

# The Liberal Mind

*Kerby Anderson tries to understand the liberal mind from a biblical perspective. What are the assumptions the liberals make? How do those assumptions square with the Bible?*

As we begin this discussion, I want to make a clear distinction between the terms “liberal” and “leftist.” We often use the terms interchangeably but there is an important difference.



Dennis Prager wrote about this and even described those differences in a PragerU video.[\[1\]](#) His argument is that traditional liberalism has far more in common with conservatism than it does with leftism. Here are some examples he uses to make his point.

Liberals and leftists have a different view of race. The traditional liberal position on race is that the color of one's skin is insignificant. By contrast, leftists argue that the notion that race is insignificant is itself racist. Liberals were committed to racial integration and would have rejected the idea of separate black dormitories and separate black graduations on university campuses.

Nationalism is another difference. Dennis Prager says that liberals always deeply believed in the nation-state. Leftists, on the other hand, oppose nationalism and promote class solidarity.

Superman comics illustrate the point. When the writers of Superman were liberal, Superman was not only an American but also one who fought for “Truth, justice, and the American

way.” The left-wing writers of Superman comics had Superman announce a few years ago that he was going to speak before the United Nations and inform them that he was renouncing his American citizenship.

Perhaps the best example is free speech. American liberals agree with the statement: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend your right to say it.” Leftists today are leading a nationwide suppression of free speech everywhere from the college campuses to the Big Tech companies.

Capitalism and the free enterprise system would be yet another example. Dennis Prager says, “Liberals have always been pro capitalism,” though they often wanted government “to play a bigger role” in the economy. Leftists oppose capitalism and are eagerly promoting socialism.

Liberals have had a love of Western civilization and taught it at most universities. They were promoters of the liberal arts and fine arts. In fact, one of the most revered liberals in American history was President Franklin Roosevelt who talked about the need to protect Western Civilization and even Christian civilization.

Today Western Civilization classes are rarely if ever taught in the university. That’s because leftists don’t believe Western Civilization is superior to any other civilization. Leftists label people who attempt to defend western values as racist and accuse them of promoting white supremacy. And attempts to promote religious liberty are dismissed as thinly disguised attacks on the LGBT community.

In conclusion, liberals and leftists are very different.

## **Ethics and a Belief in Right and Wrong**

The philosophical foundation for most liberal perspectives is secularism. If you don’t believe in God and the Bible, then

you certainly don't believe in biblical absolutes or even moral absolutes. Dostoyevsky put it this way: "If God is dead, then everything is permitted."

Even atheists admit that a view of God affects human behavior. Richard Dawkins recently expressed his fear that the removal of religion would be a bad idea for society because it would give people "license to do really bad things."

He likens the idea of God to surveillance, or as he puts it, the "divine spy camera in the sky."[\[2\]](#) People generally tend to do the right thing when someone is watching them. They tend to do bad things when no one is watching. He goes on to add that the "Great Spy Camera theory" isn't a good reason for him to believe in God.

It is also worth mentioning that more and more young people aren't making decisions about right and wrong based on logic but instead based on feelings. I began to notice this decades ago. College students making a statement or challenging a conclusion used to say "I think" as they started a sentence." Then I started to see more and more of them say "I feel" at the start of a sentence. They wouldn't use reason to discuss an issue. Instead, they would use emotion and talk about how they felt about a particular issue.

The liberal mind also has a very different foundation for discussing right and wrong. Dennis Prager recently admitted that he had been wrong. All of his life, he has said that the left's moral compass is broken. But he has concluded that "in order to have a broken moral compass, you need to have a moral compass to begin with. But the left doesn't have one."[\[3\]](#)

He doesn't mean that conclusion as an attack. It is merely an observation that the left doesn't really think in terms of good and evil. We assume that other people think that way because we think that way. But that is not how most of the

people on the left perceive the world.

Karl Marx is a good example. He divided the world by economic class (the worker and the owner). One group was exploiting the other group. Good and evil aren't really relevant when you are thinking in terms of class struggle. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, operated "beyond good and evil."

To the Marxists, "there is no such thing as a universal good or universal evil." Those of us who perceive the world from a Judeo-Christian worldview see ethics as relevant to the moral standard, not the person or their social status.

A biblical view of ethics and morality begins with the reality that God exists and that He has revealed to us moral principles we are to apply to our lives and society. Those absolute moral principles are tied to God's character and thus unchanging.

## **A Naïve View of Human Nature**

In this article we are talking about the liberal mind, while often making a distinction between liberals and the left. When it comes to the proper view of human nature, both groups have a naïve and inaccurate view.

You can discover this for yourself by asking a simple question: Do you believe people are basically good? You will get an affirmative answer from most people in America because we live in a civilized society. We don't have to deal with the level of corruption or terror that is a daily life in so many other countries in the world.

But if you press the question, you will begin to see how liberals have difficulty explaining the holocaust and Muslim terrorism. Because the liberal mind starts with the assumption that people are basically good. After all, that is what so many secular philosophers and psychologists have been saying

for centuries. Two world wars and other wars during the 20th century should have caused most people to reject the idea that people are basically good.

The Bible teaches just the opposite. Romans 3:23 reminds us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” This statement about the deceitfulness of our heart may seem extreme until we realize that Jesus also taught that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

This naïve view of human nature should concern all of us. Young people, two generations after Auschwitz, believe people are basically good. One reason is biblical illiteracy. Another reason is historical illiteracy. A recent survey found two thirds of young people did not know six million died in the Holocaust and nearly half could not name one of the Nazi death camps.[{4}](#)

This naïve view of human nature may also explain another phenomenon we have discussed before. One of the untruths described in the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, is the belief that the battle for truth is “us versus them.”[{5}](#) If you think that people are basically good and you have to confront someone who disagrees with you, then they must be a bad person. They aren’t just wrong. They are evil.

Tribalism has been with us for centuries. That is nothing new about people joining and defending a tribe. But that has become more intense because of the rhetoric on university campuses and the comments spreading through social media. We don’t have to live this way, but the forces in society are making the divisions in society worse by the day.

A biblical perspective starts with the teaching that all are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) and thus have value and

dignity. But all of us have a sin nature (Romans 5:12). We should interact with others who disagree with us with humility (Ephesians 4:2) and grace (Colossians 4:6).

## Big Government

We will now look at why liberals and the left promote big government. The simple answer relates to our discussion above about human nature. If you believe that people are basically good, then it is easy to assume that political leaders and bureaucrats will want to do the best for the citizens.

Christians agree that government is necessary and that it is one of the institutions ordained by God (Romans 13:1-7). There is a role for government to set the rules of governing and to resolve internal disputes through a legal system. Government is not God. But for people who don't believe in God, then the state often becomes God.

Friedrich Hayek wrote about this drive toward big government and the bureaucratic state in his classic book, [\*The Road to Serfdom\*](#). He argued in his book that "the most important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people."[\[6\]](#)

The character of citizens is changed because they yield their will and decision-making to a more powerful government. They may have done so willingly in order to have a welfare state. Or they may have done so unwillingly because a dictator has taken control of the reins of power. Either way, Hayek argues, their character has been altered because the control over every detail of economic life is ultimately control of life itself.

Friedrich Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom* to warn us that sometimes the road can be paved with good intentions. Most government officials and bureaucrats write laws, rules, and regulations with every good intention. They desire to make the

world a better place by preventing catastrophe and by encouraging positive actions from their citizens. But in their desire to control and direct every aspect of life, they take us down the road to serfdom.

He argued that people who enter into government and run powerful bureaucracies are often people who enjoy running not only the bureaucracy but also the lives of its citizens. In making uniform rules from a distance, they deprive the local communities of the freedom to apply their own knowledge and wisdom to their unique situations. A government seeking to be a benevolent god, usually morphs into a malevolent tyrant.

The liberal mind is all too willing to allow political leaders and bureaucrats to make decisions for the public. But that willingness is based on two flawed assumptions. First, human beings are not God and thus government leaders will certainly make flawed decisions that negatively affect the affairs of its citizens. Second, liberals do not believe we have a sin nature (Romans 3:23), and that includes government leaders. Even the best of them will not always be wise, compassionate, and altruistic. This is why the founders of this country established checks and balances in government to limit the impact of sinful behavior.

## Tolerance?

If there is one attitude that you would think would be synonymous with the liberal mind, it would be [tolerance](#). That may have been true in the past. Liberalism championed the idea of free thought and free speech. That is no longer the case.

Liberals have been developing a zero-tolerance culture. In some ways, that has been a positive change. We no longer tolerate racism. We no longer tolerate sexism. Certain statements, certain jokes, and certain attitudes have been deemed off-limits.

The problem is that the politically correct culture of the left moved the lines quickly to begin to attack just about any view or value contrary to the liberal mind. Stray at all from the accepted limits of leftist thinking and you will earn labels like racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic.

Quickly the zero-tolerance culture became the cancel culture. It is not enough to merely label an opponent with a smear, the left demands that an "enemy" lose their social standing and even their job and livelihood for deviating from what is acceptable thought. A mendacious social media mob will make sure that you pay a heavy penalty for contradicting the fundamental truths of the liberal mind.

One phenomenon that promotes this intolerance is the use of smears and negative labels. For example, patriotism and pride in your country is called xenophobia. Acknowledging the innate differences between males and females is labelled sexist. Promoting the idea that we are all of one race (the human race) and that all lives matter is called racist. Questioning whether we should redefine traditional marriage is deemed homophobic. Arguing that very young children should not undergo sex assignment surgery is called transphobia. Pointing out that most terrorist attacks come from Muslim terrorists is labelled Islamophobic.

Should Christians be [tolerant](#)? The answer is yes, we should be tolerant, but that word has been redefined in society to argue that we should accept every person's behavior. The Bible does not permit that. That is why I like to use the word [civility](#). Essentially, that is the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

Civility requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. That means we should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right, and we could be wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but



with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." We can disagree with other without being disagreeable. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that "A gentle answer turns away wrath."

This is an important principle as we try to understand the liberal mind and work to build bridges to others in our society.

## Notes

1. Dennis Prager, Left or Liberal?, <https://www.prageru.com/video/left-or-liberal/>.
2. David Sanderson, "Ending religion is a bad idea, says Richard Dawkins," *The Times*, October 5, 2019, [www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ending-religion-is-a-bad-idea-says-richard-dawkins-sqqdbmcpq](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ending-religion-is-a-bad-idea-says-richard-dawkins-sqqdbmcpq)
3. Dennis Prager, "The Left's Moral Compass Isn't Broken," September 15, 2020, [townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2020/09/15/the-lefts-moral-compass-isnt-broken-n2576225](http://townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2020/09/15/the-lefts-moral-compass-isnt-broken-n2576225).
4. Ryan Miller, "Almost two-thirds of millennials, Gen Z don't know that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, survey finds," *USA Today*, September 16, 2020, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/16/holocaust-history-millennials-gen-z-cant-name-concentration-camps/5792448002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/16/holocaust-history-millennials-gen-z-cant-name-concentration-camps/5792448002/).
5. Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, et al., *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York City: Penguin Press, 2018, [probe.org/coddling-of-the-american-mind/](http://probe.org/coddling-of-the-american-mind/).
6. F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents, the Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 48.

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# Arguments Against Abortion

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand that concerns about abortion are more than just a fundamentalist backlash. He reviews arguments from a Christian, biblical perspective and then introduces arguments from medical, legal and philosophical points of views as well. He concludes, "The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life."*

## Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

In this essay we will be discussing arguments against abortion. The first set of arguments we will consider are biblical arguments.

That being said, we must begin by acknowledging that the Bible doesn't say anything about abortion directly. Why the silence of the Bible on abortion? The answer is simple. Abortion was so unthinkable to an Israelite woman that there was no need to even mention it in the criminal code. Why was abortion an unthinkable act? First, children were viewed as a gift or heritage from the Lord. Second, the Scriptures state—and the Jews concurred—that God opens and closes the womb and is sovereign over conception. Third, childlessness was seen as a curse.

One of the key verses to understand in developing a biblical view of the sanctity of human life is Psalm 139. This psalm is the inspired record of David's praise for God's sovereignty in his life. He begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows what David is doing at any given point in time. He goes on to acknowledge that God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might

go, he cannot escape from God, whether he travels to heaven or ventures into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. Finally David contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (vv. 13-16).*

Here David speaks of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn't speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David: this is David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

In verse 13, we see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14 and 15, David reflects on the fact that he is a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praises God for how wonderfully God has woven him together.

David draws a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he refers to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion harkens back to Genesis 2:7 which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also notes that "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated *unformed substance* is a

noun derivative of a verb meaning “to roll up.” When David was just forming as a fetus, God’s care and compassion already extended to him. The reference to “God’s eyes” is an Old Testament term used to connote divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or group of people.

Next, we will consider additional Old Testament passages that provide a biblical argument against abortion.

## **Additional Old Testament Arguments Against Abortion**

Now that we’ve looked at Psalm 139, the most popular argument against abortion, let’s look at two other Old Testament passages.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. It was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). David concludes that from his time of conception, he had a sin nature. This would imply that he carried the image of God from the moment of conception, including the marred image scarred from sin.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Bearing the image of God is the essence of humanness. And though God’s image in man was marred at the Fall, it was not erased (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9). Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and therefore fully human in God’s sight.

This verse also provides support for what is called the traducian view of the origin of the soul. According to this perspective, human beings were potentially in Adam (Rom. 5:12, Heb. 7:9-10) and thus participated in his original sin. The “soulish” part of humans is transferred through conception.

Therefore, an unborn baby is morally accountable and thus fully human.

Another argument against abortion can be found in the Old Testament legal code, specifically Exodus 21:22-25.

*If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*

The verses appear to teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies then the law of retaliation (lex talionis) should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb has the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some commentators have come to a different conclusion because they believe the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they argue that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born.

There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, the normal Hebrew word for *miscarry* is not used in this passage (cf. Gen. 31:38; Exod. 23:26; Job 2:10; Hos. 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in verse 22 is a premature birth not an accidental miscarriage. Second, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, the passage cannot be used to justify abortion. The injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Also, the action was a criminal offense and punishable by law.

# Medical Arguments Against Abortion

Thus far in our discussion we have looked at biblical arguments against abortion. But what if someone doesn't believe in the Bible? Are there other arguments we can use? Yes, there are: medical arguments, for example. Let's look, then, at some of the medical arguments against abortion.

The medical arguments against abortion are compelling. For example, *at conception the embryo is genetically distinct from the mother*. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother. A developing embryo is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another set of medical arguments against abortion surround *the definition of life and death*. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could they also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb. If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus in about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a

majority of abortions.

Opponents to abortion also raise the controversial issue of fetal pain. Does the fetus feel pain during abortion? The evidence seems fairly clear and consistent. Consider this statement made in a British medical journal: "Try sticking an infant with a pin and you know what happens. She opens her mouth to cry and also pulls away. Try sticking an 8-week-old human fetus in the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth and pulls his hand away. A more technical description would add that changes in heart rate and fetal movement also suggest that intrauterine manipulations are painful to the fetus."[\[1\]](#)

Obviously, other medical criteria could be used. For example, the developing fetus has a unique set of fingerprints as well as genetic patterns that make it unique. The development of sonography has provided us with a "window to the womb" showing us that a person is growing and developing in the mother's womb. We can discern eyes, ears, fingers, a nose, and a mouth. Our visual senses tell us this is a baby growing and maturing. This is not a piece of protoplasm; this is a baby inside the womb.

The point is simple. *Medical science leads to a pro-life perspective rather than a pro-choice perspective.* If medical science can be used at all to draw a line, the clearest line is at the moment of conception. Medical arguments provide a strong case against abortion and for life.

## **Legal Arguments Against Abortion**

At this point in our discussion, we need to look at legal arguments against abortion.

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. It violated standard legal reasoning. The Supreme Court decided not to decide when life begins and then turned around and overturned the laws of 50 different states.

Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous. It overturned state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 30 million abortions (roughly the population of Canada) in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by acknowledging that it did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then it should have acted "as if" life was in the womb. A crucial role of government is to protect life. Government cannot remove a segment of the human population from its protection without adequate justification.

The burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. Put another way: "when in doubt, don't." A hunter who hears rustling in the bushes shouldn't fire until he knows what is in the bushes. Likewise, a Court which doesn't know when life begins, should not declare open season on the unborn.

The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence. The defendant is assumed to be innocent unless proven guilty. Again the burden of proof is on the entity that would take away life or liberty. The benefit of the doubt lies with the defense.

The Supreme Court clearly stated that it does not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal



principle by acting as if it just proved that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamental Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Just as there are solid medical arguments against abortion, so also there are legal arguments against abortion. *Roe vs. Wade* was a bad decision that needs to be overturned.

## **Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion**

Finally, we will conclude our discussion by looking at philosophical arguments against abortion.

A third set of arguments against abortion would be philosophical arguments. A key philosophical question is where do you draw the line? Put another way, when does a human being become a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are

given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Ethicist Paul Ramsey frequently warned that any argument for abortion could logically be also used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, of DNA fame, demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal *Nature* that if "a child were considered to be legally born when two days old, it could be examined to see whether it was an 'acceptable member of human society.'" Obviously this is not only an argument for abortion; it's an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, "A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural

influences later.” Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

More recently some line-drawers have focused on a mental criterion for personhood. Dr. Joseph Fletcher argues in his book *Humanhood* that “Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are.” This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it’s adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ. In other writings, Joseph Fletcher suggested that an “individual” was not truly a “person” unless he has an IQ of at least 40.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Obviously there are a number of biblical arguments against abortion. But there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

## **Endnote**

1. H.P. Valman and J. F. Pearson, What the Fetus Feels, *British Medical Journal* (26 January 1980): 233-234.

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*Note from Kerby Anderson:*

*So many people ask for more information on abortion; I suggest you check out the Abortion Facts Web site at [www.abortionfacts.com](http://www.abortionfacts.com).*

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# Personhood and Origins

## Does One's View of Origins Really Matter?

In the midst of carpools, meetings, appointments, and everything else that life throws at us, does it really matter whether someone is a Darwinist or a Creationist, or holds some position in between?

Whether we are aware of it or not, we all filter our life experiences through the lens of our worldview. Nancy Pearcey, author of *Total Truth*, describes a worldview as the “mental map that tells us how to navigate the world effectively.”[\[1\]](#)

As technology advances, we find ourselves wading through very murky waters that deal with questions of personhood at the edges of life. Questions about embryos and human experimentation and euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are no longer speculative theories for ethicists to ponder in their ivory towers, but something that ordinary people have to deal with either through voting or through very personal decisions. And it can be confusing—which is precisely why we need a map to guide us!

Consider this: The state of Washington recently passed a law approving physician-assisted suicide. Many are lobbying congress to vote on lifting restrictions on funding for embryonic stem cell research. Great Britain is voting on funding for research on human/animal hybrids. And many of us will have to make difficult decisions about a loved one in the hospital. Just last week, a British couple used in vitro fertilization to select from a group of their own embryos one who did not have the genetic markers for breast and cervical cancer which ran in the family, leaving the other embryos to be destroyed. One's view of origins, and particularly who man is within that view, has a profound impact on how we make

decisions regarding such bioethical issues.

## Characteristics of the Map

Pearcey says that every worldview, or mental map, has to answer these three questions: 1) How did we get here? 2) What happened to us? and, 3) How do we make things right? *Christian theism* answers these questions with the biblical record of:

- 1) Creation,*
- 2) Fall of mankind from favor and fellowship with God,*
- 3) Redemption of fallen mankind through salvation in Jesus Christ.*

*Naturalism* would answer these questions with:

- 1) Macro-evolution, natural selection randomly acting on chance variations, (no one to answer to)*
- 2) No right or wrong, just “survival of the fittest,” (no inherent law to be held to), and the*
- 3) Evolving and passing on of our DNA (no over arching plan or ultimate meaning to life than to just continue living).*

The answers to these questions directly affect our view of personhood. Both secularists and Christians would agree that “a person” is valued as having a right to life and in the United States; we would agree with our founding Fathers that they have certain inalienable rights. But the answer to the question “What is a person and how should they be treated?” is very different under each worldview, and will guide you to very different waters.

## The Christian Theism Map

From the Christian view of origins, we find that man is created in the image of God<sup>{2}</sup> and that he is a special part of creation, above all other creatures.<sup>{3}</sup> Part of being made

in the image of God is that humans are more than the sum of their physical parts. People are made up of both body and mind (or soul), and these physical and spiritual components are integral to a person's identity.[{4}](#) James 2:26 says that the body apart from the spirit is dead. The story of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:55 makes clear that when her spirit returned to her body, she was once again alive. Also passages about the resurrection, such as 1 Corinthians 15, make a distinction between the spirit and the body.

If people are both spiritual and physical, then their value is not just placed in physical abilities or in their genetics. There is value beyond the body. We would still consider a disabled person, or a person in a coma, or a victim of a horrible accident as a valuable person. Even if their body became functionless or mangled, they would still be valued as a person because their value and identity entails more than the physical self. The body is important and a crucial part of their identity, but it is not the only measure.

## The Naturalism Map [{5}](#)

From the naturalistic view of origins, popularly embodied in Darwinism, man is part of a long heritage that began with natural selection acting first on chemicals, then cells, then simple animals, and now on the current assortment of animals, including *homo sapien*. Man is considered another animal, and does not necessarily deserve any more rights or privileges than any other animal. Because the naturalistic worldview denies the supernatural or spiritual, man is seen as merely a physical being. Therefore, his value stems entirely from in his physical capabilities and genetics.

This mental map has led to such murky waters as the *eugenics movement*, through which scientists engaged in sterilization of prisoners, the intellectually weak and the poor because they wanted to improve the human race and purge "bad genes" from the gene pool. They also considered certain races as more

advanced, or more evolved, than other races. The logical end of the *eugenics movement* was realized in Nazi Germany. Darwinism is not necessarily the cause of eugenics, but eugenics is an unsurprising logical possibility under that particular worldview.

From the naturalistic view of personhood, one man can value another man based solely on his physical appearance or capabilities. Logically, from the naturalistic worldview, one can justify almost any action because “survival of the fittest” is the reigning ethic.

The eugenics movement is widely considered a black mark on American history, and many would consider it long gone with our lessons learned. However, many bioethicists, doctors and medical health professionals still practice medicine and make decisions based on a worldview and values that were used to justify eugenics. It is common to discuss a person’s “quality of life” and make decisions on how to treat—or even if they should treat a patient—based on this measure. “Quality of life” criteria are often arbitrary measures of a person’s worth based on how well they function physically and mentally compared to what is deemed “normal.” Unfortunately, such subjective “quality of life” ratings and scales likely reflect what the doctors or authors’ personally value more than the dignity or sanctity of the individual they are measuring. Quality of life measurements and our example of the Great Britain couple choosing an embryo based on its genetic markers are examples of people practicing a type of eugenics, whether they wish to call it that or not.

## **So Origins Does Matter. . .**

These are two very different views of man, and lead to widely varying conclusions about personhood or the sanctity of human life.

The Bible may not contain the words “stem cells” or

“euthanasia” but it does speak to the value and sanctity of human life. It also addresses how we should value one another and why it is so tempting to judge each other based on our own standards instead of God’s standards. Whether we are talking about the Pharisee who was thankful he was not like the tax collector or the person who decides that embryos and the elderly should not continue living because they’re worth more dead than alive, one person is placing a value on another person based on his own criteria of values as opposed to God’s. In fact, he is putting himself in the place of God.

I am reminded of a passage when God was directing Samuel to anoint a new king. Samuel was judging the sons of Jesse based on physical standards only, “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’”<sup>{6}</sup> Samuel judged Jesse’s sons based on their physical features, but God reminds him that he has standards that are beyond what man can see. The naturalistic worldview of personhood is similar to Samuel’s standards of who would be a fitting king, but the Christian theistic worldview holds that it is God’s standards, not man’s, that dictate how we are to value a person. God values individuals despite their physical features and while we may not see their value right away (David was a young shepherd), God does. Thus, we must trust that what he values is what we should value.

Again, our worldview is like a mental map. Personally, if I had to navigate murky waters, I would rather have a map made by the Creator, himself—a God’s-eye-view of the waters—than the limited perspective of someone standing right there in the middle of it. Whose map are you going to use?

## Notes

1. Pearcey, Nancy, *Total Truth*, Crossway Books, 2005, p. 23. See Probe’s review of *Total Truth* here:



[www.probe.org/total-truth](http://www.probe.org/total-truth).

2. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27 (ESV Bible).

3. "And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26 (ESV); See also Genesis 1:28-30.

4. See Probe's article on The Spiritual Brain:

[www.probe.org/the-spiritual-brain](http://www.probe.org/the-spiritual-brain).

5. For more information on Darwinism, see Probe's articles at: [www.probe.org/category/faith-and-science/origins/](http://www.probe.org/category/faith-and-science/origins/).

6. 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV Bible).

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## **"Is It Small-Minded of Me to Base Morality on Scripture?"**

A friend of mine and I were recently discussing different things and two things relating to scripture things came up. The first (what started the argument) Was I asked whether morality could be determined by age; for example, we say that is wrong for a kid but OK for an adult. My view was, if something is wrong should it not be wrong for all? She is a Christian but made some comments I wasn't sure how to respond to. She implied that I "thought small" because after about thirty minutes of debate I realized my morality was based totally on scripture. When I said "moral" I meant biblical. She however was saying the Bible doesn't answer everything and it is up to society to decide, because as she pointed out not every one is Christian and I needed to see the whole picture.

This sounds immoral to me and in arguing it (using the Bible) she asked what seems un-biblical, yet I was stumped she said that "If the Old Testament grew into the New Testament then who's to say it isn't still growing?" She almost seemed to be implying that 1) scripture is not a complete canon yet and 2) it should change based on society. This seems very un-biblical and wrong but I wasn't sure how to respond effectively.

Thanks for your e-mail. The two questions you brought up show a great deal of insight on your part. I would be honored to help you work through these issues.

First, let's deal with morality. It's great that you base your moral behavior based on biblical principles. Unfortunately, not everyone is so wise. But even biblically speaking, there are some things that may be appropriate for some people that are not so wise for others. For instance, look at marriage. Wouldn't it be safe to say that a grown up married man is morally free to have sexual intimacy with his wife, but an unmarried teenage boy is not morally free to have sex with his girlfriend? Circumstances may determine some of our standards of behavior. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 that we are free to act the way we think we should (since we have been freed from the Law), but that we must first consider that our actions affect others. Christian morality is not based on a list of rights and wrongs, but on the law of love for one another. Sure, there are some things that are always wrong (such as murder), and some that are always right (such as love), but to say that every wrong is wrong for everyone is going to lead to trouble.

Your friend has a point that not every issue is covered specifically in the Bible. But the Bible's principles can be applied to every issue. So, in fact, to think biblically is to think about the "big picture." Society is actually more interested in keeping order than in encouraging morality. Age, therefore, does make a difference about what a person ought to do; not because morality is relative, but because sources of

weakness can be different in people.

The freedom that we Christians have to make decisions is kept in check with our biblically-minded discernment about what is best for others and ourselves.

To answer your second question: yes, the canon of Scripture is closed. The New Testament is not just a highlight in the evolutionary development of the Old Testament. It is the “New Covenant.” It’s called a covenant because Jesus Christ fulfilled in person the “Old Covenant’s” purpose. Hebrews 1:1-2 points out that God has spoken in these “last days” in the person of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the inspired foreshadowing of Jesus. The New Testament is the inspired testimony to His life and works. The first few centuries of Christians had divinely guided criteria for evaluating the worthiness of a letter to be included in the New Testament. (For more on this, see [Don Closson's article on the Web.](#)) Nothing society or anyone else can come up with since could come close to adding to what Jesus has already done.

Furthermore, Jesus is the Word of God. How can God’s very presence on earth be matched? His ascension into the heavens ended His earthly ministry. In the same way, His ascension also ended any speculation about another testament. (That’s why there can be no new New Testament.) When He spoke the words “It is finished” on the cross, it illustrates that there is nothing else to be revealed. All that is necessary now is the fulfillment of His New Covenant, with the ministry of God’s Spirit (through His church) and Jesus’ glorious return. Our job is not to write more books of the Bible in order to make it apply to society. Instead we need to take what’s already there and interpret it’s vital and timeless message to every new society.

I hope this helps with your questions. If you have any more questions or need some elaborating, please feel free to respond. Awesome questions! He rewards those who seek Him.

# **“How Does the Bible Show Abortion is Murder?”**

In my “Introduction to Ethics” class, the topic for the night was abortion. As the discussion progressed, people all around me were saying that an abortion is good to do under any situation (rape, too young, the woman’s choice) and I argued my point on that abortion is murder. I stated that the Bible had claimed to that statement also. The teacher then told me that I have to prove to him and the class that the Bible says abortion is murder. Can you help me with verses, or anything I could possibly use to make my point valid?

Glad you asked!

The perspective that abortion is murder depends on two points: 1) The Bible condemns murder (taking the life of another human being), and 2) The unborn baby is a person—a human being.

## **Point #1: What is murder?**

Exodus 20:13, usually translated “Thou shalt not kill,” one of the Ten Commandments, actually means “Thou shalt not murder.” (There is a difference. Taking the life of another person in war, for example, is not the same thing as murder.)

## **Point #2: The humanity of the unborn**

*1. Both Hebrew and Greek (the languages of the Bible) do not make a distinction between pre-born and born babies. Whether they live inside or outside the womb is not important as to*

*their value or personhood.*

*2. For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be. (Ps. 139:13-16)*

*This portion of scripture is written about the unborn baby.*

*3. The Lord called me from the womb;  
from the body of my mother He named me. (Is. 49:1)*

*The prophet Isaiah says he received God's calling and naming while still in the womb.*

*4. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)*

*The psalmist states that he was a spiritual being from the point of conception. This isn't saying that he sinned while in the womb, but that he recognizes that from the earliest part of life, he was a sinner.*

*5. Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:4-5)*

*Jeremiah declares that God knew him, consecrated him (set him apart), and appointed him a prophet before he was even conceived! From God's perspective, Jeremiah's humanity began even before conception.*

*6. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's*

*greeting,  
the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with  
the  
Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you  
among  
women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I  
so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As  
soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby  
in  
my womb leaped for joy. (Luke 1:39-44)*

*The unborn John the Baptist had a physical reaction to the  
presence of Mary and ESPECIALLY her unborn Child. At this  
point, Jesus was probably only a week- or two-old embryo.  
(Scripture tells us that as soon as the angel Gabriel spoke  
to Mary about God's plan for the Holy Spirit to overshadow  
her and conceive the Messiah in her and she consented, she  
hurried to see Elizabeth, who lived about 70 or so miles from  
Nazareth.)*

I believe that these verses indicate that abortion is murder,  
but all you can do is offer the light they provide. Some  
people who don't want to believe that abortion is murder or  
that an unborn baby is anything more than a "potential human  
being" can and will refuse to accept it. (Remember what the  
Word says in Jeremiah 17:9—"The heart is deceitful above all  
things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?") Your job is  
to pray for God to open the eyes of the hearts of the others  
in your class, humbly offer the truth, and leave the results  
to God.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# India's Missing Girls and the Right to Choose

*Rusty Wright and Meg Korpi reveal that female infanticide and feticide in India's patriarchal culture stir passions for equality and fairness but raise troubling questions. Does favoring a woman's right to choose logically imply that one supports her right to terminate a fetus simply because it is female?*

Last summer, a farmer in southern India discovered a tiny human hand poking from the ground. A two-day-old baby girl had been buried alive. The reason? Much of Indian culture favors males over females, sometimes brutally so. The girl's grandfather confessed to attempting murder because his family already had too many females; keeping this one would be too costly.

This wasn't an isolated incident on the subcontinent according to award-winning filmmaker Ashok Prasad. Prasad spoke recently at Stanford University at the U.S. premiere of his BBC documentary "India's Missing Girls." Anti-female bias affects Indians rich and poor. Males can perpetuate the family name, bring wealth, and care for elderly parents. A female's family typically must pay a huge dowry when she weds, often depleting family resources. A popular Hindi aphorism: "Having a girl is to plant a seed in someone else's garden."[\[1\]](#)

## Female Infanticide and Feticide

Against odds, this baby survived, but social and financial pressures bring alarming rates of female infanticide and feticide (termination of a fetus). UN figures estimate 750,000 Indian girls are aborted every year.[\[2\]](#) Demographic studies

reveal dramatically growing gender disparity since the 1980's{3}; in some regions only 80 baby girls survive for every 100 boys.{4} Many men cannot find wives.

Financial repercussions are typically cited as the reason for discarding daughters, but the decision is often an economic choice rather than necessity. Greater gender disparity occurs in wealthier states.{5} These families can better afford the sex determination tests and sex-selective abortions that, according to a report published by the UN Population Fund, are the main contributors to the decreasing proportion of female children.{6}

Adding to the offensiveness of sex-selective abortion: the fetus must be well-formed (15-18 weeks) before the sex can be detected using ultrasound-the common sex-determination technology. "India's Missing Girls" includes brief, grisly footage of terminated female fetuses being lifted from a well belonging to a clinic that performed sex-selective abortions. After the discovery, outraged women's groups protested in the streets; several such clinics were closed down.

The heartening side of the documentary is Sandhya Reddy, who runs a children's home, cares for abandoned kids, and tries to persuade mothers to keep their daughters or girl fetuses. This angel of mercy brings love, care and opportunity to society's young rejects.

"India's Missing Girl's" poignantly depicts where devaluing women can lead. The Stanford screening's sponsors included feminist and women's organizations, but feminists and nonfeminists, liberals and conservatives alike will be moved. An [abbreviated 29-minute version](#) on [YouTube](#) is worth watching, even if only the first 10-minute segment.{7}

## Troubling Questions

To Western sensibilities, killing babies and terminating



fetuses solely because of gender is abhorrent. Yet no Hitler masterminds this mass extermination of females. It results from hundreds of thousands of personal decisions.

As the U.S. recognizes 35 years of *Roe v. Wade*, feticide's increasing contribution to India's missing girls raises a disturbing dilemma: Doesn't favoring a woman's right to free reproductive choice logically require supporting her right to terminate a fetus simply because it is female?

Important worldview questions emerge. Opposing female feticide seems to ascribe some sort of value to the female fetus. Is this value inherent because the fetus is female? If so, wouldn't equality require that we ascribe similar value to the male fetus because it is male?

Or is the fetus's value utilitarian, e.g., to ensure female influence in society or sufficient brides? Or is it merely economic-negative for Indian females, positive for males?

An enduring view of the fetus's value appears in Psalm 139. King David's worldview recognizes awe-inspiring biological intricacy fashioned by the Divine: You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!{8}

Inherently valuable? Socially useful? Economically consequential? Wonderfully complex? The troubling quandary still haunts: Can opposing female feticide be reconciled with supporting reproductive choice? The question demands a logically consistent answer from every thinking person.

## Notes

1. Raekha Prasad and Randeep Ramesh, "India's missing girls," Guardian Unlimited, February 28, 2007, [guardian.co.uk/india/story/0,,2022983,00.html](http://guardian.co.uk/india/story/0,,2022983,00.html); accessed January 18, 2008
2. Ashok Prasad, "Harsh reality of India's unwanted girls,"

BBC News, 22 October 2007,

[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this\\_world/7050657.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this_world/7050657.stm);

accessed January 18, 2008.

3. Christophe Z. Guilmoto, "Characteristics of sex-ratio imbalance in India, and future scenarios," Report presented at the 4th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive Health and Rights, Hyderabad, India, October 29-31, 2007. Published by the United Nations Population Fund

[www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/studies/india.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/studies/india.pdf); downloaded

January 25, 2008.

4. Prasad and Ramesh, loc. cit.

5. Using India's 2001 census data for each state

([www.censusindia.gov.in](http://www.censusindia.gov.in)), we found strong negative

correlations (-0.5 to -0.7) between various indicators of wealth and female-to-male sex ratios for children under 6.

6. Guilmoto, loc. cit.

7. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf32d735VgE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf32d735VgE); accessed January 18, 2008.

8. [Psalm 139:13-14 NLT](#).

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# Duke Lacrosse: Ethical Reflections

Written by Rusty Wright

The Duke lacrosse story has multiple ingredients for explosive media coverage: sex, race, politics, criminal charges, sports, class, a prestigious institution the list goes on.

Like many Duke alumni, I have personal convictions about the scandal. My Duke experience was and remains positive. So I'm biased. But I'm also realistic. Houston, we have a problem.

As much of the civilized world knows, a hired African-American stripper alleged some white players raped her at a lacrosse party. The accuser attended nearby North Carolina Central University. The accused maintain their innocence. The lacrosse coach resigned. Duke cancelled the season.

During basketball season, it was often "All Duke, all the time" on America's sports pages. Through much of the Spring, it became "All Duke, all the time" on the front pages.

Nowadays at Duke, quips one professor, historical calendars are not reckoned "BC" and "AD" but "BLC" and "ALC." "Before the Lacrosse Crisis" and "After the Lacrosse Crisis."

I'm glad Duke President Richard Broadhead emphasizes the presumption of innocence in criminal law. Travels in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have exposed me to chilling stories about presuming guilt.

At an April reunion, I found the campus buzzing with controversy. Some students conveyed deep personal pain about race and gender issues. At their national tournament in May, Duke women lacrosse players wore wristbands and headbands supporting the men's team.

Broadhead commissioned an ongoing Campus Culture Initiative emphasizing responsibility and respect. In my view, he's handled a difficult situation with exceptional grace, dignity, and transparency.

What ethical lessons might come from this episode? Of course, if rape occurred, punishment should ensue.

But setting aside the rape allegations, what about the ethics of hiring a stripper? What principles should determine how we

act in life?

When I was an undergraduate, a friend from the fraternity next door excitedly told me the dean had just given his fraternity permission to host a topless dancer at their Saturday night party in university housing.

Fast forward to 2006. On one television program, a woman argued that her own stripping had paid her college bills, and besides, it allowed her to exercise power over men.

Suppose you were a Duke student. Should you host or attend such a party? Hiring a stripper broke no laws. Both the players and the young woman could claim benefit. What's the harm?

A pragmatist might maintain, "In retrospect, it was more trouble than it was worth." A libertarian might assert, "Stripping's OK, if no one gets hurt." Some absolutists might say, "No. Never." Feminists could argue either side. Stripping exploits women as sex objects, a negative cultural influence. Yet a woman needs to earn a living.

Duke ethicist Elizabeth Kiss, soon to become Agnes Scott College president, recommends a starting point for answering the classic question, "How should I act?" She notes that the "[Golden Rule](#)" appears in various forms in different faith traditions.

Good point. Jesus said, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you."

The Jewish Talmud says, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor."

Muhammad said, "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself."

On Duke's main quadrangle sits a [plaque](#) containing the first article of the university's bylaws. The statement promotes

truth, scholarship, freedom, tolerance, and service. It begins as follows:

“The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”

Hmmm. An ethical guideline worth considering?

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# Ethics and Economics

## Introduction

What does the Bible have to say about economics? As we will see, the Bible does provide a firm moral foundation for economics. Previously we have talked about what the Bible has to say about [economics](#).<sup>{1}</sup> In this article we will discuss the ethical implications of economics, drawing many principles from the book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves* by John E. Stapleford.<sup>{2}</sup>

We should begin by establishing that there is a moral aspect to economics. This question was an important one a few centuries ago, but today economics is usually taught without

any real consideration of an ethical component.

Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). He adds that this will enable the people of God to be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). Certainly that would include economic works.

James calls on believers to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" of the word (James 1:22). This command applies to more than just our church life and family life. This would apply to doing good works in the economic realm.

There are obvious moral implications to issues often discussed in relation to economic issues. For example, in previous radio programs we have talked about the morality of such topics as [drugs](#), [pornography](#), and [gambling](#). We have also talked about the importance of Christians learning to be [good stewards of the environment](#). Each of these topics has an economic component to it, and thus implies that we should apply ethics to economics.

Legalizing drugs has economic consequences, but it also has moral consequences as well.

In previous programs, we have talked about the pornography plague.[{3}](#) The Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We should, therefore, flee the temptation of pornography (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim 2:22).

We have in previous programs also talked about what the Bible has to say about the subject of gambling.[{4}](#) The Bible teaches that we are to work by the sweat of our brow (Gen. 3:19). This is God's command as well as an opportunity. Work can be fulfilling to us as we accomplish a task and is an essential element of human worth and dignity. Gambling undercuts the work ethic by emphasizing greed (Rom. 1:29), materialism, laziness (Prov. 19:15), and covetousness (Ex. 20:17).

# Private Property

What does the Bible say about property, and especially about private property? First, the Bible clearly teaches that everything in the world belongs to the Lord. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

At the same time, the Bible also teaches that we are given dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28). We are accountable to God for our stewardship of the resources.

Because God owns it all (Ps. 24:1), no one owns property in perpetuity. But the Bible does grant private property rights to individuals. One of the Ten Commandments prohibits stealing, thus approving of private property rights. The book of Exodus establishes the rights of property owners and the liabilities of those who violate those rights.<sup>{5}</sup> Financial restitution (Ex. 22) must be made to property owners in cases of theft or neglect. Physical force is allowed to protect property (Ex. 22:2). Lost animals are to be returned, even when they belong to an enemy (Ex. 23:4). Removing landmarks that protect property is clearly forbidden (Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Prov. 22:28; Hos 5:10).

Some Christians have suggested that the New Testament rejects the idea of private property because the book of Acts teaches that the early Christians held property in common. But this communal sharing in the New Testament was voluntary. Acts 2:44-47 says, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The early Christians did not reject the idea of private property. Notice that they still retained private property rights until they voluntarily gave up those rights to help other believers in Jerusalem. This was a specific leading of the Holy Spirit to meet the increasing needs of the growing New Testament church.

We can see that they retained property rights in the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin was not that they retained control of some of their property but that they lied about it. Acts 5:4: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Also notice that Paul called for voluntary charity toward believers in Jerusalem when he called New Testament believers to give to the needs of those within the church. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 says, "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'"

## **Work**

What is the place of work in economic activity? First, we see that God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to work. God commanded them to work it and take care of it (Gen. 2:15-17). They were given an explicit command to exercise stewardship over the creation.

However, when sin entered the world, God's curse brought toil, sweat, and struggle to work (Gen. 3:17-19). But we still maintain the responsibility to work the land and cultivate it. We are also given the privilege by God of enjoying the earth



and deriving profit and benefit from what it might produce (Gen. 9:1-3).

Second, we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), so we can find work rewarding and empowering. At the same time, we should also be held accountable for the work we do or fail to do. Paul says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

Third, there is also a satisfaction in work. It not only satisfies a basic human need but it also is a privilege provided by the hand of God. Ecclesiastes 2:24 says, "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God."

Fourth, we are to work unto the Lord. Paul admonishes believers to "work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3:23). He also says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

We also learn from Scripture that without God's involvement in our work, human labor is futile. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." God's blessings come to us through our labors.

Finally, with work there should also be rest. The law of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11) and the other Old Testament provisions

for feasts and rest demonstrate the importance of rest. In the New Testament also we see that Jesus set a pattern for rest (Mark 6:45-47; Luke 6:12) in His ministry. Believers are to work for the Lord and His Kingdom, but they must also avoid being workaholics and take time to rest.

## Government

What is the role of government in the economic arena? In previous radio programs, we have discussed the role of government in society.[\[6\]](#)

First, Christians are commanded to obey government (Rom. 13:1) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13–17). We are called to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21). However, we are not to render total submission. There may be a time in which Christians may be called to disobey government leaders who have set themselves in opposition to divine law (Rom. 13:1-5; John 19:11). We are to obey civil authorities (Rom.13:5) in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, but there may be times when we may be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Second, we understand that because of the fall (Gen. 3), all have a sin nature (Rom. 3:23). Government must therefore administer justice in the political and economic realm. It must also protect us against aggression as well as provide for public works (1 Kings 10:9).

As we have discussed in previous articles, the reality of sin nature dictates that we not allow a political concentration of power. Governmental power should be limited with appropriate checks and balances. Government also should not be used in a coercive way to attempt to change individuals. We should not accept the idea that the state can transform people from the outside. Only the gospel can change people from the inside and so that they become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

In his book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves*, John E. Stapleford sets forth many functions of government in the economic realm. Government must ensure justice in the following ways:

- “Weights and scales are to be honest, a full measure (shaken down) is to be given (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:15; Prov. 20:23; Lk. 6:38), and currency is not be debased by inflationary monetary policy or other means (e.g., mixing lead with silver).”[\[7\]](#)
- Procedural justice requires that contracts and commitments be honored (Lev. 19:13).
- Government must also ensure justice when people are cheated or swindled. In these cases, the cost of restoration should be borne by the guilty or negligent party (Ex. 21:33-36; 22:5-8, 10-15). Government should also deal with those who give a false accusation (Deut. 19:16-19).
- Government should also prevent economic discrimination. This would apply to those of different economic class (James 2:1-4) as well as to those of different sex, race, and religious background (Gal. 3:26-29). Government can exert a great influence on the economy and therefore should use its regulatory power to protect against discrimination.
- That being said, the primary function of government is to set the rules and provide a means of redress. The free market should be allowed to function with government providing the necessary economic boundaries and protections. Once this is done in the free enterprise system, individuals are free to use their economic choices in a free market.

## Conclusion

What is the connection between economics and ethics? The fact that we even refer to these as separate issues is an indication of the times in which we live. In the past, ethics

and economics were interconnected.

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, addressed economic issues in a moral and theological way. He wouldn't just ask about prices and markets, but also asked the fundamental question, What is a just price?

John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* also devoted whole sections to government and economics. These were issues that he believed Christian theologians should address.

Today if moral questions about economics are discussed at all, they might be discussed in a class on economic theory. While we might hope that such discussions might surface in a seminary, usually those classes focus on theological questions rather than economic questions that deserve a moral reflection.

We have shown that economic issues often have a moral component. You can't just talk about the economic consequences of legalizing drugs, promoting pornography, or promoting gambling without dealing with the moral consequences.

We have also seen that the Bible has a great deal to say about work. Through the creation and the fall, human beings have a right and an obligation to work.

We find that the Bible also warns us of the consequences of idleness. Proverbs 24:30-34 says, "I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest, Then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man."

People are supposed to work and should be held accountable for the work they do or fail to do. Paul says, "If a man will not

work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

The Bible also teaches that God has endowed individuals with different gifts and talents (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). Even within the body of Christ, there are different members even though we are all one body in Christ.

When these differences in gifts and abilities are expressed within a free market, their respective value in terms of supply and demand means that they will receive different remuneration (1 Tim. 5:18). So it is not surprising that there are economic distinctions among individuals. Proverbs 22:2 says, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, The Lord is the maker of them all."

Ethics and economics are related, and Christians would be wise to begin exploring the moral implications of economic behavior and the impact it is having on them and society.

## Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, "A Biblical View of Economics," Probe Ministries, 2001, [www.probe.org/a-biblical-view-of-economics/](http://www.probe.org/a-biblical-view-of-economics/)
2. John E. Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
3. Kerby Anderson, "Pornography," Probe Ministries, 1997 (revised 2008), [www.probe.org/pornography/](http://www.probe.org/pornography/)
4. Kerby Anderson, "Gambling," Probe Ministries, 2005, [www.probe.org/gambling/](http://www.probe.org/gambling/)
5. Stapleford, 63.
6. Kerby Anderson, "Christian View of Government and Law," Probe Ministries, 1999, [www.probe.org/christian-view-of-government-and-law/](http://www.probe.org/christian-view-of-government-and-law/)
7. Stapleford, 86.

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# “Does God Saying Something Is Right Make It Right?”

My daughter's philosophy professor posed the question, “Does God saying something is right make it right?” He says that if the answer is “yes” then God is arbitrary, and thus not loving, and if the answer is “No” then right and wrong had to exist prior to God and He is not all powerful. (The professor says that the latter is the Catholic view, and seems to indicate that these are very early levels of philosophical thought.)

On a Web site about Socrates' ideas on the good life ([http://academics.vmi.edu/psy\\_dr/socrates.htm](http://academics.vmi.edu/psy_dr/socrates.htm)), there is this paragraph:

*In the Euthyphro the main question raised is: Are right/good acts right/good just because God (or the gods) says so, or does God say so because they are right/good? If it is just because God says so, then God's commandments seem arbitrary. And what if God does not exist? Does anything go? On the other hand, if God's commandments are made for a reason, i.e. if there is something else (other than God's arbitrary decree) about bad acts that makes them bad, what is it? And is God then irrelevant to ethics?*

The answer to the next-to-the-last question is the option your daughter's professor didn't offer, namely, the nature or character of God. Theologian J. Oliver Buswell said this about God's law: “The divine character is expressed by the divine will in the divine law” (*A Systematic Theology*, 1:264). What God says is good is good because it reflects the character of God which is good. What makes things bad is being against

God's character. If God just plucked a law out of thin air, He would be arbitrary. However, seeking some other source of right and wrong wasn't the only other option. God's law reflects God's character. Thus, the answer to the last question in the above paragraph is no—God isn't irrelevant to ethics. Morality is grounded in His nature and made known by His will.

I hope this helps.

Rick Wade  
Probe Ministries

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## **Animal House Revisited: Fraternity Fosters Faith**

College fraternities don't always have the best reputations. Wild parties, hazing, elitism, substance abuse, gang rapes and more help perpetuate the Animal House image that the film of the same name portrayed. Parents – and many students – might wonder why any sane person ever would want to join.

Though the weaknesses of university Greek-letter societies are often what grab headlines, numerous national fraternities and sororities try hard to change both their image and substance. Believe it or not, many were founded to promote character development and strong cultural values and are seeking to return to their roots.

For example, my own fraternity, Lambda Chi Alpha, has a vision "...to prepare and encourage collegiate men of good character, high ethics, and noble ideals to contribute positively to the world in which they live." Lambda Chi's annual North American

Food Drive has raised over 10.5 million pounds of food for the needy since 1993.

The liability crisis is one factor motivating “Greeks” to focus on character. In today’s litigious society, a tragic injury or death can prompt lawsuits that could put them out of business. Moderating local behavior helps perpetuate national survival.

But there is more going on here than mere survival. Often top leaders of national Greek organizations are deeply committed citizens who seek to live by and promote the principles their groups espouse.

Many Greek organizations were founded on biblical or quasi-biblical principles. Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) is one of the more prominent fraternities with over 240 active and inactive chapters and over 6,000 undergraduate members. ATO chief executive officer Wynn Smiley told me of his group’s convictions.

It seems that ATO was founded in 1865 by a 19-year-old former Confederate soldier who wanted to promote brotherly love as a means of helping to reconcile North and South after the U.S. Civil War. The organization that young Otis Allan Glazebrook founded was not religious but sought to foster reconciliation and brotherhood based on the self-sacrifice and unconditional love demonstrated by Jesus.

Smiley and his colleagues emphasize these roots in their recruitment and educational development. “Jesus made the most radical statements on love,” notes Smiley. An example: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”

Allen Wilson is ATO’s Spiritual Leadership Consultant. Most chapters have chaplains and Wilson travels to help encourage spiritual development. ATO even has a devotional book with



inspirational articles by alumni and others on practical themes like character, trust, humility, truth, servant leadership and persevering through disappointment.

Smiley readily admits that not every member or chapter exemplifies such values. But he points out that hidden personal hurts – from family illness to depression – plus students' concerns for their own future, ethical dilemmas and faith raise questions that “brothers practicing brotherly love should help each other explore.” He says that “ATO is committed to talking about issues of faith” and to providing “a loving, trusting environment for brothers to explore, discuss, argue and perhaps even on occasion resolve questions.”

He is onto something significant here. Animal House, meet the competition.