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Good without God? The Necessity of a Theistic Basis for Morality

Presented by Will Honeycutt
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One could call 2009 the year of the bus, especially for atheists. The godless are becoming extremely bold with their message of unbelief, with a desire to embolden the faithless and recruit skeptics to join their cause, and they have found the transit systems throughout the world to be an effective and cost-effective way to spread the word.

It began in January with British buses touting “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”¹ In the United States the focus has not been on refraining from worry and having fun, but rather, pushing the idea that believing in God is not necessary to be a good person. In June, New York City Atheists Inc. paid for twenty New York City buses to display a billboard reading, “YOU DON’T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GOD TO BE A MORAL OR ETHICAL PERSON.”² In August, an atheist group in Bloomington Indiana ran a bus campaign with placards simply saying “You Can Be Good Without God.”³ During the month of November, the Big Apple Coalition of Reason, a group of secular organizations that share a common vision for “promoting wider acceptance of a more rational and realistic view of the universe”⁴ ran a month long advertising campaign in a dozen Manhattan subways with posters bearing the slogan, “A million New Yorkers are Good without God. Are You?”⁵

¹ Sarah Lyall. “Atheists Send a Message on 800 British Buses.” *New York Times*, January 6, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/world/europe/07london.html?_r=1 (Internet).

² Daniel Slotnik. “Ads for Atheism Appear on Manhattan Buses.” *New York Times*, June 25, 2009. <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/25/ads-for-atheism-appear-on-manhattan-buses/> (Internet).

³ “Bloomington Bus Ads are Up!” August 11, 2009. <http://inatheistbus.org/2009/08/11/bloomington-bus-ads-are-up/> (Internet).

⁴ “Big Apple COR; New York City Coalition of Reason.” *New York Times* Nov. 13, 2009. <http://newyorkcity.unitedcor.org/> (Internet).

⁵ Jennifer 8.Lee. “‘Good Without God,’ Atheist Subway Ads Proclaim.” *New York Times*. Friday, Nov. 27, 2009. <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/19/good-without-god-atheist-subway-ads-proclaim/> (Internet). I would add that, since the date of delivery of this paper, the author has become aware of another transit

Why are nonbelievers doing these things; why do they feel the need to publicize their beliefs (or unbeliefs as the case may be)? According to Ken Bronstein, president of New York City Atheists, his campaign was to establish atheist pride and acceptance of atheism.⁶ Atheists are finding a new sense of boldness to proclaim their “Good without God” mantra. This sense of confidence for coming out atheist has been undergirded by the audacious and irreverent writings of people such as Richard Dawkins (who, incidentally largely funded the British bus campaign), Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and their ilk; Dawkins 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, probably leading the way.⁷ The most recent offering came in October 2009 with *Good without God; What a Billion Non-religious People DO Believe* by Harvard University’s Humanist Chaplain, Greg M. Epstein.⁸

Why do atheists want to prove to the world that religious people, and especially Christians, do not have a monopoly on moral goodness; that they too, and perhaps even more so, can be moral?

In the following I would like to deal with the atheist attack on religion, especially Christian theism, as the source for moral wisdom and behavior by dealing with two primary areas: First, the epistemological question about how we can know what is moral, and second, the anthropological question of the source of the essential value upon which morality is situated; the

campaign in which American Humanist Association is promoting the following since November 11, 2009: “‘Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness’ sake,’ proclaims a new holiday ad from the American Humanist Association. Already appearing today in the New York Times and Washington Post, the message will soon be blazoned on the sides, taillights, and interiors of over 200 Washington DC Metro buses.” See <http://www.americanhumanist.org/news/details/2008-11-humanists-launch-godless-holiday-campaign> (Internet).

⁶ Slotnik, 2009

⁷ Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. 2006. Other books that have come along are Christopher Hitchens’ *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York, NY: Twelve Hachette Book Group USA. 2007; Sam Harris’ *Letter to a Christian Nation*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. 2008, Dan Barker’s *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of Evangelical’s Leading Atheists*. Berkley, CA: Ulysses Press. 2008.; Greg M. Epstein’s *Good Without God: What a Billion Non-religious People Do Believe*. New York, NY: Harper Collins. 2009.

⁸ Greg A. Epstein. *Good Without God: What a Billion Non-religious People Do Believe*. New York, NY: Harper Collins. 2009.

inherent dignity and worth of human life. Before I do this, however, I need to dispel a couple of troubling areas that keep evangelicals, in my opinion, side-tracked and from getting to the root of the problem and that reduce our arguments, in the end, to absurdities with no persuasive power. The overall hope of the essay is to establish the necessity of a theistic basis for morality and the proposition that while *belief* in God's existence is not requisite to moral behavior God's existence *is* necessary for any ultimate moral justification.

Two Preliminary Concerns

Up front we need to address two issues that divert our attention on the question of God's relationship to morality. The first one involves the belief that if we do not have a God, or the threat of a God, as a cosmic police and punisher of our bad deeds, people will not want to be moral or act morally. The second deals with the claim that has prompted the ad campaigns; the suggestion that atheists cannot be or do moral goodness.

Without God Why Be Good?

"Without God" could be taken several ways, but here it means without a threat of divine punishment or promise of divine reward. Atheists laugh at this suggestion, and, I believe, rightfully so. Dawkins frames it thus; when asked "if there is no God, why be good?" he responds, "Posed like that, the question sounds positively ignoble . . . my immediate temptation is to issue the following challenge: 'Do you really mean to tell me the only reason you try to be good is to gain God's approval and reward, or to avoid his disapproval and punishment? That's not morality, that's just sucking up . . . looking over your shoulder at the great surveillance

camera in the sky . . . monitoring your every move.”⁹ He also quotes Albert Einstein’s lament on this matter. “If people are good only because they fear punishment and hope for reward, we are a sorry lot indeed.”¹⁰ Epstein refers to “many people” who “assume that the only way you can get people to act decently is to promise eternal reward, or threaten eternal punishment.”¹¹

As illustrative to this point, in a debate regarding the question concerning “whether morality can exist in the absence of God” between the Rev. Al Sharpton, not our best representative, I might add, and Christopher Hitchens, Sharpton says “if there’s no supervisory being, then what do we base morality on?”¹² Hitchens picks up on this, using similar language to Dawkins and states, “Some people believe that without fear of divine, total surveillance and supervision, everyone would do exactly as they wished; that we would all be wolves to each other.”¹³ Sharpton raised the issue of a “supervisory being” and Hitchens exploited the point, and brought up the issue of “fear” as did Dawkins and Einstein.

Dan Barker indicates that Christians invariably ask him, “Why be good if there is no punishment, no reward, no all-knowing police officer to enforce the rules?”¹⁴ He then states, “The threat of damnation is designed to be an incentive to right action, but this is a phony morality. Humanists think we should be good for goodness’ sake, not for the selfish prospect of reaping individual rewards or avoiding punishment.”¹⁵ Epstein asks, “Why do we tip waitresses we will never see again, or stop on a busy street to give a passing stranger directions? Is it

⁹ Dawkins, 226.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Epstein, 21.

¹² Fora.tv “Sharpton/Hitchens Debate – Can Morality Exist Without God?” Live from the New York Public Library May 7, 2007 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWt8a1aMkZ4> (Internet).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dan Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America’s Leading Atheists*. (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2009), 209.

¹⁵ Ibid., 220

because we think God will punish us if we [don't]? For some people, perhaps.”¹⁶ I would guess that most of us immediately see right through the silliness of “the threat of divine punishment is necessary to keep people from doing bad” postulate. I wish that I could say this was a straw man on the atheist's part, but it seems that as commonly as it is brought up by them, somewhere along the way many from among the religious, like Sharpton, have given them ammunition to attack this puerile moral sentiment.¹⁷

Is it strictly out of “fear of punishment” from a “supervisory being” that we live moral lives? Is this our primary motivation, as believers in God, for believing in God and trying to persuade others to do the same? Well, I submit that if we do, the atheist attack is warranted. This is a very infantile approach to morality, reminding me of a time when I disciplined my young daughter for hitting her cousin in the face. She was placed in time-out and after this, when processing the whole incident after the discipline was applied, I asked her “why shouldn't you hit [your cousin] in the face?” to which she replied “because I will get a time-out.” Unfortunately, many Christians carry this thinking, or at least come across as thinking, that we should be good or else. If we as Christians are doing this, if we are somehow conditioning our children with this moral sentiment; “I must do right so I don't get in trouble,” and they carry it into their adult lives and convey this to unbelievers, we should not be surprised when the unbelievers see right through this moral infantilism, which is not morality at all. I wish that I could say that the atheists are erecting a straw man, but perhaps they are not and we need to rethink the message we are conveying in answer to the question of morality.

¹⁶ Epstein, 22-23.

¹⁷ Interestingly, even Epstein refers to atheistic friends of his who “happily go along with the God-myths just because such myths because such myths at least seem to provide a basis for moral behavior.” (21) They keep their atheism private and do not try to proselytize others with it because even they fear the negative moral repercussions of most unthinking people who, if they really believed there was no God would cast off all moral restraint. There is no doubt there is some weight to this argument, but it is definitely not one we want to use as the main point when trying to demonstrate the necessity of God for morality.

There are much deeper motivations than fear of punishment or loss of reward for being moral from a Christian perspective. And I do believe, in exploring these reasons we will find a very strong apologetic for the necessity of a theistic basis for morality. Indeed, not only am I convinced that Christianity has a whole lot more to offer the debate about “why be moral?” than these fears, I think that Christianity has the superior justification for moral motivation to any other religious or philosophical system both propositionally and coherently.¹⁸

Without God How Can You Be Good?

The second preliminary issue I wish to address is the suggestion, on the part of some Christians that people cannot be good, moral or ethical without God. In this case “without God” means, minimally, belief in or acknowledgment of God’s existence, but it could also mean without the existence of God. The focus of this essay is to argue that without God’s existence there is no “good” but just because people may not believe in God does not mean they cannot be or do good.

This latter idea is obviously the very notion that the atheist transit system campaigns, and this inundation of new books from atheists, are especially addressing. I want to suggest that we, as believers, can agree with Humanist Epstein who says, “whether one can be good without God . . . does not need to be answered – it needs to be rejected outright.”¹⁹ We can agree with Epstein and call these notions “opinion” and “curious musing” but I would add they are also *unbiblical*. When we suggest that non-theists, or non-Christians cannot be good without God, we are stating a non-truth from a biblical perspective. It is another weapon in their arsenal, which, in my view, ends up diverting our attention away from the real issue and we end up spending too much time

¹⁸ With that said, I need to explain the scope of this essay, I am not going to be dealing with any other religious or philosophical systems besides the conflict between atheism and theism.

¹⁹ Epstein, ix.

and energy dealing with this rabbit trail, rather than getting to the heart of the matter, the real basis of morality.

I am anticipating objection, especially from my Calvinist brethren. Does not Paul universally conclude all humanity to be “under sin,” claiming that “there is no one who does good, no not one.”²⁰ Isn’t this clear? And of course Jeremiah unequivocally tells us, “the heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked.”²¹ And is not Scripture unequivocal when it says that “every thought and intent” of [humanity’s] heart is “only evil continually” and this “from his youth?”²² No unbelieving pagan or non-theist can possibly be good. In fact all without God are not good in the least. In light of Scripture, how can we say that someone can be “good” without God? Can we, as Christians, really attribute goodness to humanity who is univocally spoken of in Scripture as wholly corrupt? One might say I am siding with a humanist, but denying the clear teaching of Scripture.

To address this issue, I will analyze Calvin’s own remarks about virtues among the heathen. He deals with this very question in Book Two, Chapter Three of the *Institutes*²³. He does not altogether say that humans are incapable of virtue. He sees virtuous acts in those whom God has not regenerated, and cannot deny this. “In all ages there have been some persons, who . . . have devoted their whole lives to the pursuit of virtue.”²⁴ Whatever we may conclude about the corruption of human nature, we see examples of men who have “been eminent for noble actions”

²⁰ Romans 3:10-18

²¹ Jeremiah 17:9

²² Genesis 6:5, 8:21

²³ Calvin, J. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae Religionis*.; Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. (II, iii, 3, 4). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²⁴ Calvin *Institutes* 2.3.3

and have “not only excelled in illustrious deeds, but conducted themselves most honourably through the whole course of their lives.”²⁵

This does not annul the doctrine of human depravity, but rather, as Calvin says, reminds us that “amidst this corruption of nature there is some room for Divine grace, not to purify it, but internally to restrain its operations.”²⁶ On account of this internal restraint, all men are not given over to “every lawless passion” and “the human passions” do not “go to all the lengths to which they are inclined.”²⁷ God restrains “these maladies . . . to prevent their overflowing so far as He sees to be necessary for the preservation of the universe.”²⁸ People’s motives for being virtuous vary, observes Calvin, such as out of shame, fear, to gain personal advantage, but some, are able to “display more than common excellence,”²⁹ and we can celebrate virtues among pagans as “gifts of God” which we can consider “in themselves . . . justly worthy of commendation.”³⁰

Not only can we say that people can be good who do not acknowledge God, we can be grateful that belief in God is *not* a requisite for a moral life. If it were, evils would predominate on the planet, and we would truly live in a scary condition, more so than now. An important theological insight for us is that in it all “God, by his providence restrains the perverseness of our nature from breaking into external acts.”³¹ This restraining power of God on “the perverseness of our nature” automatically predicts that humans will be able to act civilly with one another and interact morally in such a way so as to preserve human society. Should we not *expect* that non-theists can be good, even without a conscious acknowledgement or belief in God?³²

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Calvin *Institutes*, 2.3.4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² A further nuance to this idea of preservation is that we see here another indication of intelligent design. We believe in intelligent design largely due to the preservation of our solar system and planet in an otherwise

These insights shed light on biblical passages. For example, Luke acknowledges the pagan tribesmen of Malta's treatment of the shipwrecked crew as "no small kindness (literally philanthropy or benevolence)" and indicated that they had a sense of "justice."³³ Paul tells us that the Gentiles are, indeed, capable of responding to "conscience" and the "law written on the heart" and that they can "do, by nature, the things contained in the law."³⁴ So, biblically speaking, we cannot deny that pagans can be, and are virtuous.³⁵

As Christians we can acknowledge the virtue in people who do not share or even actively reject my Christian beliefs. Calvin helps us to frame this well in that when admitting to "virtues" in pagan society, we do so as gifts of God's grace to accomplish His purposes with the human race, namely to maintain social order and overcome the chaos of an unguided natural state.

Having hopefully dispelled these two preliminary problems, I now turn to the main point of this essay; the epistemological and anthropological arguments for a theistic basis for morality.

The crux of the case I am trying to make is that while *belief* in God is not needed to be or do

unfriendly universe, but we can extend this to the built in sustainment and preservation of human society as well. It would certainly make sense that God would instill in humans a capacity of some kind for virtue in order to preserve his human creation. From this perspective, we can agree, with Calvin, that virtues are "the peculiar graces of God, which he dispenses in great variety" for the purpose of preservation. This would be consistent with our belief in intelligent design. Our moral capacity as humans makes civility and our thriving as individuals possible.

³³ Acts 28:1-10

³⁴ Romans 2:14-15 Of course, Calvin clearly explains why Paul is saying this, and that is to show that pagans have no excuse before God because they have an internal awareness, no matter how defiled, of His moral law (II.2.24).

³⁵ We must also agree with Calvin that, "we cannot set any value on anything that seems praiseworthy in ungodly men." This is not a contradiction of everything else that has been said. As biblical theists, and Christians who believe that Christ's death is the only way for man to receive the needed righteousness, we must agree with Calvin, whether we call ourselves Calvinist or not, that "The virtues . . . may have their praise in civil society and the common intercourse of life, but before the judgment-seat of God they will be of no value to establish a claim of righteousness." (2.3.4.) We, evangelicals, do not say, as the atheists say we do, that if we are good we earn God's favor and eternal life. Eternal life is not a reward for good works. We say that we cannot be good enough. As regards the eternal tribunal of God, we say with Isaiah that all our righteousness are as "filthy rags (64:6)" and with Qoheleth that "there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin (7:2)." Consistent with this, we say, with Calvin, "we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature; though we cease not to hold that both are placed under the universal condition of human depravity."(2.3.4) The Christian's recognition of the goodness of those who reject God's existence is not the same as saying that they are good enough to earn God's favor at His judgment. It is not the same as saying that they do not need God's grace in salvation. It is not suggesting that their civility and virtue in human society exempts them from the need for the imputed righteousness of Christ for salvation. Their morality and good works, we must insist, will not profit them with regard to justification before God (Isaiah 57:12).

good, the *existence* of God is necessary for the existence of goodness and for any ultimate justification for being and doing “good.”

Nature, Reason and Morality

Most atheists see a nexus between morality, reason and nature. Dan Barker, for example, coming from the perspective of having converted from being a practicing Christian to atheism, states, “Morality is in the mind, and reason is in the mind. No matter where you look for morality, it all comes down to the mind.”³⁶ He also insists that “the basis for values lies in nature. Since we are part of nature, and since there is nothing ‘beyond’ nature, it is necessary to assign value to actions in the context of nature itself.”³⁷ Barker refers to those who ask him “‘If you don’t believe in God, then what is your basis for morality?’” He responds “to me, the answer is obvious: we atheists find our basis for morality in nature.”³⁸ He also asserts, “Darwin’s enlightening concept shows us who we really are. We are not above nature. We *are* nature . . . natural creatures in a natural environment.”³⁹ Harris likewise insists that “a rational approach to ethics” begins with the recognition that “our ethical intuitions must have their precursors in the natural world . . . [they] have their roots in biology.”⁴⁰ Epstein, too, roots our moral epistemology in nature: Since we are products of nature, having evolved a sense of “causal reasoning” that is, we look for the causes of things, and these causal connections are what lead us

³⁶ Barker, 211. For Barker “mind” is also physical or nature since it is the function of a physical brain.

³⁷ Barker, 310.

³⁸ Barker, 213.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁰ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*. (New York, NY: Norton and Company, 2005), 170, 172. Harris, in fact, roots the objectivity of ethical truth in nature, just as one would the truth that the earth orbits the sun. He rejects relativism (even calls it a “demon”) on this scientific basis, claiming that disagreement between times and cultures no more imperils “the status of moral truth” than the disagreement about how “living systems reproduce themselves” threatens the truth about reproduction. Instead, for Harris, any disagreement suggests ignorance of science. He writes, “lack of consensus signified their ignorance of certain physical truths, not that no such truths exist” (171). He projects that the better we come to understand the brain, the better we will understand our evolved ethical nature (175).

to moral knowledge, or our “goodness.”⁴¹ Further, our reasoning leads us to the conclusion, the moral knowledge, that human needs and interests are the basis of our moral structures, especially a commitment to “treat every person as having inherent dignity and worth.”⁴²

So here is the essential atheistic, humanistic picture; our moral epistemology, how we know, is based on our anthropology, what we are as a result of evolution. I would like to explore these two areas as we build the case for the theistic basis for morality. First, we will ask, can nature be the source of our reason, upon which we base our moral knowledge, or is there something outside of nature and the evolutionary process that has given us our moral sense and second can nature be the basis of an anthropological conviction, necessary to morality, that human life has inherent worth and dignity?⁴³

Moral Epistemology; Reasoning to the Good

Barker asserts, “The assessment of value requires the use of reason. In other words, morality comes from *within* humanity. If intelligent life had not appeared on this planet, morality would not exist.”⁴⁴ So regarding the matter of morality, there is no real “mystery” to it, in Barker’s estimation. “Basic day to day morality is a simple matter of kindness, respect and reason,” he states. It comes from within that closed system of nature and there are no “cosmic moral absolutes,” no “moral imperatives,” or “compassion imperatives” from anything other than nature. He says that “the way to be moral is to first learn what causes harm and how to avoid it.”

⁴¹ Epstein, 21, 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴³ Harris, although not discussing the matter of human dignity, indicates that we have come to be people of moral intuitions that lead us to love. Love is the highest moral virtue, and it means, in a very practical sense, that we strive to make as many of our fellow species (and even in some cases sentient creatures) as happy as possible, and do what we can to reduce their suffering as much as possible. This is love, and the essence of our ethics. Reason has led us to this conclusion. “Reason is nothing less than the guardian of love” (190). Harris discusses this “Science of Good and Evil” in detail in *The End of Faith*, pp. 170-203. Although he does not discuss human dignity as such, this commitment to help others experience more happiness and less suffering is based up that assumption.

⁴⁴ Barker, 211. (Author’s Emphasis)

“Morality is simply acting with the intention to minimize harm.” But we “should” treat our neighbors “nicely,” which, of course, means a lot more than minimizing harm, because “we are all part of the same species, genetically linked.” When someone is hurting, “I recognize that someone in my natural family is suffering” states Barker.⁴⁵

But to assume reason as that which leads one to such moral insights as these, assumes too much. Neither reason itself, as we will see, nor morality, can be the product of nature, and even the atheists admit this much. This of course raises the all important question: If not nature, then what?

C. S. Lewis, when seeking to establish a framework in which miracles are possible, makes it clear that for this to be the case, there has to be something, even if just one thing, outside of nature.⁴⁶ He defines “nature” as does the naturalist as “the whole show” or “Total System” outside of which exists nothing. For the supernaturalist, on the other hand, nature is not the whole show, but a product of something greater than it, even made by that greater something. The first thing to determine before ruling on the question of miracles is whether naturalism or supernaturalism is correct. Naturalism could be deemed faulty if there is but one thing that happens in human experience that cannot be adequately explained by nature. “If necessities of thought force us to allow any one thing any degree of independence from the Total System . . . then we have abandoned Naturalism.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Miracles” in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics*. (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002). 303-334. After having read Harris, Dawkins and the like, I recognized that Lewis has already dealt with the very arguments they are currently raising. I am of the persuasion that until an atheist dismantles Lewis’ argument, there is no hope for their arguments for godless goodness to stand.

⁴⁷ Lewis, 311. It is important to understand that Naturalism is an interpretation of reality, it itself is a conclusion reached by inference. So, if there is no reason, there is no Naturalism. The very idea of Naturalism is made possible by the human ability to think and infer.

Lewis proceeds to demonstrate that the “cardinal difficulty of Naturalism”⁴⁸ is that it cannot, in fact, explain all human experience because all things, particularly our reasoning capacity, cannot be explained by mere cause and effect. If nature is all there is, then all there can be in the universe is mere cause and effect. Every event is merely “one link in a causal chain which stretches back to the beginning and forward to the end.”⁴⁹ Our acts of thinking are no less links in this chain, and as such “must have come into existence by a historical process.”⁵⁰ This process was, of course, not the product of design, since there is no design in a naturalistic worldview.⁵¹ Thus with no purpose for nature in Naturalism, nature has no goal to produce minds that can find or discover objective truth.⁵²

In our reasoning capacity, argues Lewis, and our dependence on it as a reliable means for gaining real knowledge, we find the first evidence that nature cannot explain the totality of human experience. If Naturalism is true, then “my mental processes” Lewis quotes professor Haldane, “are determined by the motions of atoms in my brain [and] I have no reason to suppose my beliefs are true.”⁵³ This unguided evolutionary process was mindless and meaningless, acting on accidental arrangements of atoms. One would have to ask why the accidents in your brain are more reliable than those happening in another brain? When we come to thinking about our acts of thinking, and we recognize them as events, we all know that they are “a very special sort of events. They are ‘about’ something other than themselves and can be true or false.”⁵⁴ Our reasoning capacity thus carries us outside of mere cause and effect.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 315.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 317.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 314.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 316.

True knowledge of anything, including nature *qua* nature, requires much more than mere cause and effect. No one accepts that one's beliefs are true if they are merely caused by historical antecedents. For example, no one would accept from someone that racism is true because he was taught so by his parents. All we have heard is what caused the belief, and in a naturalistic universe, all beliefs are traceable to such causes. We use this as a "daily rule,"⁵⁵ and so frequently that we do not even give it a second thought. But when it comes to discussion about why we hold a particular position or opinion, mere cause and effect will not do.

In a situation in which there is nothing more than nature, cause and effect should be sufficient, but it is not. As expected, even naturalists insist on some level of justification for one's beliefs, but proofs are not within the framework of mere cause and effect. Atheists do not accept historical explanations as the basis of true knowledge, they demand logical explanations, especially for moral beliefs, and so they should. But logic is precisely what carries us outside of nature, outside of mere cause and effect into the realm of what Lewis calls "ground and consequent."⁵⁶ We refuse to believe anything that is groundless, we demand justification for a person's beliefs, because merely saying that one believes something by referring to some historical process by which that belief came to be, is not acceptable to any thinking person; "I am X because my parents were X." Yet "thinking" and "knowing" are outside of the natural cause and effect process. Lewis illustrates, "As the understanding of a machine is certainly connected with the machine but not in the way the parts of the machine are connected with each other [the] knowledge of a thing is not one of the thing's parts. In this sense something beyond Nature operates whenever we reason."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid, 327.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lewis, 322.

If all we are, as Barker says, is *nature*, then nature cannot know itself. Yet this seems to be precisely what the atheists are telling us. Cause and effect gave us reason, but reason itself transcends mere historical cause and effect. Lewis and the naturalists agree that “Reason is our starting point.” But once outside of the evolutionary process to explain reason, “there is no way, except by begging the question, of getting inside again.”⁵⁸ This is exactly what the naturalist *must* do is “get inside again” because there is nothing outside of nature, they have no “outside.”

If reason is not something inside of nature, then what is its origin? The Theist, suggests Lewis, “finds Reason to be older than Nature, and from it, the orderliness of nature, which alone enables us to know her, is derived.”⁵⁹ The important thing is that the Theist, unlike the Naturalist, need not step outside of a system that has nothing outside of it to begin with because “for him, the human mind in the act of knowing is illuminated by the Divine Reason,” and is thus “set free, in the measure required, from the huge nexus of non-rational causation.”⁶⁰ This liberation is no mere series of cause and effect events that had no end or purpose in “mind,” but instead, was “designed” thus.⁶¹ Naturalists implicitly demonstrate this when they “make a tacit exception in favour of the thinking which [they] perform at that moment.”⁶² They attribute rationality to something outside of and beyond nature, because they know, intuitively, that nature *qua* nature cannot produce reason.⁶³

In the phenomena of reason and thought, then, Lewis uncovers the first hint of a supernatural explanation for human experience. Knowing, insight, true understanding and reasoning to an inference, which the very idea of “Nature” is, cannot just bubble up from nature.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 320.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 321.

⁶² Ibid. 321.

⁶³ This will become especially pronounced when we delve into the issue of morality. Morality is thought to be intricately connected to reason in a derivative sense. Without reason we would have no morality.

Our “ideas” and conclusions about anything are not consequences of nature at work. Reason is, minimally, outside of nature, and may even precede nature. Whatever the case, nature cannot adequately account for it.

Lewis’ next move is to inquire as to the source of reason. Since there is genuine reason in the universe (without it there could be no true science) we are forced to inquire as to the origin of this reason. “We have seen that rational thought is not a part of the system of Nature. Within each man there must be an area (however small) which is outside or independent of her.”⁶⁴ This independence is from Nature (the non-rational), but is not an absolute independence. You cannot derive reason from non-reason, so, no matter how far back you go, you have to have reason giving rise to reason, and it is “obvious that sooner or later you must admit a Reason which exists absolutely on its own,” argues Lewis.⁶⁵ He further argues that humans cannot be the source of this self-existent Reason.” For any human thought or reasoning process to be valid, not only must reason exist objectively, that is, outside of nature, it must exist eternally and incessantly. The source of reason cannot be intermittent (as ours is) and it cannot be the temporal product of a non-purposive natural process. His explanation is that human minds, where reason dwells, “do not come from nowhere. Each has come into Nature from Supernature; each has its tap-root in an eternal, self-existent, rational Being, whom we call God.”⁶⁶ Is it not more reasonable to conceive of each human mind as the product of a greater Mind with a purpose, rather than of a mindless and purposeless process? On this view, the human mind is evidence of a supernatural realm that has penetrated, intersected with and

⁶⁴ Ibid, 324.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 325.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

illuminated Nature. Reason is the “supernatural element in man . . . the little tell-tale rift in Nature that there is something beyond or behind her.”⁶⁷

One might question the foregoing, and somewhat lengthy, “digression” into reason in an essay dealing with morality. It is necessary, however, because Naturalists identify themselves as the champions of reason, and opposed to faith, as the source for their moral insights, thus making their moral conclusions superior to those who rely on faith in any way for those insights. This opposition to faith is exemplified in the title of Harris’ *The End of Faith* and the title of his first chapter “Reason in Exile.” He clearly indicates that there is an ongoing “war between reason and faith.”⁶⁸ So when it comes to the atheists’ morality “reason,” they say, not faith is a reliable source of morality.⁶⁹

This is a frequent yet false dilemma posed by the atheists. Chesterton states it best in *Orthodoxy*. “It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. *Reason is itself a matter of faith*. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all . . . Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic [when] they are both movements in the

⁶⁷ Lewis adds the disclaimer that he is not trying here to construct an entire anthropology or to argue for our eternal existence, he is simply trying to demonstrate that Supernaturalism rather than Naturalism best explains the phenomenon of human reason. On this view one could say “I think, therefore God is.” This does not mean that my thinking makes it so, but rather that our rational capacities necessarily presuppose a Higher Reason as their source.

⁶⁸ Harris, 15.

⁶⁹ I find it intriguing that Harris does not consider reason to be the only source of our knowledge, moral or otherwise. He speaks quite highly of intuition, not as reasons opposite, but as its “core” in fact even more basic than reason itself which even helps reason “find its feet.” “Whatever its stigma, ‘intuition’ is a term that we simply cannot do without, because it denotes the most basic constituent of our faculty of understanding. While this is true in matters of ethics, it is no less true in science. When we can *break our knowledge of a thing down no further, the irreducible leap* that remains is intuitively taken. Thus the traditional opposition between reason and intuition is a false one; reason is itself intuitive to the core, as any judgment that a proposition is ‘reasonable’ or ‘logical’ relies on intuition to find its feet . . . a person’s sense of what is reasonable sometimes needs a little help finding its feet” (183, Emphasis Added). His imager of the “irreducible leap” after reaching the limits of our “breaking the knowledge of a thing down” sound a bit to me like a “intuition of the gaps.” It appears to me that Harris is simply substituting intuition for faith. His is a leap of intuition, not of faith.

brain of a bewildered ape?"⁷⁰ Yet non-theists want both their reason and their morality, but want no god. They cannot have their cake and eat it too, which is exactly what they are trying to do.

In consideration of the source of morality, Lewis sees this, logically, as the next issue to deal with and "a further difficulty in naturalism."⁷¹ Even atheist's claim that humans, *uniquely*, have not only rational thoughts, but they also have moral thoughts; thoughts concerning right and wrong, good and evil. According to evolutionary theory, we have, unlike any other creature, evolved into moral beings who now have concerns about matters of right and wrong.⁷² Morality is not found in any other species. For instance Robert Wright, agreeing with Darwin, states, "Darwin suggested . . . that the word *moral* itself be reserved for our species."⁷³ He quotes Darwin directly, "We have no reason to suppose that any of the lower animals have this [moral] capacity."⁷⁴ Mary Maxwell is very direct. "Let me state emphatically that I do not see morality in the animal kingdom – it is something peculiar to the human species . . . *nothing in the natural world has a moral quality as such.*"⁷⁵ Epstein agrees. "Values and ethical behavior, until such time as other, similarly sentient beings, can only really be found in human beings."⁷⁶

Lewis takes it as a given that humans make moral judgments and justifications, and that morality is rooted in the human capacity to reason. Lewis' argument is, essentially, that morality, like reason, and insofar as it is rooted in reason, cannot derive from nature either. So

⁷⁰ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Chapter Three. <http://www.online-literature.com/chesterton/orthodoxy/3/> (Internet). As we have seen, even Harris speaks of intuition as not the opposite of reason, but that "reason itself is intuitive to the core" (183). I think that Harris has substituted intuition for faith, particularly in the sense that Chesterton has used "faith." Not as an organized system of religious doctrine, but an intuitive sense that our reasoning faculties are trustworthy.

⁷¹ Lewis, 330.

⁷² Thus the title of Wright's book, *The Moral Animal*.

⁷³ Wright, 185.

⁷⁴ *Descent of Man*, V.1

⁷⁵ Maxwell, 81, 85. (Emphasis Added)

⁷⁶ Epstein, 34.

just as reason requires something outside of, even above, nature, so morality needs a higher source as well.

Naturalists and Supernaturalists both agree that morality and reason are inseparably intertwined, but, and this is important, Naturalists attribute morality, at least up to a point, to a natural, historical, cause and effect process; particularly in the pre-rational, pre-moral days when our species was composed of less evolved simians neither thinking about thinking or morality. We need, at least briefly, to consider the evolutionary history of morality to be able to see its flaws, and make the case for a theistic basis for it.

From the evolutionary perspective the morality narrative unfolds like this.⁷⁷ Our moral sense evolved over the last 40,000 to 50,000 years through a process in which selfish genes eventually programmed the organisms that carried them in the best possible way to ensure their transfer to successive generations. This began when those selfish genes somehow saw a way to perpetuate themselves through kin altruism, in which organisms would concern themselves with the well-being of other organisms that shared those genes; viz. offspring, siblings and even cousins. This progressed to a tit for tat, or directly reciprocal altruism. This entails giving to others other than our kin, realizing that we can get our needs met, and live productively when we help others; it is the common ‘you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’ kind of exchange.

Eventually, we came to realize that when we do good for others, they may not return the favor,

⁷⁷ The following works outline the evolution of our moral sense: Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Esp. Chapter Five, “On the development of the intellectual and Moral Faculties During Primeval and Civilised Times.”) In *Great Books of the Western World*, Ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 49 “Darwin” Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 19th printing, 1971). Mary Maxwell, *Morality Among Nations: An Evolutionary View*. Albany, NY: State University Press, 1990. Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Why We are the Way We are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994. Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule*. New York, NY: Times Books, 2004. Richard Dawkins, *the God Delusion*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. Greg Epstein, *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, New York, NY: William Morrow Harper Collins, 2009. These works, although varying in some ways, largely present a consensus with regard to the evolution of morality. The following is a conflation of these works to provide a broad picture of the evolution of human morality. Also see note 94 below which reproduces C. S. Lewis’ account of this process, which is actually an adequate summary of Darwin in Chapter Five of *The Descent of Man*, to which the reader is referred.

but someone else will someday. This is called indirect reciprocal altruism or “pay it forward” morality, as Epstein calls it. In doing this, we found it made us feel good, and the doing of the act itself became a reward. Next in the progression was to develop a network reciprocity which means that we came to value our communities as places that could take care of us if we behaved as a citizen and gave to the community. Group selection is the highest morality in which we come to sacrifice ourselves, as in war, even giving up our chance to transfer our genes, to take care of the larger community, and this also gave us a sense of happiness. Day to day altruism, in which we give ourselves to help others and our community, what Dawkins calls our “Good Samaritan urges,” has now become a regular experience and defines the highest achievement thus far of our moral evolution. While this process was going on, over the last 40,000 to 50,000 years, “sometime along the way, moral sentiments evolved out of the premoral sentiments of our primate and hominid ancestors and moral codes were created.”⁷⁸ Eventually, however, there came a time in our human evolution when we began to be able to think and reason about our situation and select what is good for our genes, not be the passive puppets of a blind, natural selection.⁷⁹

This last point raises an internal conflict in naturalism. On the one hand we humans are mere products of nature, and thus morality, as Barker insists, is rooted in nature, but on the other hand, morality cannot be fully explained in Darwinian or naturalistic terms, it transcends the Darwinian framework. This idea of transcendence is where our argument begins. The state of nature is something that even staunch evolutionary atheists want to overcome. Wright’s thoughts are that “we are *potentially* moral animals . . . but we are not *naturally* moral animals.”⁸⁰ And James Q. Wilson actually concedes to this when he says, “modern society is, well, modern; it is a

⁷⁸ Shermer, 32.

⁷⁹ Dawkins, 220.

⁸⁰ Wright, 344. (Emphasis added)

recent development that still must cope with a human animal that evolved under very different circumstances”⁸¹ clearly implying that those previous circumstances are not the basis of our present moral sense. The fact that nature cannot be the source of our morality is an important insight which opens the discussion to the search for the true source of morality outside of nature.

Not only is nature rejected as the ultimate source of morality, it is vehemently opposed, even by atheists, as a reliable basis for establishing morality. Dawkins detaches morality from the evolutionary process when he calls our moral tendency to be “Good Samaritans,” i.e. caring for the well-being of those who are not our kin or cannot reciprocate, “a Darwinian misfiring” or “mistake.”⁸² For example, he calls “the human urge to adopt a child” this kind of “misfiring.” Dawkins, although insisting that this is not “pejorative,” (no, indeed, they are “blessed, precious mistakes”⁸³) removes this whole moral behavior outside of Darwinism as an adequate explanation for it! If it is a “misfiring” of what Darwinism normally does, then Darwinian natural selection is *not* its source. It is “independent” of the Darwinian process.⁸⁴ Dawkins further reveals his aversion when he states, “the Darwinian idea that evolution is driven by natural selection seems *ill-suited* to explain such goodness as we possess, our feelings of morality, decency, empathy and pity.”⁸⁵ For Wright, natural selection and survival of the fittest are conditions we want to escape, even rebel against; an enemy to be engaged.⁸⁶ He writes, “A close look at evolution, with its massive toll of death and suffering [suggests] . . . that it is rather at odds with what we call good.”⁸⁷ Quoting T. H. Huxley, Wright agrees “the ethical progress of

⁸¹ Wilson, 98.

⁸² Dawkins, 220-221.

⁸³ Ibid, 221.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dawkins, 215. (Emphasis Added)

⁸⁶ Wright, 342.

⁸⁷ Wright, 342.

society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, . . . but in combating it.”⁸⁸ Harris actually speaks rather diminutively of the naturalistic process as a basis for understanding our moral nature. “Strict [naturalistic] reductionism does not offer us much hope of insight into ethics. . . evolutionary biology, for instance, ha[s] some plausible stories in the scientific literature, but we should not make too much of those stories . . . nature has selected for many things that we would have done well to leave behind in the jungles of Africa.”⁸⁹ He is very straight-forward on this point when he remarks, “much that is ‘natural’ in human nature will be at odds with what is ‘good.’”⁹⁰

Evolutionists, of course, have good reason for not wanting nature to be the source of morality; that is, for rejecting the naturalistic fallacy.⁹¹ What inhumanities might prevail if a strict Darwinian understanding *were* applied to our ethics? Darwin himself raised the specter of how, if human society was patterned after, say, bee society, we would “think nothing” of unmarried females killing their brothers, and mothers killing their fertile daughters.⁹² Although Darwin made the scientific observation that we humans are the only species that allow our weakest members to breed and this “must be highly injurious to the race of man”⁹³ he was not

⁸⁸ Huxley 1894. *Evolution and Ethics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1989.80, 83. Quoted in Wright, 342.

⁸⁹ Harris, 185.

⁹⁰ Harris, 186.

⁹¹ The Naturalistic Fallacy is the false conclusion that whatever *is* true in nature *should* be true. It is also called the is/ought fallacy, or the rejection of the idea that one can draw an ought (an imperative) from an is (an indicative). A simple example of this fallacy is to conclude that since humans are naturally selfish, they *ought* to be selfish.

⁹² Wright, 342.

⁹³ “With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination. We build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care

inclined in the least to apply his own theory to his ethics. Darwin would not countenance Social Darwinism, in fact, he rejected it. Most Darwinists I have read are not Social Darwinists.⁹⁴ But if Barker is right that we are *nothing* other than nature, what makes Social Darwinism wrong? What gives the naturalistic fallacy its force?

Lewis reconstructs what would be consistent with a natural-historical, cause and effect, evolutionary narrative which brought humans to the place where they now commonly make moral judgments.⁹⁵ Yet, in all this, argues Lewis, “it does not explain how they could be right in making them. It excludes, indeed, the very possibility of their being right.”⁹⁶

“When men say ‘I ought’ they certainly think they are saying something, and something true, about the nature of the proposed action, and not merely about their feelings. But if Naturalism is true, ‘I ought’ is the same sort of statement as ‘I itch’ or ‘I’m going to be sick.’”⁹⁷ Truly, if the Naturalist uses “I ought” or “you ought” with a sense of moral urgency or even requirement, one could simply respond, ‘Oh, are you?’ because their moral language carries no more significance than their communicating how they are feeling at the moment. Lewis points

wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly anyone is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.” Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*. 323.

⁹⁴ I consider Friedrich Nietzsche the quintessential Social Darwinist. He held Christianity to be its greatest enemy. He wrote in *Will to Power*, “Through Christianity the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice. – All ‘souls’ become equal before God: but this is precisely the most dangerous of all possible evaluations! If one regards individuals as equal, one calls the species into question. One encourages a way of life that leads to the ruin of the species: Christianity is the counterprinciple to the principle of *selection* . . . The species requires that that the ill-constituted, weak, degenerate, perish: but it was precisely to them that Christianity turned its conserving force.” (Quoted by Michael J. Perry in *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 110 n. 10.)

⁹⁵ “The Naturalist is ready to explain how the illusion [of morality] arose. Chemical conditions produced life. Life, under the influence of natural selection, produces consciousness. Conscious organisms which behave in one way live longer than those which behave in another. Living longer, they are more likely to have offspring. Inheritance, and sometimes teaching as well, pass on their mode of behaviour to their young. Thus in every species a pattern of behaviour is built up. In the human species conscious teaching plays a larger part in building it up, and the tribe further strengthens it by killing individuals who do not conform. They also invent gods who are said to punish departures from it. Thus, in time, there comes to exist a strong impulse to conform” (Lewis, 331-332). Although not all atheists would necessarily agree with every step of this account, it’s general outline is exactly what they would say. Further, Lewis’ recounting quite follows that of Darwin in Chapter Five of *The Descent of Man* which the reader, again, is referred.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 332.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

out how this is not contradictory to naturalism, but most consistent with it. In fact when Naturalists insist that morality is not objective, which is consistent with their worldview, and then urge people to moral action, it is then that they are self-contradictory. Consistency would rather require that they treat their moral admonitions like they really are; no different than two peoples' taste for ice cream with one liking a particular flavor and the other finding it disgusting. Lewis asks, "Do they remember while they are writing thus that when they tell us we 'ought to make a better world' the words 'ought' and 'better' must, on their own showing, refer to an irrationally conditioned impulse which cannot be true or false any more than a vomit or a yawn?"⁹⁸

Given Naturalism, all moral judgments, all ideas of good and evil, are really no more than statements about the speaker's feelings, and in the end, actually "hallucinations."⁹⁹ We will see in the next section that, although in not so many words, even naturalistic atheists admit this, and its consequences are frightening.

Anthropology and Morality

Having dealt with the question of epistemology, and demonstrating that nature itself can give us neither our reason, nor the moral sense that our reasoning faculties lead to, we now move to the anthropological argument. Inherent to the concept of morality is the answer to the question; what does it mean to be human?¹⁰⁰ And our anthropology is based largely on our cosmology.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 333. Lewis commends the Naturalists, in a sense, because they forget that their system provides no basis for a real morality based on 'real value' of human life and its preservation. This, he says "is their glory" and while "holding a philosophy that excludes humanity, they yet remain human. At the sight of injustice they throw all their Naturalism to the winds and speak like men, and like men of genius" (333).

⁹⁹ Ibid, 332.

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Hoekema, "Among the factors that threaten human values today are the following: the growing supremacy of technology; the growth of bureaucracy; the increase of mass-production methods; and the growing

Epstein continually defines humanism thus; “Humanism is, in short, goodness without God.”¹⁰¹ Like most naturalists and atheists, he subscribes to the following cosmological narrative which began 15 billion years ago. A Big Bang occurred in a universe that had no point or purpose and eventually produced humans; the moral creature. Life began when “the first living cell” emerged somewhere along the way from non-life, and after the Earth had already been around for “a billion years.” Two billion years after that, these cells “invented” sexual reproduction which led to “an ever-quickenning spiral of change: from the first multicellular animals, to mammals who could sense their environment and feel emotion, to human self awareness,” and eventually human myths, religions, politics and pop culture.¹⁰² He then concludes, “This is the story of evolution. Humanists accept that the scientific evidence for evolution is overwhelming; we build our worldview around it because we want to look reality squarely in the face, unblinking, unflinching, unafraid of the truth.”¹⁰³ What is that “truth?” that this was a thoroughly “unguided” process in an uncaring universe.¹⁰⁴

From this “truth” faced squarely, comes another truth according to humanism; “the inherent dignity and worth of the individual person,” which is “a central humanist value.”¹⁰⁵ Consistent with this optimistic anthropology, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reached its 60th anniversary in 2008, is fully endorsed by Humanism. Like the Manifestos, it is a thoroughly secular document that roots it’s moral imperatives,

impact of mass-media. Forces such as these tend to depersonalize humanity. New developments in biology, psychology, and sociology increase the possibility of the manipulation of the masses by the few. Practices such as artificial insemination, test-tube babies, abortion, chemical control of behavior, euthanasia, genetic engineering, and the like raise questions about the dignity of human life. Add to this burning issues as racism, the problem of alienation. . . , the problem of equality between men and women, and the problem of decreasing respect for authority, and one can see why the question ‘What is man?’ has acquired a new urgency today.” See *Created in God’s Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 2.

¹⁰¹ Epstein, various pages.

¹⁰² Epstein. 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 9-10

¹⁰⁵ *Humanist Manifesto II*

articulated in 30 articles, on the foundational idea that, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,”¹⁰⁶ At the anniversary celebration, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon iterated, “the Declaration was the first global statement of what we now take for granted -- the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings.”¹⁰⁷ I want to suggest that given the cosmological “truth” of the unguided and uncaring universe, the “truth” of the “inherent dignity and worth of every human” is unsustainable, and that Humanism, which Epstein says again and again, is defined as “goodness without God,” is a mere pipe-dream.

Some atheists see this. Maxwell, for example, opines, from a strictly scientific perspective, “It is now becoming realized that there is simply no foundation for the Jeffersonian statement that men are *born* with rights, or that rights are self-evident. They can only arise in the context of a particular culture and concrete circumstances.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, the idea of intrinsic human worth, and warrant for unconditional respect and the rights that would attend that worth, are, as the postmodernists assert, nothing more than a social construct. Richard Rorty would have to be correct then, in his suggestion that any belief in intrinsic value to anything at all, let alone human life, “is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind . . . Only if we have some such picture in mind, some such picture of the universe as either itself a person or as created by a person, can we make sense of the idea that the world has an ‘intrinsic nature’.”¹⁰⁹ The naturalistic, scientific view is inimical to the concept of humanity having anything intrinsically valuable about it. Thus, in a strictly naturalistic perspective, morality, which in humanism, is rooted in the idea of inherent human

¹⁰⁶ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> (Internet).

¹⁰⁷ 60th Anniversary: Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/udhr60/> (Internet).

¹⁰⁸ Maxwell, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press 1989, 21. (Emphasis Added)

worth, is nothing other than an “illusion” as Lewis said. Science, in its current parlance, has denuded us of the sacred. The late Robert Haynes, president of the 16th International Congress of Genetics, was unequivocal on this point.

For three thousand years at least, a majority of people have considered that human beings were special . . . it's the Judeo-Christian view of man. What the ability to manipulate genes should indicate to people is the very deep extent to which we are biological machines. The traditional view is built on the foundation that life is sacred. . . . Well, not anymore. It's no longer possible to live by the idea that there is something special, unique, even sacred about living organisms.¹¹⁰

According to secular humanist Herbert Tonne, “We need to *mitigate* the truth if we are to remain reasonably sane . . . Functionally, sanity means being deluded enough to believe that life is worth living and that the human race is worth preserving.”¹¹¹ Epstein says we need to be unafraid of the truth, Tonne, on the other hand, says the truth is so frightening that we need to reduce its severity to maintain our sanity. Epstein says we need to face the reality, Tonne that we need to delude ourselves, because reality is that life, just as Shakespeare wrote, “is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury meaning nothing.”¹¹² This humanistic delusion per Tonne is that “human life is important and worth preserving.” The “truth” is, human life is not, in the humanistic framework, very important at all. Humanism’s anthropology cannot be sustained by its cosmology. Consequently, its morality, which is based on its anthropology, is on tenuous ground at best.

James Rachels agrees, but this does not stop him from constructing ethics. “We now know that we exist by evolutionary accident, . . . Hume, who knew only a little of this . . . [evolutionary story

¹¹⁰ Robert Haynes. Cited by C. Ben Mitchell in *Biotechnology and the Human Good*. By C. Ben Mitchell Edmund D. Pellegrino, Jean Bethke, Elshtain, John F. Kilner, and Scott B. Rae. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press 2007), 41.

¹¹¹ Herbert Tonne, *Scribblings of a Concerned Secular Humanist*. (Northvale, NJ: 1988), 39. (Emphasis Added)

¹¹² *Ibid.*

wrote] ‘The life of a man is of no greater importance than the life of an oyster.’ But he also recognized that our lives matter to *us*. We are creatures with desires, needs, plans, hopes; and even if ‘the universe’ does not care about those things, we do. Our theory of morality may begin from this point.”¹¹³ Morality, from this perspective does not appear to be based on reason, but rather wishful thinking. Naturalism provides no framework for either reason or morality, only illusion. One could say that human worth, if Naturalism is true, is not inherent, it is illusory. Yet “we yearn for the illusion” writes Tonne, “a person who told the truth all the time would be a menace to society and a plagued nuisance beside.”¹¹⁴

In a sense, Social Darwinism is actually held at bay by the powerful, and pragmatic, illusion of human significance; but it’s pragmatic value does not do anything to affirm its reality. Epstein, who vehemently rejects Social Darwinism, and insists that we should choose cruelty over kindness every time, still admits, that both of these have “evolutionary value,” but insists that “we can’t have both at the same time.”¹¹⁵ Thus “Humanism is the active choice that, whenever possible, dignity gets priority. It means acknowledging and understanding our selfish genes precisely so that we can evolve beyond them.”¹¹⁶ But what is the justification for the choice for dignity? There is none. Again, we see that the naturalist does not want nature to provide the basis for our morality, but that is, as they know, all we have. Epstein is saying that we must transcend our baser nature and make moral progress through reason, but this whole structure, given Naturalism is a house of cards.

Wright sees how Darwinism properly understood provides no fixed or certain basis for an objectivity when it comes to our morals. If, according to Wright, speaking from the perspective of the new and emerging evolutionary psychology, we believe the things that are necessary for getting our genes

¹¹³ James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill,1993), 181.

¹¹⁴ Tonne, 39. This is Nietzsche’s madman crying out that since God is dead, so is morality. There is no right or wrong, only the weak and strong, and all “morality” is the attempt of the weak to reign in the strong to prevent them from asserting their will to power.

¹¹⁵ Epstein, 25.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

into the next generation. Natural selection selects for these beliefs in us because it has one thing to do, transmit genes. Harris, although rejecting this reductionist perspective, makes it clear that “Appeals to genetics and natural selection can take us only so far, because nature has not adapted us to do anything more than just breed.”¹¹⁷ According to Wright our beliefs about “morality, personal worth, and objectivity . . . lead to behaviors that get our genes [or are at least believed to be likely to get them] into the next generation.”¹¹⁸ Consequently, “what is in our genes’ interests *seems* ‘right,’ – morally right, objectively right.”¹¹⁹ But this seeming is only, as the word suggests, illusory. Wright acknowledges that “many people believe what the new Darwinism underscores: that in human affairs all (or at least much) is artifice . . . [and] this belief helps nourish the central strand of the postmodern condition: a powerful inability to take things seriously.”¹²⁰

The prospect for morality in a Darwinian world thus interpreted ? “The prevailing attitude is absurdism” sates Wright. “The question may be whether, after the new Darwinism takes root, the word *moral* can be anything but a joke.”¹²¹ Maxwell, likewise, when concluding her discussion on the cause and effect evolution of our morals writes, “It is . . . *concern* about goodness or badness that gives rise later to the belief that things are objectively right or wrong . . . these evaluations are originally from Ego’s point of view . . . After a while, people set up ‘objective’ rules . . . are willing to follow these rules . . . [and] eventually the act in question appears to be intrinsically bad or wrong.”¹²² It *appears* that way, so here, again, morality is an illusion, because it is based on the anthropological illusion of the inherent worth of the human.

Wright, not sharing Darwin’s own moral optimism, explains that “[Darwin] didn’t trumpet the theory’s unsettling implication; he didn’t stress that the very sense of right and wrong, . . . is an

¹¹⁷ Harris, 186.

¹¹⁸ Wright, 324-5

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 325 (Emphasis added)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. 326 (Author’s emphasis)

¹²² Maxwell, 85.

arbitrary product of our peculiar evolutionary past.”¹²³ This “scientific enlightenment,” Wright later asserts, poses a “truly formidable threat to . . . the moral realm.”¹²⁴ Seeing life “as a movie that we watch with the bemused detachment of an absurdist” is, in Wright’s view “the specter of a thoroughly postmodern morality.”¹²⁵ While Wright does not see either Darwinism or biology the single source for this thoroughgoing postmodern morality, “together the two could do much to feed it.”¹²⁶ He says that “the *Origin’s* assault on the biblical account of creation and the *Descent’s* doubts about the status of moral sense have together delivered the one-two punch that accounts largely for the prevailing nihilism of many philosophy departments today.”¹²⁷ “Among ethical philosophers, there is nothing approaching agreement on where we might turn for basic moral values—except, perhaps, nowhere.”¹²⁸

Humanists of course, will not accept these nihilistic conclusions, except honest ones like Herbert Tonne, and find the place to turn for these moral values humanity itself. Epstein, for example, when discussing the issue of where our ethics comes from if not from God states, “the simplest way to put this is: our ethics come from human needs and interests.”¹²⁹ But why do human needs and interests matter? This is where Epstein holds on to his delusion. He cites the third permutation of the Humanist Manifesto, “Humanism and its Aspirations,”¹³⁰ which is “committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity.”¹³¹ Epstein is very careful to explain that Humanism is not based on anything that is “eternally objective.”¹³² He states,

We do not need objective values to condemn heinous crimes and uphold ethical standards. We cannot ever be confident that objective values exist. We can postulate them, but there is no way to prove them right or wrong, existent or non-existent. What

¹²³ Ibid. 327

¹²⁴ Ibid. 356.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Wright, *The Origin of the Species*, and *The Descent of Man*.

¹²⁸ Wright, 328.

¹²⁹ Epstein, 34.

¹³⁰ The Humanist Manifesto was first published in 1933, then a second edition came out in 1973. In 2003 the present version, “Humanism and Its Aspirations,” was developed.

¹³¹ Epstein, 224.

¹³² Epstein, 35.

proof would suffice? You'd have to have divine revelation, in which case, if it comes, we humanists are perfectly willing to change our minds.¹³³

If no objective values exist one wonders how human dignity and worth can be “inherent.”

Inherent means, “involved in the constitution or essential character of something: belonging by nature or habit.”¹³⁴ As Ravi Zacharias has said, “Where does human dignity come from? You cannot contrive it, it must be essential.”¹³⁵ If worth and dignity is the essence of being human, if it is constitutive of our nature, then it must be objective. It cannot be based on a subjective value system, and it could not have evolved over time to be conjured up by human imagination. Yet Epstein states that Humanists “long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty . . . , where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence.”¹³⁶ How often? Epstein argues that one need not believe in God to know that murder and rape are wrong, but why are they wrong? Are they ever justified? He would say “No” I am sure because humanists “never stop exploring how we can promote human dignity more effectively, never stop trying to better understand and eliminate human suffering.”¹³⁷ If we “never stop” does this not indicate that human dignity and worth are objective and always true? Epstein is a word wrangler. He is clearly self-contradictory here, which is *unreasonable*.

A very important realization to which Epstein comes is that there is no certainty regarding the source of the inherent human dignity and worth, foundational to the humanist cause. He writes, “But where do this inherent worth and dignity come from? It’s an important and fair question – one that neither the average religious or nonreligious person has thought a lot

¹³³ Ibid. 35-36.

¹³⁴ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. Includes index. (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

¹³⁵ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live without God* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 141.

¹³⁶ *Humanist Manifesto III*; Epstein, 224.

¹³⁷ Epstein, 37.

about.”¹³⁸ It is time that we “religious” people think a lot about this, and make this our starting point for arguing the necessity of a theistic basis for morality. Epstein knows that his worldview provides no basis for “confidence that objective values exist.” He is saying there is nothing but subjectivity in morality, but wants to make the world a place devoid of human suffering. He has no justification for his commitment to the inherent dignity and worth of humanity. He has no justification, really, for choosing kindness over cruelty except that he prefers it.¹³⁹

The humanist anthropology is that we are accidental arrangements of atoms which over time evolved in an unguided and uncaring, mindless and meaningless, universe into moral creatures that are committed to the worth of each individual person, but do not know, and cannot know, where this worth originates. It is illusory, a mere fiction. Biblical theism likewise affirms the worth of the individual. But in sharp contrast, biblical theism *coherently* roots our worth in an anthropology that reveals us to be created beings by a personal, moral God who cares deeply about His human creation. His care is such that He embeds a moral law within each heart to preserve human society, and part of this moral law is an intuitive awareness of the inherent and equal worth of each member of the human family. But because our intuitions can fail, He also reveals this to us *objectively* and *propositionally*, in the Bible, ensuring that we know Who said it; the personal and moral Maker of us all, and thus can truly know it and thus never doubt its propositional certainty.¹⁴⁰ That certainty is that humans are created with equal dignity and worth, and this worth is not illusory, but truly inherent.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Epstein, 34.

¹³⁹ I myself want to be sure to follow Lewis’ example and commend Epstein and others, like Harris and Dawkins and Barker, that they forget that their system provides no basis for a real morality based on ‘real value’ of human life and its preservation. This “is their glory” and while “holding a philosophy that excludes humanity, they yet remain human. At the sight of injustice they throw all their Naturalism to the winds and speak like men, and like men of genius” (333).

¹⁴⁰ I know this raises numerous red flags for the atheist. The whole Divine Command theory comes up here, with its attendant problems, as well as the classic refutation of a Divine Command approach, the Euthyphro Dilemma. While it has not been my goal to defend Divine Command, I know that when I speak of propositional

We might say that humanists were predicted by Paul when he said of false teachers that they would have a “form of godliness, but deny its power.”¹⁴² Many atheistic humanists have an outward visible (“form of”) virtue about them which cannot be denied, and can even be commended, but they have no foundation for their commitment to human dignity, because they

truth, it is inevitable that I have to address it, however summarily. I think the Euthyphro Dilemma legitimately challenges a Divine Command approach, but I also conclude that this is a false dilemma. The point that we need to make is that what is right originates, ultimately, not in God’s commands, but His character; not in what He says, but Who He is. The commands of God are consistent with His character, and thus, He would not command that which is inconsistent with who He is.

The problem with seeing a holy book as the source of moral wisdom is that there are several books, as Harris and others point out, that claim Divine authority over our lives (i.e. The *Qur’an*, The *Bhagavad-Gita*). Consequently, how can just one hold the moral wisdom that the entire human race needs? This is where an apologetic for the reliability and superiority of the Bible is needed. Arguing what makes the Bible so significant and trustworthy in its propositional truth claims is beyond the scope of this essay to address, but what can be said about the biblical propositions regarding human worth and moral responsibility is that they not only dovetail with human intuition and experience, but the Bible provides a cogent *system* for thinking about humanity as possessing inherent worth and dignity. Biblically speaking, humanity’s origins are not accidental, mindless and pointless, but purposeful. The Humanist tries to pull the personal and moral – human dignity and worth – out of a non-personal, amoral universe. This conjuring may be cognitively and pragmatically possible and necessary for human thriving, but there is ultimately no logical connection between beginning in insignificance, ending in insignificance and somehow possessing *inherent* worth and significance between these two poles of nothingness.

The Bible clarifies that humans originate with great meaning, and when they die do not reabsorb into nothingness. From this biblical anthropology arises moral duty, not merely God’s commands. A clear example of this is when James instructs people that they “ought not” be verbally abusive to their fellow humans because humans are “made in the similitude of God” (James 3:9-10).

¹⁴¹ I would be remiss were I not to acknowledge the current atheistic challenge. Interestingly, and ironically, atheists protest the Bible as an immoral book that speaks of an immoral God. There are passages in Scripture which, *prima facie*, seem to provide warrant for this criticism, presenting us with a disparity between the idea that humans are created with inherent dignity and worth, and how some humans are sanctioned to be treated in ancient Israel. Women, for example, appear to be lesser citizens, pagans seem to be of less value than the Israelites that are commanded to go in and kill all the citizens, even non-combatants as they take the land of Canaan. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to address these matters, but in good faith, I acknowledge their problematic nature as one who seeks to affirm inherent human dignity propositionally from the perspective of the Bible. I would definitely want to, and urge more, consideration of these matters in subsequent studies. At this point, I would say that I will suspend my judgment, believing that there are clear explanations and resolutions of this seeming disparity.

For example, I recently heard some very coherent discussion explaining the Jephthah incident in Judges 11. The key to understanding this horrific story, in which the “hero” sacrifices his daughter for God’s granting of victory in battle, is to appreciate the context of Judges in which male leadership is on a demise, and Israel is plunging deeper into moral corruption. No one can really isolate the horrible stories of Judges until they appreciate the intent of Judges is to demonstrate the Israel, in the absence of a king, including a submission to King Yahweh, does what is “right in their own eyes” even when they think, as did Jephthah, that they are serving Yahweh. One must see Jephthah in a similar light as Samson; a moral, failure.

I realize that atheists also can speak of a suspension of judgment, as Harris did, waiting until the facts are all in, when science will more adequately explain morality, but they should afford us the same privilege of suspension of judgment. While there are problems to work out in interpretation from a biblical perspective, the atheists have deeper epistemological and anthropological issues that are much more difficult to resolve, as this essay has sought to point out.

¹⁴² 2 Timothy 3:5

have denied the very thing that gives force (“power”) to their central moral value of inherent human dignity and worth.

Conclusion: A Challenge to Humanists and Evangelicals

To My Humanist Friends

In my closing remarks I quote Richard Rorty again, “The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind . . . Only if we have some such picture in mind . . . can we make sense of the idea that the world has an ‘intrinsic nature.’”¹⁴³ Rorty, of course, does not believe this himself, but realizes that in a godless, uncreated universe, there is no intrinsic/inherent worth to humanity. So to the humanists and atheists who champion the idea of the “inherent preciousness and value of every individual person” and construct an edifice of human morality and human rights¹⁴⁴ upon that idea, you have already eaten your cake, and you cannot have it back. To deny that humanity is created by God, is to insure that we are nothing more than the product of a blind evolutionary process driven by natural selection in an unguided and uncaring universe, and to strip away the substantive basis for that assertion. You make the assertion, and you believe it, despite your denial of God. Thankfully that is possible, and so is your moral behavior. Yes, you can *be* “good without God,” but you cannot, and will not, ever be able to prove, propositionally or coherently, that without God humanity has an intrinsic worth upon which a solid moral system may be erected. Simply but poignantly put, “The essence of all morality is this: to believe that

¹⁴³ Rorty, 21.

¹⁴⁴ We are constantly confronted with issues involving human rights violations. Human rights is intimately connected to morality. The presumption underlying human rights is that there is a sacredness and inviolability to human life. (See Michael Perry’s *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 1998, especially Chapter Two). Human rights make no sense, however, in the absence of *intrinsic* human value or worth. In turn, intrinsic value or worth is a tenuous idea when you start with the assumption that humans are nothing more than the accidental products of an unguided process in an uncaring universe. If we have no intrinsic worth, we have no inalienable human rights which are to be protected from violation. The basis and hope for human rights is, at its very root, theistic.

every human being is of infinite importance . . . But to believe this it is necessary to believe in God.”¹⁴⁵
How can you argue against that? As long as you hold to your atheism, you must, along with Herbert Tonne, continue to “delude” yourself into believing “that human life is important and worth preserving.” At least Tonne bites the bullet and admits that holding to the idea of human dignity in a godless universe *is* delusional. I hope you will see that you are, indeed, operating under that same delusion. If God is a delusion, then so is any notion of inherent dignity in humanity. But it is believing this delusion, rather than, given your worldview, the stark and harsh reality of our ultimately pointless existence, that pragmatically serves the preservation of society.

We theists, and particularly Christians, see our moral sense as “built in” not by selfish genes, but by a sovereign Lord and Lawgiver. We see our sense of human worth and compassion not as a “Darwinian misfiring,” but a magnificent design of an Eternal and Intelligent God for preserving His human creation. You do not have to believe this to continue to live a moral life, and for that we are thankful, and we can and will commend your virtues, but we hope you will one day realize that this capacity comes from God himself, who has written His law on your hearts; nature did not do that; nature could not do that and has no interest in doing that. God created us all with dignity and infinite worth.

To My Evangelical Brethren

I have two things to say to my brothers in faith. First, let us never, again, reduce morality to the childish idea of merely doing right in order to avoid punishment or to gain reward. Let us only demonstrate to the non-theists that their morality, virtue and goodness, while real, has no basis in nature, which they themselves readily acknowledge, because, at the outset, Naturalism undermines reason, without which morality is not possible, and the concept of inherent human dignity and worth upon which any substantive morality can be built. Second, let us no longer claim that atheism means one cannot live a moral life, or say that one cannot do or even be good without God. Human morality is not based on

¹⁴⁵ R. H. Tawney quoted by Michael Perry in his *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 1998. P. 11.

or rooted in *belief* in God, nor does it necessitate one's conscious acknowledgment of God's existence. For us to say so is our own straw man that we, as believers, often erect. Let us be the ones to tear it down, and not erect it again, so we can get on with a more substantive argument. While we cannot, and should not, say this, we must insist that if morality is not a product of nature, which even atheist's seem to conclude, then something outside of and possibly above nature is its ultimate source, and this knowledge does not come to us via an unguided natural process, but something or Someone that transcends that process. So, while *belief* in God's existence is not necessary for the practice of morality (doing or being good), God's existence is necessary for the existence and justification of morality (goodness itself).

We can agree with the Humanist that ethics is based on the "inherent dignity and worth of the individual person" but then proceed to demonstrate, as I hope this essay has successfully done, that naturalism does not provide the necessary context for making such an affirmation. Instead, a biblical view of the image of God, in which man is manifestly said to be created, provides that needed anthropological context for morality. The biblical God is a personal and moral Being from which reason and morality spring forth and contribute significantly to our understanding of that "image." As such, humans are endowed with an inherent personal and moral worth which has huge moral implications for how we interact with and treat one another. The biblical theist treats humans with dignity and respect because, in essence, the way we treat our fellow humans is also the way we treat God Himself.

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