# The Abolition of Mind

## The International Baccalaureate & its Anti-Classical Mission

by Robert Kirkendall

**THE CRISES FACING SCHOOLS TODAY ARE LEGION.** In the onslaught of disaffected teachers, undisciplined students, and rabid popular opinion, educators are seeking new systems, new orders, that might turn the tide. But the persistent temptation is to depend on power, wealth, and bureaucracy for what are fundamentally moral, relational, and philosophical problems, foregoing C.S. Lewis' classic thesis in *The Abolition of Man*: Good education is based in natural law. Teachers should impart what Plato's *Republic* calls philosophy (love of wisdom) through philomathy (love of learning), both of which trickle down from adherence to the objective laws of nature. To teach well, a teacher should be free to devote to the truth of her subject, and free to initiate students into that truth. This requires, first, a conviction that objective truths do, indeed, exist and are, in fact, discoverable. If schools are not free, not open to these realities, they tend to become idea-factories producing students who are no more than ideological employees. If we hope to curb this trend, Lewis' *Abolition of Man* offers an essential grounding for education not in man-made systems, but in reality.

The importance of Lewis' remedy is evident in a controversy among educators over the International Baccalaureate (IB), a system of globalized education standards for primary and secondary school. Its conception dates to 1948, when Geneva-based diplomats theorized about using education for world peace. The formal program was launched from Geneva in 1968. The name has changed several times, but its current title became International Baccalaureate in 2007. According to IB's website, the key intellectuals influencing its philosophy (a brand of constructivism) are John Dewey, A.S. Niel, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner. In the 1970s IB began to hold international conferences and opened international "World Schools" throughout the 1980s that eventually gave rise to regional headquarters. Sometime between 1996 and 1998, as its global reach continued to swell, it developed a more specifically global framework, mission, and curriculum with the assistance of UNESCO. To this day, IB shares its global headquarters in Geneva with UNESCO-IBO (International Bureau of Education), a sister global educational program with nearly identical mission and aims (UNESCO-IBO and IB share a postal address and office building in Geneva).

Public and private schools can become IB World Schools, involving hefty initial and ongoing fees which, according to Debra K. Niwa in "IB Unraveled." After large fees for a "feasibility study," "trial implementation," and "authorization visit," including fees for training teachers and administrators, annual fees kick in, which still do not account for all the expenses of travel, new staff positions, and materials. Niwa shows that these annual fees often increase each year, and says the total cost can reach "generous six-digit" amounts. She offers an example in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) in Arizona, which had spent $939,000 after only two years of implementation and with only one IB school location in its district. Niwa goes on to make a very concrete case, with substantial evidence, that the results of these expenditures do not include increased student performance, and concludes that IB is highly unnecessary.

The annual fees are paid for each constituent school and each program offered at that school. IB offers Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programmes, the last for high schoolers, and a career certificate. The Diploma Programmes is somewhat comparable to the Advanced Placement (AP) system. Close to 2,000 universities and colleges worldwide now accept IB credits, 951 of which are US schools. A North America Regional office was opened in New York in 1975, and a D.C.-based global center opened in 2010.

In a 2004 *Washington Times* article the director of International Baccalaureate North America, Bradley W. Richardson, is quoted saying that the ties between IB, UNESCO, and the UN are "historic and collegial," and that IB is a non-governmental organization with advisory status under UNESCO, which means it works closely with UNESCO to strategize holistically about global initiatives. Since Catholic and mainline Protestant schools have been adopting

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IB in increasing numbers, some have raised questions about moral proximity. IB's "historic and collegial ties" to the UN places it in close cooperation with population control initiatives, including massive expansion of abortion, contraception, and forced sterilization. IB is also an NGO of UNESCO, infamous for global "sex education" initiatives. Another NGO of UNESCO, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), embraces similar "education" initiatives. It is reasonable to suggest that all of these international bodies have a keen interest in collaborating over "education" strategies.

Some IB schools and employees try to deny the existence of any relationship between IB and the UN and UNESCO. However, its institutional and ideological ties are unambiguous. In 1996, the UN developed its "Sustainable Development" plan in a document titled "Agenda 21." Besides detailed plans for curing global ecology, the document states in article 36.3, "Education is critical for promoting sustainable development, . . . [for] changing people's attitudes, . . . [and to] deal with the dynamics of both the physical/biological and socio-economic environment and human (which may include spiritual) development. . . . [Sustainable development] should be integrated in all disciplines." Partnership with governmental and non-governmental educational organizations is described as necessary in order to actuate the ideals of global peace, sustainable development, and the changing of "attitudes." Education is emphasized as a means for indoctrinating children and communities into a global political agenda.

IB's own documentation shares these commitments. The IB Mission Statement is as follows:

> *The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.*
>
> *To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.*
>
> *These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.*

Many have expressed concern about the whiff of moral relativism in the final clause. However, the problems lie deeper. German scholar Theodore Haecker, in his introduction to *Virgil, Father of the West*, argues that the primary problem of modernism is not individualism but a "fashionable modern type-building attitude toward man," atomizing man into "social groups" or human labels that forego "the universal Man, the true idea of Man, the idea of the true man and mankind." The modernist, denying "ordo as the final spiritual nature of the universe" descends into a "monstrous Babelish confusion" setting up "hypnotic limitations," isolating humans into silos of types with distinct perspectives and beliefs that are theoretically unalterable based on material considerations of race, place, or culture. But the type-builders paradoxically presume to understand all types from within their own meta-type, claiming to have found a fundamental unity among mankind—which the premise of type-building denies—solely based in their own bureaucratic schemes. IB operates from this multiculturalist "type-building" vantage under which all perspectives may be mystically "right" and also unified.

IB also aims to develop children who will "help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect." This is not just a rhetorical nicety; it is language explicitly adapted from global political initiatives and internationalist slogans. It is propaganda for the Sustainable Development project. In other words, IB hopes to raise up employees for the structures promising global peace and prosperity.

An IB document titled "What is an IB Education" states, "The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally-minded people who recognize their com-

mon humanity and shared guardianship of the planet." Entirely central to the organization's "aim" are the same hallmarks of the UN's global environmentalist-culturalist absolutism. The document goes on to describe the importance of developing "international-mindedness," which includes becoming self-aware of one's own perspectives and appreciative of others. By adopting "international-mindedness," IB students will "gain the understanding necessary to make progress toward a more peaceful and sustainable world," helping the student see that his or her own "language, culture, or worldview is just one of many." This mindset includes "action and bringing about meaningful change." This is the language of the activist, politician, and bureaucrat, not the teacher. Such action and change would require authoritative sources to determine the right action and the right change, which, for IB, are obviously its global affiliates who have already outlined a detailed plan of globalized norms for "action" and "change."

This is confirmed by the former director-general from Geneva, George Walker. In the same *Washington Times* article citing Richardson, Walker is quoted saying the program's aim is to change the values of children from narrow, parochial national terms to a "global" perspective. In a document outlining the background of IB, titled "Education weaves together the strands of peace," Walker opines, "International education offers people a state of mind; international-mindedness. . . . We're living on a planet that is becoming exhausted. People everywhere aspire to [Western] standards of living, and at the same time, they want to maintain [valuable] cultural differences." Walker has lofty ambitions, but his impressive rhetoric is out of step with the actual nature of the recipients of education: Children are in need of formation of mind, not change of mind.

IB's emphasis on changing the minds of children to understand that others, "with their differences, can also be right" abstracts students from familial, local, and national contexts, fundamentally disrespecting the ways that parents and teachers may wish to educate their own children about objective truths that transcend globalist power and rhetoric. IB's documentation outlines an explicit rejection of "traditional" teaching methods in favor of a "progressive" pedagogical ethic: for instance, from "memorization" to "critical thinking," "same content for all" to "student choice," "hermetic subjects" to "transdisciplinarity," "national perspective" to "multiple perspectives." This is the fancy rhetoric of the constructivist fad in education which, at its extreme, only destabilizes the process of learning and neglects human nature by elevating the student's experience over the teacher's knowledge and wisdom. Leaving aside the teacher as an authoritative agent for student cooperation with the natural law, education is left with gaping holes that are filled by the ideologies of those in power.

That IB's global political ideology informs the content of its curriculum is evident in a capstone course and essay for Diploma Programme students, "Theory of Knowledge." The IB website says this is an opportunity for "students to reflect on the nature of knowledge, and on how we know what we claim to know." Another noble ideal; but it is hard to imagine a high school senior who is not only ready to take an epistemology course but also to develop his own working epistemology. Most teens I know have already formed their own iron-clad epistemology and are typically very unwilling to give it up for the foreseeable future.

But, for the sake of argument, let's say teens are prepared to develop epistemic theories. "Theory of Knowledge" (TOK) is mandatory for all Diploma Programme (DP) students and is "central to the educational philosophy of the DP." It is graded, as are other major assessments throughout the curriculum, by IB employees in Wales. It is composed "entirely of questions," the "most central" of which is "How do we know?" Other "questions" include, "What counts as evidence for X?" "How do we judge which is the best model of Y?" and "What does theory Z mean in the real world?" The aim of this exercise is for students to "gain greater awareness of their personal and ideological assumptions, as well as develop an appreciation for the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives." This is clarified as developing awareness of the "interpretive nature of knowledge, including personal ideological biases." The TOK is meant to give students and teachers the "opportunity" to reflect on diversity, consider the cultures of self and others, and "recognize the need to act responsibly in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain world." These are all fine ideals that, realistically, do occur when the student is in the presence of a knowledgeable, thoughtful, and intellectually-inclined teacher. But IB is not just unnecessary for good education; the emphasis on action in an "uncertain world" exposes the globalist gospel of IB: The young are saved from parochialism and called on a mission of global activism, navigating the world's complexities through IB's own authoritative euangelion of "international-mindedness."

The 2013 course companion textbook for "Theory of Knowledge" confirms that IB views itself as the moral authority for proposing and inculcating appropriate political action. It reads not like an informative textbook, but like a training manual for international diplomats, as if the student is preparing for global mission. This content is troubling from a purely academic point

of view. Contemporary sociological and cultural theorists are often cited, and a recurring theme is that one's native culture represents a "fabric of meaning" that involves an absorption of the "assumptions and values of [the] group." Haecker's assessment of modernist "typing" is apt here, since IB presumes to have achieved some transcendent "fabric of meaning" by which to judge all other fabrics and meanings.

A section on "Meta-ethics" makes it clear that IB theoretically asserts no absolute norm for objective knowledge in ethics, or any field, for that matter: "Ethical absolutism . . . argues that there is such a thing as right and wrong applicable universally. Its weakness is that, in reality, there appear to be no moral judgments accepted by every society worldwide." It contrasts these weaknesses to the other "extreme" of relativism, implying relativism as superior because it provides "flexibility" and "challenges traditional codes of morality to be open to change." The book does acknowledge the strength of "absolutism" as reflecting norms for behavior that are not based in observation of how humans actually behave but how they ought to behave—however, it concludes in a Hegelian flourish, suggesting that the "two extremes" of absolutism and relativism generate positive intellectual flux. Interestingly, after acknowledging that some level of "generalizations" do provide the foundation of human rights, the book cites the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its proof text. The UN is the only unquestioned authoritative source on ethics.

Most poignant, however, is the textbook's presumption to pontificate on "faith" and "religious knowledge" in chapters with the same respective titles. The kind of faith undergirding "religious knowledge" is declared to be a rejection of the need for "justification" and is defined as "subjective" and not "objective" since it lacks "evidence, testing, or reasoning." It does affirm the equal importance of objectivity and subjectivity in arriving at a belief, but does not clarify any standards for right judgment. The clear message to a young teenage mind is that faith-claims lack any grounding in reality. The textbook adopts a position of skeptical neutrality in favor of a global politesse aimed at teaching one not about the religious perspectives themselves but about how to engage those who do have such perspectives. The reader should be reasonable enough to have no faith but might need to diplomatically guide those who do. The chapter ends by describing how "murderous destruction," division, and bigotry have all been caused by faith.

Then, the chapter turns to discounting any real grounding for rational claims to religious knowledge. It lists straw-man forms of the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments for God's existence, followed by "counter-arguments" that are surprisingly erroneous:

> *Ontological argument, countered: Anything can be argued to exist in this way.*
>
> *Cosmological argument, countered: 1. If the First Cause is itself infinite, why not accept the idea of infinity in an infinite regress of causes? 2. What caused the First Cause? Why stop the chain of causation there?*
>
> *Teleological argument, countered: 1. If there were a Designer, it does not have to be the Christian God, or even a single deity. 2. Complexity could have an alternative explanation (e.g. chance, evolution).*

The authors have not done their homework. None of these "refutations" show meaningful engagement with the arguments themselves, and none actually respond accurately to premises. For example, they missed entirely that the ontological argument is about the existence of God, not of everything else—God's existence is qualitatively different than that of creatures, for whom existence is non-essential to being. By the very terms of the ontological argument, not everything can be argued about in this way except for God, whose essence is to exist.

The chapter goes on to discount the persuasiveness of these "reasoned arguments" as explainable based on predispositions and psychology: "It is likely that this kind of argument is persuasive primarily to those who believe in God already, and not to those whose religions have no Supreme Being or to those who do not have religious beliefs." Unlike a global ethic of human rights, the book argues that the "justifications" for religion lack objective evidence and thus "cannot be demonstrated in a way to convince everyone, using material evidence accessible to the senses, or reasoning from universally agreed premises." Because not everyone agrees, there can be no objective demonstration that would compel belief. Religious belief is relegated to psychology and affective sentiments of cultural enclaves, while IB implicitly asserts itself as the supreme alternative for sorting and determining what are "universally agreed premises." The chapter ends with a description of how religious convictions have tended to villainize others because of their differences, believing "with passionate conviction that they alone have knowledge that is true and pure, and that others are a defilement and threat." Yet IB is positioning itself as compelling enough to expect a kind of religious belief in its cultural dogmas.

The primary dogma is "international-mindedness" wherein all differences are seen and understood from a panoptic perch, fostering an integration of mankind in

which all can be right, at peace, and eco-friendly. The book cites the 1993 "Declaration toward a global ethic" drafted by the Parliament of the World's Religions, which explains that the "fundamental crisis" of our world is that of "global economy, ecology, and politics." The lack of a "grand vision" keeps mankind tangled and paralyzed. This document triangulates what IB, UNESCO, and the UN are working for: "better mutual understanding, as well as socially beneficial, peace-fostering, Earth-friendly ways of life." Littered with colored boxes highlighting international documents and agreements like this one, the "Theory of Knowledge" textbook contains blatant propaganda for the "grand vision" of world peace cast by the UN et al. Certainly, the modern heritage of international human rights language is important. But it is strange to find in a high school textbook presuming to be about epistemology. In a technical sense, it is indoctrination into sentiments and global activism, not transmission of knowledge.

TOK has its own questionable epistemological theories (or, shall we say, priorities) and lacks actual philosophy or engagement with religious arguments. It is a collection of sentimental aspirations spiced with the worst of modern sociology. It is a manual for how to live the diplomatic life of its own creators, not an academic introduction to epistemology. What we see here is not an exposè of some grand conspiracy, but simply bad education.

A close reading of *The Abolition of Man* elucidates these educational problems. Lewis opens with a critique of another textbook for primary school in which the authors claim that language has no objective value but merely expresses the emotional state of the speaker. Lewis, to the contrary, asserts that for the bulk of human history, teachers have agreed that "certain emotional reactions could be either congruous or incongruous" to the universe. There is an objective correspondence between reality and emotion, wherein "objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence, our contempt." He cites St. Augustine's idea of virtue as *ordo amoris*, "the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind and degree of love which is appropriate to it." He cites Aristotle on the aim of education to "make the pupil like and dislike what he aught," and this is the "first principle in ethics," and reviews similar concepts in Plato and Hinduism.

Lewis, famously, goes on to borrow the Chinese word *Tao* to describe this objective, universal moral reality that everything is ordered to and thus is the ultimate measure for educators, whose task is to form students in accord with reality. The Tao "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," a concept foundational to every major civilization in history.

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For IB, the only Tao becomes imitation of the human agents behind the system itself—the diplomatic bureaucrats who promote their own agenda for human society. IB brings up questions but fails to give students a philosophical, moral, or emotional foundation that will lead them to desire Reason, which Lewis calls a harmony of "our approvals and disapprovals" with "objective value [and] order." Lewis is proposing the need for a transcendent Absolute in education:

> *An open mind, in questions that are not ultimate, is useful. But an open mind about the ultimate foundations either of Theoretical or Practical Reason is idiocy. If a man's mind is open on these things, let his mouth at least stay shut. He can say nothing to the purpose. Outside the Tao there is no ground for criticizing either the Tao or anything else.*

Without the Tao, educators have no ground to stand on and nothing to teach. They may as well let the students run the show. Without the Tao, IB has nothing to stand on except itself, its own fiat, and the whims of globalized government. Lewis, importantly, clarifies that he is not appealing to religion or faith but to natural reason and philosophy—something the writers of the TOK textbook simply fail to do in their clever conglomeration of sociology, contemporary cultural theory, and international diplomacy.

Lewis ends *The Abolition of Man* with a harrowing assessment of what education looks like without the Tao: in essence, men conquering other men (global bureaucratic imperialism), masquerading as men conquering nature (environmentalism). Education is left prone to powerful Machiavellians whom he calls "man-moulders" or "Conditioners," the rich and powerful who see education as the

means for socially conditioning children into their own image. Lewis' tirade about the Conditioners sounds eerily like a denouncement of the International Baccalaureate:

> *The man-moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omnicompetent state and an irresistible scientific technique. . . . Values are now mere natural phenomena. Judgments of value are to be produced in the pupil as part of the conditioning. Whatever Tao there is will be the product, not the motive, of education. . . . [They] chose what kind of artificial Tao they will, for their own good reasons, produce in the human race . . . Thus at first they may look upon themselves as servants and guardians of humanity and conceive that they have a "duty," [which becomes] the result of certain processes which they can now control.*

Teachers are either duty-bound by conscience to form students in moral accord with the way the universe actually is, or they become slaves to a bureaucratic authority that claims to redefine what actually is, however sincerely. Francis Thompson's famous line from his poem "The Heart" makes the problem clear: "Our towns are copied fragments from our breast; / And all man's Babylons strive but to impart / The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart."

For education to flourish, the teacher must be fundamentally free to use conscience as a mode for understanding and transferring the Tao, the objective moral nature of things, as applicable to her discipline. In turn, students are either shaped as human beings in accord with their highest potential as it is dictated by human nature and reality, or they become cogs in a complicated machine run by ideological mechanists. Lewis concludes *The Abolition of Man* with this assessment:

> *The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. . . . It is no use trying to "see through" first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To "see through" all things is the same as not to see.*

Without an Absolute in education that transcends the pet projects of educators, all that is left is slavery to the absolutes constructed by the avaricious, albeit sincere, hearts of the powerful who lord an image of themselves over their pupils. If education does not have the natural law as master, its master becomes powerful men who, as T.S. Eliot has it, "try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good." These systems do not end well; but the poor of the earth inherit the kingdom that is theirs by right—that which is not an artificial machination of a bureaucratic puppet-master, but that which is truly good for children, families, and society, that which is based in reality, in the natural law, accessible to all, conducive to God-given reason.