

# UNDERSTANDING MORAL VALUES IN THE MEMOIR ENTITLED *EDUCATED* BY TARA WESTOVER: A SPIRITUAL METAMORPHOSIS

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## Abstract

This article is focused on how to analyse any moral values portrayed in the memoir "Educated," with particular emphasis on the protagonist, Tara Westover. The study intends to identify conflicts encountered by the main character through narration or dialogues with other characters, and to reveal moral values that emerge as she overcomes these conflicts. The research utilized a qualitative descriptive method and drew on the conflict theory proposed by Stanton (1965) and the theory of moral values put forth by Linda and Eyre (1993) to analyse data from the memoir. Two of the conflicts found in this study were both internal struggles by the main character involving her thoughts and feelings and external struggles with her father, abusive older brother, and family members who labelled her as a dangerous girl influenced by Satan. Through her resolution on these conflicts, the main character demonstrated various moral values, including self-reliance, self-discipline, courage, and respect. The study's findings emphasize the significance of spiritual metamorphosis in memoirs and literature, as well as how conflicts can facilitate such transformation.

**Keywords:** *conflicts, moral values, main character, memoir*

## I INTRODUCTION

Literature holds significant power in communicating values, imparting entertainment, pleasure, and information with a specific message, commonly referred to as moral value. Moral value is a key aspect of literature that can help individuals recognize important life lessons and guide their behavior. As stated by Abrams (2009), literature should contain values that shape an individual's ability to distinguish between what is right and wrong.

Moral values are often embedded in non-fiction literary works such as memoirs, which are written based on personal experiences or special sources. Through reading a memoir, readers can easily extract moral values as it reflects the author's personal journey. These moral messages are sometimes shared indirectly through conflicts that occur in the story. Memoirs often use conflict to explain or characterize problems. Therefore, understanding how an individual overcomes the conflict can be one way to extract valuable lessons conveyed through the story.

Moral values have been a part of literary works for centuries, with authors using their stories to convey ethical and moral messages to their readers. A philosopher known for her work on the ethical dimensions of literature and narrative, stated that moral values have been present in literature throughout history (Nussbaum, 1990). Memoirs, in particular, provide a unique platform for authors to communicate moral values, as they are based on personal experiences and often serve as a form of self-reflection. An expert discussed the unique role that memoirs can play in communicating moral values. He noted that memoirs are able to convey moral messages in a powerful way, as they are based on the author's personal experiences and reflect their own ethical and moral perspectives (Couser, 2012). Overall, both Nussbaum's work on the ethical dimensions of literature and Couser's discussion of memoirs highlight the important role that literature can play in conveying moral values and ethical considerations.

One memoir that can serve as an example to how fundamental moral values conveyed is Tara Westover's memoir, entitled 'Educated', which was published in 2018. The memoir tells the story of Westover's transformation from a young girl in an isolated family to a Cambridge-educated historian. Despite her lack of formal education, she became deeply interested in knowledge, which led her on a journey to Harvard University and the University of Cambridge. However, the story is filled with conflicts, including one that led to her losing her beloved family in the pursuit of her dreams. Through reading *Educated*, readers can not only be entertained but can also learn many moral values, especially through how the main character overcomes the conflicts in her life. Memoir was chosen as the data source for this study to reveal the moral values conveyed through any conflicts experienced by the main character.

The author notes that there are several previous studies on a similar topic that may be useful for guiding the current research. The first study, conducted by Azali (2022), examined moral values that

was analysed through the main character's approach to conflict resolution in James Dashner's novel "The Maze Runner". Azali analysed the conflicts and their resolution based on Stanton's (1965) theory, and the moral values that were shown through the main character's approach based on Nurgiantoro's (1998) theory. The second study, conducted by Kinaryaning (2019), focused on analysing moral values revealed through the character Andy's methods of overcoming conflicts in the film "Cargo". Kinaryaning used Murphy's (1972) theory to analyse Andy's characteristics, Boggs and Petrie's (2008) theory to analyse the conflicts, and Lickona's (1991) theory to analyse the moral values.

The third study is an article by Desica and Arianto (2022). They focused on analyzing the moral factors that aided the main character in achieving self-unity using theories proposed by Linda and Eyre (1993) and Cady (2005). The fourth study is an article by Xiaohan and Hui (2021). The authors analysed Tara Westover's experiences of trauma and her recovery process using the trauma theory proposed by Herman (1997). Based on the studies mentioned above, it appears that there is a growing interest in analysing the moral values depicted in literary works, including novels, films, and memoirs. The previous studies mentioned are related to the current study in the sense that they all deal with the analysis of moral values in literary works. However, they differ in terms of the specific works analysed, the theories used, and the methods employed. The current study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the moral values in the memoir "Educated" by Tara Westover and analysing how these values are conveyed through the author's personal experiences. This study builds on the previous studies by providing a unique perspective on the moral dimensions of memoirs and highlighting the potential of memoirs to educate and inspire readers on ethical issues. Therefore, the previous studies provide a valuable background for the current study and help to contextualize its contribution to the field of literary analysis.

Despite the growing interest in analysing the moral values in literary works, there is still a research gap when it comes to analysing the moral values depicted in the memoir "Educated" by Tara Westover. Therefore, the current study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the moral values revealed in the memoir, the ways in which the author uses her personal experiences to convey these moral values, and how readers can interpret and extract moral messages from the memoir. By doing so, the study aims to shed light on the moral dimensions of memoirs and their potential to inspire and educate read-ers on important ethical issues.

Given the aforementioned context, the discussion of moral values is a compelling topic to explore. This research is especially intriguing as it draws upon a widely-read and inspirational memoir based on a true story. The objective is to uncover the moral values that can be gleaned from the memoir's main character. Her life journey is a spiritual metamorphosis, taking her from a girl who never attended traditional schools to a Ph.D. in history at Cambridge University, which has a lasting impact on her life.

Exploring moral values is important for several reasons. Firstly, moral values are the principles and standards that govern human behavior and are therefore central to our understanding of what is right and wrong. By examining the moral values embedded in literary works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ethical dilemmas faced by individuals and society as a whole. This can help us to reflect on our own values and beliefs and make informed decisions about our actions. Secondly, exploring moral values in literature can contribute to our personal growth and development. By engaging with literary works that convey moral messages, we can learn from the experiences of others and expand our perspectives on ethical issues. This can help us to develop empathy, compassion, and a deeper understanding of the human condition. Finally, exploring moral values in literature can have broader societal implications. Literature has the power to shape cultural norms and values, and by examining the moral messages conveyed in literary works, we can gain insights into how these messages may influence social attitudes and behavior.

## II METHODS

The data was derived from a memoir entitled *Educated* written by Tara Westover, which was first published in 2018 by Penguin Random House and has 352 pages. The memoir narrates a fascinating story of Tara Westover, who became a historian educated at Cambridge University, and discusses the significance of education in broadening her horizons. The data was gathered through the observation method, which involved reading the book repeatedly to gain a deeper understanding of the narrative. The data collection process involved identifying conflicts and highlighting specific keywords that depicted how the main character overcame them. The data was then organized in a table that separated the conflicts and how the protagonist overcame them. The collected data was checked for validity to ensure accuracy. The qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyse the data, with the aim of

presenting the findings accurately, coherently, and systematically, using relevant theories. The data was analysed using conflict theory proposed by Stanton (1965) and the theory on moral values by Linda and Eyre (1993).

### III FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the outcomes and discourse are presented, founded on the information collected from the memoir entitled *Educated*. The investigation of the data deliberates the story and discussions between the characters, succeeded by a depiction of the data based on Stanton's theory of conflict and Linda and Eyre's moral values theory.

Linda and Eyre (1993) explain that moral values guide behavior, and by shaping better individuals and improving our treatment of others, they lead to both individual and collective happiness. They propose that by valuing and prioritizing others, we can receive more in return. The authors further classify values into two categories, namely "values of being" and "values of giving".

Values of being involve developing positive qualities and attitudes within ourselves that influence our behavior and interactions with others. They are acquired through practice and personal growth. The six values of being include honesty, courage, peacefulness, self-reliance and potential, self-discipline and moderation, and fidelity. Values of giving, on the other hand, are gifts we give to others that then shape our character. They are gained through the act of giving. The six values of giving are loyalty, respect, love, unselfishness and sensitivity, kindness, and mercy (Linda and Eyre, 1993).

The memoir written by Westover depicts a lengthy journey filled with a multitude of conflicts, all of which convey certain messages directly or indirectly to the readers. These messages are essentially valuable lessons, or moral values, which become apparent when Westover successfully overcomes her challenges. Upon analysing the moral values present in the "Educated" memoir using Linda and Eyre's (1993) theory of moral values, four distinct values were identified in the data: self-reliance and potential, self-discipline and moderation, courage, and respect. These values were discovered through Westover's experiences of overcoming conflicts, as described in detail below.

#### 3.1 SELF-RELIANCE AND POTENTIAL

The initial moral value that can be gleaned from Westover's journey of overcoming conflicts is self-reliance and potential. As described by Linda and Eyre (1993: 79), this value entails being aware of our potential for growth, committing to self-improvement, and taking responsibility for our actions. Throughout the memoir, Westover consistently demonstrates this value by remaining dedicated to her personal development and striving for excellence in resolving the challenges she faces.

(3-1) I made some effort to keep up my schooling in the free time I had between scrap-ping and helping Mother make tinctures and blend oils (p. 72)

The excerpt above highlights the moral value of self-reliance and potential, which is demonstrated in Tara Westover's personal journey in the memoir. Westover had to overcome her internal conflict between her desire to receive a proper education and her family's beliefs. Despite her family's disapproval, she recognized her potential and was determined to pursue her interests. However, she initially struggled with the idea of going against her family's beliefs and felt it was a betrayal to her father's sacrifices. Nevertheless, she ultimately learned to rely on her own capabilities and took the necessary steps to achieve her goals, which was an essential part of her self-reliance and potential.

Westover's lack of formal education did not diminish her eagerness to continue learning. She was motivated to seek opportunities for self-improvement, even while balancing her responsibilities of helping her parents. With a growth mindset, she was committed to becoming a better person and was able to effectively manage her time and resources. This aspect of Westover's story emphasizes her message of the importance of being aware of personal growth and self-improvement.

(3-2) Then, because I knew I wouldn't be able to pay it in February, I took a second job as a domestic cleaner, driving twenty minutes north three days a week to scrub expensive homes in Draper (p. 223)

The above excerpt portrays moral values of self-reliance and potential. The lesson to learn here is in Westover's triumph over her inner conflict between her doubts and her desire to continue her studies. Initially, her college experience was dominated by hard work to cover all of her expenses. She had to pay for her tuition and apartment by herself, which led to a lot of bills she couldn't imagine how to pay. This caused her to lose interest in her studies and feel hopeless. Although she considered dropping out of

college, she decided to persevere. She worked in various places, borrowed money from her housemate, and even sold her beloved horse to make ends meet. Eventually, she received a government grant that helped her pay off all her bills. Despite this stroke of luck, she still took on a second job to ensure the smooth progress of her studies, knowing that she could anticipate similar struggles in the future.

Despite not receiving any financial assistance from her parents, Westover persisted in her studies by working simultaneously, which took a toll on her both physically and mentally. Nevertheless, she remained dedicated to her education, despite the constant pressure of being responsible for her own expenses. She was a diligent worker who continued to work even after receiving a government grant, taking on a second job to guarantee the advancement of her studies. In her memoir, Westover's message is clear: she embraced her obligations and did not attribute her difficulties to anyone else.

(3-3) Then it was spring, then summer, and finally as summer turned to fall, I found I could read with focus. I could hold thoughts in my head besides anger and self-accusation. I returned to the chapter I had written nearly two years before at Harvard (p. 341)

The above excerpt demonstrates moral values of self-reliance and potential. The lesson to learn here is seen when Westover overcomes her external conflict with her family, who labelled her as "dangerous and influenced by Satan." Her dissertation work suffered due to her frustration and grief over losing her beloved family. She confided in her supervisor about this and was advised to quit, given the demanding nature of the dissertation work. Despite the chaos she experienced while trying to find peace with herself, she remained committed to completing her dissertation. The process was draining both physically and mentally and lasted for many seasons. Eventually, she found the ability to focus again, although she still struggled with anger and self-accusation. She decided to continue with her dissertation and eventually earned her Ph.D.

Westover faced significant physical and mental stress that made it challenging for her to concentrate fully on her studies, particularly while working on a strenuous task such as a dissertation. Her family conflict was causing problems, to the extent that her supervisor recommended that she quit. Despite the uncertainty and possible devastation, she felt at that point, Westover refused to abandon her studies and instead remained devoted to her education. It took her numerous seasons to regain her mental clarity, but she continued to persevere in her quest for personal growth and excellence. This is the core message that Westover aims to communicate through her account.

### 3.2 SELF-DISCIPLINE AND MODERATION

Another moral value that can be learned from Westover's story is self-discipline and moderation. As Linda and Eyre (1993: 93) define it, self-discipline and moderation involve the ability to balance physical, mental, and financial self-control by recognizing the limits of the body and mind, such as being moderate in speech, eating, exercise, and avoiding extreme viewpoints or actions. This value is evident in the story, as Westover demonstrates the ability to exercise self-restraint and control in dealing with conflicts.

(3-4) I woke up every morning at six to study because it was easier to focus in the mornings, before I was worn out from scrapping (p. 150)

This excerpt highlights the importance of self-discipline and moderation as a moral value. The story of Westover overcoming her conflict with her father demonstrates the valuable lesson that can be learned. Westover faced opposition from her father regarding her plan to pass the college qualification test. The conflict caused her to doubt herself, and she became fearful of divine retribution. Despite this, Westover persevered in her decision to pursue her education, even though it would not change her father's opinion. She implemented self-discipline by waking up early every morning to study, recognizing that it was easier to focus during this time, before helping her parents. Through her experiences, Westover illustrates the importance of balance and self-restraint in achieving one's goals, and this is the message she wants to convey through her memoir.

Despite lacking support from her father, Westover was determined to pursue her dream of getting a college education. She made a consistent effort to wake up early each morning and study, even though she was not necessarily motivated to do so. Instead, she demonstrated a remarkable level of discipline and commitment to achieving her goal. Westover's ability to balance self-discipline and moderation is the key message she wants to portray through her life story.

(3-5) I bought my textbooks, paid rent, and had money left over. The bishop said I should treat myself to something, but I said I couldn't, I had to save the money (p. 225)

The excerpt describes how Westover exhibited the moral values of self-discipline and moderation when she faced an internal conflict between her doubts and her desire to continue her studies. Due to financial difficulties, she considered dropping out of college. However, she eventually received a government grant that improved her finances. Rather than being content with the new-found financial stability, Westover chose to exercise self-discipline and moderation. She refrained from spending the money on frivolous things and instead saved it for the purpose of advancing her studies. Through her actions, Westover demonstrated the importance of balancing one's desires with practicality and discipline, and this is a message that she hopes to convey through her life journey.

The story illustrates Westover's exceptional skill in making wise and moderate decisions, even when presented with a government grant that resolved most of her financial issues. She took care of her essential needs such as health, books, and rent, and rather than squandering the remaining funds on superfluous things, she chose to save them. She understood that having enough was more valuable than having excess and therefore didn't feel compelled to spend more simply because she had the funds. Through her experiences, Westover emphasizes the importance of self-control and restraint, making clear that these are qualities to be admired and emulated.

### 3.3 COURAGE

The third lesson to be learned from Westover's story is about courage, which she demonstrates when overcoming conflicts. Courage, as defined by Lin-da and Eyre (1993: 48), means being willing to attempt difficult tasks while staying true to one's beliefs, even when it is unpopular or uncomfortable. Westover's story shows that she possesses this quality, as she bravely makes bold decisions based on her heart to overcome her struggles.

(3-6) I was sixteen, had never taken an exam, and had only recently undertaken any-thing like a systematic education; still I registered for the test (p. 151)

The excerpt explores the moral significance of courage, exemplified in Westover's tale. The lesson becomes apparent when Westover confronts her father's disapproval and religious objections towards her pursuit of higher education. She remained committed to her beliefs and demonstrated bravery by registering for the college qualification test after rigorous studying. Her unwavering determination gave her the confidence to pursue her aspirations, even when faced with opposition and fear. Through her experiences, Westover highlights the importance of courage in staying true to oneself and following one's aspirations, despite obstacles and opposition.

The passage highlights the moral value of courage, which is exemplified in Westover's story. Despite coming from a family background that did not value education, Westover dared to dream of going to college and had the courage to fight for it, even though it meant going against her family's beliefs and facing the consequences of being rebellious. This decision was uncomfortable and challenging, but Westover's conviction in her beliefs compelled her to push through it and grow as a person. The message that Westover wants to convey through her memoir is the importance of having the strength to try hard things and stay true to one's convictions, even in the face of adversity.

(3-7) I rise from my bed, retrieve my journal, and do something I have never done be-fore: I write what happened. I do not use vague, shadowy language, as I have done in other entries; I do not hide behind hints and suggestion. I write what I remember (p. 215)

The excerpt discusses the moral value of courage, which is demonstrated in Westover's story. The lesson is revealed when Westover overcomes the external conflict with her older brother, Shawn, who physically abused her. Despite feeling ashamed and wanting to believe that the abuse was just a game, Westover mustered the courage to face the truth and confront the painful reality of her situation. She refused to hide her experience and instead, for the first time, wrote down the details of the abuse in her journal without using vague or euphemistic language. This act of bravery shows her determination to face difficult truths and seek justice, even in the face of shame and fear.

Westover's decision to confront the truth about the abuse she experienced and to document it in her journal took immense courage. It was uncomfortable and painful, but she did not shy away from the truth. This decision was a turning point for her, as it marked the beginning of her journey towards healing and overcoming the trauma she experienced. By sharing her story with readers, Westover hopes to inspire others to have the courage to confront their own painful truths and to take steps towards healing and growth.

### 3.4 RESPECT

Linda and Eyre (1993: 136) define respect as including a variety of things, such as self-respect, respect for life, property, parents, elders, nature, and the beliefs and rights of others. The story shows that Westover has a strong sense of self-respect when dealing with conflicts.

- (3-8) I could not judge her for her choice, but in that moment, I knew I could not choose it for myself. Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind (p. 328)

The excerpt explores the moral value of respect, exemplified in Westover's story. The lesson becomes apparent when Westover confronts familial conflict and her family labels her as "dangerous and influenced by Satan." Despite understanding her sister Audrey's seemingly cruel decision, Westover chooses to respect her own beliefs and not judge Audrey for her choice. Westover stands her ground and refuses to exchange her abusive past stories for distance from her family, demonstrating self-respect and a refusal to compromise her beliefs for others. Through her experiences, Westover highlights the significance of respecting oneself and one's beliefs, even in the face of conflict and familial pressure.

The passage highlights how Westover prioritized her own well-being and self-respect despite the potential consequences of distancing herself from her family. She was confident in her decision to not trade her past experiences for acceptance from her family, as it would require her to deny her truth and invalidate the abuse she endured. Westover recognized and accepted the imperfect and unchangeable parts of herself and did not compromise her self-respect in the process. Her actions exemplify the importance of respecting oneself and one's own values and beliefs, even in the face of opposition.

- (3-9) I said I needed a year to heal myself; then perhaps I could return to their mad world to try to make sense of it (p.337)

The excerpt emphasizes the significance of respect as a moral value, exemplified in Westover's story. The lesson becomes apparent when Westover faces familial conflict, where her family labels her as "dangerous and influenced by Satan." Despite her confidence in improving her relationship with her family, Westover discovers that her doubts about her memories make her appear to be a threat to her family's faith. This realization causes her to feel broken, leading to a panic attack while in London and subsequent letter-writing to her father expressing her frustration. In prioritizing her well-being, Westover shows self-respect, acknowledging her pain and taking action towards healing before returning to her family's tumultuous environment. Through her experiences, Westover highlights the importance of respecting oneself and taking steps to prioritize personal well-being, even in the face of opposition and conflict.

Westover's decision to set boundaries with her family was a way for her to prioritize her own well-being and mental health. It was a form of self-rescue that allowed her to heal and regain a sense of control over her life. By doing so, she demonstrated respect for herself and her own needs. This is an important message that Westover conveys in her memoir, as it shows the importance of self-care and self-respect in the face of difficult circumstances.

## IV CONCLUSION

The study's findings emphasize the significance of spiritual metamorphosis in memoirs and literature and how conflicts can facilitate such transformation. In conclusion, Tara Westover's memoir, *Educated*, is a powerful illustration of spiritual metamorphosis, where she undergoes a profound transformation from a limited and oppressed existence to a life of intellectual and personal freedom. Through the conflicts she faces, both internal and external, she learns valuable moral values that guide her towards self-discovery and growth. Her journey towards self-reliance, self-discipline, courage, and respect highlights the importance of moral values in shaping one's character and transforming one's life. This transformation is not just a physical or intellectual one but a spiritual one, where Westover's worldview is fundamentally altered, and she gains a deeper understanding of herself and the world around her. Her story serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of moral values in achieving spiritual metamorphosis.

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