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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF DARWINIAN EVOLUTION
FOR HUMAN PREFERENCE BASED IN CHRISTIAN
ETHICS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND RESPONSE
TO THE “MORAL INDIVIDUALISM”
OF JAMES RACHELS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Stephen Bauer

November 2006

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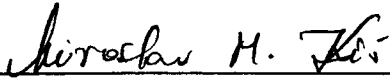
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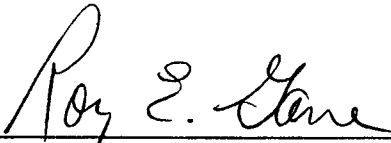
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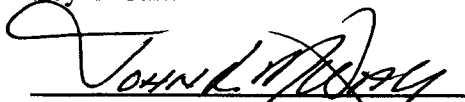
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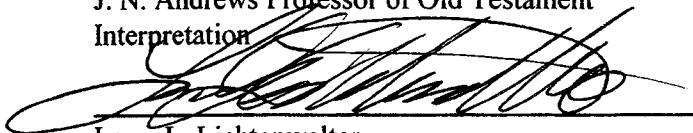
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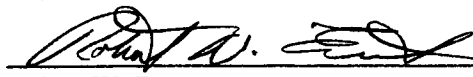
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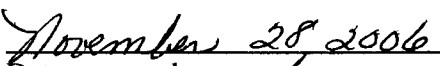
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ABSTRACT

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Adviser: Miroslav Kiš

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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Name of researcher: Stephen Bauer

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Date completed: November 2006

The Topic

This dissertation explores and analyzes James Rachels’s efforts to prove that Darwin’s theory of evolution has catastrophic implications for traditional Christian ethics.

The Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore and evaluate the question of whether or not protology affects ethics. In particular, I propose to distill the implications of evolutionary views of origins for ethics, mainly in reference to the issue of human preference over nature in ethics. I propose to disclose Rachels’s understanding of the implications of evolution on human preference (greater protections for human beings over

non-humans) in ethics (such as biblical-Christian ethics), and to evaluate his views on the basis of his internal consistency, and the accuracy of his use of Christian history and biblical data.

The Sources

In order to accomplish this purpose, many sources were consulted, starting with the works of Rachels himself. Some of the additional authors consulted include: J. V. Langmead Casserly, Richard Dawkins, Stephen J. Gould, John F. Haught, Cornelius Hunter, Jerry Korsmeyer, Andrew Linzey, John Rawls, Tom Regan, Lewis Regenstein, Michael Ruse, Richard Ryder, Peter Singer, Gerhard von Rad, Stephen Webb, Lynn White, Jr., and Benjamin Wiker.

Conclusions

First, James Rachels is essentially correct in his analysis of the impact of Darwinian evolution on Christian Ethics. Second, possibly Rachels's greatest contribution is identifying Darwin's rejection of teleology as the philosophical nerve of Darwinism. Third, Rachels correctly identifies two key pillars of human preference in Christian ethics and shows how evolution undermines each pillar. Fourth, the work of evolutionary theologians corroborate Rachels's assertion that any kind of theism incorporating Darwin's theory cannot sustain a traditional Christian view of morality. Fifth, the dependence of evolutionary theologians on Process Theology undermines the grounding of God's moral authority by limiting His foreknowledge. Sixth, Wiker is correct in his assertion that cosmology affects morality, and that changing from a biblical cosmology to a materialist one will eventually undermine Christian ethics. Seventh, I conclude that in

Many things go into the making of a Ph.D. dissertation. This work was possible, in part, because of the upbringing I received from my parents. Father started, but did not finish college, while mother never advanced beyond highschool, yet both have been avid, life-long learners, and both placed great emphasis on education. They thoroughly infused those two characteristics in me, thus steering me in a path of discovery that has led to the pursuit of this degree.

I have also been blessed with a wonderful family. My wife of twenty-five years has endured and sacrificed much so I could complete this program. My son and daughter have lived most of their lives under the shadow of "daddy's dissertation." Thus, this dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Leslie; to my children, Andrew and Heather; and to my parents, Richard and Arlyne Bauer, all of whom have given me such great support through this extended saga.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Ever since Charles Darwin published his ideas on the theory of evolution, individuals have been passionately pursuing the questions regarding the relationship of Darwinian theory to ethics and morality. Churchmen, philosophers, and scientists alike have made claims for and against the viability of such an endeavor.¹ A recent attempt to construct a theory of ethics based on evolution has been made by James Rachels, professor of philosophy at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, from 1977 to 2003.²

¹James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-4. Hereafter cited as *CfA*. Rachels's book has a well-done presentation on the history of the debate between Christians and evolutionists regarding the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. See also, C. Leon Harris, *Evolution: Genesis and Revelations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981), 17-18, who also presents a series of fundamentalist assertions regarding the moral implications of evolution. A more general history is found in Duane McCampbell, "The Development and Failure of the Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Theory of Ethics," *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983): 161-71. For a conservative Christian overview of evolutionary ethics see, Ian T. Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Toronto, Ontario: TFE Publishing, 1984), 340-430. Taylor credits Darwinism for being the root of today's teaching of situation ethics. He likewise cites a humanist author as declaring that Darwin's discovery sounded the death knell of religious and moral values (421-22).

²James Rachels (1941-2003) first served as chair of the philosophy department, then as dean of arts and humanities. He returned to regular professorship in 1983 and continued in that capacity until death from cancer in 2003. According to the University

This dissertation will endeavor to analyze and evaluate his views. Before presenting the problem, purpose, and method, I shall briefly sketch the historical background of this topic.

Historical Summary of Evolutionary Ethics

“Evolutionary ethics,” says Michael Ruse, “is a subject with a bad reputation, not entirely undeserved.”¹ Indeed, as Paul Lawrence Farber observes, previous attempts to construct a model of ideal behavior based in evolutionary theory have produced some notable disasters including the British, German, and American practice of eugenics, and the Nazi racial hygiene policies.² In addition to these notorious attempts to create an evolutionary ethics, we find there has been a small but steady stream of thinkers who have pursued this task.

Farber divides the history of evolutionary ethics into three stages. Stage one extends from the latter portion of Darwin’s life to about World War I. The second stage

Radio Station, WBHM, his textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is about to become the most sold ethics textbook in history, currently used as required reading in about one-third of all university ethics courses in U. S. colleges and universities. See, WBHM, “In Memoriam: James Rachels 1941-2003,” Undated, <http://www.wbhm.org/News/2003/rachels.html> (18 May 2004). For an obituary of James Rachels copied from the *Birmingham News*, see, “James Rachels, Ph.D. 1941-2003,” 6 September 2003, <http://www.bradpriddy.com/rachels/obituary.htm> (18 May 2004).

¹Michael Ruse, “The Significance of Evolution,” in *A Companion to Ethics*, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, ed. Peter Singer (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991; 1993 paperback with corrections), 500. Ruse is one of the most prominent evolutionary ethicists during the last decade.

²Paul Lawrence Farber, *The Temptations of Evolutionary Ethics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 3-4. See also I. Taylor, 406-11.

covers the era from World War I to the 1960s. The third stage originated in the 1970s and continues to the present.¹ Farber asserts that the third stage is simply a revival of the previous, discredited attempts to construct an evolutionary ethics. Thus Farber and like-minded thinkers assert the third stage was defeated before it even started.²

It is my contention that the third stage must still be taken seriously. While the third stage of evolutionary ethics tends to be more an explanation of the moral nature of man in evolutionary terms than a system of ethics, it is of greater significance than the prior two stages for at least three reasons.

First, a leading advocate for the third stage, Robert Wright, openly declares that the new Darwinian synthesis³ is more than just a scientific theory. He asserts that it is, in reality, a new worldview,⁴ thus ascribing a metaphysical dimension to evolution.⁵

¹Farber, 6. Farber outlines the representative proponents of evolutionary ethics for each of these three stages as well as their opponents. See pp. 6-8. See also, Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 4-5, 39-42, where he outlines the key players in the development of what Farber describes as stage three.

²Farber, 2. Timothy Anders, Anthony Flew, and Elliot Sober likewise reject current attempts to create an evolutionary explanation of morality or an evolutionary ethics. See, Timothy Anders, *The Evolution of Evil* (Lasalle, IL: Open Court, 1994), 329-330; Anthony G. N. Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 5; Elliot Sober, *From a Biological Point of View: Essays in Evolutionary Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111.

³Wright repeatedly uses the technical terminology *the new synthesis* to describe this new stage of ethical thinking informed and guided by evolutionary theory.

⁴Wright, 4-5.

⁵Wright may be the first evolutionist to make such a blunt confession, but Julian Huxley comes very close to asserting the same viewpoint. See Julian Huxley, *Essays of a Humanist* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 73.

Second, the third stage is unique in its ubiquity, spilling out of the ivory towers into everyday publications,¹ particularly since about 1990. Third, this stage of evolutionary theory and ethics revives teleology and design. The new paradigm seems bent on a quest to find, in Antony Flew's words, "some immanent substitute for Divine Providence."²

These three characteristics of the third stage seem to make it significantly different from the first two stages of evolutionary ethics. Thus we should not dismiss it with glib comments.

¹See Farber, where he laments that, "We read daily in journals and magazines that biology holds the key to human nature" (2). Examples include two cover features in *Time*: First, Paul Gray, "What Is Love?" *Time*, February 15, 1993, 47-49; Anastasia Toufexis, "The Right Chemistry," *Time*, February 15, 1993, 49-51; the cover title being "The Chemistry of Love"; second, Robert Wright, "Our Cheating Hearts," *Time*, August 15, 1994, 44-52; the cover title being, "Infidelity: It May Be in Our Genes." Other articles include: Paul Galloway, "Darwin II," *Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 1994, Tempo 1-2; Daniel Goleman, "Science: Flirtatious Come-ons Are Linked to Our Survival," *South Bend Tribune*, February 16, 1995, A12; Natalie Angier, "Sexual Harassment: An Activity Throughout the Animal Kingdom," *South Bend Tribune*, October 12, 1995, A13; Robert Wright, "Science and Original Sin," *Time*, October 28, 1996, 76-77; idem, "Styles of Polygamy," 30 August 1996, <http://www.slate.com/id/2013/> (7 November 2005). Another vein related to the biological roots of human nature is the attempt to blur the distinction between humans and other animals by showing evolutionary roots of human characteristics in lower animals. Examples include: Nathan Myrhvold, "So You're a Human Being: Isn't that Special?" *Time*, August 26, 1996, 64, condensed from idem, "Mars to Humanity: Get Over Yourself," 15 August 1996, <http://www.slate.com/id/2361/> (7 November 2005); Paul Davies, "The Harmony of the Spheres," *Time*, February 15, 1996, 58; *Turning Point* [Television Broadcast], October 10, 1996 (New York: ABC Television)[hosted by Diane Sawyer]; Kenneth Miller and Anne Hollister, "What Does It Mean to Be One of Us?" *Life*, November 1996, 50.

²Flew, 4. See also McCampbell, who describes Flew's concern as "surrogate divine providence" (171). For a more recent assertion of an immanent, self-ordering principle, see Davies, "The Harmony of the Spheres," *Time*, 58.

Christian Moral Foundations Challenged by the Third Stage of Evolutionary Ethics

Christian concepts of morality are implicitly and openly challenged in the new synthesis. For example, Ruse asserts that there are no philosophically objective foundations for ethics. Morality “is just an illusion, fobbed off on us to promote biological ‘altruism.’” Thus, morality and ethics become simply another example of an evolutionary adaptation aiding the prowess of the species, and limiting the explanation of ethics to causal argumentation.¹ More specific challenges to Christian ethics are found in regard to man's relationship to (or position in) nature.

Christian Morals and Man's Relationship to Nature

The General Issue

H. James Birx addresses the contrast of evolutionary thinking with Christian thought, writing: “The theory of evolution is indispensable for both believers and non-believers if they are to achieve a sound understanding of and proper appreciation for the true place of humankind in nature.”² Birx asserts that the proper understanding of man's place in nature requires man to overcome geocentrism and cosmocentrism.³

Nathan Myrhvold similarly asserts that the recent assertion of finding bacterial life

¹Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” *Zygon* 21 (1986): 102. See also idem, “The Significance of Evolution,” in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 43-44.

²H. James Birx, *Interpreting Evolution* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), 104.

³*Ibid.*, 101.

from Mars opens the next frontier of hubris: “Humans are still the only intelligent life—right? The wagons will circle to defend this last bastion of human conceit.”¹

Similar claims are also originating in the areas of genetics and embryology.²

The *Imago Dei* and Man's Relationship to Nature

Several authors have directly addressed the issue of man as the image of God. Philip Hefner briefly explores how evolution undermines Western religious tradition which separates man from nature and gives him moral preference over nature.³ Paul Davies asserts that if extra-terrestrial life is discovered, evolution would be affirmed while traditional Christian belief in the special relation of mankind with God would be undermined.⁴ Ruse concludes, “We believe that it simply has to matter that we are modified monkeys rather than a special creation of a good God, in his image, on the sixth day.”⁵ J. H. Randall likewise declares: “Man's relation to nature was basically altered. He was no longer a fallen angel, but a great ape trying to make good, the last and best-

¹Myrhvold, 64.

²See Miller and Hollister, 50. Significantly, the magazine cover reads “The Dawn of Life,” then in another part of the cover, “Revolutionary prenatal photographs of humans and animals challenge our view of our origins--and of ourselves.”

³Philip Hefner, “Nature, God's Great Project,” *Zygon* 27 (1992): 327, 334-339.

⁴Davies, 58.

⁵Ruse, “Significance,” 502. See also *idem*, “Phoenix,” 95, where Ruse restates his view as follows: “We humans are modified monkeys, not the favored creation of a benevolent God, on the sixth day.”

born of nature's children.”¹ If these statements are true, then humans must be viewed as merely moral monkeys and angelic apes for they are, as Wright implies, the only animal to evolve a moral dimension.²

The Work of James Rachels

Of even greater significance, however, is the work of James Rachels. Rachels expressly recognizes the importance to ethics of the place and role of man in nature. He convincingly argues that traditional morality depends on human beings being placed in a special moral category.³

Rachels, an avowed Darwinist, clearly seeks to show how Darwinian evolution undermines two classic justifications of the special status of man: That man is different from animals because he is the image of God, and that man is different from animals because he possesses reason. By destroying these two distinctions, man no longer can be special and treated on a different standard from animals. Humans are different only in degree, not in kind.⁴

¹J. H. Randall, “The Changing Impact of Darwin on Philosophy,” in *Darwin*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: Norton, 1970), 415. Also quoted in McCampbell, 163.

²See Wright, *Moral Animal*, 3-4, where morality is treated as being a unique trait of the human animal. Also note his book title, *The Moral Animal*.

³Rachels, *CfA*, 4-5. The full development of Rachels’s arguments is delineated especially in chapters 4 and 5 of his book. Chapters 1-3 are the foundational and background material that prepares the way for his exposition of man's place in nature (his non-uniqueness) in chapter 4. His exposition of his ethical system, “Moral Individualism,” is in chapter 5.

⁴*Ibid.*, 171-172. This is Rachels’s own summary of the first four chapters of his book. It gives the essential points without the detailed arguments.

Rachels offers a new morality called “Moral Individualism.” He asserts that ethics are determined by the individual's characteristics and the situation, not by the “species” of the creature. One's view of human life thus will no longer be a form of superstitious awe, and non-human life will be treated with greater dignity.¹

While Rachels is quite convincing in his depiction of the impact of evolution on human preference ethics, there appear to be at least two key areas of possible weakness. First, Rachels is clearly an ardent animal rights supporter (and also seems to support euthanasia).² He seems almost polemically driven in his attempts to equalize animal and human rights.

Second, Rachels also seems to create a straw-man by generally limiting himself to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century (i.e., industrial revolution era) viewpoints in depicting the model of human preference ethics, which he then challenges. The model he rejects seems to take a rather extreme view of human preference and may actually turn out to be a mix of Enlightenment-Humanism and Christian thinking.

Problem

Since Rachels uses evolution to challenge the concept of human preference over nature and ethics rooted in a preferential view of humans, Christians (and those of similar belief such as Jews) are faced with the problem of the veracity of his conclusions and their implications for Christian ethics. In what ways will ethics be affected by how

¹Ibid., 4-5, 171-172.

²Ibid., 173-223.

protology defines man's relationship to nature? In particular, how will ethics be changed by abandoning human preference as Rachels does by accepting Darwinian protology?

More specifically, this study must evaluate the accuracy of his depiction of Christian ethics and ethical foundations. How he treats Christian ethics may undermine the veracity of his depiction of the implications that evolution would have on ethics based on human preference. Additionally, this study must examine if Rachels has adequately established the possibility of doing evolutionary ethics.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore and evaluate the question of whether or not protology affects ethics. In particular, I propose to distill the implications of evolutionary views of origins for ethics, mainly in reference to the issue of human preference over nature in ethics, particularly in reference to the views of James Rachels.

I propose to disclose Rachels's understanding of the implications of evolution on human preference ethics (such as biblical-Christian ethics), and to evaluate his views on the basis of his internal consistency, and the accuracy of his use of Christian history and biblical data. Likewise, I shall assess and evaluate Rachels's assertion of the foundational role of human preference in Christian ethics. My analysis will presume a biblically oriented Christian perspective, as represented by Seventh-day Adventism. I shall, of course, not study Rachels in isolation from evolutionary ethicists contemporary to him (such as Michael Ruse and Robert Wright).

Significance of This Study

This study of Rachels is significant for several reasons. First, Rachels offers a new approach to ethics yet one finds no scholarly responses to Rachels's position. Peter Singer receives much attention. By contrast Rachels remains essentially untouched, even in Christian literature.

Second, the fact that Rachels builds his ethics by going head to head against Christian ethics begs for further investigation. His attacks on the view of man as the image of God and his evaluation of the moral implications of that doctrine provide a direct comparison of the ethical implications of two views of human origins. Additionally, his rebuttals raise serious questions regarding what it means to be a human being.

Third, some branches of Christianity have accepted evolutionary theories of origins. Mainline Protestants, and now the Pope, have taken a territorial approach to the issue of origins: Science gives us the physical mechanisms of origins through the theory of evolution while Religion explains the metaphysical soul dimension of man.¹ The Presbyterians made some social statements in the mid-1980's that clearly propound an evolutionary-based social ethics similar to Julian Huxley's. However, there seems to be no organized, Evangelical-Conservative Christian response. I find a strong impetus for

¹James Collins, "Vatican Thinking Evolves," *Time*, November 4, 1996, 85. Many newspapers reported the Pope's declaration of acceptance of the theory of evolution in reference to the physical evolution of man (October 24-26, 1996, depending on the newspaper), but only *Time* notes the territorial issue.

this research in the silence of most Christian scholarship regarding positions such as Rachels's.

Finally, Rachels appears to be compatible with a Postmodern emphasis on debunking human preference in morality, and in advocating animal rights.¹ In addition, his connection to the larger, animal rights movement is of some significance due to its use of evolution to minimize human specialness, though in a less thorough manner than Rachels.

Limitations and Delimitations

In this dissertation, I shall focus primarily on the work of Rachels. Since most of the work in evolutionary ethics has been done by American or British thinkers, I shall primarily focus on these thinkers when going beyond Rachels himself.

This dissertation is not designed to address directly the relative merits of creationist or evolutionary theories of origins.² It rather will focus on the ethical/meta-ethical

¹See Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 72-79; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 92-93; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 342-43. See also, J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 57, where some meta-ethical implications of the human identity issue are mentioned.

²It is also not necessary to argue directly over the merits of Darwinism versus other naturalistic theories of origins. In regard to human preference, it seems likely that Rachels could have chosen any theory of origins which eliminates divine providence, depicts man as just a highly developed animal, and still have produced the same or similar results as his analysis of the implications of Darwinism on ethics. Man still would lose his special status with God and over nature. Also, the veracity of a given theory of origins does not change the implications of that view on human preference ethics. Rather, veracity affects how widely the implications will be distributed. Finally,

implications of evolution on ethics, with a special emphasis on the issue of human preference in ethics. Additionally, I do not address the dualistic view that the physical nature of man evolved while the soul is created or generated by God.

Methodology

To accomplish this purpose, I describe and delineate Rachels's evolutionary ethics and his portrayal of Christian-based ethics. I compare these two approaches as explicated by Rachels, particularly how the issue of human preference is influenced by evolutionary and Creationist protologies, and how the resulting views of human preference affect the respective ethics. I analyze Rachels's presentation of Christian ethics and his proposed evolutionary ethics, testing the consistency and strength of his arguments. I evaluate Rachels's methods and conclusions, and identify implications of Rachels's assertions regarding evolution and human preference for Biblically based ethics.

Finally, I attempt to introduce some biblical concepts of the relationship of man to nature that Rachels does not seem to consider. I particularly focus on the basis of human preference in the biblical data, with a special emphasis on the Image of God (*Imago Dei*) and human dominion over nature. With these points in mind, let us turn to a more detailed look at historical views on man's relationship to nature.

the significance and influence of Darwinism on the intellectual world cannot be minimized in spite of the criticisms against it.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution brought to full fruition a tension between two views of the world. This tension first appeared in the pre-Socratic philosophers but has been especially acute since the advent of modern science. Morris Goldman describes these viewpoints, and in so doing, introduces the key issue to understanding the ethics proposed by James Rachels. This issue is the relationship of man to nature. In

Goldman's words:

The religious outlook is characterized by a view of man as a transcendental creature who has, inherently, duties and privileges that extend beyond what is applicable to the rest of nature. Furthermore . . . is the concept that there exists a God who . . . controls and directs the natural world. . . .

The secular view denies both these propositions. . . . It sees man as one animal species among millions of others, with no inherently special privileges beyond what it makes for itself by virtue of its unique mental capabilities. There is no supernatural God.¹

The Theocentric half of this opposing pair of ideas has been a key principle in not only Christianity, but also in the Jewish and Moslem faiths. Thus Cragg notes that the underlying belief in Christian, Jewish, and the Moslem faiths is the "concept of man as

¹Morris Goldman, "Man's Place in Nature," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 10 (1968): 100.

the proper imperialist, the dominion-holder in the earth.” Man is seen “as the vicegerent set over the things under God.”¹

It is this so-called imperialist view that led to Lynn White’s landmark article in 1967,² charging that the current ecological crisis is a result of the influence of Christianity. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson distills these accusations against Christianity into four specific charges: First, that Gen 1:28 “sets humanity apart from nature and directs humanity to conquer and exploit it.” Thus humans are viewed as “divinely appointed . . . to place nature firmly under its subjugation.” Second, “Christian values in the Middle Ages encouraged the development of modern technology, which flourished under a doctrine of humanity’s transcendence over nature. These two new forces—science and technology—then merged together with the blessing of Christianity, giving humanity unprecedented and uncontrolled power over nature.” Third, the Christian dualism between the spiritual and the material, the heavenly and earthly, made the things of this earth of little importance, or even regarding the material world as inherently evil. Thus man is distinct from nature because he is “spiritual” while nature is “material.” Finally, “the belief in the Second Coming . . . negates any reason to improve or

¹Kenneth Cragg, *The Privilege of Man: A Theme in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity* (London: University of London/Athlone Press, 1968), 3.

²Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207. This article was reprinted as a chapter in, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1973), 18-30. Hereafter, page citations are to Barbour’s edited book.

even preserve the world until then.” Granberg-Michaelson specifically cites Hal Lindsay’s dispensationalist eschatology as an example of this attitude.¹

Ever since White’s article, Christian scholars have been debating whether Christian beliefs have caused or contributed to the current strains on the earth’s environment. Central to this discussion is the issue of how Christianity views man’s relation and role to nature. Part of the challenge is that, up to the present time, no systematic theologies have dedicated a specific section to nature and man’s relationship to it. As John Jefferson Davis has observed, twenty major Systematic theologies have been produced in Evangelical circles *since* White’s article but very few have addressed the issue of our ethical obligations to the rest of nature. In fact, for these twenty systematic theologies, the median percentage of material dedicated to environmental stewardship is 1 percent, with a range from 0 -12.5 percent.²

Andrew Linzey picks up and intensifies the charge, noting that

Mainstream Christianity still propagates a range of ideas about animals which are hugely detrimental to their status and welfare. Animals are “here for our use,” indeed, “made for us.” Animals have no immortal soul, no rationality, no intrinsic worth. Animals are subordinate to humankind, who have been given ‘dominion’ (commonly understood as despotism) over them. How far these ideas are distinctly and authentically Christian is beside the point; the fact is that the Christian tradition has propagated them—and still defends them.

Indeed, those who wish to justify the exploitation of animals regard the Christian tradition as the last bastion of the anti-progressive sentiment. . . . Ethical

¹Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 30-32.

²John Jefferson Davis, “Ecological ‘Blind Spots’ in the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (2000): 274, 284.

sensitivity, it was supposed, constitutes nothing less than a rejection of Christian Values: It seems increasingly part of a *post-Christian* ethic, however to nourish the belief that animals possess dignity, personality and spirit that entitle their interests to be considered in the same fashion as the rest of us.¹

It is precisely argumentation along this line that appears to have influenced Rachels in rejecting Christian ethics as insufficient and thus the need to move beyond Christianity and attempt to create an ethics based in neo-Darwinism. It therefore seems prudent to delve a little more deeply into the dominant strains to Christian thought to see if these charges are substantiated and to provide the theological context for understanding Rachels's ethics.

Man and Nature in Patristic Thought

Introduction: Greek Philosophical Influence

The relationship of man to nature in the Patristic literature is a sketchy matter since their viewpoint can only be derived by incidental comments and discussions. However, it does appear that the early fathers were significantly influenced by Greek philosophy.²

¹Andrew Linzey, "Introduction: Is Christianity Irredeemably Speciesist?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press [Illini Books], 1998), xi-xii.

²There appears to be some historical significance to the pre-Socratic philosophers which fits better in the context of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, than with the Early Church Fathers. Richard Tarnas asserts that while some Greeks like the Pythagoreans sought to maintain the ancient myths and mystery religions, while simultaneously pursuing philosophical development, by contrast, "the general tenor of Greek intellectual evolution was otherwise, as from Thales and Anaximander to Leucippus and Democritus a naturalistic science matured in step with an increasingly skeptical rationalism. . . . With the exception of the . . . Pythagoreans, the Hellenic mind before Socrates followed a definite, if at times ambiguous, direction away from the supernatural and toward the natural: from the divine to the mundane." Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western*

One example of this influence can be found in the work of Aristotle.

In his discussion on acquiring wealth, Aristotle makes an argument that would be often repeated in Classic Christian interpretations of the Genesis statement on human dominion over nature. In his *Politics* (I:3), he asserts that it is nature's order,

that the plants exist for the sake of animals and the other animals for the good of man, the domestic species both for his service and for his food, and . . . most of the wild ones for the sake of his food and of his supplies of other kinds, in order that they may furnish him both with clothing and with other appliances. If therefore nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of men.¹

Robert Reneham observes that classic Greek philosophers argued that man was superior to animals because man alone, has reason and rational speech and can experience an emotional sense of anticipation to future events. Man alone has unique abilities with his hands. Man alone stands erect on two legs as a primary posture. Laughter is unique to humans. Because of these unique attributes, man alone is seen as being, in a sense, divine.²

Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 23-24. Benjamin Wiker sets forth the position that Epicurean materialism was revived in the Renaissance and came to its culmination in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Thus the pre-Socratic and Epicurean draining of divinity from nature may have helped transform nature into an object of scientific study, but seems to have had little bearing on early Christian theology. See also, Julián Marias, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum and Clarence C. Snowbridge (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 95; and Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 34.

¹Aristotle, *Aristotle in Twenty Three Volumes*, vol. 21, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 37.

²Robert Reneham, "The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 85 (1981): 248-51.

In addition to Aristotle, Robin Attfield observes that the Stoics believed that the irrational existed for the sake of the rational, and thus man can do to non-human nature whatever he pleases.¹

D. S. Wallace-Hadril declares that for most of the early church fathers, man's erect posture and rational ability allows him to transcend the material world and look to heaven. Rationality was viewed as a reflection or image of divinity.² Three well-known church fathers illustrate this orientation reported by Wallace-Hadril: Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, and Ambrose.

Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 330-395)

Gregory of Nyssa has one of the best developed expositions on man's relationship to nature found in Patristic literature. In his treatise, *On the Making of Man*, Gregory asserts that man's great significance is found in the fact that "no other existing thing, save the human creation, has been made like to God," especially noting that the "soul was fashioned in the image of Him Who created him."³ Gregory outlines to the reader, thirty points of discussion he will pursue on the topic of man's creation, several of which impinge on man's relationship to nature.

In Point 2, Gregory uses royal language to describe man's relation to nature. Man

¹Robin Attfield, "Christian Attitudes to Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 3 (1983): 371.

²D. S. Wallace-Hadril, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 75.

³St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, trans. Henry Austin Wilson (Manassas, VA: Eternal Word Television Network, 1996), 1.

was created last because it is not fitting “that the ruler should appear before the subjects of his rule; but when his dominion was prepared, the next step was that the king should be manifested.” The earth was thus “a royal lodging for the future king” in which “all kinds of wealth had been stored in this palace [i.e., the earth]” for his use. He further states that man’s position as ruler over nature was “assigned to him” by God.¹

Gregory further proposes in Point 3 “that the nature of man is more precious than all the visible creation.” His explanation is that the “the elemental foundation for the formation of the universe, the creation is, so to say, made offhand by the Divine power, existing at once on His command, while counsel precedes the making of man.” He reiterates this argument a second time: “O marvellous! a sun is made, and no counsel precedes; a heaven likewise; . . . All are brought into being with a word, while only to the making of man does the Maker of all draw near with circumspection, so as to prepare beforehand for him material for his formation.”² The conclusion, then, is that man must be more precious than the rest of creation due to the more intricate divine involvement in his creation.

Point 4 continues the regal argumentation introduced in Part 2. Gregory asserts that man’s nature was made “as it were a formation fit for the exercise of royalty.” Again, “our nature was created to be royal from the first.” He ties this rulership to the concept of the image of God by making an analogy to the artisan who makes an image of

¹Ibid., 5.

²Ibid., 5-6.

a royal personage. The artist indicates its “royal rank by the vesture of purple.” In the same way, “the human nature also, as it was made to rule the rest, was, by its likeness to the King of all, made as it were a living image, partaking of the archetype both in rank and in name, not vested in purple, . . . but instead of the purple robe, clothed in virtue, which in truth is the most royal of all raiment.”¹ Here (more clearly than in Part 2) Gregory more clearly ties the royal rank of humanity to its being created in the image of God.

These comments constitute the major corpus of Gregory’s argument on human superiority over nature, and indeed shows a highly developed theology of human primacy. Thus, for Gregory, Man is superior to nature because he was made like God (i.e., in God’s image), he was made to be a sovereign ruler over the things of nature, he was given the virtues for rulership, and therefore, the riches of nature are for man’s use.

Saint Basil (329-379)

Basil does not make a formal exposition on man’s relationship to nature as did Gregory of Nyssa. His views must be distilled from incidental comments scattered in his *Exegetic Homilies*. In Homily 6, he describes fallen man as “the work of the divine hands, falling far short of the animals in strength, but an appointed ruler of the creatures without reason, inferior in physical constitution, but able by the benefit of reason to be

¹Ibid., 6.

lifted up to the very heavens.”¹ Basil here seems to echo Gregory’s emphasis on man’s being an “appointed ruler,” as well as touching on the theme of reason as being the faculty separating man from animals. We also see a hint at the idea that humans are immortal while animals are not, for the possession of reason made man capable of being “lifted up to the very heavens.” Apparently, the creatures who lack reason are not capable of such “lifting up.”

Basil continues, in Homily 8, to categorize the creation into three divisions: aquatic animals, terrestrial animals, and the highest level of created being, man, because his soul is different from the soul of animals. The animals are “irrational,” and “the soul of beasts is earth.” Thus animals are mortal, without capacity for eternal life. Concerning the animal soul, Basil states, “Do not think that it is antecedent to the essence of their bodies or that it remains after the dissolution of the flesh.”²

By contrast, in Homily 9, Man’s soul is contrasted with the animals. “The herds are earthly and are bent towards the earth, but man is a heavenly creature who excels them as much by the excellence of his soul as by the character of his bodily structure. . . . Your head stands erect towards the heavens.” He further argues that in the Scriptures, if you as a human “dishonor yourself, serving your belly and your lowest parts, ‘you are

¹St. Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Claire Way, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 46 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1963), 84.

²Ibid., 118-119. See also Homily 9, p. 138, where again animals are inferior to man because they lack reason. Basil also exhorts the reader in Homily 8, p. 119, not to be like an animal, for example, not to hold anger for retribution as Camels do.

compared to senseless beasts, and are become like to them.”¹ Thus man is clearly seen as elevated above the beasts, which, in turn, explains why in Homily 8, Basil condemns “the proud philosophers, who are not ashamed to regard their own soul and that of dog’s as similar.”² It seems evident, then, that Basil held a very similar view of man to Gregory. Their contemporary, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, likewise will show agreement with the view that man is superior to nature.

Saint Ambrose: Bishop of Milan (339-374)

A comment by Ambrose concerning the benefit of death to man gives us a brief hint at his view of man and nature. In his *Seven Exegetical Works*, Ambrose teaches that in death the body “lies still and is shut in the hollow tomb *like a wild beast*. Its savagery is bereft of life.” Meanwhile, the soul flies away “on high.”³ Ambrose thus equates the body with a wild, savage beast that must be trapped in a tomb and subdued, while the soul has a natural affinity to virtue and God. It seems quite clear that Ambrose sees the locus of man in the immortal soul, and even more apparent that man is superior to “savage” animals.

The Patristics, therefore, project a very high view of man, and a low view of nature. That which is not a human soul is irrational, deserving to be shut up in the tomb and

¹Ibid., 138.

²Ibid., 119.

³St. Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 65 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1971), 97. Emphasis mine.

otherwise put into oblivion. Man is appointed the ruler of creation by God, is superior to animals by virtue of having reason, and the Creator stored riches in the earth for the kingly man to use for his own interests. This is the general picture of man and nature that Augustine would inherit and develop a generation later.

Saint Augustine (354-430)

Much like the Patristic authors before him, as Gillian Clark notes, Augustine did not dedicate a particular portion of his work to the issue of man's relationship to the animals, and nature in general. However, a sense of his theology can be derived from incidental remarks about man and nature scattered throughout his works.¹

Augustine appears to make three key points about the relationship of man to nature. First, humans are spiritual, having an immortal soul, while animals are corporeal, with no soul. The spiritual is said to be superior to the corporeal.²

Second, he refers to the statement in Gen 1 that gives man dominion over the animals. Augustine insists that this dominion is not over the heavenly luminaries, etc., but rather over the various animals.³

Third, man is different from, and gains his preeminence over, the animals because

¹Gillian Clark, "The Fathers and the Animals: The Rule of Reason?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press [Illini Books], 1998), 67.

²Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, vol. 2, trans. William Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912; reprint, 1988), 377-79.

³*Ibid.*, 435, 437.

he was made in God's image while the animals were made according to their kind. The image of God is interpreted primarily in terms of having reason and intellect which elevates man over the beasts.¹ Thus, the sixth commandment does not apply to animals because they "are not partakers with us in the faculty of reason, the privilege not being given them to share it in common with us—and therefore by the altogether righteous ordinance of the Creator both their life and their death are a matter subordinate to our needs."² Animals thus seem viewed primarily in reference to their utility to man.

This final proposition is especially cited as a foundational statement demonstrating the alleged despotic view of human dominion within Christianity. While it is true that Augustine states that the animals' lives and deaths are subject to our use, Santmire correctly points out that, for Augustine, human dominion is a "minor motif" and that "there is no suggestion that God places humanity over a lesser or valueless thing in order to dominate it."³ He rightly concludes, "Although Augustine believes that all things . . . are created as a blessing for humanity, this by no means exhausts their *raison d'être*."

¹Augustine, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De Genesi ad Litteram)*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, vol. 41, ed. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 192-93 (Section 6.12.); *Confessions*, 431; idem, "On Free Will," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. S. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 6 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1953), 138, 143. See also the editor's introduction and analysis on p. 109.

²Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. George E. McCracken, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 93. This statement is part of the explanation for why the sixth commandment does not forbid killing animals.

³H. Paul Santmire, "St. Augustine's Theology of the Biophysical World," *Dialog* 19 (1980): 181.

Human utility is not the sole reason for the existence of all visible things in the hierarchy. Rather, for Augustine, the most fundamental *telos* of the whole creation is beauty, and the glorification of God.”¹

Overall, however, it does appear that Augustine definitively favors man over the rest of nature. It is easy to see how those of a later, more technologically advanced era could use Augustinian theology, as well as the Patristic writers, to justify a despotic dominion of man over nature. However, Augustine never authorizes an unbridled, exploitative human dominion over nature, but rather seems to advocate a limited authority. So while we can see seeds of future despotism lying in Augustine, we shall see that those seeds did not germinate and bear fruit till much later in history. With this in mind, let us turn our attention to developments in the Medieval era.

Medieval Theology Concerning Man and Nature

The Medieval Christian theologians appear to pick up the views of Augustine and possibly sharpen them a bit further towards a despotic view of human dominion. Linzey asserts there was a “hardening of scholastic theology against animals” after the twelfth century, blaming this hardening on the influence of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas.² Ian McHarg observes that Medieval Christianity, in general, saw nature as rotten and rotting. But man was seen as having a divine mandate giving him dominion over all earthly life and non-life, and a commission to subdue the earth. Furthermore, the

¹Ibid., 177.

²Linzey, xii-xiii.

cosmos was thought of as a pyramid with man at the pinnacle and all below him are placed there to support man at the peak.¹ Two Medieval theologians will suffice to illustrate the extension and refining of Augustine's animal theology: John Duns Scotus, and the prince of Medieval theology, Thomas Aquinas.

John Duns Scotus (1266-1308)

John Duns Scotus appears not to have systematically dealt with the relationship of man to nature in general, or animals in particular. However, some of his incidental comments, and his citations of Augustine point to a fundamental agreement with Augustine's thinking concerning man's relation to animals and nature.

Quoting Augustine, he states that "a man is not called the image of God according to everything that pertains to his nature, but according to the mind alone." He then comments on this, saying that "from this and other passages [referring to what was just quoted from Augustine], one would conclude that every *image* is in the intellectual part, understanding by this the part that transcends the sensitive [i.e., physical sensory abilities]."² A little later, Duns Scotus again uses a statement by Augustine that "intellection" requires memory which man has but which animals don't have, while emphasizing the independence of the intellect from the senses. He then adds further

¹Ian McHarg, "The Place of Nature in the City of Man," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), 174-175.

²John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions 15:15-16* (trans. Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975], 348-49).

commentary, saying, “The memory, which animals lack, viz., that which is properly intellectual, has a likeness to the Father. . . .”¹ A few pages later he once more broaches the same issue saying, “Now the ‘image’ [of God in us] consists of what is best in our nature.”²

While not fully addressing the relationship between man and nature, these comments clearly seem to indicate a harmony with Augustine’s sharp distinction between man and nature, and especially between man and the animals. The primary focus is the intellect and reason as the definitive separator of man from animals. Such a theme is developed much more clearly in his more famous contemporary, Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Dorothy Yamamoto asserts that the Thomistic view of animals and their role “has exerted an enormous influence on Christian tradition.”³ She further notes that Aquinas’s view of the animals is based on a philosophical hierarchy of being ranked according to the degree of participation in the divine nature. Thus, humans, who have reason, are placed above all other animals, with, the elements intended to serve the higher.⁴

¹Ibid., 15:17-18.

²Ibid., 15:44.

³Dorothy Yamamoto, “Aquinas and Animals: Patrolling the Boundary?” in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press (Illini Books), 1998), 80.

⁴Ibid. See also, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.65.2 (trans. The Fathers of the English Dominical Province [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947], 1:327).

Yamamoto frames the issue in a way that will play a significant role in Rachels's reaction: "It is a cornerstone of Aquinas' scheme that there is an absolute difference between animals and humans. Humans have reason, 'intellectual nature'; animals have none, and are guided purely by instinct."¹ Aquinas asserts this absolute difference in several ways, often citing Aristotle.

First, he reiterates the patristic refrain that man is superior to animals because of his reason, and by virtue of possessing an "intellectual soul," which is immortal. On the other hand, animals have a "sensitive soul," which is corruptible.²

St. Thomas also argues that prior to the fall, man had total dominion over the animals, but that part of God's punishment for the fall is that animals now disobey us. He concludes that all animals are naturally subject to man as part of the natural order of the use of things. "Thus the imperfect are for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature that man should be master over the animals. Hence the Philosopher says (*Politic* i. 5) that the hunting of wild animals is just and natural, because man thereby exercises a natural right."³ Such arguments really make Aquinas sound like he advocates despotic dominion. Certainly he seems to state the issue in stronger terms than Augustine.

¹Yamamoto, 85.

²Aquinas, 1.76.3. This argument is later expanded in 1.91.4 and 1.93.2.

³Ibid., 1.96.1; see also, 2-2.64.1 for an almost identical argument.

However, Aquinas has tried to constrain man's exercise of dominion, even as Augustine did.

William French notes that, "for Thomas, animals are a path to God, for God created them and sustains them in being."¹ He further asserts that for Aquinas, animals are created in the likeness of God and bear the marks of their creator. Furthermore, French declares that for Thomas, "Humans are of the same *genus* as other animals, but differ in species."²

Attfield notes that Aquinas argued that cruelty to animals is wrong only because of the effects on the agent's character and on the owner's property (the animal).³ This clearly puts some moral limits on man regarding animals. But this means that animals, and by extrapolation, the rest of nature, have little or no moral standing except in reference to their impact on humans. Such an ethical position could very easily develop into a potent moral cocktail of despotic human dominion over nature. The Thomistic view of nature has dominated much of Christian thought ever since. Even the Reformers who favored Augustine were influenced by Aquinas's thinking.

¹William French, "Beast Machines and the Technocratic Reduction of Life: A Creation-Centered Perspective," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches for Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 38.

²Ibid., 38. The portions of Aquinas cited by French can be found in Aquinas, 1.13.1.2; 1.65.1.3; 1.75.3.1; 1.76.1.

³Attfield, 379.

Selected Reformation Views of Man and Nature

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

It should come as no surprise that Luther, the former Augustinian monk, had strong affinities to Augustine's thinking in the area of man's relationship to nature. Scott Ickert notes, that Luther did not treat animals separately as a theological subject, and that "for Luther the non-human creation is a function of anthropology as anthropology is a function of the doctrine of God. . . . Animals are subordinate to human beings as the latter exist to glorify—and exemplify—God. Therefore, the dominion that human beings exercise over the non-human creation, is a part of the divine ordering of creation. . . . Human dominion is not merely advised but is expressly commanded by God."¹ Luther primarily addresses human-animal issues in his expositions on Genesis.

Luther on Man and Animals

Luther expounds on the creation of man by asserting "an outstanding difference" between man and the animals.² He justifies this assertion on the grounds that man was made by a special command and plan of God as opposed to the animals, and that man was made in the image of God, while the animals were not. God created man to be ruler of the earth, sea, and air, but "No beast is told to exercise dominion."³ By contrast, "the

¹Scott Ickert, "Luther and Animals: Subject to Adam's Fall?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press [Illini Books], 1998), 90.

²Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis—Chapters 1-5*, 54 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955), 1:56-57.

³*Ibid.*, 1:66-67.

beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven were created for mankind; these are the wealth and possessions of men.”¹ However, Luther himself laments that the original dominion was lost,² and that what dominion we still have “is extremely small and far inferior to that first dominion. . . . Therefore, we retain the name and word, ‘dominion,’ as a bare title.”³

Yet after the Flood, Luther sees God as *increasing* human dominion in a way that required putting the fear of man into the animals. This is because Luther believed that before the Flood, animals were not slaughtered for food. Instead, man was a gentle master of the beasts. After the Flood, however, the animals could now be killed and their flesh eaten, thus putting them under a “more oppressive form of bondage,” being “subjected to man as to a tyrant.” Therefore, concludes Luther, at the present time, “It is a great liberty that with impunity man may kill and eat animals of every edible kind.”⁴

Luther and Compassion to Animals

In spite of his despotic-sounding viewpoint, Luther did believe in being kind to animals. The purpose of the Mosaic command not to muzzle the ox when it is treading out the grain, says Luther, “is that by practicing kindness toward beasts, they may

¹Ibid., 2:58-59.

²Ibid., 1:66-67.

³Ibid., 1:67.

⁴Ibid., 2:132-133.

become more benevolent toward people.”¹ Like Augustine, Luther here exhorts kindness to beasts, not so much for their benefit but for ours.

In his comments on Eccl 3:1, Luther declares, “Therefore God wants us to make use of creatures, but freely, as He has provided them, without prescribing the time, the manner, and the hour. . . . *so that we should not think that it is in our hands to use things as we wish* if He does not give them.”² Luther here clearly advocates that there are divine limits on man’s use of nature. Ickert further observes that the arbitrary killing of animals for sport and pleasure was not sanctioned by Luther, who asserted that we must not act like wild beasts.³

John Calvin (1509-64)

John Calvin, a contemporary of Luther, and being a devoted student of Augustine, holds a very similar view to both of these men. As Robin Attfield states it, “Peter Lombard, and later John Calvin, held that everything was made for man.” However, as Attfield also observes, Calvin’s great emphasis on the sovereignty of God led him to balance this view of dominion with a thoroughgoing stewardship model of man’s relationship to nature.⁴

¹Ibid., 9:248.

²Ibid., 15:50.

³Ickert, 97-99. Emphasis mine.

⁴Attfield, 379-80.

Calvin on Man versus Animals

In his *Institutes*, Calvin asserts that the immortal soul distinguishes man from the “brutes” and that this soul constitutes the image of God. He further teaches “that where the image of God is said to be in man, there is implied a tacit *antithesis*, which exalts man above all the other creatures, and as it were separates him from the vulgar herd.”¹

In his commentaries on Gen 1 and Ps 8, Calvin argues that man was divinely appointed, as the image of God, to be lord of the world to rule in God’s stead. This authority was given both to Adam and to his posterity. Furthermore, the rest of creation was made for man’s welfare so that “man was rich before he was born.”² Thus, “it is by the wonderful providence of God that horses and oxen yield their service to men; that sheep bear wool to clothe them with; and that all kind of cattle yield even their flesh to feed them.”³

Calvin and Limits to Human Dominion

Like Luther, Calvin sees limits to man’s dominion, especially in light of the Fall. Thus, the current exercises of dominion over cattle, horses, sheep, etc., that we now enjoy

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 1:206, 208. Emphasis mine.

²Jean [John] Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 96.

³Ibid. See also, Jean [John] Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David*, vol. 1, trans. unnamed (Oxford: Printed by D. A. Talboys for Thomas Tegg, 1860), 71-74.

are “the remnants of the good things whereof they were despoiled in Adam.”¹

Furthermore, in his exposition of Gen 2:15, Calvin asserts a thoroughgoing stewardship model with man giving strict accountability to God for how he cares for the world.²

Thus Calvin supplies a strong check and balance to arrest a despotic view of dominion.

Nevertheless, Calvin’s language regarding horses, oxen, and sheep would reappear in a new social context, the Industrial Revolution, and be used to justify an exploitative despotism of man over nature. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, man could not afford to use the animals in an abusive fashion as he was too dependent on them for his own prosperity. But the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution allowed man to perform his tasks without animals, thus opening the door for the development of a more domineering orientation.

The Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries

It was shortly after the deaths of Luther and Calvin that three forces began to assert a powerful influence on Christian interpretations of man’s dominion of nature: The new technological prowess of the Industrial Revolution, the mechanistic-secularized view of nature emerging from the Renaissance, and the rise of a capitalist economic system.³

Protestantism was a suitable religious milieu for capitalistic thinking to grow and

¹Calvin, *Psalms*, 72-75.

²Calvin, *Genesis*, 125.

³David Livingstone, “The Historical Roots of Our Eschatological Crisis: A Reassessment,” *Fides Historia* 26 (1994): 43-45; Jeremy Cohen, “The Bible, Man, and Nature in the History of Western Thought: A Call for Reassessment,” *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 156.

develop, as Cohen observes, because of its “worldly asceticism” which secularized the world.¹ Ronald J. Sider expresses a similar sentiment when he states that “the eighteenth century, however, abandoned the biblical worldview. The isolated, autonomous individual replaced God at the center of reality. . . . The destructive, unbridled consumerism of modern society is rooted in this narcissistic individualism and materialistic naturalism that flows from the Enlightenment.”²

The roots of the shift to a more mechanistic view of nature originated a couple of centuries earlier. Brother Aiden notes that starting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there “was the massive influx of Aristotelian literature and Arabic philosophy into thirteenth century Europe which effected a shift from a truly Christian cosmology to a more pagan and mechanistic one.” Thus, “Man and not God was declared to be the measure of all things.”³ In other words, Aiden implies that we cannot lay all blame for an exploitative view of nature solely at the feet of Christianity, for other philosophical influences were uniting with Christian thinking in producing this result. Aiden further argues that Nominalism played a key role in developing this mechanistic view of nature.⁴

¹Cohen, 156.

²Ronald J. Sider, “Message from an Evangelical: The Place of Humans in the Garden of God,” *The Amicus Journal* 17 (1995): 14.

³Brother Aiden, “Man and His Role in the Environment,” *Epiphany Journal* 12 (1992): 30.

⁴*Ibid.*, 29. Aiden describes Nominalism as teaching that ultimate reality resides in particulars, which means that Nominalism does not see a larger, universal reality from which all is derived (such as God), but rather these principles are only in particular things. This logically leads to the belief that higher levels emerge from lower levels based on ultimate realities contained in the lower levels. Aiden credits William of

The key reason is that Nominalism follows Greek thinking in dismantling and studying individual parts. This dismantling, asserts Aiden, leads to a reductionist, mechanistic view of reality which tends to secularize nature.¹ This approach to nature was most influentially promoted by Francis Bacon.

Sixteenth Century

Francis Bacon's Influence (1551-1626)

Francis Bacon associated his new, scientific approach to nature, not to Scripture, but to the Greeks just as Aiden has asserted. In Bacon's own words, "The sciences we possess have been principally derived from the Greeks; for the additions of the Roman, Arabic, or modern writers, are but few and of small importance, and such as they are, are founded on the basis of Greek invention."² Thus Bacon himself discredits the charge that Christianity is the primary culprit in developing the exploitative view of human dominion.

Bacon's significance is that he is the first one to systematically promote the legitimate goal of the sciences as "the endowment of human life with new inventions and riches."³ He asserted that Science should extend "to a greater distance the boundaries of

Ockham as being one of the best promoters of Nominalist philosophy.

¹Ibid., 29-31.

²Sir Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning; Novum Organum; New Atlantis*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 30 (Chicago, IL: William Benton, 1952), 117. This is from *Novum*, Aphorism 71.

³Bacon, 120 (*Novum*, Aphorism 81). See also Bacon, 34 (*Advancement*).

human power and dignity,”¹ and was to be used to “to renew and enlarge the power of the empire of mankind in general over the universe.”² Science was to be used to mine the secrets of nature so the craftsmen could produce new things for use in serving man.³

Significantly, Bacon welded the biblical concept of the dominion of man to his imperative to harness and control nature through science. Science was to be the means for man to recapture the powers over nature lost in the Fall. Bacon argued that the potential misuse and abuse of this scientific power was worth the risk to gain the benefits, and then concludes his exhortation, “Only let mankind regain their rights over nature, assigned to them by the gift of God, and obtain that power, whose exercise will be governed by right reason and true religion.”⁴

Bacon here clearly indicates science as a means to “regain their rights over nature,” and truly gives theological justification to a despotic view of dominion over nature. Yet Bacon himself tried to set some governing limits to this enterprise of conquering nature through science. Geisler astutely observes that Bacon’s closing phrase in the previous quote states, “The exercise thereof will be governed by sound reason and true religion.”⁵ Thus Bacon does not seem to have intended the unbridled exploitation of nature by man.

¹Ibid., 131 (*Novum*, Aphorism 116).

²Ibid., 135 (*Novum*, Aphorism 129). Emphasis mine.

³Ibid., 41-42 (*Advancement*).

⁴Ibid., 135 (*Novum*, Aphorism 129). Emphasis mine.

⁵Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 308.

However, the exploitative vein is precisely what the succeeding generations popularized and secularized.

The Theological Impact of Bacon

Bacon's work is recognized by many as the pivotal point where the secularized view of nature reached its critical mass in terms of becoming the dominant viewpoint. Merchant insightfully captures the significance of Bacon's theological proposition, when she declares: "While some, accepting God's punishment, had obeyed the medieval strictures against searching too deeply into God's secrets, Bacon turned the constraints into sanctions. Only by 'digging further and further into the mine of natural knowledge' could mankind recover that lost dominion. In this way, 'the narrow limits of man's dominion over the universe' could be stretched 'to their promised bounds.'"¹ Merchant polemically announces that Bacon's "science legitimized the domination of nature . . . [and] fashioned a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature."²

William Leiss likewise comes to the conclusion that

¹Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980), 170. See also, Livingstone, 43, 44.

²Merchant, 169-170. Merchant creatively strings phrases together from Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, 33, to assert that Bacon "treats nature as a female to be tortured through mechanical inventions, [which] strongly suggests the interrogations of the witch trials and mechanical devices torture witches" (Merchant, 168). However, when read in context, Bacon is doing no such thing. Rather, his mention of witchcraft is in the context of not rejecting paranormal phenomena such as "sorceries, witchcrafts, dreams, divinations, and the like," as possibly producing valid, verifiable scientific evidence. Outside of this gender-biased twisting of Bacon, Merchant appears to have correctly interpreted the significance of Bacon in shaping modern, exploitative attitudes towards nature.

Bacon's great achievement was to formulate the concept of human mastery over nature much more clearly than had been done previously and to assign it a prominent place among men's concerns. Its dangerous connection with the megalomaniacal delusions of the alchemists were severed; and, still infused with Renaissance energies, it was wedded to the predominant cultural force of the time, namely, Christianity.

In Bacon's view religion and science were engaged in a mutual effort to compensate for the damage incurred as a result of the expulsion from Paradise.¹

Leiss thus shows us that, for Bacon, recovery of lost dominion over nature was the task of science and religion. But in so doing, Leiss concludes that Bacon "unwittingly charted a course for later generations which led to the gradual secularization of the idea."²

Granberg-Michaelson likewise points to Bacon as the root of the despotic viewpoint, but adds René Descartes (1596-1650)³ and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) as accomplices. Descartes, he says, detached the human mind from nature. Bacon supplied the rationale, the goal of using science to regain dominion over nature, and Newton's view of the universe as a cosmic machine combined to lead to a mechanical paradigm

¹William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 48-49. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid., 52-53.

³Descartes does not seem to develop the man-nature relationship the way Bacon does. However, he does repeat the familiar refrain that reason "is the only thing that makes us men (and distinguishes us from animals)." He also, like Bacon, promotes the potential use of science to improve the lot of man, advocating that instead of teaching "speculative philosophy," schools should teach "a practical one, by which, knowing the nature and behavior of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens, and all other bodies which surround us, as well as we now understand the different skills of our workers, we can employ these entities for all the purposes for which they are suited, and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature." Thus Descartes echoes the Baconian mindset and shows how it was becoming mainstream thinking barely a generation later. See, René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays: Discourse on Method; Meditations; Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, trans. Laurence J. LaFleur (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964), 4, 45. Both quotes are from *Discourse on Method*, parts 1 and 6.

which excluded God from the explanation of the world. “Once Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and others liberated God from running the world, John Locke set God free from the task of upholding government and society. Natural reason and self-interest would suffice.”¹

It should be no surprise that as technological prowess increased, there would be those who would try to express a theology of dominion compatible with Bacon’s bold vision. Thus the new understanding of dominion spawned by Bacon appears to have been infiltrating Christian thinking. This can be seen in several, influential works of natural theology and natural science produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Seventeenth-Century Works

Robert Boyle (1627-91)

Robert Boyle states that people were studying nature for two reasons. Some merely wanted only to know nature. Others were studying nature in order to command her. This second group, says Boyle, would “bring nature to be serviceable to their particular ends, whether of health, or riches, or sensual delight.”² Boyle thus affirms that Bacon’s vision was indeed becoming mainstream science. Apart from this statement, Boyle has little else to say concerning the relationship of man to nature. Much more

¹Granberg-Michaelson, 42.

²Robert Boyle, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle in Six Volumes*, vol. 1 (London: J. and F. Rivington, L. Davis, W. Johnston, S. Crowder, T. Payne, et al., 1772), 310.

prominent, however, is Boyle's contemporary, Sir Matthew Hale.

Sir Matthew Hale (1609-76)

In *The Primitive Origination of Mankind*, Hale appears to weld Calvin's language of oxen and sheep, with Bacon's imperative to subvert nature to man's use. Early in his discussion of the relationship between man and nature, Hale asserts, "If we consider of Animals [*sic*], we shall find admirable accommodations in them one to another, and especially to Man: the Horse, high-spirited, yet very docible [*sic*], fitted for swiftness, carriage, and agility, . . . the Ox patient, painful, strong, fitted for draught; the Camel fitted for Strength, and a natural Saddle for Burthen; the Cow for yielding Milk; the Sheep for Cloathing; the Beasts and Birds of greatest use being most commonly made tame, and affecting a spontaneous subjection to Man: among the Vegetables some are for Food, some for Medicines."¹ It is no surprise, then, when Hale declares, "Yet the chief and ultimate accommodation of things seems principally to terminate in Man."²

Hale does put some limitation on human dominion by stating that the subjection of nature to man is not so much in terms of subservience and service, but rather is more related to their place in the divine regiment and order. Thus, in keeping with the divine

¹Sir Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind, Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature* (London: William Godbid, 1677), 359.

²*Ibid.*, 360, 362. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, John Ray would likewise argue that the animals and resources in this world were made for man's use and benefit. Ray postulates that there are still many, unknown uses yet to be discovered. See, John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation*, 12th ed., corrected (London: n.p., 1754), 367-370. Originally published in 1691.

order, “Lions, Tigers, Wolves, Foxes, Dragons, Serpents; and that these stand in need of some coercive power over them, that they destroy not the *Species* of more profitable, and yet weaker Animals. . . . Man was invested with power, authority, right, dominion, trust, and care, to correct and abridge the excesses and cruelties of the fiercer Animals, to give protection and defence [*sic*] to the Mansuete [*sic*]¹ and useful.”² Hale further declares that God made man to be “Vice-Roy of the great God of Heaven and Earth . . . ; his Steward, *Villicus*, Bayliff or Farmer of this goodly Farm of the lower World . . . *Gen* 9. 3. *Psal.* 8. 6.”³

Hale’s beliefs in human supremacy over nature would carry over into the eighteenth century. In England, William Derham would assume the prophetic mantle of Hale, and in America, Cotton Mather would rely on the work of both Hale and Derham.

Eighteenth Century

William Derham (1657-1735)

Besides Matthew Hale, William Derham is most often cited as a leading influence in championing a high-handed view of man’s dominion over nature. In a series of sixteen lectures given in 1711-12, Derham periodically expounds on the dominion of man and that the things of nature are here primarily for the benefit of man.

Derham declared that God gave man the power of reason to make effective use of

¹I.e., tame, or gentle, now spelled, “mansuetude.”

²*Ibid.*, 369-370.

³*Ibid.*, 371.

the materials and resources of this world. This provision of materials was made for man by the creator. Animal skins, trees, plants, even stones, are all from God for us to use in making our habitations, clothing ourselves, and providing for our needs.¹ He more explicitly incorporates the Baconian ideal than does Hale, when he states that “*Man’s invention* should reach to such a great variety of matters, that it should hit upon every thing that may be of any use, either to himself, or to human society, or that may any ways promote (what in him lies) the benefit of this lower part of the creation.”² Thus Derham furthers the merger of the new, Greek-based science, with the Genesis concept of human dominion.

Like those before him, Derham claims a biblical mandate supporting the advantageous use of nature by artisans and tradesmen, declaring that man was made “to bear the great Creator’s vicegerency in this lower world, to employ the several creatures, to make use of the various materials, to manage the grand business.”³ Thus, “a duty ariseth thence on every man, to pursue the ends, and answer all the designs of the Divine

¹W[illiam] Derham, *Physico-Theology: or, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from His Works of Creation*, vol. 2, From Sixteen Discourses given in 1711-12 (London: Printed for A. Strahan; T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), 61-62.

²Ibid., 145. Emphasis in original. See also, where he also declares: “And for this lower world, what material is there to be found; what kind of earth, or stone, or metal; what animal, tree, or plant, yea even the very shrubs of the field; in a word, what of all the excellent variety the Creator has furnished the world with, for all its uses and occasions, in all ages; what, I say, that man’s contrivance doth not extend unto, and make some way or other advantageous to himself, and useful for building, cloathing, food, physic, or for tools or utensils, or for even only pleasure or diversion?” (146). The answer is, “All of it.”

³Ibid., 153ff.

Providence.” Derham here turns the bending nature to human ends (which is the divine design for nature) into a moral duty.

However, Derham does try to limit human dominion, arguing, like Calvin, that human dominion operates on a stewardship model where man is held accountable by God and must not abuse his privileges.¹ He also gives us a hint that the secularization of Bacon’s vision was well underway when he laments the fact that “men are ready to imagine their wit, learning, genius, riches, authority . . . to be works of nature [as opposed to being gifts of God] . . . ; that they are the masters of them, and at liberty to use them as they please, to gratify their lust or humour and satisfy their depraved appetites.”² Thus Derham points us to the secularization of man’s view of nature as causing the unconditional, exploitative view of man’s dominion over nature, in which he is at liberty to do whatever he pleases with the natural world.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

That Derham’s and Boyle’s influence reached the settlements on the American continent is evident in the work of Cotton Mather, an American Puritan, for Mather explicitly mentions both men in his natural theology.³ Mather essentially takes up their refrain, though in a more indirect and abbreviated form.

¹Ibid., 164.

²Ibid., 163-164.

³Cotton Mather, “The Christian Philosopher,” in *Selections from Cotton Mather*, ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926), 293-294.

For example, Mather opens his essay entitled, “Of the Earth,” by quoting Prov 3:19, “The Lord by Wisdom has founded the Earth.” He then proceeds to assemble natural data reported by men such as Boyle and Derham to show how nature is a system of harmonious design. One example of this divine wisdom being manifest in creation is said to be “that the Ridges of the Mountains being placed thro the midst of their Continents, do serve as Alembicks,¹ to distil fresh Waters in vast Quantities for the Use of the World.”² Another illustration is that “minerals are dug out of the Mountains; which if they were sought only in level countries, the Delfs would be so flown with Waters, that it would be impossible to make Addits and Soughs to drein them.”³ Thus God in his wisdom put the minerals in the mountains so that we can be above the water line to dig and retrieve them. Mather gives mountains yet another divine function for human benefit. “Mountains also are the most convenient Boundaries to Territories, and afford a Defence unto them. One calls them the Bulwarks of Nature, cast up at the Charges of the Almighty.” These and other marvels should, declares Mather, cause us to say, “Great God, the Earth is full of thy Goodness!”⁴ In a later essay, he goes on to assert that a host of useful things in nature are clearly there for the happiness of mankind. They

¹An alembic was a device for purifying water akin to distilling.

²Ibid., 294.

³Ibid., 295. The editor notes in footnote 2 on this page that “Delf = a ditch; addits and soughs = drains, gutters.”

⁴Ibid., 297.

“answer the chief End of man.”¹ Thus in Mather, we see a continuation of dominionist theology.

The Puritans' View of Nature

Mather reflects not only the influence of Boyle and Derham, but to a degree, a culmination of his own Puritan heritage. This heritage was most developed in the struggle to plant new colonies and settlements in the newly discovered American continent. In the American context, Santmire notes that Puritanism contributed to this exploitative mentality by strongly emphasizing the text in Genesis where God commands man to subdue the earth. Furthermore, the Puritans put heavy emphasis on proving their election with good works that bring glory to God. “Generations of Americans,” says Santmire, “were instructed in their Churches that nature is properly man’s sphere of lordship, given to him by God, and now at his disposal to use, by the sweat of his brow, in order to bring honor to the name of God.”²

From the very onset of British settlement in New England, and Puritan authors advocated a strong assertion of dominion over nature.³ The wilderness was an evil entity

¹Ibid., 352.

²Paul Santmire, “Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature, and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), 71.

³This is best traced by studying the Puritan theology of the wilderness, which goes far beyond mere replenishment of the earth. For a fuller exposition on the Puritan theology of the wilderness, see Peter N. Carroll’s landmark work, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier 1629-1700* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). This work is an excellent resource for finding original Puritan documents.

which had to be tamed. This can be seen in the work of Puritan poet Michael Wigglesworth, who described the uninhabited New England country as, “a waste and howling wilderness, Where none inhabited But hellish fiends, and brutish men That Devils worshiped. . . . in darkness . . . Far off from Heaven’s light, Amidst the shaddows [*sic*] of grim death. . . .”¹ Such a disordered and evil land must be inhabited and subdued. This led to the problem of justifying the occupation of Indian tribal lands. Their justification reveals much about their understanding of man’s relationship to nature.

The Puritans argued that the Indians had no valid claim to vacant lands, and thus the Colonies had free right to move in. Winthrop, White, and Cotton, among others, argue that God establishes nations and peoples to “replenish the earth,” in fulfillment of the command of Gen 1:28, and its restatement to Noah in Gen 9:1.² This command,

¹Michael Wigglesworth, “God’s Controversy with New England,” in *The Poems of Michael Wigglesworth*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 90. According to Carroll, two other major aspects of the wilderness theology were the apocalyptic interpretation in which the wilderness provides protection (i.e., Rev 12:14) to set up a model, theocratic-biblical society (a “city upon a hill”), and a strong missiology in reference to seeking to convert the native Indians. See Carroll, 61-63. William Bradford, Mayflower passenger and first Governor of the Plymouth plantation and a Pilgrim (not a Puritan), describing the first views of the new land, wrote, “What could they see but a hidious and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men? . . . the whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage heiw [hue, appearance].” William Bradford, *Bradford’s History of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. William T. Davis, *Original Narratives of Early American History* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), 96.

²John Winthrop, *Winthrop Papers*, 5 vols. ([Boston, MA]: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929, 2:123 [This portion was written in 1629]; John White, *The Planters Plea or the Grounds of Plantations Examined and Usual Objections Answered* (London: William Iones, 1630), in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 62 ([Boston, MA]: n.p., 1930), pages 371-75; John Cotton, *God’s Promise to His Plantations, as it was Delivered in a Sermon* (London: William Jones for John Bellamy, 1634; reprint, Boston in New England [MA]: Samuel Green, 1686), 4-6.

argues White, is universal and is still binding “as long as the earth yeelds [*sic*] empty places to be replenished.”¹ Thus, in Cotton’s words, when a land is “void of Inhabitants,” and “is a vacant place, there is liberty for the Son of *Adam* or *Noah* to come and inhabit, though they neither buy it, nor ask their leaves. . . . If therefore any Son of *Adam* come, and find a place empty, he hath liberty to come, and to fill, and subdue the Earth there.”² White argues that the New England Colonies had “sufficient warrant from the mouth of God” to replenish the “wast and voyd Countries,” and that the “Colonies . . . have their warrant from God’s direction and command [cites Gen 1:28-29].”³ Both Winthrop and White attach the idea of fulfilling the Genesis command to the concept of giving God His “due honor,” and advancing God’s glory. Thus it is our moral duty to replenish the earth.⁴ Both Winthrop and White thus invoked the principle that men are only entitled to as much land as they can improve, concluding that the vacant lands were free for the colonies to possess and subdue.⁵

The Puritans also invoked the argument that the rest of the creation was made for man’s use and benefit. Thus, the Colonies had received God’s blessing on their industrious subjection of the land. Whatever they needed was said to be “treasured vp in

¹John White, 372.

²Cotton, 4-5.

³John White, 376, 371.

⁴Winthrop, 2:123; John White, 372-73.

⁵Winthrop, 4:101-102; John White, 385.

the earthe by the Creator, and is to be fetched thence by the sweatt of our browes.”¹ In this way, the American culture developed a clear tendency towards a strong, aggressive view of human dominion over nature, believed to have divine sanction and approval. This interpretation received some criticism and opposition in the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-Century Reaction to American Dominionist Theology

Francis Wayland (1796-1865)

According to Peter Singer, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* by Francis Wayland was “perhaps the most widely used work on moral philosophy in nineteenth-century America.”² In this work, Wayland has a short section entitled “Our Duty to Brutes,” in which he asserts of that animal “brutes are sensitive beings, capable of, probably, as great degrees of physical pleasure and pain as ourselves. . . . They differ from us chiefly in being destitute of any moral facility.”³

While Wayland explicitly rejects viewing animals as being our moral equals, and further asserting that human rights are paramount, nonetheless, he argues that human treatment of animals must be consistent with what God permits, as animals are under His protection. Thus, “we are forbidden to treat them unkindly on any pretense, or for any reason.”⁴ Wayland cites most forms of hunting, as well as horse racing, as examples of

¹Winthrop, 2:136.

²Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 222.

³Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science* (Boston, MA: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1848), 395.

⁴Ibid.

cruelty to animals that is “wrong.”¹ If Singer has correctly depicted the popularity of Wayland, then it may be that his influence is seen in two great activists who opposed human despotism over nature, John Muir and Henry Thoreau.

John Muir (1838-1914)

Muir, in the language of Calvin and Hale, repeats and criticizes the despotic view of human dominion inherited from the Puritans and touted in the mid-1800s,² saying:

The world, we are told was made especially for man -- a presumption not supported by all the facts. A numerous class of men are painfully astonished

whenever they find anything, living or dead, in all God's universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves. . . . To such properly trimmed people, the sheep, for example, is an easy problem—food and clothing “for us.” . . .

In the same pleasant plan, whales are storehouses of oil for us . . . until the discovery of the Pennsylvania oil wells. Among plants, hemp, to say nothing of the cereals, is a case of evident destination for ship's rigging, wrapping packages, and hanging the wicked. Cotton is just another plain case of clothing. Iron was made for hammers and ploughs, and lead for bullets; all intended for us. And so of other small handfuls of insignificant things. . . .

. . . Why does water drown its lord? Why do so many minerals poison him? Why are so many plants and fishes deadly enemies? Why is the lord of creation subjected to the same laws of life as his subjects?³

¹Ibid.

²See, for example, George Bush, *Questions and Notes Critical and Practical upon the Book of Genesis* (New York: John P. Haven, 1831), 45, where he says, “How exalted the original dignity of man! Made in the image of his Creator, not only in moral similitude but in official supremacy, he beheld himself head of the terrestrial creation, with every department of nature, animate and inanimate, subservient to his use!”

³John Muir, *The Wilderness World of John Muir*, ed. Edwin Way Teal (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 316-318. Second emphasis mine.

Muir's reaction to dominion theology suggests it was alive, well, and commonly advocated during his lifetime. Thus we have evidence through his reaction that the Puritan influence was alive and well in nineteenth-century America. Furthermore, Muir is significant in the fact that he represents one of first critics to directly connect Christianity with a despotic view of human dominion, and, as seen above, one of the first to put forth evidence to disprove such claims.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

Thoreau likewise objected to the total subjugation of nature, and likewise tied it to Christianity. "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom merely civil." He wished to promote wild nature because "there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and school committee and everyone will take care of that."¹ Thus, in Thoreau and Muir, we see the beginnings, both of environmental activism, and of seeing the Christian understanding as anti-nature. A century later, Lynn White, Jr., would develop the latter thought into a full blown charge against Christianity.

¹Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (n.p.: The Riverside Press, 1914; [Originally published posthumously by his wife in 1863], 3. Excerpts of *Walking* are found in his journals from 1850-52; See also *Huckleberries*, ed. Leo Stoller (New York: New York Public Library, 1970; Originally published in 1861), 30-31, where Thoreau announces, "I am not overflowing with respect and gratitude to the fathers who thus laid out our New England villages," because they built churches, but "did not preserve from desecration and destruction, far grander temples not made with hands."

Twentieth-Century Developments

Lynn White, Jr.

While Lynn White, Jr., does not explicitly mention John Muir, it is precisely the exploitative mentality towards nature to which Muir reacted that also seems to be the basis of White's controversial article in 1967.¹ This article has become the flagship work of those who wish to blame the current ecological stress on Christianity.

White asserts that Christianity has inherited from Judaism "a striking story of creation. . . . Man named all the animals, thus establishing dominance over them. God planned all this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. . . . He is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image."² This led him to charge that Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen for, "Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature." He insists that from the creation perspective, "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."³

Not only does White see the creation theology as shaping Christian thought into support for despotic dominion, but he also sees Christianity as having achieved a stunning intellectual victory over other perspectives that has sealed the victory of the

¹Lynn White, Jr., 18-30.

²Ibid., 25.

³Ibid.

exploitative viewpoint. He specifically cites the demise of paganism and its tendency to animism, as the “greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture.”¹

When White’s understanding of the creation story is examined, one begins to question if he has actually read it on its own terms. In other words, is it possible that White has built up a straw man by reading industrial revolution thinking into the original text instead of exegeting it on its own terms?

Challenges to Lynn White, Jr.

Lynn White’s article has aroused much discussion and criticism.² Some, like J. Baird Callicot, do not choose to quarrel with White’s premise that science and technology grew primarily in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Instead, he asserts that White’s analysis is incomplete. “What he fails to note is that the cognitive stock-in-trade of modern science . . . is of Greek philosophical [roots], not biblical or religious

¹Ibid., 24-25.

²Some representative examples include: J. Baird Callicot, “Genesis and John Muir,” *ReVision* 12, no. 3 (1990): 2 (paging is from an electronic version in EBSCOhost, an electronic library source); Granberg-Michaelson, 40-41; Geisler, 308-309; Henry Morris, “The Bible, Creation, and Ecology,” 1 November 1991, <http://www.icr.org/index.php?module=articles&action=view&ID=350> (7 November 2005); Steve Bishop, “Green Theology and Deep Ecology: New Age or New Creation?” *Themelios* 16 (1991): 8-14; and John B. Bennet, “On Responding to Lynn White: Ecology and Christianity,” *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 5 (1977): 71-77. In this list, Bennet is unique in arguing from a Process Theology perspective. Bishop is rich in other sources for Christian Eco-theology. A final article with, perhaps, a withering criticism of White is by John Richardson, “The Spiritual Roots of Our Ecological Crisis—Was Lynn White Right?” November 1998, <http://www.btinternet.com/~j.p.richardson/lynnwhite.html> (6 July 2003).

provenance.”¹ He declares that Newton’s imperative to “think God’s thoughts after Him,” was “inspired by Pythagoras and Democritus, not Moses and Paul.” He concludes, “In my opinion, the more culpable conceptual roots of our ecological crisis, are traceable to the intellectual legacy of Greek natural philosophy, reworked by the early moderns, rather than to the intellectual legacy of the Old and New Testaments.”²

Granberg-Michaelson likewise rejects the charge that Christianity is the cause of our ecological woes, clearly asserting the impact of the Enlightenment in opening the way for an exploitative viewpoint. He further argues that a number of non-Christian cultures have been scientifically advanced and have had major impacts on the environment. Egypt’s technology was highly developed, while the Hebrew’s technology was quite inferior.³

Norman Geisler takes White to task on his conclusions, rightly asserting that, “it is not the Christian world view that encourages the abuse of nature, but the materialistic view. Those who see nature’s resources as unlimited and man as the ultimate authority in the use of them are the exploitative ones.”⁴ That is, Christianity corrupted by Enlightenment, materialistic thinking has inappropriately interpreted human dominion in terms of exploitation to match the psyche of the intellectual revolution surrounding them.

¹Callicot, 2.

²Ibid.

³Granberg-Michaelson, 40-41.

⁴Geisler, 308-309.

Finally, Callicot notes that, by and large, most Christian responses to views such as held by White promote a stewardship model of man's relation to nature instead of a despotic model.¹ Steve Bishop also argues that human dominion is in the context of God's ownership of the earth. Thus, "Creation is not anthropocentric, it is theocentric." Furthermore, Bishop argues that human dominion "is not rulership without limits." He cites various limits on man's use of nature, prescribed in the Pentateuch, as evidence that man was not seen as empowered to do whatever he pleases with nature.² This implies, as I have suggested earlier, that White has not accurately portrayed the creation theology of Genesis. But having noted some criticism of White's position, it is important to remember White's challenge to Christians that we cannot get out of our ecological crisis until we rethink our religion.³ Andrew Linzey has set out to do precisely this—to reformulate Christian theology in terms of Animal Ethics.

Andrew Linzey

Andrew Linzey, the first professor of animal theology in the world, has set out to rethink Christian theology in terms of animals and their rights in their relationship with

¹Callicot, 2.

²Bishop, 8-9. Bishop catalogs Mosaic regulations of man's use of nature as evidence that man did not have unbridled freedom to exploit nature in the name of dominion. A partial list of Bishop's evidence includes divine limits on human diet (Gen 1:29-30; Lev 17:10-14), the prohibition of using fruit trees to build siege works (Deut 20:19), the prohibition of taking a mother bird with her young (Deut 22:6); the prohibition of muzzling the ox when it is threshing grain (Deut 25:4); and the requirement to rest the land every seventh year (Lev 25:1-12).

³Lynn White, Jr., 28.

man.¹ Linzey, like Rachels, flat out rejects “speciesism” which he defines as “an *arbitrary* favoring of one species’ interests over another.”² Linzey sees Christian theology as generally focusing on the difference between animals and humans. Besides the creation theology and philosophical arguments on man having reason, Linzey adds one more reason animals are second class in Christian theology. Citing Barth’s soteriology, he shows that in Christian thinking, man is special because Christ incarnated as a human, and died to save humans. “The incarnation is the trump card to vanquish all other creaturely rights to specialness, intrinsic worth, and respectful treatment.”³

Linzey’s significance lies in the fact that he appears to be the first Christian theologian to seriously attempt to reinterpret the “Christian” exploitative view of nature and animals, and thus to establish a Christian theology of animal rights. Linzey thus is breaking new ground in Christian theological circles.

Ironically, Linzey claims that his work is not inspired by the ongoing debate encapsulated in Lynn White’s article. In his words, “Confronting speciesism, then, is not about Christian theology’s latest concession to secular fashion, it is an imperative derived from the heart of theology’s mission: to render a truthful, non-partial account of the creation God has made.” While this is ostensibly so, it seems odd that Linzey has undertaken this task at the peak explosion of the animal rights movement which, like

¹Linzey claims this title for himself. See, Andrew Linzey, “Notes on Contributors,” in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions About Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, Illini Books, 1998), 251.

²Linzey, “Introduction,” xii.

³Ibid., xii-xv.

Rachels, is usually based in evolutionary and not Christian thinking. Yamamoto hints at this in one of her chapters in Linzey's book, arguing that we can find no indisputable factor distinguishing us from animals.¹ This distinction has been precisely where this historical survey interfaces with Rachels's work.

It is in this historical context that I launch my investigation of James Rachels and his view of the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. Rachels will criticize Christianity for holding a despotic view of dominion which is neither philosophically nor scientifically tenable in the light of Darwin's theory of evolution. He will also offer an alternative approach to ethics based on the principles of Darwinian evolution.

¹Yamamoto, 88.

CHAPTER THREE

SPECIESISM AND THE ROLE OF HUMAN

PREFERENCE IN ETHICS

Introduction

James Rachels has two dimensions to his Darwinist ethics that impinge on the issue of human specialness. In the first dimension, he shares common ground with other current thinkers, most easily seen through the eyes of the animal rights movement. In short, Rachels joins many in the cry against “speciesism.” This chapter will focus on this dimension of Rachels’s ethics. It will place Rachels in the context of fellow animal rights advocates. Chapter 4 will focus on Rachels’s unique contributions among modern thinkers concerning evolution and ethics. These two chapters will have but little critique of Rachels and his peers. My purpose is to set forth their side of the arguments as accurately and unbiasedly as possible. I shall respond to the arguments in this chapter in chapter 5 and likewise for chapter 4 in chapter 6. With this in mind, let us explore the issue of speciesism to see where Rachels fits into the contemporary landscape, and to discover how Darwinian evolution is used in a manner that generates significant moral implications.

The Oxford Group and Speciesism

According to Tom Regan,

In 1971, three young Oxford Philosophers—Roslind and Stanley Godlovich, and John Harris—published *Animals, Men and Morals*.¹ The volume marked the first time philosophers had collaborated to craft a book that had to do with the moral status of nonhuman animals.

In the past twenty-five years, these philosophers have written more on “the animal question” than philosophers of whatever stripe had written in the previous two thousand.²

Richard Ryder notes the significance of this landmark event, observing that the philosophical enterprise of addressing the moral significance of animals has been primarily within British circles, especially in connection with Oxford University. Key participants in the “Oxford Group,” as he christens these scholars, include the Godlovitches, John Harris, Richard Ryder, Peter Singer, Stephen Clark, and Andrew Linzey. The movement reached its critical mass in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ryder further declares that while the British philosophers (i.e., the Oxford Group) pioneered the issue, American philosophers have joined the British bandwagon in further exploring and developing the issues surrounding the moral status of animals.³

¹Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris, eds., *Animals, Men and Morals: An Enquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-humans* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1972).

²Tom Regan, foreword to *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, ed. H. Peter Steeves, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, ed. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), xi.

³Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Towards Speciesism* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 1-4.

Ryder believes that the counter-cultural social movements of the 1960s like hippies and flower children were a key factor in opening the door for considering moral issues as related to animals.¹ Indeed, a number of authors in this animal rights movement use strong revolutionary and ideological rhetoric to promote their cause. Peter Singer says, “Only by making a radical break with more than two thousand years of Western thought about animals can we build on a solid foundation.”² Similarly, Ryder asserts, “The struggle against speciesism is not a sideshow; it is one of the main arenas of moral and psychological change in the world today. It is part of a new and enlarged vision for peace

¹Ibid., 3. He additionally asserts that the animal rights movement is a result of an eclectic collection of ideas such as the counterculture of the hippie movement, individualist rejection of social institutions, science demystifying man into an animal, higher education, and television which combined to produce the anti-speciesist movement. See pp. 3-5. On pp. 309-311, Ryder expands his explanation of origins of speciesism, giving four factors: (1) Punishing non-humans for our sexual weakness [he ties viewing man as an animal, contrary to Puritan theology, as one factor in looser attitudes to sexuality]; (2) Social classes—The Middle and Upper classes are asserted to look down on animals in a similar way to looking down on the lower social classes of humans; (3) Repressing “perennial guilt surrounding humankind’s speciesism,” by over-arguing the case in favor of speciesism; (4) The lower classes tyrannize animals to get a sense of power for themselves. He also roots speciesism in Puritan theology where what is “natural” for animals is “unnatural” for humans (again focused greatly on sex drives), but credits Freud for educating us to accept our “animal natures.”

Finally, Ryder believes that “the gradual decline in the overt importance attached to Christian values has left an amoral vacuum,” opening the way for an alternative ethical approach (329). Peter Carruthers also points to a weakness in Christianity as opening the way for an alternative ethical approach when he asserts that Christian values carry little conviction in an increasingly secular era. See Peter Carruthers, *The Animals Issue: Moral Theory in Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13-14.

Both Ryder and Carruthers cite urbanization of Western culture for aiding the shift towards anti-speciesism. Urbanization has disconnected most from direct use of animals, and significant numbers of pets have increased our sentimentality towards animals in general. Animals to a great degree are not seen as a threat to our safety. See, Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 318, and Carruthers, xii.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 224.

and happiness. . . . The time has come for a revolution in our attitudes.”¹ These changing attitudes towards animals are indicative, in Ryder’s words, “of the gradual triumph of reason and compassion over habit, vested interest, and convenience.”² Regan argues that human preference over animals is unjust to the core and this means that advocates of animal rights are not reformists but abolitionists!³ This moral preference for humans is now called “speciesism,” a word Regan claims to have coined for this purpose in 1970.⁴ Since this word was created in the context of a counter-cultural movement, we need to briefly explore its nuances.

The Nature of Speciesism

General Concepts

In their article on Speciesism in the *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, Andrew Linzey and Paul Waldau give the following definition of speciesism:

“Speciesism is the arbitrary favoring of one species’ interests over the interests of others.”⁵ Two years later, Andrew Linzey used almost identical language in declaring

¹Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 1.

²Ibid., 2. On p. 4, he pejoratively labels what he calls discrimination on the basis of species as “*illogical*” and “*unjust*.” Emphasis in original.

³Tom Regan, “Animal Rights: What’s in a Name?” in *Animal Welfare and the Environment: An RSPCA Book*, ed. Richard D. Ryder (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1992), 55.

⁴Ibid., 328.

⁵Andrew Linzey and Paul Waldau, “Speciesism,” *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 788.

speciesism to be “an *arbitrary* favoring of one species’ interests over another.”¹ Kevin Dolan begins to narrow the definitional focus by asserting that “the essence of speciesism can be summed up in the phrase: ‘the boundary of my group is the boundary of my concern’.”² Paul Waldau makes it clear that the implied focus of the term is human speciesism³—the preference of humans over other animals simply because they are human. Richard Ryder believes human speciesism is rooted in appearance, like racism.⁴ Evelyn Pluhar echoes Ryder’s focus on appearance by noting that “not coincidentally, we humans tend to assume that we are the paradigms of moral significance. As other beings depart in greater and greater degree from our model, most of us find progressively more difficult to accord than our moral concern.” Pluhar later concludes, “Not surprisingly, the further we depart from our own characteristics, the less likely we are to extend our moral concern.”⁵ Roslind Godlovitch makes a similar observation in her statement that, “This view about animals runs alongside another generally accepted view concerning human beings. Whereas we think that a few animals may be sacrificed for the benefit of many humans . . . we do not accept this utilitarian reasoning with regard to humans and

¹Linzey, “Introduction,” xii. Emphasis in original.

²Kevin Dolan, *Ethics, Animals, and Science* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Science, 1999), 127.

³Paul Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27.

⁴Richard Ryder, *Victims of Science: The Use of Animals in Research* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), 16.

⁵Evelyn Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 1, 8.

allow experiments which cause suffering and death to be carried out on a minority of our fellows in order to ‘maximize the happiness’ of the scope of the remainder. Thus seems that our moral principles differ substantially when we apply them to human beings in animals.”¹ Singer explicitly likens speciesism to racism, sexism, and slavery.² Thus to be accused of speciesism is highly pejorative, similar to being accused of being racist. It is also interesting to note that the term is not used for preferential value of a non-human species. It is used only in reference to preference of humans over the animal kingdom.

Singer asserts that speciesism violates the “fundamental moral principle of equality and consideration of interests that ought to govern our relations with all beings.” This, he asserts, causes us to inflict suffering on non-humans for “trivial purposes,” but that “generation after generation of Western thinkers have sought to defend the right of humans to do this.”³ Singer here reveals the cultural target of the indictment as “speciesism”: It is primarily Western culture and thinking that comes under attack for being “speciesist.” Also, even human preference for “trivial purposes” is clearly condemned. Waldau criticizes the inclusion of the adjective “trivial” as a weakness. Some trivial issues, he argues, favor humans without being objectionable. Therefore, he maintains that the definition would be much stronger and more useful if speciesism is

¹Roslind Godlovitch, “Animals and Morals,” in *Animals, Men and Morals: An Enquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-humans*, ed. Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1972), 156.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 55-56. Much of the “pop literature” on Animal Rights makes this same comparison.

³*Ibid.*, 223.

restricted to undue human preference in a “critical issue.”¹ However, he offers no suggestion on determining the difference between trivial and critical, leaving the reader with no clear means of making the distinction.

James Rachels reiterates the concept of speciesism found in such authors as Singer, and repeats those sentiments in his own writings. He argues that “the traditional doctrine of human dignity is speciesist to the core, for it implies that the interests of humans have priority over those of all other creatures.”²

Rachels believes this speciesism exists largely because of what he calls “traditional morality.”³ But what does Rachels mean by traditional morality? Another statement clarifies his intent: “Darwin’s earliest readers realized that an evolutionary outlook might undermine the traditional doctrine of human dignity, *a doctrine which is at the core of Western morals.*”⁴ Rachels observes that this means that as we probe the relationship of morality to religion, the religious focus is likely to be on Christianity because it is the dominant religion of Western society.⁵ Specifically he mentions the doctrine of man

¹Waldau, 37.

²James Rachels, *CfA*, 181.

³Ibid., 1-5.

⁴Ibid., 79. Emphasis mine.

⁵James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3d ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 55; idem, *CfA*, 102. See also *CfA*, 182, where Rachels states that “many defenders of traditional morality have embraced the radical form of speciesism. Aquinas and Kant . . . both held that the interests of non-humans count for nothing.” Thus Aquinas, a major Christian theologian, is identified with “traditional” morality. Although unstated, Rachels’s writings seem to imply that other religions are not seen as posing the kind of speciesist threat that he claims to find in Christianity. In

being the “image of God” as a major culprit in causing speciesism.¹ Rachels sees Aquinas’s incorporation of the Aristotelian hierarchy of being as a corollary cause of Western speciesism.² Thus, for Rachels, ethical systems rooted in “human hubris” are focused on protecting HUMAN rights and interests.³

Elements (1999), 61, it seems clear that by “Christianity,” Rachels is essentially referring to Roman Catholic moral theology and Catholic based natural law theory.

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 4, 171; idem, *Elements* (1999), 102.

²Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 60-61, 102. Rachels’s mention of the Aristotelian view of reality points to a fundamental issue undergirding the speciesism debate. Stephen Toulmin asserts that there has been a fundamental shift from an “ahistorical” view of nature and reality to a historical one. In the ahistorical view, there was an “‘immutable’ order of nature and human knowledge.” The cosmos was “a fixed and ‘well-ordered’ body of eternal entities and their relationships.” Toulmin argues this concept of an underlying, immutable reality which shapes and structures our history, is rooted in Greek philosophy, citing especially Plato. Concerning the shift to a historical, more relativist paradigm, Toulmin observes: “Only from 1750 on did the new historical point of view begin to put down serious roots. At first, it made inroads only into the human sciences; but it soon spread into natural sciences: first, into the history of the earth, by way of paleontology and historical geology, and next into biology, with the discovery of organic evolution, which led to Darwin’s theory of variation and natural selection.” Stephen Toulmin, “The Historization of Natural Science: Its Implications for Theology,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 233-241, esp. 233-235. Thus, Darwinism cannot see any fixity of species for this would reflect the immutable order of the ahistorical approaches to nature. If fixity of species is thus rejected, then this would imply that the concept of species is an artificial and arbitrary categorization that can have no moral significance. We shall see Rachels develop this argument in chapter 4.

³Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 195. Rachels here attributes human tendencies to speciesism as being part of our evolutionary development, and in this context asserts that humanocentric ethics restricts morality to the protection of human interests. However, since Rachels accuses traditional ethics as being founded on foundations of human preference, and thus inherently speciesist, the clear implication of Rachels’s assertion is that any ethics recognizing human preference is ultimately an ethics which protects only human interests, whether explained by evolution, or justified by theological and philosophical concepts.

Four Forms of Speciesism

Radical versus Mild Speciesism

Unlike the previous authors, Rachels classifies speciesism into different forms, consisting of two sets of paired categories. In the first pair, radical speciesism and mild speciesism, his contrast “has to do with the extent of the view.”¹ In radical speciesism, “even the relatively trivial interests of humans take priority over vital interests of nonhumans. Thus, if we have to choose between causing mild discomfort to a human, and causing excruciating pain to a non-human, we should prefer to cause pain to the non-human and spare the human.”²

In mild speciesism, “when the choice is between a relatively trivial human interest and a more substantial interest of a non-human, we may choose for the non-human. . . . However, if the interests are comparable . . . we should give preference to the human’s welfare.”³ Thus, only when human interests are either greater than or approximately equal to animal interests is human preference given. But for Rachels, this is not the only way to categorize speciesism.

Qualified versus Unqualified Speciesism

Rachels shifts the discussion to another way of distinguishing types of speciesism,

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 183.

²*Ibid.*, 182.

³*Ibid.*

saying, “In addition to distinguishing between radical and mild speciesism, we may distinguish between qualified and unqualified versions of the doctrine.”¹ Rachels asserts that this method of comparing forms of speciesism differs from the former in that it “has to do with its logical basis.”² Rachels defines unqualified speciesism as “the view that mere species alone is morally important. On this view, the fact that an individual is a member of a certain species, unsupplemented by any other consideration, is enough to make a difference in how the individual should be treated.”³ In other words, unqualified speciesism asserts that species membership alone is the basis of having moral significance and protection. Applied to humans, any human would automatically have superior rights over an animal merely because of membership in the human race. Thus, it seems closely related to the view of radical speciesism discussed earlier. Unqualified speciesism is essentially an entitlement model of morality regardless of personal function and ability. It is this concept of speciesism that Rachels likens to racism, a comparison that he notes is also made by Singer.⁴ The one without rights is “equally as intelligent,

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 183.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 181, 183. On p. 181, Rachels uses a quote from Singer, cited below to establish the racism analogy. Then on p. 183, he uses the example of a “martian” who differs from humans only in bodily appearance, yet is discriminated against on the basis of not being human. This clearly builds on the racism model borrowed from Singer two pages earlier. Comparing speciesism with racism and sexism is commonplace in animal rights literature. For example, see Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 3-4; Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1, 7-9, 234. Rachels’s quotation of Singer is from p. 9.

and equally as sensitive, with just the same cares and interests as anyone else. The only difference is that he has a different kind of body.”¹

By contrast, Rachels proposes qualified speciesism, introducing it as “a more sophisticated view of the relation between morality and species. . . . On this view, species alone is not regarded as morally significant. However, species-membership is correlated with *other* differences that *are* significant. The interests of humans are said to be more important, not simply because they are human, but because humans have morally relevant characteristics that other animals lack.” In other words, this form of speciesism is based on the functional abilities of the typical member of the species, not on the membership itself. Rachels gives several examples of typical human traits used to justify human preference in morality. He notes that characteristics such as ability to reason, language, being the image of God, the ability to enter into morally binding agreements, and greater sensitivity to pain and suffering (due to our superior intelligence) have all been suggested as justifications of human preference.² It appears that, for Rachels, once the human function is verified, this form of speciesism will still have more affinity to radical speciesism than to mild speciesism.

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 182, 183.

²*Ibid.*, 184.

Animal Rights as a Foil for Exploring Evolution and Ethics

A classic argument in the animal rights literature is to blame human preference ethics on Christianity.¹ Thus, we find in the literature of the animal rights advocates, discussion and argumentation of moral standing based on an Darwinian-evolutionary world-view opposing perspective of traditional, theocentric morality which they label as being speciesist.

If we wish to discover some of the ethical implications of Darwinism, then, it seems likely that we can find fruitful insights by examining the work of animal rights authors. It should be noted, however, that we are not interacting with animal rights literature to debate animal rights, but rather to identify possible implications of Darwinian evolution for ethics, and especially for Christian ethics. All the arguments examined in this chapter are to be understood as occurring in the context of a moral revolution intended to replace traditional Western ethics with a morality based in the “facts” of Darwinian evolution. Thus how do animal rights advocates use Darwinian Evolution to address the issue of speciesism?

One key proposal comes from Richard Dawkins. A second, complementary approach is found in James Rachels. Because Rachels’s contribution is closely linked to

¹See for example, Peter Singer, “Heavy Petting,” undated from 2001, <http://www.nerve.com/Opinions/Singer/heavyPetting/main.asp> (22 May 2003), also located at <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm>. This article is a response to a book on bestiality by Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, trans. Paul Vincent (n.p.: Verso, 2000). See also, Singer, *Animal Liberation*, chapter 5; Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 309-312; Pluhar, 11-12. See also chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on the history of human preference in Western culture.

his unique arguments for a Darwinist ethics, I shall save most of his work in this area for chapter 4. I shall start, then, by exploring Dawkins's proposal of an approach to morality based on belief in the evolutionary kinship of man and animals. Then we shall explore kinship-based criteria for granting moral status to humans and animals.

Morality Based on Evolutionary Kinship

Zoologist Richard Dawkins, from Oxford, expresses his opposition to human preference speciesism by attacking the speciesist structure of thought which he calls, "discontinuous thinking." For Dawkins, discontinuous thinking is a mind-set which has a great need to categorize everything into separate, unrelated entities. He illustrates it with South African courts (during the Apartheid era) adjudicating whether particular individuals of mixed parentage (racially) are legally Black, White, or Colored. In a similar fashion, the discontinuous mind chooses to divide the animals (including the human animal) into discontinuous species having no relation to each other. Thus, for the speciesist, "humans are humans while gorillas are animals. There is an unquestioned yawning gulf between them such that the life of a single human child is worth much more than the lives of all the gorillas in the world."¹ Dawkins restates the issue this way: "But

¹Richard Dawkins, "Gaps in the Mind," in *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, ed. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 81. Dawkins's juxtaposition of a human child with gorillas is in reference to the following hypothetical letter used to open the article: "Sir, You appeal for money to save the gorillas. Very laudable, no doubt. But doesn't it seem to have occurred to you that there are thousands of *human* children suffering on the very same continent of Africa. There'll be time enough to worry about gorillas when we've taken care of every last one of the kiddies. Let's get our priorities right, *please*" (emphases in original). He then suggests (pp. 80-81) that we can illustrate the speciesist double-standard by substituting

tie the label *Homo sapiens* even to a tiny piece of insensible, embryonic tissue, and its life suddenly leaps to infinite, incomputable value.”¹ Dawkins concedes that while a good case may be made for saving human children over gorillas, he also adds that “a good case could be made the other way.”²

From Discontinuous Thinking to the Concept of Kinship

Dawkins seeks to undermine the discontinuous mind-set with his concept of the “ring species.” He illustrates the concept of a ring species with two species of seagulls found in England, the herring and lesser black-backed gulls. If you start with herring gulls in England and move westward from Europe around the world, the herring gulls slowly change in characteristics. By the time you get back to England, the ring of species change you have followed will have changed from herring gulls, through small incremental steps, into the lesser black-backed gull, a distinctly separate species. The neighboring members in the ring can interbreed while the two species at the ends of the ring cannot.³ These incremental steps Dawkins likens to the extinct evolutionary links

the word “aardvarks” for “humans” and see if you still agree with the concept of the letter.

¹Ibid. The implications of this statement for issues like abortion, stem cell research, cloning, and genetic manipulation should not be underestimated. Most Christian opponents of these invoke the human status of the cells and organisms involved as the grounds for moral and legal protection. Dawkins’s removal of such status opens the door for severely undermining the traditional foundations for exercising extreme caution in some of these issues, or even prohibiting others. These implications do not fall within the scope of this work. Nevertheless, they beg for further investigation.

²Ibid., 80.

³From a purely geometric perspective, a ring does not have ends. The only

between humans and apes, and thus he argues that humans are a ring species as well. As a ring species, Dawkins asserts that humans have a kinship with the apes (and maybe other animals) which is not discontinuous, but rather, continuous. He reasons that “there is no natural category that includes chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans but excludes humans.” Dawkins concludes that to distinguish between man and apes as separate categories is to make an artificial distinction not found in reality.¹ In a similar vein, Dolan asserts that our early evolutionary ancestors had no theological basis for separating humans from animals and thus tended to view animals as creatures who were fellow kin.² Such arguments clearly challenge speciesism and any humanocentric ethics associated with it.

Ryder also argues for a moral kinship between man and animals. Ryder opines, “Surely if animals are related through evolution, then we should all be related morally,” and then declares his belief that Darwinism provides “grounds for asserting the *moral* kinship of all animals.” He further asserts that while Darwinism has almost universally demonstrated the “*physical* kinship” of men and animals, it has not yet caused most people to take “the logical next step of admitting *moral* kinship.”³ Ryder argues that

exception is when drawing a picture of a ring. Dawkins uses a conceptual trip around the globe with the same starting and ending point, to draw such a ring. The significance of the ring species illustration is its depiction of a continuum of being. Dawkins then transfers the concept of a geographic continuum of being going around the world to a continuum of being going through time, which is called evolution.

¹Ibid., 82-84.

²Dolan, 123.

³Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 3, 330-31. Emphasis in original.

when we establish the kinship of humans and animals, we must go beyond the basic concept of animal welfare to the stronger concept of animal rights.¹ So what moral implications come when the “logical next step” is taken?

Moral Implications of Evolutionary Kinship

“Continuously Distributed Morality”

Dawkins’s ring-species argument raises the question of the nature of ethics in the context of evolutionary kinship. He declares that “as long as our social mores are governed by discontinuously minded lawyers and theologians, it is premature to advocate a quantitative, continuously distributed morality.”² In the context of the larger debate over speciesism, when Dawkins proposes an ethics that is “quantitative,” he is using this term in juxtaposition to the term, “qualitative.” This means that, for Dawkins, being entitled to rights and privileges is not to be based on possession of a special quality or qualities (such a being human, and thus a qualitative criterion). Instead of looking for ontological qualities to gain moral status, one would look at how many functional factors there are to entitle the subject to rights.³ The phrase, “continuously distributed,” refers to the ring-species concept. The scope of ethics and morality is to be continuously distributed across the species ring instead of being discontinuously restricted to a

¹Ibid., 3.

²R. Dawkins, “Gaps,” 87.

³In the next chapter, we shall see that this quantitative versus quality argument is a major foundation for James Rachels’s proposed ethical system.

privileged species or group of species in the ring. Thus ethical privilege would be based in functional attributes, and not on a qualitative status such as being human. Once morality is based on functional attributes, it cannot avoid becoming relativist. A number of authors assert that ethical relativism is precisely what one would expect from a Darwinist world-view.

Inherent Relativism

Dawkins asserts that “ethical principles that are based upon accidental caprice should not be respected as if cast in stone.”¹ In other words, for Dawkins, humans are an accidental product of a designless evolution. Thus, human preference ethics are based on a meaningless act of chance. Dawkins not only challenges the validity of human preference in ethics due to these principles of evolution, but he also undermines any concept of ethical absolutes because “ethical principles . . . should not be respected as if cast in stone.” From an evolutionary perspective, then, ethical principles, standards, and norms, must now be viewed as relative, evolving with man, ever adaptable, never absolute. Dawkins is not the only one to come to such a conclusion.

Julian Huxley, the great evolutionary ethicist of the mid-twentieth century (A.D.), likewise points out the relativist bent in ethics rooted in evolutionary thinking, noting that “any standards of right and wrong must in some way be related to the movement of that process [evolution] through time.”² Thus, ethics is the product of evolution and is itself

¹Ibid., 87.

²Julian Huxley, *Touchstone for Ethics: 1893-1943* (New York: Harper and

evolving.¹ Huxley is echoed by Antony Flew in his discussion of Darwin's position that man is totally part of nature, having evolved from it. Flew states: "As applied to ethics in particular this involves that all moral ideas and ideals have originated in the world; and that, having thus in the past been subject to change, they will presumably in the future too, for better or worse, continue to evolve."² Due to Darwin's influence, Huxley declares that prior ethical systems have been "replaced with a thoroughgoing ethical relativism."³ Huxley even observed that the concept of "Absolute," as result of Darwin's theory, seems destined to disappear in all fields—truth, beauty, goodness or any other value.⁴ Huxley asserted that evolutionary thought "will have nothing to do with Absolutes, including absolute truth, absolute morality, absolute perfection, and absolute authority."⁵

Michael Ruse joins Huxley in asserting that human morality is an evolutionary adaptation built into us by natural selection. In particular, Ruse defines morality in terms of altruistic behavior. "We all know what morality is about. It is about helping other

Brothers, 1947), 131.

¹Ibid., 114.

²Flew, 55.

³Huxley, *Touchstone*, 114.

⁴Julian Huxley, *New Bottle for New Wine* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 59.

⁵Julian Huxley, *Essays of a Humanist* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 73-74.

folk.”¹ Again, he states that “if morality means anything, it means being prepared to hold out a helping hand to others.”² By defining morality in terms of helping others, Ruse sets his reader up for the assertion that morality (i.e., helpfulness) evolved in humans through the “good biological strategy” of “cooperation,” which gave humans an advantage in the “struggle for existence.”³ Altruism, then, is seen as the root of human morality.⁴

Because altruistic cooperation is seen as so crucial to human survival and evolution, Ruse argues that natural selection had to produce a sense of binding obligation to make humans act altruistically. Otherwise, there would be no universal cooperation necessary to produce the advantages humans have enjoyed. Ruse calls these genetically generated moral impulses “epigenetic rules.”⁵ Ruse observes that this explanation of moral origins in humans reduces morality, to a great degree, to feelings and sentiments of

¹Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 208. For Ruse’s full discussion of the evolution of morality in man see chapter 6, esp. 217-222, and 250-252.

²Ibid., 217.

³Michael Ruse, “The New Evolutionary Ethics,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. Nitecki and Doris V. Nitecki (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 144. This chapter is a condensed refinement of the arguments in *Taking Darwin Seriously*, chapter 6.

⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 218-219.

⁵Ibid., 222, 251-252. Interestingly, Ruse places epigenetic rules in comparison to Kant’s Categorical Imperative, arguing that the latter is “embedded” in the former [p. 244]. Ruse discusses Kant twice in this chapter [pp. 210-211; 244-247], without directly referring to Kant’s epistemological theory and categories. In my opinion, having a set of epigenetic moral rules programmed into our very nature sounds suspiciously close to Kant’s preprogrammed epistemological categories found in his view of human nature. While not directly related to the topic of this work, pursuing this potential interrelationship of Ruse’s and Kantian thought would be an interesting study.

obligation.¹ Thus, Ruse declares, “Morality has neither meaning nor justification, outside the human context. Morality is subjective.”² In a later work he goes further in declaring the evolutionary advantages of a genetically generated sense of duty to others, stating, “Often we perform better if we are *deceived* by our biology. . . . We think we ought to help, that we have obligations to others, because it is in our biological interests to have these thoughts.”³

Because of his belief that morality is essentially genetically generated trickery, this leads Ruse to some key conclusions concerning the nature of morality and ethics. Ruse opines that, “there is no foundation for ethics at all! . . . The supposed underpinning is chimerical in some sense or another.”⁴ Ruse boldly concludes that, “morality is no more than a collective illusion fobbed off on us by our genes for reproductive ends.”⁵ Thus, for Ruse, morality is not based on any objective standard of right or wrong but, rather, is rooted in a fictitious fable that our “genes make us believe.”⁶ If morality is merely an illusion, a hereditary deception, then its principles certainly cannot be absolute, but must of necessity be relative.

¹Ibid., 252.

²Ibid.

³Ruse, “The New Evolutionary Ethics,” 147. Emphasis mine.

⁴Ibid., 150-151.

⁵Ibid., 151.

⁶Ibid., 152. Ruse’s seminal form of this argument can be found in his book, *Darwinism Defended: A Guide to the Evolution Controversies* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982), 272-273.

Others have also noted the relativistic bent introduced by evolutionary thinking. Robert Morrison explicitly asserts that evolution “tends to lead to a relativistic philosophy. Goodness can be only judged in relation to prevailing circumstances. There is no absolute scale of righteousness against which the individual can measure himself for all time.”¹ Ian Taylor, an opponent of evolution, describes humanists as declaring Darwinian evolution to be the “death knell of religious and moral values” as part of his own assertions to this effect.² The evolutionist, H. James Birx, likewise hints at a moral revolution when he asserts that “the empirical truth of organic evolution still challenges those entrenched beliefs of traditional theology concerning a god, freewill, immortality, and a divine destiny.”³ Dawkins more deeply develops these implications through his kinship model of morality.

Evolutionary Kinship Said to Undermine Religiously Rooted Ethics

What if Missing Links Were Not Extinct?

Dawkins unpacks some key moral implications of Darwinian evolution, when, in reference to kinship, he declares, “The point I want to make is that, *as far as morality is concerned, it should be incidental that the intermediates are dead.* What if they were not? What if a clutch of intermediate types had survived, enough to link us to modern

¹Robert S. Morrison, “Darwinism: Foundation for an Ethical System?” *Christianity and Crisis* 20 (1960): 120.

²Ian Taylor, 422.

³Birx, 102.

chimpanzees by a chain . . . of interbreeders?”¹ In other words, from an evolutionary perspective, if enough of the missing links between chimpanzees and man had survived, so that interbreeding was possible between all the neighboring forms in the ring between chimps and humans (like the gulls), how could we claim humans were special and distinct? Where could the discontinuous mind draw the line of moral favoritism?

It is precisely the concept that we can have intermediates who might be, in discontinuous terminology, 80 percent human, 93 percent human, or 61 percent human, that suddenly makes it hard to draw the moral boundary of inclusion. The almost infinite number of variables makes a concrete answer seem ludicrous. In a similar way, Dawkins is arguing that the many intermediates implied in the evolutionary model makes it ridiculous to try to establish a definition of essential humanness entitling us to special moral consideration over the animals.² Dawkins boldly asserts that “we need only to discover a single survivor [of an intermediate species], say a relict [*sic*] *Australopithecus* in the Budongo Forest, and our precious system of norms and ethics would come crashing about our ears. The boundaries with which we segregate our world would be all shot to pieces. Racism would blur with speciesism in obdurate and vicious confusion.”³

¹R. Dawkins, “Gaps,” 85. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid. On p. 82, Dawkins illustrates the difficulty of defining the boundary of humanness in discontinuous terms by noting the fight of pro-life opponents of abortion who view the concept of “human” as absolute, the opposite of Dawkins’s concept of ring-species continuity. These people cannot be argued with, he says, because their discontinuous minds cannot accommodate the concept that “the fetus could be half human or a hundredth human.” Their way of thinking is an all-or-nothing mentality with no capacity for half-measures.

³Ibid., 85.

The ring-species argument has much in common with Rachels's argument that for Darwin there could be no set species, but rather, there is a continuum of being in which individuals share some characteristics in common while differing in others. However, it is different from Rachels in scope, because its focus is primarily on establishing kinship through an organic union of man to animals through evolution, while Rachels is more focused on the alleged arbitrariness of defining species. The organic nature of Dawkins's view is seen in two ways: first in his word picture in which an imaginary line of individuals is envisioned representing the stages of evolutionary development up to man. Each individual stands about a yard apart across the continent of Africa. Near mid-line, there is a common ancestor from which two lines of primates descended, ours being one of the lines. Starting at the Indian Ocean in Somalia, we would reach this common ancestor, depicted as a female midway through the species ring. "The ancestor is standing well to the east of Mount Kenya, and *holding in her hand the entire chain of her lineal descendants*, culminating in you standing on the Somali beach."¹ The other hand holds the second line of descendants, the apes. Thus, through this ancestor, there is an organic tie between the two lines of descendants.

The second way in which we see an organic connection between man and animals in Dawkins's position is in the appeals made to the ability of one species in the ring of species to interbreed with the neighboring species in the ring sequence. Only when separated by multiple steps does interbreeding become impossible, as is illustrated by the

¹Ibid. Emphasis mine.

two species of sea gulls at opposite ends of the same ring. This ability to interbreed with neighboring species in the ring is asserted to mean that if the closest evolutionary ancestors of humans were still alive, then we would be able to interbreed with them. The kinship argument, then, claims in part that this organic connection to animals makes them our evolutionary relatives, which, in turn, makes them entitled to equal consideration with humans. Ergo, it is morally wrong to discriminate against one's evolutionary family on the basis that there is no interconnection between you as a human and them as animals. The theoretical possibility of finding a surviving member of our ring of species, especially one we could interbreed with, begs a corresponding question: What if science were to create a transgenic hybrid of human and non-human beings?

Implications of Human-Animal Transgenic Hybrids

Dawkins raises this very issue when he continues:

But I can assert, without fear of contradiction, that if somebody succeeded in breeding a chimpanzee/human hybrid the news would be earth-shattering. Bishops would bleat, lawyers would gloat in anticipation, conservative politicians would thunder, Socialists wouldn't know where to put their barricades. . . . Politics would never be the same again, nor would theology, sociology, psychology or most branches of philosophy. The world that would be so shaken, by such an incidental event as a hybridisation [*sic*], is a speciesist world indeed, dominated by the discontinuous mind.¹

Ryder stretches the issue further by asking, "One day, if human apes are interbred with other apes, will it be justifiable to hunt, or eat, or experiment upon the hybrid child,

¹Ibid., 86-87.

or should he or she be sent to school?”¹ This is an excellent question for it stretches the issue of what it means to be human. Would such a hybrid be entitled to equal rights with “pure” humans?

Ryder raises a second question in reference to the transgenic issue which clarifies this moral identity issue:

In order to produce cheaper meat, pigs have already been born who contain human genes. Yet surely this makes a nonsense of our speciesist morality?[sic] Is it not partial cannibalism to eat such a Humanopig? *How many human genes are required to make a creature human in the eyes of the law?*²

By asking how many genes are required to make a creature legally (or morally) human, Ryder effectively brings us back to Dawkins’s proposed ring-species continuum of creatures, meaning we can have beings who are only X or Y percent human. How is their moral status to be determined? Ryder’s purpose seems to be to try to elevate the animals to human-style preference, instead of lowering human status. But is it possible that his argument may make it possible to devalue humans instead of increasing the moral value of animals?

Elevation of Animals or Demotion of Humans?

Ryder raises the possibility that kinship could demote human moral value instead of elevating the moral status of animals when he states:

The real and awful prospect of interbreeding human and nonhuman in the 1990's

¹Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 7.

²Ibid.

becomes daily more probable. . . . Within years, the ancient conceptual gulf between man and beast will be closed by the scientists. Will this lead to increased callousness to humans, or to a sudden dawning that we owe duties toward all sentient life?¹

Ryder consistently pursues the track of seeking to increase our sense of duties to all sentient life, human or animal. Says Ryder, "One is left with the startlingly simple position, already stated, that whatever is morally wrong in the human case, is probably wrong in the nonhuman case as well. . . . What holds for humans, especially for such categories as mentally handicapped and infants, should apply to in the case of nonhumans."² Ryder pushes this new ethics to the conclusion that "where it is wrong to inflict pain upon a human animal, it is probably wrong to do so to a non-human sentient. *The actual killing of a non-human animal may be wrong if it causes suffering or, more contentiously, if it deprives the non-human of future pleasures.*"³ Thus Ryder seeks to shut out the degradation of our attitude towards human life and increase our protection of non-human sentient life. But on what grounds does Ryder come to these conclusions about morality? Why not lower our view of human life instead? This last statement by Ryder seems to beg the question of moral foundations, for it reveals an assumed criteria by which inclusion in moral protection is granted. He appears to assume a utilitarian hedonism as the fundamental criterion of moral good and evil. But why should one

¹Ibid., 318.

²Ibid., 6. By asserting that the rights of less than fully functional humans are grounds for extending the same rights to at least some animals, Ryder is using a technique that is known as the argument from marginal cases. This category of argument will be examined later in the chapter.

³Ibid., 6-7. Emphasis mine.

accept this foundation for launching moral imperatives? What criteria for moral protection are proposed by anti-speciesist thinkers?

Proposed Characteristics That Entitle One to Moral Standing

Waldau notes that animal rights advocates are not uniformly agreed on this matter.¹

If the boundary of moral preference is not to be defined by membership in the human race, then where are we to draw the new line? Ryder argues that it is not differences between the species but differences within a species that are morally relevant.² This would seem to imply that shared characteristics could also have moral relevancy.

Roslind Godlovitch asserts, however, that it is not just any shared characteristics between men and animals, but that it is only “relevant similarities” that matter.³ But what are relevant similarities? What kinship characteristics really matter in reference to moral standing?

Waldau asserts that there are several key standards proposed for redrawing the moral preference boundary line. Beyond invoking the status of being a “fellow creatures” with us, the proposed boundaries of moral inclusion include, sentience, mental life of a certain complexity, and traits common to humans and some animals.⁴

¹Waldau, 28.

²Ryder, *Victims*, 14-15.

³Godlovitch, 157.

⁴Waldau, 28.

The Sentiency Criterion

The Basic Grounds of the Sentiency Position

Peter Singer asserts that Jeremy Bentham is significant in that he appears to be the first to denounce human dominion over nature as tyranny rather than legitimate government.¹ In addition Bentham is significant for forging the fundamental argument for sentiency as the ultimate criterion for determining moral status. Said Bentham,

The day *may* come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum* are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, *Can they suffer*? Why should the law refuse its protection to any *sensitive* being? The time will come when humanity will extend its mantle over everything which breathes.²

In particular, the phrase, “The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they suffer?” has become the chief slogan of the animal rights movement. Richard Ryder aptly has coined the term “Painism” as a label for defining the boundary of moral protection for an individual on the ability to suffer, where suffering is defined in terms of pain. The moral aspect of this approach applies to the pain of others. Thus, “we should do

¹Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 211.

²Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1876), 311. All emphases are original except the final two.

to others what we believe will give them pleasure and not do to them what we believe will cause them pain.”¹

Singer points out that Bentham rejects any kind of contractualist foundation for ethics, proposing instead a hedonist basis of morality: Pain and suffering are inherently morally evil while pleasure and happiness are the essence of the morally good. In Ryder’s words, “Pain, can be said, is the quintessence of evil. All painful events are bad and all bad events are painful. It is on this premise that Singer declares that the only grounds for having interests, and thus rights, is the capacity to be able to suffer (i.e. experience pain).”² The ability to experience pain, then, becomes the criterion of defining sentience or consciousness. Says Ryder,

Whatever are the *causes* of consciousness, its moral importance is clearly paramount. It matters not if an animal, whether human or nonhuman, is intelligent or communicative, or has an immortal soul. All that matters is that it is conscious: in particular that it can be conscious of pain and pleasure. This should be the bedrock of our morality. Pain is pain regardless of the species suffering it.³

Thus, says Ryder, all major theories of behavior (including Freud and Skinner) are based on the principle that pleasure is desired and pain is avoided.⁴ Since animals can seek to gain pleasure and avoid pain, Ryder declares that our laws must recognize that “nonhumans have claims to life, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness just as we do; and

¹Richard Ryder, “Painism: The Ethics of Animal Rights and the Environment,” in *Animal Welfare and the Environment: An RSPCA Book*, ed. Richard Ryder (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 196, 198-199.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 7-9.

³Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 325.

⁴Ryder, “Painism,” 198.

among the liberties that individual non-humans should be able to enjoy is the freedom from exploitation by humankind.”¹ Why *individual* nonhumans?

Ryder declares, that since pain is non-transferrable—that is, one can never consciously and directly feel another’s pain—ethics based on the ability to suffer pain must be individualistic since species cannot feel pain. For Ryder there can be no sum or averaging of pains because what is morally significant is the pain of *one*, not the combined pain of a group.² Rachels likewise argues that the capacity to suffer belongs to individuals, not groups, and thus moral status is based on individual characteristics, not on species membership.³ This painist criterion, and specifically the use of Bentham, belies, then, a tendency of these ethicists to favor a utilitarian approach to morality.⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 202. It should be noted that Ryder seems to contradict this argument to some degree in *Victims*, 15. On pp. 14-15, he gives a brief, but classic sentience argument based on individual abilities to suffer. He then argues in the context of challenging politicians with the significance of the sentience criterion, that “those politicians who still believe that politics have some remote connection with morality or who vaguely believe that their job has to do with increasing the total sum of happiness, should question why non-human animals should not be also represented by them?” Here Ryder focuses on the classic utilitarian formula of the greatest sum of happiness for the greatest number of sentient beings, explicitly citing Bentham. However, it is to be the sum of individual experiences of happiness, and not a conglomerate sum that essentially turns into an averaging of happiness. Thus Ryder would probably not feel that there is any contradiction between his two books.

³Rachels, *CfA*, 173, 192.

⁴In *CfA*, pp. 190-192, Rachels is seeking to rebut the idea that moral protection depends on the capacity to create and maintain social contracts with reciprocal obligations. He asserts that the proponents of the contractual foundation fail “to distinguish the conditions necessary for *having* a moral obligation from the conditions necessary for being the *beneficiary* of a moral obligation.” For example, Rachels notes that adult humans are considered morally obligated not to torture one another. If a

Current Assertions of Utilitarianism

Richard Ryder demonstrates the bent to utilitarianism when he declares that “animal liberation” has “its foundation partly in utilitarian philosophy.”¹ The key to Ryder’s declaration is that the sentiency/painism argument is rooted in a statement of Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, where animals are to be included in the calculation of pain and suffering. Since the foundational principle underlying these assertions is the evolutionary kinship of man with the animals, it becomes relatively easy to shift the concept of rights from a humanocentric focus to a sentiency-based view of suffering that includes the animals.

Singer likewise confesses his utilitarian leanings,² and Carruthers confirms the utilitarian bent of the animal rights advocates by noting that from a utilitarian standpoint, there is no reason for “an impartial, benevolent observer,” who is equally sympathetic to the interests of all affected, to count animal interests as of lower importance than our

mentally retarded person violates this norm, we tend not hold them responsible because of their diminished capacity to responsibly know what they are doing. But in the reverse, we still hold the rational adult responsible for torturing a mentally handicapped person who is unable to recognize the moral issue, but is still capable of experiencing pain. Thus we have a person who lacks the ability to enter into a reciprocal social contract, yet who can benefit from a moral standard. But it is the capacity to experience pain, not the human species membership, that is morally significant for Rachels. Emphases in original.

¹Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 329.

²Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14.

own.¹ It would seem, though, that as soon as anti-speciesist ethics is admittedly a form of utilitarianism, that it becomes subject to the classic criticisms leveled against utilitarianism, an issue that seems to be avoided in animal rights literature. On the other hand, utilitarian hedonism may play a role in using the concept of marginal cases to try to help define the circle of moral inclusion.

The Argument from Marginal Cases and Human Preference in Ethics

Basic Forms of the Argument

The argument from marginal cases is a classic tactic for exploring the extended implications of a particular position. The animal rights advocates regularly resort to the marginal-cases argument in attempting to discredit support for human preference over animals in ethics. According to Waldau, the “marginal cases argument” essentially holds that certain “higher” non-human animals cannot fairly be denied basic moral rights because there are “marginal” humans who have fewer abilities than the animals, but are still granted full moral status.² Thus, the argument concludes, the animal should receive rights similar to those granted to the human. Singer frames the issue in a slightly different manner:

If equality is related to any actual characteristics of humans, these characteristics

¹Carruthers, 55-56.

²Waldau, 26.

must be some lowest common denominator, and pitched so low that no human lacks them—but then the philosopher comes up against the catch that any such set of characteristics which covers *all* animals will not be possessed *only by humans*.¹

These articulations illustrate a type of the marginal-cases argument that Evelyn Pluhar asserts is the favorite form of this argument in current usage, which she labels as the “categorical version.”² It should be noted that the categorical version essentially *assumes* that marginal humans have rights and thus argues that animals of similar characteristics (i.e., functionally) to marginal humans deserve the same rights.

Pluhar labels the second genre of the argument from marginal cases as the “bioconditional version.” The bioconditional version does not assume rights are granted to marginal humans, but rather asserts that marginal humans and animals of similar characteristics (functionally) either share the same rights, or are equally deprived of rights. The argument, then, is conditioned on marginal humans having rights. This results in the conclusion that, in Pluhar’s words, “either *both* marginal humans and any nonhumans who are similar to them in all morally relevant respects are maximally morally significant, are highly morally significant, or *neither* are.”³ The key difference

¹Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” in *Applied Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 226. See also, idem, *Unsanctifying Human Life: Essays on Ethics*, ed. Helga Kuhse (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 89. In *Applied Ethics*, Singer informs the reader in the first footnote of the chapter containing this quote, that the chapter is “an abridged version of an essay which was first published in *Philosophic Exchange* vol. 1, no. 5, (Summer 1974).” It is the 1974 version which was republished in *Unsanctifying Human Life*, 79-93. This is indicated in the footnote on p. 79.

²Pluhar, 63.

³*Ibid.*, 66. The abbreviated form appears on p. 120: “Either both are highly morally significant or neither are.”

between bioconditional and categorical versions is that the bioconditional version poses a direct threat to the rights of marginal humans. Thus, Pluhar asserts that full-personhood arguments are toppled by marginal cases because, “according to their view, those who are not full persons, be they humans or non-humans, are in the same moral (or to be more exact, nonmoral) boat.”¹

Intended Purpose

It is critical to understand why this argument is used. Frey provides a key insight into the core motives of the marginal-cases argument. He diagrams the argument structure as follows:

1. Criterion X, while excluding animals, also excludes babies and the severely mentally-enfeebled from the class of right holders;
2. Babies and the severely mentally-enfeebled, however, do have rights and so fall within this class;²
3. Therefore, criterion X must be rejected as a criterion for the possession of rights.

He continues, “Obviously, this argument is essentially negative and indirect, in that it does not seek to establish that animals *have* rights but rather to undermine criteria the application of which yield [*sic*] the result that they do not have rights.”³ Pluhar concurs with Frey in stating that “the entire point of the bioconditional version of the argument is

¹Ibid., 120.

²The key assumption is premise #2. The marginal-cases argument thus is essentially trying to argue, “Since babies and mentally handicapped humans still have rights, the sentient animals ought to have similar rights.”

³R. G. Frey, *Interests and Rights: The Case Against Animals* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980), 28-29.

to show us exactly where the full-personhood view leads. It is a challenge to that view.”¹ Nevertheless, the context in which the argument is presented is always in reference to advocating the elevation of certain animals to equal moral status with people, and not to devalue the moral status of marginal humans. As Waldau points out, one must accept the argument of marginal cases and protect other animals, or deny protection to both.²

One sees the intent is not to undermine human rights, but rather to expand animal rights in many statements by many authors. For example, Christoph Anstötz argues that the modern, enlightened “opposition to discrimination against intellectually disabled people is based on principles that lead to opposition to discrimination against other sentient beings who are also unable to defend their own interests.”³ In a similar vein Singer opines that since we have now established universal human rights, the same criteria should now be extended to animals.⁴ He also argues that the elimination of human preference will not only bring better treatment of animals, but more compassion to humans!⁵ Rachels remarks, “I fancy that human beings may be more humane when they realize that, as their dependent associates live a life in which man has a share, so

¹Pluhar, 73.

²Waldau, 37.

³Christoph Anstötz, “Profoundly Intellectually Disabled Humans and the Great Apes,” in *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, ed. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 158.

⁴Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 55.

⁵Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 234-235.

they have rights which man is bound to respect.”¹ Ryder supports the same sentiment but from a negative statement, that if humans persist in the total subordination of nonhumans, we are paving the way for a more callous attitude towards the weak, elderly, and handicapped of our own species.²

Pluhar, in fact, reveals her distaste for this very implication raised by Ryder. She declares that attempts to restrict “maximum moral significance” to humans, either lapse into unfounded prejudice (i.e., speciesism) or imply that many humans are not really morally significant at all. She then concludes that “neither form of this dilemma is particularly enticing.”³ For an ethics based in individual functionality, however, the marginal-cases argument is very significant. Pluhar has aptly shown that if preference and prejudice are set aside, the marginal-cases argument intended to elevate the moral status of non-humans can just as easily demote them. There is no guarantee that marginally functional humans will find protection. The marginal-cases argument becomes empowered because an evolutionary understanding of origins and life leads to a model of moral entitlement based on an individual’s functional capabilities. It is this

¹James Rachels, “Why Darwinians Should Support Equal Treatment for Other Great Apes,” in *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, ed. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 153.

²Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 11.

³Pluhar, 120-121. It is significant to note the emotional response of Pluhar to the bioconditional version’s implication that many marginally functional humans could lose rights. Pluhar thus reflects the general preference for the categorical version seen in most uses of this tactic. Their desire is not to undermine human rights but to elevate the moral status of animals.

individualism that will become the foundation of Rachels's unique system of ethics based on Darwinian evolution. Let us now turn to examining Rachels's singular contribution.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DARWINIST MORAL THEORY OF JAMES RACHELS

Introduction

What might a system of ethics based on Darwinian evolution look like? We have already observed some general implications of Darwinism for ethics including a tendency to favor Utilitarian ethics, and a propensity to relativism in ethics. But so far we have not looked at how a moral theory or system based on the principles of Darwinian evolution might be structured. No doubt there could be some variations based on differing individual interpretations of the moral significance of Darwinism. Nevertheless, the fact remains that most connections of ethics to Darwin have remained disjointed and isolated from systematic ethical theory. One exception, however, is James Rachels.

In terms of recognition, Rachels stands in sharp contrast with the more renown Peter Singer. In *The New Yorker*, Michael Specter characterizes Singer as follows: “Peter Singer may be the most controversial philosopher alive; he is certainly among the most influential.”¹ By contrast, Rachels is comparatively unknown, yet he appears to have made a more significant contribution in unpacking the moral implications of

¹Michael Specter, “The Dangerous Philosopher,” *The New Yorker*, September 6, 1999, 46.

Darwinian evolution. This is because Rachels goes where no one else has gone.

Rachels's significance is twofold: First, he explicitly sets out to build an ethics based in the "facts" of Darwinism, and second, he seeks to undermine the pillars of traditional Judeo-Christian ethics in order to create a need for a revised ethics. In so doing he engages Christian ethics and theology much more directly and fully than Singer.¹ Thus Rachels, in explicitly seeking to establish a Darwinist ethics at the expense of Christian ethics, stands alone.

Rachels has expounded his moral theory in two key books, as well as in a few articles. The first book he published was a college textbook on ethics, *The Elements of*

¹A brief comment on the differences between Rachels and Singer is in order. In some ways, they are virtually indistinguishable in their overall thrust, especially in reference to animal rights. Their differences seem mostly to be more in emphases, than in content. However, there are some key divergences that we shall summarize here.

Singer is more explicitly and more purely Utilitarian than Rachels. He builds his ethics first on Utilitarian reasoning, with gleanings from Evolution. By contrast, Rachels directly seeks to build his ethics on Darwinism and ends up with a type of Utilitarianism as the result. Other differences include the fact that Rachels focuses on the principles of equal consideration of interests, and the concept of being subjects of a life, much more than Singer does. Also, Singer regularly invokes and discusses the principle of universifiability, whereas Rachels never mentions it. While both advocate abortion and euthanasia, Singer seems more prone to push the discussion to the extreme possibilities, including the issue of infanticide.

The single biggest difference between them is that Singer will take the principle of utility to the point of rejecting any preferentialism or parochialism so that he sees no difference between one's moral obligations to one's family and to poor starving people in India or Africa. By contrast, we shall see Rachels explicitly build such preferentialism into his ethics because it results in a Utilitarian type of good for the community, though the primary motivation is not Utilitarian.

What they share in common is a rejection of any theistic influence in ethics, and a penchant to blame Christian ethics for producing anti-animal morality. Both thus do ethics in a completely secular fashion rooted in human reason. Since Rachels is more explicitly built from Darwinism, and more directly interacts with Christian ethics and theology, he seems more significant for the purposes of this study.

Moral Philosophy,¹ which has passed through four editions, as of this writing. The second book, *Created from Animals*, sets the philosophical foundations for his ethics, explicitly basing them on Darwinism. Thus, this book provides the centerpiece of this study, while his other works play a supplemental role.

Rachels's Use of Darwin to Inform and Ground Ethics

How Darwinism Interfaces with Traditional Ethics

In his introduction to *Created from Animals*, Rachels explicitly declares his intent to discuss and explore the moral implications of Darwin's theory of evolution and intimates that Darwinism undermines the foundations of Christian ethics, especially in reference to the issue of human preference in ethics.² This does not mean that he takes Christian ethics as insignificant. To the contrary, in another work, he makes it clear that the "traditional theory" must be taken seriously, both due to its enormous influence, and due to its being the only fully worked-out, systematically elaborated theory of morality we have.³ It is important to note that Rachels does not claim to have falsified the

¹James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986); 3d ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 1999); 4th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 2002). Hereafter will be footnoted respectively as Rachels, *Elements* (1986), *Elements* (1999), and *Elements* (2002). If there is a second edition, it appears to exist only in theory as I have been unable to find a library holding it. However, since there is a third edition, it seems there must have been a second.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 1-5.

³James Rachels, *The End of Life: Euthanasia and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4. Rachels's comment seems to have the unspoken implication that with Christian ethics having a nearly 2000-year head start, Rachels's proposed ethics will not be as complete or as systematic since his theory is still in its formative stages.

Christian position. In his own words, “I would not argue that Darwinism entails the falsity of the doctrine of human dignity; rather, I would contend that Darwinism undermines human dignity by taking away its support.”¹

The focal point of this confrontation between Rachels’s Darwinian ethics and traditional Christian ethics, then, is the issue of human preference in moral theory and thinking. He asserts that “after Darwin, we can no longer think of ourselves as occupying a special place in creation.” This, in turn, leads Rachels to state that “traditional morality is based, in part on the idea that human life has a special value and worth. If we must give up on our inflated conception of ourselves, and our picture of the world as made exclusively for our habitation, will we not have to give up, at the same time, those elements of our morality which depend on such conceptions?”² Thus Rachels proposes the possibility that “Darwinism is incompatible with traditional morality, and so provides reason for rejecting that morality and replacing it with something better.”³

Rachels notes that there has been a history of reactions to Darwin, in which the general pattern has been to assert that the theory of evolution devalues man, and threatens to undermine traditional Western morals. Says Rachels, “There is an idea about how

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 171.

²*Ibid.*, 2-4.

³*Ibid.* See also Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 1, 187-89. Peter Singer likewise sees a need and reason to replace traditional (i.e., Christian) morality with a new and improved theory of morals. He likens the ethical movement to which he and Rachels belong as the moral equivalent to the Copernican Revolution in astronomy—imperfect but a great improvement over the previous theory. He depicts Christian ethics as all but dead but still lingering in influence due to the populist masses.

Darwinism might be related to ethics that is older and deeper than either ‘evolutionary ethics’ or sociobiology. Darwin’s earliest readers realized that an evolutionary outlook might undermine the traditional doctrine of human dignity, a doctrine which is at the core of Western morals. Darwin himself seems to suggest this when he says that the conception of man as ‘created from animals’ contradicts the arrogant notion that we are a ‘great work’.¹ Rachels suggests, however, that the significance of this point has been underestimated. “I shall argue, however, that *discrediting ‘human dignity’* is one of the most important implications of Darwinism, and that it has *consequences that people have hardly begun to appreciate.*”²

However, Rachels is careful not to assert that the traditional ethical view of human preference is patently false. Rachels asserts that “Darwin’s theory does not entail that the idea of human dignity is false. . . . Darwinism does, however, *undermine* the traditional doctrine [of human dignity] . . . by taking away its support.” He then informs us that “to replace the doctrine of human dignity, I offer a different conception, moral individualism, which I argue is more in keeping with the evolutionary outlook.”³ Rachels here reveals his significance by directly pitting Christian morality against Darwinian evolution and

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 79. Rachels appears to be alluding to a quotation by Darwin found in the introduction of *CfA*, 1. “Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work worthy of the interposition of a deity. More humble and I think truer to consider him created from animals.” See, Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin’s Notebooks, 1836-1844*, transcribed and ed. Paul H. Barrett (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 300.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 79-80. Emphases mine.

³*Ibid.*, 5. “Moral individualism” will turn out to become the label by which Rachels identifies his proposed ethical system in chapter 5.

joins the authors cited in the previous chapter in calling for a revolution in ethics.

But how does Rachels see Darwinian evolution as subverting human dignity and thus undermining traditional morality? What is the “support” that is undermined?

Two Pillars Grounding Traditional Ethics

Rachels asks, “What exactly is the traditional idea of human dignity?” He goes on to clarify that his question is focused, not in past historical squabbles, but “in the basic idea that forms the core of Western morals, and that is expressed, not only in philosophical writing, but in literature, religion, and in the common moral consciousness.”¹ Why, then, does Rachels see the doctrine of human dignity such a critical component of traditional ethics?

In a nutshell, he sees the human dignity doctrine as resting on two premises: “Traditional morality depends on the idea that human beings are in a special moral category. . . . Traditionally it has been supported in two ways: first, by the notion that man is made in the image of God, and secondly, by the notion that man is a uniquely rational being.”² Rachels eventually labels these pillars of traditional morality the “image of God thesis” and the “rationality thesis.”³

Rachels sees two implications of placing a significant distinction between human

¹Ibid., 86.

²Ibid., 3-4. Emphasis in original. Rachels later gives a self-summary of his book that recapitulates these very points. See p. 171.

³Some examples of this labeling can be found in, *ibid.*, 91, 97, 171.

and non-human life, especially in reference to the image-of-God thesis. First, human life is sacred and, thus, the central concern for morality is the protection and care of human beings. Second, non-human life is thus less valuable than human life and is therefore not entitled to the same degree of moral protection as a human being. Rachels notes that some take this distinction to mean that “non-human animals” have no moral standing at all. “Therefore, we may use them as we see fit.”¹ How, then, does Rachels perceive the image of God and the rationality theses to support such a distinction between man and animal? Since the image-of-God thesis is where most of his engagement with the theological foundations of traditional ethics occurs, let us start there.

Pillar One: The Image-of-God Thesis

For Rachels, the image-of-God thesis may be the most significant underpinning of traditional ethics. He clearly sees this view as rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition, starting with the Genesis account of creation in which man is said to be created in the image of God. Thus, Christian morality, for Rachels, is the prime proponent of the doctrine of human dignity in Western society. Says Rachels:

The Western religious tradition, a blend of Judaism and Christianity, is a case in point. Man, it is said, was made in the image of God, with the world intended to be his habitation, and everything else in it given for his enjoyment and use. This makes man, apart from God himself, the leading character in the whole cosmic drama. But that is only the beginning of the story. Other details reinforce the initial thought. Throughout human history, God has continued to watch over and interact with man, communicating with him through the saints and prophets. One of the things communicated is a set of instructions telling us how we are to live;

¹Ibid., 86.

and almost all those instructions concern how we must treat other humans. Our fellow humans are not to be killed, lied to, or otherwise mistreated. Their lives are sacred. Their needs are always taken into account, their rights always respected. The concern we are to show one another is, however, only a dim reflection of the love that God himself has for mankind: so great is God's love that he even became a man, and died sacrificially to redeem sinful mankind. And finally, we are told that after we die, we may be united with God to live forever. What is said about the animals is strikingly different. They were given by God for man's use, to be worked, killed, and eaten at man's pleasure. Like the rest of creation, they exist for man's benefit.¹

Rachels here identifies four key theological themes from the Judeo-Christian tradition that he believes undergird the doctrine of human specialness. However, Rachels will ultimately focus only on one of these four, leaving the other three untouched in further discussion.

The first theological theme, which is the one upon which Rachels trains his focus, is the doctrine that man was created in the image of God, and that all in this world was made for his use and enjoyment—the image-of-God thesis. We shall soon see that for Rachels, the concept of the image of God is the most crucial undergirding principle for establishing the doctrine of human dignity. Thus if the image-of-God thesis can be called into question, a major pillar of Western ethics is thought to have been crumbled. We have seen, however, that Rachels identifies three other theological themes that he believes undergird the traditional view of human dignity.

In the second theme, we saw Rachels make the claim that the human preference found in the Genesis creation story is further bolstered by the biblical account of God's continued watch-care and interaction with man, including communicating with man

¹Ibid., 86-87.

through prophets, and giving them a set of instructions on how to live (i.e., the 10 Commandments). Thus he alleged that the morality thus attributed to divine prescription is focused on protecting humans from mistreatment, while the animals were relegated to human exploitation and use. These provisions are said to be understood by the Judeo-Christian tradition as an evidence of God's great love for mankind, presumably above the animals.

The third theological foundation for human preference presented by Rachels is the doctrine of salvation. In his depiction of Christian thinking, God so loves mankind that He became a man and died sacrificially to redeem mankind. It is implied in the context of the previous quotation that God did not offer to do anything for animal redemption. Thus Rachels asserts that the incarnation is interpreted to mean that animals are less valuable than humans. The use of salvation to bolster human preference has also been depicted by the animal theologian from Oxford, Andrew Linzey. He asserts that the tendency of Christian theology to juxtapose humans over against the animals "is encapsulated in Karl Barth's view that 'God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but man' and that '*this and this alone* was the content of the eternal election of grace' [*sic*]. Given this overarching divine election of divine humanity, it must follow that human kind *is* special, unique, distinct, superior, and so on. . . . The incarnation is used as the trump card to vanquish all other creaturely rights to specialness, intrinsic worth, and respectful treatment."¹

¹Linzey, "Introduction," xv. Linzey's citation of Barth is, "Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, T &

In addition to the doctrine of salvation, the fourth and final theological concept that Rachels believes supports the doctrine of human preference over animals is the doctrine of final destiny. Humans are promised the hope of life with God after death. While the exact depiction of the relationship of death and eschatology can be debated,¹ the more important point to this discussion is that traditional Christian theology promises some kind of afterlife in paradise with God, while animals seem to miss out because salvation is presented as human-centered.

Rachels concludes that “the central idea of our [i.e., Western] moral tradition springs directly from this remarkable story. The story embodies a doctrine of the specialness of man and a *matching ethical precept*.” He reiterates the elements found in this story—that man alone is made in the image of God and that creation was made for his use and benefit, and that man is the center of God’s love and attention—and then calls this theological package the “image of God thesis.” He then articulates the moral meaning of the image-of-God thesis as having two dimensions: “The matching moral idea . . . is that human life is sacred, and the central concern of our morality must be protection and care of human beings, whereas we may use other creatures as we see fit.”²

T Clark 1960, pp. 16, 18; . . .” Emphases in original.

¹Not all Christians agree on the exact nature of death, nor of eschatological events. Debates between Dispensationalists and non-Dispensationalists could be cited as one example of disagreement over eschatology within Christendom. Likewise, there is division over whether a soul remains conscious after death. But for Rachels these are moot issues. The issue is that in whatever theological form presented, individual humans are promised the possibility of some kind afterlife while individual animals seem not to be given this privilege.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 87. Emphasis mine.

Rachels repeats and enlarges these two points by suggesting “some practical implications of the idea of human dignity.” First is the doctrine of the sanctity of human life—*innocent* human life to be more precise. Rachels observes that traditional ethics usually recognizes that “guilty persons—criminals, aggressors, and soldiers fighting unjust wars—are not given this protection, and in some circumstances they may be justly killed.” However, traditional ethics is said to erect an inviolable wall of protection around the innocent. The practical outworking of this doctrine, notes Rachels, is that traditional morality does not permit practices such as suicide, infanticide, and euthanasia.¹ Thus, innocent human life becomes untouchable.

Rachels further explores the second implication of the human dignity doctrine by appealing to Aquinas and Kant to show the “traditional” view of the moral status of animals. The usual statements of everything in nature being made for man’s usage are repeated, and Aquinas is cited as saying that “charity does not extend to irrational creatures.” Kant is cited as claiming that animals have no ends in themselves but are merely means to an end and that end is man.²

Succinctly stated, then, for Rachels the overall basis of human dignity is rooted in the theological premise that if man is the central object of God’s love and watch-care, then man’s protection should be the central object and focus of morality. Thus the image-of-God thesis becomes the first central pillar for upholding the sanctify of human

¹Ibid., 88.

²Ibid., *CfA*, 90-91.

life over animal life in Rachels's argument. But the appeal to Kant brings us to the second pillar of the human dignity position, the rationality thesis.

Pillar Two: The Rationality Thesis

In Rachels's words, "Few Western moralists have been satisfied to leave the idea of man's specialness stated in an overtly theological way." Thus he notes that they reasoned that they should be able to identify the essential nature of this divine image that is possessed by man. "The favored answer, throughout Western history, has been that man alone is rational." He notes that "the doctors of the Church" adopted Aristotle's argument that man alone is rational, this being the single characteristic distinguishing him from animals. Rachels calls this the "rationality thesis: man is special because he alone is rational. Non-human animals are not rational, and so are not to be compared, in this regard, with humans."¹

Rachels asserts that the importance of the rationality thesis is that it "secularized" the doctrine of man's specialness. Thus, "even if the image of God thesis is rejected, the matching moral idea need not be abandoned."² Rachels casts this "rejection" in the context of Christian apologetics, where secular arguments are used to defend the same conclusion that was reached by theological debate. But without saying it directly, Rachels demonstrates that he sees a second possibility: If the image-of-God thesis

¹Ibid., 87-88.

²Ibid., 88.

becomes weakened or is eliminated from theology, then only one pillar would remain for supporting human dignity.

Here we find the significance of Darwinian evolution for Rachels. The image-of-God thesis, according to Rachels, is ultimately rooted in the doctrine of biblical creation. But Darwin's theory of evolution, in many circles, has brought the Genesis account into disrepute. Thus we earlier saw Rachels label it a "remarkable story." Darwinist evolution is the alternative that allows creation to fall and thus undermine the image-of-God thesis. Then Rachels only has to undermine the rationality thesis, and, in his mind, human dignity will be a dead issue.

We have seen why Rachels believes the image of God and rationality theses are foundational to traditional ethics. But how does Rachels understand Darwinism to undermine these theses?

"How Darwinism Might Undermine the Idea of Human Dignity"¹

Before showing how Darwinism may undermine the traditional pillars of Christian ethics, Rachels first sees it necessary to show us that it is possible to discuss ethics in the context of Darwin's theory. To make his case, Rachels addresses the problem of the is-ought fallacy, or "Hume's Guillotine," as he likes to call it. Simply stated, the argument is made that it is logically improper to derive a moral imperative (an "ought") from a basic matter of fact (an "is"). To derive an "ought" from an "is" is to fall into the

¹Ibid., 91. This is an actual section heading used by Rachels.

is-ought fallacy. In Rachels's words, "Factual statements can never by themselves logically entail evaluations."¹

Overcoming Hume's Guillotine

Rachels observes that, in traditional morality, the elements in the image of God and rationality theses (i.e., God exists, He created man in His image, etc.) "are, speaking loosely, matters of (purported) fact." Once these "facts" are established (the "is"), they are said to entail (the "ought") that the purpose of morality is the protection of human life. Rachels asserts that this logic commits the is-ought fallacy. Rachels, however, notes that Hume's Guillotine is just as merciless with those who wish to argue that Darwinism undermines the doctrine of human dignity, "For the facts of evolution do not, by themselves, entail any moral conclusions."² Thus, for Rachels, Hume's Guillotine cuts both ways, giving neither Creationist nor evolutionist an advantage. So what is Rachels's solution to this apparent dilemma?

Rachels notes that philosophical reassurances that we cannot derive "ought" from "is" are "too quick and easy," and thus, "the nagging thought remains that Darwinism does have unsettling consequences." He continues, "I believe this feeling of discomfort is justified. Matters are more complicated than a simple reliance on Hume's Guillotine would suggest." The key reason matters are more complicated is that "our beliefs are often tied together by connections other than strict logical entailment." Rachels uses the

¹Ibid., 91-92.

²Ibid.

anti-abortion movement to illustrate how a position can be maintained when new evidence removes the original grounds for the viewpoint. He asserts new grounds are found and substituted but the position is not forsaken. Strict logical entailment would say the position should have been given up. But we are not strictly logical beings.¹ And this, in turn, opens the way for Rachels's solution to the is-ought issue. And his solution provides his logic for how Darwinism "might" undermine traditional ethics.

Rachels is arguing that, in a similar fashion, believers in the human dignity doctrine have essentially proven that traditional ethics does not deduce the doctrine of human sanctity from the image of God by strict logic. This is because, asserts Rachels, that as old reasons are overthrown by new evidence, they keep shifting their argument to continue to provide support for the established belief. Thus, traditional morality "never depended on taking the matching moral idea as a strict logical deduction from the image-of-God thesis or the rationality thesis." Rather, these theses provided moralists with what they felt were "good reasons" (i.e., good justifications) for accepting the moral conclusion of a human centered ethics.² The difference between merely providing "good reasons" and strict logical entailment is the key that Rachels believes delivers both traditional ethics and his own work from the impact of Hume's Guillotine. In other words, for Rachels, by never claiming to supply absolute proof, but rather merely providing "good reasons," we escape the is-ought fallacy. Notice how he now argues on

¹Ibid., 92-97.

²Ibid., 97.

what grounds Darwinism undermines traditional ethics.

First, Rachels observes that claiming that Darwinism undermines traditional morality “is not the claim that it entails that the doctrine of human dignity is false.” Rather, “it is, instead, the claim that Darwinism provides reason for doubting the truth of the considerations that support the doctrine. From a Darwinian perspective, both the image-of-God thesis and the rationality thesis are suspect.” Second, Rachels asserts that there are “good Darwinian reasons, for thinking it unlikely that any other support for human dignity can be found. Thus Darwinism is believed to furnish the ‘new information’ that undermines human dignity by taking away its support.”¹ So what is this “new information”?

How Darwin’s Theory Undermines the Image-of-God thesis

Rachels’s primary tactic to undermine the image-of-God thesis will be to try to show that Darwinian evolution cannot support the kind of theism necessary to produce such a conclusion.² But what in Darwinism does Rachels see as undermining the grounds of the image-of-God thesis? Rachels offers two aspects of Darwinism that he believes

¹Ibid., 97-98.

²Rachels summarizes his work at the end of chapter 4 in *CfA*, by stating that chapter 3 is dedicated to showing how Darwinism undermines the image-of-God thesis, while chapter 4 is focused on undermining the rationality thesis. See Rachels, *CfA*, 171.

undermine classical theism, and in undermining classical theism, undermine the image-of-God thesis.

The problem of evil

The first aspect is the issue of evil and suffering in the world. As Rachels notes, “The existence of evil has always been a chief obstacle to belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. How can God and evil co-exist? If God is perfectly good, he would not want evil to exist; and if he is all-powerful, he is able to eliminate it. Yet evil exists. Therefore, the argument goes, God must not exist.”¹ Rachels then gives a short list of traditional answers offered by theologians “through the centuries.”

1. Perhaps evil is necessary so that we may appreciate the good. . . .
2. Perhaps evil is a punishment for man’s sin. Before the fall people lived in Paradise. It was their own fault sin that resulted in their expulsion. Therefore, people suffer because they have brought it on themselves.
3. Perhaps evil is placed in the world so that, by struggling with it, human beings can develop moral character. . . .
4. Perhaps evil is the unavoidable consequence of man’s free will. In order to make us moral agents, rather than mere robots, it was necessary for God to endow us with free will. But in making us free agents, God enabled *us* to cause evil, even though he would not cause it himself.
5. Or, if all else fails, the theist can always fall back on the idea that our limited human intelligence is insufficient to comprehend God’s great design. There is a reason for evil; we just aren’t smart enough to figure out what it is.

All these arguments are available to reconcile God’s existence with evil. Certainly,

¹Ibid., 103.

then, the simple version of the argument from evil does not *force* the theist to abandon belief.¹

Rachels does not further analyze these particular arguments for he has already concluded they are not overly effective in changing the theist's mind. Rather he gives two common rejoinders to these arguments before proceeding to his conclusion.

The first rejoinder, which may come in varying forms, focuses on the fact that there is an excessive amount of evil in the world for the first three arguments to be valid. The second rejoinder argues against number 4 by appealing to the distinction between moral and natural evil. Free will is only responsible for the former and is inadequate for the latter.² But, as we have seen, these do not force the believer to forsake their belief in God.

Rachels thus argues that Darwin contributes "two distinctive twists" that strengthen the argument from evil. First, theological arguments justifying the existence of God and the presence of evil in this world center on human suffering, belying the human centered focus of traditional morality. But for Darwin, says Rachels, these arguments assume, based on the creation story, that man has always been a co-occupant with animal and plant life forms on the earth, whereas in the evolutionary view evil and suffering existed for millions of years before man arrived on the scene. Thus, "the traditional theistic rejoinders do not even come close to justifying *that* evil. . . . The evolutionary

¹Ibid., 104. Emphasis in original.

²Ibid., 104-105.

perspective puts the problem in a new and more difficult form.”¹ Rachels does not further develop this point.

Second, Rachels asserts that Darwin’s theory would expect natural evil, suffering and unhappiness to be widespread as it is, while the divine hypothesis view would not. “Thus, Darwin believed, natural selection accounts for the facts regarding happiness and unhappiness in the world, whereas the rival hypothesis of divine creation did not.”²

This second point is especially crucial for Rachels. He notes that Darwin sought an account of origins and life that most easily fits the facts of suffering with the least amount of explanatory contortions. On this account, Rachels claims that “Divine creation is a poor hypothesis because it fits the facts badly.”³ He asserts that in the creation hypothesis, we would expect evil not to exist at all, and that it requires too many explanations, ultimately claiming that the coexistence of God and evil is beyond our ability to understand. In the mean time, the current patterns of suffering are said to be just what Darwin and his theory would expect with natural selection in process. “Thus, Darwin believed, natural selection accounts for the facts regarding happiness and unhappiness in the world, whereas the rival hypothesis of divine creation does not.”⁴

To put it another way, Rachels’s fundamental argument against the image-of-God thesis, which he claims to have derived from Darwin himself, is that the doctrine of

¹Ibid., 105-106. Emphasis in original.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 106.

⁴Ibid.

creation upon which the image-of-God thesis depends is less parsimonious than Darwinian evolution.¹ Darwin's theory is said to require less explanation to satisfy the facts on the extent of evil and suffering. Since Darwin has, in Rachels's view, presented an alternative to divine creation that is viable and exhibits greater parsimony, the divine creation hypothesis is now undermined by good reasons. And of course, to spell out the implication of Rachels's argument, if there is no divine creation, and possibly no God, how can man be *created* in the image of God? If man can no longer be the image of God, then that pillar of traditional ethics is toppled by Darwin's theory, and traditional ethics begins to crumble. In raising the specter of denying the existence of God altogether, Rachels brings us to his second major set of arguments for why Darwin undermines traditional ethics.

Teleology: The central issue

Rachels credits Marx for pinpointing the "philosophical nerve" of Darwin's theory in declaring the theory of evolution to be "the death blow . . . to 'Teleology' in the natural sciences."² Thus, it may be that the most significant aspect of Darwin's theory is his overall rejection of teleology in nature. Rachels reminds us that "a teleological explanation is an explanation of something in terms of its function and purpose: the heart

¹Tom Regan places much emphasis on the principle of parsimony or simplicity in his argumentation, including some discussion and description of the principle. See *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 21-24.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 110-111.

is for pumping blood, the lungs are for breathing, and so on.”¹ Teleology thus implies a purpose or design, which must have been determined by the intentions of a maker.² But there can be no designer in Darwinian evolution, and as Rachels notes, “If there is no maker—if the object in question is not an artifact—does it make sense to speak of a ‘purpose’?” The answer is, “No,” says Rachels. Any purposes attributed are merely those *we* assign. Thus, “the connection between function and conscious intention is, in Darwin’s theory, completely severed.”³

Rachels has thus highlighted the debate over the design argument (offered by Paley) which is considered by many to be definitively refuted by Hume.⁴ The problem is, notes Rachels, that Hume, and other critics of the design argument, only pointed out logical deficiencies in the design argument, but “they could not supply a *better way* of understanding the apparent design of nature. . . . Darwin did what Hume could not do: he

¹Ibid. Rachels admits, “It is an exaggeration to say that Darwin dealt teleology a death blow; even after Darwin we still find biologists offering teleological explanations. But now they are offered in a different spirit. Biological function is no longer compared to the function of consciously designed artifacts” (112).

²The term "Teleology" is used in two fundamentally different, but related ways. In the philosophical realm, teleology asserts there is some kind of ordering design or purpose in nature that produces the predictable formulas and laws used in the sciences today. The discipline of Ethics also uses the term, "teleology, to designate systems of morality in which good and evil are determined by consequences. Teleological ethics are thus goal oriented instead of duty oriented. For example, the woman hiding the Jew from the Nazis would not worry about duties to tell the truth regardless of consequences, but in teleological ethics, would lie when questioned by the Gestapo with the goal of saving the Jew's life (not to mention avoiding significant trouble for herself).

³Ibid., 111-112.

⁴Ibid., 118.

provided an alternative, giving people something else they could believe. Only then was the design hypothesis dead.”¹ For Rachels, then, the significance of Darwin is that he provided the “good reasons” that Hume was unable to provide, which made the rejection of teleology plausible because there was a viable alternative for interpreting data. It is the fact that Darwin’s theory provided rational reasons for rejecting teleology that makes Darwin’s theory so capable of undermining the image-of-God thesis.

Removing teleology undermines a divinely designed ethics

The rejection of teleology is a major weapon in the war to divorce morality from religious and theological grounding. In his textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Rachels notes that, “in popular thinking, morality and religion are inseparable. People commonly believe that morality can be understood only in the context of religion.”² Rachels asserts this is partly due to the fact that, “when viewed from a non-religious perspective, the universe seemed to be a cold, meaningless place, devoid of value or purpose.”³ By contrast, for Judaism and Christianity,

the world is not devoid of meaning and purpose. It is the arena in which God’s plans and purposes are realized. What could be more natural, then, than to think that “morality” is a part of the religious view of the world, whereas the atheist’s view of the world has no place for values?

. . . In both the Jewish and Christian traditions, God is conceived as a

¹Ibid., 120. Emphasis in original.

²Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 54. The title of this chapter, “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” also hints at the vernacular view that indeed the one does depend on the other.

³Ibid., 54.

lawgiver who has created us, and the world we live in, for a purpose. . . . God has promulgated rules that we are to obey. . . . But if live as we should live, we must follow God's laws. This, it is said, is the essence of morality.¹

Rachels further intimates that this populist opinion is merely seeking order and design where there are none, for evolution shows us that there is no teleology, no divine purpose, but only blind laws of nature. Thus Rachels clearly tries to show that traditional ethics can only be grounded in the concept of being part of a grand design created by an almighty Creator-God. He clearly asserts that Darwinism undermines this foundation. Peter Singer echoes the same sentiment. "Once we admit that Darwin was right when he argued that human ethics evolved from social instincts that we inherited from our non-human ancestors, we can put aside the hypothesis of the divine origin for ethics."²

The issue here, however, is not the efficacy of the design versus materialism argument. It is, rather, that to accept Darwin's theory is to accept that there is no purpose or design in nature at all. This completely opposes classic Judeo-Christian theism, in which there is a cosmic design and purpose in which the image-of-God concept plays a specific role. Rachels asks the clinching question: "Can theism be separated from belief in design? It would be a heroic step, because the design hypothesis is not an insignificant component of traditional religious belief. But it can be done, and in fact it has been done, by eighteenth-century deists."³

¹Ibid., 55.

²Peter Singer, "Introduction," in *Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

³Rachels, *CfA*, 125.

The retreat to deism

Deism, he notes, rejects any personal-relational view of God, replacing that with a God who created natural laws, made the world, and now lets it run itself by those natural laws. The God of deism is hands-off and not concerned with details. Thus there is theism without teleological design.¹ What is the significance of this for Rachels? Rachels declares, “Since deism is a consistent theistic view, it is tempting simply to conclude that theism and Darwinism must be compatible, and to say no more. But the temptation should be resisted, at least *until we have made clear what has been given up in the retreat to deism.*”² And just what is it that must be given up in the “retreat to deism”? Rachels asserts that “when the world is interpreted non-teleologically—when God is no longer necessary to explain things—then theology is diminished.”³ And how is theology diminished? “The image of God thesis does not go along with just any theistic view. It requires a theism that sees God as actively designing man and the world as a home for man. If, by abolishing the view of nature as designed in substantial detail, Darwinism forces a retreat to something like deism, then we are deprived of the idea that man has a special place in the divine order. Even if we can still view nature in some

¹Ibid.

²Ibid. Emphasis mine.

³Singer also uses these arguments but in reverse order: “When we reject belief in a god we must give up the idea that life on this planet has any preordained meaning. Life *as a whole* has no meaning.” Thus Singer connects rejection of teleology with atheism. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 331.

sense as God's creation, we will no longer have a theism that supports the doctrine of human dignity."¹

In the words of Sigmund Freud, the God of the deists is "nothing but an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrine."² All that is left is the concept of God as the original cause. But, says Rachels, Darwin has asserted that to say the original cause is God is merest speculation. It can be asserted but no good reasons can be given to substantiate it. And, in fact, Rachels asserts that if we can accept that God is uncaused, then there is no good reason to reject the assertion that the universe is uncaused.³ Thus what is left is a theism so worthless as to make religious belief essentially nonsense.

Two statements of Rachels bring us to his crowning conclusion: "I have already argued in this chapter that Darwinism undermines theism." How severe is this undermining of theism in Rachels's view? Says Rachels, "In summary then, the

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 127-128.

²Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1928), 57. Of further interest is that between pp. 25 and 35, Freud argues that deities are human inventions to personalize the forces of nature so that man can feel he has a relationship with these forces that will enable man to manipulate nature or at least be protected from it. Thus Freud casts human culture as a tool to aid the dynamic of man versus nature. This clearly depicts a culture where man is viewed as special apart from nature and juxtaposed against it. In relation to Rachels's use of the quotation in the text above, it is significant that Freud asserts, "And *the more autonomous nature becomes and the more the gods withdraw from her*, the more earnestly are all expectations concentrated on the third task assigned to them" (p. 31, emphasis mine). Freud astutely connects autonomy of nature to a withdrawal from divine dominance, thus underscoring Rachels's assertion that deism is too anemic a theism to support traditional morality.

³Rachels, *CfA*, 108, 126.

atheistical conclusion can be resisted, but only at great cost.”¹ Indeed the theological cost is great enough to leave traditional ethics reeling. But just how irresistible is the “atheistic conclusion?” For Rachels, it is irresistible enough to assert, in another work, that theism is incompatible with morality!

Is the existence of god antithetical to morality?

In an essay entitled “God and Moral Autonomy,”² Rachels directly asserts that the existence of God is antithetical to morality. He quickly comes to his overall theological proposition: “The argument is that God cannot exist, because there could not be a being toward whom we should adopt such an attitude.”³ But Rachels does sum up his argument with the following syllogism:

1. If any being is God, he must be a fitting object of worship.
2. No being could possibly be a fitting object of worship, since worship requires the abandonment of one's role as an autonomous moral agent.
3. Therefore, there cannot be any being who is God.⁴

This overall logic causes him to make the following moral conclusion:

In saying that a being is worthy of worship, we would be recognizing him as having an unqualified claim on our obedience. The question, then, is whether there could be such an unqualified claim. . . .

¹Ibid., 127, 126.

²James Rachels, “God and Moral Autonomy,” in *Can Ethics Provide Answers? And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 109-123.

³Ibid., 109.

⁴Ibid., 119.

. . . There is a long tradition in moral philosophy, from Plato to Kant, according to which such a recognition could never be made by a moral agent. According to this tradition, to be a moral agent is to be autonomous, or self-directed. . . .

On this view, to deliver oneself over to a moral authority for directions about what to do is simply incompatible with being a moral agent. To say “I will follow so-and-so’s directions no matter what they are and no matter what my own conscience would otherwise direct me to do” is to opt out of moral thinking altogether; it is to abandon one’s role as a moral agent. And it does not matter whether “so-and-so” is the law, the customs of one’s society, or Jehovah. . . .

We have, then, a conflict between the role of worshiper, which by its very nature commits one to total subservience to God, and the role of moral agent, which necessarily involves autonomous decision making.¹

So, then, what seems to lie behind Rachels’s dismissals of theistic ethics is a philosophical argument that an absolutely supreme being to whom we ought to fully submit is incompatible with our being free moral agents. For Rachels, we cannot both think for ourselves and submit to a divine moral authority. As a result, in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Rachels promotes reason over religion, the latter being depicted as being morally useless. In his own words, “Right and wrong are not to be defined in terms of God’s will; morality is a matter of reason and conscience, not religious faith; and in any case, religious considerations do not provide definitive solutions to the specific moral problems that confront us.”²

Rachels here seems to imply that Judeo-Christian morality is essentially rote obedience to divine commands and rules which are seen as being related to God’s master

¹Ibid., 118-119.

²Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 69.

purposes.¹ A second possible implication intended by Rachels is that obedience to divinely prescribed norms is incompatible with human reason.

Rachels's disconnection of morality and religion

In his college textbook, Rachels explicitly develops the position that submission to divinely prescribed moral standards is essentially an unreasoned belief that is maintained by popular opinion.² He further charges then that those who adhere to a religious viewpoint actually first make up their minds concerning a moral issue, and then interpret the Bible or Tradition to justify their pre-fabricated conclusion.³ In fact, he charges that

¹Singer makes a similar argument, though from a slightly different angle, in the context of asserting and implying that Christian ethics is often irrelevant and impractical to today's society. He then argues that "ethics is practical, or it not really ethical. If it is no good in practice, it is no good in theory either. *Getting rid of the idea that an ethical life must consist of absolute obedience to some short and simple set of moral rules* makes it easier to avoid the trap of an unworkable ethic." And just what is the simple set of moral rules Singer has in mind? "Some don't think of an ethical approach to life as one in which every time we are about to enjoy ourselves, an image of a *stone table* drops from some section of our mind, *engraved* with a commandment saying, '*Thou shalt not!*'" (all emphases mine). The language in the last sentence clearly evokes biblical language referring to the ten commandments. Thus Singer rejects any definition of morality rooted in the idea of an unchanging, moral code that is to be always obeyed, and like Rachels, divorces ethics from religion. See Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 203-204.

²Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 54.

³See *ibid.*, 66-68, where Rachels tries to illustrate such mis-uses of Scripture and Tradition in reference to abortion. His basic premise is that the interpreter is first against abortion and then searches for apparent justification in the text or tradition. He essentially argues that texts are pulled out of context and used in an illicit way. Rachels is to be commended for sensitivity to context but he himself may fall victim to his own criticism. In discussing the use of Jer 1.5, he quotes vss. 4-6 to supply context. Rachels argues that the context is of Jeremiah asserting the divine source of his prophetic call and authority. "He is saying, 'God authorized me to speak for him; even though I resisted, he commanded me to speak.'" But then Rachels asserts that Jeremiah was merely being

this often happens.¹ Thus, believers in religion are depicted as unthinking, unreasonable folk who have the conclusion prior to looking at the evidence. Essentially, this also means that Rachels is charging Jews and Christians with being emotivist (or subjectivist) in their ethics since they supposedly arrive at their moral conclusions apart from any meaningful evidence. Nevertheless, he feels he has sufficiently undermined the efficacy of Scripture as a moral authority to not have to address the issue in further detail.²

Rachels illustrates the charge that any ethics rooted in divinely prescribed norms or

poetic when he says God intended him to be prophet before he was born. The question, of course, is what evidence is there in the context that Jeremiah intended this poetically? Rachels offers none. In so doing, he seems to fall into the same kind of eisegesis of which he accuses others. While it is not possible to do a full exegesis here, it seems that Rachels has undermined his own argument. If the divine call to Jeremiah is poetic regarding the unborn stage of Jeremiah's life, why not explain the prophetic office to which he is called as merely poetical language as well. Rachels never considers how Jeremiah understood his own statement. Instead of addressing the moral argument that God's call to the unborn has moral implications for abortion, Rachels tritely dismisses it as poetic. He seems to forget others in the Scriptures who had divine purposes prescribed for them prior to conception or while in-utero, such as Sampson, Cyrus, and John the Baptist. Are these all poetic as well? Rachels has not interpreted the text in a fair and impartial manner, but rather a shallow manner suited to his purposes and thus falls to his own criticisms of twisting the Scriptures to fit a preconceived belief.

¹Ibid., 55. See also James Park, "From Rule-Morality to Rational Ethics: Debating the Ten Commandments," Undated, <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/O-ETHICS.html> (20 May 2000), where he even more clearly expresses the same sentiment as Rachels concerning Christian morality: "In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Ten Commandments are often thought to be the basic moral code. But most people raised as Jews or Christians cannot name all 10 commandments. *Rather, they affirm their own morality based on these commandments.* As a matter of historical fact, the various denominations of Judaism and Christianity do have systems of morality, which have developed over the centuries within each religious community—*sometimes loosely based on the Bible.*" Emphasis mine.

²Tom Regan also argues that the multiplicity of interpretations of Scripture make it invalid for use as a moral authority. See, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 125-126.

commandments is really a prefabricated morality by appealing to Plato's famous argument in *Euthyphro*. The central challenge by *Euthyphro* to theism concerns whether there is a standard of good apart from God. In succinct form Plato's dialogue asks if one's conduct is good because God commanded it, or did God command the conduct because it was good?¹ For Rachels, this is a poison-pill for theism. On the one hand, if "conduct is right because God commands it," then, "this leads to trouble, for it represents God's commands as arbitrary."² For example, argues Rachels, honesty could not be said to be morally right before God commanded it. Thus, if God commanded lying instead, lying would be morally good, and thus, "the doctrine of God's goodness is reduced to

¹Rachels gives no specific reference data, but the argument referred to can be found in Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 35-39. Michel Ruse also makes use of the *Euthyphro* argument. See, Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 167-169. Interestingly, it is not "good" (ἀγαθός or καλός) that Socrates debates with Euthyphro but "holiness" (ὅσιος). The word, ὅσιος, has to do with what the gods command, that is, with pious duty. Thus Rachels extrapolates the more narrow definition of "good" out of this dialog. Of further note is that the argument invoked by Rachels draws some of its power from Socrates' earlier argument that "holiness" cannot be defined as being what the gods love since the gods argue over what is holy and is not. If the gods cannot agree on what is holy, then holiness must be defined independently from the gods, who are now then subjected to this higher standard. (We cannot help but see here a major moral disadvantage of polytheism in contrast to monotheism). Thus the argument invoked by Rachels and Ruse is the second major argument by Socrates against holiness being determined by the gods. It is also interesting to note that Socrates complains he is being prosecuted for denying the stories of the gods to be true (p. 21). In a similar fashion, Rachels's denial of the existence of God is a fundamental foundation of his argument. The possibility is raised that both Rachels and Socrates have argued, in part, on the basis of personal ideology and not merely from pure principles of reason.

²Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 56. Emphasis in original.

nonsense.”¹ The reciprocal problem would be this. If “*God commands right because it is right*,” then we face a “different problem, which is equally troublesome for the theological conception of right and wrong,” for it means there is an independent standard of right and wrong apart from God.² This would seem to imply that we would not need God to know what is good, an equally unpalatable option for the classical theist. This is why, says Rachels, that a “theological conception” of the good has been “virtually abandoned.”³ Thus Rachels sees theistic ethical theories as rooted in beliefs that are self-defeating, eliminating their relevance for moral guidance.⁴

Rachels’s arguments against the role of religion clearly advocate the conclusion that God and ethics have no valid relationship. While his arguments in this realm are not all explicitly grounded in Darwinian thought, Rachels’s conclusion makes sense in light of his commitment to Darwinism. Since Rachels has accepted the anti-design views of Darwin, it would seem natural, even logical, to reject the existence of a designing, almighty God and thus His moral authority. So while Rachels does not seem to fully ground this ethical conclusion directly in Darwinism, it certainly fits into his moral

¹Ibid., 57.

²Ibid., 57-58. Emphasis in original.

³Ibid. In the context of the chapter, the “theological conception of right and wrong” is another term for the Divine Command theory of morality, in which good is good because God commanded it.

⁴Rachels makes this argument in criticizing the Divine Command Theory of ethics. What he seems not to recognize is that the Divine Command Theory is not the only theological moral theory that Christians can espouse. Not all Christian views of ethics contain the voluntarism found in some versions of the Divine Command Theory.

package based on evolutionary theory. Thus for Rachels, the doctrine of human dignity requires a certain doctrine of creation, which requires a particular doctrine of God, who can prescribe a humano-centric ethics. Rachels believes that Darwin's theory clearly and successfully undermines these foundations of traditional, Judeo-Christian morality. For Rachels, the image-of-God thesis is dead. But what of Rachels's second pillar of traditional ethics—the rationality thesis?

How Evolution Undermines the Rationality Thesis

Rachels's attempt to rebut the rationality thesis does not engage Christianity to any significant degree, and so is less significant to this study. Therefore, I shall only give a cursory summary.¹ The simple core of his argument is based on the conclusion that "Darwin did not deny that human rational abilities far exceeded those of other animals. But, he insisted that the *difference is only one of degree, not of kind.*"² Thus, "intelligence is not, for Darwin, an all-or-nothing thing that one either has fully or lacks completely. . . . Man is not *the* only rational animal; he is merely more rational than other animals."³ Thus humans cannot be viewed as the unique possessors of reason, and, by

¹Rachels himself states that the entire fourth chapter of *CfA* is dedicated to rebutting the rationality thesis; see *CfA*, 171. The core of his rebuttal is contained in pp. 132-147.

²*Ibid.*, 133. Emphasis mine.

³*Ibid.*, 136. Emphasis in original. In the succeeding pages Rachels sets forth various evidences to support the concept that rationality evolved in small stages in pre-human ancestors, and thus, reason is not a uniquely human ability. In particular, from 149-158, he discusses the evolution of altruism in a manner not unlike Ruse and others as seen in chapter 3, except that Rachels uses altruism as evidence of pre-human rationality, instead of drawing conclusions about the nature of morality as Ruse does.

implication, they cannot be said to be uniquely different from animals in a way that entails preferential treatment.

By showing that evolutionary theory removes reason from being a uniquely human attribute, Rachels believes Darwinism undermines the second pillar upholding traditional ethics. With both the image-of-God thesis and rationality thesis believed to be removed, Rachels concludes his chapter by asserting, “I have argued that Darwinism must also lead to the rejection of the idea that man is the only rational animal. We may now draw the conclusion that the traditional supports for the idea of human dignity are gone. They have not survived the colossal shift of perspective brought about by Darwin’s theory.”¹ Thus Rachels feels he has toppled the second and final pillar holding up the edifice of traditional, Christian ethics. What does he propose for replacing traditional ethics?

Morality without Human Specialness

With the pillars of traditional ethics believed to be toppled, Rachels now asks, “If the idea of human dignity is abandoned, what sort of moral view should be adopted in its place?” Rachels answers his own question by proposing a new view of ethics, based on Darwin’s theory of evolution which he labels “moral individualism.”² In addition, Rachels pursues the question of how morality will work without human preference in his

¹Ibid., 171.

²Ibid., 173.

textbook. He asks, “What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?”¹ His approach in the textbook is built in a way different enough from *Created from Animals* that one cannot really synthesize them into one presentation, yet the conclusions are complementary. They are two different roads to the same destination.

Because of this difference, I shall first finish his work in *Created From Animals*, and then move on to his work in his textbook. In using the textbook, I follow a more chronological order, focusing first on the first edition, then noting refinements made in the third and fourth editions. With this in mind, let us move to Rachels’s proposed ethics of moral individualism.

Rachels’s Ethics of Moral Individualism

According to Rachels, in moral individualism, “the basic idea is that how an individual may be treated is to be determined, not by considering his group memberships, but by considering his own particular characteristics.”² For Rachels, all moral decisions are to be made based on the *individual’s* own personal characteristics and not on the basis of species or other group membership. Thus, “If A is to be treated differently from B, the justification must be in terms of A’s individual characteristics and B’s individual characteristics. Treating them differently cannot be justified by pointing out that one or

¹Rachels, *Elements* (1986), 139. This is the chapter title for the 12th and final chapter of the book.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 173.

the other is a member of some preferred group, not even the ‘group’ of human beings.”¹

Rachels further drives his point home by arguing that in making a moral decision involving chimps and humans, “it is not good enough simply to observe that chimps are not members of the preferred group. . . . Instead, we would have to look at *specific* chimpanzees and *specific* humans.”² In other words, we would have to ask why this specific chimp or specific human was entitled to moral consideration. The consideration is decided strictly on the individual’s characteristics and capacities. In a nutshell, then, for Rachels, moral status is *merited* on an individual basis. It is not *granted* by a higher moral authority, nor is it *granted* on the basis of any kind of connection to group.

Rachels asserts that these conclusions are grounded in Darwinian evolution when he states:

This kind of thinking goes naturally with an evolutionary perspective because an evolutionary perspective denies that humans are different in kind from other animals; and *one cannot reasonably make distinctions in morals where none exist in fact*. If Darwin is correct, there are no absolute differences between humans and the members of all other species—in fact there are no absolute differences between the members of *any* species and all others. . . . As Darwin puts it, there are only differences of degree. . . . Therefore, the fundamental reality is best represented by saying that the earth is populated by individuals who resemble one another, and who differ from one another, in myriad ways, rather than saying that the earth is populated by different *kinds* of beings.³

We here see that the crux of Rachels’s argument is that differences of kind do not exist in evolutionary fact, but rather, all creatures share sameness and difference. Therefore

¹Ibid., 173-4.

²Ibid., 174. Emphases mine.

³Ibid. First emphasis mine; all other emphases in original.

Rachels interprets this to imply that species boundaries are arbitrary and meaningless for morals. Furthermore, moral status cannot thus be based on that which is not “factual,” namely the concept of species boundaries. Based on these arguments, Rachels asserts that “moral individualism is a view that looks at individual similarities and differences for moral justification, whereas human dignity emphasized the now-discredited idea that humans are of a special kind.”¹

Moral Individualism and Aristotle

Rachels expands on this foundation by appealing to a maxim he asserts was recognized by Aristotle: The principle that “like cases should be treated alike, and different cases should be treated differently.”² Since Rachels believes species membership has been excluded from being a factual reality, he cannot advocate it as being part of the criteria for determining what constitutes “like cases.” Thus, Rachels argues that moral individualism implies that, “if he [Darwin] was right, . . . it would follow that, often, when we object to treating humans in a certain way, we would have similar grounds for objecting to the similar treatment for a non-human animal.” He asserts that such a conclusion is demanded by consistency.³

Rachels here seems to assume the moral standing of humans, and thus tries to

¹Ibid., 174-175.

²Ibid., 196.

³Ibid., 175. Rachels here is on the edge of using the marginal-cases argument, but he does not develop it fully, nor does he use the term “marginal cases” in this work.

elevate animals to a human level of moral protection in the name of logical consistency. However, he does not explore the issue of whether animals should be promoted to equal status with humans, or whether some “defective” humans should be demoted in status to the level of animals. Rachels seems to take human rights for granted and thus appears to assume the elevation of the moral status of animals as a natural consequence. The bottom line, though, is that for Rachels, moral status is only to be granted based on a being’s individual characteristics.

Equality of Treatment versus Equal Status

Rachels seeks to illustrate the individualistic nature of granting moral status by noting that Western thinkers for the last three centuries have argued the principle that all humans are equal. But, asks Rachels, what does this really mean? The fact is that not all men are equal.¹ Rachels interprets this principle as being a statement about human *treatment* and not about human *status*. The principle of equality, for Rachels, is thus to grant rights to equal consideration and treatment, with the emphasis on treatment. But, Rachels notes, not all people are treated equally, sometimes for good reasons. Here is where Rachels may stumble, for his illustrations of good reasons are not drawn from analogous cases.

For example, he argues that all can apply to law school but not all are accepted. All get the opportunity, but some are rejected for good reasons. A second example is the fact that doctors do not prescribe the same treatment to every patient. Thus equal people

¹Ibid., 175-76.

are treated differently for “relevant reasons.”¹ The problem, of course, is that most moralists would not consider entrance to law school a “right” that the applicant is entitled to, nor would one be considered to have a “right” to a given medical treatment. Both are privileges that can be sought if one can meet certain conditions such as being able to pay for the service sought. Thus Rachels is trying to make an analogy between privileges and rights, which thus seems fundamentally flawed. Rights fundamentally do not have the contingencies that privileges have. Freedom of Speech and having a job are not morally analogous. The first is guaranteed to Americans as a fundamental right, while the other is obtained through merit. Of course, Rachels is precisely treating rights as something merited by individuals, which reduces rights to privileges.

Rachels has well illustrated his fundamental moral principle that each individual deserves equal consideration, though not necessarily equal treatment. Few would argue against his position that some criteria are more relevant than others. Law school, for example, requires a certain level of educational training, which is why a high-school drop out could never qualify. Likewise, a doctor should base treatment on medical symptoms and not on irrelevant characteristics such as place of birth, race, or gender. But a possible weakness in his analogies is that the services provided by the law school and physician are fundamentally privileges, not rights. Both the doctor and law school can be moral while refusing to give their services if one has no resources to pay for the services requested, even if that individual is qualified in all other ways. If one is entitled by right

¹Ibid., 176.

to those services, then such refusal is wrong and no payment would be necessary.

Despite the possible weakness of analogy, what Rachels is trying to do is to establish Aristotle's maxim as a basic moral principle of moral individualism. Furthermore, he is taking advantage of the fact that Aristotle's language is not humanocentric. "Like cases should be treated alike." For Rachels, these "cases" cannot be restricted by species membership. Thus, whatever the species, "individuals are to be treated the same way unless there is a relevant difference between them that justifies a difference in treatment."¹ This, of course, begs the question of what constitutes a relevant difference?

The Principle of Equality/Equal Consideration of Interests

In pursuing the question of what constitutes a morally relevant characteristic to justify differentiation of treatment between individuals, two things will become clear in regard to Rachels's viewpoint. First, as we have already seen, for Rachels, species membership is not a morally relevant characteristic and thus, any system of ethics giving moral relevance to species (i.e., to being human) is speciesist, which of course is seen as undesirable.²

Second, what constitutes a morally relevant difference between individuals

¹Ibid.

²We have already examined Rachels on speciesism so will not pursue this issue further here. His fundamental argument is found in *CfA*, 181-194.

“depends on the treatment we have in mind.”¹ Here a situational element is introduced into Rachels’s moral theory. But what criteria should be used to determine the situational relevance of a given characteristic? Is this to be determined by common sense or intuition? Common sense seems easily used in some cases—blindness would likely not be a relevant factor in seeking to become a musician, but would be most definitely a problem for someone wanting to become an airline pilot—but in other cases could be less than clear from a common-sense perspective. So the question remains: What criteria do we use to determine a morally relevant characteristic from an incidental characteristic?

Rachels responds to this challenge by admitting that, “I cannot develop a complete theory of relevant differences here—that would take us too far from the subject at hand, and would involve controversies whose resolutions do not really matter for present purposes. But I do indeed need to say something about what such a theory would look like.”² Therefore, Rachels seeks to address this problem by offering a “general principle” for defining morally relevant differences: “Whether a difference between individuals justifies a difference in treatment depends on the kind of treatment that is in question. A difference that justifies one kind of difference in treatment need not justify

¹Ibid., 177.

²Ibid. Rachels here is stuck in a dilemma. To not address the issue of establishing the criteria for determining what constitutes a relevant difference for moral purposes is to torpedo the theory of moral individualism which he is advocating. But to develop such a criteria is said to be so complicated as to be seemingly impossible to accomplish in a portion of one chapter. Rachels seems to seek the advantage of expounding his ideas while hiding from rigorous criticism in the name of not being able to adequately pursue the issue.

another.”¹ Rachels, continues that the corollary conclusion is “that there is no *one* big difference between individuals that is relevant to justifying *all* differences in treatment.” Thus any differences of treatment cannot be based on species membership. But as eloquent as this sounds, we are still left with the problem of how to know what a relevant difference is.

Rachels offers no surefire way to determine a morally significant difference, but rather gives various examples that attempt to illustrate the concept of relevant differences. In the final analysis, Rachels gives only this one criterion: If it is permissible to treat one individual one way, and a second individual in a differing way, “surely there must be some difference between them that explains why. This is what the principle of equality requires.”² Such an assertion, however, does not tell us how to determine if that “reason” is a good reason or not. The closest he comes is to adopt the painist perspective and argue that beings able to experience pain should not be caused such pain without a good reason, and species membership is not a good reason. So Rachels talks much, but in the end offers no clear criteria on how to determine morally relevant differences for justifying differing treatments. Instead he focuses on what are *not* relevant differences, finally concluding that “humans and non-humans are, in a sense, moral equals.”³

¹Ibid., 178.

²Ibid., 180.

³Ibid., 182.

To illustrate how this moral equality between humans and animals might work, and riding the evolutionary argument that humans are different from animals only in degree, and not in kind, Rachels argues that the grounds of ethical importance are not found in the individual itself, but “that it is the richness and complexity of the *individual* life that is morally significant.”¹ And here Rachels confesses a major implication: “Some humans, unfortunately, are not capable of having the kind of rich life that we are discussing. An infant with severe brain damage . . . may never learn to speak, and its mental powers may never rise above a primitive level. In fact, its psychological capabilities may be markedly inferior to those of a rhesus monkey. In that case, moral individualism would see no reason to prefer its life over the monkey’s.”² The most controversial portion is the obvious favoring of the monkey over the baby and the clear application of the doctrine of no human dignity. As Rachels notes in his textbook, this means that not every life is precious. It is only lives with certain qualities that become precious.³ But underlying this argument is a more foundational concept: That moral standing is granted on the basis of *currently active* attributes and capabilities.

In short, Rachels is taking a functional model of determining moral significance, treating rights as being more like privileges, and thus, regardless of species membership, those individuals who meet a specified level of minimum function deserve to be

¹Ibid., 189. Emphasis in original.

²Ibid.

³Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 9.

considered while those falling short of the required functions deserve to be excluded.

Therefore, for Rachels, when the principles of Darwinian evolution are applied to ethics, rights are earned and not granted. There can be no God-granted rights that are inalienable. Nor are rights granted by any other authority. They are earned by the “richness” of our individual life, and forfeited with ease. The individual is just one accident away from losing the functions on which rights are said to be given.

We see here, of course, teleological ethics in the form of Utilitarianism.

Individuals are merely containers holding experiences, and the container is of no value.

The container is disposable. The richer the experiences of the individual life, the greater the moral status. This “richness” of the individual life eventually is refined by Rachels into the concept, apparently borrowed from Regan, of an individual being the “subject of a life.”¹

Subjects of a Life

For Rachels, being the subject of a life gives one moral standing. Again, tying himself to Darwinism, he asserts that after Darwin’s theory, “the value of a life is, first and foremost, the value it has *for the person who is the subject of a life*. Our lives are

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 198. It appears that Rachels is indebted to Regan for this concept, yet he never cites Regan as a source in this chapter. However, Regan had discussed the concept of being a “subject of a life” in 1983, seven years prior to Rachels’s use of the term here. See Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 243-248; 392. (See Pluhar, 231, where she hints that Regan *introduced* this concept.) This concept is also discussed by Tom Regan, *The Thee Generation: Reflections on the Coming Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 57-58, 77-78.

valuable, not to God or to nature or to the universe, but to us.”¹ This concept is then developed into the concept of having biographical life, not just a biological life. Biological life is merely being biologically alive. The irreversibly comatose person is biologically alive but has no biographical experiences. Rachels declares that for such a person, “being alive, sadly, does such a person no good at all. The value of being alive may therefore be understood as instrumental.” This is because biological life is necessary to have a biographical life.² Therefore, biographical life is the only kind of life worth having. To take a biological life, when no biographical life is possible, is not morally evil. Termination of a biological life is only morally wrong when it destroys a biographical life. In such a case, the animal or person has an interest in staying alive.³ The primary evil then consists in the loss to the victim, who can recognize the magnitude of the impending loss.⁴

At this point, we should note here the total self-centeredness of this viewpoint.

Ultimately our lives have meaning only to us, individually. Unlike Singer,⁵ Rachels does

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 198. Emphasis in original. Most of this discussion is duplicated in Rachels, *End of Life*, 5, 22-28, 65.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 199.

³Rachels, *End of Life*, 28.

⁴Rachels, *CfA*, 198.

⁵See Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, 216-217, where Singer discusses the non-personhood of infants and, in some cases, the need to euthanize an infant before familial attachments are made. See also Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 182-183, where Singer argues that even a healthy newborn infant has no claim to life through its own characteristics, but only through being desired by biological or adoptive parents.

not explicitly make any room here for the value of our life to others. (We would note however, that his concept of multiple strategies Utilitarianism, which he published later and which we shall soon examine, would seem capable of recognizing the moral significance of the value of our lives to others.) The bottom line is that some animals and some, but not all, humans are considered to be subjects of a life and thus qualify to receive moral protection. We again see a functional model of rights—only those intelligent enough to be subjects of a life, who can prefer to stay alive should be protected.

Rachels, however, does insert a loophole that can elevate humans over animals. He recognizes that humans are capable of a biographically more complex life than most other animals. Thus if one had to sacrifice an animal or a human, being unable to save both, the greater complexity of the average human's biographical life over that of the animal would suggest the loss of the human's life is the greater loss. However, this also leaves the door open for a sub-average human to be judged to have a biographically inferior life to the animal, in which case the animal would be argued to take preference.¹

But why should greater biographical complexity be the determining criterion of moral protection or exclusion? This is not made clear by Rachels. He appears to depend solely on the appearance of having a self-evident maxim to commend this argument. However, it seems suspiciously akin to Utilitarianism. The creature with a more complex biographical life can have far more pleasures, and thus has higher utility. While Rachels

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 209.

has derived a type of Utilitarian ethics from Darwin, he seems to have moved from the primary foundation of Darwinian evolution to the secondary foundation of Utilitarianism. He makes no argument to directly tie his subjects of a life view to Darwinism as such. Rather it becomes a second generation, logical, extrapolation from his more foundational principle of denying human specialness due to Darwin.

Rachels's vision of morality without human specialness, then, has led us a long ways. We have seen him argue that Darwinism undermines the foundations of traditional Western or Judeo-Christian ethics by making it impossible for man to be the image of God, and by undermining the rationality thesis. Further, Rachels has attempted to give some criteria on how to establish which individuals have moral status and which do not. While deriving much from Darwinism, his primary criterion of being the "subject of a life" seems more rooted in Utilitarian thinking than in Darwinism itself. A form of Utilitarianism has been used to fill the vacuum left by the perceived fall of the pillars supporting traditional ethics. And this is where moral individualism ties into Rachels's work in his textbook. A survey of three editions of his textbook will help us expand our understanding of his vision of ethics without human preference.

Ethics without Human Preference as Depicted in
The Elements of Moral Philosophy

Published first in 1986, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* lays out the basic rationale of Rachels's ethical structure to a target audience of college students. The core elements of his theory remain essentially the same in each edition. The later editions update illustrations with more recent stories while making minor changes to sharpen the

argumentation. The fourth edition carries somewhat greater significance as it makes an important expansion to Rachels's moral theory. In each edition, Rachels surveys most of the key, classical theories of the past 2,500 years, and argues why he believes each is insufficient. He then proceeds to propose his own system of ethics. It is his own ethical proposals that we shall examine. For the sake of clarity, I will outline his theory as given in the first edition, and then survey later editions for new developments and refinements.

The First Edition

In the first edition of his textbook, Rachels introduces his system of ethics with this question: "What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?"¹ To answer this question, Rachels will ultimately work through arguments to produce three key axioms describing such a system: (1) We should not prefer humans over non-humans, (2) we should act to promote the interests of everyone alike, and (3) we should treat people as they deserve to be treated, considering how they themselves have chosen to behave. Let us see how he gets to each one, especially noting the role of Darwinian evolution in the process, and also noting other moral implications as well.

"Morality without Human Hubris"

Rachels proposes the first characteristic of a satisfactory moral system in the first heading of the chapter text, "Morality Without Human Hubris," before any discussion is waged. Rachels then argues that "a satisfactory theory would, first of all, be sensitive to

¹Rachels, *Elements* (1986), 139. This is the chapter title for the 12th and final chapter of the book.

the *facts about human nature*, and it would be appropriately modest about the place of human beings in the scheme of things.”¹ What “facts about human nature” does Rachels have in mind and why do they diminish human importance?

Rachels, as we would expect, turns to Darwinian evolution to supply those facts. His first evolutionary “fact” is that humans are relative newcomers on the evolutionary scene. “The first humans appeared quite recently. The extinction of the great dinosaurs 65 million years ago . . . left ecological room for the evolution of the few little animals that were about, and after 63 or 64 million *more* years, one line of that evolution finally produced us. In geological time, we arrived only yesterday.”² This is interpreted to mean that we do not have the right to oust other animals from positions of moral significance. Thus his first evolutionary argument is quite different from the line of reasoning in *Created from Animals*, for here he uses Evolution to make a simple argument from seniority. We are too new, in evolutionary terms, to have the seniority to oust other animals from the sphere of moral status. Therefore, we get the first of Rachels’s proposed three moral axioms of a satisfactory moral system: The proposition that we should not prefer humans over non-humans.

Rachels further develops this conclusion from evolution by arguing that our early ancestors evolved a warped and erroneous view of ethics. Rachels asserts:

But no sooner did our ancestors arrive than they began to think of themselves as the

¹Ibid., 139. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid., 140. Emphasis in original.

most important things in all creation. Some of them even imagined that the whole universe had been made for their benefit. Thus, when they began to develop theories of right and wrong, they held that the *protection of their own interests had a kind of ultimate in objective value*. The rest of creation, they reasoned, was intended for their use. We now know better. We now know that we exist by evolutionary accident, as one species among many, on a small insignificant world in one little quarter of the cosmos.¹

By this line of argumentation, the student is taught that early humans wrongly reduced morality to the protection of human interests alone, and that an ethics that focuses on protecting human interests is inherently opposed to the “facts” of evolution. In addition, Rachels adds to his argument against human importance by citing the philosopher David Hume. “‘The life of man,’ he wrote, ‘is of no greater importance to the universe than an oyster.’”² Thus the student is led to believe that there is no cosmic design or importance to our lives, and thus no special importance in moral consideration.

Before moving to the second axiom of a satisfactory moral system, we must note some further moral implications of Rachels’s evolutionary argument thus far. In claiming that ethics evolved as part of human evolution, Rachels opens the door for the conclusion, as we have seen earlier with Dawkins and Ruse, that ethics must therefore be inherently relativistic, capable of evolving and adapting with new data. Although

¹Ibid. Emphasis mine. The astute reader can see the subtle but direct attack on classic Christian anthropology regarding man’s relationship to nature (which we discussed earlier in this work), although Christianity is not explicitly named here.

²Ibid. Rachels gives no reference data for the citation. Rachels further asserts that Hume recognized “that our lives are important to *us*.” Emphasis in original. This is highly reminiscent of his “subjects of a life” argument found in *CfA* earlier, but Rachels does not develop that angle in the textbook. Additionally, beliefs used to characterize Christian ethics in *CfA* are now attributed to an evolutionary development and thus are cast with much less significance than was done in *CfA*.

Rachels does not explicitly develop this aspect of the argument, the relativist bent nevertheless lurks in the shadows influencing the ethical process. Rachels's evolutionary explanation of how morals evolved leads to further implications and will generate his second axiom.

Consequentialism: The means of determining good reasons

Rachels observes that while human hubris is “largely unjustified,” it is not “*entirely* unjustified,” for “we have evolved as rational beings.”¹ In a separate article, Rachels quotes the claim from Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* that “as man gradually advanced in intellectual power and was enabled to trace the more remote consequences of our actions; . . . so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher.”² Thus, for Rachels, our powers of reason evolved to give us abilities not found in the animal kingdom—abilities to reason based on cause and effect. Hence, Rachels develops a teleological approach to ethics, in part, as a logical product of Darwinian evolution.³

Once the consequentialist approach to ethics is established, Rachels then sees another implication for morality. Consequentialism introduces the ability to have personal interests—X consequence is in my interests while Y consequences is not. For

¹Ibid., 140-141.

²Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871), 101, quoted in Rachels, “Why Darwinians Should Support,” 153.

³This is not to say that consequentialism is ethically bad or good. I am merely showing that Rachels builds his case for consequentialism as a natural outgrowth of Darwinian evolution.

Rachels, our superior powers of reason are what “makes us capable of having a morality. . . . Thus we take the fact that an action would help satisfy our desires, needs, and so on—in short, the fact that an action would *promote our interests*—as a reason in favor of doing that action.”¹ Rachels then concludes that, “the origin of our concept of ‘ought’ may be found in these facts [regarding the development of recognizing personal interests].” Thus, for Rachels, human intelligence evolved to where we can conclude that we ought to perform said action, not because of impulse or emotions, but because we have good, substantive *reasons*. “We use the word ‘ought’ to mark this new development of the situation: we *ought* to do the act supported by the weightiest reasons.”² Through the influence of Darwinian evolution, morality thus becomes defined as acting according to reason as opposed to irrational impulse.

But reason alone is not enough for Rachels. He argues it must be supplemented with the concept of consistency—we must be consistent in applying our reasons. Therefore, he concludes that consistency of reasoning should produce similar actions for similar situations, which means reason must act with impartiality. This leads Rachels to give his second moral axiom: “Reason requires impartiality: we ought to act so as to promote the interests of everyone alike.”³

¹Rachels, *Elements* (1986), 140-141.

²*Ibid.*, 141. Emphasis in original.

³*Ibid.*

Resembles Utilitarianism

So far, then, Rachels has argued that a sufficient moral theory should (1) not prefer humans over non-humans, and (2) be based on reason, applied impartially with consistency. This moral theory would prescribe that we should act to promote the interests of everyone alike. While not yet developed by Rachels in this volume, we would note that “everyone” is to be controlled by the proposition that “everyone” cannot be restricted to human beings. Again evolution plays a factor.

Evolution, for Rachels, shows man is a social creature, who lives in communities where cooperation and caring for one another’s welfare are crucial to human survival and existence. Thus, “There is pleasing theoretical ‘fit’ between (a) what reason requires, namely impartiality; (b) the requirements of social living, mainly the adherence to a set of rules that, if fairly applied, would serve everyone’s interests; and (c) our natural inclination to care about others, at least to a modest degree.”¹ Rachels’s use of language such as to “serve everyone’s interests” and “fairly applied” cannot help but cause a reader familiar with classic ethical theories to conclude that there is an element of Utilitarianism creeping into Rachels’s ethical reasoning.

Moral status earned, not granted

Rachels admits the Utilitarian bent of his conclusion, stating, “So far, M[orality] W[ithout] H[ubris] sounds very much like Utilitarianism. However there is another fact

¹Ibid., 141-142.

about human beings that must be taken into account, and doing this will give the theory a decidedly non-Utilitarian twist.”¹ What is this new “fact” that will deliver Rachels from the implications of Utilitarianism? It is that humans are not only rational agents capable of choice, but such agents can be held accountable for their actions. In short, humans can be held “*responsible* for their freely chosen actions.”²

Rachels develops the ability to be held responsible in social reciprocity as a means of holding people accountable. Thus, for Rachels, since we evolved as social beings, being held responsible through reciprocal relationships ensures we will get treated as we *deserve*. Thus, Rachels’s final axiom of a satisfactory moral theory is stated: “We should treat people as they deserve to be treated, considering how they themselves have chosen to behave.”³

The grounds for exceptions

Thus far in his textbook, Rachels’s moral theory has given three major axioms for morals: (1) We should not prefer humans over non-humans, (2) we should act to promote the interests of everyone alike, and (3) we should treat people as they deserve to be treated, considering how they themselves have chosen to behave. He now moves on to question how the second and third axioms are connected. Rachels answers this question

¹Rachels, *Elements* (1986), 142. Rachels in this edition calls his theory “Morality Without Hubris” which he abbreviates MWH. In *Created from Animals*, we saw it named “Moral Individualism,” which is the title most recognized by other authors.

²*Ibid.*, 142. Emphasis in original.

³*Ibid.*, 143.

by arguing that the second moral axiom “establishes a general presumption in favor of promoting everyone’s interests, impartially.” Axiom three “specifies the grounds upon which the presumption may be overridden.”¹ In short, axiom three provides the grounds for determining what is a “good reason” for justifying exceptions in treatment. Rachels now synthesizes the whole axiomatic package with this simple statement: “We ought to act so as to promote impartially the interests of everyone alike, except when individuals deserve particular responses as a result of their own past behavior.”²

With this synthesis, Rachels claims that “this principle combines the best elements of both Utilitarianism and Kantian ‘respect for persons,’ but is not produced simply by stitching those two philosophies together.”³ Furthermore, he argues that he is not merely eclectically combining elements from two contradicting schools of ethics, but rather these elements have been synthesized together based on the “facts of the human condition.”⁴ It is this effort to start with evolution, instead of with a particular school of ethics (such as Singer who is unabashedly Utilitarian) that sets Rachels apart from his peers.

Rachels admits, however, that his present presentation could be more comprehensive. “Although more needs to be said about the theoretical basis of this view, I will say no more about it here.”⁵ Some may criticize this development, but in all

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 144.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

fairness it should be noted that his book was designed as a college text for those uninitiated in the realm of ethics, and thus we would expect the theoretical portion to be understated.¹ But having laid the foundations as he has, Rachels now turns to the issue of who is to be included the moral community in which everyone's interests are impartially protected and advanced?

Who is part of the newly defined moral community?

In this new, Darwinist morality, who, then, should be given moral status and protection? Rachels's Utilitarian tendencies reveal themselves in his answer: "We ought to give equal consideration to the interests of everyone who will be affected by our conduct."² But who is affected by our conduct? "In principle, the community with which we should be concerned is limited only by the number of individuals who have interests, and that, as we shall see, is a very large number indeed."³ Rachels is forced by logic to conclude that those impacted by our choices cannot be limited by time or place. For Rachels we are obliged to consider all their interests equally, including future generations or someone on a distant continent. Thus, in what Rachels admits is a "radical" example, "when a person is faced with the choice of spending ten dollars on a trip to the movies or contributing to famine relief, he should ask himself which action

¹It should also be noted that Rachels has not avoided this duty, but has more thoroughly examined those foundations in *Created from Animals*.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

would most effectively promote human welfare, with each person's interests counted as equally important. Would we benefit more from seeing the movie than a starving person would from getting food? Clearly he would not. So he should contribute the money to famine relief."¹ Likewise, he seeks to expand the moral community to future generations who have interests in inheriting a world not polluted by nuclear waste, etc. These two expansions of the moral community (to include those on the other side of the globe and not just those near me; and future generations) lead Rachels to conclude that "the Utilitarians were right to insist that the interests of nonhuman animals must be given weight in our moral calculations. As Bentham pointed out, excluding creatures from moral consideration because of their species is no more justified than excluding them because of race, nationality, or sex."² The animals are affected by what we do, and have interests in not having to suffer unnecessarily. Rachels finally appeals to impartiality as the reason that our circle of moral protection should be expanded both through space and time into the future, and across species boundaries.³

Rachels again admits that his Morality Without Hubris "has much in common with Utilitarianism,"⁴ but notes that in an earlier chapter, the reader was shown that

¹Ibid., 145-145.

²Ibid., 146. I have not been able to find such a statement in the writings of Bentham. However, in our earlier discussions, we have seen Singer make such a statement. I suspect Rachels may have crossed over the concept accidentally, in part due to the foundational work by Bentham in including all sentient beings in the Utilitarian moral calculus.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Utilitarianism failed to account for the values of justice and fairness. He asks, “Can MWH do any better in this regard? It does, because it makes a person’s past behavior relevant to how he or she should be treated. This introduces into the theory an acknowledgment of personal [i.e., individual] merit that is lacking in unqualified Utilitarianism.”¹ In other words, Rachels claims to have introduced a theory of individual punishment missing in classic Utilitarian theory. Punishment by definition means differential treatment of one person over another, he argues, but “this is justified, on our account, by the person’s own past deeds. . . . The account of punishment suggested by MWH is very close to Kant’s.”² By including this theory of punishment, Rachels believes he has essentially fixed the justice problem in Utilitarianism, so that with Kant, one can punish an offender, not as a means to an end, but in reference to holding the offender responsible for his deeds. What is important for this study is not the fine points of Kant and Utilitarianism, but rather that this Kantian-Utilitarian hybrid was synthesized in attempting to create an ethics that harmonized with a Darwinian anthropology. Rachels has avowedly come to these conclusions seeking to keep in harmony with evolutionary theory and its principles. Now that we have seen Rachels’s outline of his undergraduate version of Darwinist ethics, let us briefly look at the third and fourth editions to see how Rachels further refines and argues his theory.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 147.

Third Edition: Mild Refinements

What about love and loyalty?

In his introduction to the third addition, Rachels states that the only chapter to have been substantially altered was the final chapter, “‘What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?’ My opinion about the proper answer to that question has changed since the second edition, and the revised chapter reflects that.”¹ However, a careful reading of the final chapter in comparison to the first edition shows, in my opinion, little if any real difference. The same fundamental skeletal structure and argumentation are found, albeit some arguments are shortened and others lengthened. He still promotes the same three core components for his moral system: Morality without human hubris, promoting everyone’s interests alike, and treating people as they deserve to be treated based on their past behavior. However, he does add a short section apparently addressing a potential criticism not considered in the first edition.

Focusing on the second axiom of promoting everyone’s interests alike, Rachels observes that it “‘apparently fails to capture the whole of moral life.’”² He does allow that he thinks this failure is only apparent and not real, however. Rachels works his way out of his apparent dilemma by noting that promoting everyone’s interests alike “‘is not the

¹Rachels, *Elements* (1999), xii. This quote shows there must have been a second edition, but my university’s library was unable to find another institution with the second edition in its holdings. Thus there is no coverage of that edition in this analysis.

²*Ibid.*, 198.

only morally praiseworthy motive.”¹ He notes that a mother has different attitudes for a child not her own and her own child. She is not as concerned with the other child’s interests. Loyalty among friends can likewise cause differential treatment. Yet we value both a mother’s love for her child, and the loyalty of friends. Rachels responds to this tension by concluding that “only a philosophical idiot would propose to eliminate love and loyalty, and the like from our understanding of moral life. If such motives were eliminated, and instead people simply calculated what was best, we would be much worse off.”² Rachels is fundamentally correct to make this observation, which seems to overturn his previous argument in the book’s first edition (but not found in the third edition), that all interests must be considered regardless of space and time. Possibly this is the substantial change he referred to in his introduction.

Consequential reasons for including love and loyalty

It is significant that Rachels focuses on the lack of welfare generated by a purely Utilitarian moral calculus devoid of such motives as love and loyalty. Rachels, as a consequentialist, is arguing to keep love, loyalty, and the like in our system of morality because he believes the benefits outweigh the consequences of an emotionless moral calculus. In so doing, Rachels has here introduced a seminal form of an argument that we shall see him further develop in the fourth edition of his textbook. He names this seminal form, “*Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism*. The ultimate end is the general

¹Ibid., 199.

²Ibid.

welfare, but diverse strategies may be endorsed as a means of achieving that end.”¹

However, this innovative use of consequentialism to include certain emotional factors in morality does not mean that Rachels is subverting the role of reason in defining and determining morality.

Quite to the contrary, Rachels continues to equate morality with rationally based action as he did in *Created from Animals*. In this same opening chapter, Rachels argues that moral judgments must be backed by good reasons, by logic, and not merely by citing moral authorities.² He further states that,

the minimum conception [of morality] may now be stated very briefly: morality is, at the very least, the effort to *guide one’s conduct by reason*—that is, to do what there are the *best reasons* for doing—while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual will be affected by warns conduct. . . .

The conscientious moral agent is someone who is concerned impartially with the interests of everyone affected by what he or she does; who carefully sifts facts and examines the implications; who accepts principles of conduct only after scrutinizing them to make sure they are sound; who is willing to *listen to reason* even when it means that his or her earlier convictions may have to be revised; and who finally, is willing to act on the results of this deliberation.³

Certainly there is much appeal in Rachels’s assertions. We all like to believe we are objective, rational agents willing to face the evidence, whatever it is. Rachels has used some very rational arguments to include attitudes of love and loyalty in the Utilitarian calculations, giving his position great emotional appeal. Let us now examine his expansion of this argument in the fourth edition of his textbook.

¹Ibid., 201.

²Ibid., 15.

³Ibid., 19.

Fourth Edition: Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism

Expanding the arguments for Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism

Rachels informs us that the fourth edition of *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* is essentially unchanged in content from the third edition, with changes mostly focused on updating illustrations. However, Rachels does tell us that a new section has been added to the final chapter which “further elaborates what a satisfactory moral theory would be like.”¹ This new section, in conjunction with modifications in the previous section, further develops the argument for love and loyalty as part of renaming his satisfactory moral system. In the first and third editions, his moral theory was called Morality Without Hubris. In the third edition he introduced the term Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism (MSU). Now, in the fourth edition he more fully develops MSU.

Rachels returns to his benefits argument, introduced in the third edition, and repeats the essential foundational arguments, again showing concern for the lack of attention to motives and virtues in classical Utilitarianism. Unlike the previous edition, in this one, Rachels credits the Utilitarian, Henry Sidgewick, as the source of his idea that non-Utilitarian actions can have an overall Utilitarian benefit.² The essential concept Rachels seeks to perfect is that some actions, having no direct Utilitarian motive, still produce good overall, Utilitarian results. Rachels notes, for example, that loving your

¹Rachels, *Elements* (2002), xi. The “further elaboration” is found on pp. 198-199.

²Ibid., 197.

child preferentially over non-relatives violates classical Utilitarian calls for equal consideration of interests, yet human society is better off because of such love. Likewise for loyalty, honesty, and other virtues—even if not perfectly Utilitarian, they bring positive benefits to the whole community. The upshot, then, is that Rachels argues that non-Utilitarian actions having Utilitarian results are therefore morally desirable. We thus are able to achieve utility by multiple strategies instead of just consequential moral calculus. Thus Rachels coined the name: Multiple Strategies Utilitarianism.¹

How MSU works

In some ways this twist on Utilitarianism is a stroke of genius. Until now, Rachels has struggled with the usual limits of Utilitarianism in accommodating motives and virtues (i.e., character) into the moral system. The MSU argument allows him to remain a Utilitarian while incorporating these desirable traits into his moral system. Rachels now tries to give us a glimpse of how this new morality would work in practice.

Rachels proposes that every person whose life is both satisfying to himself or herself and contributes positively to the welfare of others will be characterized by an “optimum list” of virtues, motives, and methods of decision making.² This optimum list is also labeled, from an individual’s personal perspective, “my best plan.”³ In Rachels’s words,

¹Ibid., 195-198.

²Ibid., 198.

³Ibid., 199.

This list would include at least the following:

- The virtues that are needed to make one's life go well;
- The motives on which one will act;
- The commitments and personal relationships that one will have to friends, family, and others;
- The social roles that one will occupy, with the responsibilities and demands that go with them;
- The duties and concerns associated with projects one will undertake . . . ;
- The everyday rules that one will follow most of the time without even thinking; and
- A strategy, or group of strategies, about when to consider making exceptions to the rules, and the grounds on which exceptions can be made.

The list would also include specification of the relations between the other items on the list—what takes priority over what.¹

It is of utmost importance to emphasize that the focus is placed on the individual—no one shares the same optimal list with another, though they could share components in the list.

No other combination of virtues, motives, and methods of decision making could better equip that specific moral agent. This seems to reflect Rachels's adherence to the Kantian principle that moral precepts are self-imposed by a rational, autonomous, free moral agent. The penalty for violating these self-imposed moral precepts, notes Rachels, is, "in Kant's words, 'self-contempt and inner abhorrence.'"² It also dovetails with the individualist moral focus in Rachels's moral individualism as seen in *Created from Animals*. Thus in MSU, there can be no universal code of moral precepts. Each best plan is to be custom designed by the individual and imposed on himself. The key in constructing that optimum list is that it must be made to optimize the agent's chances of

¹Ibid., 198-199.

²Rachels, "God and Moral Autonomy," 118.

the individual's "having a good life, *while at the same time* optimizing the chances of other people having good lives."¹ Thus this should still promote everyone's interests alike.

Rachels admits that the individual's optimal list "might be extremely hard to construct. . . . As a practical matter, it might even be impossible."² Also, the relativist bent is clearly seen in this statement about one's optimal list: "It would help us keep our promises, but not always, and to refrain from hurting people, but not always; and so on."³ MSU, therefore, includes a number of elements we have seen Rachels and others propose on the basis of Darwin's theory of evolution. MSU ends up assuming a resemblance to Rule Utilitarianism when Rachels concludes that, for MSU, "the [morally] right thing for

¹Rachels, *Elements* (2002), 199. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 198-199. See also, Rachels, *End of Life*, 2-3, where Rachels shows his relativistic bent by stating that "moral philosophy may be revisionary, and not merely descriptive. . . . I shall assume that we may reject received opinion [i.e., Christian teaching] if it goes against reason." Also, Rachels makes an analogy between breaking the rules of the road to avoid an accident, and making exceptions to moral rules. "It is the same with moral rules. It is important to understand their point because otherwise we will not be able to judge intelligently when to make exceptions to them" (27). One possible flaw in Rachels's analogy is that the laws for driving often have provisions written into the law whereby one is entitled to break a rule to avoid an accident (often because the other driver is breaking the rules). In other words, such provisions are made because it is realized that the law cannot handle all situations encountered on the road. Rachels seems to assume that morality has the same kind of limits, thus needing the provision for making exceptions. However, it seems that all Rachels has done is to open a free-for-all argument on when to make exceptions, which leaves us with little to no moral guidance for making decisions.

me to do is to act in accordance with my best plan.”¹

Rachels’s conception of a satisfactory moral system

Now that we have used *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* to look at Rachels’s conception of the major elements of a satisfactory moral system, I will summarize the essential points before critiquing them. First, Rachels believes that a satisfactory system of ethics must take into account the “facts” of human nature as revealed by Darwinian evolution. These “facts” led Rachels to conclude that since humans are relatively recent in the evolutionary timetable, they should not be so quick to claim special moral privileges and protections for humans. Thus he proposes *Morality Without Human Hubris*. This first major premise means that the circle of moral inclusion must include some or many of the animals.

Since Rachels believes man evolved, the next move is to note that humans have evolved capacities of reason far superior to other animals. These capacities of reason allow man to perceive the workings of cause and effect in freely chosen actions. This evolutionary capability opens the way to define good and evil in terms of consequences, and to argue an obligation to make choices most likely to produce good consequences. Thus, for Rachels, it seems that consequentialism is a key implication of Darwinism.

¹Ibid., 199. This concept of grading moral imperatives is surprisingly similar to Norman Geisler’s concept of Graded Absolutism, in which Geisler argues that divinely commanded absolutes sometimes conflict, and so must be graded or ranked to see which absolute takes precedence in the conflict. Thus, for Geisler, in Nazi Germany, when confronted by the Gestapo and you are hiding Jews, the moral imperative to save life is argued to take priority over the imperative to tell the truth, and you would be exempted from the requirement against lying. See Geisler, 116-117.

This leads to Rachels's second major premise, that everyone's interests should be promoted alike. Rachels asserts that we must consider the interests of everyone who may be affected by our actions, and that our considerations must not be limited by space or time. Thus strangers on the other side of the world deserve equal consideration along with, say, your child. Likewise, future generations must have their interests considered. Rachels admits the strong Utilitarian flavor in his ethical system to this point.

But Utilitarian consequentialism is flawed for Rachels because it can justify injustice. Therefore, Rachels borrows from Kant to develop the concept of deserts, which becomes his third major premise: People deserve to be treated according to their previously and freely chosen behaviors. This third principle regulates when to make exceptions to promoting everyone's interests alike.

Rachels then notes one other issue that permits some exceptions based on geographical proximity. We love and care for those closest to us. He concludes that moral systems must incorporate virtues such as love and loyalty even though they are not directly Utilitarian in promoting everyone's interests alike. This argument is eventually developed into Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism, where virtues such as love and loyalty, although not directly Utilitarian because they prefer some people's interests over others, ultimately produce more benefits to society than a pure Utilitarianism could. Thus, non-Utilitarian means can still accomplish Utilitarian ends, hence the designation of Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism.

MSU in turn is revealed to be an individualistic ethics, where each individual develops his optimum list/best plan of moral virtues, values, rules, principles, criterion

for exceptions, and a prioritization of the items on the list in a moral hierarchy, to name some elements in the list. No two lists are alike as Rachels believes there can be no universal, one-size-fits-all morality. In this way, MSU dovetails nicely with his concept of moral individualism.

Rachels appears to believe that MSU is worked out and chosen on the basis of a Darwinian world-view.¹ Combined with his work in *Created from Animals*, Rachels has shown that Darwinism undermines traditional, Western, Christian ethics. He has proposed in its place a radically different form of ethics in which rights are earned, not granted, to individuals who are subjects of a life, and based on their individual, functioning characteristics. What are we to make of Rachels's ethics from a biblical Christian perspective? How efficacious is Rachels's argument? Let us analyze his assertions.

¹Not all recognize Darwinism as a "world-view." Of significance, however, is the observation by the evolutionist Robert Wright concerning the impact of E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology*, published in 1975. Says Wright, "A small but growing group of scholars has taken what Wilson called 'the new synthesis,' and carried it into the social sciences with the aim of overhauling them. . . . Slowly but unmistakably, a new worldview is emerging. . . . Here 'worldview' is meant quite literally. The new Darwinian synthesis is, like quantum physics or molecular biology, a body of scientific theory and fact; but *unlike them* is also a *way of seeing* everyday life" (emphasis mine). Wright, *The Moral Animal*, 4-5.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION OF ANTI-SPECIESIST USES OF EVOLUTION TO INFORM AND SHAPE ETHICS

Introduction

It is time now to turn to the task of analyzing the moral implications of Darwin's theory of evolution. To stay within the limits of this study I shall focus on evaluating the connections between evolution and ethics, especially the impact on Christian ethics. First, I shall analyze the three arguments against speciesism, their veracity and their implications for traditional ethics. This chapter will cover the work presented earlier by several notable authors, including Rachels. The next chapter will evaluate the unique contributions of Rachels in showing how Darwinism undermines Christian theology and ethics. Finally, in both chapters, I will use an exploration of implications as the primary means of conducting my analysis.

Analysis of Arguments Against Speciesism

We have seen several ways of arguing against human speciesism on the grounds of evolution. However, my purpose is to analyze these arguments, not in reference to the veracity of animal rights, but rather as a means of distilling moral implications from Darwinism. In this analysis, then, I shall analyze three issues where anti-speciesist views

impinge on ethics, often in reference to principles based in Darwinism. Then I shall offer some alternative suggestions.

Analysis of the Kinship Argument

Dawkins's concept of evolutionary kinship seems to be one of the more substantive arguments in justifying the rejection of human preference speciesism.¹ The centerpiece of establishing an evolutionary kinship between humans and the animal kingdom was the concept of the ring-species. This argument inherently challenges the concept of species fixity that is asserted as being necessary to justify human preference. Dawkins's ring-species argument, then, carries significance in that it specifically engages in the more

¹While not as directly tied to belief in evolution, a foundational argument against speciesism is exemplified by Ryder's assertion, which is also echoed by others including Rachels, that speciesism is merely based in external appearance as is racism and sexism and is thus morally equivalent to both. It is of interest to note that virtually none of these leading authors offer substantive reasons for justifying this analogy. Rather, they virtually seem to assume that the analogy is self-evident.

The analogy to racism and sexism seems convincing only if certain presuppositions are held, some of which may be rooted in Darwinian evolution. Thus, to those not holding those beliefs, the analogy to racism and sexism is less than convincing. One key reason is that those who practice racism and sexism are making distinctions in rights and privileges between fellow members of the human race who possess an extremely high degree of similarity. By contrast, speciesism makes its moral differentiation between human and non-human beings, where the contrast is much greater, and there is thus more room to argue in favor of differential treatment based in those dissimilarities. The differences between a male and female human, or two races of humans regardless of gender, are much less distinct than those between humans and, for example, a dog, chimpanzee, or donkey. Because of this lack of full analogy, the racism-sexism argument seems to be more emotive or psychological than moral, resonating with basic civil rights themes, and appealing to a generation with strong tendencies to interpret issues in terms of power and oppression.

specific task of discrediting human dignity, and does so on the basis of evolution.¹

¹A less related, but interesting parallel to this argument is the attempt to undermine human dignity through the issue of extraterrestrial life. Paul Davies asserts, “The existence of extra-terrestrial intelligences would have a profound impact on religion, shattering completely the traditional perspective of God’s special relationship with man. The difficulties are particularly acute for Christianity, which postulates that Jesus Christ was God incarnate whose mission was to provide salvation for man on Earth.” He further claims that multiple worlds would necessitate a host of alien Christs to save the aliens, which he deems as absurd. See, Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1983), 71.

Wiker seems to assert a similar conclusion in arguing that there was a revival of Epicureanism, culminating in the Renaissance and Reformation. In discussing what he believes to be the morally relativistic influence of William of Occam, Wiker asserts that part of this relativism is rooted in the affirmation by radical Augustinians that there is a “plurality of worlds” beyond earth. Wiker juxtaposes this with the Aristotelian view that “the first cause cannot make more than one world.” Thus, for Wiker, this radical Augustinian view and the ensuing attacks on Aristotelianism “affected the moderate users of Aristotle, the Thomists, as well.” Thus, if human dignity is partly rooted in the earth’s being the only inhabited planet created by God, Davies’s assertion carries heavier weight in the human dignity debate. See, Wiker, 106-107.

However, it seems that belief in multiple worlds does not have to undermine human dignity or the absoluteness of Christian ethics. In fact, the multiple worlds argument can be used in favor of human dignity. One of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White, asserted the existence of other inhabited worlds in many statements. For example, “Man was created a free moral agent. Like the *inhabitants of all other worlds*, he must be subjected to the test of obedience.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 331-332. In another statement she uses the idea of multiple worlds to assert the specialness of this one: “How grateful we should be that, *notwithstanding this earth is so small amid the created worlds*, God notices even us. The nations are before him as the drop in the bucket, and as the small dust in the balance; and *yet the great, the stupendous work that has been done for us* shows how much he loves us.” Idem, “The Government of God,” *Review and Herald*, March 9, 1886, 145-146. It seems, then, that human dignity is not solely dependent on Aristotelian philosophical foundations as Wiker seems to assert. Likewise, neither Augustine nor Ellen White is known for their moral relativism, so it seems that belief in multiple worlds does not entail moral relativism as Wiker seems to conclude.

Kinship as Organic Union

The kinship argument at first seems compelling enough to be self-evident. But one wonders if certain key elements of evolutionary theory are being excluded from the argument, which, if included, might change the entire picture of ethics based in kinship. Dawkins does not appear to take into account the theory espoused by Ruse and others that our moral capacity evolved through manifestations of altruism, as part of our evolution, and thus making morality to be primarily understood as helping others, especially one's immediate kin. If morality did evolve this manner, then at best, only the higher primates can be claimed as evolutionary kin entitled to equal consideration. One look at the evolutionary tree raises serious questions concerning who in the animal kingdom are truly our evolutionary kin. Are those not in our branch of the evolutionary tree disqualified as kin worthy of altruism? It seems likely that dogs, donkeys, dolphins, and ducks, for example, would not be in ring-species relationship with humans, and thus would not qualify as kin entitled to moral inclusion with man since their organic connection to us is less complete. On this ground, then, the extension of moral protection to non-kin branches of the evolutionary tree becomes a less compelling, if not downright contradictory, basis for the broad inclusion argued by Dawkins.

A partial rebuttal to this objection may be offered through Dawkins's use of the organic inclusion tactic by raising the specter of creating human-animal transgenic hybrids. If a human-nonhuman transgenic creature can be developed through our genetic technology, Dawkins sees this as again blurring the boundary between human and

animal, thus demonstrating an organic interconnection which discredits human preference. More importantly, it permits interbreeding between species who are not neighbors in the sequence of the ring-species. However, this is less than compelling support for the organic kinship argument because this form of transgenic breeding is accomplished, not through the natural selection processes of evolution, but through artificial intervention by humans. Therefore, transgenic creations by human technological prowess cannot provide support to ring-species organic union argument.

However, the potential for artificial transgenic breeding mentioned by Dawkins is of significance to the human preference issue in a different way. We have seen Ryder question, in reference to pigs with human genes spliced into their genome, how many human genes are needed in the pig to qualify it for human status. In other words, transgenic breeding raises the specter of so blurring the boundaries between human and animal that human preference in ethics becomes impossible to practice at the practical level. This is a valid and unavoidable consequence of creating transgenic hybrids of humans with non-human beings. The intent seems to be to elevate the animals to human-like moral status. Thus R. G. Frey asserts that “the more we can pile up the human traits we are prepared to endow animals with, the more likely we will regard them as honorary persons and so to put them into a position to possess rights.”¹ However, the implications may not open vistas of greater moral inclusion as Dawkins and Ryder envision.

¹Frey, 86. Frey calls this humanizing of animals, “rampant anthropomorphism.”

Dawkins and Ryder clearly believe that the kinship argument should elevate the moral status of animals rather than undermine the moral status of humans. However, this conclusion is by no means guaranteed and the kinship principle might just as readily produce a universalist ethics in which humans are diminished significantly while animals are elevated moderately if at all.¹ We shall see this more clearly in my examination of marginal cases.

An Arbitrary Criterion

Another potential problem in the kinship argument is that it can be criticized as being both arbitrary and a new form of exclusivism. The ring-species relationship

¹It is interesting to note, that in Seventh-day Adventism, where Ellen White is regarded as having exercised the ministry of a prophet, a hotly disputed statement may add some insight into Ryder's issue of how interbreeding human and animal might change ethics. In 1864 Ellen White wrote of the antediluvian world: "But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere." The infamous phrase, "amalgamation of man and beast," has been much debated and I wish not to pursue that debate here. My point in raising the issue is that it *may* be possible that she really intended to assert that in the days of Noah, his contemporaries created human-animal hybrids. Whether or not she intended hybridization of human with animal, she clearly associates this "amalgamation" with a defacement of the "image of God." This assertion correlates with Rachels's argument that evolution blurs the moral boundary between human and animal by undermining the image-of-God thesis. See, Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1864; facsimile reprint: Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 64.

If we take some homiletical license with Christ's statement that the days before His second advent will be like the days of Noah (Matt 24:37; Luke 17:26), the technological possibility of such hybridization now discussed would suggest that Ellen White would likely see Ryder's interbreeding of humans and animals precisely as producing a callousness towards human life more than an elevation of animal life in moral status. For more history of the discussion on Ellen White's statements on amalgamation, see F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics: An Answer to the Major Charges that Critics Have Brought Against Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951).

becomes merely a new type of exclusionary boundary. But why should one ring of species be included while another is excluded? Has Dawkins merely expanded speciesism into genus-ism or phyla-ism? In other words, it seems that the kinship argument violates the fundamental dictum of anti-speciesism authors that moral rights and privileges do not come by membership in a group but on individual capabilities and merits. Kinship ethics, however, is still based first on group membership, though it can also be based on a minimum functionality criteria. But, as the anti-speciesists including Rachels have charged, human preference in ethics is also based on group membership and can likewise be based on defining the minimum functional attributes to qualify for human status. How then is kinship ethics not essentially speciesist, when it simply is expanding the boundary of the group?

Dawkins's moral model still seems to base moral privilege in a new kind of group membership—evolutionary kinship to man. But this begs the question of why kinship with the animals should be a criterion for moral status? I have already raised the problem of how to define who is included in the kinship criterion. But on what grounds do we conclude that kinship between man and members of other branches of the evolutionary tree is morally significant? Why should these other branches be included or excluded? Dawkins does not address such issues. He merely assumes that if the species barrier is broken by the organic connections, then human preference is gone. This is a valid inference, but when he redraws the line of moral inclusion around organic kinship, the new boundary seems just as arbitrary, if not more so, than the old boundary is accused of.

William Saletan illustrates the arbitrary nature of such argumentation in looking at

the Korean practice of eating dog meat. He cites Brigitte Bardot as arguing that eating dogs is wrong because they are “friends, not animals.” He continues by quoting her as saying, “Cows are grown to be eaten, dogs are not.” Saletan observes that “if you refuse to eat only the meat of ‘companion’ animals . . . you’re saying that the morality of killing depends on habit or even whim.”¹

To illustrate this argument, Saletan notes that the companionship standard is completely subjective. For Koreans, dogs are livestock, not companions, so eating them is not a problem, whereas for Bardot, dogs are only companions. But, he notes, a change is underway in Korea, especially the cities, where citizens are now starting to keep dogs as pets. Korea now has two classes of dogs: “pet dogs,” and “meat dogs”—also called “junk dogs” or “lower grade” dogs. From the perspective of the dogs, Saletan notes, “But you don’t become a ‘lower-grade’ dog by flunking an IQ test. You’re just born in the wrong place.”² One could also note a potentially similar twist on this argument, where the division is by breed instead of by birth place. Both seem quite arbitrary and whimsical.

In a similar fashion, the kinship argument has not shed the alleged arbitrary nature of the speciesism it seeks to refute. Thus, it leaves us with the choice of who is kin with

¹William Saletan, “Wok the Dog,” *Slate*, 16 January 2002, www.slate.com/?id=2060840 (20 May 2003). Saletan gives no citations for the quotes by Brigitte Bardot. The significance of his argument, however, is not dependent on Bardot actually having said these things.

²*Ibid.* Saletan also notes that in parts of Spain, cat stew is eaten, while the French eat horses, both of which could be argued as companion animals by many people.

moral status, and who is not, being at least partially grounded in human whim. A high degree of moral relativism is thus manifested in ethical arguments based in evolution. This lack of firm foundations undermines the felicity of evolutionary kinship as being a significant criterion for defining moral status. And there is yet another reason to doubt the efficacy of evolutionary kinship as a standard for determining the boundary of moral status.

Does the Kinship Argument Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy?

Robert Griffiths argues that proponents of the animal rights movement commit the naturalistic fallacy. In simple terms, Griffith states the fallacy as applied to animal rights: “‘Man *is* evolved from lower forms of life, therefore lower forms of life *ought* to be treated in certain ways;’ or ‘Some animals *are* intelligent, therefore they *ought* to possess rights;’ or ‘Animals *are* capable of suffering, therefore they *ought* to be spared it.’”¹ Griffiths argues that all naturalistic philosophies including Utilitarianism commit the naturalistic fallacy. He concedes that this fallacy “does not negate naturalistic ethics entirely, but it does show that ethics cannot be grounded exclusively in the facts of human (or animal) experience.”² Griffiths states that the fallacy is a logical one in that there may be excellent moral reasons why I should not do what another dislikes (such as cause pain). But, he concludes, the imperative to not cause pain cannot be logically

¹Robert Griffiths, *The Human Use of Animals*, Grove Booklets on Ethics, no. 46 (N.p.: Grove Books, 1982), 17.

²Ibid.

derived from the fact that the potential victim does not like pain.¹

Griffiths illustrates the problem in a different way. He distills the kinship argument into a syllogism: “All men have rights; all men are animals; therefore animals have rights.” While sounding very logical, Griffiths charges it contains a lapse of logic. The subject of the second phrase is not the subject of the final phrase, thus invalidating the syllogism. He uses the following syllogism: “All cats have fur; all Tigers are cats; therefore all Tigers have fur,” to show how “tigers” is the subject of the last two-thirds of the syllogism. Taken that way, the animal rights syllogism should read, “All men have rights; all animals are men, therefore animals have rights,” but this is clearly problematic. For animals to get rights, “animals,” not “men,” should be the subject of the final two-thirds of the syllogism.² In other words, just because men have rights does not automatically entitle animals to rights even if we are “kin.”

Based on the arbitrary nature of the kinship criterion demonstrated by Saletan, and the questionable logic of the argument shown by Griffiths, it seems safe to conclude that kinship can only undermine human preference. It is incapable of providing a criterion of moral inclusion that requires the uplifting of animals. Ultimately, Dawkins’s argument seems almost spiritual rather than scientific in nature. As Christians argue for equal human rights on the basis that we are all children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, so Dawkins seems to ultimately argue that we are all children of evolution—humans and

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 4-5.

animals—and thus are all brothers and sisters in Darwin! It seems likely that the kinship argument provides a less than compelling foundation for determining moral inclusion, and this may be why it is not often used to provide those definitions. Instead, two major veins of criteria were proposed to help determine the boundary of moral status. They are the sentiency criterion and the argument from marginal cases.

Analysis of The Sentiency Criterion (Painism) for Moral Inclusion

We have seen the sentiency criterion proposed as the means of determining who is entitled to moral protection. It is rooted in Bentham's argument that the real question for determining moral status is not whether the individual in question can reason or speak, but whether they can suffer. Thus, we saw Ryder christen this view with the term "Painism." We will recall that this criterion is expressed succinctly in the statement: "We should do to others what we believe will give them pleasure and not do to them what we believe will cause them pain."¹ But is it really that simple?

Regan's Qualification of Painism

Regan opines that we cannot merely assert that causing pain is bad. He qualifies the concept of pain with the word, "unnecessary." It is unnecessary, unjustifiable pain that is morally wrong.² But this begs two questions: How are we to define "unnecessary," and who determines that definition? We generally consider causing

¹Ryder, *Painism*, 196, 198-199.

²Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 50-51.

unnecessary pain to children as child abuse. But what the child may consider abusive and what adults consider abusive may drastically differ. For example, neither the parent who takes their child to the doctor for immunization shots, or for surgery to correct a congenital defect, nor the medical personnel who perform the procedures are considered to be abusing the child, even though the child may feel the pain is neither justifiable nor necessary. Likewise, Regan's argument opens the door to undermine the very ethics he is trying to build, for humans historically have shown great ability to justify immoral treatment of marginal groups or individuals in the name of a greater or common good. How easily might we justify the necessity of animal suffering for a greater good. Thus, not ALL pain is bad, as we saw Ryder claim. And this now raises the question of who has the right to decide what pain is justifiable, especially for agents like animals and small children who are incapable of making such judgments? Who becomes the moral authority?

This is a vexing matter, for the need of a paternalistic moral authority goes against the very nature of the painists' argumentation which is trying to appeal to a universal code of reason that will compel all human debaters into agreement with the sentience criterion. Indeed, Ryder has observed that "unless one adopts a religious view, right and wrong are *intrinsically* about what is desired and what is avoided."¹ This is a telling comment. For it is precisely apart from religious influence, in harmony with Darwin and

¹Ryder, *Painism*, 198. This also raises the specter that the hedonist base of the speciesist model of morality, and its affinities for Utilitarianism, is antithetical to religion, presumably here referring to the Judeo-Christian religion that has dominated Western culture and its associated approach to morality.

Bentham, that these thinkers use suffering and pain as the grounds for morality. Yet, the very issue that some pain, even involuntary pain, is justifiable, leads to the need of establishing a paternalistic authority to decide such matters. But this need, in turn, opens the door for an outside value system such as religion to control the definition of morally versus immorally inflicted pain, and thus, Bentham's hedonistic principle is no longer the true grounding point of the moral system. Also, without the possible re-introduction of theological or other clarifying influences,¹ there are several other weaknesses to pain or suffering as the grounding criterion of moral status.

The Problem of Assessing Pain

A key problem for the sentiency-painism position is the issue of how to define the boundaries of sentiency. What is the difference in sentiency between a chimpanzee, dog, and snail? This is not an easy question, particularly if we take the continuous mind-set of Dawkins where creatures can be 37 percent or 99 percent sentient. What is 100 percent sentiency? A key admission of Ryder is that the premise that sentience fades with descent on the phylogenic scale is unproven.² In his discussion of vivisection, C. S. Lewis highlights this problem by asserting that we have no real way of knowing how

¹This is the route Andrew Linzey takes, seeking to re-interpret what he sees as traditional, speciesist Christian theology, into a more animal-friendly system. See Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), chapters 1-4; idem, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2000), chapters 1-6.

²Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 332.

conscious an animal is, and that arguments here are essentially opinions.¹ In similar fashion, Singer questions the ability to compare the sufferings of men with other animals, in order to undermine the argument that beasts suffer less than humans.² Singer, however, has caused himself a problem: If we cannot say for certain that animals suffer less than humans (especially in response to a standardized stimulus), then it is equally impossible to claim any similarity between human and animal suffering, and Singer's attempt to equate the two falls flat.

A corollary problem is raised by Marian Stamp Dawkins. She observes that a key area of division between the animal rights activists and animal use advocates "is a failure to agree on how to recognize and define suffering."³ Not only is there a failure to agree on how to measure animal suffering, but an even more fundamental issue which undermines the use of suffering to determine the moral boundaries of inclusion. Ultimately, we are faced with the even more basic question, How can we know how much an animal is suffering? Says Dawkins, "We do not know infallibly what the mental experiences of other animals are like, particularly those animals that are structurally very different from us."⁴ We thus end up with two key problems for ethical rights being based in the capacity to suffer.

¹C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 225.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 232-33.

³Marian Stamp Dawkins, *Animal Suffering: The Science of Animal Welfare* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1980), 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2.

First, suffering is subjective. Two creatures experiencing the same pains can suffer differently. How then can such variable perceptions provide a stable foundation for building our concepts of ethical preferences and rights? And who defines suffering? How often have oppressors caused suffering while denying that their victims were indeed suffering? It would seem that such a malleable criterion leaves us with no real ethics at all.

Second, if we cannot enter into the mental experiences of animals, and thereby enter into their suffering, how can we possibly objectively evaluate their suffering or potential suffering sufficiently enough to build the moral boundaries of exclusion and inclusion on such limited evidence? Again we are given a foundation for ethics that becomes highly subjective and unstable. Should ethics, especially Christian ethics, be based on and built from such an unstable foundation of speculation and opinion?

Is pain the same as suffering?

R. G. Frey observes that suffering is not merely unpleasant or painful sensations, but that it requires the organism having the sensations to possess a mental capacity capable of suffering.¹ And yet we have seen it argued that our ability to assess whether such mental capacity exists in animals, and to evaluate how equivalent their suffering is to ours, is impossible, or at best very limited. As C. S. Lewis cogently asserts in regard to vivisection, “Unless we know on other grounds, that vivisection is right we must not

¹Frey, 39-41.

take the moral risk of tormenting them [animals] on a mere opinion.”¹ In restated form, willingness to risk inflicting unjustified pain is, defacto, a willingness to knowingly inflict unjustified pain.

When Frey asserts that suffering is more than merely painful sensations, and that a certain mental capacity is required to be capable of suffering, he implies that pain and suffering are not one and the same thing. Thus it becomes hypothetically possible for two sentient creatures to experience identical pains, but different levels of suffering.

Ryder notes that the ability to anticipate pain can increase the total suffering, while the ability to project a positive future consequence can reduce the total suffering.² This is because, as Leahy notes, many scholars, including some of the key animal rights advocates, concede that humans can suffer more than animals because of the superiority

¹Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 225. Note however, how Lewis *reverses* the logic from the sentience school. Lewis, instead of arguing how much pain animals feel, instead takes the higher moral road by asserting that the lack of objective data on animals' ability to experience pain is precisely why we should not risk inflicting suffering by procedures such as vivisection. Thus Lewis takes a restrictive approach to ambiguity instead of a permissive approach and in so doing side-steps the animal rights advocates who are programmed only to confront the permissive mind-set.

Griffiths uses a similar tactic to argue that basing animal rights in evolution is not a prudent methodology. “To base an ethics of animal welfare on what is still widely regarded as only a hypothesis is to skate on thin ice. It is bad ethics to make one's morals depend so heavily on the vagaries of the results of scientific research” (17). Both men underscore the problem of basing ethics on the moving targets of opinion and science. However, both men clearly have an absolutist view of ethics, which the evolutionist would see as a weakness. Nevertheless, it does seem that an ethics based on a moving target could hardly be normative in the practical world.

²Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 326.

of human intelligence.¹ Ryder's point is well taken but opens a new problem. If suffering does not have to include pain, then we should become less supportive of defining the limits of morality in terms of pain. Rather we must now define the moral boundaries in terms of the broader criterion of suffering. Furthermore, suffering now becomes a function of "mental capacity," which becomes a euphemism for rational intelligence. If suffering implies and requires a minimum level of intelligence, then Bentham's foundation for including the animals has artificially separated reason from the capacity to suffer. Reason and thinking do play a role after all. Thus the very concept that is supposed to deliver the animal rights proponent from the use of intelligence and reason as criteria for defining the boundaries of moral preference ends up being grounded in the very intelligence it was invented to replace.

Why Choose Pain for a Criterion?

Both Frey and Griffith attack what they perceive to be a subjective or arbitrary designation of pain as the primary grounds of establishing moral rights. They both assert that it is not clear that the experience of pain automatically has intrinsic moral value to ground rights. Frey charges essentially that the adequacy of the criterion of sentience (or pain) is an unargued, unproved assumption. Second, both argue that even if experiences of pain do have intrinsic moral value, this is no guarantee that pain is the only experience

¹Michael Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29.

to have intrinsic moral value.¹ On what basis is pain to be chosen over these other options as the grounding value of morality? What justification is offered by the animal rights advocates for choosing pain over these other experiences? Frey declares he is aware of no answer to this last question.²

There appears to be no direct attempt to answer to Frey's objection. The closest thing to an answer may be the general, Bentham-based hedonist argument that human and animal behaviors are grounded in avoiding pain and in seeking pleasure. Thus, morality ought to be grounded in avoiding pain and promoting pleasure (or happiness). But why should behaviorism be the grounding principle for ethics? Just because an act appears to produce pleasure or happiness does not entail the conclusion it is moral. Adultery is mutually pleasurable but few would assert that it is morally good.

Frey argues that pain is an ineffective means for establishing rights if it is the sole ground, as it is with Bentham and the animal rights advocates. He illustrates his point by presenting the case of a war veteran who is quite conscious and cogent, but his war injury made him incapable of feeling pain. Has he lost his rights since he can no longer feel pain? This argument can be extended to the comatose human as well. Have they lost their rights and interests because they are comatose? Could a photographer enter the room of a comatose person and take immodest photos because they cannot feel pain nor

¹Frey, 46-50, 145; Griffiths, 15. Chapter 11 of Frey has a major section arguing this issue in detail.

²Frey, 46-50; Griffiths, 15.

can they suffer?¹ Does a person born with a congenital condition making them unable to feel pain have no rights?²

Frey also observes that if pain is the sole basis of moral rights and interests, then future generations can have no moral rights or interests as they do not yet have a nervous system enabling them to feel pain (or suffer).³ Such an argument would undermine key moral positions on caring for the earth and the environment because the future generations are entitled to receive a habitable earth from us. Could it not be convincingly argued that preventing real, present pain, trumps actions to prevent potential, future pain that may not occur? Frey concludes that the painists offer no objective test criteria to be met in order to demonstrate pain and suffering, and thus it becomes a version of speciesism that simply has expanded the circle to include more than just humans. It is still discrimination in the speciesist sense, just on a broader scale.⁴

One other point about pain should be made here. Casserley, writing well before

¹Frey, 34-36; 145-147.

²An actual case history of such a person can be found in Robert Marion, *The Boy Who Felt No Pain* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990). Marion's book is a personal memoir of his early career in medicine. In this volume he tells the story of treating an infant who felt no pain at all. Several years later he encountered the boy again, and the patient was a physical and medical mess due to not feeling any injuries. Would the painists say he was not suffering and thus had no rights? Could we do experiments on him that we could not do on others since he feels no pain?

This example highlights the fact that every criterion based in functionality is bound to face a situation where one faces a marginal case where granting moral status is an exception to the criterion and yet seems to be in order. I shall examine the issue of arguing from marginal cases shortly.

³Frey, 34-36.

⁴Ibid., 44.

painism was in vogue, declares, "Pain is not the worst of evils."¹ He contends that there is "widespread modern superstition that all pain is stark and unredeemable evil, and that indeed, evil and pain necessarily amount to the same thing. . . . Pain is indeed a species of evil, but pain is not, so to speak the most evil form of evil. Both moral evil, sin, and social evil, injustice, are worse than pain. The fight against pain may never be carried on by immoral or unjust means. It is never worth while [*sic*] to corrupt men or societies in order to avoid pain."² Casserley's point is well taken. Bentham's foundation for painism presupposes hedonist consequentialism in judging good and evil by the pleasure or pain produced by choices and actions. Few would argue that pain is evil. The frequent instances of individuals willingly placing themselves in a position to suffer pain for various higher purposes would seem to indicate that many do not see pain as the ultimate evil. Thus Pinches rightly argues that "sentience, therefore, turns out to be one of a number of features of a given animal that humans must consider when seeking to treat it well. It has no special, privileged status."³ There is one other problem for the sentience criterion.

¹J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Man's Pain and God's Goodness* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1951), 63. See also Peter Anthony Bertocci, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1951), 394: "Hardship is not necessarily evil."

²Casserley, *Man's Pain*, 60-61.

³Charles Pinches, "Each According to Its Kind," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches for Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 201.

The Problem of Predation

Another challenge for the sentiency view is the problem of predation. Those advocating the sentiency criterion for moral protection do not appear to address this issue adequately. The issue of predation begs the question of why it should be considered morally wrong for a man to kill and eat a zebra, while for a lion to kill and eat a zebra is not immoral. Peter Alward clarifies the argument, saying, "In particular, what is in need of explanation is exactly why non-human carnivores, but not humans, may permissibly eat meat. That is, the (relevant) properties differentiating humans from non-human carnivores need to be delineated and an explanation needs to be given as to why possession of such properties, or the lack thereof, ground the moral distinction at issue."¹ This issue is particularly problematic in these modern times when it is likely that the lion will inflict more pain and suffering on the zebra than the man.² Why is the pain inflicted by the lion not morally evil (or at least not as evil) as that given by a man?

Singer tries to show why a predator can kill other animals to eat with no moral culpability, while humans cannot. He appeals to William Paley's argument that

the reasons alleged in vindication of this practice [humans killing animals to

¹Peter Alward, *Naive! Who Me?* 2000, <http://people.uleth.ca/~peter.alward/papers/Naive-who-me.htm> (6 July 2003).

²With a scoped rifle, a hunter can easily kill a game animal up to 800 yards away. The bullet will reach the animal before the sound of the rifle shot, and with an accurate shot, the animal will be dead before it can be fully aware that anything happened. However, if the shot is off, then the animal may well suffer but this can be quickly remedied with a second shot. Any way you look at it, the modern hunter is likely to inflict far less pain and suffering than the lion.

eat], are the following: that the several species of brutes being created to prey upon one another, affords a kind of analogy to prove that the human species were intended to feed upon them; that, if let alone, they would overrun the earth, and exclude mankind from the occupation of it; that they are requited for what they suffer at our hands by our care and protection.

Upon which reasons I would observe, that *the analogy* contended for is extremely lame; *since brutes have no power to support life by any other means, and since we have*; for the whole human species might subsist entirely upon fruit, pulse, herbs, and roots, as many tribes of the Hindoos actually do.¹

Singer is arguing that the lion or wolf has no other options for food, whereas we do.

Thus killing prey animals is necessary for lion and wolf. Furthermore, Singer argues that predators do not kill for pleasure, in contrast to humans who do kill for sport. He therefore joins Paley in arguing that just because some animals kill others for food, it is not a moral ground to justify our killing for food.²

All of this wrangling over necessity leaves the prime question unanswered: Why is it wrong for a man to kill a zebra and eat it while it is morally acceptable for the lion to kill and eat it? Pain is still pain whether inflicted by a lion or a human. Singer offers one other answer to this conundrum: “The most decisive point, however, is that nonhuman animals are not capable of considering the alternatives open to them *or of reflecting on the ethics of their diet*. Hence it is impossible to hold the animals responsible for what they do.”³ Thus, he argues that the difference between animal and human predation is

¹William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Boston, MA: West and Richardson, 1818), 70. Second emphasis is mine. Singer merely summarizes Paley’s point. He makes no direct quotation. See Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 237.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 235, 237.

³Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 71. Emphasis mine.

that the animals have no moral ability and thus cannot be held accountable, while humans can make such reflections and be held culpable. But this is begging the question for the argument assumes that there is a moral problem with humans eating animals. Why should my sense of morality defacto prohibit eating animal flesh? There needs to be a separate reason for having such a moral requirement.¹ Neither Singer, nor any of his cohorts adequately addresses the problem of distinguishing between animal suffering caused by predacious animals, and similar forms of suffering caused by humans.

Thus Bentham's hedonism is challenged in two key ways. First, because for Bentham, all pain is evil whether intended or unintended. The zebra suffers either way, and for the painists, the issue is suffering, not motive or intent. Second, the major feature distinguishing the morality of the lion from that of man is not pain but the ability to reason creatively.² The very criteria of human preference ethics that is discarded in favor

¹It is interesting that Singer then asserts that "it must be admitted that the existence of carnivorous animals poses one more problem for the ethics of Animal Liberation, and that is whether or not we should do anything about it. . . . The short and simple answer is that once we give up our claim to 'dominion' over the other species we have no right to interfere with them at all. . . . We should not try to play Big Brother either." A little later he asserts that "we cannot and should not try to police nature." See Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 238-239. By contrast, Steve Sapontzis argues the opposite, in an apparently Utilitarian argument. "Where we can prevent predation without occasioning as much or more suffering than we would prevent, we are obligated to do so by the principle that we are obligated to alleviate avoidable animal suffering." Steve Sapontzis, "Predation," *Ethics and Animals* 5 (1984): 36.

²The attempt to make a moral difference between predatory animals and humans is based on the argument that humans have powers of judgment and reason that animals do not have. Sapontzis tries to refute this type of argument by using the illustration of an human toddler tormenting a cat, and then concluding: "Tormenting cats remains wrong, whether it is done by someone who 'ought to know better' or by someone who 'can't tell right from wrong' (27-28). But Sapontzis seems to deliberately ignore the fact that the moral judgement in this case is neither made by the cat, nor by the toddler, but by a

of sentience, returns as the defining criteria that gives humans moral obligations not binding on the animals. But why should our superior intelligence diminish the right for a human to be a predator while not impacting the lion? No one seems to address these problems.

The presence of predators has proved to be a major challenge for morality based on the capacity to suffer or experience pain. It has proven itself to be situationally relative and is thus unstable. The sentience criterion has been shown to be subservient to survival, and is thus a form of moral relativism. No substantial explanation has been found to explain why pain caused by predatory animals is morally acceptable while pain caused by human predators is not ethically justifiable.

Potentially Grounded in Emotivism

Not only are the advocates of sentience accused of providing no solid grounds for using pain as the master criterion for extending rights, but it is asserted that there is an emotivist basis involved in selecting the hedonist concept of good and evil. Griffiths argues that the use of pain and pleasure to determine moral status is very appealing to the modern man because most moderns use this standard for their own behaviors,¹ while

human sufficiently developed to have judgmental powers sufficient to morally evaluate the situation. So, the immorality of the situation cannot be known except by superior human powers. While cat and toddler can express their preference against suffering, they can make no moral judgment on it. The morality is dependent on someone outside the dynamics between them.

¹Griffiths, 15.

Ryder explicitly links this moral mind-set to the work of Freud and Skinner.¹ It seems reasonable to suspect that painism is rooted in the modern psyche with its focus on self-esteem and avoiding suffering. Thus, the animal rights position seems partly, if not mainly, rooted in emotional preference.

A significant problem, then, as C. S. Lewis observes in regard to vivisection, is that opposing views can both end up grounding their appeals primarily in emotive arguments. “And neither appeal proves anything. If the thing is right—and if right at all, it is a duty—then pity for the animal is one of the temptations we must resist in order to perform that duty. If the thing is wrong, then pity for human suffering is precisely the temptation which will most probably lure us into doing the wrong thing. But the real question—whether it is right or wrong—remains meanwhile just where it was.”² This being the case, it makes sense that another means of elevating animals to moral status has been proposed in the form of the marginal-cases argument.

Analysis of the Marginal-Cases Argument

Introduction

The marginal-cases argument is another weapon in the arsenal of the animal rights advocates to try to elevate animals to inclusion in the moral community with humans. By way of review, we saw that there were two versions: The categorical version and the bioconditional version. The categorical form, simply stated, claims that marginal

¹Ryder, *Painism*, 198.

²Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 224.

humans, such as the mentally handicapped, often have less capabilities than many animals, especially higher mammals. Thus, it is argued that since marginal humans are included in the protected moral community, then there is no good reason to exclude the higher mammals. This view essentially *assumes* that marginal humans have rights and thus argues that animals of similar characteristics to marginal humans deserve the same rights.

We also saw Pluhar assert the existence of a “bioconditional” version of the marginal-cases argument. This version assumed no rights and merely asserts that marginal humans and animals of similar functionality deserve the same consideration. However, both marginal humans and animals can be excluded from the moral community as easily as being included. Thus, this view, does not guarantee the elevation of animals to protected moral status.

Evaluation of the Argument from Marginal Cases

Unintended implications

The potential for the marginal-cases argument to undermine basic human rights is illustrated by Kevin Dolan. He questions why we ascribe human dignity to “mentally defective” infants, and psychopaths like Hitler, a dignity which an elephant or pig can never achieve.¹ Dolan’s question clearly opens the

¹Dolan, *Ethics*, 121. On p.119, Dolan also applies this type of argument to the fetus, concluding that to give infant rights based on potential humanness which is not yet developed, would mean that we should also extend those rights to the unborn. He rejects this argument, declaring it invalid, saying it is akin to arguing that contraception and abstinence are wrong since the egg and sperm have the same potential being denied.

door for undermining the concept of a unique and intrinsic dignity being ascribed to humans.

C. S. Lewis details the essence of this demotion of human rights when he asserts that Darwinian scientists must be naturalistic in their outlook, which, in turn, says Lewis,

brings us up against a very alarming fact. The very same people who most contemptuously brush aside any consideration of animal suffering if it stands in the way of “research” will also, on another context, most vehemently deny that there is any radical difference between man and the other animals. On the naturalistic view, the beasts are at bottom just the same *sort* of thing as ourselves. Man is simply the cleverest of the anthropoids. . . .

. . . Once the old Christian idea of a total difference in kind between man and beast has been abandoned, then no argument for experiments on animals can be found which is not also an argument for experiments on inferior men.¹

Singer makes this exact point, arguing that if non-speciesist criterion justifies the suffering of some less sentient for the greater good of the more developed, then we cannot exclude human infants—he specifically stipulates orphaned infants—or retarded humans from consideration.²

Frey likewise concurs that unless we include babies and the mentally handicapped within the class of right holders on the grounds that they potentially possess certain

However, his analogy falls short. The sperm and egg do not have that potential until they unite and the ensuing embryo is implanted in the uterine wall. Until both conception and implantation occur, the potential development is limited to a cell mass with no developed biological systems. Thus he falls short in his criticism.

¹Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 226-227.

²Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 16-17. See also, Dolan, 119, where he asserts that Singer’s use of an orphaned infant to make his point is calculated to divest the argument of extraneous issues such as parental feelings, thus isolating the issue of protecting the infant solely on grounds of human status. Nevertheless, Singer’s example illustrates the truth of Lewis’s argument.

human attributes, there is no reason to grant them rights at all. Significantly, Frey declares that the arguments for human preference are essentially *religious* arguments and that “unless one of these arguments is accepted, we have no basis upon which to differentiate the cases of babies and the severely mentally-enfeebled from that of animals.”¹ Frey lucidly highlights the distinct possibility when the boundary between human and animal is blurred, the marginal cases will be further marginalized instead of further protected. That is, we become more likely to exploit babies and the mentally handicapped than to protect the sentient animals, because the argument from marginal cases is grounded in granting rights based on functionality. If the functions on which rights are granted are too broad, rights lose their significance and no one will take them seriously.

We saw Rachels go one step further in raising the possibility that there may be instances where the animal may be entitled to preference over the human.² Granted, Rachels seems to try to limit the possibilities to extremely marginal cases, but nevertheless, we see the potential of a complete reversal of the overall intent of the argument from marginal cases residing within the argument itself.

What do these practitioners of the marginal-cases argument do with these criticisms? Virtually nothing. Pluhar suggests that Frey, who defends human preference,

¹Frey, 31-32.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 209.

is one of the few who actually face up to the possibility of lost rights.¹ Pluhar herself exhibits strong tendencies to dismiss such challenges to the argument from marginal cases by asserting that the criticism applies only to the bioconditional version.² But why should the bioconditional view impact only the human-person criterion of moral inclusion and not the categorical version as well? Pluhar does not address this issue. The argument from marginal cases is capable of results opposite to the purpose for which it is used. Saletan gives us a good illustration of how unintended consequences can cause severe problems for the argument from marginal cases.

Saletan's reversal of the marginal-cases argument

Responding to a Peter Singer article on bestiality,³ William Saletan turns the marginal-cases argument against one of its own champions. Singer appears to argue that social mores against bestiality are part of a larger program of speciesism (influenced by Christianity) to differentiate humans from animals. Singer hints that the current world view of man and animals not being different means we may need to re-think the issue. In other words, sex between humans and animals may not be evil if it is not cruel to one of

¹Pluhar, 121.

²For example, she responds to an attack on the argument from marginal cases by asserting that the “‘reversibility’ charge [i.e. that marginal cases undermines human rights instead of increasing animal rights] . . . applies only to the *bioconditional* version of the argument.” Ibid., 72. She never says why it does not apply to the categorical version.

³Singer, “Heavy Petting.” See also, William Saletan, “Shag the Dog,” *Slate*, 5 April 2001, <http://www.slate.com/id/103801/> (20 May 2002).

the participants, and is mutually satisfying.¹

Saletan responds by raising the issue of consent: Is sex without consent immoral? What mental capacities are needed to give consent? If Singer believes consent is necessary, then the marginal-cases argument kills him, for as Saletan points out, “A philosopher’s duty is to clarify his principles and defend their consistent application. Those who embrace the principle of consent, and who agree that an animal ‘is no more capable than a child of giving meaningful consent,’ have done both. They have stated their principle and applied it to sex with children.”² Saletan has brilliantly reversed the direction of the argument from marginal cases. The crucial implication is that if it is morally acceptable to have sex with a non-consenting animal, then there must be no ethical inhibition to having sex with non-consenting humans of similar capabilities to the animals. Thus, Saletan has astutely pointed out that if Singer sticks with his argument from marginal cases in general, and holds to his proposals on bestiality, then defacto he has to approve of some types of pedophilia.

This specter diminishes the attractiveness of the argument from marginal cases. The destructive effects of pedophilia and other sexual abuse of children are widely recognized. Even apart from speciesism, we have sound reasons to conclude such practices are morally wrong. Saletan has masterfully exploited this issue, and has convincingly demonstrated that the marginal-cases argument is not automatically in favor

¹Singer, “Heavy Petting.”

²Saletan, “Shag the Dog.”

of rights for marginal humans, nor does it automatically create equal rights for animals.

Danger of basing moral duties on extreme cases

It is possible that Singer might respond to this critique by chastising Saletan for using an overly extreme case for grounding his moral criticism of Singer's position. But this is no more extreme than Singer's own tactics. Neuhaus, reporting on a debate he had with Singer, depicts Singer's propensity to begin the argument "with hard cases (the anencephalic infant being his prime example)," and then develop the general moral rule (for example, a general moral rule concerning abortion).¹ Of more significance to us is that Rachels is equally prone to the same method. In his fourth edition of his textbook, he opens the book with three extreme cases to begin establishing the foundations of moral reasoning.² Throughout the book several more such cases are used, and major

¹John Neuhaus, "A Curious Encounter with a Philosopher from Nowhere," *First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life* 120 (February 2002): 3. For a specific example see Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, *Should the Baby Live? The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1-3, where Singer and Kuhse open with a Down's Syndrome case to begin establishing a case for euthanizing handicapped infants. Instead of developing the moral norms based on the average healthy baby, the norm is first set to accommodate the extreme case, then applied to the normal cases. He uses another Down's Syndrome example in *Unsanctifying*, 218, to debunk the concept of the sanctity of human life to again argue in favor of euthanasia. Such tactics appear to be the norm for Singer.

²Rachels, *Elements* (2002), 1-11. In reference to euthanasia, Rachels's first chapter of the 4th edition of his textbook uses cases ranging from an anencephalic baby, co-joined twins who could not be separated without forfeiting the life of one, to a father who killed his 2 year old daughter with advanced cerebral palsy an act of mercy killing. Each of these cases is used to stretch traditional ethical views to logical absurdities which are then said to discredit the traditional views. See also Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 1-15. Another example can be found in, *CfA*, 189, where Rachels contrasts a severely brain-damaged infant, instead of a normal healthy infant, with an ape to argue for granting higher rights to the latter.

moral policies are suggested based on such cases. Therefore, it seems that Saletan's turning of the tables is not inappropriate.

Rachels notes that precedential arguments based on these extreme cases are often opposed by the "slippery slope" argument. Stated in simple form, the slippery slope argument would assert that if we accept case A to be legal and moral, it will eventually lead to radicalized applications, B, C, . . . Z. Rachels rightly notes that "this kind of argument is easy to abuse." He then continues, "If you are opposed to something, but you have no good arguments against it, you can always make up a prediction about what it might lead to; and no matter how implausible your prediction is, no one can prove you wrong."¹ There is some truth to this. However, the moral conclusions drawn by Rachels (and Singer) are extreme enough to authenticate the charges that they are sliding down the slippery slope. Grounding morality on extreme or marginal cases seems less than prudent, and seems to make it possible for one to justify the violation of individuals in less extreme circumstances.

Marginal-cases argument rooted in human preference

A second possible way that Singer might respond to Saletan's argument is that it still belies human speciesism. This is indeed possible. But the attractiveness of Pluhar's and Singer's marginal case arguments is no less speciesist. Their efforts to gain support for animal rights create an emotive tie between the rights of animals and certain classes of humans. Thus, it seems implied that if we wish to preserve these rights for certain

¹Rachels, *Elements* (2002), 11.

humans (a key assumption of this argument), we must concede that the animals have rights as well. Such a position, however, appeals to species-based self-interest.

The speciesist taint is not limited to the argument from marginal cases. Singer seeks to make animal rights more palatable to the unconvinced reader by arguing that animal rights advocates have a better record of caring for human beings than do speciesist humans, and that the elimination of human moral preference will create more compassion for humans. Singer asserts rightly that to care for animals does not mean we do not and cannot care for humans.¹ By appealing to humanocentric interests in advocating animals' rights, Singer is making a speciesist appeal, rooted in species self-benefit.

Ryder argues from the reverse angle. He asserts that if we persist in the total subordination of nonhumans, we are paving the way for a more callous attitude towards the weak, the elderly and the handicapped in our own species.² Here, again, the case is argued in terms of human benefit. Thus the very premise being rejected is relied upon to ground the assertion. The animal rights advocates cannot seem to fully avoid basing rights on being human, much as they try to avoid doing just that. We must suggest that this is evidence that humanness has moral meaning, or of a common, inherently speciesist mind-set. Either way, the animal rights advocates end up with a contradiction that makes less than full sense. The marginal-cases argument is inadequate because it does not

¹Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 234-35.

²Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 11.

clearly define the minimum standard of moral inclusion. At best, it hints at functions like self-awareness, or at least a minimum level of intelligence, but the standard is not clear.

Trying to ground rights in personal abilities and functions has shown itself to be problematic. There is one final proposal that attempts to fill this void. Up to this point, I have focused my evaluation on arguments made by a grouping of scholars allied in the cause for elevating animal rights. What remains is the task of evaluating the individual position of Rachels and his ethics of moral individualism.

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION OF RACHELS'S USE OF EVOLUTION TO INFORM AND SHAPE ETHICS

Moral individualism is Rachels's attempt to solve some of the challenges associated with the marginal-cases argument. In moral individualism, Rachels strongly advocates that all rights are to be determined by the individual's capacities and abilities. Species membership has no moral relevance. This radical rejection of species as relevant to morals, and the ensuing emphasis on the moral significance of the individual, raises some new challenges.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that reaction to Rachels is virtually non-existent. There appears to be two reasons for this. First, the evolutionary world-view is so dominant that, even in many Christian circles, it is now beyond question. Thus the fundamental premises of the arguments rooted in evolutionary development go unchallenged and the arguments are seen as self-evidently sensible. Second, concerning Rachels, Peter Singer has published abundantly more than Rachels and thus has been the central focal point of Christian reaction. This has left little reaction if any to the work of Rachels. Therefore, I shall, to a great extent, have to press on alone in my analysis of these issues.

Implications of Rejecting the Moral Significance of Species Membership

Charles Pinches argues that the radical anti-speciesists can only deal with the rights of individual specimens. This individualistic focus leaves them with little or no ability to deal with issues pertinent to populations of a species, since species distinctions are virtually denied.¹ Pinches offers the additional criticism that those who oppose speciesism make a “strong anthropocentric/nonanthropocentric distinction” which he argues to be a false dichotomy that separates the interests of others entirely from my own, which is impossible, even with animals.² In other words, radical moral individualism leads to an isolationist morality where the interrelationships between individuals can become morally minimized. This could lead to some interesting results.

Take, for example, Saletan’s reversal of the marginal-cases argument as related to bestiality, which was examined earlier.³ If Saletan is correct, Rachels’s position would undermine the concept that bestiality is somehow unnatural, for why should trans-species sexuality seem odd if species membership is morally irrelevant?

This possibility is further illustrated in a news report about a man in Maine who came out of the closet as a “zoophile”—one who practices bestiality. The man’s father responded to this news by attempting to kill him, thus bringing the issue into a court of

¹Pinches, 196-197.

²Ibid., 189.

³Saletan, “Shag the Dog,” 4-5.

law. The victim petitioned the court to allow his “wife” (i.e., his dog with whom he commits his acts of bestiality), to be permitted to accompany him into the court room. The petition was signed “Philip and Lady Buble” with a paw-print near his signature. In verbal arguments, Mr. Buble told the judge, “I’ve been informed your personal permission is needed, given that *my wife is not human*, being a dog of about 36 pounds weight and very well behaved.”¹

Now if the dog and Mr. Buble are not different in kind, as Rachels claims, but merely share some characteristics, while not sharing others, why should the concept of a human being married to a dog (let alone the bestiality involved) strike us as being bizarre? According to moral individualism, this case should be judged strictly on the individual characteristics of the dog and Mr. Buble without regard to species membership. And even if Rachels finds grounds to reject *this* case as morally valid, it remains a theoretical possibility that one human and a particular dog could qualify for a trans-species marriage by having the right cocktail of individual characteristics. For moral individualism, one cannot automatically say that such an arrangement is bizarre, for the apparent oddity is rooted in species significance. Rachels might well object that an overly radical case has been chosen to make this point, yet we have already seen his penchant for using extreme cases to develop his ethics. Therefore we are not out of

¹“Admitted Zoophile Is Beaten by Father with Crowbar Piscataquis County ME (US),” 7 December 2000, <http://www.pet-abuse.com/cases/854/ME/US/1> (7 November 2005). Originally found in May 2002 at a now-defunct site. Emphasis mine. See also, “Philip Buble,” 31 October 2005, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Buble (7 November 2005).

bounds to evaluate a real, but unusual case by the methods he advocates. Moral individualism thus seems capable of supporting ethical conclusions quite contrary to common sense and moral intuitions. Aside from this, the significance of moral individualism is found in the underlying criterion for determining, one individual at a time, who is included in the moral community: being the subject of a life.

Analysis of the Subjects-of-a-Life Criterion

Questionable Use of Regan's Work

The subjects-of-a-life criterion seems logical and appealing, even self-evidently true. It would appear that Rachels has offered a unique contribution, as no credit is given to any other authors during his presentation of the issue. However, eight years earlier, Tom Regan proposed the "subjects-of-a-life" criterion.¹ In fact, Regan's presentation is more substantive, yet Rachels neither mentions nor offers any citation to Regan in connection with the subjects-of-a-life criterion. Rachels lists Regan's book in the bibliography of *Created from Animals*, and discusses the significance of Regan a number of pages later, so he would appear to be aware of Regan's work including this proposed criterion. In addition, Rachels makes periodic use of the argument in *The End of Life*,² sometimes in veiled form, but again never ties it to Regan. Whether purposely or accidentally, the failure to properly credit Regan as the source of this idea would seem to

¹Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 243-248.

²See Rachels, *The End of Life*, 5, 23-28, 49-55, 64-66. In all of these Rachels is arguing favorably towards euthanasia for those who cannot have a biographical life.

be a grievous omission. Furthermore, such an omission raises questions on the originality of other, undocumented arguments given by Rachels. It may be that Rachels's unique referencing style—in general, he only give references for direct quotations—may have contributed to this oversight.¹ Be that as it may, Rachels's argument while very similar to Regan's, is communicated in a manner more easy for the common man to understand. This ability to communicate to the non-scholar is a key strength of Rachels which is demonstrated throughout much of his work.

Significance of Subjects-of-a-Life Criterion

The significance of the subject-of-a-life criterion is highlighted by Ryder, when he notes that Regan was reacting to Utilitarian arguments, mainly by Singer, for the sentience-painist criterion of moral inclusion. Ryder notes that for Regan, Singer's view is too limiting, and that “nonhumans as well as humans have a certain ‘inherent value’ which may be independent of the pleasure and pain which they experience.”² The key point is that Regan himself argues that this inherent value is “a categorical value, admitting of no degrees. . . . One either *is* a subject of a life . . . or one *is not*. All those who are, are so equally.”³ Why it is categorical is not clearly argued by Regan but seems to be accepted as a given. This definition of an equally inherent value to all subjects-of-

¹In *CfA*, Rachels's referencing style is rather unique. It is very cumbersome to use and generally only gives references for direct quotations. These are unnumbered, and listed by the opening line of the quotation in lists located at the end of the book, and indexed by each chapter. He has no numbered footnotes or endnotes.

²Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 325.

³Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 245. Emphasis in original.

a-life appears to be the foundational concept for Rachels's assertion that all subjects-of-a-life deserve equal consideration, though not necessarily equal treatment.

Rachels likewise acknowledges the significance of Regan, by describing the Utilitarian position as protecting animal welfare.

Singer, a utilitarian, would acknowledge that if an experiment [on animals] was designed so as to minimize suffering, and if it actually did more good than harm, it could be justified. He only criticized the great mass of research that could not pass even this minimum test. But Regan would have none of this utilitarian calculating. Instead, he said, we must acknowledge that, like humans, animals have *rights* that should not be violated under any circumstances whatever, not even if we think there is a great good to be achieved. While Singer was a reformer, Regan was an abolitionist.¹

Thus, Rachels appears to join Regan in the abolitionist position. And the significance is this: According to online notes posted by Professor Ransom Slack, "Regan's perspective is actually very similar to Kant's." Both define persons as having inherent moral value and thus we have a duty to respect their rights. Where they disagree is in how they define the inherently valuable person. "For Kant, persons are those with rational souls. For Regan, persons are those who are subjects of a life."² Thus Regan differs from Singer by locating the moral value within the individual instead of in the ability to suffer.

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 217-218. Emphasis in original. This argument clearly evidences connection to the subjects-of-a-life criterion but Rachels never makes the direct connection.

²Ransom Slack, "Lecture Notes 11," Undated, http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/philosophy/15.275_notes_11.pdf (17 May 2002). These appear to be the professor's notes for a class. See, Ransom Slack, "15.275 L02 Ethics and the Environment," University of Manitoba, Winter 2001, <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/philosophy/15.275%20L02%20MainPage.htm> (17 May 2002). The wording between the two direct quotes is heavily dependent on Slack's outline but some editing was needed to smooth out the grammar.

Subjects-of-a-Life Criterion Based in Functions

At first glance, this seems to exclude the subjects-of-a-life criterion from being a functional definition of rights because of the appeal to inherent value. But further information proves otherwise. The individual who is the subject of a life is so because of a multiplicity of functions. According to Regan, the subjects of a life “have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independently of their being the object of anyone else’s interests.”¹ This is a staggering list of functions and capacities that are deemed necessary to be the subject of a life. Rachels merely condenses Regan’s explanation into the concept of having a biographical life as opposed to merely a biological life. Even in simplified form, this list is, to a great degree, merely asserting a form of self-awareness as the grand criterion of moral protection. But this means, as Rachels notes, that “having a biographical life requires some fairly sophisticated mental capacities.”²

This leads to an apparent difference between Rachels and Regan in that Rachels argues that the richness of one biographical life over another seems to give it more value

¹Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 243.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 208.

than the less rich individual. “Thus, killing an animal that has a rich biographical life might be more objectionable than killing one with a simpler life.”¹ He then notes the following implication: “The lives of humans and non-humans need not be accorded exactly the same value.” This, however, would seem to open the way for a new form of human speciesism, to which Rachels is clearly opposed. It could now be argued that the richness of a human’s life is greater than that of a dog or ape, therefore the human gets automatic preference. Furthermore, Rachels seems to have thus reintroduced the Utilitarian concept of the individual being mere receptacles of experiences, which Regan vehemently opposed.² But there is a second question embedded in this differentiation of value based on the richness of the biographical life. How much biographical richness can the individual lose before disqualification for the moral status of being the subject of a life? In addressing this last issue, Rachels makes applications not found in Regan.

Subjects of a Life and Marginal Cases

Rachels uses the subjects-of-a-life criterion to argue that loss of biographical life may be grounds for justifying suicide and euthanasia, citing actual cases to bolster his point for each.³ But this raises a problem. Why should an otherwise rational person be

¹Ibid., 209. On this and the preceding page, Rachels contrasts bugs and shrimp, who apparently have no biographical lives, with the rhesus monkey and humans, who are asserted to have biographical lives.

²See, Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 243, where he argues, “Those who satisfy the subject-of-a-life criterion themselves have a distinctive kind of value—inherent value—and are not to be viewed as mere receptacles.”

³Rachels, *CfA*, 200-205.

able to commit suicide or request euthanasia? Has not Regan argued that if the individual is rational, enough to no longer desire life, has the capacity of carry out initiative, etc., as being inherently valuable and not to be violated under any circumstances? Why should the subject of a life be permitted to violate his own inherent value through being a subject of a life? It seems that the biographical life criterion has now become a matter of subjective preference.

For example, Rachels uses “the famous ‘Texas burn case’” to argue for the preferential interpretation of biographical life. This case involved one Donald C. who was horribly burned in an a gas-line explosion. He was left blind, crippled, without fingers, and other injuries. Donald had been a rodeo performer, pilot, and “ladies man” among other things. Donald was treated against his will for two years, before changing his mind. Rachels claims that nine years later, Donald still maintained the doctors should have let him die and this was rational on Donald’s part, because “what his injury had done, from his point of view, was to destroy his ability to lead the life that made him the distinctive individual he was.”¹ It would appear, then, that for Rachels, biographical life is something chosen, a collection of choices and experiences, which makes one the individual he or she is, and not merely the possession of certain capacities as Regan argued. Thus, Donald lost his biographical life of choice but not his biological life. Because Donald’s biographical life was no longer of no value to him, his biological life, upon which his biographical life depends, would have no further worth.

¹Rachels, *End of Life*, 54-55.

Criticisms of the Subjects-of-a-Life Criterion

J. P. Moreland criticizes Rachels's assertions based on the Donald C. case as being totally subjective. He proposes a hypothetical counterexample in which a woman chooses the biographical life of prostitution.

Her life plan is to become the best prostitute she can be. She enjoys bestiality, group sex, and certain forms of masochism. Her life has value from her point of view if and only if she can achieve these goals. Now suppose that she is in an accident that confines her to a wheelchair such that she is in no pain, she can lead a relatively productive life in various ways, but she can no longer pursue her desire to be the best prostitute ever. Does it make any sense to say that she would be rational to desire to die? Does it make sense to say that her biographical life is what gave her life value? . . . Without objective material grounds that constitute a morally appropriate life plan, subjectivism would seem to follow.¹

Indeed, Rachels's concept of biographical life seems to have departed from Regan's inherent value model to extreme subjectivity. If one's biographical life is the primary ground of personal identity, as was argued with Donald C., it makes other characteristics morally insignificant, and seems to raise the possibility of one individual maintaining multiple biographical lives. Moreland charges Rachels with teaching such. "It is even possible for a bigamist, says Rachels, to lead two biographical lives."² Thus, Rachels has moved from the inherent-value model to a personal preferential model not far from personal egoism.

¹J. P. Moreland, "James Rachels and the Active Euthanasia Debate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988): 88.

²Ibid., 86. Moreland does not reference this source. Whether or not Rachels actually makes this assertion, it is a logical possibility to occur under Rachels's proposed criterion.

A second area of concern is the loss of rights due to accident or injury. Suppose an individual becomes comatose. Is that individual no longer the subject of a life? He or she would currently have no self-awareness or preferences. Who determines that an individual is no longer the subject of a life? It cannot be made by the individual in question for if they can make such a judgment, they defacto have the capacity to qualify as a subject of a life. An external party must decide in behalf of that individual. But if rights are based on one's actual condition and not on future possibilities, why should the comatose person be considered the subject of a life, even if the prognosis is good that they will recover in the near to moderate future? If outside relationships are excluded from reckoning, there is no reason to save the comatose person. Thus those who are marginal cases could end up in a rather precarious position concerning further biological life.

J. P. Moreland illustrates this with his argument related to the rule against killing innocent persons.

According to Rachels, people without biographical lives are no longer morally significant regarding the rule not to kill. . . . But if the person has lost the right not be killed—for example, because he was in a persistently vegetative state—it would seem that he has lost other rights as well. It would seem that one could experiment on the person or kill him brutally if he so desired. Why? Because we are no longer dealing with an object that has relevant rights. In these cases there would seem to be no moral difference between a lethal injection or a more brutal means of killing. The patient has no life and is not an object of moral consideration and thus approaches a thing-like status.¹

¹Ibid., 88.

This is a devastating critique for it broadens the implications of a loss of rights due to loss of functions qualifying one to be a subject of a life. Furthermore, it would seem that many marginal cases and many animals could no longer qualify for being the subject of a life.

In addition to these challenges, Rachels's disparaging attitude towards biological life seems unwarranted. As J. P. Moreland notes of Rachels, "His understanding of biographical life, far from rendering biological life morally insignificant, presupposes the importance of biological human life."¹ Thus, Moreland rightly argues the wholistic indivisibility of biological and biographical life. The subjects-of-a-life criterion thus seems less than appealing due to its highly relativistic definition based in functional capacities. It seems probable, then, that to define moral inclusion on the basis of functional capacities threatens the equivalent of a moral, graveyard spiral, in which as the individual diminishes in capabilities, rights diminish also. Then, as the diminishment of rights further hinder one's abilities and capacities, this further diminishment causes additional loss of rights.

The inconsistencies of the sentiency (painist) and marginal-cases criteria point to a larger overall problem. These approaches, as well as Rachels's "subjects-of-a-life" criterion, share the common characteristic of grounding rights in functional capabilities. Thus, they have argued that there is no uniquely human function that excludes the

¹Ibid., 86.

animals while including all humans, including marginally functional humans. Such difficulties beg the question of how rights are to be grounded.

Some Challenges of Grounding Rights

Difficulty Establishing Moral Claims

A notable challenge for the grounding of rights is that not everyone accepts them as an objective reality. For example, Ryder argues, “I have come around to the view that rights are just human inventions.”¹ He continues by arguing that “morality serves a useful psychological function for the individual by making it easier to decide how to behave.”² But this raises some key problems. If morality is merely a human invention, generated, as argued by Ruse and others, by evolution, why should it be universally binding? At most it should have relevance to the individual making the decisions. Furthermore, it seems that our moral sense may well complicate decisions, not simplify them. How often do animals get stuck in deliberating options? It would seem far less likely than for the average human. And if we invented rights, why should animals have them? Rights would precisely have entailed protection of exclusively human interests since the animals do not have such a concept of entitlement. So Ryder’s position makes the concept of rights completely subjective and human centered.

Ryder also distinguishes between rights and duties. “Rights are said to reside in the victim, whereas duties are in the perpetrator. Moral instruction used to place emphasis

¹Ryder, *Painism*, 197.

²Ibid.

upon the doer[;] now it emphasizes the done-to.”¹ Thus, for Ryder, those who possess power have the capability to act and control others, and thus tend to favor focusing on duties—how they should act. By contrast, those who feel powerless tend to focus on rights because they do not have the ability to fully act independently and thus worry about being victimized by the powerful. Thus Victorian morality was seen by Ryder as a means of protecting the rights of particular classes while “today morality is a concern for *all* classes.”² And this is how Ryder tries to bring the animals into the picture: as one of the previously excluded classes. But why should a human invention be applied to animals other than an anthropomorphizing of animals as victims of the powerful? Ryder does not supply an answer.

Others propose various criteria for rights but all tend to focus on some kind of function. Roslind Godlovitch argues that the fundamental grounding principle of rights is the right to be free from constraint. “Ultimately, all moral rights rest on a presupposed right which is not itself grounded on a further principle.” This presupposed principle is “the equal right to be free from constraint.”³ For Godlovitch, this means that “in granting that someone has a moral right, one recognizes his liberty to pursue those interests that are compatible with the like interests of others.” Thus, she believes that “the only

¹Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 328.

²Ibid. Emphasis in original.

³Godlovitch, 158.

condition to be met in order to have a moral right is that one has interests, and this condition is met by all sentient beings.”¹

Two things of significance stand out in Godlovitch’s argument. First, she admits that rights are ultimately based on a principle or principles that is presupposed and not grounded on some other value or premise. This is fundamentally true but many, including Rachels, seem to feel that presuppositions can be avoided and that all the foundational principles of morality and rights can be grounded in reason. But this itself is an unprovable presupposition, therefore Godlovitch is fundamentally correct.

Second, in grounding rights in interests she presumes a minimum level of function as the criterion for granting rights.² But how are interests determined? Sentiency, usually in the form of painism, is usually proposed, but this presupposes a minimum level of intelligence to be able to give an indication of preference (i.e., such as cries of distress, fleeing, flinching, etc.). This functionality view, in turn, brings us back to the problems of the marginal-cases argument that we have just examined.

The problem of determining the criteria of moral inclusion is highlighted by Dolan’s claim that “a right is the power to claim what is due.”³ But one must have a fairly high level of intelligence to make such a claim, and a tribunal in which to voice the

¹Ibid.

²Frey also notes that some appeal to having interests as the ground of rights. Additionally, Angus Taylor makes the same argument that those who have interests have rights. See, Frey, 6; Angus Taylor, *Magpies, Monkeys, and Morals: What Philosophers Say about Animal Liberation* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1999), 43.

³Dolan, 135.

claim. This is why Frey argues the inability to maintain moral rights apart from the concept of legal rights.¹ So the functional model, which is a type of consequentialism, leaves us in a state of deep confusion in clearly establishing rights.

Rawls's Analysis of Grounding Rights

Rawls rejects using the consequences of present circumstances as a viable means of establishing the foundations of rights, arguing, in part, that the this approach, which he calls “procedural interpretation,” can justify significant inequalities and thus provides no real protection for the individual.² In response to this problem, he proposes that “the principle of equal liberty must be secured in advance of a given situation rather than depending on calculations of maximal good.”³ To do this, Rawls proposes his doctrine of the original or initial position—a hypothetical viewpoint in which moral rights and protections are to be determined from the perspective of being in an original position of ignorance of what one’s actual future status and condition will be. Thus, there can be no self-serving decisions because one might end up in the morally excluded group.⁴

However, the individual in the original position must be a moral person, which for Rawls, means that they are capable of having a conception of what is good for themselves, and are capable of having a sense of justice. By moving the functional model to the

¹Frey, 8-9.

²John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 444.

³*Ibid.*, 27, 139.

⁴*Ibid.*, 15-19.

original position, Rawls believes he protects individuals qualifying as a marginal case, who through various misfortunes or circumstances end up functionally challenged in real life.¹ Thus, Rawls seems to impute the average human qualities and intelligence to the original position, which would seem then to exclude animals.² So, while Rawls has provided a provocative alternative, it is still functionally based and offers no reason to stick with the original-position basis of morality other than sheer self-interest. Thus, Regan classifies Rawls's ethical theory as a form of "rational egoism."³ Rawls's solution is intriguing, but at bottom, without any real consequences for violating or rejecting the original-position criterion, there is little reason other than perceived self-interest for adopting it.

Rawls's concept of the original position reveals another problem by grounding the original-position criterion of moral inclusion in a minimum level of functionality. The original-position considers only that the individual cannot consider a particular view of his or her personal future in determining moral protections. This raises the question about duties to future generations. Rawls has no way to commend moral duty to future generations due to his egoistic perspective, because the original-position criterion seems incapable of including the perspective of another person in its calculation.

¹Ibid., 442-443.

²Regan responds vigorously against this characteristic of Rawls's moral theory, noting that the one in the original position must therefore be human, thus excluding animals from moral consideration. Regan, *Animal Rights*, 166, 167.

³Ibid., 163. Rational Egoism is clearly viewed by Regan as a form of Contractualism. See, 156-158.

A similar dilemma is found in Singer's work. Singer rejects the fetus as having actual characteristics entailing rights, and denies that potential characteristics have any moral bearing. In which case, the fetus is entitled to no rights, including to life.¹ It would seem that Singer's position would deny moral duties to future generations because they have no actual functions and capacities on which to base rights. The only consideration that could be given is to the present generation. So functional criteria do not give us a clear moral picture, nor do they provide a compelling case for protecting animals or marginal human cases. This may be why Griffiths chastises those who try to ground animal rights in evolution, for he sees evolution as under effective attack and criticism. Thus, "to base an ethics of animal welfare on what is still widely regarded as only a hypothesis is to skate on thin ice. It is bad ethics to make one's morals depend so heavily on the vagaries of the results of scientific research."²

Must Animals Have Rights to Be Given Moral Protection?

The arguments we have examined seem to assume that if animals are not granted equal rights with humans, then animals are automatically open to exploitation and abuse. Frey flatly denies this, asserting that denial of moral rights to animals does not leave them defenseless. He states that even if no moral rights are posited, actions can still be morally wrong. The issue is sufficient justification, not rights.³ Thus, we see that having

¹Singer, *Rethinking*, 210.

²Griffiths, 17.

³Frey, *Interests and Rights*, 170.

rights is no guarantee that sufficient reason to suspend those rights will not be found, and even when rights are possessed, there is no guarantee they will be respected. This last point is significant precisely because these animal rights proponents uncritically assume that right will be respected and that a denial of rights for animals entails their exploitation and abuse, yet this latter entailment is not necessarily true.

Carruthers likewise argues that regarding the question whether animals have moral standing, “A negative reply need not entail that there are no moral constraints on our treatment of animals.”¹ Thus, “even if we were to agree that animals lack moral standing, it would not follow that we can, with impunity, treat animals as we please.”² Carruthers notes that “things that lack moral standing may nonetheless have indirect moral significance, giving rise to moral duties in a round-about way.”³ Furthermore, “it needs to be emphasized that our question about the moral standing of animals is not the same as the question whether animals *matter*.”⁴

On what grounds then do they matter? Carruthers argues that castles have no moral significance for rights, but can have moral significance because many people care about them. Thus, because people care about castles, we have a duty to preserve and protect

¹Carruthers, 3.

²Ibid., 2.

³Ibid., 1.

⁴Ibid.

them. Likewise, observes Carruthers, we can have indirect duties to animals because of the people who love them.¹

The Indirect Duty Criterion

Regan describes the argument represented by Carruthers as the “indirect duty view” of rights.² This is because there must a third party who has an interest in the subject whose rights are in question. In reference to animals, David DeGrazia describes this position as asserting that “we have indirect duties to animals based on direct duties to humans.”³ This view, however, is not without its critics.

Regan argues that if the third party to whom the duty is owed is somehow removed from the situation (e.g., by death or by change of mind), then the individuals to whom the indirect duty is due lose their rights.⁴ DeGrazia attacks the indirect duty criterion from

¹Ibid, 2. See also p. 194, where he gives two contractualist reasons for treating animals well: (1) Out of respect for animal lovers; (2) on the basis of the good or bad character qualities of character that animals may evoke in us. Both are clearly rooted in human interests and both are based on the ability to have a contractual relationship.

²Regan, *Animal Rights*, 150.

³David DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41. An example of a lack of moral spillover, given by DeGrazia, is that if there were not other humans in the world to have an interest in the animals, then acts of cruelty to animals would become morally neutral. It is important to note also that DeGrazia tends to confuse indirect duty with the argument that cruelty to animals harms the character of the abusing human. These are actually separate arguments.

⁴Regan, *Animal Rights*, 160. An unwitting illustration of this is found in Singer’s Utilitarian argument concerning the rights of the fetus or newborn baby. Singer argues both have no inherent rights as they have no capacities worth basing rights on, but adds that due to the “others affected” by an abortion or infanticide, that the right to life may be granted. But he also clearly implies that the unwanted newborn or fetus can be

the opposite side. Suppose one can act cruelly to animals with no undesirable moral spillover to others—for example, you are the only human in the world so no one can claim offense—then acts of cruelty to animals must be morally neutral, and DeGrazia finds this unacceptable.¹ Thus he is forced to argue, “*it is prima facie wrong to cause suffering (regardless of who the sufferer is).*”² But with all the suffering caused by predation, we have seen this to be a problematic assumption.

By contrast, Carruthers assigns rights to the context of relationships and responsibilities. Rights imply responsibility to properly manage those rights in a way that will not interfere with others’ rights. Animals such as an elephant, dog, or dolphin cannot assume such responsibilities, for, as Regan notes, they cannot be held morally accountable for their actions.³ But this raises two questions. First, what responsibilities can a newborn human baby or comatose adult hold? Carruthers seems to have a good point but the marginal-cases argument could now be used to exclude some humans from possessing rights. Second, why should one treat animals nicely because unknown strangers love those animals? Such reasoning may well provide protection to domestic animals since their welfare is clearly tied to human interests, but it seems to leave little protection for wild creatures. Just because someone loves mice, should people be morally bound from setting traps in their homes to protect their property? Carruthers

terminated. See Singer, *Rethinking*, 210-212.

¹DeGrazia, 41-43.

²Ibid, 43. Emphasis in original.

³Regan, *Animal Rights*, 152.

hints at the right idea, but has too narrow a vision. He has come very close to a significant theological concept which, if taken seriously, would give us basic moral duties to animals, but without investing them with human-style rights.¹

Theological Form of Indirect Duty Criterion

Our duty to animals can be grounded in the biblical belief that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein” (Ps 24:1 KJV). Since God owns the animals and cares for lilies and sparrows (Matt 6:28, 10:29-31), we are to treat them with care because He cares. It is true that if the indirect duties are to man alone, this model will fail in protecting the marginal cases or the animal kingdom. But, for the believer in God, it is a different story. Thus, Dolan notes the propensity of

¹Lest we think Carruthers is a Bible-bashing fundamentalist, let the reader be reminded that Carruthers is seeking a purely secular rationale to ground his ethical arguments. In fact, on pp. 13-14, in reference to the animal rights issue, he finds theistic ethics deficient for two reasons: First, Christian values carry little conviction in an increasingly secular era. They are not salable. Second, he uses Plato’s argument from *Euthyphro* (which we saw in the previous chapter) as to whether God chooses the good because it’s good or whether it’s good because God chooses it. Either way, it is argued, you end up with a concept of good which is independent from God. Therefore we would not need God in order to know what is good. Thus, he concludes, when we read the Bible, our interpretations should be constrained and controlled by our scientific knowledge, and we should reinterpret those passages which are contradictory to modern scientific knowledge. Carruthers states that if, in our secular view, we can find no moral objection to homosexuality, then we must dismiss St. Paul’s condemnation of it as Paul speaking as a man of his time, rather than accept it as the word of God.

I cannot digress into lengthy discussion of these interesting tangents at this juncture. Rather, the point is that Carruthers’s objections to animal rights are not rooted in religious argumentation. Thus he comes close to supporting the stewardship motif but falls short because of his lack of theistic reference.

those advocating religiously based ethics, particularly Christians, “to deny rights to animals yet talk of humans having duties toward animals.”¹

Recognizing Godlovitch’s claim that the grounding point of ethics is an unprovable presupposition, the Christian looks to God for moral guidance. In addition to the statement that “the earth is the Lord’s,”² further texts reinforce the idea that God also owns the wild beasts and the “cattle on a thousand hills.”³ The biblical God knows and sees all,⁴ and is maker and source of wisdom.⁵ But these attributes alone are not enough.

As we have seen Frey argue, moral rights need to be connected to legal rights.⁶ Thus, God’s awareness of all behavior must be complemented with a judicial dimension, and hence the necessity of the doctrine of divine judgment of the world. As Qoheleth tells us, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man. For God shall bring every work

¹Dolan, 136. Regan hardly mentions the use of God in indirect duty models, reserving the issue to two brief acknowledgments of such a belief, but he never interacts with it in any substantive way. This may be due to earlier arguments in chapter 1, where he eliminates religious theories as viable sources of ethics, thus siding with Rachels in disconnecting God from morality. See Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 150, 193. By contrast, we have seen Rachels acknowledge the significance of religious ethics and offer a thoughtful response, and thus commend him for it.

²Exod 9:29; Deut 10:14; Ps 24:1.

³Ps 50:10.

⁴Isa 46:10; 1 Cor 3:19-20.

⁵Prov 2:6; 8:22.

⁶Frey, 8-9.

into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil.”¹

Stories like God’s reaction to Balaam beating his donkey, and His threat in Revelation to “destroy them which destroy the earth,”² seem to indicate that there will be judicial reckoning for how men treat God’s earth and animals. And the God who never sleeps or slumbers, and knows when the sparrow falls, even numbering the hairs of our heads, also promises that he does not forget things.³ Thus the only weak point in the indirect-duty-to-God view is the human agent. But even then, the forgetful human will be held accountable. The indirect duty view, as duties to an almighty, governing God, means that even if we deny that animals have unique rights and privileges in and of themselves, there are still universal, morally binding duties towards them. Thus, it is not duties in reference to man, but in reference to God that will provide the moral foundation for maintaining moral obligations to the animal kingdom, while still ascribing a higher level of moral status to humans.

After examining a number of anti-speciesist attempts to find a functional model for grounding individual rights that will include some animals with humans in the sphere of moral protection, I have found that the proposed criteria for moral status seem to create as many or more problems than they solve. Perhaps this is, in part, because these arguments are not part of an orderly, unified system of thought. Rachels’s moral

¹Ecc1 12:13-14 KJV.

²Num 22:21-34; Rev 11:18. Balaam’s confession of sin is in the context of the angel’s confrontation over how he had treated his donkey.

³Ps 121:4; Isa 49:15; Matt 10:29-30; Luke 12:6-7.

individualism was a start towards making an orderly system, but he does little else with it. Thus in later works he expanded and developed his ideas. What shall we make of his expanded version of ethics in reference to evolution and its impact on morality?

Analysis of Rachels's Expanded Ethical Theory

Introduction

Rachels's use of evolution in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* at first seems trite. Maybe this is because he treats evolution as an accepted fact instead of as the scientific theory it is. Furthermore, Rachels does not explain why relative newness on the evolutionary timetable means humans should not prefer their own species over others. He just tosses the idea out that being relative newcomers should make us humble. But why should it? By evolutionary models, the humano-centric mentality must have been a trait that helped man avoid extinction and become the superior species he now is. So why is human preference wrong?

Rachels's only answer is that it seems to open the door for mistreatment of animals. But in his textbooks, he never really addresses why the animals should be considered for moral protection, except for a brief reference to their ability to suffer. Rachels could have strengthened his case against human hubris had he chosen to use an evolutionary kinship argument similar to Dawkins. Rachels himself admits the theoretical portions are incomplete but rightly justifies this due to the target audience of his book—people who have never studied ethics.¹

¹Rachels, *Elements* (2002), ix.

Consequentialist Tendencies

On the other side of the coin, Rachels's other deductions from Darwinism make rational sense. For example, it seems nearly self-evident that consequentialism is a logical extension of evolutionary principles. This, in turn, leads to a teleological form of ethics in which the moral good is maximizing good consequences. As Peter Singer notes, "Consequentialists start not with moral rules but with goals. They assess the actions by the extent to which they further these goals."¹ Rawls points out the attractiveness of consequentialism in stating, "Teleological theories have a deep intuitive appeal since they seem to embody the idea of rationality. It is natural to think that rationality is maximizing something and that in morals it must be maximizing the good. Indeed, it is tempting to suppose that it is self-evident that things should be arranged as to lead to the most good."²

Rachels certainly takes advantage of the intuitive appeal of teleological ethics, especially Utilitarianism, but he appears to avoid some of the limits of consequential ethics. Singer notes that "the consequences of an action vary according to the circumstances in which it is performed."³ Pure consequentialism, then, has at least two crucial limits. First, no matter what one's motive is, whatever one *intended* the consequences to be, they may turn out different from expected and thus the agent can end

¹Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3.

²Rawls, 22.

³Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3.

up acting immorally by accident. Consequentialism thus gives little assurance that good intentions can produce good results. This inability to give moral confidence highlights a second major limitation of consequentialism.

The second weakness of consequentialism is that it is only as effective as our capability to forecast results of our actions. In average, simple circumstances, this may not be much of a problem. If a man takes the radiator cap off his car radiator immediately after driving, he is likely to get scalded by boiling coolant. But in more complicated issues, our ability to forecast results accurately diminishes significantly. The difficulty of some medical prognoses can be good illustrations of the difficulty of forecasting consequences. Rachels does nothing to address these limitations except to acknowledge that virtues such as love and loyalty are important, even though they may not show immediate consequentialist value. For that we must give him credit. On the other hand, however, it seems that Rachels himself may have fallen victim to the apparent self-evidential qualities of teleological ethics.

A final aspect of the problem of forecasting consequences is one I have never seen addressed by consequentialists. We have seen Rachels demand that we include future generations in our moral reckoning. But how far into the future should we calculate potential consequences in order to properly consider everyone's benefits? Suppose there is an energy executive deciding on policies and procedures for finding more oil, gas, coal, etc. How far into the future should she calculate projected consequences? A month? A year? 5 years? 50 years? 150 years? Assumably one should integrate all future consequences into the reckoning, yet the further forward in time one makes projections,

the greater the chance of inaccuracy. This, in turn, increases the chance that an action that seems moral at first can end up becoming immoral over time. The limited ability of man to forecast consequences points us to the fact that human reason is limited and fallible. This raises questions about the limits of human reason.

Is Reason Alone Sufficient?

Rachels essentially tries to use reason as the sole ground of morality. His cohort in animal liberation philosophy, Peter Singer, likewise puts all his moral eggs in the basket of reason.¹ Singer, however, may have unwittingly crippled the reason-alone case. While arguing for an ethics based solely on reason, he makes a lengthy argument that rationality is not limited to ethics because one can be rational while still being unethical. Reason thus does not *have* to be ethical.²

This observation deals a fatal blow to the belief that morality can be determined solely by reason. If, as Singer says, the unethical can be equally in accordance with reason, then reason alone must be incapable of determining what is moral and immoral. Some other assisting element is now needed. As Gordon Preece states, "Reason is

¹Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 8-9. See also: Peter Singer, *Rethinking*, 189, 220, where Singer is apparently attracted to an ethics based on reason alone because he perceives the "traditional" or "standard view" of ethics, i.e., the Judeo-Christian moral system, as being "paradoxical" and "incoherent." His cohort in advocating infanticide, Helga Kuhse says: "Peter Singer has been accused of being cold-hearted and excessively rational, and it is true, as Singer explained to a reporter, that for him it is generally reason first and emotions second." See Kuhse, "Introduction: The Practical Ethics of Peter Singer," 11.

²Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 320-335.

important, but not all-important.”¹ Tony Coady notes that reason must take the facts of human nature into account including dispositions and emotions. He asserts that such moral emotions as sympathy, resentment, indignation, and compassion, are important to rationality and ethics.² Thus Preece declares that “humankind does not live by head alone.”³ To do so would make one, in C. S. Lewis’s words, “Men Without Chests.”

Lewis has created a word picture in which, reason, like a king, is to rule man through an executive officer. Thus, “the head rules the belly through the chest—the seat . . . of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest—Magnanimity, Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between the cerebral man and the visceral man. It may even be said that by this middle element man is man: for by his intellect his is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.” Lewis then charges that some modern educators, in the name of being intellectual, are out to create men without chests—without habituated moral sentiments. He then concludes that

¹Gordon Preece, “The Unthinkable and Unlivable Singer,” in *Rethinking Peter Singer: A Christian Critique*, ed. Gordon Preece (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 54.

²Tony Coady, “Morality and Species,” *Res Publica* 8, no. 2 (1999): 12. Coady is reacting to Singer’s direct rejection of emotional influences in moral thinking. See Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 170-171, where Singer asserts that when contemplating infanticide, “We should put aside feelings based on the small, helpless and—sometimes—cute appearance of human infants,” and calls such emotions “strictly irrelevant” to the moral evaluation of infanticide. Thus, Rachels’s MSU is of significance in that Rachels has called for morals to be based on the facts of human nature as explained by Darwinism, including emotions. Significantly, he also has gone beyond Darwinism to take the facts of our psychological and emotional nature and include those factors in MSU, as Coady suggests the ethicist should.

³Preece, “The Unthinkable,” 55.

“in a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them honor and virtue. . . . We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”¹ In short, both moral intuition and sentiment are needed to assist our powers of reason and prevent unethical conclusions. Rachels partially acknowledges this need in recognizing the moral importance of virtues such as love and loyalty which normally would not fit into a Utilitarian-style ethics, but he does not go far enough in allowing moral intuitions to aid reason in shaping moral conduct.²

The Norm of Treating People as They Deserve

A final issue of Rachels’s ethics is his proposed norm of treating people as they deserve. Certainly, there is a need for some concept of the basic principle of just deserts. Justice is crippled if there is no foundational concept that freely chosen behaviors can and should be duly recompensed. But, Rachels has no corresponding concept of grace to mingle with the concept of deserts. In this regard, it seems that biblical Christianity has a great advantage, but as that is more a theological concern, I shall instead inquire into the tie between deserts and exceptions. Rachels uses the principle of deserts as a means to

¹C. S. Lewis. *The Abolition of Man: How Education Develops Man’s Sense of Morality* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1947), 34-35.

²Singer illustrates the divorce of moral intuitions from reason when he argues for the moral acceptability of infanticide. In *Practical Ethics*, 170-171, he states: “We should put aside feelings based on the small, helpless and—sometimes—cute appearance of human infants. . . . IF we can put aside these emotionally moving but strictly irrelevant aspects of killing of a baby we can see that the grounds for not killing persons do not apply to newborn infants.” Rachels appears not to be quite so radical in his devotion to reason. For more discussion of the need of moral intuitions, see Preece, “The Unthinkable,” 26-27, 32, esp. 54-59.

know when to make an exception to the moral obligation to promote everyone's interests alike. But how easily can this exception be made? How moral is a morality that can be relatively easily bypassed with exceptions?

We have arrived at two major but conflicting views of morality. One dictionary of philosophical terms defines "morality" as "what in fact people believe to be right or wrong."¹ Such a definition of morality makes it subject to the whims of people's beliefs. Rachels's concept of the optimal list fits into this definition of morality as being what the individual believes to be right or wrong for his/herself.

But this definition of morality seems tremendously fickle and shallow. Should not something moral carry more weight than mere "belief" even if that belief is well reasoned? Morality should be more universally binding and prescriptive if it is to have any meaning. Thus Tom Regan declares that a moral principle, "must prescribe that *all* moral agents are required to act in certain ways, thereby providing, so we are to assume, rational guidance in the conduct of life."² *The American Heritage Dictionary*, however, provides a different definition of morality: "The quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct."³ In a similar fashion, *The Living Webster Dictionary* gives the

¹Gregory Pence, *A Dictionary of Common Philosophical Terms* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), s.v. "morality."

²Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 130. Emphasis mine.

³*The American College Dictionary*, 2d College ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), s.v. "morality."

definition, “the quality of conforming to principles of good conduct.”¹ Notice that here morality involves conformity to moral standards, which seem to be cast as universal. Regan thus correctly catches the prescriptive and universal elements of morality. It seems that Rachels’s planning for exceptions weakens these two key elements of morality, leaving us on the edge of ethical subjectivism—right and wrong are what we believe or decide is right and wrong. On the other hand, we must not confuse situational flexibility in applying moral principles. Rachels is to be commended for his situational sensitivity, but it seems he has sacrificed too much in the process, leaving morality as less than universally prescriptive.

Another key problem comes in Rachels’s argument that we should treat individuals as they deserve to be treated based on their prior, freely chosen behavior. If just deserts are based on what the agent has freely chosen, then the whole subjects-of-a-life argument from *Created from Animals* gets called into question. The marginal human, including the infant, and the shrimp have not freely chosen their condition. Why then should their lack of self-awareness become a criteria for moral exclusion in some circumstances? By arguing for treatment based on recompensing responsibility, Rachels introduces a huge conflict into his system of ethics, particularly in reference to justifying differential treatment between the interests of marginal human cases and a higher animal, as neither party has the ability to make the free choices upon which the principle of just deserts stands. Rachels neither shows recognition of this problem, nor offers any solution to it.

¹*The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Chicago, IL: The English Language Institute of America, 1975), s.v. “morality.”

Analysis of Rachels's Attacks on the Image-of-God Thesis

Introduction

We come now to Rachels's unique contribution. Rachels appears to be unique in his effort to use the theory of evolution to dethrone traditional, Christian ethics, and then to propose a replacement moral system based on the principles of Darwinism. I shall divide this analysis into two sections. First I shall examine Rachels's claims that Darwinism undermines traditional ethics. In particular, I shall especially focus on his attempts to discredit the image of God thesis, though I shall also briefly survey his efforts to undermine the rationality thesis. Second, I shall analyze the nature of the ethics that Rachels proposes for replacing traditional ethics to see key implications for Christian morality.

It would be easy to merely say that it is self-evident that if man evolved from apes instead of being specially created by God for a particular purpose, then man cannot be made in the image of God so therefore cannot claim special significance over the rest of creation. Though true, if Rachels is right, such an argument seems shallow and trite. Rachels provides substantive reasons beyond this basic truism for concluding that evolution indeed undermines man's special status as the image of God. We saw that Rachels uses two closely related issues to assert that Darwinism gives good reasons for rejecting the image-of-God-thesis: Teleology and the problem of evil. These two pillars of Rachels's argument open some key vistas of moral and theological implications, some of which we have seen Rachels explicate. At the heart of both arguments is the belief

that the present natural order is, in some way, incompatible with the existence of God as traditionally depicted in Christianity.

Analysis of the Attack on Teleology

The traditional view of God has been seen to heavily involve the concept of a divine design that can be found in nature. By contrast, Rachels has flatly asserted that Darwinism is devoid of any such design and thus is incompatible with a traditional view of God. In identifying teleology as the philosophical nerve of Darwinism, Rachels thus intersects a long-standing philosophical debate to which he makes little or no reference. Wiker frames the design issue in terms of a war between two philosophical world-views: Aristotelian and Epicurean. Teleology was later argued in German philosophical circles, with Kant and Hegel favoring cosmic design while Nietzsche rejected it.

Aristotle versus Epicurus

Epicurus

Wiker asserts that “Aristotle’s account of nature is teleological . . . because nature always acts for an end, the completeness of particular forms. . . . Epicurean materialism is nonteleological.”¹ Aristotle’s belief that there was a purpose and design in nature can be seen, for example, in his work, *Parts of Animals (De partibus animalium)*. Here, Aristotle discusses which is first in priority: The Final Cause, that for the sake of which the thing is formed, and the Efficient Cause, to which the beginning of motion (i.e.,

¹Wiker, 103. See also pp. 20-21, where Wiker identifies this point as “the argument of this book.”

development) is due. Aristotle concludes that it is clearly the Final Cause that is first, since it is the *logos* or rational ground that determines course of development of each entity of nature. ¹ "Logically prior to the seed stands that of which it is the seed, because the End is an actual thing and the seed is but a formative process."²

Aristotle explicitly rejects the idea that anything in nature originates or develops through chance. "So Empedocles was wrong when he said that many of the characteristics which animals have are due to some accident in the process of their formation."³ By contrast, he asserts, based on his teleological principle of the Final Cause, that, "*because* the essence of man is what it is, *therefore* a man has such and such parts, since there cannot be man without them. . . . *Because* man is such and such, *therefore* the process of his formation must of necessity be such and such and take place in such a manner. . . . And thus similarly with all the things that are constructed by nature."⁴ Thus, Aristotle clearly believes in an internal principle, which inherently contains design, which makes the man, dog, oak, etc., what they are. There is a design

¹Aristotle, *Aristotle in Twenty Three Volumes*, vol. 12, *Parts of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 57, 59.

²Ibid., 75.

³Ibid., 61.

⁴Ibid., 63 (emphases original in the English translation). Aristotle makes similar arguments when discussing the formation of the embryo. See, Aristotle, *Aristotle in Twenty Three Volumes*, vol. 13, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 145-155.

for each entity. By contrast, we shall see that Epicurus rejected any concept of design in the cosmos, and did so, in part, through severing the gods from any work of rulership.

Epicurus

Epicurus was an atomist who believed that all matter is eternal, though the atoms may recombine. Hence he interpreted reality as being fundamentally materialist, without design in nature, and that true knowledge of that reality is to be gained through our senses.¹ This view, in turn, affects his view of the nature of man and of the gods.

Concerning man, Epicurus taught that the human soul disintegrates at death, and that in death there is no sense-perception.² In a letter to Menoecus, he wrote, "Get used to believing that death is nothing to us. For all good and bad consists in sense-experience, and death is the privation of sense-experience."³ Here we see a clear connection of ethical good being connected to sense-experience and thus consequences. This is the hedonist principle that what brings pleasure is good, while that which causes displeasure or pain is evil. As Epicurus asserted, "We say that pleasure is the starting-point and goal of living blessedly."⁴ It seems significant that Rachels, as a modern materialist, follows

¹Epicurus, "Letter to Herodotus," in *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 6-7. This also means that for Epicurus, there can be an infinite number of cosmoi (8).

²Ibid., 14, 18.

³Epicurus, "Letter to Menoecus," in *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 29.

⁴Ibid., 30.

the Epicurean pattern of uniting his materialism with a consequentialist criterion of good and evil. It seems probable that there is a natural linkage between them. But why?

For Epicurus, the gods cannot be gods, enjoying a blessed and happy existence, unless they are free from "disturbance in the mind and leisure from all duties."¹ Cicero describes the Epicurean view as believing that a god is not needed to explain the origins of this earth and its contents when one understands the vast reaches of space, filled with an infinite number of atoms that combine and recombine to produce "those forms and shapes which you think cannot be produced without the use of a veritable blacksmith's shop!"² Cicero's Epicurus thus rails against the advocates of divine design, saying, "And so you have burdened us with the yoke of an eternal master whom we are to fear by day and by night; for who would not fear an inquisitive and busy god who foresees everything, thinks about and notices everything, and supposes that everything is his own business?"³ Design is here linked to accountability. If God is busy, designing and creating, then everything is His business, and we can be held accountable to Him, thus the fear by day and night. Thus, in his own words, Epicurus concludes, "It was impossible for someone ignorant about the nature of the universe [i.e., his atomistic, materialist view] but still suspicious about the subjects of the myths [i.e., about gods and

¹Cicero, "On the Nature of the Gods," in *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 53.

²Ibid., 54.

³Ibid.

death] to dissolve his feelings of fear about the most important matters."¹ Thus, for Epicurus, natural science was the means to disassociate the gods from our reality and give us the "just life" which is "most free from disturbance" by the gods and death.²

The contrasting positions on teleology in the natural world held by Aristotle and Epicurus have been discussed and advocated periodically through the ensuing centuries, and we cannot pursue all of those views within the scope of this work. However, I shall briefly move a few centuries forward to two German Idealists—Kant and Hegel—who advocated teleology, and then Nietzsche, who rejected it. Because Nietzsche is so significant in this postmodern era, and the fact that he reacted, in part, to Kant, makes it seem prudent to briefly explore their views of teleology in nature.

Selected Views from German Philosophers

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant seems to hold a teleological view of history and nature. Kant argues that "whatever concept one may hold, from a metaphysical point of view,

¹Epicurus, "Ancient Collection of Maxims," in *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 33.

²*Ibid.* Lucretius adopted this Epicurean view and argued against Aristotelian teleology. We are not to fall into the error that eyes were made so that we can see, etc. "Nothing is born is us simply in order that we may use it, but that which is born creates the use. . . . All the members . . . existed long before their use; they could not have grown up for the sake of the use." Clearly he rejects any design or designer in nature, and significantly, sounds exceptionally close to Darwin's view nearly two millennia later. This would imply no design in reality or morality, and Epicurus has already demonstrated the logical moral outcomes of such a view. See, Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 341, 343.

concerning the freedom of the will, certainly its appearances, which are human actions, like every other natural event are determined by universal laws. . . . Each, according to his own inclination, follows his own purpose, often in opposition to others; yet each individual and people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal; all work toward furthering it, even if they would set little store by it if they did know it."¹ Thus Kant believed that some universal inner principle drove humans and nature towards an overarching, but generally unspecified, goal.

In this regard, he is reminiscent of Aristotle's concept of an inner *logos* that moves the things of nature towards particular goals. Kant gives several theses that further express his belief in a larger, goal-driven process working in human kind and nature at large. For example, the first two theses are, "All natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end," and, "In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural capacities which are directed to the use of his reason are to be fully developed only in the race, not in the individual."² Nature is regularly spoken of as determining and regulating things to particular purposes and ends. This would make sense in light of Kant's epistemology where nature has endowed all human minds with certain *a priori* categories with which they experience life and reality.³ All reality for Kant seems to be imbued with a type of rational structure. It would make sense that if

¹Immanuel Kant, *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck, Robert E. Aulen, and Emil L. Fackenheim, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11.

²Ibid., 12, 13.

³See, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (New York: Willey Book Co., 1900), 2-12.

nature has design and purpose, then morality would be a part of that reality and originate out of some larger design. Thus, in arguing how self-restrained compliance with duty is preferable to compliance through external constraint, Kant argues that this shift from external to internal motivation comes, in part, by the laying down of "ends," not prescribed by our preferences, but by the designs found within practical reason itself. Then he concludes, "The highest, unconditional end of pure practical reason (which is still a duty) consists in this: that virtue be its own end and, despite the benefits it confers on human beings, also its own reward."¹ Kant thus associated prescriptive morality with a teleological view of reality. This would make sense, for if there is a master design for reality, morals must be included in that design.

Georg Hegel

Georg Hegel adopted and refined this Kantian teleology while rejecting some of Kant's epistemological theory.² He especially highlighted the role of teleology in the movements of history. Reason is "the infinite material of all natural and spiritual life, and the infinite form which activates this material content. . . . Its end is the absolute and ultimate end of everything; and on the other, it is itself the agent which implements and realizes this end, translating it from potentiality into actuality both in the natural universe

¹Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158.

²For more discussion of the epistemological differences between Hegel and Kant see Andrew Schouten, "Naturalism Contra Idealism: Metaphysics, Teleology, Ethics," 20 April 2004, 7, andrew_redux.blogs.com/redux/files/naturalism_contra_idealism_metaphysics_teleology_ethics.doc (6-12-06).

and in the spiritual world—that is, in world history."¹ Even more explicitly, he asserts "that world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational process—whose rationality is not that of a particular subject, but a divine and absolute reason—this is a proposition whose truth we must assume; its proof lies in the study of world history itself, which is the image and enactment of reason."² Hegel also uses alternate vocabulary to label the teleological force that drives history, calling it a world spirit (*geist*) that arose as a necessary evolution from the rational processes. "This spirit is the substance of history," and is asserted to be "absolute."³

This rational, directing process or spirit is also described as being "the divine will which rules supreme and is strong enough to determine the overall content."⁴ Hegel goes so far as to label this guided process of history as both "the realization of Spirit," and the "true *Theodicæa*," finally asserting that what "is happening every day, is not only not 'without God,' but is essentially His Work."⁵ It seems self-evident that Hegel is essentially promoting a form of pantheism, and we shall shortly examine the work of evolutionary theologians who take a panentheist approach to reality, but without any real

¹Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 27.

²Ibid., 28.

³Ibid., 29.

⁴Ibid., 30. This *spirit* operates through the dialectical process described, for example, on page 33.

⁵Georg Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 457. These quotations are from the final paragraph of the book.

design or purpose, unlike Hegel. It seems evident, however, that if reason is a divine force in history that would also be a factor in ethics and morals as well. Thus Hegel and Kant support an approach to reality that seems to necessitate a prescriptive, rationally designed morality. But just as Epicurus saw no design when Aristotle did, in a similar fashion, Friedrich Nietzsche denied cosmic design, contradicting the Kantian and Hegelian support of teleology.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche appears to have developed his nihilistic philosophy, in part, out of his perception of the nature of the natural world, and how language relates to objects in that world. In *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*, he uses the example of the leaf (*Blatt*). Each individual leaf is unique and different, with no two being identical, yet we eliminate those real, living differences to create language that contains, not the idea of an actual leaf, but an abstraction of leaves. Thus language is always metaphoric. Thus all truths are actually lies since each of these truths is an abstraction. Thus he asserts that, "Die verschiedenen Sprachen, neben einander gestellt zeigen, dass es bei den Worten nie auf die Wahrheit, nie auf einen adäquaten Ausdruck ankommt: denn sonst gäbe es nicht so viele Sprachen. Das "Ding an sich" (das würde eben die reine folgenlose Wahrheit sein) ist auch dem Sprachbildner ganz unfasslich und ganz und gar nicht erstrebenswert."¹ Since the "thing in itself" is inaccessible to human language, all

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne," n.d., <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/tlsg.htm> (8 August 2006). The site notes this is from the *Nachlass*, Fragment 1873. My translation: "The different languages

attempts to describe it through language are abstractions and thus untruths.

Nietzsche laments the human tendency to gravitate to these abstractions and thus be self-deceived. "Das Uebersehen des Individuellen und Wirklichen giebt uns den Begriff, wie es uns auch die Form giebt, wohingegen die Natur keine Formen und Begriffe, also auch keine Gattungen kennt, sondern nur ein für uns unzugängliches und undefinirbares X.

Denn auch unser Gegensatz von Individuum und Gattung is anthropomorphisch und entstammt nicht dem Wesen der Dinge, wenn wir auch nicht zu sagen wagen, dass er ihm nicht entspricht: das wäre nämlich eine dogmatische Behauptung und als solche ebenso unerweishlich wie ihr Gegenteil."¹ Thus, Nietzsche seems to deny the correspondence model of truth, for the thing in itself seems viewed as unknowable. Thus, the only alternative is Nihilism.

For Nietzsche, the truth ultimately "turns against [Christian] morality," exposing its "teleology," that is, its orientation to purpose and design.² In another work, he laments

placed beside each other demonstrate that, with words, one never comes to the truth, never to an adequate expression. The 'thing in itself' (which also will be the pure truth free of consequence [i.e., outside influence]) is to the language creator [literally: sculptor] totally incomprehensible and not at all worth the effort." This website also has an English version: Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," n.d., <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/tls.htm> (8 August 2006).

¹Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge." My translation: "The failure to notice the individual and the actual gives us the idea as well as giving us the form, whereas nature knows no forms and ideas, also no species, but only an X [which is] consequently, for us, inaccessible and undefinable. Because even our contrast of [the] individual and species is anthropomorphic and does not originate in the nature of the thing, if we do not venture to say that it [the contrast] does not correspond to it [nature], that [the anthropomorphic contrast] would be, namely, indemonstrable as the antithesis to it [nature]."

²Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Anthony Ludonici, *The Complete Works of Nietzsche*, vol. 14, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 9.

this desire to explain things in terms of purpose and design as "the essence of our species and herd."¹ In fact, he defines morality as "herd-instinct in the individual."² This teleology is then called a "lie,"³ and Nietzsche goes on to argue that there is no causality in which something unconditioned (i.e., such as God) is a causal force and the reason for the conditioned.⁴ Thus, for the thinking man, traditional forms of morality lead to nihilism because their lies are discovered. For Nietzsche, Nihilism means "that the highest values are losing their value. . . . There is no answer to the question: 'to what purpose?' . . . Life is absurd."⁵

In Nietzsche's view, "Once you know that there are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for only against a world of purposes does the word 'accident' have a meaning. Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life."⁶ This rejection of design led Nietzsche to deny any other "worlds" (such as heaven) beyond our own, and any belief in having life after death, to deny the existence of hell,⁷ and to assert that the

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27.

²Ibid., 115.

³Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 9.

⁴Ibid., 19.

⁵Ibid., 8.

⁶Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 110.

⁷Ibid., 131, 187; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All or None*, trans. Thomas Conner, *The Complete Works of Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, vol. 11 (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 7, 15.

notion that God is now dead.¹ The result of our rejecting these lies is that "the authority of conscience" now takes first place over any of the following authorities: personal authority, reason, history and its immanent spirit (an apparent reference to Hegel), and happiness, especially the happiness of the greatest number.² We now create ourselves anew through the exercise of our own wills.³

Significant to this study is his assertion that, "It is supposed that one can get along with a morality bereft of religious background; but in this direction the road to Nihilism is opened."⁴ A key result of this Nihilism is that "in his own estimation, man has lost an infinite amount of *dignity*."⁵ Nietzsche here affirms a key claim of Rachels, that loss of teleology leads to a loss of human dignity. Nietzsche clearly develops the formative concepts of Epicurus to their logical results.

Two opposing world-views

This excursus into philosophical discussion over teleology affirms Rachels's assertion about its significance, and it is the tension between two opposing world-views that Wiker so masterfully develops. Rachels notes that it was Hume who showed the logical deficiencies of the design argument, but that he was not able to provide an

¹Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 6; idem, *Gay Science*, 119-120.

²Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 20.

³Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 189.

⁴Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 19.

⁵Ibid.

intellectually satisfying alternative for explaining the apparent design found in nature.

Thus, Rachels rightly senses the significance of Darwin in that he “did what Hume could not do: he provided an alternative, giving people something else they could believe.

Only then was the design hypothesis dead.”¹ Hunter concurs on this connection between

Hume and Darwin, stating, “Darwin’s great contribution to this tradition [of distancing God from creation to avoid natural evil] was the scientific flavor he gave to the solution, to the point that most readers lost sight of the embedded metaphysical presuppositions.

Whereas the earlier solutions lacked detailed explanations, Darwin provided scientific

laws and biological details.”² Wiker affirms Rachels’s conclusion with his assertion that

“the war had already been won, so to speak, and the appearance of Darwin’s *Origin* was

simply the last piece of the machine falling into place with a satisfying ‘snap.’” Again, a

few pages later, Wiker makes his point by quoting Richard Dawkins’s assertion that

“Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”³ The irony is, however,

that the choice to accept a teleological or materialist world-view seems to be grounded

ultimately in faith, not in empirical evidence. Thus, as Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll

assert, “Neither of these theories can be proven or disproven, and each can develop

arguments against the other. The philosopher who wants to meditate on philosophical

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 120.

²Cornelius Hunter, *Darwin’s God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 126.

³Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Experience of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: Norton, 1986), 6; quoted in Wiker, 149.

matters *first must decide which outlook he accepts*, and then proceed to construct his theories."¹

The incompatibility of the classical view of God with Darwinism has been well highlighted through the issue of teleology, and Rachels is to be commended for expressing it so clearly. What Rachels seems to imply beyond the argument is brilliant. He has argued that the world “when viewed from a non-religious perspective, is a cold, meaningless place, devoid of value or purpose.”² Effectively, this means that *reality* is cold, meaningless, and devoid of value or purpose. Put another way, if there is a God, why would He avoid design in reality, while using it in morality?³ Furthermore, if, as Rachels and others have charged, morality is the product of evolution, which has no design, how can there be a divine design for morality? Morality at best would have to be totally relativistic in nature. Rachels’s argument is fundamentally sound, provided he recognizes the assumption he explicitly included in the argument—namely that the world is viewed from a non-religious perspective. But why should one view the world this

¹Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 132.

²Rachels, *CfA*, 54.

³See also, Jerry D. Korschmeier, *Evolution and Eden: Balancing Original Sin and Contemporary Science* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 89, where he alludes to this issue in arguing that “the concept of a fixed human nature designed by God has been much used in the natural law approach to moral theology. *The laws of nature reflect the laws of God*, this system proposes, and violation of nature’s laws, or purposes, is deemed to be sinful as a result. This idea that physical processes determine the only proper human ends (physicalism) provides the support for such things as the [Catholic] Church’s position on contraception, because interference with the physical purpose of the sex act is considered to violate divine law. *The nature of evolution belies this particular version of a natural law approach.*” Emphasis mine.

way? Rachels logically turns to the classic form of the argument from the problem of evil to provide most of his rationale for rejecting a religious perspective of the world.

Does Natural Evil Undermine the Image-of-God Thesis?

Hume on the Problem of Evil

In addition to attacking teleology, Rachels makes use of the larger problem of natural evil to undermine theism, and thus theistic ethics. The problem of natural evil is most famously articulated by David Hume in the late eighteenth century. In his *Dialogues*, parts 10 and 11, Hume seeks to refute the ability to do Natural Theology, and in the portion we shall examine, makes specific arguments denying we can make any analogy from man to God. In Part 10, Hume introduces the argument with a long, almost redundant, yet pathos laden description of human and animal misery in this world.¹

Through the character *Philo*, Hume challenges another character, *Cleanthes*:

And is it possible, *Cleanthes*, said *Philo*, that after all these reflections, and infinitely more, which might be subjected, you can still preserve your anthropomorphism [i.e., man and God are analogous], and assert the moral attributes of the deity, his justice, benevolence, mercy, and rectitude, to be of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures? His power we allow is infinite: Whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy: Therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: He is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end: But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore it is not established for that purpose. . . .

Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. 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?²

¹David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell (New York: Penguin Books), 103-108.

²*Ibid.*, 108-109.

The core of Hume's argument, then, is that natural evil is inconsistent, yea, incompatible with the concept of there being an all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving God. This is seen in his conclusion to Part 10: "But there is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind, from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes, or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone."¹ A few pages later, in Part 11, Hume, through Philo, answers the rebuttal that the balance between pain and happiness in the world favors happiness, therefore the pain is explainable in terms of a good God. He declares that even if there is a balance which favors happiness over pain it proves nothing: "For this is not, by any means what we expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness. Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. It is contrary to his intention,? But he is almighty."² Notice the argument is based on human expectation and extrapolation about God. If God is loving and powerful, then Hume *expects* there can be no natural evil.

Hume next resorts to the bad engineer argument, in which it is argued that if God is an all-wise designer, why do all these problems and malfunctions abound? Every animal lacks a key skill for its survival and things like the weather bring both life-giving rains

¹Ibid., 112.

²Ibid.

and destructive floods.¹ Thus, for Hume, God must be a poor designer or malicious in character. Hume now comes to his crowning point. Says Hume:

The true conclusion is, that the original source of all things is *entirely indifferent* to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy.

There may *four* hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: *that* they are endowed with perfect goodness, *that* they have perfect malice, *that* they are opposite and have both goodness and malice, *that* they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles. And the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seems to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.²

This completes Hume's articulation of the basic argument from natural evil.

C. S. Lewis has put the argument in a pithy, succinct form: "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks

¹Ibid., 117-119. Richard Dawkins uses a form of this argument in arguing against the design hypothesis. He likens the design argument to doing reverse-engineering: Since X does Y job well, it must have been designed by its maker to do X. He adds to it the assumption that design is trying to "maximize" something. So he applies these two principles to create a bad engineer argument against teleological interpretation. "Cheetahs give every indication of being superbly designed for something, and it should be easy enough to reverse engineer them and work out their utility function. They appear to be well designed to kill antelopes. . . . Conversely, if we reverse engineer an antelope we find equally impressive evidence of design for practically the opposite end: the survival of antelopes and starvation among cheetahs. It is as though cheetahs had been designed by one deity and antelopes by another. Alternatively, if there is only one Creator who made the tiger and the lamb, the cheetah and the gazelle, what is He playing at? Is He a sadist who enjoys spectator blood sports?" Dawkins's conclusion is that evolution makes for sense because "the maximizing of DNA survival" is, by contrast, "elegant in its simplicity." Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: BasicBooks/HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 105-106.

²Hume, *Dialogues*, 122.

either goodness, power, or both.' This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form."¹ The fundamental argument asserts that since natural evil exists, whatever or whoever caused this world to exist can be neither loving, nor hostile, but rather must be indifferent. The argument from natural evil has been adopted in succeeding generations.

Mill and Others on the Problem of Evil

John Stuart Mill echoed Hume's bad engineer argument, arguing that religion can only be useful for those of inferior intellect. Says Mill:

For it is impossible that any one who habitually thinks, and who is unable to blunt his inquiring intellect by sophistry, should be able without misgiving to go on ascribing absolute perfection to the author and ruler of so clumsily made and capriciously governed a creation as this planet and the life of its inhabitants. . . . The worship must either be greatly overclouded by doubt, and occasionally quite darkened by it, or the moral sentiments must sink to the low level of the ordinances of Nature: the worshipper [*sic*] must learn to think blind partiality, atrocious cruelty, and reckless injustice, not blemishes in an object of worship, since all these abound to excess in the commonest phenomena of nature.²

Mill also reiterates Hume's argument from expectations, in a way, asserting that the dominant expositions of the ways of God are "on many occasions totally at variance" with the precepts said to be prescribed by this morally perfect deity. He cites several examples of these teachings including the doctrines of Hell, and the doctrinal duo of Predestination and Limited Atonement.³

¹C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), 26.

²John Stuart Mill, "Utility of Religion," in *Three Essays on Religion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1874), 112.

³*Ibid.*, 113-115. Note that two of the three examples are explicitly Calvinist: Predestination and Limited Atonement. While Mill does not use these exact terms, he

What is his response to these doctrines? Mill declares, “Is there any moral enormity which could not be justified by imitation of such a deity?”¹ Mill's argument seems to be that if God can will such suffering in hell by willfully withholding salvation from “so many,” then such a God is immoral and would certainly not be concerned with natural evil. So, like Hume, Mill found the dominant Christian teachings about God's perfections to be incompatible with the existence of natural evil. The incompatibility of natural evil with God as depicted by Christianity has been an oft-repeated refrain since Hume and Mill articulated their opinions.²

Korsmeyer refines the definition of the problem by noting that the locus of the problem of evil is in the natural realm. “Moral evil could always be explained as the result of human sin. But the problem was natural for physical evil.”³ Ruse is even more bold in asserting that “the biggest question of all for the Christian believer is the ‘theodicy’ problem. If, as the Christian believes, God is omnipotent (all powerful) and all-loving, then why evil? . . . How do we explain it?”⁴ The British theologian, Julian Casserley, describes the problem of natural evil as “a theological and intellectual

describes these two doctrines in fairly exquisite detail, strongly asserting their immorality.

¹Ibid., 114.

²An excellent source for tracing the incompatibility argument in history is Cornelius Hunter, *Darwin's God*, cited earlier. Hunter traces this view through many thinkers for the purpose of deriving the doctrine of God assumed by the argument. We shall examine this angle a little later in this work.

³Korsmeyer, 96.

⁴Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be Christian?* 129.

conundrum. . . . It is indeed without doubt the greatest of all the problems with which Christian thinkers and teachers have to grapple.”¹ Alvin Plantinga verifies the problematic nature of Hume’s challenge in saying, “The amount and variety of *evil* in our world has often baffled and perplexed believers in God.” He continues by noting that philosophers have argued that the fact of evil in our world “is both obvious and undeniable; but then belief in God, . . . is in some way intellectually dubious, or questionable, or out of order, or worse.”² Thus many great minds have recognized the enormity of this problem. Rachels has indeed chosen a potent issue with which to undermine the image-of-God-thesis. However, attempts by Christian theologians and philosophers to formulate an answer to this challenge are not lacking. While a full study of this issue will not fit within the scope of this work, a brief survey of responses and counter-responses seems in order, due to the significance of the argument.

¹Casserley, *Man’s Pain*, 11. This book is condensed and republished in the first essay of J[ulian] V. Langmead Casserley, *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. and intro. by C. Don Keys, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 3. Hereafter cited, respectively, as *Man’s Pain* and *Evil*. In this same reference Casserley articulates the problem: “How can we believe, as the Bible and Church teach, that God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving, and the Creator and Master of all things, when the world which He has made and governs contains so much that is painful and unjust? . . . Is it possible for a man who is intelligent and realistic to understand and accept a faith which asserts such paradoxes as these?” For Casserley, however, the problem of pain is not merely theoretical, but practical: “How can I *live* as a Christian in a world in which pain happens to me, or my acquaintances, enemies, and friend? . . . That is the practical problem, and it is the most urgent and challenging problem of all.” Casserley, *Man’s Pain*, 11; idem, *Evil*, 3.

²Alvin Plantinga, “Epistemic Probability and Evil,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 69-70.

Survey of Responses to the Problem of Evil Argument

C. S. Lewis astutely asserts that it is Christianity itself that causes the philosophical problem of pain or natural evil, though the existence of Christianity in a world of pain is also problematic: “To ask whether the universe as we see it looks more like the work of a wise and good Creator or the work of chance, indifference, or malevolence, is to omit from the outset all the relevant factors in the religious problem. . . . *In a sense, it [Christianity] creates, rather than solves the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think to be good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.*”¹

While this is a lucid and valid point, many will not consider this to be any real solution, for explaining the origins of the problem of evil does not solve it. Peter Bertocci, however, lists four standard Christian responses to the problem of evil. First, God did not will evil but allowed it in order to give true freedom to man. Second, suffering is part of God’s ultimate plan for achieving some overall greater goodness. Third, natural evil is a tool God uses to achieve the best possible world. Richness with suffering is better than poorness without it. Finally, in what seems a variant of the third option, suffering prepares man for a joyous eternity with God. It is a disciplinary tool for man’s refinement and purification in preparation for eternal life.²

¹Lewis, *Pain*, 24. Emphasis mine.

²Bertocci, 401-408.

The freedom argument

The freedom argument is rooted in a twofold classification of evil. Ruse observes that “it is customary and convenient to draw a distinction between two kinds of evil: moral evil, that is human-caused evil—Auschwitz—and physical evil, that is the pain of natural processes—the child with sickle-cell anemia.”¹ He then restates the argument in more detail, stating: “The most popular and powerful argument to explain moral evil—one which goes back to Saint Augustine—is that it is something resulting from human free will. God is His love gave humans freedom, and that meant freedom to do ill as well as good. . . . This does not mean that God is indifferent to suffering.” The adequacy of this particular argument depends crucially on our understanding of the notion of free will.²

C. S. Lewis pushes the freedom argument further by arguing that while it may be possible to conceive of a world in which God corrects the consequences of every misuse of our free will, then free will would be blotted out. For example, he argues that if my using a wooden beam as weapon was countered by God making it soft like grass, or if the air would not be permitted to carry the waves of sound containing abusive and dishonest words, then “such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible.”³

¹Ruse, *Can a Darwinian*, 129.

²Ibid.

³Lewis, *Pain*, 32-34. Most of this book is focused on the problem of moral evil, though there is some interaction with the issue of natural evil. Only the last chapter really focuses solely on the problem of natural evil, especially animal pain.

Thus, he concludes, “Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and existence of free wills involve, and you will find that you have excluded life itself.”¹

Ruse appears to counter the free-will choice by arguing that “free will cannot explain away the agony of the child in distress from a genetic ailment.”² Paul Draper charges that the freedom argument still does not answer the question of pain. “Notice that, so far, we have no explanation of the existence of pain. For there are morally right actions and morally wrong actions that do not entail the existence of pain. . . . So God could have given humans freedom without permitting pain.”³ It should be noted, however, that Draper seems to ignore the opposite side of his argument. Just because some forms of free choice do not involve pain, does not necessarily entail that all free choices can be given without possibility of suffering. Draper, however, is not content at criticizing the free will answer to the problem of evil. He also attacks the second argument, in which supreme wisdom permits pain as part of a higher plan for producing a greater good.

¹Ibid.

²Ruse, *Can a Darwinian*, 130.

³Paul Draper, “Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists,” *Nous* 23 (1989): 341. This article was republished in, *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 12-29. This dissertation cites the original journal paging.

Pain as a means to a greater good

Attack of the argument of greater good. Draper summarizes this argument, “Since God’s knowledge about good and evil is limitless, it is not at all surprising that He produces or permits evils for reasons that are unknown to humans.” He offers two rebuttals. First, “antecedently—that is, independent of observations and testimony O[bservation] reports—we have no reason to think that God’s additional knowledge concerning good and evil is such that He would permit any of the facts O[bservation] reports to obtain.”

Second, “Indeed, we have no more reason antecedently to believe that such a being would know some great good unknown to us whose existence entails the existence of pain.”¹ But why? By cutting out observation and testimony from influencing the conclusion, what is left but mere speculation? It seems, then, that the antecedent is one’s presuppositions, which are not necessarily provable anyway. Thus, since Draper rejects theism,² the argument of divine wisdom is, *de facto*, nonsensical.

Bertocci attacks the argument of there being unknown, all-wise purposes, by asserting that the proponent of such a view “argues not from what he knows about the world, but from a conception of what might be.” He later calls these arguments “imaginary conceptions.”³ Eric Kraemer, building on Draper’s work, makes a similar

¹Ibid., 345-346. His use of “antecedently” is not fully clear but seems to be the equivalent of *a priori*.

²Ibid., 334.

³Bertocci, 408.

argument against the idea of God having higher purposes that allow for natural evil to occur. He depicts the argument as “chalking up evil to incomprehensible greater goods that would require it.”¹ Kraemer wonders if a species capable of producing the scientific and technological marvels that we humans have produced “is really beyond God’s ability to teach us even the rudiments, no matter how sketchy or incomplete, of an adequate account of evil.”² But has Kraemer, like Draper, denied the conditions needed for God to teach those rudiments?

Responses to the attack on greater good. Alvin Plantinga does not see our purported ignorance of God’s methods as such a stumbling stone. While admitting that the Epicurean question of how a good and powerful God can permit natural evil, Plantinga nonetheless argues that, “There is no reason to think that if God *did* have a reason for permitting the evil in question, we would be the first to know. . . . we don’t know why God permits evil; *but where, so far, is the problem?*”³ The only problem seems to be the assumption that man’s great intellectual and technological progress implies nothing is beyond his grasp. Plantinga at least is humble enough to acknowledge the limits of human ability, great as it is. He further argues that the existence of evil does not necessarily entail a denial of divine existence. Says Plantinga,

¹Eric Russert Kraemer, “Darwin’s Doubts and the Problems of Animal Pain,” Undated, http://cal.calpoly.edu/~jlynch/Kraemer_Darwin.htm (6 July 2003). Internal evidence points to this being published sometime after 1996.

²Ibid.

³Plantinga, 71.

At present, however, I think it widely conceded that there is nothing like straightforward contradiction or necessary falsehood in the joint affirmation of God and evil; *the existence of evil is not incompatible with the existence of an all powerful, all-knowing and perfectly good God*. Accordingly, those who offer an antitheistic argument from evil—call them ‘atheologians’—have turned from deductive to *problematic* arguments from evil. The typical atheistical claim at present is not that the existence of God is *incompatible* with that of evil, but rather that the latter offers the resources for a strong probabilistic argument against the former.¹

Thus Plantinga asserts that the atheistical argument is not as compelling as it sounds. He bolsters the conclusion that the problem of evil does not entail atheism by arguing that the claim that evil implies God’s existence to be improbable “isn’t just clear or obvious or self evident. . . . Why should we think this is true?”² Yet,

the suggestion is that there are evils such that it is simply apparent that no omnipotent and omniscient being, if there were such a person, would have a good reason for permitting them. . . .

But this to me seems clearly false; that is, it seems that there are evil states of affairs which, while indeed there *could* be an omnipotent, omniscient God who had a good reason for permitting them, are nonetheless such that in fact it is apparent to us that there isn’t any such reason—no outweighing good he couldn’t achieve without permitting the evil in question, and no evil he couldn’t avoid without permitting it. How could such a thing as that be *apparent* to us? Consider the case of the child who dies a lingering and painful death from leukemia. True enough: we can’t see what reason God, if there is such a person, has for permitting this child to suffer in that way. But (granted that it is indeed possible that he have a reason) can we just *see* that he doesn’t have a reason?³

¹Ibid.. First emphasis mine; all others in original.

²Ibid., 72.

³Ibid., 73. Last two emphases mine.

Plantinga has shown that the argument against the possibility of hidden divine purposes fails to acknowledge the finiteness of human knowledge and reason. He bolsters this point by use of the biblical character of Job.

This is the lesson of the book of Job. . . . He can't see any reason why God should allow him to be afflicted as he is; he concludes, unthinkingly, that God doesn't *have* a good reason. As a matter of fact, according to the story, God *does* have a good reason, but the reason involves a transaction among beings some of whom Job has no awareness at all. *The point here is that the reason for Job's suffering is something entirely beyond his ken. . . .*

Job complains that God has no good reason for permitting the evil that befalls him. *He believes that God doesn't have a good reason because he, Job, can't imagine what the reason might be.* In reply, God does not tell him what the reason is; instead, he attacks Job's unthinking assumption that if he can't imagine what reason God might have, then God probably doesn't have a reason at all. . . .

. . . Clearly, the crucial problem for this probabilistic argument from evil is just that nothing much follows from the fact that some evils are inscrutable; if theism is true we would expect that there would be inscrutable evil. Indeed, a little reflection shows there is no reason to think we could so much as grasp God's plans here, even if he proposed to divulge them to us. But then the fact that there is inscrutable evil does not make it improbable that God exists.

Plantinga's argument then is that if theism were true, we should *expect* inscrutable evil to exist.

Casserley makes a similar argument and differentiates between absolute proof and enough knowledge to enable adequate moral function.

If Christianity is true—that is, if the ultimate truth is the God revealed to us in the Bible—then it necessarily follows that the breadth and splendor of the truth must be too great for the finite human mind ever to comprehend it completely and exhaustively. . . .

I do not mean to say, however, that because the Christian cannot know everything he knows nothing. . . . *Thus Christianity gives us a real knowledge of God and a real understanding of the purposes of human life but, quite frankly, not a complete one.* The important thing is that the knowledge which it gives us is sufficient for us in practice. *It gives us enough to guide and shape our lives in*

accordance with God's will and in pursuit of valid purposes.¹

C. S. Lewis builds on the inscrutability argument by asserting that,

we must never allow the problem of animal pain to become the centre of the problem of pain; not because it is unimportant . . . but because it is outside the range of our knowledge. God has given us data which enable us, in some degree, to understand our own suffering: He has given us no such data about beasts.²

Then, he takes the biblical teaching that “man was not the first creature to rebel against his maker” to posit the possibility of satanic activity as the primary cause of natural evil including animal pain.³

Great Controversy motif

Plantinga and Lewis have introduced the concept of a conflict between God and a rebel creature as a partial explanation for the problem of natural evil. This is a familiar concept to the Seventh-day Adventist theologian, for the motif of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan is a dominant theological theme in Adventism. But this motif entails belief in a perfect creation unlike our present one, but corrupted by the influence of creaturely rebellion against the creator, ergo, by sin. John Baldwin, a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, exemplifies this position in his article, “God, the Sparrow, and the Emerald Boa.” Baldwin argues that the “original creation was a predation-free habitat,” and that “there were no carnivores in Eden.” He further

¹Casserley, *Man's Pain*, 14; idem, *Evil*, 4.

²Lewis, *Pain*, 129.

³Ibid., 134.

argues that “sin and its accompanying curses affected life on earth.” He cites the causal connection of sin to death in Romans 5:12 and notes Romans 8:20, that the creation was subjected to futility. There was “an immediate change in the original order—from a death-free habitat to one ruled by the life-death cycle.”¹

Ellen White, a founding pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, ascribes the freedom to sin and to effect such changes as part of a master plan of God to permit true freedom to created moral agents. One example of her teaching in this regard is seen in the statement, “For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his [Satan’s] principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question.”² Thus, White would seem to belong to the group who explain natural evil in terms of being permitted for a greater long-term good.

Kraemer provides a direct challenge to the Great Controversy motif, rejecting the argument that natural evil helps achieve some greater good as “unconvincing.” He suggests a hypothetical scenario in which there are some “idiotic giants, modeled perhaps after the Cyclops, who live on other planets but are obsessed with observing all nonhuman suffering on Earth through powerful telescopes,” and that “every bit of animal

¹ John T. Baldwin, “God, the Sparrow, and the Emerald Boa,” in *Dialogue: An International Journal of Faith, Thought, and Action*, 1996, http://dialogue.adventist.org/articles/08_3_baldwin.htm (6 July 2003).

²E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 42. See also idem, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), chapters 29 and 42.

suffering goes towards improving the moral situation of these pathetic giants, the theist might claim that earthly animal suffering was counterbalanced by creating greater goods [*sic*] elsewhere in the universe.”¹ In almost sarcastic language, Kraemer rejects such a scenario, asserting,

However unlikely this situation might appear to us, and even if we accept the crude Utilitarian calculations it presupposes, the Cyclopsian scenario faces the standard problem confronting most theistic attempts to explain away the existence of evil. This is the problem of making it plausible to believe that God, an all-powerful and all-knowing being, really had no better method available for the moral improvement of the Cyclopsian race than to permit the huge amount of animal suffering we find on the earth. Since we can, with no apparent difficulty, imagine God making video tapes of animal suffering . . . to think of God’s ingenuity being defeated by the mental limitations of the Cyclopsian hordes is a possibility that is hard to take seriously. Clearly a deeper reason is needed to make the necessity of animal suffering plausible.²

Kraemer here reiterates the old argument that God must have had better options than this one to accomplish a greater good. Thus he effectually denies that there can be any truly inscrutable evil within the context of theistic belief. We have already seen an effective response to this charge by Plantinga. Kraemer is following the well-worn path of failing to acknowledge the limits of human understanding. Furthermore, in the Great Controversy motif, there is more than mere moral improvement for the universe. There is also a rescue from the power of sin and a restoration of the pre-sin order.

The deliverance dimension presupposes that the current world order is altered from the way God originally intended and created the world, while the argument based on the

¹Kraemer, 7.

²Ibid.

problem of evil seems to presuppose that the current state of natural woe is how God originally created this planet. Thus, in Hume's *Dialogues*, Cleanthes counters Philo with the argument that, for the infinitely wise God, "a less evil may then be chosen, in order to avoid a greater: Inconveniences are to be submitted to, in order to achieve a desirable end: benevolence, regulated by wisdom, and limited by necessity, *may have produced a world such as the present.*"¹ But what if he did not create it so? On the one hand, it could change the nature of the argument by removing direct divine culpability for the evil in this world. On the other hand, it merely moves the problem backwards one step to the issue of why God permitted natural evil, even if he did not create it. Nevertheless, the fundamental position of Hume and those of similar persuasion makes a major assumption about the nature of creation in order to make the argument from evil efficacious.

We have seen charges, rebuttals, and countercharges on both sides of the debate over natural evil. Each side has strengths and weaknesses and neither position has been overly effective in convincing the other. There remain, however, two arguments that Rachels believes will strengthen the case for the alleged antithesis between God and natural: The excess evil argument, and the argument on the principle of parsimony.

The problem of excess evil

The basic argument. Rachels has argued that traditional theological responses to the problem of evil are both man centered, and more importantly, assume the co-existence of man with animals during the whole history of natural evil. But if man

¹Hume, 113.

evolved, there were millions of years of suffering unrelated to man, his will, or his choices. Rachels thus asserted that “the traditional theistic rejoinders do not even come close to justifying *that* evil. . . . The evolutionary perspective puts the problem in a new and more difficult form.”¹

However, this challenge is not as difficult as it may seem for, as Rachels has alluded, perspective matters. The problem is that his argument mixes two perspectives. Because Rachels assumes the correctness of the Darwinist position, he argues for a presence of natural evil prior to human existence. But this merely mixes theism with materialism, without including the supporting theological package that comes with belief in God. Thus, Rachels ascribes blame to God for something not attributed to Him by Scripture—creation through an evolutionary process. If one wishes to posit divine involvement, it seems prudent that such speculation must be done on theistic and not materialist terms. The excess evil argument is thus rooted in a view of God skewed from its proper context. There is, however, a second issue buried within the argument of excess. Is all the excess evil compatible with belief in God? This brings us to the argument from the principle of parsimony.

The argument from parsimony. Rachels has appealed to Darwin’s belief that the “facts” of evolution better accommodated and explained the existence of natural evil than do the “facts” of theism. He is thus arguing that Darwinism is more parsimonious than Christianity when it comes to natural evil. Rachels is not alone in making such claims,

¹Rachels, *CfA*, 105-106. Emphasis in original.

for Draper observes that “the important question, a question that David Hume asked . . . but that most contemporary philosophers of religion have ignored, is whether or not any serious hypothesis that is logically inconsistent with theism *explains some significant facts about evil or about good and evil much better than theism does.*”¹ Kraemer echoes the same conclusion: The fact there is widespread natural evil is best explained by a means of origins that is indifferent to happiness and suffering, and not by theism.²

An interesting problem is that all three of the above authors use the argument that theism is less parsimonious than materialism in relating to the problem of natural evil, yet none take time to justify the efficacy of this method. While Rachels is affirmed in that his claim is not unique, the question remains as to how effective parsimony is as a tool for evaluating the problem of natural evil.

Critique of parsimony. John Hubbard notes two key attributes of this philosophical tool: “Parsimony is a relative characteristic; parsimony can only be used to describe one theory in comparison with another. Different types of parsimony can

¹Draper, 332. Emphasis mine. Draper follows Hume in offering the “Hypothesis of Indifference” (HI) as a better alternative to theism, urging that “HI explains the facts O[bservation] reports much better than theism does. . . . O[bservation] is much more probable on the assumption that HI is true than on the assumption theism is true.”

²Kraemer, 5.

conflict with each other.”¹ Thus, he argues that parsimony is a limited tool with relativistic tendencies.

But such relativity is a problem for Rachels’s argument, for, as Cornelius Hunter has shown, “the problem of evil presupposes the existence of an objective evil—the very thing the materialist seems to deny. . . . In other words, the problem of evil is generated only by the prior claim that evil exists.”² Furthermore, the relativity of parsimony makes it unlikely that it can be a capable criterion for determining truth. Not all simple explanations are true. Hubbard illustrates this by observing that “knowing the fact that three points on a highway are in a strait line should yield the more parsimonious conclusion that the highway is a strait line. However, our previous knowledge of the existence of curves in roads, makes this an improbable conclusion.”³ In addition, sometimes data are so complex that parsimony becomes a difficult tool to use effectively. As James Thornton has observed, “Adoption of this principle, though seemingly obvious, leads to problems about the role of simplicity in science, especially when choosing between hypotheses that are not (or are not known to be) equivalent. There are often different and clashing criteria for what is the simplest hypothesis, and it is not clear

¹John Hubbard, “Parsimony and the Mind,” 19 May 2003, <http://www.tk421.net/essays/simple.html> (3 July 2003). The website indicates this article was originally written for the Macalester College course PHIL 89: Senior Seminar, in May 1995. The current web copy has been updated slightly since my research, now being said to be last modified February 19, 2005. Hubbard defines three kinds of parsimony: Epistemological, Ontological, and Literary, and asserts that any one can be in contradiction with the other two.

²Hunter, 154.

³Hubbard, 4.

whether a simpler hypothesis is *pro tanto* more likely to be true: and if not, what justification other than laziness there is for adopting it.”¹ It would seem that the complexity of both Christian theology and Darwin’s theory would make parsimony a less than ideal arbiter for determining the truthfulness or preferability of one over the other. Could it be that the parsimony argument based on evil could be reversed back on those trying to eliminate theism?

The problem of good. Casserley creates such a conundrum by countering the problem of excess evil for the theist with the problem of excess good for the atheist.

What are we to say, then to the objector who argues that the ‘problem of evil’ only arises for us because we believe in the good God? For the atheist, apparently, there is no problem of evil. If only we will abandon our belief that the source and foundation of the universe is morally good, the presence of evil in the universe will cease to perplex us.

But there is no way out of our difficulty through any such denial of God and the basic righteousness of existence. If the fact of evil is an intellectual problem for the man who believes that the order of the universe is ultimately a moral order, the fact of good is an equally or even more intractable problem for the man who believes that the order of the universe is non-moral. . . . *There is a problem of evil for the theist, but there is also a problem of good for the atheist.* The theist must ask himself, ‘How is it that God’s world so often falls below its own proper level?’ But the atheist must likewise confront himself with the opposite question: ‘How is it that a basically non-moral universe occasionally rises above itself to such undeniable moral heights?’ The latter question is of the two the more difficult to answer plausibly and convincingly.²

¹James Thornton, “Occam’s Razor,” in *James Thornton’s Theory-of-the-Week*, 22 January 2001, http://www.jamesthornton.com/theory/theory?theory_id=8 (18 May 2004).

²Casserley, *Man’s Pain*, 38-39. Emphasis mine.

In a similar statement in another work, Casserley appeals, ironically, to explanatory power to clinch his point. “On balance the problem of evil for the believer is less acute than the problem of good for the unbeliever. It is easier to understand that the good God’s world might fall below itself than to imagine how a non-moral world of non-moral beings could contrive so frequently to rise above itself.”¹

Casserley has raised a significant question, for in designless materialism, we would not expect to find excess good which is not really necessary for survival. Survival could be achieved with much less good in the world. Therefore, the excess good should be a waste of resources in an evolutionary scenario. Why all this unnecessary good? Even altruism cannot account for all of it.

C. S. Lewis complicates the conundrum for the atheist by taking the problem of good and intensifying it into the problem of religion. Lewis observes that when he was a professed atheist,

¹Casserley, *Evil*, 11. The full quotation is very similar to the previous one and reads: “We shall not escape from our difficulties by giving up our faith in God’s goodness. The objector may say to us, ‘You are wondering how it is that pain and injustice are found in God’s good world. You have only to stop believing in the good God and the problem will no longer arise.’ This sounds more reasonable at first sight than it really is. Certainly the fact of evil constitutes a problem for the man who believes that this universe is in the last resort a moral universe, created and governed by a morally perfect being. But there is good as well as evil in the universe, and if we deny that this is a moral universe, if we deny that there lies behind it an all-powerful moral being who made it and governs it, then we should find ourselves up against the problem of good. If the order of the universe is non-moral, how did this goodness get into it . . . [i.e., good things like courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice]? On balance the problem of evil for the believer is less acute than the problem of good for the unbeliever. It is easier to understand that the good God’s world might fall below itself than to imagine how a non-moral world of non-moral beings could contrive so frequently to rise above itself.”

there was one question which I never dreamed of raising. I never noticed that the very strength and facility of the pessimists' case at once poses us a problem. *If the universe is so bad, or even half so bad, how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator?* Men are fools, perhaps; but hardly so foolish as that. The direct inference from black to white, from evil flower to virtuous root, from senseless work to a workman infinitely wise, staggers belief. The spectacle of the universe as revealed by experience can never have been the ground of religion: it must always have been something in spite of which religion, acquired from a different source, was held.¹

Lewis has raised a question even more difficult for the atheist to escape from than Casserley's problem of good. But Lewis compounds the severity of this point by noting that

it would be an error to reply that our ancestors were ignorant and therefore entertained pleasing illusions about nature which the progress of science has since dispelled. . . . Certainly at all periods the pain and waste of human life was equally obvious. . . . It is mere nonsense to put pain among the discoveries of science. Lay down this book and reflect for five minutes on the fact that all the great religions were first preached, and long practiced, in a world without chloroform.

At all times then, an inference from the course of events in this world to the goodness and wisdom of the Creator would have been equally preposterous; and it was never made.²

This is a most powerful argument that the existence of natural evil is not incompatible with theistic belief. Indeed, the point is well taken that if excess pain and suffering is incompatible with belief in God, then why did the great religions develop under such stringent conditions? The problems of good and of religion are at least as great a

¹Lewis, *Pain*, 15. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid., 15-16. Lewis adds a footnote at this point which reads: "i.e., never made at the beginnings of the religion. *After* belief in God has been accepted, 'theodicies' explaining, or explaining away, the miseries of life, will naturally appear often enough." Emphasis in original.

challenge for the followers of Hume, as the problem of natural evil is to the theist, possibly greater.

Rachels has made a generally accurate summary of the discussion of the problem of evil, but while giving a thoughtful look at the issue, he has not given the issue full treatment. The theistic responses deserve more than just mere summaries. It also seems odd that Rachels has not mentioned or cited key modern discussions on the issue of pain and natural evil. On the other hand, Rachels is to be commended for recognizing that the argument from natural evil does not force the renunciation of theism. Rachels admits that the atheistic conclusion is hard to resist, though not impossible. Since theism can be maintained with evolution, this raises the issue of the relationship of theology to Evolution.

Darwinian Theism

Introduction

Rachels has asserted that if theism is maintained with belief in Darwinism, then the type of theism permitted cannot support traditional ethics, especially in the matter of human preference. But how efficacious is this claim?

There are two issues imbedded in Rachels's conclusion. First, all the argumentation concerning God, from Darwin to Rachels, presupposes a particular doctrine of God. What kind of god is thus depicted? Second, are there any theologians who have attempted to build a theological view of God based on the principles of Darwinism? If so, does their view of God refute or support Rachels's claim that

Darwinian theism cannot support a robust enough view of God to be compatible with traditional ethics?

Darwin's God

Plantinga offers us an initial answer to the first question. He notes that the only arguments for incompatibility between God and evolution “have turned from deductive to *probabilistic* arguments from evil.” Thus, “the typical atheological claim at present is not that the existence of God is *incompatible* with that of evil, but rather, that the latter offers the resources for a strong probabilistic argument against the former.”¹ This is exactly what Rachels has argued, and by shifting the argument to probability instead of logical entailment, Rachels has felt little need to interact deeply with the argument over natural evil. However, the probabilistic argument (a type of parsimony assertion) itself assumes a particular doctrine of God. This issue is superbly developed by Cornelius Hunter.

Hunter cites numerous claims by evolutionists, giving various reasons why “God would not have created [the present natural order] in this way.”² Such an approach he calls “negative theology” for it is offering proof by negative instead of positive evidence.³ But in so doing, argues Hunter, “they are beholden to a specific notion of God, and notions of God, no matter how carefully considered, are outside the realm of

¹Plantinga, 71.

²In many parts of this book Hunter quotes or cites an evolutionist making such a claim. For examples see, Hunter, 12-13, 44-49, 63-64, 81-84, 98-99, 109-110.

³Ibid., 47-48. See also 97, 103.

science.”¹ Thus, a major assumption of the evolutionary position is not scientific at all! And this point is foundational to why Hunter calls Darwin’s theory the “evolution theodicy.”² But why does Hunter see Darwin as so theological?

Hunter argues that a seminal influence on Darwin was Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In Hunter’s view, Milton was addressing the problem of evil, and solved it by distancing God from the creation. “Both men were dealing with the problem of evil—Milton with moral evil and Darwin with natural evil—and both found solutions by distancing God from evil. And most important, the two held similar conceptions of God.”³ However, “Darwin’s solution distanced God from creation to the point that God was unnecessary. One could still believe in God, but not in God’s providence. Separating God from creation and its evils meant that God could have no direct influence or control over the world. God may have created the world, but ever since that point it has run according to impersonal natural laws that may now and then produce natural evil.”⁴ Therefore, “Darwin was now increasing this separation to the point that the link between creation

¹Ibid., 92.

²Ibid., 13. Hunter frequently calls evolution a theodicy and, on 173-175, closes the book on this theme.

³Ibid., 12.

⁴Ibid., 16.

and God was severed.”¹ Thus, Hunter claims to have uncovered “the evolutionist’s notion of a restricted God.”²

How did Darwin and his contemporaries come to define God with such restrictions? Hunter notes that modernism spawned a trend towards viewing God in terms of being a “comprehensible deity.”³ Since the classical Christian view of God seemed incompatible with the natural world they observed, the concept of a supernatural deity who intervenes and rules was increasingly rejected, and eventually replaced with, as Hunter names it, “rational theism.”⁴ Thus God was seen as acting only according to natural laws. Hunter credits two key ideas for fueling this trend of invoking “*divine sanction* and *intellectual necessity*. In the former, God is seen as being all the greater for designing a world that works on its own, rather than requiring divine intervention. In the latter, the restricting of God to natural laws is urged because only this ensures meaningful scientific inquiry is possible. If natural laws are subject to violation, then we cannot

¹Ibid., 17. Mattill makes a similar observation to Hunter, by asserting that when Darwin proposed natural selection as the creative force, “Darwin rewrote Genesis and transferred God’s workload to the process of evolution, even as Newton had transferred another part of the divine workload to gravity. Biology and astronomy were *dislodging God from governing the world*.” A. J. Mattill, Jr., *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs* (Gordo, AL: Flatwoods Free Press, 1995), 26. Emphasis mine.

²Hunter, 47.

³Ibid., 115.

⁴Ibid., 115-116, 128-132. Ultimately, all of chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to discussing the issue of how the concept of God became restricted.

discern the law from the exception.”¹ In the divine sanction argument, then, “we should expect God to use secondary means because this requires all the more wisdom and foresight. . . . God may be almighty, but his is all the more impressive because he does not exercise his might.”²

But for Hunter, this raises a serious problem: “In what we might call the *problem of morality*, how can God be so aloof from his creation, allowing even his creatures to be the result of blind mechanical forces, yet simultaneously be the source of our moral law and the ultimate judge of our actions? In the former he has become non-existent, or at least irrelevant; in the latter he is vital.”³ This is precisely the dilemma Rachels seeks to

¹Ibid., 116. Emphasis in original. C. S. Lewis strenuously objects to this last point that allowing the supernatural into the system makes differentiating between natural and supernatural impossible. “But there is one thing often said about our ancestors which we must *not* say. We must not say ‘They believed in miracles because they did not know the Laws of Nature.’ This is nonsense. When St Joseph discovered that his bride was pregnant, he was ‘minded to put her away.’ He knew enough biology for that. . . . He regarded it as a miracle precisely because he knew enough about the Laws of Nature to know that this was a suspension of them. . . . If a man had no conception of an established order in Nature, then of course he could not notice departures from that order. . . . Complete ignorance of the laws of Nature would preclude the perception of the miraculous just as rigidly as complete disbelief in the supernatural precludes it, perhaps even more so.” Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 26. Lewis again uses Joseph, in a Socratic style dialog, to make the same point on pp. 72-73.

²Hunter, 118. On this page, Hunter uses a quotation from Thomas Burnet (1635-1715) to illustrate the divine sanction argument. Burnet argues that we would esteem a clock maker who makes clock that strikes the hours automatically to be a superior clockmaker to one making a clock requiring the maker to push a button each hour to make it strike. Thus a God who makes a mechanical universe that runs itself without miracles is deemed superior.

³Ibid., 138. Hunter is here culminating a discussion on the fact that the tension between natural law and morals had raged for a century or more prior to Darwin, and thus Darwin did not develop his arguments against, nor his views of, God in a vacuum.

capitalize on in arguing that theism is either incompatible with morality, or that a Darwinian divinity is not robust enough to support traditional morality. So Rachels is certainly not being unreasonable to make such assertions. What kind of God, then, is there to believe in if the divine sanction and intellectual necessity arguments are accepted?

According to Hunter, the result is that “God, on the one hand, is seen as all-good but not necessarily all-powerful, or at least does not exercise all his power. God is virtuous, not dictatorial.”¹ But notice, then, that elimination of God is no longer necessary. “The end result of Darwin’s theory is not that there is no God, but rather, that God is disjoint from the material world. . . . In evolution theodicy, the Creator must be disjoint from creation, but no more than this is required.”² Thus, Hunter disagrees with Rachels that Darwinism makes atheism difficult to resist, but agrees that the theory of evolution does entail a view of God not compatible with traditional Christian morality. Is Hunter right in arguing that Darwinism offers deliverance from the problem of evil through a reinterpretation of God which saves God’s goodness by limiting his power?

A Theology of Evolution

Introduction

From the late twentieth century until the present, we find movement in the direction of promoting such a theology. First, there is the denial that Darwinism is incompatible

¹Ibid., 146.

²Ibid., 165.

with belief in God. Ruse seems to take this view, noting that “Darwinism does not dissolve away Christian belief,”¹ and that “Darwinism is ecumenical. Its processes can and will accommodate wide range of theological options.”² Kenneth Miller, a biologist, makes a similar argument: “The common assumption, widely shared in academic and intellectual circles, is that Darwinism is a fatal poison to traditional religious belief. One may, of course, accept the scientific validity of evolution and profess belief in a supreme being, but not without diluting traditional religion almost beyond recognition, or so the thinking goes. Incredibly, all too many traditional believers accept this view, not realizing that is based on a more humanistic culture of disbelief than on any finding of evolutionary science.”³ Like Ruse, Miller seems to be arguing that Darwinism does not defacto eliminate God and religion, and he seems to leave the door open for a variety of theological options. But how wide is a wide array of options? Ruse recognizes that, “obviously, if you are a fundamentalist Christian, then the Darwinian reading of Genesis is going to give you major problems—insoluble problems, I suspect.”⁴ Thus the portal to

¹Ruse, *Can a Darwinian*, 138.

²Ibid., 216. This is the last sentence of the body of the book. The epilogue asks, “can a Darwinian be a Christian? Absolutely! Is it always easy for a Darwinian to be a Christian? No, but whoever said that the worthwhile things in life are easy? Is the Darwinian obligated to be a Christian? No, but try to be understanding of those who are. Is the Christian obligated to be a Darwinian? No, but realize how much you are going to forswear if you do not make the effort” (217).

³Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), xii.

⁴Ruse, *Can a Darwinian*, 217.

religious Darwinism may not be as wide as is touted. Not all may enter, though some have.

Putting Darwin into Theology

John F. Haught, possibly the leading scholar in the recently formed movement of evolutionary theology, laments that not just the discipline of theology has failed to grapple with the implications of Darwin's theory, but neither have the philosophers. "If theology has fallen short of the reality of evolution, however, so also has the world of thought in general. . . . Philosophy also has yet to produce an understanding of reality—an ontology—adequate of evolution."¹ Thus he charges that, "to a great extent, theologians still think and write almost as if Darwin had never lived."²

One might be tempted to think that Haught has forgotten the work of Teilhard de Chardin in combining theology with Darwinian evolution, but Haught assures us otherwise. "Although Teilhard himself was a profoundly religious thinker, he was not a professional theologian, and so his own efforts to construe a 'God for evolution' stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions demanded."³ Thus, Haught believes the challenge of properly accounting for evolution in theology still remains.

¹John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 1.

²Ibid., 2.

³John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 162.

Haught responds to this problem by proposing the possibilities of a theology informed by evolution.

Scientific skeptics, of course, decided long ago that the only reasonable option Darwin leaves us is that of a totally Godless universe. That theology survives at all after Darwin is to some evolutionists a most puzzling anachronism. We would have to agree, of course, that if atheism is the logical correlate of evolutionary science, then the day of religions and theologies is over. But as we shall see, such a judgement is hardly warranted. I shall argue in the pages ahead that Darwin has gifted us with an account of life whose depth, beauty, and pathos—when seen in the context of the larger cosmic epic of evolution—expose[s] us afresh to the raw reality of the sacred and to a resoundingly meaningful universe.¹

Haught expresses high hopes about the prospects of a Darwinian theology: “I cannot here emphasize enough, therefore, the gift evolution can be to our theology. For us to turn our backs on it, as so many Christians continue to do, is to lose a great opportunity to deepen our understanding of the wisdom and self-effacing love of God.”²

But what would such a theology be like? Haught declares: “Evolutionary theology, unlike natural theology, does not search for definitive footprints of the divine in nature. It is not terribly concerned with ‘intelligent design,’ since the notion seems entirely too lifeless to capture the dynamic and even disturbing way in which the God of biblical religion interacts with the world. Instead of trying to prove God’s existence from nature, evolutionary theology seeks to show how our new awareness of cosmic and biological evolution can enhance and enrich traditional teachings about God and God’s way of

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 2.

²John F. Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 114.

acting in the world.”¹ Thus evolution is supposed to give us a richer view of God, presumably superior to the traditional view. Diarmuid O’Murchu, another contemporary evolutionary theologian, expands on the idea of evolution enriching our view of God: “Evolutionary theology wishes to keep open the possibility that all forms of creaturehood (plant and animal alike) are dimensions of divine disclosure and can enlighten us in our desire to understand God more deeply and respond in faith more fully. Evolutionary theology is committed to a radically open-ended understanding of how the divine reveals itself in and to the world.”² This means that in evolutionary theology, nature is not used as evidence to prove classical attributes of God. Rather, both Darwinian evolution and God’s creatorship are assumed to be true. Thus, evolution shows us how God created, and this method of creating, in turn, deepens our understanding of who God is and how He operates. But, cautions Haught, “trying to locate God’s activity within or at the level of natural biological causation really amounts to a shrinkage of God. This approach is known as ‘god-of-the-gaps’ theology. . . . A god-of-the-gaps approach is a science stopper. . . . But, even worse, it is theologically idolatrous. It makes divine action one link in the world’s chain of finite causes rather than the ultimate ground of all natural causes.”³

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 36.

²Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 88.

³Haught, *101 Questions*, 18-19.

This, in turn, means that we cannot ascribe specific activity to God. The result, as O'Murchu notes, is that "evolutionary theology borrows liberally from process thought, proposing God's total involvement in the evolutionary process to be a primary conviction upon which everything is postulated."¹ O'Murchu further asserts that "the process position challenges the assumption that our God must always be a ruling, governing power above and beyond God's own creation."² Why is the tendency to favor process theology significant? O'Murchu explains, "What conventional believers find unacceptable about the process position is the notion of a vulnerable God, allegedly at the mercy of capricious forces as are all other creatures of the universe."³ Thus, the first significant theological impact of Darwin that we shall examine is the limiting of God's power in order to save His goodness.

Limiting God's Power to Save His Goodness

The limiting of divine power is one of the early issues that Haught examines in his book, *God after Darwin*. Early in the book, Haught examines David Hull's argument that the present order is incompatible with the concept of God. Hull asks, "What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomenon epitomized by the species on Darwin's Galapagos Islands?" He eventually answers, "The God of the Galapagos is careless,

¹Ibid., 79.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. This is not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”¹

Haught’s answer to Hull’s unworshipable God involves the call to alter our concept of God to fit the data of modern science. Says Haught,

But what if “God” is not just an originator of order, but also the disturbing wellspring of *novelty*? And, moreover, what if the cosmos is not just an “order” (which is what “cosmos” means in Greek) but a still unfinished *process*? Suppose we look carefully at the undeniable evidence that the universe is *still* being created. And suppose also that “God” is less concerned with imposing a plan or design on this process than with providing it with opportunities to participate in its own creation. *If we make these conceptual adjustments, as both contemporary science and a consistent theology actually require that we do*, the idea of God not only becomes compatible with evolution, but also logically anticipates the kind of life-world that neo-Darwinian biology sets before us.²

But would this not impeach the goodness of God as Hull has charged?

A number of theologians and philosophers would answer this question, “No.”

Their solution is to argue that natural evil is unavoidable for God because His power is limited. Bertocci argues that “*the evidence indicates God is not omnipotent*,” and goes on to argue that only by having limited power can God’s moral goodness be preserved.³

C. Don Keyes states that through the work of Julian Casserley, he has come to the conclusion that

¹David L. Hull, “The God of the Galapagos,” *Nature* 352 (August 8, 1991): 486. The last lines are quoted in Haught, *God after Darwin*, 6.

²Haught, *God after Darwin*, 6. Final emphasis mine. Later, on p. 38, Haught again appeals to the argument that if God created an unfinished, evolving universe, we should expect natural evil and contingency.

³Bertocci, 413-414. Emphasis in original. See also 466-467 where he repeats his argument that limited power is the only way to maintain God’s moral goodness.

God ought not to be defined primarily in terms of sovereignty and power. The implications of this statement liberated me from interpreting God's omnipotence as the kind of coercive power capable of always preventing evil. Instead, I now firmly believe with Plato that the goodness of God is his most essential quality and that he is the author only of the good things that happen. Ultimately 'power' and 'good' are different kinds of reality, but of the two, good is more absolutely attributable to God. The power of the good is almost always indirect.¹

Keys gives no good reasons for ascribing goodness as an absolute quality while treating omnipotence as a symbolic or relative quality, other than the ability to explain evil, and possibly the support of Plato. It is also significant, as we shall soon see, that goodness becomes the supreme, untouchable attribute of God to which all other attributes, including power, seem to be subjugated.

Korsmeyer echoes the refrain in which God's power is limited in order to preserve his goodness.

The painfully slow evolution of life, spreading in great diversity into all available niches, trying out all possible avenues of advance, the huge role of chance, the

¹C. Don Keys, "Julian Casserley's Hope," in *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. C. Don Keys, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), xxii-xxiii. Casserley actually says little about God's power, but what he says seems to agree with Keys's reaction to his work. In this quote, Casserley is combating a form of humanism he perceives to focus on developing human power but not human morality:

"Strangely enough, most of those humanists who seem drawn towards a humanism of power are precisely the people who are most apt to react against a conception of God as kind of a celestial policeman wielding absolute powers over men. For myself, *I not only object to a conception of God that thinks of him merely, or even primarily in terms of sovereignty and power*, but I object also to any conception of man that thinks of him merely or even primarily in terms of sovereignty or power, and I object to both doctrines for the same reason, that they misapprehend the true value and excellence of personality [i.e., character]. The person, whether divine or human, finds authentic self-expression in the range and integrity of his loving and in the wide variety of his values. A humanism of power *is as objectionable as the Calvinistic-type of theism* and for precisely the same reasons." Casserley, *Evil*, 27. Emphases mine.

stumbling advances to greater complexity, all these things suggest a divine nature *at odds with the omnipotent God of classical theism*. The universe, as we know it, was not created in an instant of *absolute coercive power*. The creeping advance of matter and life, the spread of probabilities, the diversity of approaches, *all suggest some sharing of power between Creator and creatures*. It is as though divinity labored to persuade, to lure creatures forward, creatures who sometimes responded to the invitation, and sometimes did not. . . . *The universe's story is suggesting that divine power is different from what we have imagined*. It is like the power of love, persuasive, patient, and persistent. . . .

. . . The idea of creation by persuasion, surprisingly, suggests a Creator much closer to the biblical God of love than that of classical theism.¹

All of these authors speak as if their position on limiting God's power is so self-evident that there can be no criticism of it.

Kraemer offers three rebuttals to the limited power view of God. First, is God only limited in power as claimed? If He is limited in power, why not in knowledge and goodness as well? Why limit God's power only? Second, he picks up Hume's argument that if God were this limited in power, He should have created fewer animals with better faculties for happiness. Third, Kramer questions if such a limited, imprudent God is worthy of respect and worship. He reminds us that "other great but limited beings, saints and heroes, clearly merit respect, but not worship. Once God is similarly limited, the problem of justifying the worship-worthiness of God needs to be addressed."²

Claiming a More Exalted View of God

Haught directly addresses the issue of God's worship worthiness and does so in several places. He states, for example, that "if the idea of God is to arouse our instinct to

¹Korsmeyer, 84. Emphases mine.

²Kraemer, 11.

worship, this idea cannot be smaller than the universe that science has made so conspicuous to us.”¹ By contrast, “the notion of God as an intelligent designer is inadequate. The God of evolution is an inexhaustible and unsettling source of *new* modes of being, forever eluding the encapsulation in orderly schemata.”²

Haught argues that the biblical view of God, which he describes as “the anthropomorphic one-planet deity,” is too small for the evolutionary view of the cosmos. Thus, “the idea of a personal God such as we have in the Bible is a stumbling block for many evolutionary scientists as well.” What we “traditionally called ‘God’ now appears too small for them.” Thus he charges that they turn to Eastern religions “and other forms of mysticism to satisfy their very human craving for infinite horizons.” Haught concludes, “in any case theology must take pains to ensure that our notion of God is not slighter than the epic of cosmic and biological evolution itself.”³ Haught further asserts that “to insist on a special creation, as many Christians do, is to shrink God to the role of magician. It is also a refusal to acknowledge the creative vocation that all creatures have in some degree, and which we humans have in a very special way. A robust theology of

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, ix. Interestingly, while Haught here argues that our concept of God must be based on a cosmological perspective supplied by science, in his *Responses to 101 Questions*, he argues that “this is not a God that theology invented just to accommodate Darwin. This is the empathetic God revealed in the pages of the Bible” (124). How can one base his view of God on the scientific discoveries interpreted through the theoretical perspective of Darwin, while not making any accommodation to Darwinism? These two statements concerning the role of science through Darwin seem to disagree with each other.

²Haught, *God after Darwin*, 9.

³Haught, *101 Questions*, 36.

creation finds more to admire in a divine creator who calls this self-creating universe into being, than a ‘designer’ who directly forces everything into a prefabricated.”¹ Such a God, for Haught, loses some of the traditional concept of transcendence, for he sees God as “immediately operative in the depths of all natural processes. . . . The Spirit of God is hiddenly present in all instances of new creation.”² Alluding to Teilhard de Chardin, Haught asserts that the reality of God, from an evolutionary perspective, “begins to shift from the One who abides vertically ‘up above’ to the One who comes into the world from ‘up ahead,’ out of the realm of the future.” This is asserted to match the biblical eschatology of Isaiah “where God is the One who ‘goes before’ the people.”³

Reversing the analogy, Haught argues for an entering of God into creation. “Evolution happens, ultimately, because of the ‘coming of God’ toward *the entire universe* from out of an always elusive future. And just as the arrival of God does not enter the human sphere by crude extrinsic forcefulness but by participating in it and energizing it from within, we may assume that it does not enter coercively into the pre-human levels of cosmic and biological evolution either. *The coming of God into nature*, like the nonintrusive effectiveness of the Tao, is always respectful of the world’s

¹Ibid., 53-55.

²Ibid., 53. Emphasis mine.

³Haught, *God after Darwin*, 39-40. See also *101 Questions*, 50-51, where Haught gives similar argumentation including the connection to Teilhard de Chardin. In *101 Questions*, question 94, Haught summarizes the theology of Teilhard including the “omega principle” to which the “up ahead” refers. Question 95 expounds on Whitehead’s process philosophy. These two become the pillars for Haught’s evolving reality drawn by a God who lures all in development towards him.

presently realized autonomy.”¹ Haught here introduces a panentheistic view of a God as the solution to the problem of evil. But why would God want to choose such an unobtrusive means of wooing evolution along? For Haught, “the world is in evolution, then, because God is a God of *persuasive* rather than coercive power.” Based on the assumption that evolution is how God created, Haught argues that “it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Creator does not want a universe that remains content with the way things are, but one that strives adventurously to become something more.”²

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 99.

²Haught, *101 Questions*, 136-137. See also, *idem*, *God after Darwin*, 42, where he uses the language of adventure to opine that God values surprises over order. “According to process theology, evolution occurs because God is more interested in adventure than in preserving the status quo. ‘Adventure,’ in Whiteheadian terms, is the cosmic search for more and more intense versions of ordered novelty, another word for which is ‘beauty.’ God’s will, apparently, is the maximization of cosmic beauty. And the epic of evolution is the world’s response to God’s own longing that it strive towards ever richer ways of realizing aesthetic intensity.” Thus, Haught’s cosmic God of evolution seems more like an adventure addict who gets his ultimate thrill from creating through a totally contingent, random processes that surprise even Him.

Haught by his own admission appears to base this proposal on the argument the from imagination offered by Guy Murchie. See, Haught, *God after Darwin*, 29-30. Says Murchie, “Try to imagine that you are God. This might not come naturally to you. To be God of course you have to be a creator. And a creator, by definition, must create. So you, the creator, now find yourself creating creatures (a word meaning created beings) who have to have a world to live in. But what kind of world should they live in? Or more specifically, what kind of world will you decide to create for them? . . . As for life and adventure, Earth is literally teeming with it. . . . Earth provides the optimum, if not the maximum, in prolonged stimulation of body and mind and, most particularly, she excels in educating the spirit. . . . Honestly now, if you were God, could you possibly dream up any more educational, contrasty, thrilling, beautiful, tantalizing world than Earth to develop spirit in? . . . Would you, in other words, try to make the world nice and safe—or would you let it be provocative, dangerous and exciting? In actual fact, if it ever came to that, I’m sure you would find it impossible to make a better world than God has already created.” Guy Murchie, *The Seven Mysteries of Life: An Exploration in Science and Philosophy* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 621-622.

Haught thus sees a God with limited power as more worship worthy.

Haught is not the only one to argue that a limited God is more deserving of worship than the traditional Christian God. Korsmeyer declares, “our God should be worthy of worship.”¹ In the context of advocating panentheism, Korsmeyer asserts, “The whole of the created universe is within God, although God is other and superior to it. God is both eternal and temporal, and God both includes and transcends the world. But is such a God perfect, and so worthy of worship?”² The context seems to imply an affirmative answer. Korsmeyer then defines divinity in a manner consistent with limited attributes: “Indeed, God must be greatest, must be transcendent, in all categories. . . . God is defined as that perfect, supremely excellent being, than which no other individual being could conceivably be greater, but which itself, could become greater.”³ Thus, like Haught, Korsmeyer asserts that God both can and does evolve with the rest of the universe. His power is limited. But such a view produces an intriguing irony.

The Hidden, Humble God of Evolution

Haught proposes that such a panthesitic God is actually more deeply involved in the world than a deity who controls things by external power. His work is “interior to the

¹Korsmeyer, 91.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 92.

process of creation.”¹ But why should we believe such a God inhabits nature? Is there any evidence for this conclusion?

Ironically, the answer is, “no.” Three times in as many pages, Haught asserts that the concept of divine humility better explains the evolutionary data than does traditional theology or materialism.² In another work, he argues that “nothing less than a transcendent force, radically distinct from, *but also intimately incarnate in matter* could ultimately explain evolution.”³ Haught describes this immanent presence as God’s “self-withdrawal,” “self-absenting,” and “self-concealment,” so as to not have any external influence or exercise of “coercive power” over the universe.⁴ “God is present in the mode of ‘hiddenness.’”⁵ Twice more he asserts that God is present in the form of “ultimate goodness.”⁶ Thus Haught associates the limited power of God, represented by His hiddenness, as being ultimate goodness.

It seems ironic, with Haught’s dedication to modern science, that he claims this hidden God can only be detected by faith. Says Haught, “The world is embraced constantly by God’s presence. But this presence does not show up as an object to be grasped by ordinary awareness or scientific method. It is empirically unavailable, in

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

²Haught, *God after Darwin*, 53-55.

³Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 163

⁴Haught, *God after Darwin*, 195, 197, 203.

⁵Ibid., 195.

⁶Ibid., 197, 203.

other words. . . . Only those attuned to religious experience will be aware or appreciative of it.”¹ This is amazing! Haught is appealing to subjective experience for a major pillar of his theology. And he makes the appeal more than once: “The raw ingredients of evolution flow forth from the depths of divine love, a depth that will show up only to those whose personal lives have *already been grasped by a sense of God.*”² A few phrases later he reiterates, “The very fact that nature can lend itself to a literalist reading is a consequence of the humble, hidden and vulnerable way in which divine love works. The very possibility of giving an atheistic interpretation of evolution is that God’s creative love humbly *refuses to make itself available at the level of scientific comprehension.*”³

Haught claims to base this subjective discovery of God in nature from Tillich’s concept of God as infinite depth. Thus,

religion is a state of being grasped by inexhaustible depth that lurks beneath the surface of our lives and of nature too. In religious experience we do not so much grasp this depth as allow the depth to grasp us. Depth takes hold of us in such a powerful way that we can neither deny it nor master it, though of course we may try to flee from it. . . . This depth is a “*self-authenticating force* [which] assumes an almost revelatory character. To those who have been grasped by it, everything else pales in significance, including all previous renditions of reality. . . .

. . . When I use the term ‘God’ in this book I intend, nonetheless, to follow Paul Tillich’s claim that God really means depth. . . . ‘God’ means the inexhaustible depth that perpetually draws us towards itself, the depth without which no enduring joy or satisfaction or peace is possible.⁴

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

²Ibid., 60-61. Emphasis mine.

³Ibid., 61.

⁴Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 27-29. Emphasis mine.

So Haught appeals to the self-authenticating nature of divine depth as proof of God's immanent presence within nature. On the other hand, he does appeal to one vein of evidence that is discernable to the unbeliever as well: Indian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Platonic beliefs are all based on the concept of a hidden, deeper reality than the visible world, and that Christ espoused a similar concept by declaring that God's Kingdom is within us.¹

O'Murchu argues a similar point to Haught, using the evolutionary process as a means of revealing the divine. He concludes, "Consequently, revelation may be defined as the process of unveiling in which both the meaning of the world and the meaning of God become more apparent at the same time."² And again it is awakened and sustained by faith. "The faithfulness of the Originating and Sustaining Mystery awakens faith not only in the human heart, but also in the heart of creation itself. Faith invites faith."³

The panentheistic hiddenness of God has been argued by Haught to be an expression of divine humility to protect the absolute freedom of the universe. This concept of divine humility is significant, for Haught develops it into a metaphysics for grounding his theology.

¹Ibid., 29-30.

²O'Murchu, 88, 90.

³Ibid., 34.

The Metaphysical Foundation of Divine Humility

Haught argues that “the metaphysics of divine humility . . . explains the actual features of evolution much more intelligibly than either of the main alternatives.”¹ But from where does he get ideas to turn divine humility into a metaphysics? In *God after Darwin* we get several clues all pointing to one conclusion: His metaphysics of divine humility is based in the concept of the *kenosis* of Phil 2. Haught declares:

At the very center of the Christian faith lies a trust that in the passion and crucifixion of Christ we are presented with the mystery of a God who pours divine selfhood into the world in an act of unreserved self-abandonment. The utter lowliness of this image has led some theologians in our century to speak carelessly of God as “powerless.” . . . The image of God’s humility does not imply weakness and powerlessness, but rather, a kind of “defenselessness” or “vulnerability.” . . .

The image of the self-emptying God lies at the heart of Christian revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity.²

A later statement asserts, “As I have noted, it is in its encounter with the crucified man Jesus . . . that Christian faith is *given this key to God’s relation to the world*. . . . The Creator’s power (by which I mean the capacity to influence the world) is made manifest paradoxically in the vulnerable defenselessness of a crucified man.”³ For Haught, the

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 55.

²*Ibid.*, 48-49. Haught makes use of the theology of Moltmann to help establish the conclusions quoted above. A key quotation of Moltmann is found in, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 88, quoted in Haught, 49, and reads: “This self-restricting love is the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah. Even in order to create heaven and earth, God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as Creator took . . . the form of a servant.”

³Haught, *God after Darwin*, 112, 113. Emphasis mine. See also p. 111: “At the center of Christian faith lies the conviction (John 3:16) that ‘God so loved the world that

kenosis of Philippians 2, especially as seen in the crucifixion, is the primary way in which God has related to creation, through eternity. “It is to this image that Christian theology *must always repair* whenever it thinks about God’s relationship to the world and its evolution.”¹ This model is one of defenseless, vulnerable love, not supervisory governance.²

Bertocci offers an alternative foundation for this view of love. “Plato long ago realized that it was the very essence of love to be in want. . . . Love is beautiful and wise because it seeks the beauty and wisdom it already enjoys but incompletely; it is good because it is lured by a good which it incompletely possesses.”³ Thus, in the Platonic sense as well, love is seen as fundamentally empty and in need. This Platonic definition seems to exercise great influence regarding how evolutionary theologians define love.

He gave his only Son’ to redeem and renew that world. *Theologically translated*, this text and many others like it imply that the *very substance of the divine life is poured out into creation*, and that the world is now and forever open to an infinitely replenishing future.” Emphases mine.

¹Ibid., 111. Emphasis mine.

²In my opinion, Haught has missed the point of Phil 2 which is the voluntary self-sacrifice of God in Christ to provide the perfect obedience necessary to satisfy human duties to God as the sacrificial substitute for all men. Haught seems instead to turn the *kenosis* into the ultimate expression of the modern mentality of victimhood. Christ as victim arouses our sympathies and gratitude, but the substitutionary atonement dimension is entirely missing in Haught.

³Bertocci, 457. Bertocci is synthesizing Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 3, *Lysias, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 183-189. Bertocci seems to summarize Plato with a bit more clarity than is actually found in Plato, but the overall concept of love being rooted in desire for good and beautiful things seems to be the foundational concept Bertocci builds on.

But if love becomes defined in terms of God's defenseless vulnerability, then love becomes defined in terms of giving total, unregulated freedom to the universe and its creatures by his self-emptying.

Love's Power Is Non-Coercive

A key implication of this empty, needy love is that it must be non-coercive.

Haught makes this fundamental connection by stating:

The doctrine of grace proclaims that God loves the world and all of its various elements fully and unconditionally. *By definition*, however, love does not absorb, annihilate, or force itself upon the beloved. Instead it longs for the beloved to become more and more 'other' or differentiated. Along with its nurturing and compassionate attributes, love brings with it a longing for the independence of that which is loved. Without such 'letting be' of its beloved, the dialogical intimacy essential to a loving relationship would be impossible. . . .

. . . Divine love does not compel, but invites. To compel, after all would be contrary to the very nature of love.¹

Miller argues in a similar fashion that the divine love is not a controlling power in the universe. "The Western God stands back from his creation, not to absent Himself, not to abandon His creatures, *but to allow His people true freedom*. A God who hovers, in all His visible power and majesty, over every step taken by mere mortals never *allows them the independence that true love, true goodness, and true obedience requires*."²

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 39-41. Emphasis mine. Haught repeats these types of arguments on pp. 112-114.

²Miller, 253. Emphases mine. Earlier Miller has argued that "our first step would be to assume that an all-powerful Deity decided to make creatures and to endow them with free will and the ability to make moral choices." How? "The genius of the creator's plan was that by creating a separate world, a world that ran by its own rules, *He would give His creatures the 'space' they would need to become independent, to make true moral choices*" (emphasis mine). See pp. 249-250.

Miller reiterates the argument a little later, declaring: “A world without meaning would be one in which a Deity pulled the string of every human puppet, and every material particle as well. . . . By being always in control, the Creator would deny His creatures any real opportunity to know and worship Him. *Authentic love requires freedom, not manipulation.* Such freedom is best supplied by the open contingency of evolution, and not by strings of divine direction attached to every living creature.”¹

Haught uses emotive and almost pejorative language to describe the traditional view of God in contrast to his humble, vulnerable God.

The God of Jesus is utterly unlike . . . our traditional images of God understood as divine potentate or ‘designer.’ Theology is offended by evolution *only when it assumes a rather imperious concept of divine omnipotence.* . . .

Evolutionary science, however, demands that we give up one and for all the *tyrannical* images we may have sometimes projected onto God. The real stumbling block to reconciling faith and evolution, therefore, is not the sufferings in nature and human history, but our failure to have acquainted ourselves sufficiently with the startling image of a God who seeks the world’s freedom and who shares in the world’s pain.²

In another work, Haught declares, “Only a *narrowly coercive* deity would have collapsed . . . creation . . . into the *dreary confines* of a single originating instant.” He further describes such a process as “*freezing* nature into a state of finished perfection.”³ He calls such a sovereign God “our divine magician.”⁴ By contrast, evolution invites us to “recapture the often obscured portrait of a self-humbling, suffering God *who is anything*

¹Ibid., 289. Emphasis mine.

²Haught, *101 Questions*, 127. Emphasis mine.

³Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 80. Emphasis mine.

⁴Ibid.

but a divine controller or designer of the cosmos."¹ The evolutionary God "refrains from wielding the domineering power that both skeptics and believers often project onto their ideal of the absolute." Yet God is not "a weak or powerless God incapable of redeeming this flawed universe, but one whose salvific and creative effectiveness is all the more prevailing because it is rooted in a divine humility."²

Korsmeyer makes similar arguments to Haught. "Absolute power is not a trait consistent with a God who *is* love; shared power is. . . . In our neoclassical model, God's power is solely persuasive. God persuades creatures into being."³ Korsmeyer ties this view of God to the worship issue. "A God who is love is worthy of worship; a God who is omnipotent, whose power is coercive, is not."⁴

Haught welds the concept of non-coercive power to the effectiveness of divine influence. "God's compassionate self-restraint allows for the world's self-creation and

¹Ibid., 81.

²Ibid., 82.

³Korsmeyer, 96. Emphasis in original. In arguing for a power-sharing God, Korsmeyer sounds not unlike Mill. Mill argues that the problem of evil makes us worship a contradictory god, for "the ways of this Deity in Nature are on many occasions totally at variance with the precepts, as he believes, of the same Deity in the Gospel." The only non-contradictory view of Deity for Mill is one which posits two competing principles or powers, one good and one evil. But this seems, for Mill, to diminish the good god's power, for, "a virtuous human assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-laborer with the Highest, a fellow combatant in the great strife; contributing his little, which by the aggregation of many like himself becomes much, towards that progressive ascendancy, and ultimately complete triumph of good over evil, . . . as planned by the Being to whom we owe all the benevolent contrivance we behold in nature." Mill, 113, 116-117.

⁴Korsmeyer, 94.

permits God to be much more deeply *related* to the world than a divine dictatorship would be. God's power may be said to be *relational* rather than unilateral. Relational power is more vulnerable but *ultimately more influential than unilateral power* since it allows for more autonomy, integrity and richness in the world to which God is intimately related."¹ Thus Haught asserts that, "in the final analysis, persuasive power is more influential, more 'powerful', than coercion."² In a different text, Haught expands the argument, declaring: "Process theology responds that if power means 'the capacity to influence' then a persuasive God is *much more powerful* than a hypothetical being who magically forces things to correspond immediately to the divine intentions. A coercive deity—one that an *immature religiosity* often wishes for . . . would not allow for the otherness, autonomy, and self-coherence necessary for the world to be a world unto itself."³ Haught also ties the concept of a loving, non-coercive deity to a rejection of external influence in a way that essentially demands a wholly immanent view of God. "How effective, after all, is coercive power, even in the human sphere? At best it can manipulate things or persons only externally. *It can never influence from within*, but only

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 139. Final emphasis mine; all others are original.

²*Ibid.*, 138.

³Haught, *God after Darwin*, 41. Emphasis mine. See also, Haught, *101 Questions*, where we find question 97: "Isn't Whitehead's notion of persuasive power a gratuitous diminishment of God's omnipotence?" He answers, "Process theology would answer that it is not. For if 'power' means 'the capacity to influence,' persuasive power has a much deeper impact on the world, at least in the final analysis, than would any hypothetically coercive exercise of force. . . . A world created by divine compulsion would be nothing more than an appendage of God's own being rather than world unto itself" (138).

superficially from without. In the presence of a vulnerable, defenseless love, however, the world is allowed to experience its *own internal power*—a power of self-creativity that eventually takes the form of human freedom. God’s power is manifested most fully in God’s self-emptying empowerment of the creation.”¹ Haught is looking for the best way that God can exercise non-coercive, freedom-giving power to nature and to man. Thus, for Haught, to avoid external coercion and demonstrate his humility, God must become fully immanent in relation to nature.²

Panentheistic Nature of Evolutionary Theology

We have already seen statements by Haught and others clearly implying a panentheistic view of God, but now we shall see that this position is clearly advocated through the concept of a divine incarnation with the material universe. For example, Haught describes his God of evolution as “a promising God already incarnate in matter.”³ Commenting on the saying of Jesus, “if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me,”⁴ Haught offers an alternative model of incarnation, declaring, “This

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 115. Emphasis mine.

²C. S. Lewis offers an important critique of such an overselling of divine love: “It is for people that we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. If God is love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness.” Lewis ascribes the emphasis on a non-intervening view of divine love to the desire to have “a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence,” who merely wishes that “a good time was had by all.” Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 40-41.

³Haught, *101 Questions*, 115.

⁴John 12:32, KJV.

image suggests that the most glorious form of power is that which humbly invites other beings to enter into *organic unity* with God of their own accord, and not out of compulsion.”¹ A page later, Haught describes this organic unity of nature with God in these terms, “Christ’s human nature, according to the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), must not get lost in the divinity to which it is united. God clearly wants to relate to a world that is ‘other’ than God. *In Christ’s human nature, Christians believe, the whole universe somehow subsists.* So in the Christian way of looking at things, *God’s presence in the world* does not dissolve the world any more than the divine nature of Christ nullifies the humanity of Christ.”²

This is a most interesting argument. It argues analogically from the incarnation in Christ to a broader incarnation of God into the universe. Just as God was in Christ without destroying His human nature, so God is said to be in the world in a similar fashion, without obliterating it. This is quite reminiscent of the organic union model of Dawkins in his ring-species argument. Haught appears to see God as organically united with the physical cosmos. Yet it is not without some irony, that Haught also sees the incarnational model as a way of avoiding us merging the world with God to the point that no distinction can be made between the two.³ He asserts a need to maintain the

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 117. Emphasis mine.

²Ibid., 118. Emphasis mine.

³Ibid., 118-119.

otherness of God from the world “if we are to avoid pantheism.”¹ Nevertheless, Haught describes Jesus as having an “incarnational solidarity with all of nature and history, [by which] the suffering in these realms is assimilated into the life of God where it takes on an unfathomable but redemptive meaning.”² Thus an organic level of union is strongly implied.

God Feels the Pain Found within the Cosmos

The panentheistic concept of God incarnating with the universe introduces an interesting implication to evolutionary theology. Because God is organically united to the material world, He feels its pain and suffering.³ Says Haught,

Evolutionary thought helps us move beyond the aloof apathetic deity of so much pre-Darwinian piety. I believe, along with many other theologians today, that the

¹Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 79. Haught thus rejects a pure pantheism, but accepts the panentheism of process theology.

²Haught, *101 Questions*, 125.

³For example, see Murchie, where he addresses the problem of finding meaning and solves it by advocating process theology: “The key philosophical question then boils down to: why the world? What are we here for? Specifically, why were you and I conceived such sorry worms upon a troublous mote named Earth? It is a tough one. Scientists and philosophers have wrestled with it for millenniums to meager avail. . . . But one of the better [theories] among recent ones is ‘process theology,’ which postulates that God, along with His universe, is in a perpetual process of development. . . . Although it limits God, from a human standpoint, by associating Him with a finite time field, process theology compensates, as I understand it, by permitting his all-knowingness to be explained by making all life an actual part of His experience. Thus what you and I do and think, *God feels and knows eternally through our senses, our lives, our aspirations, our sacrifices, our creations, along with all such everywhere*”(620). Emphasis mine. It is significant that God’s knowledge is argued to come through the sensory apparatus of creation. Does this imply that God cannot know independently of the creation? Murchie does not address this question.

notion of God as self-emptying love makes sense after Darwin. *This is the God who suffers along with creation and saves the world by taking all of its evolutionary travail and triumph into the everlasting divine compassion. . . .*

The suffering of living beings, therefore, is not undergone in isolation from God, but becomes part of God's own story. . . .

. . . By seeing it all as *God's own suffering*, we can hope for an ultimate victory of love and life over pain and death.¹

Haught ties this idea of God sharing in the world's suffering to the *kenosis* metaphysics by invoking Christ's passion, declaring, "According to the Christian faith, the passion and resurrection of Jesus present us with the portrait of a God who shares fully in the suffering of this world and who rises victoriously over it."² This is Haught's answer to the theodicy issue in the problem of natural evil. God suffers with us, and our suffering is eternally recorded in God's experience.

John Bennet makes a similar argument. "Furthermore, since God's experience, unlike ours, is radically and perfectly complete, his actuality is co-extensive with all that is. In short, God includes within his experience the totality of nature—nature as we abuse it as well as nature as we care for it. . . . The God of love is so related to everything that as things occur and change, the occurrences and changes register (perfectly) with God."³ In fact, without this process theology view, says Bennet, "nature has no religious value if it makes no contribution to the actuality of God."⁴

That O'Murchu likewise believes in an incarnational model of nature is clear for he

¹Haught, *101 Questions*, 124, 126. Emphasis mine. See also Murchie, 620.

²Haught, *101 Questions*, 124.

³Bennet, 75-76.

⁴*Ibid.*, 75.

asserts that, “in the becoming of creation, the God-reality also takes shape and form; in the suffering of pain and evolution, God also suffers and struggles.”¹ But he then goes a step further in specifically applying this paradigm to human beings. Very early in his book he declares, “I believe in the incarnation of the divine in the human soul, initially activated in Africa over four million years ago.”² Later, he reiterates and expands on this point. Referring to the appearance of man in evolution as a product of the “divine energy” 4.4 million years ago, O’Murchu continues, “This is where we encounter incarnation for the first time. In its basic sense, incarnation means God coming in the flesh of humanity, fully entering into that embodied condition, blessing and affirming that all that is happening to it, and using it thenceforth as a means of bearing witness to the presence of the divine in the world. Everything Christians claim was happening to our humanity in and through Christ had started 4.4 million years ago.”³ O’Murchu cites a widespread record of human history testifying to belief in God as an immanent force within nature as a major evidence for this incarnation, panentheistic paradigm of God. He then notes that this same majority of human beings has tended to see this force in feminine terms, a female deity, which O’Murchu refers to as “goddess consciousness.”⁴

¹O’Murchu, 79.

²Ibid., 3.

³Ibid., 153.

⁴Ibid., 90.

God as Mother

Korsmeyer agrees that the feminine view of deity is helpful in understanding the panentheistic view of God. “Another helpful metaphor is God as Mother of the world. Imagine the world as present in the womb of God, created and nourished by divine love.”¹ O’Murchu notes that in this approach God is not being viewed historically as a feminine being, but rather as the possessor of a certain set of qualities. “Such qualities include fertility, creativity, intensity of engagement, diversity of involvement, *immanence in the cosmic and planetary processes*, paradox, and above all, relationality.”² He then adds, “Comparing creation to a female womb has resonances in a number of religious traditions.”³

It should be no surprise that a mother-God has been presented by these scholars. Elizabeth Achtemeier, in her critique of feminist theology, notes the propensity for pantheistic views of God found in the concept of goddess.

It is precisely the introduction of female language for God that opens the door to such identification with the world, however. If God is portrayed in feminine language, the figures of carrying in the womb, of giving birth, and of suckling immediately come into play. . . . But if the creation has issued forth from the body of the deity, it shares in the deity’s substance; deity is in, through, and under all things, and therefore everything is divine. . . . If God is identified with his creation, we finally make ourselves gods and goddesses—the ultimate and primeval sin (Gen 3).⁴

¹Korsmeyer, 94.

²O’Murchu, 90. Emphasis mine.

³Ibid., 91.

⁴Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Why God Is Not Mother: A Response to Feminist God-Talk in the Church,” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, 20. As an aside, Achtemeier

Thus, O'Murchu and Korsmeyer have made a very natural comparison of God a woman or mother. Such a view meshes well with a pantheistic or panentheistic view of God, thus strengthening their argument for a highly immanent God.

Salvation as Deification

Achtemeier's analysis points to a tendency to argue salvation as a type of apotheosis. We can find this tendency in evolutionary theology. In a Roman Catholic newsletter of opinions, Jack Keene levels a charge against Teilhard de Chardin that may also apply to our evolutionary theologians. After an undocumented quotation of Teilhard confessing pantheistic tendencies, Keen asserts, "Teilhard essentially taught that the world itself was being transubstantiated into Christ."¹ In Haught's argument that God's presence in the evolutionary process is hidden, but real, we can see a concept very similar to the commonly understood Catholic concept of the sacrament. God is said to work in nature in the same way that He is said to work in the sacrament. Thus it is not surprising that Haught, a Roman Catholic,² uses sacramental language in defining divine revelation

observes that, "*The few instances of feminine imagery for God in the Bible all take the form of simile, not metaphor. . . .* That distinction is instructive. A simile compares one aspect of something to another. For example, in Isaiah 42:14, God will, 'cry out *like* a woman in travail,' but only his *crying out* is being referred to; he is not being identified as a whole with the figure of a woman in childbirth. In metaphors, on the other hand, the whole of one thing is compared with the whole of another" (19). All emphases in original.

¹Jack Keene, "Teilhard, Darwin, and the Cosmic Christ," *Southern Papist Perspective: A Catholic Opinion News Letter*, Fall 1999, Issue 44, <http://www.trosch.org/for/teilhard-keene991.htm> (18 May 2004).

²Haught, *God after Darwin*, 6-7.

as “the communication of *God’s own selfhood* to the world.”¹

Korsmeyer also expresses the ultimate destiny of the world in terms of apotheosis. “The divine life is constantly receiving the lives of everyone in the world, and adding each moment to the collected moments of their past. All these moments are experienced by God with no loss of intensity or immediacy. *The past of the world enters the everlasting present of the divine immediacy. The world is transformed in God, who weaves everything that is worthwhile into greater harmony, a greater whole.*”² For Korsmeyer, “Perhaps we have been called into existence to assist the great divine evolutionary plan to move the whole universe toward divinity, to be co-workers, co-creators in bringing about the Kingdom of God among us. Perhaps eschatology has to be rethought.”³

Closely associated with this new direction in eschatology is the issue of what happens at death. Haught tends to reject the body/soul dualism that means a separation of the soul from nature, and seems to see death as a further aspect of God’s incarnating

¹Ibid., 39. In the context, the word “communication” seems to carry the connotation of sacrament as understood in Roman Catholicism.

²Korsmeyer, 102. Emphasis mine.

³Ibid., 88. In saying God has an evolutionary plan, Korsmeyer may be treading on dangerous ground. In the 1980s, one Protestant denomination combined the concepts of an evolutionary view of origins, with the biblical doctrine of human dominion over nature to concoct a Christianized form of Julian Huxley’s Moral Darwinism, where man takes over the supervision of his own evolution. This included advocacy of eugenics and abortion as tools for managing our evolution. For more information see, Stephen Bauer, “Genesis, Dominion, and Ethics: A Critical Analysis of Ethics Based on the Concept of Dominion in Genesis 1:26-28,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 6, no. 2 (1995): 77-108.

Himself into nature. Thus, death “would not be a distancing from, but a movement toward a deeper intimacy with, and eternally embodied deity.”¹ Resurrection seems to be seen as almost typological, a symbol of the process where God “opens up a new future for humans and for the whole creation.”² How would this panentheistic absorption into the divine, impact our understanding of eschatology?

Evolution, Eschatology, and Human Preference

Korsmeyer asserts that “the idea of God bringing the universe to an end in the near future through Christ’s second coming is not compatible with the evidence of the divine efforts in the universe for fifteen billion years.”³ O’Murchu likewise affirms, “I no longer believe in the anthropocentric myth of the end of the world. There is every likelihood that we humans will destroy ourselves, but not creation. Creation has an infinite capacity to cocreate.”⁴ Haught likewise denies, based on an evolutionary perspective of our world’s history, that there was an original, perfect world that lost its perfection and will once again be restored. “Thus, a scientifically informed understanding of redemption may no longer plausibly make themes of restoration or

¹Haught, *God after Darwin*, 162. Here and on the next page, Haught’s presentation of death sounds almost like the Eastern Religions’ hope of Nirvana, the absorption of all individuals into the cosmic one. Says Haught, “A theology of death sensitive to ecology and evolution would interpret dying in Christ as a transition from our present relatively shallow associations with the world to an *ever deepening solidarity with the entire universe and its future with God.*” Emphasis mine.

²Ibid., 114.

³Korsmeyer, 88.

⁴O’Murchu, 4.

recovery dominant. . . . It would be absurd, therefore, to seek the restoration of a chronologically primordial state of material dispersal.”¹ Not only does evolutionary theology overturn our concept of God, but it also seems unable to support the hope of a restored, sinless perfect world. The second coming of Christ disappears from the theological radar screen.² And it is in the context of this concept of eschatology that our evolutionary theologians see fit to raise the issue of human preference.

For Haught, “Evolution, to repeat our theme, means the world is unfinished.” But on the other hand, “redemption, therefore, . . . must mean . . . the healing of *tragedy* (and not just the consequences of human sin) that accompanies the universe *in via*. . . . It would be callous indeed on the part of theologians to perpetuate the *one-sidedly anthropocentric and retributive* notions of pain and redemption that used to fit so comfortably into pre-evolutionary pictures of the world.”³ Thus, the traditional plan of salvation is seen as being overly favorable to human status. Korsmeyer holds a similar position: “Second, any ‘exclusive’ theology, which in effect suggests that God is only concerned with one group of people on one planet of one small star, is not credible. It is the product of a theology that considers Scripture in a literalist manner, convinced it provides a comprehensive scientific worldview, and has not considered the scientific

¹Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 170.

²Even without doing evolutionary theology, Darwin’s theory has historically shown a penchant for undermining the biblical doctrine of the second coming. One good example is, Zachary Hayes, *What Are They Saying about the End of the World?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 40-46. Hayes cites a number of scholars holding to this denial. Of significance is that Hayes explicitly ties denial of the parousia to evolution.

³Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 169. Last emphasis mine.

evidence of who we are, where we are, and how we got here.”¹ Korsmeyer further posits the need of animals for a similar redemption to humans. “What we can be very sure of is that God loves them and wills their salvation. It is the divine nature to love.”² So, the new interpretation of salvation includes animals with man in such a way that human preference is diminished so as to include the animals. While not as fully developed as the non-theistic evolutionists, there is a clear leaning towards rejecting human preference in moral matters, just as Rachels predicted would happen.

Divine Feeling as the Ground for Animal Rights

How, then, does God redeem man, animals, and all of nature? By feeling, experiencing, and remembering forever all earthly suffering through being pantheistically present in the world.³ For Korsmeyer, the fact that God feels all sentient suffering, including animals, becomes the basis of rights. “The process viewpoint even has implications for animal rights. *Since all individuals, human and otherwise, are felt by God, and thus have value in themselves, they have rights and we have duties towards them.*”⁴ This means humans cannot be elevated over the animals because the sufferings of both are incorporated in the divine being. It further implies that to cause unnecessary

¹Korsmeyer, 89.

²Ibid., 129.

³Haught, *101 Questions*, 139; idem, *Deeper than Darwin*, 82; idem, *God after Darwin*, 43. See also Korsmeyer, 101-102.

⁴Korsmeyer, 101-102. Emphasis mine. His position appears to ground moral duties in the obligation not to cause further pain to God, a kind of cosmic painism, so to speak.

pain to the animals is to cause that pain to God. Korsmeyer then finds another way to undermine human significance.

Korsmeyer makes a very Rachels-like statement when he argues that “there is no substance that has been placed into the human body that can be marked, or that is different from animal souls. That difference is in degree, though still ‘immense.’”¹ He refines his point by asserting

that which we call soul in humans is not a substance that appears at conception or birth. The potential to become a human being occurs at conception. But the potential is not actual; therefore the becoming of a human being goes through many stages in time. Personhood develops in time. The mature human is self-conscious, has memories, hopes and fears, anticipates the future, and transcends the physical world in value, creativity, and knowledge of God. The development of human personhood goes through stages as a human matures, it is not an absolute, and cannot be used as though it were, to support arguments against abortion or euthanasia, for example.²

Thus, another reason humans cannot have moral preference is that their human status is seen as being a relative quality, apparently based on certain individual functions instead of some inner essence. Again we have discovered that the evolutionary and process theologians investigated here have all ended up drawing conclusions remarkably similar to Rachels.

The Validation of Rachels

Evolutionary Theology Verifies Rachels’s Claims

Rachels has used the issues of teleology and the problem of evil to argue that

¹Ibid., 101.

²Ibid.

Darwinism relates to theism in one of two ways. Evolution is either incompatible with theism or, in the event of maintaining belief in God, cannot support a view of divinity robust enough to support traditional Christian ethics. I have taken a long detour through the problem of natural evil and then on into evolutionary theology to look at some serious evidence in relation to these claims. How have Rachels's assertions fared?

I believe Rachels is fundamentally correct in this analysis of the relationship between Darwinism and theism, and thus between evolution and traditional morality. The God of the evolutionary theologians is too non-coercive to give any kind of specific moral guidance. Such direction would likely be seen as an infringement on human freedom. Furthermore, Benjamin Wiker, publishing a decade later than Rachels but never citing Rachels in his work, explains why Rachels is right in his conclusions concerning the relationship of theism to Darwinism.

The Metaphysical Nature of Evolution Verified

Wiker corroborates Rachels's assertion that Deism is the only form of theism compatible with Darwinism. In addition, he agrees with Rachels's assertion that, ultimately, atheism is not easily resisted within the Darwinist framework.

Deism therefore became the religion of the new [materialist] view of nature; that is, it was the religion that a closed system of nature would allow. As with Epicurus, the divine was both distant and impotent to interfere with nature. . . . [This] was rooted in the Epicurean animosity to an interfering, miracle-performing deity. Simply put, Deism was the form religion had to take in a Newtonian cosmos; and one sign that God did not ultimately belong in the system was the all

too easy slide of Deism in the eighteenth century to materialist atheism in the nineteenth.¹

Wiker further asserts that “it was the materialist prohibition of miracles that provided the strongest acid in dissolving biblical authority, and thereby helped prepare the West for the reception of evolutionary theory as a substitute faith.”² It is significant that Wiker, a theist and Christian, has come to similar conclusions as Rachels, apparently independently of any influence from Rachels. Both Rachels and Wiker thus imply that Darwinism has a metaphysical dimension hidden within the theory. In fact, Wiker is quite explicit, saying, “Darwinism in its most fundamental sense is not merely biological, but truly cosmological in scope.”³ Hunter concurs, charging evolution with masking its metaphysical tendencies. “Darwin’s great contribution to this tradition [of distancing God from creation to avoid natural evil] was the scientific flavor he gave to the solution, to the point that most readers lost sight of the embedded metaphysical presuppositions. Whereas the earlier solutions lacked detailed explanations, Darwin provided scientific laws and biological details.”⁴ For Wiker, the two key consequences

¹Wiker, 205. Two pages later,, Wiker proves his point that atheism becomes hard to resist by relating the story of one theologian, David Friedrich Straus (1808-1874). “Typical of a whole line of German and English scriptural scholars of the nineteenth century, he gave up doctrine after doctrine in an frantic effort to save the faith from irrelevancy, and having given everything away, he himself became a materialist denying Christianity altogether. . . . The historical lesson is simple, and allows Straus to stand as a kind of nineteenth-century type: having adopted Epicurean means, Straus could not help but achieve Epicurean ends, not only in his work as an exegete, but in himself” (207).

²Ibid., 239-240.

³Ibid., 215.

⁴Hunter, 117.

of this hidden metaphysics is that Darwinian materialism has “devoured God the creator and the immortal human soul, leaving behind a completely Godless, soulless universe.”¹

The Connection between Cosmology and Morality

Wiker’s mention of the immortal soul is significant for it is only through this medium that Wiker sees the possibility of life after death, which, in turn, makes divine judgement possible.² Wiker argues that Epicurus saw life under the threat of divine reward and punishment as undesirable and thus needed a new cosmology that would get rid of the gods and thus make the good life, a life without fear of future accountability, possible.³ Wiker observes, of Epicurus, that “he very astutely realized that every way of

¹Wiker, 20.

²Ibid., 21-22. For Seventh-day Adventists, Wiker’s assertion that Darwinism does away with the concept of divine judgment, and thus human accountability to God, is significant on two fronts. First, SDA’s deny the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as being unbiblical. However, they would agree with Wiker that a concept of afterlife is needed in order to have a viable form of reward and punishment. This is reflected in 1 Cor 15, where Paul argues that if there is no resurrection, then the Christian hope of afterlife becomes meaningless and we might as well “eat, drink; for tomorrow we die” (vs. 32). So, then, Wiker is correct in asserting the doctrine of afterlife as essential to the judgment. However, he either ignores or fails to see the bodily resurrection promised in 1 Cor 15 as an alternate means to the immortal soul for making afterlife a viable possibility.

³Ibid., 20-22. See also, Wiker, where he makes a similar claim for the Epicureanism revived in the Renaissance and onward: “Epicureanism became hedonistic in modernity because its modern proponents believed that if the pleasures of this world were increased, the worries about, and belief in, the next world dissolve. The pleasures of the body, so they thought, would dispel the belief in the soul” (156). This is also seen in Mill, where he explicitly uses Epicureanism to argue against sacrificing present pleasures for future promises of reward such as is found in Christianity (105). Richard Dawkins, in reacting to the September 11, 2001 airliner attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City, also takes a very negative view of belief in an afterlife, and the religions that teach it. “Religion teaches the dangerous nonsense that death is not the end. If death

life, every view of morality, is groundless unless it is grounded in the way things actually are, in nature.”¹ This assertion Wiker labels “the great law of uniformity.”

According to the great law of uniformity, “every distinct view of the universe, every theory about nature, necessarily entails a view of morality; every distinct view of morality, every theory about human nature, necessarily entails a cosmology to support it.”² This means that “materialist-defined science must necessarily lead to materialist-defined morality.”³ Thus, “Epicurus designed a view of nature to fit his desired way of life, a cosmology to support his morality. Modernity began by embracing his cosmology and ends by embracing his morality.”⁴ This is just another way of demonstrating what we examined earlier: Acceptance or rejection of teleology in nature determines whether or not one's morals also derive from a master design.⁵

if final, a rational agent can be expected to value his life highly and be reluctant to risk it. . . . There is no doubt that the afterlife-obsessed suicidal brain really is a weapon of immense power and danger.” For Dawkins, “To fill a world with religion, or religions of the Abrahmic kind, is like littering the streets with loaded guns. Do not be surprised if they are used.” Richard Dawkins, “Religion’s Guided Missiles,” *Guardian Unlimited*, 15 September 2001, www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4257777,00.html (22 February 2004).

¹Wiker, 22.

²Ibid. Also, “A materialist cosmos must necessarily yield a materialist morality, and therefore Darwinism must yield moral Darwinism” (27).

³Ibid., 23.

⁴Ibid.

⁵See pp. 229-243 of this dissertation.

Two Cosmologies at War

Wiker again mirrors Rachels in arguing that Christianity and Darwinism are irreconcilable. “Any attempt to reconcile the two—either from the side of theology, as for example, Kenneth Miller’s *Finding Darwin’s God* or John Haught’s *God after Darwin*, or from the side of Darwinism, as for example Michael Ruse’s *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* or Stephen J. Gould’s *Rocks of Ages*—can only end in conjuring up a superfluous deity or cobbling together an incoherent, unstable, ‘two spheres’ approach (where the universe is tidily divided between science and religion).”¹ Of the former charge, Wiker adds that “the problem with a superfluous deity should be obvious. . . . Evolutionary theism (or any of its variants), rather than providing anything new, is merely following in the ruts of Epicurus’ wagon.”²

As to the latter assertion, Wiker argues that Gould’s concept of non-overlapping magisteria (science and religion—i.e., materialism and theism) “is bound to fail,” and also that it “is doomed to failure.”³ This is because of the power of the great law of uniformity: “No amount of gerrymandering of reality whether it has its roots in Polybius, or the good intentions of the materialists, or the desperation of Christians, can override this most fundamental law: *there is only one universe.*”⁴ Thus, “as a house divided

¹Ibid., 27. Gould’s book information is, Stephen J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages* (New York: Ballantine, 1999).

²Wiker, 314.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid. Emphasis in original.

against itself cannot stand, so also our society [or church], defined by two ancient and antagonistic accounts of nature and human nature, cannot withstand this fundamental disagreement for long.”¹ By “releasing the gods from toil, Epicurus was really releasing nature, and hence human nature, from any divine interference,” so fulfilling his goal of “our freedom from disturbance.”² Wiker goes so far to allege that,

indeed, no greater and more effective alliance has existed for the eradication of Christianity, both doctrinally and morally, than that between liberal Christianity and materialists.

But there are other Christians, those who have made peace with Darwinism, but who resist the encroachments of moral Darwinism—not realizing, in conformity to the great law of uniformity, that acceptance of one must bring acceptance of the other. You cannot accept the theoretical foundations of Darwinism and reject the moral conclusions.³

To a great degree, this is exactly what Rachels asserted over a decade before Wiker, though in much less detail. Wiker draws two moral implications of the cosmological shift to materialism.

¹Ibid., 25.

²Ibid., 45. Emphasis in original.

³Ibid., 301. It should be noted that for Wiker, Christianity seems very much tied to Aquinas and Aristotle. This is especially evident on pp. 103-104 where he speaks with great approval of Aquinas’s integration of Christianity with Aristotle, followed by allegations that “radical Augustinianism,” which appears to be his euphemism for the Protestant Reformation, as a major aid in reviving Epicureanism. Thus he appears to charge Protestantism with undermining true Christianity without directly saying so.

Wiker seems to have created a type of Great Controversy motif, but instead of being framed in terms of Christ versus Satan, it appears to be structure in terms of Aristotle (through Aquinas) vs. Epicurus. For the Protestant who claims the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, this is a problematic point for it bypasses the supremacy of scriptural authority, while implicating the Reformation as aiding that which is destructive to Christianity. Wiker’s argument that cosmology is the grounding issue is significant and correct. This is why the Bible starts with a cosmology in Gen 1, and why the *Sola Scriptura* Christian should reframe Wiker’s motif into Scripture vs. Epicurus.

Two Implications for Morality

For Wiker, the first implication of the new cosmology is that in the evolutionary view, humans lose their preferential place in the moral universe. Wiker specifically asserts that Darwin's "*Descent of Man*, destroyed the distinct feature, reason, which nonmaterialist philosophy understood as *the* sign of the existence of an immortal and immaterial soul in man."¹ Here Wiker verifies the veracity of Rachels's argument that the rationality thesis was a key pillar of establishing human preference and is undermined by evolution.²

Wiker then highlights a second implication of Darwinism for ethics which parallels with Rachels: The supreme importance of the individual. After explicating that Thomas Hobbes's explanation of nature is not friendly to the concept of family, due to the inherently antagonistic stance between individuals asserting self-interest, Wiker adds: "The atomistic individualism that Hobbes's account promoted must continually view the natural family as a side effect of sexual desire. As the consequence of this myth, modern Epicurean hedonism will continually strive to liberate sexual desire from its unintended side effect, procreation. Another important hallmark of Epicurean hedonism will follow upon this: as opposed to the natural law argument that the family is the foundation of

¹Ibid., 239. Emphasis in original.

²Ibid. Wiker likewise precedes this conclusion with a similar tactic to Rachels—citing Darwinian statements that there is no substantive difference between the mental capabilities of man and animals. It is a matter of varying degrees, not of kind. So Wiker again, without citation of Rachels, has made a very similar moral argument and conclusion concerning Darwin's theory and ethics.

society, modern Epicureanism will make the individual—the presocial unit, as it were—the foundation of society.”¹ If the individual is the foundation of society, then it would seem that morality becomes the protection of the individual’s rights, as in Hobbes. Rachels has merely taken this concept beyond the human to any individual, and Wiker has shown us why—the inherent individualism of materialist metaphysics forces such a conclusion unless vigorously resisted.

Rachels’s Unfinished Work

I believe Rachels is fundamentally correct in this analysis of the relationship between Darwinism and theism. The data from the evolutionary theologians, as well as from Hunter and Wiker, have repeatedly validated Rachels’s position. But Rachels, it seems, has not gone far enough in his effort to undermine Christianity and its moral veracity. While mentioning the doctrines of creation, divine revelation (including the moral law), the plan of salvation, and the eschatological end of the world, he focuses only on creation and the cosmological dimension reiterated by Wiker. In the other three areas he is strangely silent, not developing any of those issues to any degree of significance. I propose Rachels could easily have gone further than he did.

Extending Rachels’s Attack

Rachels alluded to the ten commandments as part of the biblical picture of God’s regard for man. But if Darwinism is accepted as factual, then the lack of teleology means

¹Wiker, 164.

there can be no divine design for morality, just as there was none for creation. Why would God avoid design in creation only to have design in morals? The designless theism that Rachels rightly demands of Darwinism would have to eliminate the ten commandments, and all other direct moral guidance by God as shown in the Bible. In such a scenario sin is eliminated since there can be no divine law or design to violate.¹ Thus Darwinism clearly undermines the foundations of biblical morality and theism.

The elimination of the ability to sin (because there is no divine design such as the 10 commandments) means one would eliminate the need of salvation from sin and its penalty. There would be no need for an incarnation and sacrificial death by Christ for incarnation is a designed, planned, unnatural act incompatible with Darwinism or a deistic god who uses no design. Removing teleology thus undermines yet another pillar of Christian faith which points to human dignity and preference.

Additionally, if there is no divine design, how can such a theism have any meaningful eschatology? If suffering and death are tools of evolutionary progress, then death and suffering are natural. Death is no longer an enemy as the Scriptures declare (for example, 1 Cor 15:26). If Darwin is right, then why should we hope for the world to come in which death and suffering will be no more (Rev 21-22)? Man's importance in the plan of salvation and divine future is replaced by an uncertain future of natural selection, personal insignificance and death. There can be no special destiny since there is no divine design which calls for it.

¹Rom 4:15; 5:13; 7:7. Paul here argues that sin is not reckoned where there is no law and that he would not know what sin is except for the law.

Furthermore, the destruction of eschatology destroys human accountability to God, a crucial element of morality for it is impossible to have accountability without design. If there is no design, how can there be a judgement?¹ I would propose that without accountability one can not have a genuine morality. If the moral capacity in humans evolved through traits of altruism, as Rachels and others have suggested, then morality merely becomes being helpful to others. But morality is bigger than mere unselfishness. It involves justice and injustice. Thus morality is bigger than the evolutionists tend to depict it. Why argue over moral obligations if there is no accountability? This question begs a question Rachels never addresses: Why be moral?² What difference does it make whether one is moral or immoral if there is no accountability to a being with universal moral authority?

Rachels seeks to answer the accountability question by declaring his adherence to the Kantian doctrine that moral precepts are self-imposed upon by the morally and rationally autonomous agent. The penalty for violating these self-imposed moral precepts is, “in Kant’s words, ‘self-contempt and inner abhorrence.’”³ But there are

¹For Seventh-day Adventist theology this is especially devastating due to the great emphasis on the “investigative judgment.” Such a judgment is incompatible with Darwinism or deism, leaving man with no real accountability to God. Deism and Darwinism cannot sustain such a doctrine.

²While Rachels does not address the question, “Why be moral?” Peter Singer does. Helga Kuhse reports that he wrote his MA thesis on this question, and Singer devotes the final chapter of *Practical Ethics*, “Why Act Morally?” to the issue as well. See Kuhse, 9; Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 314-79. In a simplistic nutshell, Singer argues we should be moral because it gives our lives meaning and direction in a meaningless world, and brings greater personal happiness than purely self-centered living.

³Rachels, “God and Moral Autonomy,” 118.

plenty of people who have no sense of any duty, let alone self-imposed duty, and who feel no “self-contempt,” regardless of their actions. Thus Rachels seems to assert that there is no external accountability in morality. But on what grounds can one argue with the “immoral” person to convince them of their immorality? Rachels has offered his doctrine of treating people as they deserve to be treated. But who decides this issue? If individuals decides just deserts, ethics will degenerate to egoism and vigilanteism. The alternative for Rachels is to argue for a type of contractual morality as a means of protecting one’s own interests.

Is the Concept of God Antithetical to Ethics?

As to the charge that the concept of the existence of God is antithetical to ethics, it seems that the rationale is more driven by emotion than logic. This can be seen, in part, by the fact that before Rachels starts his essay on this matter, he has a header quoting Kant: “Kneeling down or grovelling [*sic*] on the ground, even to express your reverence for heavenly things, is contrary to human dignity.”¹ Such a quip clearly is designed, by its setting, to arouse strong emotions against the idea of submission to a supreme being. It is seen as being contrary to human dignity. Ironically, it has been this very dignity that Rachels has sought to undermine by attacking the image of God thesis.

Second, the concept of God’s sovereignty presented by Rachels is nothing more than a caricature of divine sovereignty as found in Scripture. For Rachels, divine sovereignty seems to be construed as only being a mindless, moronic submission to God.

¹Ibid., 109.

Rachels may have a point if one's understanding of God is akin to Calvin's doctrine of divine sovereignty. This may be because Rachels generally appeals only to Augustine and Aquinas as representative of Christianity.¹ Scholars holding a heavily Augustinian view of divine sovereignty, such as Charles Hodge and Millard J. Erickson, have animated discussions in their writings trying to explain how God wills everything that happens before it happens, and yet somehow we can still be said to freely choose to do what God willed we would do, and therefore must do.² Such interpretations of divine sovereignty have greater vulnerability to Rachels's charge that divine sovereignty and human moral accountability are incompatible. But other Christian versions of the doctrine of God are less susceptible to Rachels's complaint.

To say that God deserves unconditional submission is not necessarily contradictory with human moral freedom. The God of Scripture invites us to "reason" with Him (Isa 1:18). Additionally, man must have moral freedom before this almighty God or else there could be no moral accountability to Him, including a judgment.³ Just because we

¹Rachels never makes direct reference to Protestant sources of Christian theology. This seems to be a significant omission by Rachels. To never mention Calvin or Luther, for example, seems to be a glaring omission. Possibly due to the strong theological connections of Calvin and Luther to Augustine, Rachels felt them to be secondary sources in reference to Augustine. Still, the equation of Christianity with solely Roman Catholic sources seems to be a critical weakness of Rachels.

²See, for example, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872), 541-546; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), chapter 16, esp. 357-362.

³Would it be fair to hold a severely mentally handicapped human accountable for an action they are unable to comprehend is wrong? Suppose a 45 year old with a mental capacity of a three-year-old played with matches, thus starting a fire that destroyed several homes, killing one person. Would we charge such a person with arson? In like

ought to submit to God does not mean that we *have* to submit. The Scriptures reveal a God who gave freedom to Adam and Eve to disobey, albeit they were held accountable for their free choices. Accountability to divine judgment is precisely the tool that allows God to be fully sovereign and humans to be truly free moral agents who can be held accountable. Rachels, instead, sees accountability to anyone except oneself alone as antithetical to morality, yet we have seen that such a position makes it all too easy to be immoral without consequence. Morality, without accountability to a higher authority, collapses. And indeed, this collapse is what Rachels argues Darwinism does to traditional ethics. Thus, Rachels's argument that the existence of God is incompatible with the human moral freedom does not account for the necessary conditions for having free moral agents. It seems rooted in a psychological aversion to a God who grants freedoms but holds us accountable.

Rachels has offered one last trump card to oust God from morality: Plato's Euthyphro argument. We have seen that Rachels clearly believes that he has proffered an unanswerable argument to the traditional theist. Either God is arbitrary, or there is an independent standard of good. One could easily get seduced into responding point by point to the subtleties of Plato's argument. But I believe this misses the point. The real answer lies outside the parameters framed by Plato, and further developed by Rachels.

Both fail to take into account one key attribute of God found in Scripture. For Plato this

manner, God cannot hold dogs to the same standards as humans. Morality presupposes the capacity to be both moral and responsible. If not, moral demands lose their authority and power. This does not mean that this mentally handicapped person has no rights. But it means they cannot be held to the same moral standard as the average human.

is excusable as he was likely ignorant of the Hebrew Scriptures and historically prior to the Christian era. But for Rachels there is less excuse. And what is this attribute of God? Divine foreknowledge.

The Bible teaches that God knows the end from the beginning. This includes a knowledge of the future which separates Him from the other gods of antiquity.¹ Furthermore, it is clear that God not only knows what *will* occur, but also what *might* happen. This is most easily seen in the blessings and curses of the covenant with Israel. God lists out two possible scenarios and Israel's choices will determine which avenue is actualized.² Thus God is the only being who is qualified to determine good and evil consequentially. He is not subject to the limitations of consequentialism due to His foreknowledge and perfect wisdom. Neither Plato nor Rachels accounts for this possibility.³ It is not without significance that those influenced by process theology deny God's ability to foresee future, freewill choices.⁴ In so interpreting God's abilities, they

¹Isa 45:21; 46:10. In these two chapters God contrasts Himself with the idol-gods. The idol-gods are made while God is maker (thus the significance of the doctrine of Creation) and God is Lord of the future, and the idol-gods have no ability to control or foretell the future. The uniqueness of God as Lord of the future is again highlighted in Dan 2:27-28, 47, and all of chapter 4.

²See Deut 27-29.

³In Gen 3, prior to the fall of man, God is said to have known evil. Presumably He also knew the workings of evil prior to the fall of Lucifer and the angels as well. How then, could God have known evil if it did not yet exist, and that it was evil? Foreknowledge of what might happen allows Him to see what is destructive and useful to the welfare of His creatures.

⁴See, for example, Bertocci, 448-449, where he argues from a process perspective that in order for us to be truly free, God cannot foreknow future freewill choices. Thus God's foreknowledge is limited to that which is believed to be knowable, which does not

undermine the very means by which God knows what is good and evil, and thus able to show us what is good.¹

James Rachels has taken great care to systematically undermine any possibility of combining theism with ethics. Like Sampson's attack on the two pillars of the Philistine temple, Rachels is attacking two pillars he believes uphold the temple of traditional Christian morality—the image-of-God thesis and the rationality thesis. For the believer in Darwinism, the religious pillars for traditional ethics, especially human preference, have been removed.

Rachels has made a significant effort to produce an alternative ethical theory that is rooted in Darwinian principles. He has been especially insightful in showing how an ethics based on Darwinism might look. While I disagree with his choice of supporting the Darwinist position contrary to Christianity, Rachels has made a fundamentally lucid and accurate assessment of the fatal implications of Darwinism for Christian ethics. But an important question remains: Has Rachels accurately portrayed biblical theology in relation to nature?

include future free choices. See also, Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 3-4, 37-39. Freewill Theism, also called the Openness of God, holds a view of divine foreknowledge similar to the process theologians, though for different reasons. For more on Freewill Theism, see David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), esp. chapters 1-2; Clark Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994). For an overview of the current foreknowledge debate, see Gregory A. Boyd and others, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

¹See Mic 6:8, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good."

Rachels and Scripture

Introduction

When James Rachels published *Created from Animals* in 1991, theological works focusing animal and environmental issues were virtually nonexistent. In the decade following Rachels's volume, there has been an eruption of published works seeking to develop theological justifications for protecting the environment and animals.¹ These efforts have generally represented an approach to Scripture which treats the Bible and non-biblical sources as equal in authority. One example of this perspective is illustrated in the work of Stephen Webb. He asserts, "I need to substantiate my point that the Bible alone is for Christians a necessary but not sufficient basis for developing an ethics of animal compassion."² Thus he proposes a method based on Tillich's concept of "correlational theology" in which biblical and non-biblical sources dialogue as equal partners in a give-and-take arrangement not "governed and controlled by a single

¹A major pioneer in the theological realm has been Andrew Linzey, several of whose works we have cited several times previously. Additional works include, Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); idem, "Ecology vs. the Peaceable Kingdom: Toward a Better Theology of Nature," *Soundings* 79 (1996): 239-252; John Passmore, "The Treatment of Animals," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975): 195-218; Lewis G. Regenstein, *Replenish the Earth: A History of Organized Religion's Treatment of Animals and Nature—Including the Bible's Message of Conservation and Kindness Towards Animals* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991); Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001). Thirteen different authors have contributed chapters to *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

²Webb, *God and Dogs*, 20.

philosophical method,” and having “no essential form or structure.”¹

Most of the studies done in the last decade are closely allied to Webb’s methodology. Furthermore, most of these efforts appear to be forms of systematic rather than biblical theology. Nevertheless, these authors do make some significant observations about what Scripture says about the relationship of humans to nature, and particularly to animals. I shall briefly survey how these authors use Scripture to establish the moral value of animals as biblical. Then I shall turn to two aspects of biblical theology that may shed further insight. First, I shall examine what Gen 1 means by the term “dominion,” and second, I will survey how divine limitations on human usage of animals and nature demonstrate a clear limitation of that dominion.

Does Scripture Value Non-Humans?

Theological Attempts to Establish the Worth of Nature and Animals

Stephen Webb observes that, in Scripture, the animals were pronounced “good” prior to and independently of the creation of man, suggesting they have some inherent value in themselves. Additionally, Webb appeals to the biblical record of the inclusion of animals in the Sabbath commandment, the saving of animals in Noah’s ark, and Mosaic laws protecting both wild and domestic animals to assert that the Bible depicts animals as having inherent value in themselves, which entitles them to compassionate treatment. He likewise argues that the angel’s chastisement of Balaam, in part, for how

¹Ibid., 18.

he abused his donkey, shows God's displeasure with animal abuse.¹ Thus he lays an effective foundation of biblical data to support his claims. It may be argued, however, that Webb has a tendency to do minimal exegesis and thus tends to use the biblical references more like "proof texts."

Lewis Regenstein makes essentially the same arguments as Webb, based on the same passages. In addition, he cites such texts as Exod 23:5, where one is to help their enemy's beast get up when unable to rise due to its heavy burden.² Unfortunately, Regenstein often does little more than cite texts, leaving it to the reader to figure out why the text is relevant to the discussion. By contrast, Ellen White explicitly argues a direct duty to animals based on this same text. Commenting on the story of the good Samaritan, she says,

The merciful provisions of the law extended even to the lower animals, which cannot express in words their want and suffering. Directions had been given to Moses for the children of Israel to this effect: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him." Ex. 23:4, 5. But in the man wounded by robbers, Jesus presented the case of a brother in suffering. How much more should their hearts have been moved with pity for him than for a beast of burden!³

¹Ibid., 20-23.

²Regenstein, 19-21.

³Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940, 500.

Ellen White insightfully argues that Mosaic law contains regulations with implications for animal welfare. It also seems clear that helping the enemy's beast is precisely for the sake of the beast itself, in spite of its master's reputation. Thus, Ellen White shows the Bible appears to depict duties to animals independently of benefitting people.

Regenstein, however, does nothing of significance to unpack this text. By contrast, Regenstein does do more explication in exploring the implications of the Sabbath (with its inclusion of the animals in the prescribed rest), Jesus' comments on rescuing animals in distress on the Sabbath, the role of animals in justifying God's concern for Nineveh, and Balaam's incident with his talking donkey.¹

Regenstein's weakness is that he tends to treat texts with high exegetical potential too superficially, while simultaneously over-focusing on weaker texts, sometimes using them completely contrary to their context. For example, he cites Num 35:33-34 as talking about environmental pollution, when the context is the moral pollution of the "land" by blood-feuds.² Such questionable exegesis undermines the credibility of the points just cited.

These scholarly attempts to grapple with the relationship of mankind to nature are commendable. It is lamentable that Rachels apparently never responded to works such as

¹Ibid., 19-21, 24, 36, 38.

²Ibid., 20. This example is followed by using Isa. 5:8 to condemn real estate developers who don't leave enough green zones in their subdivisions. The context, however, seems to be condemning their greed, and not to address environmental issues. In the ensuing pages there are more examples of such severing of the text from its context. See pp. 22, 34-35, and 41.

these in the years between publishing *Created from Animals* and his death a little over a decade later. Likewise, Evangelicals have been slow to address the issue of the Bible and our attitudes towards animals and the environment. Thus we must ask: Can a *sola Scriptura* theology produce an ethics of respect for nature and compassion to animals? I suggest that there is evidence that the Bible does not support a despotic view of human dominion as suggested by Rachels and others. While I cannot do a full biblical theology of nature here, I shall use an introductory exegesis of portions from Gen 1 as a case study to demonstrate the despotic viewpoint does not appear to be supportable by Scripture.

Dominion in Genesis 1:26, 28

Some implications of "image" and "likeness"

Genesis 1:26 states that man was made in God's image (*selem*; צִלְמֵנוּ) and likeness (*d'mût*; דְּמוּת). Elsewhere in Scripture, *selem* (צִלְמֵנוּ) is used to depict idols and statues (see 1 Sam 6:5, 11; Ezek 7:20; 16:17).¹ Thus it connotes the idea of something copying or representing a unique, original entity. In Gen 1:26, "image" is immediately communicated in terms of human dominion over the earth (vs. 26), suggesting, it would seem, that man's dominion over the earth is to mimic or image God's rulership over the universe. Nahum Sarna takes such a position by observing, "The continuation of verse

¹See also, John E. Hartley, "צִלְמֵנוּ," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), 2:767, where he notes that *selem* (צִלְמֵנוּ) is used only of images depicting things related to deity. For an extended discussion of the nuances of צִלְמֵנוּ, with many listed sources, see F. J. Stendebach, "צִלְמֵנוּ *selem*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 12:391-396.

26 establishes the evident connection between resemblance to God and sovereignty over earth's resources."¹

These same ideas are reinforced by the parallelism of "image" (*selem*; צֶלֶם) with "likeness" (*d'mût*; דְּמוּת). While "likeness" seems to be less discussed, and there is some disagreement on the relationship "likeness" with "image" among those who discuss it, there seems to be some consensus that "likeness" is either interchangeable with, or a modifier that limits the meaning of "image." This limitation is usually asserted in terms of making it clear that man as the image of God is not to be seen as identical with God, but rather being similar to God.² Hamilton asserts that the "concrete term, 'image' is toned down by the more abstract term, 'likeness.'"³ There seems to be some significance to this last observation. "Image" tends towards a conceptual model that is frozen and

¹Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 12. Sarna goes on to make the classic argument to which Rachels objects: "In other words, the resemblance of man to God bespeaks the infinite worth of a human being and affirms the inviolability of the human person."

²Bruce Waltke, with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 66; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961), 56; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 135; Victor P. Hamilton, "דְּמוּת." *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 438; H. D. Preuss, "דָּמָה דָּמָה; דְּמוּת דְּמוּת," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 257.

³Hamilton, *Genesis*, 135. See also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 29, where he notes that *d'mût* (דְּמוּת) has the ending of an abstract noun.

rigid, like a statue. "Likeness," being more abstract, brings in a more flexible, dynamic dimension akin to the concept of *similarity*. I suggest that *dēmût* (דְּמוּת) helps clarify *selem* (צֶלֶם) by adding a more dynamic dimension and nuance.

The close relationship between *dēmût* (דְּמוּת) and *selem* (צֶלֶם) is underscored in Gen 5:1-3 where the two words are used in an extremely similar fashion to Gen 1:26, yet reversing the use of the Hebrew prepositions, כּ and ב. Again this implies an essentially synonymous use of the two terms in Genesis.¹ Sailhamer captures this synonymity when he observes that each animal was made according to its kind but man and woman were made in the image of God, not merely according to their own kind. Thus, "man's image is not simply of himself; he also shares a likeness to his creator."² What is the significance of this emphasis, the image and likeness of man to God being a dynamic similarity?

The Bible presents God's fundamental relationship to the earth and universe as one of nurture and sustenance (Heb 1:3; Ps 104). Since man was made to be the image of God, it seems evident that his dominion was meant to mimic God's sustaining rule. Jesus notes that God not only cares for sparrows (Matt 10:29; Luke 12:6) but He even cares for "the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven" (Matt 6:30). Frear notes that the underlying assumption of Christ's argument assumes a basic

¹See Sarna (12) and Wenham (30) where both assert the interchangeability of these terms in the Genesis text. Hamilton also notes that some argue this view (*TWOT*, 438).

²John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Franke E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 2:37.

value for animals.¹ It would seem, then, that since God cares for and values plants and sparrows, so should His image. Therefore, we can infer a moral duty to animals and nature, framed in terms of humans having the obligation, as God's image, to mimic and copy His nurturing and sustaining stance towards the natural world. This means that human dominion was to be exercised within the limits of the divine example. What, then, is the meaning of "dominion?"

The meaning of "dominion"

William White observes that the verb for dominion, רָדָה (*rādā*), is used twenty-two times in the Old Testament, with the first uses occurring in Gen 1.² Victor Hamilton further asserts that whereas in the majority of the uses of רָדָה (*rādā*), the word usually describes one person or nation ruling over another, it is sometimes used to describe a "shepherd's supervision over his flock (Ezek 34:4)."³ He further notes that

the last passage—Ezek. 34:4—shows that *rādā* could be connected with force and harshness. *Such is not the normal nuance of the verb, however.* Thus the three passages from Lev 25 expressly say the master is not to rule over his servants with harshness. . . . The reigning king of Ps 72 is also the champion of the poor and disadvantaged. What is expected of the king is responsible care over that which he rules. . . . Man is created to rule. But this rule is to be compassionate and not

¹George L. Frear, Jr., "Caring for Animals: Biblical Stimulus for Ethical Reflection," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches for Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 6-7.

²William White, "2121 רָדָה (*rādā*)," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 2:833.

³Hamilton, *Genesis*, 137.

exploitative. Even in the garden of Eden, he who would be lord of all must be servant of all.¹

Gerhard von Rad also notes the royal theme in Gen 1:26-28. According to von Rad, the concept of man as the image of God is derived from the practice of a king placing an image of himself in a province he does not visit, as a symbol of his claim of authority over the region. Thus, “man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem. He is really only God’s representative, summoned to maintain and enforce God’s claim to dominion over the earth.”² Accordingly, humans would not be entitled to do as they please. Rather, they were expected to operate within God’s policies which sustain and nurture, but do not exploit. von Rad notes that if we wish to discover what it means to be made in the image of Elohim, we find in ancient Israel that Elohim was characterized by descriptors, “wise” and “good” (2 Sam 14:17, 20; 1 Sam 29:9).³

Claus Westermann also asserts that Gen 1 contains “echoes of the Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology,” but with a key difference. In other cultures, man was said to have been created “to relieve the gods of the burden of everyday work.” By contrast, “in Gen 1:26 the goal of humans is within this world—dominion over the animals. . . . The goal of the creation of humans is detached from the life of the gods and directed to the life of this world.”⁴ Thus, he asserts that “people would forfeit their kingly role among

¹Ibid., 137-138. Emphasis mine.

²von Rad, 58.

³Ibid., 57.

⁴Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 159.

the living . . . were the animals made subject to their whim.”¹ Westermann thus sees human dominion as conditioned on properly representing God’s methods of nurturing rulership.

Gordon Wenham echoes the arguments of Westermann and von Rad. He further develops, however, the idea of a philosophy of kingship when he asserts:

Because man is created in God’s image, he is king over nature. He rules the world on God’s behalf. This is of course no license for the unbridled exploitation and subjugation of nature. Ancient oriental kings were expected to be devoted to the welfare of their subjects, especially the poorest and weakest members of society (Ps 72:12-14). . . . Similarly, mankind is here commissioned to rule nature as a benevolent king, acting as God’s representative over them and therefore treating them in the same way as God who created them. Thus, animals, though subject to man, are viewed as his companions in 2:18-20.²

Nahum Sarna further develops a similar concept of kingship to that asserted by Wenham:

The verbs used here and in verse 28 express the coercive power of the monarch, consonant with the explanation just given for “the image of God.” This power, however, cannot include the licence to exploit nature banefully, for the following reasons: the human race is not inherently sovereign, but enjoys its dominion solely by the grace of God. Furthermore, the model of kingship here presupposed is Israelite, according to which, the monarch does not possess unrestrained power and authority; the limits of his rule are carefully defined and circumscribed by divine law so that kingship is to be exercised with responsibility and is subject to accountability.³

Bishop echoes this same sentiment when he asserts,

The earth is not humanity’s to do with as it seems fit. It is God’s creation, and as God’s delegates, we are to take care of it on his behalf; humanity is accountable to God for its treatment of the earth (*cf.* Pss 115:6; 8:4-6).

¹Ibid.

²Wenham, 33.

³Sarna, 12-13.

It is not rulership without limits. God follows on from the cultural mandate to place immediate constraints on dominion: men are not to kill for food (vv. 29-30). . . .

. . . Dominion is not a dictatorial rulership, we are not to lord it over creation: it is a delegated rulership, a rulership that is accountable. As God's stewards of creation, we will be called to account for how we have treated his earth.¹

It seems abundantly clear that Gen 1 contains a limited-dominion motif, including accountability to God for how that dominion is exercised. The readers of Genesis should understand human dominion as a divinely granted gift to be managed according to God's sovereign will. There is doubtless more that can be done to mine the theological content of Gen 1 concerning the relationship of mankind to nature. However, we have seen enough biblical evidence to demonstrate a clear pattern of limited, nurturing dominion and to exclude the viability of exploitative interpretations.

Argument from Divine Restrictions

Bishop appeals to a second body of evidence to assert that human dominion was always regulated. He asserts that "Gen 2:15 contains an amplification of what it means to subdue and rule, and here the context is that of the garden."² He further adds that the garden context of the command to dress and keep the habitat implies a servant motif restricting the concept of dominion.³ Bishop could have strengthened this assertion by

¹Ibid., 8-9. The "cultural mandate" is described in comments on Gen 1:26-28, as a call to develop and unfold creation as image bearers of God. See p. 8.

²Bishop, 9. See also, Callicot, 2.

³Bishop, 9.

noting that in Gen 2:15, man was appointed to “cultivate” (עָבַד – ‘*abād*)¹ and to “protect” (שָׁמַר – *shamar*),² and that neither word implies a despotic dominion. Webb aptly observes, “Traditionally, Christian theology portrays heaven as a garden, not a wild jungle, a place like the original garden of Eden where God allows life to grow without the countless sacrifices and violent death.” Thus, “exploitation is not a form of gardening.”³

Bishop interprets this conditional, limited dominion of man over nature in terms of a stewardship model where there can be no exercise of absolute power by man.⁴ In a similar vein, Regenstein argues that human dominion is simply a stewardship over the natural realm, exercised as a subsidiary governor to extend God’s nurturing dominion

¹According to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, עָבַד used with an inanimate objects means, “to work on, develop, cultivate.” With personal objects, it “means ‘serve’ and expresses the relationship between an ‘*ebed* and his or her . . . lord, master.” This latter use would suggest that cultivation is to be viewed from a service perspective and not one of exploitation. Helmer Ringgren, “עָבַד,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 10:382. In addition, ‘*ebed* (a servant) is the noun form of the verb, thus reinforcing the service orientation of the verbal form.

²In Gen 3:24, this word describes the activity of the cherubim in guarding the entrance of the garden to prevent human entrance. Thus we see its connotation is of protection, not exploitation.

³Webb, “Ecology,” 245, 246.

⁴See also Morris, 2, where he argues for an accountable stewardship of man over nature. See also Pinches, 195-201, where he asserts the concept of man being the image of God to mean mimicking God’s sustaining care over nature.

into the world.¹ Stewardship implies some restrictions and accountability to the owner or sovereign.

Prior to the fall of man, clear limits were imposed on the use of natural resources by divine command. First, a particular fruit tree is declared off limits, apparently as a means of demonstrating God's ownership and man's stewardship (Gen 2:15-17). Second, Keil and Delitsch note that both man and animals were given a diet "exclusively from the vegetable kingdom." They further conclude, "From this it follows, that, according to the creative will of God, men were not to slaughter animals for food, nor were animals to prey upon one another."² As Webb states, "The Genesis account provocatively portrays a vegetarian world . . . in which the humans exercise authority over the animals but do not use or kill them."³ Thus even prior to the fall, we see limits on man's use of nature. He is given no opportunity to act at whim.

After the fall, Bishop notes that we find further limitations on human dominion. People were not to eat the blood of animals; fields are not to be reaped to the borders; fruit trees could not be harvested during their first five years, nor could their wood be used to build siege works; a kid could not be boiled in its mother's milk; the ox was not

¹Regenstein, 27.

²C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1, trans. James Marti (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 65. See also, Gary L. Comstock, "Pigs and Piety: A Theocentric Perspective on Food Animals," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 112, where he makes a similar argument.

³Webb, *God and Dogs*, 20.

to be muzzled while threshing grain; they were to obey the law of the bird nest in which a mother bird was not to be taken with the young; and they were to implement sabbatical years for resting the land.¹

Jo Ann Davidson highlights the divine limitation on human dominion by citing Mosaic laws that protect both the environment and animals. For example, in war, fruit trees were not to be cut for military usage. While this could be interpreted as primarily for the benefit of humans—not destroying the food supply—the protection of trees shows a limit on human sovereignty. Humans thus were not allowed to use nature any way they wished. In addition, Davidson cites the protection of animals employed in labor for human masters—the ox is not muzzled while threshing grain (Deut 25:4); one should help his enemy’s animal rise with a heavy load (Exod 23:4-5; Deut 22:1-4); and the sabbatical years for the land (Lev 25:6-7).² Such divinely given regulations reinforce the idea that human dominion over nature was never absolute, nor does it justify exploitative use of the natural world. Clearly such restrictions imply that it is not God’s plan that man have unrestricted dominion over nature.

Both Davidson and Henry Morris appeal to the implications of the weekly Sabbath rest prescribed even for animals (Exod 20:8-11; 23:12). Morris asserts that this

¹Ibid. Biblical citations, in order, are: Lev 17:10-14, 19:9, 23; Deut 20:19, 25:4, 22:6; Lev 25:1-12.

²Jo Ann Davidson, “Seventh-day Adventists and Ecology,” in *The Word of God for the People of God: A Tribute to the Ministry of Jack J. Blanco*, ed. Ron du Preez, Philip G. Samaan, and Ron E. M. Clouzet (Collegedale, TN: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2004), 360-361. A similar argument can be found in Frear, 6-7.

addresses the issue of human dominion, for God “ordained a weekly rest for animals as well as people.”¹ This point is significant, in that the extension of the Sabbath restriction on work to draft animals suggests that humans were not seen as having unrestricted dominion over the animals. Thus, the Sabbath commandment protects animals from undue exploitation by humans. While it is true that Jesus declared the Sabbath was made for man, this does not have to mean it was made exclusively for man. Rather, the Sabbath protection of work animals seems better understood as part of God’s overall care for the animals, including the wild animals.² Morris ties the weekly Sabbath protection for animals to the resting of the land during sabbatical years to further show that God restricted man’s use of nature. “Although His greatest provisions are for men and women, He also provides for animals, and even for the land itself. . . . If God is so careful to provide for His creatures, we as His stewards thereof should also care for them.”³ Morris’s comments evoke yet again a stewardship model of man’s relationship to nature. Thus the biblical model appears to fit well with the theistic version of the indirect duty model for determining moral obligations to nature and animals.

Duties to Animals Based in Creation Kinship

In addition to restrictions on the use of nature by humans, we also find a form of

¹Davidson, 361; Morris, 3.

²Both in the Psalms and in the sayings of Christ we find depictions of God’s care for the wild animals. For example see, Pss 104:14, 21, 27, 28; 136:25; 147:9; Matt 6:27-30; 10:29-31; Luke 12:6-7, 27.

³Ibid.

kinship argument depicted in Scripture. George Frear argues cogently that “the Bible recognizes human kinship with animals. The terms ‘flesh’ and ‘all flesh,’ for instance, often join human and animal together.” He observes that “the Hebrew word, *nephesh* [נֶפֶשׁ] denotes the ‘life’ or ‘will’ or ‘soul’ of human and animal.” He also notes that animals share the same “breath of life” and man.¹ Frear argues that the Bible does differentiate between man and animal as well, but insightfully concludes, “This aspect of the biblical outlook only qualifies, it does not remove, the sense of kinship.”² This commonality highlights the stewardship and indirect duty models proposed earlier, pointing to the common creator of all and His loving, sustaining rulership over all. Creation kinship, however, does not undermine human preference.

Steve Bishop argues that “the opening chapters of Genesis show that humanity’s relationship with the rest of creation is ambiguous: we are part of it *and* we are above it.”³ While highlighting God’s care for the sparrow, Christ reminds us that “you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:29). The elevated status of man over the rest of nature is no more incompatible with moral duties to animals than God’s exalted status is with His nurturing care of us and of the non-human realm. One can believe both in special human moral status *and* in moral duties to animals.

Since I have argued for basing animal treatment on an indirect duty to God as part

¹Frear, 5. He appears to be alluding to Gen 2:7; 6:17; Eccl 3:19, though he does not cite specific texts.

²Ibid.

³Bishop, 9. Emphasis in original.

of a theology of stewardship, this means that I have essentially argued that animals have a type of moral status, even rights. I have argued that God grants special status to humans as the image of God, while Rachels has argued contrarily to both points. Since God owns humans too (1 Cor 6:19-20, is it not possible that God grants rights to animals too, and may those rights not differ in their content and level of protection from humans? To grant rights to animals does not entail equal rights with humans. Thus, while the Bible never classifies killing an animal as murder, it does exhort us that the righteous man regards the life of his beast (Pro 12:10). Furthermore, a functional model is theologically akin to legalism where salvation—in this case rights—are meritoriously earned. By contrast, God's kingdom is based in grace, where free moral agents are called to deny self and protect the poor and weak (Rom 6:14; 15:1-2; Matt 16:24; 25:40-45; Jas 2:1-7). Therefore, humans rights are graciously extended to marginal humans while basic protections against abuse and exploitation are graciously given to animals. Hence, to grant rights to humans based on species membership is neither speciesist nor exploitative, but rather a gracious act of God. These grant-based rights protecting human welfare do confer on us a right to abuse and exploit those of lesser rights and status, including the animals.

There is much more that could be done, but it seems safe to make the following conclusion. There is sufficient biblical data to seriously undermine the charge that the doctrine of man's being made in the image of God gives him unbridled sovereignty over nature. Furthermore, the curses in Gen 3 strongly suggest that a significant portion of that dominion was lost through the curse on Adam and Eve. Thus our dominion is even

less absolute than prior to the fall. But the evidence appears to favor the interpretation that the pre-fall form of dominion was still based in a stewardship model of nurturing care, with due accountability to God. As Geisler has shown, “It is not the Christian view that encourages the abuse of nature, but the materialist view.”¹ Thus, evolutionary materialism seems more likely to produce despotism in man, than the biblical view.

James Rachels may not have given as balanced a view of Christianity and Scripture as he might have. However, the sad truth is that Christendom has often given credence to Rachels’s charges. Ultimately, it is not the charges and countercharges that matter. Rachels is one of a very few to catch the significance of protology for ethics, and even if his presentations of theological issues are incomplete, his work with the foundational issues seems well done. We have seen his predictions fulfilled in regard to theism and the moral significance of human beings. It is time, now, to review what we have learned and assess its significance.

¹Geisler, 308. For Geisler’s full discussion on these two views see, 294-298, and 302-309.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Ever since Charles Darwin published his ideas on the theory of evolution, individuals have been passionately pursuing questions regarding the relationship of Darwinian theory to ethics and morality. Churchmen, philosophers, and scientists alike have made claims for and against the viability of such an endeavor. Attempts to use Darwin's theory to guide ethics can be divided into three historical stages. The first stage covers the period from the time of Darwin to about World War One. Stage two covers the era from the first world war into the 1960s. The third stage extends from the 1970s to the present.

The third stage carries special significance for Christian ethics, for three key reasons. First, it is in this stage that proponents of Darwinism declare it to be more than science. Some now admit that evolution is a world-view, and thus ascribe a metaphysical dimension to Darwin's theory. Second, the new Darwinian influence on morality has become somewhat ubiquitous, spreading from the ivory towers of academia into everyday life and society.

Third, this stage of evolutionary morality makes a focused attack on human

preference over animals in ethics. In particular, the idea that humanity holds a special, superior position over the rest of nature is frequently challenged in this new view.

Darwin's evolution means that man is no longer viewed as a special creation—the image of God, but rather, man is now viewed as merely another animal among many. This paradigm shift is seen by its proponents as undermining the long moral tradition of Christian ethics, which views man as inherently more valuable than the rest of nature.

A foundational element in the attack against Christian ethics is Lynn White's charge that the Judeo-Christian view of human dominion over nature is responsible for much of our current ecological problems. Historically, there is a strong history of Christian thinkers declaring the superior moral value of humans over animals and the rest of nature, extending from the early church fathers through the medieval period, and into the twentieth century. This history includes statements by key Christian theologians and thinkers seemingly justifying the exploitation of nature as a fundamental right of man, regardless of the consequences to non-human creatures and the inanimate world.

In addition, the more secular influence of Francis Bacon's imperative to use the powers of science to regain human dominion over nature helped fuel both secular and theological thought from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Bacon's influence is evident in some works by Boyle, Hale, Derham, Mather, and even the Puritans, who had a strong theology of divine imperative to subdue the wilderness and harness its resources for human benefit. By the nineteenth century, there was increasing reaction and opposition to this dominionist theology which was expressed by thinkers such as Francis Wayland, John Muir, and Henry Thoreau. The twentieth century brought

an even stronger reaction in Lynn White's criticism of Christianity's tradition of emphasis on the dominion of man over nature. A number of Christian thinkers reacted to White's charges, proposing a more balanced view of human dominion, casting it in terms of stewardship instead of exploitative power. For the issue of evolution and ethics, however, it was not until the early 1970s that a major breakthrough came in the form of a movement to discredit Christian morality on the basis of an evolutionary view of man's relationship with nature.

It was around 1970 that the Oxford Group brought the moral status of animals into mainstream philosophical discussion. One fruit of this development was the invention of the term "speciesism" to describe the arbitrary favoring of one species's interests over another. Speciesism was presented as being in the same moral genre as racism and sexism, with particular emphasis being focused against placing human interests over the interests of non-humans. The new, anti-speciesist movement called for a major moral revolution which would abolish the old, traditional morality and replace it with a new one that was not inherently speciesist. Darwin's evolution plays a key role in the anti-speciesist argumentation, on the basis of the evolutionary belief that man is merely another, albeit highly developed animal in this world and is thus not entitled to any special privileges based solely on the fact of being human. Thus, the animal rights issues serves as a convenient foil for exploring the relationship between evolution and ethics.

A core argument in the animal rights movement is the idea that the animals and man are evolutionary kin, with a leading proponent of this model being Richard Dawkins. Dawkins argues that traditional morality is based on what he calls "discontinuous

thinking.” Discontinuous thinking is a form of thinking in which an individual needs to categorize everything into separate, unrelated categories. Thus, in traditional morality, humans are a discontinuous species, having no relation to other species. The chasm perceived to exist between humans and animals is the foundation of promoting a sacrosanct protection of anything classified as human, including embryos. For Dawkins, then, we must carry out a moral revolution by replacing the discontinuous view of man and nature, with a continuous one based on the data of Darwin’s theory.

The new perspective is illustrated in Dawkins’s concept of the “ring species.” The concept is illustrated by following the geographic change in a particular species of sea gull around the world, thus creating a geographic circle, or ring. In Dawkins’s example, the two ends of the ring meet in England with two species of gulls that cannot interbreed, yet constitute two ends of one continuous line of interrelated species. At any point in the ring, one species can interbreed with the neighboring species segment, but no further. This is used to argue that humans are in ring-species relationship with the animals, especially certain apes. Thus, while the incremental relationship between man and ape is too wide for interbreeding, the apes are in our ring-species group and should not be discriminated against on the basis of speciesist rationale. The new attitude is mandated by the new “continuous” view of man and ape. Physical kinship is thought to imply moral kinship as well. Thus, the call is made to go beyond animal welfare to animal rights.

This kinship-based morality has some key moral implications of significance to Christian ethics. First, rights are viewed as possessed on the basis of quantitative

criteria—functional abilities—instead of on qualitative grounds—possession of abstract qualities (such as membership in a species group such as human beings). Second, this means that there is no absolute ground of ethical principles, mores, or norms. All morality becomes relativist in order to be able to continue to adapt and evolve with man and nature. Third, not only is morality relative, but, if Ruse is right, our moral sense might be a totally arbitrary invention of our genes. Thus it has been asserted that there can be no absolute foundation for ethics.

To further establish their point, the issue of potential transgenic breeding of human with non-human creatures is used to bolster the argument that rights cannot be based on species membership (i.e., being human). Transgenic breeding begs the question, “How many human genes must a creature have to be considered human?” Thus, the possibility of this practice is used as evidence to blur the boundaries between human and animal, thus making a speciesist basis for grounding moral protection impossible.

To replace the species criterion, many thinkers have proposed some form of functional criterion to mark the boundaries of moral protection. A favorite proposal, based on Bentham’s principle of Hedonism, is the sentiency criterion—the ability to feel pain. In this model, pain is essentially equated with suffering, so any organism capable of suffering deserves moral protection. Thus, the painist approach to grounding rights exhibits a strong affinity to utilitarian ethics.

The utilitarian tendencies of the animal rights movement may help fuel an alternate argument for grounding rights, known as the marginal cases argument. In its simplest form, proponents of the argument, including Rachels, assert that since “marginal”

humans—humans exhibiting less than typical development (for example, a person with Down’s Syndrome)—are recognized to have moral status, then animals demonstrating a similar level of developmental function should logically be included in the circle of moral protection. Thus, many animals should have similar rights to those granted to humans. The intended purpose of this argument is to elevate the rights of animals. However, the argument can be equally effective in reverse: Since animals do not have rights, marginal humans, whose functional level is no higher than the animals, would lose their moral protection. Thus, the marginal-cases criterion does not guarantee that the moral status of animals will be elevated, but rather leaves a door open to devalue human rights.

The animal rights movement provides a convenient foil for bringing out some key implications of Darwin’s evolution for ethics, but it offers no prescriptive, organized system of ethics based on Darwinism. Thus the significance of James Rachels. Rachels offers the foundations of a proposed moral system based on Darwin’s theory, and he does so by explicitly comparing and contrasting his proposed ethics with Christian ethics. His central premise is that Christian ethics restricts morality to the protection of human interests. This anthropological focus is said to be supported by two conceptual pillars. The first pillar, which Rachels calls the “image of God thesis,” is that humans are entitled to moral protection because they are fundamentally different from, and superior to, animals because they are the image of God. For Rachels, this sense of human specialness is further bolstered by theological concepts such as God giving man special guidance in prescribing a moral code, God giving periodic prophetic guidance to humans, and by the

plan of salvation which seems to save only man while excluding animals.

The second pillar is the “rationality thesis,” which argues that humans possess the capacity to reason while animals do not. Therefore, humans are entitled to a greater level of moral privilege than animals.

For Rachels, if man evolved, then he cannot be an image of God. Furthermore, he appeals to “Humes guillotine” to argue that even if man *is* the image of God, it does not mean that humans *ought* to get moral preference over the animals. Additionally, Rachels appeals to the problem of evil, used by Darwin and others, to argue that the prevalence of natural evil is incompatible with the existence of the God of traditional biblical and Christian theology. This brings Rachels to the “philosophical nerve” of Christian ethics—teleology, that is, divine design. Rachels argues that evolution is incompatible with Christian thinking because the former rejects teleology while the latter ties morality to a divine design and prescription. He bolsters his argument against teleology by invoking the problem of evil: There is too much natural evil in the world to be compatible with the Christian idea of God. If there is a God, at best He can be like the God of the deists, and such a God is not robust enough to support traditional biblical and Christian morality. Both the denial of design and the argument from evil are seen as undermining the image-of-God-thesis. Rachels also argues that the existence of God is antithetical to morality, as he believes that submission to God violates our moral sense and freedom. Thus true morality cannot be connected to religion. Instead it can only be founded on the principles of teleology, with right and wrong being solely determined by consequences.

Rachels also argues that evolution undermines the rationality thesis. This is because, from an evolutionary perspective, reason developed incrementally, and thus, the issue is not one of quality—we have reason and animals do not—but rather, one of quantity—both animals and man have reason, but man has a higher quantity. Since the animals have some levels of reason (or intelligence), this blurs the boundary between animals and humans, making it impossible to make a moral distinction based on possession of reason. Having satisfied himself that evolution effectively topples the two pillars supporting Christian ethics, Rachels turns to developing a new morality without human specialness.

Rachels proposes to replace traditional ethics with a system he calls “Moral Individualism.” In this approach to ethics, rights are granted solely on the capacities and abilities found in the individual. Species membership is of no moral significance. Each individual stands alone, receiving no benefit or detriment in moral protection from others. Central to this new approach is the dictum that every individual deserves equal consideration of interests, which Rachels calls “the principle of equality.” Differences in treatment between individuals are appropriate when justified by good reasons. Thus, a blind man cannot be an aircraft controller, but a hypothetical ape who can read, write, and has good test scores, plus a solid academic track record, could not be rejected from law school because it is an ape, not a human.

In addition to the principle of equality, Rachels proposes a second pillar for supporting his new ethics—the concept of being the biographical “subject-of-a-life.” Biological life is only of value to one who is alive if they can prefer life over death.

Thus, a certain level of self-awareness is needed to be the subject-of-a-life. Being the subject-of-a-life is the primary criterion Rachels offers for determining the boundary for moral protection. Thus a shrimp is not a subject-of-a-life while dogs, apes, and other more developed animals are subjects-of-a-life and entitled to moral protection alongside humans. Rachels illustrates the implication of such an ethics with the assertion that a healthy ape could be entitled to more rights than a comatose human. It is also on the grounds of the subjects-of-a-life criterion that he advocates abortion and some cases of euthanasia.

In ensuing publications, Rachels expands moral individualism into a form of utilitarian ethics. Again, he stays committed to “morality without human hubris.” Rights are still merited by the individual, not granted by a moral authority, and provisions are made for making exceptions to the general moral prescriptions provided by his proposed system. Rachels tries to avoid the cold, sometimes counter-intuitive claims of pure Utilitarianism by arguing for “Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism,” in which certain intuitive attractions to forms of love and loyalty that might violate a purely Utilitarian ethics are viewed as indirectly contributing to the greater good. Thus the mother caring for her child while another suffers, helps produce a good society, so the short-term utility seems compromised but the long-term utility is enhanced.

Rachels proposes an overall concept of a satisfactory moral system. First, a satisfactory moral system must take into account the “facts” of human nature as revealed by Darwinian evolution. Thus, since humans are relative newcomers on the evolutionary scene, they are not entitled to claim special privileges over other creatures. This means a

satisfactory moral system will take into account the evolutionary development of our powers of reason, which are defined in terms of piecing together the chain of causes and effects. Thus, evolution means that ethics must be based on consequential reasoning. An action is good if it produces good consequences. This is what produces the utilitarian tendencies in his ethics.

The second major characteristic derives from the denial of human specialness. It asserts that everyone's interests must receive equal consideration, though equal treatment is not guaranteed. Rachels couches this equal consideration of interests in a heavily Utilitarian context, which opens the possibility of injustice being perpetrated in the name of the greater good.

To solve the potential justice problem, Rachels offers a third characteristic of a satisfactory moral system. It is the principle of just deserts: each individual deserves to be treated according to his previously and freely chosen behaviors. This is the principle used to govern and justify exceptions to the second premise that we need to treat everyone's interests alike. These three premises or principles are the governing principles of his alternative to Christian ethics, and were chosen on the basis of his explicit attempt to make ethics compatible with Darwin's theory of evolution.

I then turned to the task of analyzing the implications for ethics that were claimed for evolution. I suggested that evolutionary kinship was an arbitrary criterion that may commit the naturalistic fallacy. I then turned to analyze painism and discovered several problems with this proposed criterion. These challenges include the fact that some pain is good and necessary, manifold problems with objectively assessing pain, and the

assumption that pain is the equivalent of suffering. Another conundrum for the painist is predation. Why is it immoral for a man to kill and eat a zebra while it is moral for the lion to do so? The zebra experiences pain and suffering either way. I suggested that painism may be grounded largely in emotivism.

Next, I examined the marginal cases-argument. We saw that the marginal-cases argument is grounded in the intent to elevate the moral status of animals. However, there is nothing to prevent the unintended effect of devaluing the rights of marginal humans instead of strengthening the moral protection of animals. Furthermore, Saletan used the marginal-cases argument to refute Singer's apparent justification of bestiality by saying that this defense of the practice implies approval of sexual relations with marginal humans since neither animals nor marginal humans are capable of giving informed consent. Thus the marginal-cases argument can be a two-edged sword that slices deeper than expected or intended. It further seems that basing rights on marginal cases bases moral duties on extreme cases. Normal life becomes regulated by morals grounded in highly abnormal scenarios, and thus seems less than prudent. Finally, the marginal-cases argument seems to assume human preference in ethics, thus the belief that it will elevate animals instead of devalue humans. But this assumption is anomalous with the anti-speciesist context in which the argument is offered.

My next task was directly analyzing Rachels's challenge to Christian ethics. I first examined some challenges to his ethics of moral individualism. One criticism is that such an individualist focus makes it virtually impossible to recognize or deal with moral issues related to groups or populations. Thus, moral individualism leads to an

isolationist morality where the interrelationships between individuals can become morally minimized.

For example, why should bestiality be viewed as aberrant if species membership carries no moral significance? This point was also illustrated by news story concerning a man who claimed to be married to a dog. If species membership does not matter, then the man and the dog, viewed purely individually, could theoretically be suited for a transgenic marriage. We would have no grounds to argue that such a practice would violate any design or order, for the bizarreness of the case is precisely rooted in species significance. Furthermore, such an argument mimics Rachels's tendencies to establish ethical principles based on highly unusual and extreme cases.

Being the subject-of-a-life was the next item considered. First, we noted that Rachels seems to have used a concept invented by Tom Regan, yet he never credits Regan as the source of his idea, even though Regan is cited regularly by Rachels. This seems to be a grievous omission on the part of Rachels. It calls into question the veracity of his other, seemingly original contributions.

We then observed that the subjects-of-a-life criterion seemed quite Kantian, expanding the concept of "persons" who are not to be used as means to an end. We further noted that the criterion of being the subject-of-a-life at first seems to avoid the pitfalls of an ethics based in the individual's functionality, but instead, turns out be ground rights in present functions and capacities after all. Most notably, to be a subject-of-a-life requires minimum levels of intelligence, self-awareness, memory, reason, and more. Thus this criterion becomes subject to the criticisms leveled against grounding

rights in personal functions and development. Furthermore, we saw criticisms leveled against this view, charging that it is inherently subjective, for the subjects-of-a-life standard is grounded in the concept of biographical life which is self-chosen, instead of biological life which is mere existence. Thus, one can lose his chosen biographical life and wish to no longer live even though the biological organism is in fine condition. This would make other characteristics and relationships insignificant in that loss of one's chosen "life" could be used to justify suicide, thus impacting others in the individual's matrix of relationships. Finally, such a view seems to quickly digress into rank subjectivism.

We also saw it argued that the subjects-of-a-life criterion is inherently unstable. What happens if one becomes comatose so that they are no longer the conscious subject-of-a-life? At this point, the individual is no longer able to express a preference to remain alive or not. The decision must be made by an external party. But if rights are based on being the subject-of-a-life, then how can the comatose qualify as having rights? Based on the current capacities, there is no reason to recognize rights and maintain life. Thus it might even be possible to justify killing or to conduct experimentation on the persistently comatose.

Finally, the subject-of-a-life criterion seems to discredit the obvious interrelationship between biological life and biographical life. You cannot have the second without the first and thus there is a holistic dimension to these two aspects of life. Because of this holism, any decline in functionality would mean a decline in moral value and protection.

The issue of grounding rights was thus raised and examined. The current proponents of animal rights give a conflicting picture of the grounding of rights. Ryder sees rights as a merely psychological, though useful, function. But if rights are merely a figment of our imaginations, a fictitious invention, why should we take them seriously or impute them to animals? Another problem was the admission by Godlivitch that rights are ultimately grounded on unprovable presuppositions. This is complicated by the fact that appeals to functions, such as feeling pain, presuppose a minimum level of intelligence to be able to understand and interpret pain.

We examined Rawls attempt to counter the functional model with his “original position” model. Here, we are to imagine we are in an “original position” not knowing how we shall fare in life, and thus we should determine moral actions apart from perceived self-interest based on one’s personal station in life. Rawls’s purpose is to bypass the marginal-cases argument by determining right and wrong apart from direct, personal circumstance. However, Rawls provides no good reason to accept his original position approach to morality, and he merely pushes functionality back into a hypothetical original position in which ignorance of the future is supposed to check selfishness.

All this wrangling over the grounding of rights seems to miss one key point: Animals can have moral protection without having to possess rights. Having rights is no guarantee that the free exercise of them will be permitted, nor is there any assurance they will be respected. Further, even if we argue that animals do not have rights, this is no license to treat them however we please. I argued that we can have moral obligations to

animals through an indirect duty to someone else, such as an owner, or even God. The claims of God to own all things in this world would imply some duty to God in reference to how we treat His world and its creatures.

Having looked at some of the positions related to Rachels, we turned our attention to analyzing Rachels's proposals. We noted that in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Rachels's use of evolution in shaping ethical theory seemed almost trite. Evolution is treated as a fact and not a theory, and the resulting claim that humans have no right to claim moral priority is based on a seniority argument—as relative latecomers, humans have no right to make high claims of privilege. The same volume affirms the consequentialist tendencies of Rachels, thus placing his ethics in traditional teleological theories such as Utilitarian ethics. We noted that these theories have deep intuitive appeal but that Rachels fails to address two key limits of teleological ethics. First, there is no assurance that the good intended in an action will actually come to fruition. An action can be immoral due to its consequences in spite of motive. Second, there are multiple problems with trying to forecast consequences. The further into the future we forecast, the lower the accuracy. Furthermore, it is debatable as to how far into the future one must try to forecast consequences in order to assure a moral outcome.

Another issue claimed by Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* is that ethics should be based on reason alone. However, we saw that Singer observed that reason alone does not have to be ethical. One can be simultaneously rational and unethical. Thus reason alone is an insufficient guide to determining what is moral and immoral. Reason is important, but it is not all-important.

A final element from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* which I analyzed was the norm of treating people as they deserve. For Rachels, justice means giving people their just deserts based on their freely chosen behaviors. But this means Rachels can have no corresponding concept of grace or forgiveness as found in Christianity. Rachels intends this criterion to be used to govern exceptions to the rule that we must equally consider everyone's interests. However, it seems that exceptions can be easily made, thus bypassing his foundational criteria in authority. Second, his proposal of developing a personal "optimal list" of moral standards for oneself raises problems because of the inherent subjectivity in the concept. Personal lists can vary widely and thus no universal norm can be established. Yet morality assumes a universally binding obligation. How can there be any moral authority without moral obligation being universal? Rachels's proposal weakens morality by making it relative only to the individual. Why should one person accept another's moral opinion as authoritative? Rachels is situationally sensitive but in the process subverts the ability to have any universally binding moral standards. Third, this view would seem to contradict his subjects-of-a-life criterion in *Created from Animals*, for the shrimp and infant have not freely chosen their conditions, yet are essentially punished by exclusion from the morally protected.

The core of Rachels's work, however, centered in its relationship to Christian ethics, and this is Rachels special contribution to the debate on how evolution impacts ethics. I argued that Rachels identification of teleology as the philosophical nerve of evolution is especially important, and saw several other authors who concurred. The genius of Rachels argument is that it asks why, assuming the truth of evolution, God

would avoid design in the natural world while employing it in the moral sphere.

Furthermore, if morality is the product of evolution which has no design, then there can be no design in morality either. Ultimately, this argument is based on the problem of evil, first raised by Hume in the eighteenth century. The argument, that the presence of natural evil implies either that God is good, but not all-powerful, or that God is all-powerful, but not good, has been oft repeated between Hume and Rachels with the apparent assumption that it is irrefutable.

We saw several attempts to answer this objection including the arguments that natural evil is a necessary by-product of granting moral freedom to humans, that suffering can be a means to accomplishing a greater good, the Great Controversy motif (which introduces multiple wills into the equation), and the problem of excess good in the world. This led to an examination of Darwinian theism and how it handles the problem of evil.

The evolutionary theologians, such as John F. Haught, and other theologians influenced by evolution, such as Julian Casserley, solve the problem of evil by restricting God's power in order to save His goodness. Haught acknowledges the influence of process theology in his work. A number of problems for traditional Christian theology are generated by evolutionary theology. Beyond the basic claim of God being limited in power to preserve His goodness, evolutionary theology claims God is hidden, panentheistically in nature, and that this presence in nature is what lures evolution along. Furthermore, the master paradigm for how God relates to the universe is seen in the *kenosis*—Christ's emptying of Himself. Thus, God's love is so non-coercive he had to

create by a totally random process in order to preserve the absolute freedom of creation, and God incarnates Himself into all of nature. God's hidden presence in nature means He feels all the tragedy and evil that happens since the material universe is His body. God is also depicted as a mother instead of a father, salvation becomes something of a deification and absorption into the divine, and biblical eschatology is openly denied. Interestingly, human preference is rejected and God's feeling of all that happens in the cosmos is used as a reason to give animals rights.

The significance of evolutionary theology is that it validates Rachels's claim that a theism which embraces evolution cannot depict a God robust enough to support traditional Christian morality. Furthermore, the work of Wiker and Hunter shows us that evolution is a metaphysical system of thought, based on an Epicurean cosmology which needs no God. Wiker asserts that cosmologies always affect morality, and that if Christianity is mixed with Darwinism, the evolutionary cosmology will eventually overturn theology and ethics. This is a cosmological war. I finally suggested that Rachels pinpointed several areas of potential conflict between Christianity and evolution, but that he focused only on the cosmological implications related to origins. I suggested that he could have gone further, tracing the effect of no teleology on the veracity of the ten commandments, the plan of salvation, and on eschatology.

As an extension of the theological issues, I returned to Rachels's assertion that the existence of God is antithetical to morality. First, I suggested that Rachels's argument against the compatibility is based in a view of human dignity which he has tried to undermine elsewhere. Second, his understanding of divine sovereignty is a caricature of

the biblical view, though may be valid in criticizing a Calvinist concept of God's control over all. This is more than likely as Rachels only references to Christian theology are rooted in Augustine and Aquinas. Rachels most significant effort to oust God from morality is in his use of Euthyphro's argument found in the works of Plato. The question is raised as to whether good is good because God declared it good, or did God choose it because it is already good. This would seem to leave only two options for a solution: Either God is arbitrary and hence His goodness is undermined, or there is an independent standard of good higher than God, thus H is not supreme. Neither solution is useful to the Christian's faith.

I proposed that divine foreknowledge is the solution to this dilemma. In the biblical model of divine foreknowledge, God knows all the possibilities that may happen, not just those things that will actually happen. Thus, God, through foreknowledge, can determine good and evil consequentially from an eternal perspective. He is thus not arbitrary, yet can speak authoritatively to man on what is good and evil. I proposed that divine foreknowledge is the foundation of God's moral authority. But a God compatible with evolution can have no such foreknowledge, nor can such a deity exercise the level of governance needed to grant rights to creatures. Thus, evolution essentially demands a teleological approach to ethics.

Finally, I briefly examined Rachels's use of Scripture and found it wanting. In arguing that the Bible teaches that man has despotic dominion over the earth without need to consider the needs and sufferings of animals, Rachels has missed the biblical notion of stewardship, which lies at the heart of the indirect duty model mentioned

earlier. There is much biblical evidence that human dominion was not absolute, but was restrained within a number of parameters, all of which offered some protection to nature. Restrictions such as the law of the birdnest, helping your enemy's beast to stand up under its burden, and other laws benefitting animals, all point to a limited, not absolute dominion of man in the context of being stewards accountable to God. In short, it seems Rachels may have nearly created a straw man that he could then tear down. Nonetheless, the fact that he seeks to build an ethics based on evolution, while simultaneously showing how evolution undermines Christian ethics, remains a significant and noteworthy contribution to the discussion.

Conclusions

There are several key conclusions that can be made based on the evidence examined in this study. First, and foremost, James Rachels is essentially correct in his analysis of the impact of Darwinian evolution on Christian ethics. While he appears to create a partial straw-man description of Christianity based solely on Augustinian and Thomist foundations, but also reflecting the dominionist theology of the industrial revolution, his argument ultimately depends less on those assertions than on concepts found in the next three conclusions.

Second, possibly Rachels's greatest contribution is his identification of the rejection of teleology as the philosophical center of Darwinism. While Rachels used this rejection of teleology primarily to refute divinely prescribed ethics (including ethics based on a design in nature), we saw that he could have extended the anti-design

argument to undermine the ten commandments, the plan of salvation, and biblical eschatology. If there is no divine design, then there can be no morality based in divine revelation. Thus, as Rachels, Dawkins, Singer, and others have suggested, evolution cannot co-exist with an absolutist ethics. Morality must be relative and capable of evolving with man. Relativism in ethics is a major consequence of Darwin's theory.

Third, Rachels's attack on the two key pillars of traditional morality was closely connected with the lack of design in evolution. The argument that evolution undermines the image-of-God thesis by altering our view of man into a highly evolved animal was especially effective in undermining Christian ethics. This is reflected less precisely in both the ethics of evolutionary kinship promoted by several, including Richard Dawkins, and in the ethics of Peter Singer, particularly his explanation of the traditional rejection of bestiality as immoral. In short, Rachels has made a strong and effective effort to eliminate Christian morality and has offered a rational alternative, based in Darwin's evolution, which eliminates human preference in ethics.

Fourth, Rachels was also correct in asserting that the kind of theism supportable by evolution cannot have a God robust enough to support the traditional, Christian system of morality. While Rachels did not give adequate or substantive evidence to support this assertion, my study on Evolutionary Theology, as championed by Haught and O'Murchu, demonstrated the accuracy of Rachels's assertion. The God of evolutionary theology cannot be a ruling, sovereign deity for He is depicted as being too non-coercive to act in that manner. The theory of divine action espoused by Haught, O'Murchu, and others means God cannot have a kingdom, conduct a judgment, or intervene in natural events.

As in Process Theology, God Himself is an evolving being and not absolute. Why, then, should morality be absolute? Thus Rachels leaves us with a strong tendency to moral relativism, which was demonstrated both in Dawkins's kinship ethics, and in Ruse's assertion that morality is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes. The Christian moralist should recognize catastrophic implications for Christian morality in such relativism.

Fifth, the grounding of Process Theology on evolution is also significant, not only because God is no longer viewed as an absolute being, but also because of its implications on divine foreknowledge. I have argued that divine foreknowledge is the key to refuting the Euthyphro argument. In this sense, I agree with Rachels that good and evil are determined consequentially. However, man can never have the knowledge needed to accurately determine good and evil because, in part, he cannot accurately foretell the future. This would mean, therefore, that foreknowledge of all possible events and choices is the foundational quality that makes God a moral authority possessing both the ability and the right to prescribe to finite creatures what is good and what is evil, for He alone has the consequential knowledge needed to determine moral standards. Neither Plato nor Rachels accounts for this possibility. It is especially significant that professedly Bible-believing Christians are generating interpretations of Scripture that question at least some of God's capacity to foreknow—especially in the matter of future free-will choices by created beings. The similarity of such a view to that of evolutionary theology is astounding. Both have a limited God in the name of love—love being defined in terms of giving absolute freedom to creatures to the point that God is either

limited by nature or by His choice. But to limit God's foreknowledge is to limit His moral authority and makes Christian morality vulnerable to the Euthyphro challenge. If God cannot know future, free-will decisions, then it seems that He would only be an authority in matters of natural evil. He could no longer be an authority in moral good and evil because He, Himself, cannot know the consequences of our choices, and thus, the outcome of human choices could surprise even God.

Sixth, it thus seems that Wiker is correct in his assertion that cosmology affects morality. Since it seems clear that a God compatible with designless evolution is not robust enough to support biblical or traditional Christian morality, that a final moral consequence confronts us. If the body of Christ abandons biblical protology—its belief in biblical creation as recorded in Genesis—and adopts an evolution view of our origins, then an eventual shift of morality is inevitable. The first generation or two involved in such a switch will retain a strong enough sense of tradition that it will keep them from developing the implications of the conversion to their fullness. With each ensuing generation, however, the staying power of tradition wanes and the moral implications of evolution will eventually become more manifest in the Church. A God compatible with evolution cannot be the source of the prescriptive, absolutist, revelational ethics of Scripture. Thus, sooner or later, traditional ethics will be undermined.

A seventh conclusion arises. We have seen much vexation over the ground of rights and moral protections. Various criteria have been suggested by those favoring an evolutionary world-view. What all these have in common is that rights are based on some kind of personal capacity or function. This is what fuels the marginal-cases

argument with its challenges. The variety of criteria seems less to establish rights than to undermine human preference. Even Rawls's attempt at grounding rights in the "original position" is ultimately a functional criterion. The main problem with basing rights on functionality or capacity is that the moral protection provided is not stable. One can lose rights quickly through an accident. By contrast, the God of Scripture grants rights to man, based on His foreknowledge of consequential good and evil, rights granted by a supreme being are not conditioned on the capacities and functions of the recipient. Likewise, God can prescribe duties to animals without conferring rights on them, because ultimately, those duties are to God Himself. When our view of God is weakened as it is in the evolutionary scenario, however, such a God is not capable of granting rights, and Christian ethics is, again, undermined. Furthermore, the concept of all men being granted certain inalienable rights is destroyed.

In addition to these moral implications of Darwin's theory, I would note two theological implications of evolution of significance for Christian theology. First, the view of God promoted by Haught and O'Murchu, in the name of evolution, seems highly compatible with Abelard's Moral Influence theory of atonement. The non-coercive, non-intervening God who feels all our pain, but cannot do anything since action is coercive, seems a natural match to a God who needs no satisfaction but merely demonstrates His love to us through the cross in an effort to morally influence us. The point, then, is that variants of the moral influence theory will have a greater affinity to an evolutionary view of God than to the biblical understanding of who He is. It thus seems that a theology based on the moral influence theory would be highly susceptible to being united with the

panentheism inherent in evolutionary theology.

Second, the strong propensity of evolution to produce panentheist doctrine should concern biblical Christians. The evolutionary theologians claim that the incarnation of Christ is not confined merely to humanity, but is an incarnation of God to all of nature. A similar claim is made by Andrew Linzey. Linzey rejects any interpretation of the incarnation which would give particular significance to one group such as humans, or one gender within humanity—that of being male. Linzey asserts concerning the incarnation that, “far from being God’s Yes to male humanity alone, or male and female humanity, the incarnation can be viewed as God’s Yes to creation: specifically to fleshly and sentient life. By becoming flesh, the Logos identifies, according to this paradigm, not only with humanity but with all creatures of flesh and blood.”¹

The idea of an incarnation by Christ to all of nature, however, is an idea which we have seen to be closely allied with the panentheism proposed in evolutionary theology. The compatibility of Evolutionary Theology can adapt both panentheism in general, and a moral influence soteriology into its system of thought with minimal modifications. It appears, therefore, that Darwin’s theory has both ethical and theological implications at great variance to the views held by traditional Christian theologies.

This study has highlighted several key consequences of the theory of Evolution for biblically based Christian theology and morality. Thus, I have achieved my purpose of uncovering some of the implications of protology for ethics. We have seen that,

¹Linzey, “Introduction: Is Christianity Irredeemably Speciesist?” xvi.

concerning ethics, it favors ethical relativism and Utilitarianism. Furthermore, Rachels has rightly shown that evolution undermines the foundational pillars of traditional Christian ethics rooted in the specialness of humans over the rest of nature. Human dignity is undermined and rights become grounded in individual capacities and functions, instead of being a divine bequest. Theologically Rachels argued that evolution begs an atheistic orientation, but also argued that any God compatible with evolution is incompatible with Scripture, this latter point being demonstrated in the works of evolutionary theologians who limit God's power in an attempt to preserve His goodness. Thus, whether by atheism, or by a redefined theism, the only viable moral philosophy compatible with evolution is one that is teleological. Both in the ethical and theological realms, Rachels has rightly revealed that evolution eviscerates biblical and orthodox Christian beliefs and values. We must still recognize, however, that having observed some of the key implications of evolution for Christian morality and theology, we must note that there remains much more to do in unpacking the theological and moral challenges of Darwin's theory for Christianity.

Areas for Further Study

It seems, then, that there are several areas of further study that are called for based on the results of this endeavor. First, the relationship between divine foreknowledge and God's moral authority must be pursued in greater depth. In light of theological movements such as the Openness of God theology, which clothes itself in the garments of evangelical Christianity, this is a most urgent need.

Second, in light of the current emphasis on animal rights, Bible-believing Christians need to develop a clear theology of animals, based on the principles and methods of *sola Scriptura* faith. Some work has been done, but mostly from a more liberal Christian orientation. Thus, the task remains for Bible-believing scholars to address this issue more comprehensively.

Third, there needs to be an effort made to produce an approach to ethics based on the biblical doctrine of Creation. It would appear that the Wisdom literature contains some moral counsels rooted in creation.¹ Likewise, Jesus made an ethical application to marriage and divorce based on the creation design. In the ten commandments, the fourth commandment makes a strong appeal to creation, and may have implications concerning the other nine. Such data need to be gathered and developed in a systematic fashion.

Fourth, the potential relationship between the moral influence view of atonement and evolutionary theology needs further exploration. Does the apparent fact that the moral influence view can blend so easily into evolutionary theology have significant implications for biblically based Christian theology? Is it possible that the probable ability of the moral influence theory to so easily integrate with an unbiblical theology have any implications for the biblical veracity with the theory?

¹See Craig G. Bartholomew, "A Time for War, and a Time for Peace: Old Testament Wisdom, Creation and O'Donovan's Theological Ethics," in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 91-94, where he develops the position that the biblical Wisdom Literature is an ethics based in creation, based on a survey of well-known Old Testament scholars.

Finally, at the more practical level, greater effort must be made to ground professed Bible-believing Christians in biblical morality. The influence of evolution is such that relativism is creeping into Christian morality from the grass-roots level, partly because the Church assumes a depth of spirituality that may be lacking. The moral implications of evolution can slip into the church through non-scholarly means and alter the courses of both theology and morality. Darwin's theory appears to have much deeper implications than many recognize.

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