

## Lesson 3: Power to Think about Emotions

### PURPOSE

To acquire the capability to examine one's emotional reactions in light of objective reality.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand that emotions should correspond to objective reality.
2. Understand how the power to think and one's emotions can and ought to cooperate in understanding reality.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- C. S. Lewis: Illustrations of the Tao
- Paul Ehrlich: The Problem
- Objective vs Relative table
- [Lecture](#) Population Control as the new Fascism by Germaine Greer

### VOCABULARY

- Objective: a judgement about the truth or existence of something that is not determined by personal opinions or feelings.

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall that human dignity is the foundation for human rights. Recall the definition of population control policies and examples of such policies. Highlight once more that human creativity is the world's greatest resource.

**Step 2:** In the previous lesson, the class learned that the power to think is one of the most important human powers. One of the important areas where people use this power is in the international policy and human rights arena. In the previous lesson, the class saw that the question of development is an important one in which people can make either excellent or non-excellent policies based on how they use their power to think and to choose to see persons (either as economic burdens or creative persons of infinite value).

In Grade 11, the class learned that people are often prone to bias in their decision-making. There are cognitive biases and emotional biases. Emotions can help guide our thinking to see things more clearly or to take actions more decisively. There are many great and heroic deeds that may never have been accomplished if not for the power of emotions to lend strength and support. But, there are also times when emotions are not the best guide. For example, many people can relate to situations when anger completely blurred their judgement, or when being hurt or insecure led them to make a bad decision. The goal is to integrate one's emotions with the power to think and to choose so as to maximize the opportunities for emotions to be good and reliable allies while minimizing opportunities for them to mislead one toward negative decisions.

**Step 3:** In this lesson, the class will explore how emotions relate to the power to think. Emotions themselves are neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong. Emotions are mental states brought about by thoughts, feelings or behavior. Emotions are good and helpful when they correspond to reality, and are often unhelpful when they are not in line with reality.

For example, the following emotions are unhelpful or wrong to foster:

Malicious joy over other person's misery (in German; *Schadenfreude*).

Having fun in watching someone torturing another human being.

Laughing when a person with disabilities is not able to move over some obstacle.

Hating when someone does us good.

In each of these examples, it is clear that there is something "wrong" with these emotions. This is because these emotions do not correspond to the value or good of another person that we should foster. For example, torturing another human being is a violation of human dignity (the value) of another person. The appropriate response to the violation of human dignity is indignation or disgust, not fun and enjoyment.

However, it is important to consider the emotion one feels and evaluate it in light of truth and reason. After that, if it is clear that the emotion is not helpful or good (that is, in accord with reality), one should accept that reality and try to overcome the initial emotional reaction by choosing the good and acting in accord with that good. In one sense, this disconnect shows a person the ways in which they need to guide or educate their affective (emotional) lives to correspond to the reality of the good of themselves and others. As one struggles to choose the good, so one shapes their affective life.

Still, there are also emotions one feels in response to what is often called “the difficult good”. Some examples include:

Waking up on time in the morning, right when the alarm goes off.

Overcoming one’s tiredness to help their parent with the dishes.

Choosing to visit a sick friend or family member instead of going with friends to see a movie.

Often, one feels the urge to resist the “difficult good” in everyday life. While one may not be tempted to laugh in the face of another’s misery, it is common to feel tiredness or apathy when faced with chores at home or the choice to do a small deed of kindness for another person. Sometimes, this could be as small as the choice to listen patiently while a friend or family member tells a story they have told many times before, and listening as though it is the first time. These little acts of heroism to achieve the “difficult good” educate our emotions to be able to overcome initial reactions in the face of more serious situations. For example, a firefighter may feel the emotion of fear when they see a burning house with a small child inside. However, when they choose to act in spite of that fear to achieve the “difficult good” to save the child, they place the good of that child’s life over their own initial emotional response. It takes practice and patience to develop the ability to achieve the difficult good, but by becoming aware of our emotions and our power to think and choose what is good in small, everyday tasks, one shapes their affectivity and grows in their emotional life.

Even though one’s emotional response may not be “quite there yet,” that knowledge is, of itself, useful. By acting in line with that knowledge and trying to choose the good, one develops their affective life to be more in line with reality. The education of one’s emotions to correspond to reality is an exciting life-long project, and we may get discouraged at times, especially when dealing with situations which call for choosing the difficult good. However, step by step, small action by small action, by thinking well about the good and by choosing it, a person develops the inner strength to choose the good even in very difficult situations. By regularly practicing this, one can and will guide their emotions until their emotions themselves can become reliable guides and allies in decision making throughout life.

**Step 4:** Ask students what it means to say that something is objective? Write the definition on the board:

**Objective:** a judgement about the truth or existence of something that is not determined by personal opinions or feelings

Give students the handout, [C. S. Lewis: Illustrations of the Tao](#) to illustrate examples of some norms of behavior accepted by different cultures and epochs as objectively true. Give students a few minutes to read the handout, before asking them to select and share one or two of their favorite quotations with the class. Ask students why they chose this selection and how it speaks to a universal or objective value?

**Do objective values exist or are values and morals subjective and relative?**

**Can you name some objective truths or values?**

Ask students if they have heard the statement, ‘everything is relative’. Throughout history, people in power have argued that objective values and morals are actually subjective and relative, and have used this to justify horrors such as slavery, racism, and antisemitism. In the case of slavery, some argued that the slaves themselves were not equal to their masters and thus their value was relative, in cases of racism, some argue that people of some races are not equal to people of others, in cases of antisemitism, some argued that Jewish people were not equal to other people. Each of these examples is inconsistent with the objective reality that all human beings have equal human dignity, and are equal in value. Each of these examples show that some ideas are objectively wrong, since they do not correspond to reality, regardless of what some people think or feel about it.

All people hold at least some truths and values to be objectively wrong. For example, slavery, rape, genocide, and murdering the innocent are always wrong. Similarly, some things are always objectively true or right. For example,  $2+2=4$  and other mathematical truths are always true, regardless of one’s opinion. It is also objectively true that all people have dignity, and that it is always noble to help people in need or to protect the weaker members of the human community.

**Step 5:** Read together as a class the text by [Paul Ehrlich: The Problem](#), an excerpt from Chapter 1 of his book *The Population Bomb*. After reading the text, listen to the first 6:40 minutes of [Germaine Greer’s lecture](#) on Population Control and her response to Ehrlich. Using the Answer Key provided, lead the class in discussion.

Highlight that from this, the class can conclude that it is very important to use one’s power to think in an excellent way and to integrate one’s emotional responses with the power to think. An emotional response which is not integrated with the power to think excellently can have serious consequences. In Ehrlich’s case, his feeling of being overcrowded led himself and others to justify coercive population control policies, causing serious human rights violations for decades.

**Step 6:** It is very important to distinguish those values and truths which are objective from those which are merely subjective (i.e. which depend on us, our emotions at the time, etc). Divide students into groups. Ask the groups to resolve the [Objective vs. Subjective](#) table in order to distinguish between objective and subjective values and statements. Discuss the conclusions with the whole class, using the Answer Key as a guide.

Some examples of subjective and objective claims:

Objective		Subjective or relative	
Mathematical statements	$2 + 2 = 4$	Statements of taste	Vanilla is tastier than chocolate.
Scientific statements	When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction on the first body.	Preference or liking someone or something	I like football more than basketball. My favorite color is green.
Statements of logic	All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.	Mere opinions	I think cats are better pets than dogs, but that's just my opinion.
Ethical statements	Every human person has dignity. It is always wrong to take an innocent human life.	Statements of perspective	To me, this cloud certainly looks like a ninja.

**Step 7:** Summarize. Recall that emotions should correspond to objective reality and that one should integrate them with their power to think and to choose. Explain the difference between objective and subjective statements and how one can distinguish them from one another.

## C.S. Lewis: Illustrations of the Tao<sup>15</sup>

St. Augustine defined virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it. Aristotle said that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. [...]

The Chinese speak of a great thing (the greatest thing) called the Tao. It 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, still and tranquilly, into space and time... 'In ritual', say the Analects, 'it is harmony with Nature that is prized.' The ancient Jews likewise praise the Law as being 'true'.

This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as 'the Tao'. [...] It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.

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Lewis gathered a series of quotes from different cultures and different epochs to show how all cultures considered some moral norms to be objectively true.

### On The Law of General Beneficence

'Do not murder.' (Ancient Jewish. Exodus 20:13)

'Terrify not men or God will terrify thee.' (Ancient Egyptian. Precepts of Ptahhotep. H. R. Hall, Ancient History of the Near East, p. i3}n)

'I have not brought misery upon my fellows. I have not made the beginning of every day laborious in the sight of him who worked for me.' (Ancient Egyptian. Confession of the Righteous Soul. ERE v. 478)

'I have not been grasping.' (Ancient Egyptian. Ibid.)

<sup>15</sup> Source: Abolition of Man by C.S. Lewis.

'Who meditates oppression, his dwelling is overturned.' (Babylonian. Hymn to Samas. ERE v. 445)

'He who is cruel and calumnious has the character of a cat.' (Hindu. Laws of Manu. Janet, Histoire de la Science Politique, vol. i, p. 6)

'Slander not.' (Babylonian. Hymn to Samas. ERE v. 445)

'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' (Ancient Jewish. Exodus 20:16)

'Utter not a word by which anyone could be wounded.' (Hindu. Janet, p. 7)

'Has he [...] driven an honest man from his family? broken up a well cemented clan?' (Babylonian. List of Sins from incantation tablets. ERE v. 446)

'I have not caused hunger. I have not caused weeping.' (Ancient Egyptian. ERE v. 478)

'Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.' (Ancient Chinese. Analects of Confucius, trans. A. Waley, xv. 23; cf. xii. 2)

'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.' (Ancient Jewish. Leviticus 19:17)

'When the people have multiplied, what next should be done for them?' The Master said, 'Enrich them'. Jan Ch'iu said, 'When one has enriched them, what next should be done for them?' The Master said, 'instruct them.' (Ancient Chinese. Analects, xiii. 9)

### **On Duties to Parents, Elders, Ancestors**

'Your father is an image of the Lord of Creation, your mother an image of the Earth. For him who fails to honour them, every work of piety is in vain. This is the first duty.' (Hindu. Janet, i. 9)

'Honour thy Father and thy Mother.' (Ancient Jewish. Exodus 20:12)

'I tended the old man, I gave him my staff.' (Ancient Egyptian. ERE v. 481)

'You will see them take care of [...] widows, orphans, and old men, never reproaching them.'  
(Redskin. ERE v. 439)

### **On The Law of Justice (b) Honesty**

'Choose loss rather than shameful gains.' (Greek. Chilon Fr. 10. Diels)

'Thou shalt not steal.' (Ancient Jewish. Exodus 20:15)

'Justice is the settled and permanent intention of rendering to each man his rights.' (Roman. Justinian, Institutions, I. i)

'If the native made a "find" of any kind (e.g., a honey tree) and marked it, it was thereafter safe for him, as far as his own tribesmen were concerned, no matter how long he left it.'  
(Australian Aborigines. ERE v. 441)

'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' (Ancient Jewish. Exodus 20:16)

'Regard him whom thou knowest like him whom thou knowest not.' (Ancient Egyptian. ERE v. 482)

### **On the Law of Good Faith and Veracity**

'With his mouth was he full of Yea, in his heart full of Nay?' (Babylonian. ERE v. 446)

'I sought no trickery, nor swore false oaths.' (Anglo-Saxon. Beowulf, 2738)

'The Master said, 'Be of unwavering good faith.' (Ancient Chinese. Analects, viii. 13)

'Hateful to me as are the gates of Hades is that man who says one thing, and hides another in his heart.' (Greek. Homer. Iliad, ix. 312)

'Anything is better than treachery.' (Old Norse. Hávamál 124)



### On The Law of Mercy

'Whoso makes intercession for the weak, well pleasing is this to Samas.' (Babylonian. ERE v. 445)

'I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, a ferry boat to the boatless.' (Ancient Egyptian. ERE v. 446)

'One should never strike a woman; not even with a flower.' (Hindu. Janet, i. 8)

'In the Dalebura tribe a woman, a cripple from birth, was carried about by the tribes-people in turn until her death at the age of sixty-six.' [...] 'They never desert the sick.' (Australian Aborigines. ERE v. 443)

'Nature confesses that she has given to the human race the tenderest hearts, by giving us the power to weep. This is the best part of us.' (Roman. Juvenal, xv. 131)

### On The Law of Magnanimity

'There are two kinds of injustice: the first is found in those who do an injury, the second in those who fail to protect another from injury when they can.' (Roman. Cicero, De Off. I. vii)

'[...] Vigour is valiant, but cowardice is vile.' (Ancient Egyptian. The Pharaoh Senusert III, cit. H. R. Hall, Ancient History of the Near East, p. 161)

'The Master said, 'Love learning and if attacked be ready to die for the Good Way.' (Ancient Chinese. Analects, viii. 13)

'We must not listen to those who advise us "being men to think human thoughts, and being mortal to think mortal thoughts," but must put on immortality as much as is possible and strain every nerve to live according to that best part of us, which, being small in bulk, yet much more in its power and honour surpasses all else.' (Ancient Greek. Aristotle, Eth. Nic. 1177 B)

**Paul Ehrlich: The Problem<sup>16</sup>**

I have understood the population explosion intellectually for a long time. I came to understand it emotionally one stinking hot night in Delhi a few years ago. My wife and daughter and I were returning to our hotel in an ancient taxi. The seats were hopping with fleas. The only functional gear was third. As we crawled through the city, we entered a crowded slum area. The temperature was well over 100, and the air was a haze of dust and smoke. The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect. Would we ever get to our hotel? All three of us were, frankly, frightened. It seemed that anything could happen – but, of course, nothing did. Old India hands will laugh at our reaction. We were just some overprivileged tourists, unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of India. Perhaps, but the problems of Delhi and Calcutta are our problems too. Americans have helped to create them; we help to prevent their solution. We must all learn to identify with the plight of our less fortunate fellows on Spaceship Earth if we are to help both them and ourselves to survive.

**QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:**

How did Ehrlich come to the conclusion that there are too many people in the world? What kind of reaction did he have?

Where did Ehrlich go wrong when interpreting his feelings, according to Greer?

Were Ehrlich's emotions adequately integrated with his power to think excellently? Explain.

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<sup>16</sup> The Population Bomb by Paul Ehrlich.

**Answer Key for the teacher**

- 1. How did Ehrlich come to the conclusion that there are too many people in the world? What kind of reaction did he have?** Ehrlich explains that he came to understand emotionally that the world is overpopulated “one stinking hot night in Delhi a few years ago.” He and his wife and daughter were returning to their hotel in an ancient taxi. He describes the experience which made them feel frightened:

“The seats were hopping with fleas. The only functional gear was third. As we crawled through the city, we entered a crowded slum area. The temperature was well over 100, and the air was a haze of dust and smoke. The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand hom squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect.”

- 2. Where did Ehrlich go wrong when interpreting his feelings, according to Greer?** Greer explains that Ehrlich thought the world was overcrowded because he felt overcrowded, partly also because he felt that activities carried out in the street, like washing and eating, were improper. This led him to “impose fantasies on other people’s behavior”. He in fact did not know if Indians felt overcrowded; he concluded that because he himself felt overcrowded. However, he did not interpret his emotions in the correct way. Delhi is, in reality, much less crowded than many Western cities. There was a lot of dust in the air because the streets were unpaved – not because people were walking on them. All of this led him to the wrong conclusion that overpopulation is the cause of food shortages, as if having babies by itself causes a collapse in the food support system. It was by the influence of this fear that he argued for policies which limit people’s choices through compulsory birth control (of which we learned in the previous lesson).
- 3. Were Ehrlich’s emotions adequately integrated with his power to think excellently? Explain.** Ehrlich’s emotions were not well integrated with his power to think excellently due to the fact that his emotions did not correspond to reality. As Greer explained, he felt overcrowded but he had no basis by which to draw the conclusion that Indians feel that way as well or that the world is overpopulated. Ehrlich confused his subjective feeling with the objective facts of the situation. But facts did not support his feelings. As Greer explains, the facts are that Delhi is in reality much less crowded than many Western cities and that there was a lot of dust in the air because the streets are unpaved not because people are walking on them.

**Objective vs relative table**

Statement	Objectively right, objectively wrong or relative (right in some cases, wrong in others)?	Explain.
The prisoner in a concentration camp sharing a piece of bread with another is a noble action.		
You should look people in the eyes when shaking hands.		
Religious people are just stupid.		
Not everyone deserves to have their dignity respected.		
People have equal dignity regardless of their skin color.		
Chess is really boring.		
The sun is bigger than the moon.		
The earth is big.		
The earth is 2000 years old.		
Cheating on the exam is not wrong if the teacher does not find out.		
Truth is relative.		
We cannot say Nazi concentration camps were morally wrong since they were legal.		
Classical music is boring.		
Genocide can be justified in some cases.		

Nike sneakers look much better than Adidas ones.		
I should not be late for meetings unless I have a really good reason.		
My mom is always right.		
It is ok to manipulate people if this helps me to get some benefit from them.		

**Objective vs Subjective table – Answer Key for the teacher**

Statement	Objectively right, objectively wrong or relative (right in some cases, wrong in others)?	Explain.
The prisoner in a concentration camp sharing a piece of bread with another is a noble action.	Objectively right	This action is always noble unless it is done for some kind of bad motive.
You should look people in the eyes when shaking hands.	Relative	In some cultures it is impolite to look people in the eyes when shaking hands.
Religious people are just stupid.	Relative	This is a mere opinion and it is not grounded in facts. While there might be some religious people we would all “stupid”, there are also many who are not.
Not everyone deserves to have their dignity respected.	Objectively wrong	Human dignity is universal and should be always respected.
People have equal dignity regardless of their skin color.	Objectively right	Everyone has equal dignity – that’s a universal and objective truth.
Chess is really boring.	Relative	For some chess is boring, but others find it amusing.
The sun is bigger than the moon.	Objectively right	We can measure this and it holds true regardless of our opinions.
The earth is big.	Relative	It is big in comparison to the moon but small compared to the Sun.
The earth is 2000 years old.	Objectively wrong	We can be sure that it is certainly more than 2000 years old since we have written history dating much before that.

Cheating on the exam is not wrong if the teacher does not find out.	Objectively wrong	Teacher finding out does not change the objectively wrong nature of the act.
Truth is relative.	Objectively wrong/Relative	Certain things are objectively true. For instance, one truth is: it is always wrong to take the innocent life of another person. Therefore, the statement that 'truth is relative' is false.
We cannot say Nazi concentration camps were morally wrong since they were legal.	Objectively wrong	Laws can be unjust. Their legality does not change their objectively wrong nature.
Classical music is boring.	Relative	Different people can disagree about this.
Genocide can be justified in some cases.	Objectively wrong	Genocide is always wrong regardless of circumstances.
Nike sneakers look much better than Adidas ones.	Relative	Some people find that Nike sneakers look better, some others that Adidas look better.
I should not be late for meetings unless I have a really good reason.	Objectively right	Respecting the other person demands that we try to come on time for the meetings.
My mom is always right.	Relative	No person is always right in everything, so this is likely to be just a preferential opinion.
It is ok to manipulate people if this helps me to get some benefit from them.	Objectively wrong	This is treating people merely as objects and so it is always wrong.