

## 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)