition of Man* relate to life in *That Hideous Strength*. Through the examples laid out in both story and essay, virtue is taught.

In conclusion, one cannot use only story or only essay to teach virtue, but story and essay must be used together in order to truly give one understanding about virtue. In teaching, one must first explain a concept to the student’s mind. Essays are ideal to give understanding to the mind because they present an explanation with reason, appealing to the mind. However, since an excess of dependence upon reason is detrimental, one must make sure the emotions are involved in learning virtue. Through examples appealing to the emotions, one is able to see and feel virtue. Essay provides the explanation of virtue, while story reaches the emotions to communicate virtue. Story and essay are like a jigsaw puzzle: when they are put together, they form a complete picture of virtue. In the pursuit of virtue, pursue story and essay.

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Term Paper 4 Final Draft Outline

Although many scholars believe that either essays or stories alone are sufficient to explain virtue, stories and essays must both be used to teach virtue because together, they give understanding to both the emotions and the mind, the two areas that all learn through.

I. Virtue is purposed with directing the lives of men into harmony.

A. Morality is essentially concerned with bringing harmony to the world.

B. As C.S. Lewis shows in *Mere Christianity* (76), morality subsumes virtue.

C. Thus, virtue is purposed with directing the world into harmony, just as morality is.

II. Essays should be used to give a basic explanation appealing to one's reason of virtue because, when looking at how people learn, one can see that in teaching the explanation of a concept must first be taught to the student's mind.

A. Dorothy Sayers presents a system of learning in "The Lost Tools of Learning" that is primarily concerned with teaching students how to think and grasp difficult concepts.

B. Implied in her essay is that understanding these concepts is of the utmost importance in learning something; explanation is critical.

C. To give an explanation of a concept to the mind, essays should be used since they present information with reason appealing to one's mind; by this way can a basic foundation of virtue be taught.

III. However, since one cannot rely wholly on essays since they mainly appeal only to reason, there must also be an appeal to the emotions, the other distinct area of people.

A. While reason in itself is wrong, G.K. Chesterton writes that an excess and unhealthy dependence upon it is harmful.

B. Instead of focusing wholly on reason to explain a concept, the emotions must be also reached when teaching virtue.

C. In the *Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis writes that students will learn virtue with ease only if they first have the right emotions towards right and wrong; one's knowledge of virtue will be expanded once the emotions respond to it since it becomes an experience.

D. Since all have a basic knowledge of right and wrong, none can argue that one's emotions would think something wrong was right or vice versa.

E. By feeling correctly towards good and evil, one will be able to embrace virtue.

IV. One's emotions must respond to seeing virtue; emotions can respond to virtue in story.

A. One's emotions must be actively involved in pursuing virtue or else apathy towards virtue ensues, for if emotion is not encouraged in oneself, then virtue cannot be learned.

B. Emotions can respond to virtue by seeing it in the form of example since examples play a key role in helping one understand a concept.

C. One can sympathize with virtuous characters' examples in a story.

V. Essays provide the explanation of virtue to the mind while stories connect to the emotions by showing virtue in action.

A. Story and essay complement each other to present a better picture of virtue than either one could on its own.

B. Together, story and essay reach both the mind and the emotions to truly teach one of virtue.

