

Ethics: Pick or Choose?

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How to Choose Right From Wrong

After four years at Harvard University as an undergraduate, one student proclaimed in his graduation oration that there was one central idea, one sentiment which they all acquired in their Harvard careers; and that is, in one word, confusion.

That same year, Harvard's graduate-student orator said, "They tell us that it is heresy to suggest the superiority of some value, fantasy to believe in moral argument, slavery to submit to a judgment sounder than your own. The freedom of our day is the freedom to devote ourselves to any values we please, on the mere condition that we do not believe them to be true."[\[1\]](#)

Our universities are teaching students that there are no solid guidelines to life. Since everything is relative, they are totally free to create anything they want out of their lives. Students are told that no one has a right to tell them how they ought to live. Decisions about right and wrong are strictly up to them. It makes no difference what they choose to make of their lives. Students are not encouraged to ask the traditional questions about the usefulness of life or the value of an exemplary life. As the above graduate student pointed out, they don't even want you to take your own conclusions about life seriously. It is a philosophy of ambiguity. It is the philosophy of humanistic existentialism. Many today are striving to break away from traditional values and embrace a sense of futility. Today we see it in the lives of teenagers who have "tried everything" and found life to be wanting. We see it in the life style of the "survivalists" who have given up hope in God and the future, holing up in defense of a coming catastrophe.[\[2\]](#)

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the fathers of humanistic existentialism, the world is absurd, lacking any concept of ultimate justification. Sartre declares we have no ultimate purpose or plan to our lives. We are nothing and are therefore free to make ourselves into anything we want to be.^{3} It doesn't even matter if you believe in your own proclamations because there is no more reason for you to exist than for you to not exist. Both are the same. The existentialist says you can just pick and choose your values. It makes no difference. There is no transcendent truth or power beyond man himself. Sartre doesn't believe in any God, nor does he believe that there is any preconceived design. There is no principle of authority to determine action. He says one must invent an original solution for each situation.^{4} Therefore, in the sovereignty of his freedom, man creates his own values. Morality is rooted in human choice. Man alone gives his life its importance. Mankind must somehow transcend a life of absurdity and despair.

Is this humanly created reality true or are those who believe it trying to live in a dream world? Is the existentialist trying desperately to deflect the true absurdity and despair of his position? Is this the view of life that we expect our college students to be learning?

The Foundation of Existentialism

Prior to World Wars I & II, modern man believed that through science and human engineering an ever better world was evolving. They believed that mankind was getting better, that peace and prosperity would reign. They were convinced that we had finally figured out how to live together in harmony and to build a better world.

Then came the rude awakening of two world wars and the hideous crimes against human beings perpetuated by Hitler's Third Reich. Out of the continuing frustration and destruction of World War II came a new philosophy of life. It was a

philosophy conceived by those who had lost hope, who could only see the chaos. They lost their hope in any ultimate meaning for life. They were unable to see beyond the carnage of war-torn Europe. Their view of life was called humanistic existentialism.

Men like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus sought to establish a new view of life, a “new humanism” with a whole new set of values. Prior to these men, the need for a transcendent force, a higher authority beyond man himself, helped set limits and gave guidance to our lives. An example of this transcendence would be the Ten Commandments, given to man by God. These new philosophers defined transcendence in an entirely different way. They saw transcendence only in their own aims and goals. For the existentialists, transcendence was a way to escape what they saw as the meaninglessness of life by establishing aims and goals to make whatever they wanted out of themselves, to create their own reality. For them there were no norms or standards, other than what they might choose to agree upon among themselves.

You have to realize that for these existentialist thinkers, all human activities were equivalent in value. Human activity amounted to the same thing “whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations.”^{5} However, without God, there can be no transcendent view of human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it.^{6} Man is merely an evolved animal. Today we see many young people caught up in this attitude of cynicism and despair. They just don't care anymore. Life has become jaded. Many young people pass their time in a fantasy world of drugs, music and sex.^{7}

Man's nothingness forms the foundation of existential thinking. Man is an empty bubble floating on a sea of nothingness.^{8}

Trying to build an ethic for life based on the philosophy of existentialism is quite a challenge. Not only do the

existentialists have to create a set of values to live by, but first of all, they have to create optimism out of a view of absurdity and despair. It is called an ethic of ambiguity because each person has no one to answer to but himself. There is no one else to blame, each individual is without excuse. Life is merely a game to be won or lost, to seek to become one's own hero.

The existentialist wills himself to be free and in so doing wills himself to be moral.[{9}](#)

Existentialism Collides with a Biblical Worldview

We live in a world that has been characterized as “plastic”, without value and sterile. Many have forgotten what it means to live, to be fully human. Hours are spent in front of the TV, in a world of fantasy and escapism. Many people are becoming devoid of human warmth and significant human interaction.[{10}](#)

In this essay I have examined the ethics of humanistic existentialism. To fully understand ethics one must have considerable clarity about what it is to be human.[{11}](#) Is man an evolved animal required to create his own essence, as the existentialist would say? Though there is freedom to choose our own actions, there is no significance in our actions. Choices are made in the face of meaninglessness. The values of existentialism are anchored in the world of ordinary experiences. Their values come from what is. And for the existentialist what is, is man's absurd condition.[{12}](#)

How does existentialism compare to a God-centered, theistic view of ethics? For the Christian, ethical values are revealed to man by God. Perfect freedom lies only in service to God.[{13}](#) The existentialist defines God as “self-caused” and then says there is no God because it is impossible to be self-caused. The Christian says that God is “uncaused”, not self-

caused. If you want absolute freedom, it is all too easy to deem God nonexistent. Even Sartre admits that “since we ignore the commandments of God [concerning] all value prescribed as eternal, nothing remains but what is strictly voluntary.”[{14}](#) Throwing off all limitations and declaring his atheism, Sartre explains the process in his autobiography:

I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands...I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion, I blasphemed...He never looked at me again...I had the more difficulty getting rid of Him [the Holy Ghost] in that He had installed Himself at the back of my head...I collared the Holy Ghost in the cellar and threw Him out.[{15}](#)

Aldous Huxley, another famous existentialist, said:

For myself, no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was ... from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.[{16}](#)

The truth of Huxley's words ring out loud and clear. All around us we find individuals rejecting the truth of God's word and embracing false doctrines that allow them to vent their passions and immorality. Satan loves to get us discouraged and despairing, then he shows us a false way out that caters to our old fleshly nature, a way that allows us to do as we please.

The Bible says that we are in bondage either to sin or to God. We will serve one or the other. Our only choice is to decide who or what we will serve, the God of the Spirit, or the god of the flesh. The choice is ours.

Rejecting Biblical Truth Ultimately Leads to Despair

How did modern philosophy arrive at such a seemingly absurd state? In the late nineteenth century certain scholars assaulted the Bible and Christian beliefs. This “higher criticism” was promoted by men dedicated to the destruction of orthodox Christianity. In their minds the Bible was no more than a novel, a book of fiction with some good moral lessons. This movement was the spiritual legacy of the Enlightenment which put the claims of religion outside the realm of reason. Natural law, based on human reason alone, was slowly substituted for biblical law. Christian faith was separated from historic reality. The focus of all studies was shifting from God to man.

The real motive of higher criticism of the Bible was purely ethical. Men and women don't like the idea of having to be obedient to God. Therefore, they denied the historic validity of the Bible. This denial was based on an evolutionary model of human morality and human history. They sought to separate ethics from faith^{17} in order to free themselves from God's final judgment.

Kierkegaard, a 19th century philosopher, is considered the father of existentialism. He took this idea of the separation of faith and reason and said that we could not know God rationally. Therefore, he tried to reach God by what he called an irrational leap of faith. Since it was not rational to believe in God, but it was necessary, you must believe irrationally. Sartre and Camus simply took the next step when they said belief in God was not only irrational, but unnecessary.

Therefore, modern man started the path to a meaningless life when he questioned whether man could know God. Indeed, when man questioned even God's ability to communicate with man,

this led the existentialist to ask, "If God is dead, isn't man dead also?" This existential death of man has led to apathy, absurdity and ambiguity. The philosopher Bertrand Russell said it best when he said:

What else is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and to emptiness. Sometimes a voice of one drowning, and in a moment the silence returns. The world seems to me quite dreadful, the unhappiness of many people is very great, and I often wonder how they all endure it. It is usually the central thing around which their lives are built, and I suppose if they did not live most of their lives in the things of the moment, they would not be able to go on.

Rejection of God's grace creates a world of hopeless despair. Existentialism leaves man without hope. In contrast, the Christian has the hope of eternal life based on faith in a living, personal God whom we can personally experience with all our mind, body and spirit.

Can Human Beings Live the Existential Life?

How many of your acquaintances are demonstrating by their lives that they believe there are significant ethical implications in the decisions they make and the activities they are involved in? Do you know people who live life caught up in self-preoccupation, doing only that which gives immediate pleasure? Are they filling their lives with movies, TV, sports and other preoccupations which shield them from dealing with the ethical reality of their lifestyle?

In this essay I have been discussing the ethics of humanistic existentialism, an ethic of freedom in ambiguity. It is an ethic that says man is nothing except what he or she decides to create of themselves and whatever choice they make really

doesn't matter.

It sounds absurd, and it is, but sadly it is the ethic often being taught on the college campuses. One philosophy professor at a major university in Texas proudly informs his classes that he is an atheist and that his goal is to show the class that they can develop a system of ethics without a belief in a god. Of course he is right. One can design a set of relativistic ethical standards, but it is an ethic built on sand. An ethic of ambiguity will never give the support these students need in the hard world of reality. Did Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, the leading writers in existentialist theory, hold to their position till the end? There is evidence that they did not. From a dialogue recorded in 1980 when nearing his death, Sartre came very close to belief in God, perhaps even more than very close. He made a statement that may show his acceptance of the grace of God. He said,

I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.

In this one sentence Sartre seems to disavow his entire system of belief, his whole life of dedication to existentialism. If this is true, it is a condemnation of humanistic existentialism by Sartre himself. [{18}](#)

What about Albert Camus? According to Rev. John Warwick Montgomery, an internationally respected Lutheran minister and author, there was a retired pastor of the American Church in Paris who told him that Albert Camus was to have been baptized within the month of his tragic death and that Camus had seen the bankruptcy of humanistic existentialism. [{19}](#)

All this is second hand information, but it does cast a shadow upon the ethics of existential humanism. Either we live a life of hope or of despair. Regardless of the claims made,

existential humanism does not leave room for hope. Simone de Beauvoir, the mistress of Sartre and also an existentialist writer, came the closest of any of these writers to the real truth when she said it was reasonable to sacrifice one innocent man that others may live.^[20] This is the foundation of the whole gospel message of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God, died that all men might be saved. Meanwhile the existentialist stands alone with hope only in one's self. He is alone in a world without Christ, instead of being secure in the knowledge of Christ's love and redemption. Praise God that He is there and He is not silent!

Notes

1. Robert N. Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991), 43, 44.
2. C. Stephen Evans, *The Philosophy of Despair: Existentialism and the Quest for Hope* (Dallas: Probe Books, 1984), 17, 71-72.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism and Ethics." *Moral Education*. Barry I. Chazan and Jonasa F. Soltis, Eds. (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1973, reprinted from *Existentialism*, New York: The Philosophical Library, 1947), 11-61.
4. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1991), 142.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1965), 627.
6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948), 28.
7. Evans, 72.
8. Norman L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 40-41.
9. De Beauvoir, 24-25.
10. Evans, 74.
11. Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa:

- The University of Alabama Press, 1989), 28.
12. Otto Bollnow, "Existentialism's Basic Ethical Position," *Contemporary European Ethics*, Joseph J. Kockelmans, Ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 332.
 13. Philip Thody, *Sartre: A Biographical Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 72.
 14. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 23-24.
 15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words* (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 102, 252-253.
 16. Quoted by Stanley L. Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980), 116.
 17. Gary North, *The Hoax of Higher Criticism* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 9-48.
 18. Geisler, 46-47.
 19. John Warwick Montgomery, "Letter from England," "On the Reliability of the Four Gospels," *New Oxford Review* (May 1994), 22-24.
 20. De Beauvoir, 150.

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How Do You Spell Truth?

What is Truth?

Do you remember the commercial that asked, "How do you spell relief?" To the horror of elementary teachers everywhere, you were supposed to answer "R-O-L-A-I-D-S." In a similar fashion, today, if you ask someone, "How do you spell truth?" you might be surprised by the response. As a young Christian in college, I was greatly influenced by the writings of Francis Schaeffer. I will never forget the impact of his critique of modern

culture and his use of the phrase "true truth." True truth might be thought of as truth with a capital "T" because it is based on the existence of a personal God, the creator of all that exists, and a revealer of Himself via the Bible and the Incarnation of His Son, Jesus. Today, if you ask average men and women how to spell truth, their responses will probably indicate a view that is strictly earthbound truth beginning with a small "t." God is not in the picture; in fact, belief in God would be seen as a handicap in discerning truth accurately. The methodology of science provides this type of truth and also sets its limits. However, there is another spelling for truth that is finding more and more adherents. Today, especially on college campuses, the question might be answered with C-O-N-S-T-R-U-C-T, as in social construct. Like the Roloids answer above, this response doesn't seem to fit. In this approach truth is generated by the social group, whether they be white middle-class male Americans or female southeast Asians. What is true for one group may not be true for another, and there is no such thing as universal truth, something that is true for all people, all the time.

These three conceptions of truth describe three comprehensive systems of thought that are active in Western culture and in the U.S. The first (Truth) portrays Christian theism (what some refer to as a pre-modern view). Although this view is still quite popular, many in our churches function as if they were members of the second group which is often classified as a modernist perspective (truth). The third group (truth as social construct) is a fairly recent arrival, but has become highly influential both in academia and in common culture. It has been called postmodernism. People within these three different perspectives see the world quite differently. Until recently, Christians focused their apologetics, or defense of the faith, mainly at modernists and as a result often attempted to justify belief within a modernist framework of truth. Now we are being called upon to respond to a postmodern view that will require a far different approach. Although

postmodernism has many aspects that Christians must reject, it has also revealed just how much Christian thinking has been influenced by the modernist challenge.

In this discussion we will look at modernism and postmodernism in light of Christian evangelism and apologetics. We are now fighting a two-front battle, and we need to develop different tools for each. We also are in need of a vaccine against assuming the presuppositions of either modernism or postmodernism as we attempt to live and think within a biblical framework. Much of this debate revolves around the notion of what is true, or perhaps how we as individuals can know what is true. This may sound like an ivory tower discussion, but it is a vital topic as we attempt to share the truth of the Gospel to those we encounter.

The Modernist View

In their book *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*^{1}, Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh use an interesting metaphor to describe the different views of truth and the ways that we perceive it in our culture. Imagine three umpires meeting after a day at the park. As they reflect on the day's activities one ump declares, "There's balls and there's strikes and I call 'em the way they are." Another responds, "There's balls and there's strikes and I call 'em the way I see 'em." The third says, "There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothin' until I call 'em." Each of the umpires may make the same call, but they will be making it for very different reasons. The position of the first ump is known as naive realism. He believes that his calls correspond to something quite real and substantive called balls and strikes. He is also very confident that he can discern what is a ball or a strike with a high degree of accuracy. This confidence is a trademark of modernism. As we will see later, the other two umpires reflect positions that reject such a confidence in knowing what is true. It doesn't mean that they don't make

decisions, they just lack the confidence that their decision conforms exactly to what is really "out there."

Modernism grew out of the Enlightenment and matured in the last century to dominate much of European and American thought. Its greatest American advocate has been John Dewey. Writing around the turn of the century, Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism has dominated American educational theory to this day. In his book *Reconstruction in Philosophy*,[{2}](#) he highlights the difference between pre-modern and modern thinking. First, modernism rejects the reality of supernatural events or beings. It focuses on this world and the secular. Second, it rejects the authority of the church or religion in general and replaces it with the power of individual minds utilizing the methodology of science. Third, it replaces the static world of the middle ages with a belief in progress towards a future human utopia. Finally, it believes that the patient scientific study of nature will provide the means for this utopia. Humankind is to conquer and control nature for its use.

The implications of modernism were and are profound. Under its umbrella, humans were seen as biological machines just as the universe became understood as an impersonal mechanism needing neither a creator nor a sustainer God. All of human behavior could conceivably be explained biologically, given enough time for science to study the data. As a result, humans are viewed as self-governing beings and free to embrace whatever their rational minds discover. Modernists might be called rationalistic optimists because they are quite confident in their ability to perceive "reality as reality, relatively unaffected by our own bias, distortion, or previous belief system"[{3}](#). One's conclusions can reflect reality outside ourselves, not just thoughts within our own minds.

With the advent of modernism Christianity found itself under the cold calculating eye of science. Modernism tells a story of mankind as its own savior that is, with the help of

science, modernism has no need for a savior provided by God. Sin is not in its vocabulary, and redemption is not needed; humans lack only education.

Next, we will look at the arrival of postmodernism and its accompanying challenges.

The Postmodern Condition

We have considered the impact of modernism on the question of what is true. Now we will focus on the postmodern view. Where modernism is very confident that it can discover truth via science, postmodernism is defined by its skepticism that truth of any type can be known. Much of postmodernism is negative response to the confidence of modernism. Yet, postmodernism is a strange combination of a vague romantic optimism that mankind can solve its social and economic problems, with a dramatic pessimism of ever knowing truth at a universal level. This reflects the strong influence of atheistic existentialism on postmodern thinking. Individuals are told they must stand up and confront an absurd existence and impose meaning and order on to it, all the while admitting that there is no universal truth guiding what they choose to do.

To a postmodern, modernism ended with atomic bombs being dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Modernism led to imperialism and the colonialization of the third world by the supposedly more modern and advanced industrial nations. It led to the destruction of the environment, and it has led to a naive confidence that technology can solve any problem in its path.

Often, postmodernism is known more for what it doesn't believe than for what it does. One author writes that we have come to the point where answers to the "questions of ultimate concern about the nature of the good, the meaning of truth and the existence of God are taken to be unanswerable and hence, in some fundamental sense, insignificant." [\[4\]](#)

Let's consider some of the significant themes that postmodernists have written about. The first is the theory that truth is a social construct. This theory would argue, for example, that Western modernity which has come to dominate the globe and define what is rational and normative for human life is not in place because it is any truer than other worldviews. Instead, it is a set of ideas that people have used to manipulate others with in order to gain power over them. Those who are not "scientific" are viewed as primitive and as a result are marginalized and finally oppressed by Western culture. Western culture, then, has not discovered how things really are; instead, it has imposed one view on the world to its advantage. Our basic problem is that all ideas, all concepts, and all truths are communicated via language, and all language is man made. No one can step outside of language to see whether or not it corresponds with reality. In the words of one postmodernist, all principles (or ultimate truths) are really preferences.

As a result of postmodernist thinking, anyone who claims to know something that is universally true, true for everyone, everywhere, anytime, is accused of marginalizing those who disagree. Once a person or group is marginalized, a justification has been established to oppress them. To postmodernists, a totalizing meta-narrative (a story that claims to answer all the big questions about reality) always results in violence towards those outside the accepted paradigm. They point to Western culture's aptitude towards conquering and destroying other cultures in the name of progress and modernization.

One can easily see that a Christian worldview conflicts with much of what postmodernity teaches. Christianity claims to be true for everyone, everywhere. It is not surprising that postmodern feminists and others have pointed their finger at Christianity for oppressing women, gays, and anyone else who holds to a different construct of reality. How do we as

Christians respond to this critique? Do we side with the modernists and join the fight against postmodern influences? Or can we find something helpful in the issues raised by postmodernism?

Postmodernist Kenneth Gergen argues that, "When convinced of the truth or right of a given worldview a culture has only two significant options: totalitarian control of the opposition or annihilation of it." Another has written that modernity has given us "as much terror as we can take."⁵ Postmodernists argue that by claiming to know the truth we automatically marginalize and oppress others. It encourages the questioning of everything that modernism has come to accept as natural or good. Capitalism, patriarchy, and liberal humanism are just a few ideas that modernity has left us with and that we have to realize are just social constructs. We are free, according to postmoderns, to throw off anything that doesn't work since all institutions and social norms are social constructs created by society itself. However, with this freedom comes disorientation. The current social scene in America is a prime example of this effect. Traditions about family, gender roles, economic responsibility, and social norms are being questioned and abandoned. This has left us with a sense of loss, a horrifying loss that acknowledges that there is nothing solid undergirding why we live the way we do. It has left us with an amazing amount of pluralism and a radical multiculturalism that some feel has removed essential buffers to chaos.

The confidence of modern man in rugged individualism has been deconstructed by postmodernism to reveal the inevitability of violence and subjugation. What is left? Many postmodernists argue that not only is the self a construct, that the autonomous self is a myth, but that the self is actually a servant of language. Most people see language as a tool to be used by individuals to express ideas to another person. Many postmodernists see things quite differently. They would argue that our language uses us instead. Another way of thinking of

this is that we don't have a language, a language has us. All that we know of reality is given to us by the symbols present in our language. This has created a self-identity problem of dramatic proportions for postmoderns. Many have responded by embracing this lack of rootedness by seeing that life is being in a "state of continuous construction and reconstruction."

Now that we have briefly surveyed both the modern and postmodern positions, let's begin to think about them from a biblical standpoint. We should first acknowledge that when doing apologetics, or defending the faith, we are not merely attempting to win arguments or make others look foolish. Apologetics should always be done in the context of evangelism, the goal of which is to share the gospel in a meaningful way, to convey the truth of special revelation concerning God's plan for salvation with humility and compassion.

Christians should probably reject both the confidence of modernism and the pessimism of postmodernism regarding our ability to know and understand truth. Modernity's dependence on science as the only valid source for truth is too limited and fails to consider the effects of the fall on our ability to know something without bias. We are often sinfully rational, willfully rejecting what is true. On the other hand, the postmodern view leaves us without hope that we can know anything about what is really real. It holds that we are literally a prisoner of the language game played by our culture group, regardless of its social class or race.

Next, we will consider how postmodern thinking should affect evangelism.

A Christian View of Truth

We have been considering the challenges of modern and postmodern thinking to the notion of truth and the communication of the Gospel. Earlier we used the metaphor of

umpires who call strikes and balls within different frameworks for knowing. The ump who "calls 'em the way they are" is a naive realist; the second ump who "calls 'em like he sees 'em" represents the critical realist view, and the ump who says "they ain't nothin' until I call 'em" portrays a radical perspectivist view. The questions before us are, What view should a Christian take? and How does this choice affect the way in which we do apologetics and evangelism?

If we accept the view of the first ump who "calls 'em the way they are," we have adopted a modernist perspective. Unfortunately, experience tells us that the assumptions that come with this view don't seem to hold up. It assumes that common sense and logic will always lead people to the Truth of the Gospel we just need to give people enough evidence. While this approach does work with some, it works mainly because they already agree with us on a theistic, Western view of reality. However, modernism has also led many to see the universe as a godless machine run by the logical laws of nature as discovered by science. For example, New Agers or Hindus have a common understanding that leads them elsewhere. Their basic assumptions about reality are quite different from ours, and it is much more difficult to find common ground with them. In fact, they have consciously rejected the Western view of reality.

The third ump who says "they ain't nothin' until I call 'em" sees truth as entirely personal. Although we admit that people do create personal frameworks for interpreting life and reality, there is ultimately only one true reality, one true God. However, we might learn from the perspectivist in order to find common ground when witnessing. One commonality is the notion of an acute consciousness of suffering by marginalized people. Christianity shares this concern yet offers a radically different solution.

The second umpire states that there are balls and strikes, and "I call 'em as I see 'em." This view of truth, called critical

realism, recognizes that there is one true reality, but that our ability to perceive it is limited. The Bible teaches that sin has distorted our view. Even as believers we must admit that we don't always understand why God does what He does. This is partially because truth is personal in the sense that it is rooted in a personal God, and we can never know all that there is to know about Him. Even Peter, who walked with Christ, didn't understand God's plans. He rebuked Jesus when Jesus told His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, be crucified, and resurrected.

The best evangelistic approach attempts to find common ground with an unbeliever while never relinquishing all that is true of the Christian worldview. If rational, logical arguments are persuasive, use them. If storytelling works, as in the more narratively oriented societies of the Middle East, use it. We should not be limited to either a modernist or postmodernist view of truth, but work from a distinctively Christian perspective that holds that the God who created the universe wants us to gently instruct others in the hope that He will grant them repentance and lead them to a knowledge of the truth.

Notes

1. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 31.
2. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), pp. 47-49.
3. Dennis McCallum, ed. *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1996), pp. 23-26.
4. Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 31.

5. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, p. 35.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 52.

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The Morality of the West

Cheating in the Schools

According to a study by Rutgers University, over 70% of all university students admit they have cheated at least once. And there's probably a few more who wouldn't admit it. The most common form of cheating admitted to is plagiarism. Students have always copied from someone else's paper or stealthily brought forbidden notes into the classroom. But the incidence is rising. Nineteen percent admit they have faked a bibliography, and fourteen percent say they have handed in a computer program written by someone else. [\[1\]](#)

This report highlights the fact that many students today are either unable or unwilling to act in an ethical manner. William Kilpatrick, in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, brings to light the millions of crimes committed yearly on or near school property. Children go to school scared and intimidated. Many teachers contemplate and actually do leave the profession because of all the discipline and behavior problems. [\[2\]](#) A professor of philosophy at Clark University says:

Students come to college today as moral stutterers. They

haven't been taught much respect for what I call "plain moral facts," the need for honesty, integrity, responsibility. It doesn't take a blue-ribbon commission to see this. Students don't reason morally. They don't know what that means.[\[3\]](#)

Also, Mr. Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics, said "Far too many young people have abandoned traditional ethical values in favor of self-absorbed, win-at-any-cost attitudes that threaten to unravel the moral fabric of American society."[\[4\]](#) This "self-absorbed" attitude is based on a whole new set of assumptions about how we should adopt our values and the right of individuals to construct their own values.

Where do these ideas come from? Are our young people only now discovering the difference between what their parents have preached to them and what they actually do? Is it simply due to the fact that society is changing? Or is this an ethical vacuum caused by a value system without a solid foundation?

Some have suggested that we have simply discovered more efficient ways of uncovering people's wrongdoing so it just seems that people are less moral in their dealings. In other words, we are just more aware of the imperfections that were always there. A more interesting question, however is whether the behavior is the result of values being communicated by society? Have the rules changed? and who makes these rules, God or men? The Christian and the theist turn toward the Creator of the Universe. The humanist or atheist turns toward himself. This distinction between theism and humanism is the fundamental division in moral theory.

It appears that we are rapidly approaching a Godless, valueless society in which "power ethics" or the "political rationalism" of humanism is replacing the Judeo-Christian ethical base of traditional morality. The roots of our present dilemma go all the way back to the secular humanism of the

fifteenth- and sixteenth- century Renaissance, and the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The idea of the sufficiency of human reason grew stronger during these periods, continually challenging Judeo- Christian values in an increasingly sophisticated way. Humanity was placed at the center of the universe, rather than God.

The Moral Results of Reason Alone

Just as our Lord said that man cannot live by bread alone, so man cannot live by reason alone. If we exclude revelation as a source of direction in discovering who man is and rely solely on our intellect, and our own ideas of how we came to be, then we will naturally slip into a pessimistic and ultimately depressing view of human nature.

The seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke said that all knowledge comes from sensation. In other words, the only reality is what we can see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or measure. Not much room for revelation here. Other philosophers have followed up on this idea and have concluded that man is shaped by evolutionary processes and the culture that surrounds us. The notion that man is born with some innate nature has been rejected. Men like Hegel, Darwin, and Marx believed that all living forms and social systems were nothing more than the result of progressive transformations over time. As the influence of the religious community began to wane in the nineteenth century, many began to search for a meaning to life totally apart from God. Man simply no longer believed he had a place in eternity. Therefore all he could do was hope to find his place in the movement of history. [\[5\]](#)

Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* catapulted the abandonment of God and revelation by attempting to show that God was not even necessary in the creation of living things. If God did not create us, then we certainly could not gain our sense of meaning and purpose from a book purportedly written by Him. Frederich Nietzsche purposed to highlight the ethical

implications of Darwinism. Nietzsche's "superman" concept transformed man into the maker of his own destiny. Man was truly the measure of all things. If God is dead, as Nietzsche declared, and nature is all there is, then what is, is right. Human life was therefore stripped of any purpose or goal. The contemporary Harvard professor, E. O. Wilson has stated, "No species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its genetic history." Elsewhere he declares that our dilemma is that "we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature." This will ultimately result in a sense of hopelessness, pessimism, apathy, and absurdity. William Kilpatrick in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, says "Suicides among young people have risen by 300 percent over the last thirty years." {6} Next to accidents it is now the second leading cause of death in teenagers. Many of the deaths due to accidents are the result of auto accidents in which alcohol has played a role which can also be traced back to a sense of hopelessness and despair. Young people who may have never heard of Nietzsche are nevertheless living their lives in accordance with his philosophy of living recklessly.

A group of scholars presented the case of biblical authority to a group of students at Princeton University. At the conclusion of their presentation, a student stood and said:

I am surprised that I found myself feeling that you two were right and all of us were wrong, at least insofar as this very basic point: why we stand where we stand makes all the difference in the world. So the weakness of your presentation was that you were arguing on the basis of logic and presuppositions and intellectual integrity with persons who are perfectly ready to dispense with all three. {7}

Our young people are so far removed from a rational discussion of what is right and what is wrong that they are unable to even decide what criterion should be used to make the

decision, let alone make the decision itself. This is the inevitable result of the philosophical trend to utilize human reason alone apart from the revelation in Scripture. As our creator, God alone has the authority and knowledge to inform us as to how we are to act. Left to ourselves, we will only be confused.

Why Are Biblical Values No Longer Taught in Schools?

Many students today are so confused that they not only don't know what ethical system is valid, but they don't even know how to evaluate them. One might ask, why aren't the schools teaching the values our children need, values that will work for them rather than against them?

To understand the lack of values being taught in our educational institutions, we need to go back to the biblical critics who were writing in Germany in the nineteenth century. The product of an attempt to operate by human reason alone, this movement placed the claims of religion and particularly the Bible outside the realm of human reason. If the Bible was not reasonable, then the Scriptures lost their foundation in real history. The traditions of the faith were seen as merely that, tradition with no basis in reality. This meant that the events contained in the Bible were to be evaluated on whether they were reasonable within a universe where the supernatural was assumed to be nonexistent or at least not involved in the real world. These scholars, called higher critics, believed that all morality is totally relative to historical time and place. The laws of the Bible were now to be seen as being understood only within the times that the Bible was describing. A Sabbath was only useful to an agrarian and shepherding culture. The same would be true for adultery or taking the Lord's name in vain.

This approach essentially denies the unity and moral integrity

of the entire Bible. {8} The end result is that in people's minds, their ethics became separated from their faith. This eventually resulted in deism, a view that says that God only provided the necessary input to get the universe started but left it completely on its own after creation. He never intervened in natural or human history again. God is still there, but there is no possibility of any communication between God and His creation. Well, if you can't communicate with God and He has no influence over your life, why bother with worrying whether God existed at all? The worldview of naturalism quickly follows which says that there is no God.

Nietzsche's "madman" said, "God is dead!" {9} God was now out of the picture. Nietzsche simply took the next step. He tried to force men and women to, "feel the breath of empty space." If you have been following the train of thought here you are probably beginning to see the connection between Nietzsche's ideas and the state of our youth today. Many young people feel that there is no grand purpose for their life. Life is empty and cheap. If you believe in some form of a grand purpose, it is really only a grand illusion. All that is left, therefore, is to live for the pleasure of the moment. Gain what pleasure you can in an absurd universe. This will ultimately lead to an attitude of despair. If God is dead, what's the use of conforming to any rules. If I die as a result of my actions, so what, life is absurd anyway.

Students today often seem to be lost in relativism and are unable to think about or look into their futures. They shrivel up within the confines of their immediate surroundings. There is no longer any hope in eternity or in real justice.

Many of today's young people wander about their school halls with no hope, no dreams, no optimism about their future. Rock groups such as *Nirvana* and *Nine Inch Nails* continually fill their heads with the meaninglessness of a universe in which God is dead and life is absurd. We should be filled with great sadness when we witness the destruction this kind of thinking

results in such as the suicide of Nirvana's heart and soul, Curt Cobain. I believe we should also see such people as Jesus does, as lost sheep. They are a great mission field for which the truth and historical reality of the gospel can find fertile ground.

The Twentieth Century Results of a "God Is Dead" Universe

The Greek philosopher Plato understood that there must be some universal or absolute under which the individual things (the particulars, the details) must fit. Something beyond the everyday must be there to give it all unity and meaning. Even the atheist and existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, realized that a finite point is absurd if it has no infinite reference point.[{10}](#) Sartre chose to believe that this infinite reference point did not exist, therefore, the only thing worth doing is existing and making choices, regardless of what those choices may be. But how can we tell students, our children, that anything is right or wrong if there is no absolute reference point such as the Bible, to base this on?

Existentialism says that we need to make a "leap of faith"[{11}](#) and seek to find our meaning without reason. In other words, we just have to find what works for us. And as we go through life, what works will constantly be changing. If we actually try to think about it, if we try to rationalize a meaning, we will only get depressed. According to existentialism, the only way to be happy, is to not think, to be blindly optimistic.

Another perspective is power ethics or "political naturalism." Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) was a great voice in the revival of political naturalism in the sixteenth century. In his book *The Prince*, a ruler who wants to keep his post must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires.[{12}](#) In other words, do what you need to do to preserve your position and don't

concern yourself with what is ethical. Just preserve your power. Machiavelli's ethical stance of whatever strengthens the state is right had a great influence on the thinking of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Feuerbach's claim that God was merely a human invention had a lot to do with the writings of Karl Marx (1819-1883) who took these ideas as validation of his own views. His ideas provided a foundation upon which Lenin and Stalin were able to build a society around the power ethics of political rationalism. Feuerbach and Marx rejoiced in the fact that the loosing grasp of religion had made it possible to create a city of man in an entirely human space.[{13}](#) In Russia there was a concerted attempt to root out Christianity and substitute an extremely intolerant and militant form of the religion of the Enlightenment.[{14}](#)

Adolph Hitler is another example. So profound was Nietzsche's philosophy upon Hitler, that it provided the framework for his tireless efforts to obliterate the Jews and the weak of this world.[{15}](#) Nietzsche had proclaimed the coming of the Master Race, and a Superman who would unify Germany and perhaps the world.[{16}](#) Hitler, in his book *Mein Kampf*, clearly announced his intent to take Nietzsche's logic and drive the atheistic worldview to its logical conclusion. In Nietzschean terms, atheism will inevitably lead to violence and hedonism.[{17}](#) Hitler personally presented a copy of Nietzsche's works to Benito Mussolini, and Mussolini submitted a thesis on Machiavelli for his doctor's degree.

When human reason is allowed to be unaccountable it becomes solely a function of power, it legitimatizes the construction of a totalitarian state and in the case of Hitler the end result was the Holocaust. The real legacy of unbridled humanism is terror.[{18}](#)

The Purification of Moral Relativism

We construct museums so that we may never forget the horror of the German Holocaust. Russia is trying to recover from a total

collapse of a power structure that was based on political rationalism and historical materialism. They had to find out the hard way. The fundamental dogma of the Enlightenment, the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man, is a myth at best. It was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who related what he overheard two old peasants say during the blood baths of Stalin's regime, "It is because we have forgotten God. That is why all this is happening to us." Out of the rubble of a failed system rose a people desperate to reestablish an ethical base that will work for them rather than against them. An article in *USA Today* illustrates a new hope for values in Russia. It reports that:

Officials say up to 55% of Russian teachers, many of whom were former atheists, have made personal commitments to Christ. Many are using the New Testament in schools. "For ages, (Russia) was a country of believers and morality was very close to the people," says assistant principal Olga Meinikova, 32, of school No. 788. "For a short period 74 years we lost it all. All Russian teachers should teach this course; Americans too. The Bible is part of normal education."[\[19\]](#)

Teams of Americans are helping to train Russian teachers how to teach Judeo-Christian morals and values based on a system of biblical ethics. The military has also been retraining their staff in Judeo-Christian morality, ethics, and values. Russia reached the bottom of a Godless society and is making an effort to rebuild its ethical base.

We face a dilemma in Western culture. We can continue along the line of thinking that "reason" is our only hope and trust in the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man. Another extreme is to throw out reason altogether and embrace the philosophy and religion of the new age. The biblical view is to return to the concept of the fallen nature of mankind and rebuild on the traditional base of historic Christianity,

which puts reason under the authority of Scripture. This is the traditional basis for ethical teaching in Western culture. It applies to all our institutions of training, including churches and ministries. The ethics modeled by too many Christian leaders is at best a utilitarian form of ethics. At worst, it is a pragmatic form of ethics that serves the self-centered goals of the individual or institution.

In conclusion, ethics based on Enlightenment thinking is not the answer. Crane Brinton, in his book *A History of Western Morals* says, "the religion of the Enlightenment has a long and unpredictable way to go before it can face the facts of life as effectively as does Christianity."^[20] We appear to have an implosion of values in a society. Many are seeking to teach our children that there is no God and no afterlife, but if you live an ethical life it will pay off. It is a standard without a foundation, floating in mid air. Society must re-evaluate its commitment to Enlightenment ethics and thinking. Until it does, we will see a continuing loss of values and respect for humanity.

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The Problem of Evil

Rick Rood helps us understand the challenging question of evil and why it is allowed to remain in this world. Speaking from a Christian worldview perspective, he gives us a thorough understanding of how Christians should consider and deal with evil in this world. The Bible does not shirk from addressing the nature and existence of evil AND our responsibility to stand against it.

The Problem of Evil – Introduction

John Stott has said that “the fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith.” It is unquestionably true that there is no greater obstacle to faith than that of the reality of evil and suffering in the world. Indeed, even for the believing Christian, there is no greater test of faith than this—that the God who loves him permits him to suffer, at times in excruciating ways. And the disillusionment is intensified in our day when unrealistic expectations of health and prosperity are fed by the teachings of a multitude of Christian teachers. Why does a good God allow his creatures, and even his children to suffer?

First, it’s important to distinguish between two kinds of evil: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil results from the actions of free creatures. Murder, rape and theft are examples. Natural evil results from natural processes such as earthquakes and floods. Of course, sometimes the two are intermingled, such as when flooding results in loss of human life due to poor planning or shoddy construction of buildings.

It’s also important to identify two aspects of the problem of evil and suffering. First, there is the philosophical or apologetic aspect. This is the problem of evil approached from the standpoint of the skeptic who challenges the possibility or probability that a God exists who would allow such suffering. In meeting this apologetic challenge we must utilize the tools of reason and evidence in “giving a reason for the hope within us.” (I Pet. 3:15)

Second is the religious or emotional aspect of the problem of evil. This is the problem of evil approached from the standpoint of the believer whose faith in God is severely tested by trial. How can we love and worship God when He

allows us to suffer in these ways? In meeting the religious/emotional challenge we must appeal to the truth revealed by God in Scripture. We will address both aspects of the problem of evil in this essay.

It's also helpful to distinguish between two types of the philosophical or apologetic aspect of the problem of evil. The first is the logical challenge to belief in God. This challenge says it is irrational and hence impossible to believe in the existence of a good and powerful God on the basis of the existence of evil in the world. The logical challenge is usually posed in the form of a statement such as this:

1. A good God would destroy evil.
2. An all powerful God could destroy evil.
3. Evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, there cannot possibly be such a good and powerful God.

It is logically impossible to believe that both evil, and a good and powerful God exist in the same reality, for such a God certainly could and would destroy evil.

On the other hand, the evidential challenge contends that while it may be rationally possible to believe such a God exists, it is highly improbable or unlikely that He does. We have evidence of so much evil that is seemingly pointless and of such horrendous intensity. For what valid reason would a good and powerful God allow the amount and kinds of evil which we see around us?

These issues are of an extremely important nature—not only as we seek to defend our belief in God, but also as we live out our Christian lives. [\[1\]](#)

The Logical Problem of Evil

We have noted that there are two aspects of the problem of evil: the philosophical or apologetic, and the religious or emotional aspect. We also noted that within the philosophical aspect there are two types of challenges to faith in God: the logical and the evidential.

David Hume, the eighteenth century philosopher, stated the logical problem of evil when he inquired about God, "Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (Craig, 80). When the skeptic challenges belief in God on the basis of the logical problem of evil, he is suggesting that it is irrational or logically impossible to believe in the existence of both a good and all powerful God and in the reality of evil and suffering. Such a God would not possibly allow evil to exist.

The key to the resolution of this apparent conflict is to recognize that when we say God is all powerful, we do not imply that He is capable of doing anything imaginable. True, Scripture states that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26). But Scripture also states that there are some things God cannot do. For instance, God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Neither can He be tempted to sin, nor can He tempt others to sin (James 1:13). In other words, He cannot do anything that is "out of character" for a righteous God. Neither can He do anything that is out of character for a rational being in a rational world. Certainly even God cannot "undo the past," or create a square triangle, or make what is false true. He cannot do what is irrational or absurd.

And it is on this basis that we conclude that God could not eliminate evil without at the same time rendering it impossible to accomplish other goals which are important to Him. Certainly, for God to create beings in his own image, who are capable of sustaining a personal relationship with Him,

they must be beings who are capable of freely loving Him and following his will without coercion. Love or obedience on any other basis would not be love or obedience at all, but mere compliance. But creatures who are free to love God must also be free to hate or ignore Him. Creatures who are free to follow His will must also be free to reject it. And when people act in ways outside the will of God, great evil and suffering is the ultimate result. This line of thinking is known as the “free will defense” concerning the problem of evil.

But what about natural evil—evil resulting from natural processes such as earthquakes, floods and diseases? Here it is important first to recognize that we live in a fallen world, and that we are subject to natural disasters that would not have occurred had man not chosen to rebel against God. Even so, it is difficult to imagine how we could function as free creatures in a world much different than our own—a world in which consistent natural processes allow us to predict with some certainty the consequences of our choices and actions. Take the law of gravity, for instance. This is a natural process without which we could not possibly function as human beings, yet under some circumstances it is also capable of resulting in great harm.

Certainly, God is capable of destroying evil—but not without destroying human freedom, or a world in which free creatures can function. And most agree that this line of reasoning does successfully respond to the challenge of the logical problem of evil.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

While most agree that belief in a good and powerful God is rationally possible, nonetheless many contend that the existence of such a God is improbable due to the nature of the evil which we see in the world about us. They conclude that if such a God existed it is highly unlikely that He would allow

the amount and intensity of evil which we see in our world. Evil which frequently seems to be of such a purposeless nature.

This charge is not to be taken lightly, for evidence abounds in our world of evil of such a horrendous nature that it is difficult at times to fathom what possible purpose it could serve. However, difficult as this aspect of the problem of evil is, careful thinking will show that there are reasonable responses to this challenge.

Surely it is difficult for us to understand why God would allow some things to happen. But simply because we find it difficult to imagine what reasons God could have for permitting them, does not mean that no such reasons exist. It is entirely possible that such reasons are not only beyond our present knowledge, but also beyond our present ability to understand. A child does not always understand the reasons that lie behind all that his father allows or does not allow him to do. It would be unrealistic for us to expect to understand all of God's reasons for allowing all that He does. We do not fully understand many things about the world we live in—what lies behind the force of gravity for instance, or the exact function of subatomic particles. Yet we believe in these physical realities.

Beyond this, however, we can suggest possible reasons for God allowing some of the horrendous evils which do exist in our world. Perhaps there are people who would never sense their utter dependence on God apart from experiencing the intense pain that they do in life (Ps. 119:71). Perhaps there are purposes that God intends to accomplish among his angelic or demonic creatures which require his human creatures to experience some of the things that we do (Job 1-2). It may be that the suffering we experience in this life is somehow preparatory to our existence in the life to come (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Even apart from the revelation of Scripture, these are all possible reasons behind God's permission of evil. And

at any rate, most people agree that there is much more good in the world than evil—at least enough good to make life well worth the living.

In responding to the challenge to belief in God based on the intensity and seeming purposelessness of much evil in the world, we must also take into account all of the positive evidence that points to his existence: the evidence of design in nature, the historical evidence for the reliability of Scripture and of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In light of the totality of the evidence, it certainly cannot be proven that there are no sufficient reasons for God's allowing the amount of evil that we see in the world...or even that it is improbable that such reasons exist.

The Religious Problem of Evil – Part I

But the existence of evil and suffering in our world poses more than a merely philosophical or apologetic problem. It also poses a very personal religious and emotional problem for the person who is enduring great trial. Although our painful experience may not challenge our belief that God exists, what may be at risk is our confidence in a God we can freely worship and love, and in whose love we can feel secure. Much harm can be done when we attempt to aid a suffering brother or sister by merely dealing with the intellectual aspects of this problem, or when we seek to find solace for ourselves in this way. Far more important than answers about the nature of God, is a revelation of the love of God—even in the midst of trial. And as God's children, it is not nearly as important what we say about God as what we do to manifest his love.

First, it is evident from Scripture that when we suffer it is not unnatural to experience emotional pain, nor is it unspiritual to express it. It is noteworthy for instance that there are nearly as many psalms of lament as there are psalms of praise and thanksgiving, and these two sentiments are mingled together in many places (cf. Pss. 13, 88). Indeed, the

psalmist encourages us to “pour out our hearts to God” (Ps. 62:8). And when we do, we can be assured that God understands our pain. Jesus Himself keenly felt the painful side of life. When John the Baptist was beheaded it is recorded that “He withdrew to a lonely place” obviously to mourn his loss (Mt. 14:13). And when his friend Lazarus died, it is recorded that Jesus openly wept at his tomb (Jn. 11:35). Even though He was committed to following the Father’s will to the cross, He confessed to being filled with anguish of soul in contemplating it (Mt. 26:38). It is not without reason that Jesus was called “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3); and we follow in his steps when we truthfully acknowledge our own pain.

We cross the line, however, from sorrow to sin when we allow our grief to quench our faith in God, or follow the counsel that Job was offered by his wife when she told him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9b).

Secondly, when we suffer we should draw comfort from reflecting on Scriptures which assure us that God knows and cares about our situation, and promises to be with us to comfort and uphold us. The psalmist tells us that “the Lord is near to the brokenhearted” (Ps. 34:18), and that when we go through the “valley of the shadow of death” it is then that his presence is particularly promised to us (Ps. 23:4). Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you” (Isa. 49:15). He is more mindful of us than is a nursing mother toward her child! It is of the One whom we know as the “God of all comfort and Father of mercies” that Peter speaks when He bids us to cast our anxieties on Him, “for He cares for us” (1 Pet. 5:7). Our cares are his personal concern!

The Religious Problem of Evil – Part II

We noted that when suffering strikes it is neither unnatural to experience emotional pain, nor unspiritual to express it. But we also noted that when suffering strikes, we must be quick to reflect on the character of God and on the promises He gives to those who are enduring great trial. Now we want to focus on one of the great truths of God's Word—that even in severe trial God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). This is not at all to imply that evil is somehow good. But it does mean that we are to recognize that even in what is evil God is at work to bring about his good purposes in our lives.

Joseph gave evidence of having learned this truth when after years of unexplained suffering due to the betrayal of his brothers, he was able to say to them, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). Though God did not cause his brothers to betray him, nonetheless He was able to use it in furthering his good intentions.

This is the great hope we have in the midst of suffering, that in a way beyond our comprehension, God is able to turn evil against itself. And it is because of this truth that we can find joy even in the midst of sorrow and pain. The apostle Paul described himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10). And we are counseled to rejoice in trial, not because the affliction itself is a cause for joy (it is not), but because in it God can find an occasion for producing what is good.

What are some of those good purposes suffering promotes? For one, suffering can provide an opportunity for God to display his glory—to make evident his mercy, faithfulness, power and love in the midst of painful circumstances (Jn. 9:1-3). Suffering can also allow us to give proof of the genuineness of our faith, and even serve to purify our faith (1 Pet. 1:7). As in the case of Job, our faithfulness in trial shows that we

serve Him not merely for the benefits He offers, but for the love of God Himself (Job 1:9-11). Severe trial also provides an opportunity for believers to demonstrate their love for one another as members of the body of Christ who “bear one another’s burdens” (1 Cor 12:26; Gal. 6:2). Indeed, as D.A. Carson has said, “experiences of suffering... engender compassion and empathy..., and make us better able to help others” (Carson, 122). As we are comforted by God in affliction, so we are better able to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4). Suffering also plays a key role in developing godly virtues, and in deterring us from sin. Paul recognized that his “thorn in the flesh” served to keep him from boasting, and promoted true humility and dependence on God (2 Cor. 12:7). The psalmist recognized that his affliction had increased his determination to follow God’s will (Ps. 119:71). Even Jesus “learned obedience from the things He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). As a man He learned by experience the value of submitting to the will of God, even when it was the most difficult thing in the world to do.

Finally, evil and suffering can awaken in us a greater hunger for heaven, and for that time when God’s purposes for these experiences will have been finally fulfilled, when pain and sorrow shall be no more (Rev. 21:4).

Note

1. The line of reasoning in the first three sections of this article can be found in many sources on the problem of evil. Chapters 3 and 4 of William Lane Craig’s book cited in the resources below has served as a general guide for my comments here.

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Human Nature

Don Closson provides an overview to how naturalism, pantheism and Christian theism view human nature. He discusses questions considering how each view deals with purpose, good and evil,

and death.

In the twenty-five years prior to 1993, the federal government spent 2.5 trillion dollars on welfare and aid to cities. This was enough money to buy all the assets of the top Fortune 500 firms as well as all the farmland in America at that time.[\(1\)](#) As part of the Great War on poverty, begun by the Johnson administration in the 1960's, the government's goal was to reduce the number of poor, and the effects of poverty on American society. As one administration official put it, "The way to eliminate poverty is to give the poor people enough money so that they won't be poor anymore."[\(2\)](#) Sounds simple. But offering money didn't get rid of poverty; in fact, just the opposite has occurred. The number of children covered by the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program has gone from 4.5 percent of all children in America in 1965, to almost 13 percent of all children in 1991. One of the reasons for this increase has been the rapid deterioration of the family for those most affected by the welfare bureaucracy. Since 1960, the number of single parent families has more than tripled, reflecting high rates of children born out of wedlock and high divorce rates.[\(3\)](#) Rather than strengthening the family in America and ridding the country of poverty, just the opposite has occurred. Why such disastrous results from such good intentions?

Part of the answer must be found in human nature itself. Might it be, that those creating welfare policy in the 1960's had a faulty view of human nature and thus misread what the solution to poverty should be? In this essay I will look at how three different world views—theism, naturalism, and pantheism—view human nature. Which view we adopt, both individually and as a people, will have a great influence on how we educate our children, how and if we punish criminals, and how we run our government.

Christian theism is often chided as being simplistic and lacking in sophistication, yet on this subject, it is the

naturalist and pantheist who tend to be reductionistic. Both will simplify human nature in a way that detracts from our uniqueness and God-given purpose here on this planet. It should be mentioned that the views of Christian theists, naturalists, and pantheists are mutually exclusive. They might all be wrong, but they cannot all be right. The naturalist sees man as a biological machine that has evolved by chance. The pantheist perceives humankind as forgetful deity, whose essence is a complex series of energy fields which are hidden by an illusion of this apparent physical reality. Christian theism accepts the reality of both our physical and spiritual natures, presenting a balanced, livable view of what it means to be human.

In this essay I will show how Christian theism, naturalism, and pantheism answer three important questions concerning the nature of humanity. First, are humans special in any way; do we have a purpose and origin that sets us apart from the rest of the animal world? Second, are we good, evil, or neither? Third, what happens when we die? These fundamental questions have been asked since the written word appeared and are central to what we believe about ourselves.

Are Humans Special?

One doesn't usually think of Hollywood's Terminator, as played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, as a profound thinker. Yet in *Terminator II*, the robot sent back from the future to protect a young boy asks a serious question.

Boy: *"You were going to kill that guy!"*

Terminator: *"Of course! I'm a terminator."*

Boy: *"Listen to me very carefully, OK? You're not a terminator anymore. All right? You got that?! You just can't go around killing people!"*

Terminator: *"Why?"*

Boy: "What do ya mean, Why? 'Cause you can't!"

Terminator: "Why?"

Boy: "Because you just can't, OK? Trust me on this!" [\(4\)](#)

Indeed, why not terminate people? Why are they special? To a naturalist, one who believes that no spiritual reality exists, options to this question are few. Natural scientists like astronomer Carl Sagan and entomologist E.O. Wilson find man to be no more than a product of time plus chance, an accident of mindless evolution. Psychologist Sigmund Freud and existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre agree, humankind is a biological machine, perhaps slightly more complex than other animals, but governed by the same physical needs and drives.

Yet as Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* fame put it in the original *Star Trek* movie, logic and knowledge aren't always enough. He discovered this by mind melding with V-GER, a man made machine that, after leaving our solar system, evolves into a thinking machine elsewhere in the galaxy and returns to earth to find its creator. [\(5\)](#) If logic and knowledge aren't enough, where do we turn to for significance or purpose? A naturalist has nowhere to turn. For example, Sartre argued that man must make his own meaning in the face of an absurd universe. [\(6\)](#) The best that entomologist E. O. Wilson could come up with is that we do whatever it takes to pass on our genetic code, our DNA, to the next generation. Everything we do is based on promoting survival and reproduction. [\(7\)](#)

Pantheists have a very different response to the question of human purpose or uniqueness. Dr. Brough Joy, a medical doctor who has accepted an Eastern view of reality, argues that all life forms are divine, consisting of complex energy fields. In fact, the entire universe is ultimately made up of this energy; the appearance of a physical reality is really an illusion. [\(8\)](#) Gerald Jampolsky, another doctor, argues that

love is the only part of us that is real, but love itself cannot be defined. [\(9\)](#) This is all very consistent with pantheism which teaches a radical monism, that all is one, and all is god. But if all is god, all is just as it is supposed to be and you end up with statements like this from the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh:

There is no purpose to life; existence is non- purposive. That is why it is called a leela, a play. Existence itself has no purpose to fulfill. It is not going anywhere—there is no end that it is moving toward...[\(10\)](#)

Christianity teaches that human beings are unique. We are created in God's image and for a purpose, to glorify God. Genesis 1:26 declares our image-bearing nature and the mandate to rule over the other creatures of God's creation. Jesus further delineated our purpose when he gave us the two commandments to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Romans 12:1 calls us to be living sacrifices to God. Unlike naturalism or pantheism, the Bible doesn't reduce us down to either just our material, physical nature or to just our spiritual nature. Christianity recognizes the real complexity of humanity as it is found in our physical, emotional and spiritual components.

Are We Good, Bad, or Neither?

To a naturalist, this notion of good and evil can only apply to the question of survival. If something promotes survival, it is good; if not, it is evil. The only real question is how malleable human behavior is. B. F. Skinner, a Harvard psychology professor, believed that humans are completely programmable via classical conditioning methods. A newborn baby can be conditioned to become a doctor, lawyer, or serial killer depending on its environment. [\(11\)](#)

The movie that won "Best Picture" in 1970 was a response to Skinner's theories. *A Clockwork Orange* depicted a brutal criminal being subjected to a conditioning program that would create a violent physical reaction to just the thought of doing harm to another person. Here is dialogue between the prison warden and an Anglican clergyman after a demonstration of the therapy's effectiveness.

Clergyman: *"Choice! The boy has no real choice! Has he? Self interest! The fear of physical pain drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement! Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice."*

Warden: *"Padre, these are subtleties! We're not concerned with motives for the higher ethics. We are concerned only with cutting down crime! (Crowd Applause) And with relieving the ghastly congestion in our prisons! He will be your true Christian. Ready to turn the other cheek! Ready to be crucified rather than crucify! Sick to the very heart at the thought even of killing a fly! Reclamation! Joy before the angels of God! The point is that it works!"* [\(12\)](#)

Stanley Kubrick denounced this shallow view of human nature with this film, yet Skinner's behaviorism actually allows for more human flexibility than does the sociobiology of E. O. Wilson, another Harvard professor. Wilson argues that human emotions and ethics, in a general sense, have been programmed to a "substantial degree" by our evolutionary experience. [\(13\)](#) In other words, human beings are hard coded to respond to conditions by their evolutionary history. Good and evil seem to be beside the point.

Jean-Paul Sartre, another naturalist, rejected the limited view of the sociobiologist, believing that humans, if anything, are choosing machines. We are completely free to decide who we shall be, whether a drunk in the gutter or a ruler of nations. However, our choice is meaningless. Being a

drunk is no better or worse than being a ruler. Since there is no ultimate meaning to the universe, there can be no moral value ascribed to a given set of behaviors. [\(14\)](#)

Pantheists also have a difficult time with this notion of good and evil. Dr. Brugh Joy has written,

In the totality of Beingness there is no absolute anything—no rights or wrongs, no higher or lower aspects—only the infinite interaction of forces, subtle and gross, that have meaning only in relationship to one another. [\(15\)](#)

The Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh wrote,

I am totally passive. Whatsoever happens, happens. I never question why, because there is no one to be asked. [\(16\)](#)

Christianity teaches that the universe was created by a personal, moral Creator God, and that it was created good. This includes humanity. But now creation is in a fallen state due to rebellion against God. This means that humans are inclined to sin, and indeed are born in a state of sinfulness. This explains both mankind's potential goodness and internal sense of justice, as well as its inclination towards evil.

What Happens at Death?

Bertrand Russell wrote over seventy books on everything from geometry to marriage. Historian Paul Johnson says of Russell that no intellectual in history offered advice to humanity over so long a period as Bertrand Russell. Holding to naturalist assumptions caused an obvious tension in Russell regarding human nature. He wrote that people are “tiny lumps of impure carbon and water dividing their time between labor to postpone their normal dissolution and frantic struggle to hasten it for others.” [\(17\)](#) Yet Russell also wrote shortly before his death, “Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly

strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.”[\(18\)](#) One has to ask why he would pity these self-centered lumps of impure carbon and water?

Most people over forty begin to question the nature and consequence of death. Some become obsessed with it. A recent movie called *Flatliners* focused on what death might hold for us. It involved a number of young doctors willing to die temporarily, to find out what was on the other side.

Young Doctor #1: *“Wait a minute! Wait! Quite simply, why are you doing this?”*

Young Doctor #2: *“Quite simply to see if there is anything out there beyond death. Philosophy failed! Religion failed! Now it’s up to the physical sciences. I think mankind deserves to know!”* [\(19\)](#)

Philosophy has failed, religion has failed, now it's science's turn to find the answers. But what can naturalism offer us? Whether we accept the sociobiology of Wilson or the existentialism of Sartre, death means extinction. If nothing exists beyond the natural, material universe, our death is final and complete.

Pantheists, on the other hand, find death to be a minor inconvenience on the road to nirvana. Reincarnation happens to all living things, either towards nirvana or further from it depending on the Karma one accrues in the current life. Although Karma may include ethical components, it focuses on one's realization of his oneness with the universe as expressed in his actions and thoughts. Depending on the particular view held, attaining nirvana is likened to a drop of water being placed in an ocean. All identity is lost; only a radical oneness exists.

Christianity denies the possibility of reincarnation and rejects naturalism's material-only universe. Hebrews 9:27

states, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..." It has always held to a linear view of history, allowing for each person to live a single life, experience death, and then be judged by God. Revelation 20:11-12 records John's vision of the final judgment. "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. {12} And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." All three versions of what happens at death may be wrong, but they certainly can't all be right! We believe that based on the historical evidence for Christ's life and the dealings of God with the nation of Israel, the Biblical account is trustworthy. We believe that those who have placed their faith in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross will spend eternity in glorified bodies worshiping and fellowshiping with their Creator God.

Evaluation & Summary

In his autobiography, entomologist E. O. Wilson writes that as a young man he accepted Christ as his savior, but because of what he perceived to be hypocrisy in the pulpit he walked away from the church shortly after being baptized. Later at Harvard University he sat through a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King Sr. and then a series of gospel songs sung by students from the campus. He writes that he silently wept while the songs were being sung and said to himself, "these are my people." [\(20\)](#) Wilson claims to be a naturalist, arguing that God doesn't exist, yet he has feelings that he can't explain and desires that do not fit his sociobiological paradigm. Even the staunchly atheistic Jean-Paul Sartre, on his death bed, had doubts about the existence of God and human significance. Naturalism is a hard worldview to live by.

In 1991 Dr. L. D. Rue addressed the American Association for The Advancement of Science and he advocated that we deceive ourselves with "A Noble Lie." A lie that deceives us, tricks us, compels us beyond self-interest, beyond ego, beyond family, nation, [and] race. "It is a lie, because it tells us that the universe is infused with value (which is a great fiction), because it makes a claim to universal truth (when there is none), and because it tells us not to live for self-interest (which is evidently false). `But without such lies, we cannot live.'" [\(21\)](#) This is the predicament of modern man; either he lives honestly without hope of significance, or he creates a lie that gives a veneer of meaning. As William Lane Craig writes in his book *Reasonable Faith*,

Man cannot live consistently and happily as though life were ultimately without meaning, value or purpose. If we try to live consistently within the atheistic worldview, we shall find ourselves profoundly unhappy. If instead we manage to live happily, it is only by giving the lie to our worldview. [\(22\)](#)

The pantheist is little better off. Although pantheism claims a spiritual reality, it does so by denying our personhood. We become just another impersonal force field in an unending field of forces. Life is neither going anywhere nor is there hope that evil will be judged. Everything just is, let it be.

Neither system can speak out against the injustices of the world because neither see humankind as significant. Justice implies moral laws, and a lawgiver, something that both systems deny exist. One cannot have justice without moral truth. Of the three systems, only Judeo-Christian thought provides the foundation for combating the oppression of other humans.

In J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*, Packer argues that human beings were created to function spiritually as well as physically.

Just as we need food, water, exercise, and rest for our bodies to thrive, we need to experience worship, praise, and godly obedience to live spiritually. The result of ignoring these needs will be the de-humanizing of the soul, the development of a brutish rather than saintly demeanor. Our culture is experiencing this brutishness, this destruction of the soul, on a massive scale. Only revival, which brings about personal devotion to Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, will reverse this trend. Since we are truly made in God's image, we will find peace and fulfillment only when we are rightly related to Him.

Notes

1. Stephen Moore, "The growth of government in America," *The Freeman*, April (1993), 124.
2. Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C: Regnery, 1992), 174.
3. William Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 50.
4. *Terminator II: Judgment Day* (Carolco Pictures Inc., 1991).
5. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Paramount Pictures, 1980).
6. John Gerassi, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of His Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50.
7. Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 3.
8. Brugh W. Joy, *Joy's Way* (Los Angeles: J.B. Tarcher, Inc., 1979), 4.
9. Gerald G. Jampolsky, *Teach Only Love* (New York: Bantam, 1983), 52.
10. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *I Am the Gate* (Philadelphia:

Harper Colophon, 1977), 5.

11. Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 105.

12. *A Clockwork Orange* (Warner Bros. Inc., 1971).

13. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, p. 6.

14. Robert D. Cumming, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Random House, 1965), 363.

15. Joy, *Joy's Way*, p. 7.

16. Rajneesh, *I Am the Gate*, p. 5.

17. Israel Shenker, "The Provocative Progress of a Pilgrim Polymath," *Smithsonian* (May 1993), 123.

18. Ibid.

19. *Flatliners* (Columbia Pictures, 1990).

20. Edward O. Wilson, *Naturalist* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994), 46.

21. William L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 71.

22. Ibid., p. 70.

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Truth or Tolerance?

If I were to ask you what our culture deemed more valuable, truth or tolerance, what would you say? To emphasize the

purpose for the question, consider the following three illustrations.

Case 1. Recently, I had a conversation with a young man about Christianity. He listened closely to what I had to say about how Jesus Christ had saved me from my sin, but immediately became very defensive when I tried to suggest that he too had that same need for Christ as his Savior. He explained to me that because we live in a pluralistic society, all religions are equally valid roads to God. "You're just being too closed-minded," he said. "Jesus works for you, just like Buddha works for someone else. So if you want people to respect what you have to say, you need to be more tolerant of beliefs unlike your own."

Case 2. Last year, a dean at Stanford University began to pressure evangelical Christian groups on campus to stop the practice of "proselytizing other students." Ironically, what angered the dean was not the content of the message that was being shared, but the practice of sharing itself. He believes that in approaching someone with the Gospel, you are implying that the person's beliefs are inferior to your own. Such an implication is unacceptable because it is self-righteous, biased, and intolerant.

Case 3. Graduate student Jerome Pinn checked into his dormitory at the University of Michigan to discover that the walls of his new room were covered with posters of nude men and that his new roommate was an active homosexual who expected to have partners in the room. Pinn approached the Michigan housing office requesting that he be transferred to another room. Listen to Pinn's own description of what followed: "They were outraged by this [request]. They asked me what was wrong with me—what *my* problem was. I said that I had a religious and moral objection to homosexual conduct. They were surprised; they couldn't believe it. Finally, they assigned me to another room, but they warned me that if I told anyone of the reason, I would face university charges of

discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.”^{1} In their mind, Jerome had no right to a new room because he was being intolerant.

Notice that in each of these scenarios, Christians are not accused of “false teaching,” but of “false practice.” The young man, the dean, and the housing officials never challenged the *truth* of these moral claims, but the *legitimacy* of making such claims in the first place.^{2} Similar situations occur every day in schools, universities, the media, the marketplace, and the halls of government. Consequently, Christians are being silenced, not by superior ideas, but by our culture’s impeachment of moral absolutes and inauguration of moral openness.

So what are Christians to do? Are we not called to be confident carriers of the truth of the Gospel? Then how do we voice our belief that Jesus is the *only way* without being intolerant of someone who thinks differently? This is one of the most difficult dilemmas facing Christians today. In this essay we will examine the nature of the tolerance revolution in our culture, expose its strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly, establish a Christian response to the question of truth or tolerance.

Tolerance Under a Microscope

On two different occasions, Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, sponsored a campaign to encourage its community to speak out against the excessive amount of violence and sexual promiscuity on television, in the movies, etc. To bolster this drive, they distributed bumper stickers that read, “Speak Up For Decency.” Within days of the arrival of these stickers, another bumper sticker appeared that looked practically identical to the first one, except it read, “Speak Up For Liberty.” The seriousness of this reaction was nailed home when I came to a stop light and counted over ten “Speak Up For Liberty” stickers on the back of the van in front of

me; it was as if the driver was protecting freedom from fascism.

After considering the message on each sticker, I found myself at an impasse. On one hand, I agree that there is too much indecency on television, yet on the other hand, I believe that liberty is our nation's most prized resource. Yet after more consideration, I came to the conclusion that this was not a debate over freedom, but a discrepancy over the interpretation of tolerance.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *tolerance* as "the capacity for or practice of recognizing and respecting the options, practices, or behavior of others." First, tolerance demands recognition, which is a legal imperative. Naturally, the Constitution recognizes and protects the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Second, it calls for respect, which is a social imperative. The Declaration of Independence declares that we are all created equal, indicating that we need to respect all men, even when there are differences of opinion.

However, in our culture, tolerance is not being discussed as a legal or social imperative, but a moral one. In response to a survey concerning beliefs about God, a sixteen-year-old girl replied, "In my mind, the only people who are wrong are the people who will not accept different beliefs as being, well, acceptable." [\[3\]](#) This girl believed that the only real sin is to not accept or *tolerate* other people's beliefs. Likewise, openness or "uncritical tolerance" has become our society's moral standard. Consequently, people who seem intolerant are wrong.

But is tolerance a moral virtue? By definition, the function of tolerance is relegated to the legal and social arena in order to *protect* moral issues, not *enforce* them. As a result, talking about tolerance as a moral virtue is a circular argument. Listen to the following statement: "It is morally

wrong to say that something is morally wrong.” Is that statement not self-defeating?

In addition, any moral standard necessitates intolerance of anything which violates that standard. Merely using the phrase “a moral standard of tolerance” is a contradiction in terms. In S. D. Gaede’s words, “If you are intolerant of someone who is intolerant, then you have necessarily violated your own principle. But if you tolerate those who are intolerant, you keep your principle, but sacrifice your responsibility to the principle.”^{4} Consequently, a person who is wholly committed to tolerance, must resort to total apathy. Yet putting over ten bumper stickers on a car is hardly apathetic and thus anything but tolerant.

The notion that tolerance is a virtue is a paradox. Nevertheless, it has become the dominant moral guideline for our culture.

What If Truth Is Relative?

Believe it or not, our world is waging a war against truth. Allen Bloom writes, “Openness—and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth . . . is the greatest insight of our time.”^{5} The philosophical basis for the uncritical tolerance that is so prevalent in our society is the replacement of truth with relativism.

According to the *Barna Report*, 66% of the entire population believe “there is no such thing as absolute truth.” Another poll estimated that 72% of Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five also reject the notion of absolutes.^{6} So what do the majority of Americans believe? Well, without absolutes, they are left with moral relativism: the notion that all values are legitimate, and that it is impossible to judge between them. Truth is reduced to personal preference; what’s true is what works for you.

The assumption that truth is relative has infiltrated almost every facet of our society: the marketplace, the arts, government, education, family, and even religion. According to a poll, 88% of evangelical Christians claim that the “Bible is the written word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches,” and yet 53% also believe there are no absolutes.[\[7\]](#) Ironic? Not when one considers how powerful and pervasive this philosophical trend really is. Allen Bloom summarizes the logic behind the assumption that truth is relative:

*The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.*⁸ Bloom, 26.

Bloom is saying that instead of searching for mankind’s past faults, the world has condemned our ability to claim to be right at all.

But is the viewpoint that truth is undefinable a plausible philosophical position? Is not the claim, “there are no absolute truths” intrinsically self-contradictory? Gene Edward Veith notices that “[t]hose who argue that ‘there is no truth’ are putting forth that statement as true.”[\[9\]](#)

So to make this claim, there must be at least one truth that is universal. And if there is one universal truth, then the premise that there are no absolutes is false.

Another problem was illustrated by R. C. Sproul. He recalled the Senate hearings over Clarence Thomas’s Supreme Court nomination and the opposing testimonies of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas. Sproul admitted that he didn’t know who was telling the truth. However, what he knew with absolute certainty was that “they both couldn’t be telling the truth.” In the same way, Christianity claims exclusively that

salvation is an unearnable gift from God, whereas Islam claims exclusively that a man must earn his salvation. It is possible that both are not true, but it is impossible for *both* to be true.

Moral relativism is hard-wired into our culture. But let's reclaim the superiority of truth—God's truth—as the solution for the sickness of our culture, a sickness that tolerance and moral relativism cannot cure.

Tolerance and Chapped Lips

I would bet that each of you is familiar with the dry, burning sensation of chapped lips. With this in mind, what is the almost instinctual reaction when you feel your lips drying out? You lick them, right? For a moment they feel better, but then what happens? They get even drier, don't they? In fact, the more you lick, the worse they get. This is an example of mistaking the immediate solution for the correct solution. If moist lips are the desirable end, shouldn't we lick them to make them well again? Of course not, even if it feels right at first. As most of you know, the appropriate cure for chapped lips is not licking, it's lip balm.

Well, the same is true in life. We live in a world burdened by injustice, discrimination, and inequality; they are the "chapped lips" of our culture. Many people insist that the best solution is a greater degree of tolerance. In some ways this answer sounds right. But is tolerance the lip balm for our culture or are we just licking our lips? Are we just mistaking the immediate solution for the correct solution?

To answer this question, I want to glance at a couple of what I call "tolerance trends." The first is political correctness. S. D. Gaede notes that the goal of political correctness "is to enforce a universal standard of tolerance, regardless of race, gender, cultural background, or sexual orientation."[10](#) Thus, the Golden Rule for a politically correct person is to

not do, say, or even imply anything that any other individual or group might find offensive.

A second tolerance trend is multiculturalism. Whereas political correctness is more legalistic, the goal of multiculturalism is greater inclusiveness. Schools and universities are not just teaching history from the traditional “dead white male” perspective, but including the experiences of African-Americans, Native Americans, women, and other groups who have been marginalized. Businesses are supporting this movement as well. “Multicultural workshops” are being created to help workers get along in a more culturally diverse business environment.[\[11\]](#)

On one hand, there is much to be praised about these movements. Christians have more reason than anyone to abhor discrimination and prejudice. God hates injustice and loves to liberate the oppressed, and so should we. Therefore, a Christian perspective should transcend cultural, racial, or class distinctions.

At the same time, these tolerance trends are merely impulsive reactions to the problem and not well-thought-out solutions. The reason is simple. If our goal is just more tolerance, then discrimination isn’t wrong in a moral sense, it’s only offensive. Yet what constitutes “being offensive” changes according to the whims of the ethnic and social group involved. Consequently, a standard of tolerance becomes arbitrary and variable because it is subject to interpretation based on an underlying bias. Ultimately, no matter how legitimate it sounds, how right it feels, or how rigorously it is enforced, tolerance alone can never eliminate prejudice any more than licking can cure chapped lips.

Justice and equality will become realities not by superficially incorporating tolerance, but by embracing absolute truth—a transcendental truth that includes the foundation for both moral law and human value—an unwavering

truth which at times may even demand intolerance. It is a truth that only a God who is a righteous Judge and a loving Creator can establish.

Restoring Credibility and Confidence in the Christian Solution

To this point we have examined the short-comings of tolerance and the superiority of truth. But understanding the situation is only half the battle. As Christians, we are called to action. So how do we reach a world that is choking on its own tolerance?

First, we must remind ourselves of the authority and power of God's truth. In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to "put on the full armor of God" as our defense against the enemy. In verse 14, Paul reminds Christians that first and foremost we are to "stand firm . . . having girded your [our] loins with truth." In a culture that is bearing down on Christians, we must remain steadfast and resist evil. We do so by preparing ourselves for the fight, by girding ourselves with the truth. It is the foundation for everything else. In the words of the late Ray Stedman,

Truth is reality, the way things really are. Therefore it is the explanation of all things. You know you have found the truth when you find something which is wide enough and deep enough and high enough to encompass all things. That is what Jesus Christ does.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and yes, forever." The truth of Christ is much more encompassing than anything this world has to offer.

Second, if you are walking in truth, you will discover that there is a time for both tolerance and intolerance. For example, Jesus associated with the sick, the poor, and the

dejected. He shared meals with prostitutes, tax collectors, and criminals. Christ doesn't judge us by our skin color or social status, but by the condition of our hearts.

Unfortunately, Christians have a long way to go in matching His standard. All too often, we are hampered by racial differences and social barriers. Perhaps it's time that we began to raise our voice against injustice and not leave it up to the ebbing multiculturalist movement.

Yet as accepting as Jesus was, He was extremely rigid about the exclusiveness of His claims. Of all the choices in life, He tells us there is only one way, one truth, and one life—His. How much more exclusive, even intolerant, can you get? Christians need to remember that loving another person may sometimes mean being respectfully but firmly intolerant of what is not true.

Earlier I told of a conversation I had with a peer about Christianity. After I realized we had actually been disagreeing regarding our assumptions about truth, I started over. I asked him why tolerance was an issue of morality. He thought for a moment. Then I asked him how truth could possibly be relative, and we began questioning his own assumptions about morality. Finally, I shared C. S. Lewis's notion that any moral law, including his claims regarding tolerance, implies the existence of a Moral Law Giver. And by the end of the conversation, he was beginning to consider the possibility of God and his own accountability to Him.

This young man was not ready for a spiritual tract about the Gospel, but he was eager to hear about truth. And there are people everywhere—people you know—who are just like him. Without hearing a verse from Scripture, this man moved one step closer to his Creator. Why? Because, as Paul writes, "truth is in Jesus." That means that sharing truth is sharing Christ, no matter what form or fashion it takes.

Notes

1. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1991}, 8-9.
2. S. D. Gaede, *When Tolerance is No Virtue* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993}, 12.
3. Lynn Minton, "Fresh Voices," *Parade Magazine*, 11 June 1995, 10.
4. Gaede, 23.
5. Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987}, 26.
6. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994}, 16.
7. *Ibid.*, 16.
8. Bloom, 26.
9. Veith, 59.
10. Gaede, 21.
11. *Ibid.*, 36.

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Politically Correct Ethics

Liberal Idealism's Approach to Ethics

Ben and Jerry's ice cream is renowned for being the ice cream for those who want to be friendly to the environment. Ben and Jerry's Homemade Inc. built a national reputation by (1) claiming to use only all natural ingredients and (2) sending a percentage of the profits to charities. The company's Rainforest Crunch ice cream supposedly uses only nuts and berries from the rain forests.

But there is a lot more to ethical behavior than a laid-back, socially correct agenda. An audit of Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc. revealed the use of sulfur dioxide preservatives and use of margarine instead of butter in some of the flavors. Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc. also served on the editorial board of Anita Roddick's Body Shop, another company expounding the use of natural products. It took an article in *Business Ethics* to expose Body Shop's false advertising claims and other ethical failures. Synthetic colorings, fragrances, and preservatives were being used in Body Shop products. [\[1\]](#)

Today we live in a world engrossed in the ideas flowing from a socially correct agenda, and it is overshadowing the time proven priority of basic business ethics. It is an agenda centered in tolerance and environmentalism. (Interestingly, those on the environmental side are not very tolerant of those who do not hold to their rigid perspective, such as their stand on not using animals in product testing.)

Levi Strauss is another interesting case in point. The company has a strong politically correct mindset, and diversity and empowerment are central for their organizational ethics. They have demonstrated a strong concern for human rights, yet they are clearly on the liberal side of family values. They have been boycotted by the American Family Association for their support of homosexuality providing benefits for the "domestic partners" of their employees.

Although this socially correct movement expounds the idea of tolerance for all, proponents tend to be very intolerant of anyone who may support a position they do not agree with. Kinko's Copies found this out the hard way when they advertised on the Rush Limbaugh show. A boycott was quickly threatened until Kinko's promised not to advertise on Rush's show again.

There is great danger in using political views to measure business ethics because social goals can become equated with business ethics. This is not right. Business ethics is concerned with the fair treatment of others such as customers, employees, suppliers, stockholders, and franchisees. Truth in labeling and advertising is paramount in establishing a business enterprise and is even more important than the issues of animal testing and commitment to the rain forest, as important as they may be. [\[2\]](#)

This approach to ethics comes from liberal idealism. We see this perspective in Robert Bellah's book, *The Good Society*. Liberal idealism seeks to transform society by social engineering. The liberal idealist looks for ways of managing a modern economy or developing broad social policies that will meet the needs of society as a whole. This system believes in the innate goodness of mankind, the worldview of enlightenment thinking, that men and women are fully capable of reasoning what is good and right, i.e., the autonomy of human reason. There is no felt need for revelation or any authority beyond themselves. Liberal idealism is marked by a lot of faith in government and the ability of organizational programs to orchestrate a healthy society.

We will be contrasting this line of thought with a more bottom up view that emphasizes personal integrity and greater concern for individual moral convictions.

Bottom up Ethics

But there is another more traditional way of looking at ethics. It is an individual model, rather than an organizational one. It demonstrates a greater concern for the moral conviction of individuals. This view emphasizes that institutions don't make ethical decisions, people do. It stresses that virtue comes from the individuals who make up the many small groups and larger institutions, from families to voluntary associations to multinational corporations. The goal is to convert the individual in order to change the institution. Answers are sought more through education and/or religion to reach the individual in the belief that transformed individuals will transform their institutions.

A corporation that has established an ethics department with an approach more along the lines of the individual model is Texas Instruments. Their theme is "Know What's Right Do What's Right." Their emphasis is on training individuals within the corporation to know the principles involved in each unique ethical dilemma that may present itself and motivating the individuals involved to make good ethical decisions. The company maintains various avenues of support to assist individuals within the corporation in making difficult decisions. Carl Skoogland, vice president of the Ethics Department at Texas Instruments, has said, "In any relationship an unquestionable commitment to ethics is a silent partner in all our dealings." Their seven-point ethics test is oriented toward individual initiative:

1. Is the action legal?
2. Does it comply with our values?
3. If you do it, will you feel bad?
4. How will it look in the newspapers?
5. If you know it is wrong, don't do it!
6. If you're not sure, ask.

7. Keep asking until you get an answer. [\[3\]](#)

Although critics might say these types of simple maxims lack in specific guidance, when combined with an overall educational program they help individuals think through issues and make the right decisions themselves, multiplying the base of ethical agents within the corporation.

Traditional Western culture, which has given us the most advanced and free lifestyle of any culture, has been based on both a Greek model of transcendent forms and a Judeo-Christian model of God-given objective standards. This tradition has taught us that we are all flawed and need a personal transformation before we can be of any true value in transforming society.

Religion and Education in Ethical Development

Earlier we mentioned Robert Bellah's book, *The Good Society*, and its support of liberal idealism, or the ability of government and organizational programs to orchestrate a healthy society through broad social agendas.

William Sims Brainbridge, in writing a review of Bellah's book, makes a statement that could well apply to so many of the modernist writings: "The book's prescription sounds like a highly diluted dose of religion, when what the patient needs might be a full dose."

This "organizational model" fails to fully appreciate the need for integration of religion and education in order to provide a united front against the materialism and self-centeredness of our present culture. As long as we allow our educational system to teach that we are evolved animals, here by chance and of no eternal significance, we can only expect short-

sighted self-interest. If fundamentally all there is is matter, energy, time, and chance, why can't one believe in anything such as apartheid, or ethnic cleansing, or euthanasia, or genocide? Where is liberal idealism's source for personal integrity and convictions other than in cultural relativism? Under a theory of cultural relativism all intercultural comparisons of values are meaningless.

The need, of course, is for transcendent truths. By transcendent, we mean an ethical ideal independent of any given political system or order. This ethical ideal can then serve as an external critique of corporate or political aspirations or activities. Is this not what Plato was referring to when he discussed his theory of universal forms, that there are ideals beyond the reality of this physical world? In this postmodern world we are now experiencing a complete rejection by many of any objective truth. In fact, anyone who still believes in the search for truth is often labeled as ethnocentric, i.e., the liberal idealism of our present age refuses to accept that someone might find a truth that has universal application.

The ethics of enlightenment thinking do not appear to be the answer. Crane Brinton, in his book, *A History of Western Morals* says, "the religion of the Enlightenment has a long and unpredictable way to go before it can face the facts of life as effectively as does Christianity."⁴ We appear to have an implosion of values in a society that is seeking to teach that there is no God and no afterlife, but if you live an ethical earthly life somehow it will pay off.

British historian, Lord Acton, is best remembered for his warning that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. He believed that liberty was the highest political end. But, he also recognized that liberty can't be the sole end of mankind. There must also be some kind of virtue, and virtue has its roots in religion. Lord Acton's work showed that no society was truly free without

religion.^{5} Professionals must be educated to understand the moral worth of their actions and the roles religion and education play in promoting self-control.

Religion and Education at Odds

We have been discussing the need for both religion and education in establishing an ethical base for all our actions. But the question arises, how will we find the needed balance in an American society in which public education and traditional religions are at odds with one another over very basic presuppositions such as the nature of the universe, humanity, ethics, culture, evil, truth, and destiny?

The liberal solution has been to remove the traditional truths and make our institutions humanistic. The conservative response has been to establish an independent educational system in which those who hold to more traditional values can integrate religious truth with educational aims. We now have two major educational tracks, the public track based on the religion of secular humanism and the private track based on the religion of biblical Christianity. The professionals involved in the educational institutions must decide how to deal with the tension between the two tracks. The need is to resolve tension and build bridges of understanding, rather than intensify the cultural war. But, as Christians, we must not compromise truth. There must be cooperation without compromise.

John Adams, our first vice-president, said, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."^{6} Meaning is the living fabric that holds us together with all things and meaning for life will only be found through the transcendent values of religion. In his article, "The Globalization of Business Ethics: Why America Remains Distinctive," David Vogel writes, "Thanks in part to the role played by Reformed Protestantism in defining American values, America remains a

highly moralistic society.”[\[7\]](#)

At this point, in realizing the need to be fair, we must be willing to give a critical assessment of the gross behavioral failures that have occurred in the realm of the religious. The most blatant examples are probably the numerous TV evangelists who have fallen prey to greed and other temptations that have destroyed their lives and ministries. Another example is the many ministers and priests who have practiced sexually deviant behavior with children in their care. Many of these religious leaders are now or have been serving time in prison for their personal moral failures.

These examples highlight the moral depravity of mankind. But this does not mean that we need to adopt the sixteenth century views of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who had a very low view of human nature. Unfortunately, much of the world has been heavily influenced by the amoral perspective of a Hobbesian foundation of ethical behavior. Hobbes decided that what is good or bad is based on what society likes or dislikes. This is cultural relativism, the rejection of any standard beyond that established by the present culture. Hobbes, like so many others, seems to have had an innate fear of the possibility that there might be a transcendent truth out there worth pursuing. Because of our personal inner moral failure, we must look outside ourselves to find the standards by which we are to live and establish those standards in our laws and in our educational systems.

Does a Rising Tide Lift all Boats?

President Kennedy said, “A rising tide lifts all boats.” But think about it! Does a rising tide lift all boats? Not if some of the boats have holes in them.

In this essay we have been discussing the contrast between a politically correct ethical approach to dealing with our ethical concerns against a more bottom up individual

responsibility approach.

The historic roots of the American experience are bound up in the idea of individualism, a political tradition that enshrines individual liberty as its highest ideal. But democracy requires a degree of trust, and unfortunately, our heritage of trust is eroding. American businesses have been transformed from comfortable and stable rivals into bloodletting gladiators.^{8} There is a problem in emphasizing individual freedom and the pursuit of individual affluence (the American dream) in a society with an economy and government that has rejected the principles of natural law. Too many of our boats have holes in them i.e., little or no personal integrity. We must work at restoring the principles of individual integrity and personal responsibility before we try to establish an ethical agenda for our organizations. Unless we realize our own morally flawed state, we will seek to repair the institutions without the humility and personal transformation necessary to afford any hope of ultimate success. Organizational ethical behavior is very important, but it must be elevated through an upsurge of individual ethical behavior.

Those coming from a liberal idealism approach to ethics hold noble ideas of common good based on a belief in the inherent goodness of men and women. They believe that if we just change the structures of society, the problems will be solved. Their perspective is that greater citizen participation in the organizational structures of our government and economy will result in a lessening of the problems of contemporary social life. What they neglect to consider is that government attempts to make people good are inherently coercive. Our constitution rests on the premise that virtue comes from citizens themselves, acting through smaller groups, such as the family, church, community, and voluntary associations. The stronger these small, people-centered groups are, the less intrusive the government and other large organizations need to

be.

But how do you deal with the need for individual transformation? A common phrase we often hear is "You can't legislate morality." In reality all laws are a legislation of morality. All we are doing is changing an "ought to do/ought not to do" into a "must do/must not do" by making it a law. A solid base of moral law helps to establish the standard for individual behavior, but as the New Testament so clearly tells us, the law is inadequate to the task at hand. It is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that enables us to overcome the forces within and without that seek to destroy our God-given abundant life. Only by placing our trust in Christ can we begin to repair the holes in our life. When the internal integrity of our life is as it should be, we are then ready for the tides of life to come. A rising tide does lift all boats that have internal integrity.

Notes

1. Marianne M. Jennings, "Manager's Journal," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. Texas Instruments, publication TI-28172.
4. Crane Brinton, *A History of Western Morals* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 462.
5. Charles Oliver, "Leaders & Success," *Investor's Business Daily*, 14 December 1993.
6. Quoted in John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 185.
7. David Vogel, "The Globalization of Business Ethics: Why America Remains Distinctive," *California Management Review* (Fall 1992), 44.
8. Robert Reich, "Corporate Ethic: We can change behavior by altering mix of incentives," *The Dallas Morning News*, 14 January 1996, 5J.

Slogans – A Biblical Worldview Response

Jerry Solomon considers many popular slogans to see how they are designed to influence our thinking. Taking a biblical, Christian worldview, he finds that many popular slogans are promoting vanity, immediate gratification, or materialism. Ends that are not consistent with an eternal Christian life view. As he points out, we do not have to let these slogans control our thinking.

Let's try an experiment. I'll list several slogans, some from the past, others from more contemporary times, but I'll leave out one word or phrase. See if you can supply the missing word or phrase. Here are some examples:

"Give me liberty or give me. . ."

"Uncle Sam wants . . ."

"I have a . . ."

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask . . ."

"Just do . . ."

"Life is a sport; . . ."

"Gentlemen prefer . . ."

"Image is . . ."

"Coke is . . ."

"You've come a long way, . . ."

"This is not your father's . . ."

"You deserve a break . . ."

Well, how did you fare with my experiment? Unless you've been living in a cave for many years, you probably were able to

complete several of these phrases. They have become a part of "The fabric of our . . ." Yes, the fabric of our lives. In most cases these slogans have been written to promote a product. They are catchy, memorable maxims that help the listener or reader associate the statement with a commodity, thus leading to increased sales. Advertisers spend millions of dollars for such slogans, an indicator of their importance.

Double Meanings

Often a slogan contains a double entendre intended to attract us on at least two levels. For example, an ad for toothpaste from several years ago asks, "Want love?" Obviously, the advertiser is playing upon a universal need. All of us want love. But the initial answer to the question is "Get . . . Close Up." Of course a couple is pictured in close embrace with vibrant smiles and sweet breath as a result of their wise use of the product. The implication is that they are sharing love, but only as a result of using the love-giving toothpaste. Another example, again from several years in the past, states "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins." The double meaning is obvious, especially when the slogan is coupled with the accompanying picture of a young girl. No doubt the companies that hired the ad agencies for such campaigns were very pleased. Their sales increased. The fact that I am even using these illustrations is indicative of their success in capturing the attention of the consumer.

Slogans and the Christian

But the marketplace is not the only arena where slogans are found. Christians often use them. Many contemporary churches strive to attract the surrounding population by utilizing various adjectives to describe themselves. For example, words such as "exciting," "dynamic," "friendly," or "caring" are used as part of a catchy slogan designed to grab the attention of anyone who would see or hear it. And such slogans are

supposed to be descriptive of how that particular church wants to be perceived. This applies especially to those congregations that are sometimes called “seeker sensitive.” The idea is that there is a market in the surrounding culture that will be attracted to the implications of the slogan. One of the foundational tenets of our ministry at Probe is that the Christian should think God’s thoughts after Him. Then, the transformed Christian should use his mind to analyze and influence the world around him. One of the more intriguing ways we can experience what it means to have a Christian mind is by concentrating on the content of the slogans we hear and see each day. In this article we will examine certain slogans in order to discover the ideas imbedded in them. Then we will explore ways we might apply our discoveries in the culture that surrounds us.

Slogan Themes: Vanity

“Break free and feel; it reveals to the world just how wonderful you are.” “Spoil yourself.” “Turn it loose tonight; don’t hold back.” “You deserve a break today.” “Indulge yourself.” “Have it your way.” These slogans are indicative of one of the more common emphases in our culture: vanity. The individual is supreme. Selfishness and self-indulgence too often are the primary indicators of what is most important. Such phrases, which are the result of much thought and research among advertisers, are used to play upon the perceptions of a broad base of the population. A product can be promoted successfully if it is seen as something that will satisfy the egocentric desires of the consumer.

Christopher Lasch, an insightful thinker, has entitled his analysis of American life *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch has written that the self-centered American “demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire.” [\(1\)](#) We will return to the subject of immediate gratification later, but the emphasis of the moment

is that slogans often focus on a person's vanity. The individual is encouraged to focus continually on himself, his desires, his frustrations, his goals. And the quest that is developed never leads to fulfillment. Instead, it leads to a spiraling sense of malaise because the slogans lead only to material, not spiritual ends.

One of the more famous slogans in the Bible is "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." This exclamation is found in Ecclesiastes, an Old Testament book full of application to our subject. King Solomon, the writer, has left us with an ancient but very contemporary analysis of what life is like if self-indulgence is the key. And his analysis came from personal experience. He would have been the model consumer for the slogans that began this essay today: "Break free and feel." "Spoil yourself." "Turn it loose." "You deserve a break today." "Indulge yourself." But he learned that such slogans are lies. As Charles Swindoll has written:

In spite of the extent to which he went to find happiness, because he left God out of the picture, nothing satisfied. It never will. Satisfaction in life under the sun will never occur until there is a meaningful connection with the living Lord above the sun. (2)

Solomon indulged himself physically and sexually; he experimented philosophically; he focused on wealth. None of it provided his deepest needs.

So what is Solomon's conclusion in regard to those needs? He realizes that we are to "fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). How would the majority of this country respond if a slogan such as "Fear God and keep His commandments!" were to suddenly flood the media? It probably wouldn't sell very well; it wouldn't focus on our vanity.

One of the Lord's more penetrating statements concerning

vanity was focused on the man who is called the rich young ruler. Douglas Webster has written that

It is sad when Jesus is not enough. We are told that Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and loved him. But the love of Jesus was not enough for this man. He wanted it all: health, wealth, self-satisfaction and control. He knew no other way to see himself than the words we use to describe him a rich young ruler. [\(3\)](#)

Perhaps this analysis can apply to us too often. Is Jesus enough, or must our vanity be satisfied? That's a good question for all of us.

Slogan Themes: Immediate Gratification

"Hurry!" "Time is running out!" "This is the last day!" "You can have it now! Don't wait!" These phrases are indicators of one of the more prominent themes found in slogans: instant gratification. This is especially true in regard to much contemporary advertising. The consumer is encouraged to respond immediately. Patience is not a virtue. Contemplation is not encouraged.

Not only do we have instant coffee, instant rice, instant breakfast, and a host of other instant foods, we also tend to see all of life from an instant perspective. If you have a headache, it can be cured instantly. If you need a relationship, it can be supplied instantly. If you need a new car, it can be bought instantly. If you need a god, it can be provided instantly. For example, a few evening hours spent with the offerings of television show us sitcom dilemmas solved in less than half an hour; upset stomachs are relieved in less than thirty seconds; political candidates are accepted or rejected based upon a paid political announcement. About the only unappeased person on television is the "I love you, man!" guy who can't find a beer or love.

You're a consumer. Be honest with yourself. Haven't you been enticed to respond to the encouragement of a slogan that implies immediate gratification? If you hear or see a slogan that says you must act now, your impulse may lead you to buy. At times it can be difficult to resist the temptation of the moment. The number of people in serious debt may be a testimony to the seriousness of this temptation. The instant credit card has led to instant crisis because of a thoughtless response to an instant slogan. When we hear "Act now!" or "Tomorrow is too late!" we can be persuaded if we are not alert to the possible consequences of an unwise decision.

One of the most respected virtues is wisdom. The wise man or woman is held in high esteem. This is especially true for the Christian. The Bible tells us of the lives of many people: some wise, some unwise. The wise person is portrayed as someone who patiently weighs options, who seeks God's counsel, who makes decisions that extend far beyond instantaneous results. The unwise person is portrayed as one who acts without sufficient thought, who doesn't seek God's counsel, who makes decisions that may satisfy for the moment but not the future. So the contemporary Christian should strive to become wise in the face of the slogans that surround him. He should realize that the supposed benefits of products cannot be compared to wisdom. As Scripture states:

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her (Proverbs 3:13-15, NASB).

Let's develop our own slogan. Perhaps something like, "Wisdom now; decisions later!" would be a good antidote to the messages we hear and see so often. Also, let's implant the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, especially patience and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And let's reinforce our

thought life with the truth that things of value are not achieved instantly. That reminds me of another slogan: "Rome was not built in a day." And how Rome was built is not nearly as valuable as how our lives are built.

Slogan Themes: Materialism

In the early sixteenth century an Augustinian monk declared *Sola Fide!*, "Faith Alone!", a slogan that had been used by many before him. But Martin Luther issued this proclamation in opposition to certain theological and ecclesiastical emphases of his time. Instead of teaching that faith could "make" one righteous, he insisted that only God can "declare" one to be righteous based upon Christ's victory on the cross. Eventually he came to believe that the church needed reformation. And as the saying goes, "The rest is history."

In the late twentieth century it appears that the most important slogan is *Sola carnalis*, "The flesh alone!" or "The physical alone!" Put in a contrary manner: "What you see is what you get!" Material things are usually the focus of our attention. Non material or spiritual things generally are not part of our consciousness. The impression is that life can be lived properly through the purchase of products. Or, life is to be lived as if this is the only one you've got; there is no heaven or hell, no sin, no sacrifice for sin, no judgment. As the old commercial says, "You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get." And the slogan of a more recent commercial relates that "It doesn't get any better than this!" as friends share the events of a wonderful day together in a beautiful setting while drinking just the right beer. Of course, there is a measure of truth in each of these slogans. We should live life with gusto, and we should enjoy times of companionship with friends. But from a Christian standpoint, these ideas should be coupled with a sober understanding that this life is not all there is.

Jesus often spoke directly to those who would deter Him from

His mission, which required His brutal sacrifice. For example, Satan sought to tempt Jesus by focusing on material things. But the Lord rejected Satan's enticements by focusing on things that transcend this life. And His rejections always began with a powerful, eternally meaningful slogan: "It is written," a reference to the truth of Scripture. On another occasion, after Jesus showed "His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things," Peter proclaimed, "This shall never happen to You." Jesus replied that Peter was setting his mind on man's interests, not God's. Then followed a haunting statement that has become a crucial slogan for those who would be Christ's disciples: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." This conversation came to a conclusion when Jesus asked two rhetorical questions: "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:21-26)

Do those questions sound trite? Have we heard and read them so often that we don't consider their implications? If we are immersed in the concepts of today's slogans, such questions should be sobering. Referring back to our previous examples, Jesus' questions contain answers that say no, it is not true that "You only go around once." And yes, it does get better than this. We are more than physical beings destined for dirt. We are spiritual and physical beings destined for life in heaven or hell. And for the believer in Christ this life is to be lived with "the life to come" in mind.

Are We Slaves of Slogans?

"Remember the Alamo!" "No taxation without representation!" "I shall return!" "I have not yet begun to fight!" "Never give up!" These memorable slogans are the stuff of legends. They represent a level of commitment that led many to give their lives for a cause or country. Are the slogans of today any

less intense? No doubt many new ones are entering the consciousness of those who have been at the center of the tragic conflicts in Bosnia, Lebanon, and other centers of violent conflict. Strife seems to create powerful slogans.

But what of the strife that is found on the battlefield of our minds? Slogans are indicative of the war that is a part of the life of the mind. (It is fascinating to note that the etymology of the word slogan stems from the Gaelic *slaugh-garim*, which was a war cry of a Scottish clan.)

No doubt I could be accused of exaggerating the impact of slogans. But let's remember that enormous amounts of money are spent to encourage us to respond to the messages they contain. For example, commercials shown during the most recent Super Bowl cost the sponsors approximately \$1,000,000 per 60 second spot. Such sums surely would not be spent if there weren't a significant payoff. And it is not as if slogans were hidden in some underground culture; we are flooded with them at every turn. As one writer has put it: "Commercial messages are omnipresent, and the verbal and visual vocabulary of Madison Avenue has become our true *lingua franca*." [\(4\)](#) We may be at the point where we can communicate with one another more readily through the use of advertising slogans because they provide a common ground. But what is that common ground? Is it compatible with a Christian worldview? The answer to both questions in our secularized culture is usually "No!".

We have emphasized three themes that are readily found in contemporary slogans: vanity, immediate gratification, and materialism. Of course, there are many more subjects, but these serve to demonstrate that the *lingua franca*, the current common ground, is one that should be carefully weighed against the precepts of Scripture. The Christian worldview cannot accept such themes.

A disciple of Christ is challenged not only to consider the implications of slogans in the marketplace, but in the church

as well. We can be swayed by the same ideas that drive those who formulate the slogans of commercialism. Douglas Webster offers these penetrating comments:

Public opinion has become an arbiter of truth, dictating the terms of acceptability according to the marketplace. The sovereignty of the audience makes serious, prayerful thinking about the will of God unnecessary, because opinions are formed on the basis of taste and preferences rather than careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection. Americans easily become "slaves of slogans" when discernment is reduced to ratings. [\(5\)](#)

Surely none of us would like to be described as a "slave of slogans." We want to believe that we are capable of sorting out the messages we hear so often. Yes, we are capable through the Lord's guidance. But as Webster has written, we must be sober enough to be sure that we are not being led by taste and preferences. Instead, we should implant careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection in our lives. And I hasten to add that such thinking should apply to us both individually and within our churches.

Perhaps the most fitting way to conclude our discussion of slogans is with another slogan: "To God be the glory in all things!" Such a thought, if made the center of our lives, surely will demonstrate the power of slogans.

Notes

1. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner, 1979), 23.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1985), 16.
3. Douglas D. Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill: 1992), 68.
4. Rogier van Bakel, "This Space for Rent," *Wired* (June 1996),

160.

5. Webster, 29.

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The Worldview of Jurassic Park – A Biblical Christian Assessment

Dr. Bohlin examines the message of Jurassic Park, bringing out some of the underlying messages on science, evolution, new age thinking, and cloning. The movie may be entertaining, but a Christian scientist points out some of the misconceptions people are taking away from the movie. Remember, this is just a piece of fiction—not a scientific treatise.

The Intent Behind Jurassic Park

Driving home after seeing the movie *Jurassic Park* in the first week of its release, I kept seeing tyrannosaurs and velociraptors coming out from behind buildings, through intersections, and down the street, headed straight at me. I would imagine: What would I do? Where would I turn? I certainly wouldn't shine any lights out of my car or scream. Dead give-aways to a hungry, angry dinosaur. Then I would force myself to realize that it was just a movie. It was not reality. My relief would take hold only briefly until the next intersection or big building.

In case you can't tell, I scare easily at movies. *Jurassic Park* terrified me. It all looked so real. Steven Spielberg turned out the biggest money-making film in history. Much of

the reason for that was the realistic portrayal of the dinosaurs. But there was more to *Jurassic Park* than great special effects. It was based on the riveting novel by Michael Crichton and while many left the movie dazzled by the dinosaurs, others were leaving with questions and new views of science and nature.

The movie *Jurassic Park* was terrific entertainment, but it was entertainment with a purpose. The purpose was many-fold and the message was interspersed throughout the movie, and more so throughout the book. My purpose in this essay is to give you some insight into the battle that was waged for your mind throughout the course of this movie.

Jurassic Park was intended to warn the general public concerning the inherent dangers of biotechnology first of all, but also science in general. Consider this comment from the author Michael Crichton:

Biotechnology and genetic engineering are very powerful. The film suggests that [science's] control of nature is elusive. And just as war is too important to leave to the generals, science is too important to leave to scientists. Everyone needs to be attentive.[{1}](#)

Overall, I would agree with Crichton. All too often, scientists purposefully refrain from asking ethical questions concerning their work in the interest of the pursuit of science.

But now consider director Steven Spielberg, quoted in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*: "There's a big moral question in this story. DNA cloning may be viable, but is it acceptable?"[{2}](#) And again in the *New York Times*, Spielberg said, "Science is intrusive. I wouldn't ban molecular biology altogether, because it's useful in finding cures for AIDS, cancer and other diseases. But it's also dangerous and that's the theme of *Jurassic Park*."[{3}](#) So Spielberg openly states

that the real theme of *Jurassic Park* is that science is intrusive.

In case you are skeptical of a movie's ability to communicate this message to young people today, listen to this comment from an eleven-year-old after seeing the movie. She said, "Jurassic Park's message is important! We shouldn't fool around with nature." [\[4\]](#) The media, movies and music in particular, are powerful voices to our young people today. We cannot underestimate the power of the media, especially in the form of a blockbuster like *Jurassic Park*, to change the way we perceive the world around us.

Many issues of today were addressed in the movie. Biotechnology, science, evolution, feminism, and new age philosophy all found a spokesman in *Jurassic Park*.

The Dangers of Science, Biotechnology, and Computers

The movie *Jurassic Park* directly attacked the scientific establishment. Throughout the movie, Ian Malcolm voiced the concerns about the direction and nature of science. You may remember the scene around the lunch table just after the group has watched the three velociraptors devour an entire cow in only a few minutes. Ian Malcolm brashly takes center stage with comments like this: "The scientific power...didn't require any discipline to attain it...So you don't take any responsibility for it." [\[5\]](#) The key word here is responsibility. Malcolm intimates that Jurassic Park scientists have behaved irrationally and irresponsibly.

Later in the same scene, Malcolm adds, "Genetic power is the most awesome force the planet's ever seen, but, you wield it like a kid that's found his dad's gun." Genetic engineering rises above nuclear and chemical or computer technology because of its ability to restructure the very molecular heart of living creatures. Even to create new organisms. Use of such

power requires wisdom and patience. Malcolm punctuates his criticism in the same scene when he says, "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should."

Malcolm's criticisms should hit a raw nerve in the scientific community. As Christians we ask similar questions and raise similar concerns when scientists want to harvest fetal tissue for research purposes or experiment with human embryos. If Malcolm had limited his remarks to *Jurassic Park* only, I would have no complaint. But Malcolm extends the problem to science as a whole when he comments that scientific discovery is the rape of the natural world. Many youngsters will form the opinion that all scientists are to be distrusted. A meaningful point has been lost because it was wielded with the surgical precision of a baseball bat.

Surprisingly, computers take a more subtle slap in the face—surprising because computers were essential in creating many of the dinosaur action scenes that simply could not be done with robotic models. You may remember early in the movie, the paleontological camp of Drs. Grant and Satler where Grant openly shows his distrust of computers. The scene appears a little comical as the field-tested veteran expresses his hate for computers and senses that computers will take the fun out of his quaint profession.

Not so comical is the portrayal of Dennis Nedry, the computer genius behind *Jurassic Park*. You get left with the impression that computers are not for normal people and the only ones who profit by them or understand them are people who are not to be trusted. Nedry was clearly presented as a dangerous person because of his combination of computer wizardry and his resentment of those who don't understand him or computers. Yet at the end of the movie, a young girl's computer hacking ability saves the day by bringing the system back on line.

The point to be made is that technology is not the villain.

Fire is used for both good and evil purposes, but no one is calling for fire to be banned. It is the worldview of the culture that determines how computers, biotechnology, or any other technology is to be used. The problem with *Jurassic Park* was the arrogance of human will and lack of humility before God, not technology.

The Avalanche of Evolutionary Assumptions

There were many obvious naturalistic or evolutionary assumptions built into the story which, while not totally unexpected, were too frequently exaggerated and overplayed.

For instance, by the end of the book and the film you felt bludgeoned by the connection between birds and dinosaurs. Some of these connections made some sense. An example would be the similarities between the eating behavior of birds of prey and the tyrannosaur. It is likely that both held their prey down with their claws or talons and tore pieces of flesh off with their jaws or beaks. A non-evolutionary interpretation is simply that similarity in structure indicates a similarity in function. An ancestral relationship is not necessary.

But many of the links had no basis in reality and were badly reasoned speculations. The owl-like hoots of the poison-spitting dilophosaur jumped out as an example of pure fantasy. There is no way to guess or estimate the vocalization behavior from a fossilized skeleton.

Another example came in the scene when Dr. Alan Grant and the two kids, Tim and Lex, meet a herd of gallimimus, a dinosaur similar in appearance to an oversized ostrich. Grant remarks that the herd turns in unison like a flock of birds avoiding a predator. Well, sure, flocks of birds do behave this way, but so do herds of grazing mammals and schools of fish. So observing this behavior in dinosaurs no more links them to birds than the webbed feet and flattened bill of the Australian platypus links it to ducks! Even in an evolutionary

scheme, most of the behaviors unique to birds would have evolved after the time of the dinosaurs.

A contradiction to the hypothesis that birds evolved from dinosaurs is the portrayal of the velociraptors hunting in packs. Mammals behave this way, as do some fishes such as the sharks, but I am not aware of any birds or reptiles that do. The concealment of this contradiction exposes the sensational intent of the story. It is used primarily to enhance the story, but many will assume that it is a realistic evolutionary connection.

Finally, a complex and fascinating piece of dialogue in the movie mixed together an attack on creationism, an exaltation of humanism and atheism, and a touch of feminist male bashing. I suspect that it was included in order to add a little humor and to keep aspects of political correctness in our collective consciousness. Shortly after the tour of the park begins and before they have seen any dinosaurs, Ian Malcolm reflects on the irony of what *Jurassic Park* has accomplished. He muses, "God creates dinosaurs. God destroys dinosaurs. God creates man. Man destroys God. Man creates dinosaurs." To which Ellie Satler replies, "Dinosaurs eat man. Woman inherits the earth!" Malcolm clearly mocks God by indicating that not only does man declare God irrelevant, but also proceeds to duplicate God's creative capability by creating dinosaurs all over again. We are as smart and as powerful as we once thought God to be. God is no longer needed.

While the movie was not openly hostile to religious views, Crichton clearly intended to marginalize theistic views of origins with humor, sarcasm, and an overload of evolutionary interpretations.

***Jurassic Park* and the New Age**

Ian Malcolm, in the scene in the biology lab as the group inspects a newly hatching velociraptor, pontificates that

“evolution” has taught us that life will not be limited or extinguished. “If there is one thing the history of evolution has taught us, it’s that life will not be contained. Life breaks free. It expands to new territories, it crashes through barriers, painfully, maybe even dangerously, but, uh, well, there it is!...I’m simply saying that, uh, life finds a way.”

Evolution is given an intelligence all its own! Life finds a way. There is an almost personal quality given to living things, particularly to the process of evolution. Most evolutionary scientists would not put it this way. To them evolution proceeds blindly, without purpose, without direction. This intelligence or purposefulness in nature actually reflects a pantheistic or new age perspective on the biological world.

The pantheist believes that all is one and therefore all is god. God is impersonal rather than personal and god’s intelligence permeates all of nature. Therefore the universe is intelligent and purposeful. Consequently a reverence for nature develops instead of reverence for God. In the lunch room scene Malcolm says, “The lack of humility before nature being displayed here, staggers me.” Malcolm speaks of Nature with a capital “N.” While we should respect and cherish all of nature as being God’s creation, humility seems inappropriate. Later in the same scene, Malcom again ascribes a personal quality to nature when he says, “What’s so great about discovery? It’s a violent penetrative act that scars what it explores. What you call discovery, I call the rape of the natural world.” Apparently, any scientific discovery intrudes upon the private domain of nature. Not only is this new age in its tone, but it also criticizes Western culture’s attempts to understand the natural world through science.

There were other unusual new age perspectives displayed by other characters. Paleobotanist Ellie Satler displayed an uncharacteristically unscientific and feminine, or was it New Age, perspective when she chastened John Hammond for thinking

that there was a rational solution to the breakdowns in the park. You may remember the scene in the dining hall, where philanthropist John Hammond and Dr. Satler are eating ice cream while tyrannosaurs and velociraptors are loose in the park with Dr. Grant, Ian Malcolm, and Hammond's grandchildren. At one point, Satler says, "You can't think your way out of this one, John. You have to feel it." Somehow, the solution to the problem is to be found in gaining perspective through your emotions, perhaps getting in touch with the "force" that permeates everything around us as in *Star Wars*.

Finally, in this same scene, John Hammond, provides a rather humanistic perspective on scientific discovery. He is responding to Ellie Satler's criticisms that a purely safe and enjoyable *Jurassic Park*, is not possible. Believing that man can accomplish anything he sets his mind to, Hammond blurts out, "Creation is a sheer act of will!" If men and women were gods in the pantheistic sense, perhaps this would be true of humans. But if you think about it, this statement is truer than first appears, for the true Creator of the universe simply spoke and it came into being. The beginning of each day's activity in Genesis 1 begins with the phrase, "And God said."

Creation is an act of will, but it is the Divine Will of the Supreme Sovereign of the universe. And we know this because the Bible tells us so!

They Clone Dinosaurs Don't They?

The movie *Jurassic Park* raised the possibility of cloning dinosaurs. Prior to the release of the movie, magazines and newspapers were filled with speculations concerning the real possibility of cloning dinosaurs. The specter of cloning dinosaurs was left too much in the realm of the eminently possible. Much of this confidence stemmed from statements from Michael Crichton, the author of the book, and producer Steven Spielberg.

Scientists are very reluctant to use the word “never.” But this issue is as safe as they come. Dinosaurs will never be cloned. The positive votes come mainly from Crichton, Spielberg, and the public. Reflecting back on his early research for the book, Michael Crichton said, “I began to think it really could happen.”[{6}](#) The official *Jurassic Park* Souvenir magazine fueled the speculation when it said, “The story of *Jurassic Park* is not far-fetched. It is based on actual, ongoing genetic and paleontologic research. In the words of Steven Spielberg: This is not science fiction; it’s science eventuality.”[{7}](#) No doubt spurred on by such grandiose statements, 58% of 1000 people polled for *USA Today* said they believe that scientists will be able to recreate animals through genetic engineering.[{8}](#)

Now contrast this optimism with the more sobering statements from scientists. The *Dallas Morning News* said, “You’re not likely to see Tyrannosaurus Rex in the Dallas Zoo anytime soon. Scientists say that reconstituting any creature from its DNA simply won’t work.”[{9}](#) And *Newsweek* summarized the huge obstacles when it said, “Researchers have not found an amber-trapped insect containing dinosaur blood. They have no guarantee that the cells in the blood, and the DNA in the cells, will be preserved intact. They don’t know how to splice the DNA into a meaningful blueprint, or fill the gaps with DNA from living creatures. And they don’t have an embryo cell to use as a vehicle for cloning.”[{10}](#) These are major obstacles. Let’s look at them one at a time.

First, insects in amber. DNA has been extracted from insects encased in amber from deposits as old as 120 million years.[{11}](#) Amber does preserve biological tissues very well. But only very small fragments of a few individual genes were obtained. The cloning of gene fragments is a far cry from cloning an entire genome. Without the entire intact genome, organized into the proper sequence and divided into chromosomes, it is virtually impossible to reconstruct an

organism from gene fragments.

Second, filling in the gaps. The genetic engineers of *Jurassic Park* used frog DNA to shore up the missing stretches of the cloned dinosaur DNA. But this is primarily a plot device to allow for the possibility of amphibian environmentally-induced sex change. An evolutionary scientist would have used reptilian or bird DNA which would be expected to have a higher degree of compatibility. It is also very far-fetched that an integrated set of genes to perform gender switching which does occur in some amphibians, could actually be inserted accidentally and be functional.

Third, a viable dinosaur egg. The idea of placing the dinosaur genetic material into crocodile or ostrich eggs is preposterous. You would need a real dinosaur egg of the same species as the DNA. Unfortunately, there are no such eggs left. And we can't recreate one without a model to copy. So don't get your hopes up. There will never be a real *Jurassic Park*!

Notes

1. Sharon Begley, "Here come the DNAsaurs," *Newsweek*, 14 June 1993, 61.
2. Patrick Cox, "*Jurassic Park*, A Luddite Monster," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 July 1993.
3. Steven Spielberg, quoted by Patrick Cox, *WSJ*, 9 July 1993.
4. Cox, *WSJ*, 9 July 1993.
5. From this point on all dialogue is from the movie *Jurassic Park*, Kathleen Kennedy and Gerald R. Molen, Producers, copyright 1993, Universal City Studios, Inc., and Amblin Entertainment.
6. Michael Crichton, quoted in "Crichton's Creation," *The Jurassic Park Official Souvenir Magazine*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: The

Topps Company, Inc., 1993), 4.

7. "Welcome to Jurassic Park," *The Jurassic Park Official Souvenir Magazine*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: The Topps Company, Inc., 1993), 2.

8. American Opinion Research poll of 1,000 adults from May 7-24, 1993 cited in *USA Today*, Friday, June 11, 1993, 2A.

9. Graphic inset, "How Real is *Jurassic Park?*," *The Dallas Morning News*, Monday, 14 June 1993, 10D.

10. Begley, "Here Come the DNAsaurs," 60-61.

11. Raul J. Cano, Hendrik N. Poinar, Norman J. Pieniasek, Aftim Acra, and George O. Poinar, Jr. "Amplification and sequencing of DNA from a 120 135-million-year-old weevil," *Nature* 363 (10 June 1993): 536-38.

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Measuring Morality

Introduction

In evaluating ethical systems we can be lost in a maze of systems, details, and terminology. Such arguments lead nowhere, shed little light on the subject, and polarize people into opposing camps. A helpful way to sort through this subject is to ask a basic question which will make clear the assumptions underlying disparate views. That question could be stated this way: "What makes an action right or wrong in this system?"

Cultural Relativism

When the question is asked “What makes an action right or wrong?” one category of answer will be: “Culture,” that is, culture determines what is right or wrong whatever a cultural group approves of is right; whatever the group disapproves of is wrong.

This is the ethical position known as cultural relativism. There are several key ingredients that make up this view.

1. Culture and Custom – In cultural relativism, moral standards are the result of group history and common experience which over time become enculturated ways of belief and action, i.e., customs, mores, and folkways.

2. Change – Since group experiences change with the passage of time, then naturally customs will change as a reflection of these new experiences.

3. Relativity – What is right (or normal) in one culture may be wrong (or abnormal) in another, since different forms of morality evolved in different places as a result of different experiences cultural adaptation. Thus, there are no fixed principles or absolutes.

4. Conscience – Cultural relativism holds that our consciences are the result of the childhood training and pressures from our group or tribe. What our consciences tell us is what our culture has trained them to tell us.

An Evaluation of Cultural Relativism

In trying to evaluate cultural relativism some things must be clear. First, it is quite obvious that there are many things we can all learn from other cultures. No culture has a monopoly on wisdom, virtue, or rationality. Second, just because we may do things a certain way doesn't mean that our way is the best or the most moral way to do those things.

Having said this, however, there are some problems cultural relativism faces. First, it is not enough to say that morals originated in the world and that they are constantly evolving. Cultural relativism needs to answer how value originated out of non-value; that is, how did the first value arise?

Second, cultural relativism seems to hold as a cardinal value that values change. But, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then this theory claims as an unchanging value that all values change and progress. Thus, the position contradicts itself.

Third, if there are no absolute values that exist transculturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are they to handle such conflicts?

Fourth, where does the group, tribe, or culture get its authority? Why can't individuals assume that authority?

Fifth, most of our heroes and heroines have been those who courageously went against culture and justified their actions by appealing to a higher standard. According to cultural relativism such people are always morally wrong.

Finally, cultural relativism assumes human physical evolution as well as social evolution.

Situational Ethics

When the question "What makes an action right or wrong?" is asked another answer one hears is that "love" is the determining principle. This is the basis of situational ethics, a system made popular by Joseph Fletcher.

Three Types of Ethical Systems

Fletcher believes there are three approaches to making moral decisions. The first he calls legalism which he defines as

“rules and regulations.” He rejects this system as being more concerned with law than with people.

Fletcher states that the second approach to morality is antinomianism, meaning “against law.” Antinomians reject all rules, laws, and principles regarding morality and see no basis for determining whether acts are moral or immoral. Fletcher rejects antinomianism because it refuses to take seriously the demands of love.

The third option, Fletcher’s personal choice, is situationism. It is often called situation ethics or the new morality. It argues for a middle road between legalism and antinomianism.

The Three Premises of Situationism

The first premise of situationism is that love is the sole arbiter of morality in any situation. This means that under certain conditions doing the loving thing may require us to break the rules or commandments of morality because they are only contingent, whereas love is the unchanging absolute.

Second, situationism holds that love should be defined in utilitarian terms. This means that to be truly loving an action should be judged by whether or not it contributes to the greatest good for the greatest number.

Third, situationism is forced to accept the view that the end justifies the means. The problem here is that the end in mind is often one chosen arbitrarily by the person who acts. This posture, of course, opens to the door for all sorts of brutality and abuse.

Criticisms of Situationism

The ethical system known as situationism is subject to several serious criticisms. The first is that love, as defined by Fletcher, is of no help whatsoever in making moral decisions because everyone may have a different opinion of what is loving or unloving in a given situation. The truth is, love

without ethical content is meaningless, and without rules (or principles, or commandments), love is incapable of giving any guidance on making moral decisions. In fact, it isn't love that guides many of the decisions in Fletcher's system at all, but preconceived personal preferences.

A second criticism of situationism is that in a moral system based on the consequences of our actions, we have to be able to predict those consequences ahead of time if we want to know whether or not we are acting morally.

We may start out with the best of intentions, but if our prediction of the desired consequences does not come true, we have committed an immoral act in spite of our good intentions. And now we begin to see the enormity of the situationist's dilemma: (1) calculating the myriad possible outcomes of each and every ethical possibility before making the needed decisions, and then (2) choosing the very best course of action. Such calculations are impossible and thus render the moral life impossible.

Naturalism and Behaviorism

When the question, "What makes an action right or wrong?" is posed to the naturalist, the answer comes back "Whatever is, is right." To see how we came to this point, we must review how naturalism and behaviorism arose in reaction to dualism.

Dualism's Difficulties

the philosophy of dualism holds that there are two principal substances in the universe: matter and mind (or soul or spirit). These two substances correspond to the material and immaterial aspects of human life and reality. The belief goes back all the way to Plato and is compatible with the Christian worldview.

When Descartes came along, he ascribed to the concept that matter and mind (or spirit) are different, but he eventually

came to assert that matter and mind (spirit) are so diverse that they have no common properties and cannot influence each other. This led to what is known as the mind-brain problem: namely, if mind and body (matter) cannot interact, how do we explain the fact that the mind appears to affect the body and the body appears to affect the mind?

Naturalism Catches On

While philosophers and scientists pondered this dilemma, the growing implications of Newton's discovery of the law of gravity served to further complicate things. Since observation and mathematical calculations revealed that all bodies (including human bodies) are subject to the same seemingly unbreakable laws, the existence of the mind (or spirit) became increasingly difficult to maintain. Consequently, some philosophers thought it much simpler to believe in only one substance in the universe.

Thus dualism (meaning two substances: matter and mind) lost popular appeal and naturalism or materialism (meaning one substance: matter) gained the ascendancy. If there is only one substance in the universe, then all particles of matter are interrelated in a causal sequence and the universe, human beings included, must be a giant computer controlled by blind physical forces. Thus, according to naturalism, humans are mere cogs in the machine. We cannot act upon the world, rather the world acts upon us. In such a world the mind is just the by-product of the brain as the babbling is the by-product of the brook. Freedom, therefore, is an illusion, and strictly speaking there is no morality at all.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism grew out of naturalism and is an extension of it. One form of behaviorism is called sociobiology, a theory that morality is rooted in our genes. That is, all forms of life exist solely to serve the purposes of the DNA code. According to sociobiology, the ultimate rationale for one's existence

and behavior is the preservation or advancement of the person's genes.

The more well-known form of behaviorism comes from B. F. Skinner. He stated that we are what we are largely because of our environmental training or conditioning.

Evaluating Behaviorism

When we remember that both forms behaviorism are built on naturalism, the implications are the same: man is a machine; all our actions are the product of forces beyond our control, and we possess no special dignity in the universe. Thus, strictly speaking, behaviorism does not propose a theory of morality, but it results in antimorality.

Emotive Ethics

In modern ethical thought an unusual answer has been given to the question, "What makes an action right or wrong?" The answer? "Nothing is literally right or wrong: these terms are simply the expression of emotion and as such are neither true nor false." This is answer of emotive ethics.

This theory of morality originated with David Hume and his belief that knowledge is limited to sense impressions. Beyond sense impressions, our knowledge is unfounded. What difference does such a theory make? It renders intelligent talk about God, the soul, or morality impossible, because real knowledge is limited to phenomena observable by our physical senses. Discussion of phenomena not observable by our physical senses is considered to belong to the realm of metaphysics, a realm that cannot be touched, felt, seen, heard, nor smelled.

What can we know if our knowledge is limited to our sense experience? Hume claimed that all we can know are matters of fact. We can only make factually verifiable statements such as, "That crow is black" or "The book is on the table." On the other hand, we cannot, in this system, make a statement like,

“Stealing is wrong.” We cannot even say, “Murder is wrong.” Why? Because wrong is not a factual observation and cannot be verified empirically. In fact, it is a meaningless statement, and merely an expression of personal preference. We are really just saying “I don’t like stealing,” and “I dislike murder.” It is on the order of saying, “I like tomatoes.” Someone else can say, “I dislike tomatoes,” without factual contradiction because it’s just the statement of two different personal preferences.

In summary, emotive ethics holds that it is impossible to have a rational discussion about morals. This is because ethical statements cannot be analyzed since they do not meet the criteria of scientific statements; that is, they are not observation statements. Thus, in emotivism, all actions are morally neutral.

An Evaluation of Emotivism

Upon reflection, emotivism is less devastating than it first appears. For starters, emotivists can never say that another ethical system is wrong; they can only volunteer that they don’t like or prefer other systems. Likewise, they can’t say that we ought to accept their views. Emotivism, therefore, by its own principles, allows us to reject this theory.

Second, unless emotivists provide some rational criterion for making moral choices, they must allow moral anarchy. Their only objection to terrorist morality would be, “I don’t like it.” The emotivist, then, is left with no reason to judge or oppose a dictator or terrorist.

Third, the thesis of emotivism that rational discussion of morality is impossible is false. Their assumption that the only meaningful utterances are statements of factual observation is one of emotivism’s basic philosophical flaws, and it cannot be factually verified! It does not fit into the “crow is black” model proposed by emotivists themselves.

Morality is open to rational discussion. Emotivism's arbitrary limitations on language cannot be maintained.

Traditional Absolutes

Earlier we considered four systems of ethics cultural relativism, situationism, behaviorism, and emotivism that in one way or another all self-destruct, ultimately destroyed by their own arbitrarily chosen principles.

Now we must reexamine traditional ethics: the Judeo-Christian ethic based on revelation, i.e., the Bible.

1. God's moral revelation is based on His nature.

God is separate from everything that exists, is free of all imperfections and limitations, and is His own standard. No moral rule exists outside of Him. Holiness, goodness, and truthfulness indeed all biblical morality are rooted in the nature of God.

2. Man is a unique moral being.

The biblical picture of mankind differs strikingly from the humanistic versions of mankind. We alone were created in the image of God and possess at least four qualities that distinguish us from the animals: personality, ability to reason, moral nature, and spiritual nature.

3. God's moral principles have historical continuity.

If God's moral revelation is rooted in His nature, it is clear that those moral principles will transcend time. Although specific commands may change from one era to another, the principles remain constant.

4. God's moral revelation has intrinsic value.

God's standards, like the laws of nature, have built-in consequences. Just as we have to deal with the laws of nature,

we will eventually have to deal with the consequences of violating God's standards unless we put our faith in Christ who took on the consequences of our disobedience by His death on the cross.

5. Law and love are harmonized in the Scriptures.

In the biblical revelation, love and law are not mutually exclusive, but are harmonized. Love fulfills the law. If we love God, we will want to keep His commandments.

6. Obedience to God's Law is not legalism.

The Bible speaks strongly against legalism since biblical morality is much more than external obedience to a moral code. No one can live up to God's standards without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, because we are judged by our attitudes and motivations not just external performance.

7. God's moral revelation was given for our benefit.

Though in the short run it may sometimes appear that biblical moral standards are too restrictive, we can be sure that such injunctions are for our benefit because of His love for us. After all, in the long run God knows best since because of His omniscience, He can calculate all the consequences.

8. Exceptions to God's revelation must have biblical sanction.

Biblical morality is not based on calculating the consequences since only God can do that perfectly. Our responsibility is to obey; God's responsibility is to take care of the consequences.

9. "Ought" does not always imply "can."

According to the Bible, we do not, and cannot, live up to what we know to be right. Yet God is not mocking us because He has left us a way out. He made provision for our weaknesses and failures because Christ's death on the cross in our behalf

satisfied His moral requirements.

What makes an act right or wrong then? The answer is: the revealed will of God found in the Bible.

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