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Isaac Kantola

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**A World of Difference:
A Comparison of the Worldview Differences Regarding Personhood and Human Rights**

Isaac Kantola

Liberty University Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

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Despite much of the American tradition being under attack, most Americans still hold the principle of inherent human rights in high regard. The United States was founded upon the idea that people, “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” and this concept is still largely valued by the majority of Americans today.¹ These words reflect the Judeo-Christian views held by the American founders, and one can clearly see evidence of the Christian worldview throughout their founding texts. However, one need not travel far to learn that these views are not universal. Nations including Iraq, China, and Russia hold very different systems of belief, many of which are contrary to those of the Christian worldview. These differences span far beyond rights and ultimately reflect disagreements on a more fundamental question: what does it mean to be human? This work seeks to investigate the differences between various worldviews on the topic of humanity and human rights, using the worldview framework put forth by Drs. David Noebel and Jeff Meyers in their work *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews*. These authors present six major worldviews for analysis, those being Islam, Secularism, Marxism, New Spirituality, Postmodernism, and Christianity. The stance of each worldview on the topic of personhood and rights will be compared to that of the Christian worldview, with a discussion of their pitfalls contrasted with the preeminence of the Christian worldview. As convincing as some of their arguments may be, every worldview except that of Christianity approaches these issues with a flawed understanding, ultimately leading to faulty and dangerous conclusions. First, a discussion on the worldview expressed by one of the world’s leading religions: Islam.

¹ United States, *The Declaration of Independence* in Congress July 4. (New York: Duffield, 1907), 14.

Founded by the prophet Muhammad in the A.D. 600's, the tenets of the Islamic worldview are expressed in their holy book, the Quran. Authored by Muhammad between AD 610 and AD 632, this text is, as *Understanding the Times* so eloquently puts it, the documental basis for a religion that believes it, "not only supersedes Christianity, but it is, in fact, the fulfillment of Christianity."² Though this leads to small similarities between the two worldviews on the issues of personhood and human rights, their ultimate conclusions are vastly different. For example, the Quran affirms that humans are created by God, stating that, in a conversation with His angels, God stated, "I am indeed going to set a viceroy on the earth."³ Furthermore, it acknowledges the first sin and affirms that humanity turned away from God, stating in Quran 2 verse 36 that, "...Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what state they were in."⁴ However, Islam's interpretation of what many would call the "fall" differs greatly from that of Christianity. In Romans 5:12, the Bible teaches that Adam and Eve's sin was passed down to humanity, and a sin nature now possesses all humanity (New King James Version). Although Islam acknowledges the sin of Adam, it does not state that this fall caused all humans to have an inherent sin nature. Rather, Islam teaches that, "No person earns any (sin) except against himself (only), and no bearer shall bear another's burden."⁵ In other words, each person is responsible for their own actions and is not born with an inherent sin nature, a view diametrically opposed to that of the Christian worldview.

The Islamic view on human rights is a more complicated subject, as what is taught in the Quran is not necessarily practiced by all Muslims. As Tamara Kharroub, a senior fellow at

² Jeff Meyers and David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times*, 2nd ed. (Manitou Springs: Summit Ministries, 2016), 56-60.

³ Ali G. Gharaei, *The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*. (Ali Gholi Gharaei, 2022), Ch. 2 v 30, Hoopla Digital.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Qarai, *The Qur'an*, Ch. 6 v164.

Washington DC's Arab Center puts it, "the Qur'an clearly instates the principles of equality among all humans," and that, "despite the empirical differences among humans ... the Qur'an regards them as equals..."⁶ However, one need only look at the news to learn that countries under Muslim rule suffer immense human rights violations, most notably against women. Kharroub states that these leaders cite other passages of the Quran and Islam's patriarchal backgrounds as justification for these actions, however, this contradiction between Islamic principles and practice is worthy of note.⁷ Christians and Muslims, though agreeing that rights come from a Creator and that all people are created equal, come to quite divergent conclusions regarding both human nature and human rights.

Though a few similarities exist between the worldviews of Christianity and Islam, one would be hard pressed to find any correlation between Secular beliefs about personhood and rights and the beliefs held by the Christian worldview. This is largely due to the secular worldview is denying the existence of a God, claiming that all things are of natural origin and explanation. Charles Darwin, perhaps one of the greatest catalysts of the development of the secular worldview, wrote in his notebooks that, "Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work ... More humble and I think truer to consider him created from animals."⁸ This quote is a near-complete summary of the thesis of secularism; namely, that humans are not created by God and instead evolved from animals. This view is in stark contrast to the Genesis account of Creation, in which God created man "In His own image," (Gen. 1:27). Being made in God's

⁶ Tamara Kharroub, "Five things you need to know about women in Islam: Implications for advancing women's rights in the Middle East," Arab Center Washington DC, Oct 4, 2015, arabcenterdc.org/resource/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-women-in-islam-implications-for-advancing-womens-rights-in-the-middle-east/

⁷ Ibid

⁸ James Rachels, "Darwin, Species, and Morality," *The Monist* 70, no. 1 (2014): 98, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist19877014>.

image would naturally lead to one having inherent value, an idea rejected by secular thinkers. In writing about this topic in his work *A Devil's Chaplain*, popular atheist apologist and author Richard Dawkins states that, "We admit that we are like apes, but seldom realize that we *are* apes."⁹ Although Dawkins was not necessarily referring to human worth in making this statement, the secular belief that humans are simply the next step up in an evolutionary ladder leads to difficulty in grounding human value and worth in any objective standard. The Christian concept of humanity as created is absent from the secular worldview, and instead is replaced with naturalistic explanations for their origin. However, without a grounding of a human worth in an objective standard, does a person truly have value? Is there any real foundation upon which to claim the existence of inherent human rights? If the mind and body are truly one, as secularism claims, and there is no basis for the mind outside of this present reality, then, as *Understanding the Times* so eloquently puts it, we are simply, "matter in motion."¹⁰ This worldview's stance on what it means to be human is diametrically opposed to that of Christianity's, and shares many similarities with the next worldview of analysis: Marxism.

Though Karl Marx and the basics of his ideology are well-known today, only a small number are aware of the radical extent of the ideas put forth in his most popular work, *The Communist Manifesto*. The systems of Communism and Socialism are widely known and discussed in the public square, but few know that the implications of Marxism span far beyond economics and politics. Marx's *Manifesto* explicitly states that, "the theory of Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."¹¹ However, this same work

⁹ Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain*. Reprint edition. (Mariner Books, 2004), 25, www.hoopladigital.com/title/11994987

¹⁰ Meyers and Noebel, *Understanding the Times*, 88

¹¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 22.

states that Communism, “abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality...”¹² and that the concepts of freedom and justice are also to be abolished.¹³ Thus, it is a fallacy to assume that Marx intended for his ideas to be limited to economic planning. If these so-called “eternal truths” are abolished, one is left in a world much like that of the secularists. With the absence of these eternal truths, there is no objective basis upon which to measure the value of humanity. In his essay *On the Jewish Question*, Marx states that, “None of the so-called rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man, beyond man as a member of civil society...”¹⁴ An article published in *Human Rights* brings clarity to this statement, explaining that Marx claims rights are derived from human institutions, and not from an objective standard outside of humanity.¹⁵ Though Marx at least acknowledges that rights do exist in some form, this view severely devalues human life by reducing the basis of rights to be whatever society determines. By contrast, the Bible is full of references to the inherent value and rights of humanity stemming from a source other than worldly institutions, with passages like Genesis 9:6 affirming that, “God made man in his own image,” Thus, where the Christian worldview provides an objective standard for human value, Marxism claims this value to be a construct based only upon societal consensus.

Admittedly, Noebel’s and Meyer’s umbrella term “New Spirituality” encompasses a wide variety of beliefs, many of which are hard to define and specifically categorize. Thus, much of this essay will focus on analysis of the worldview expressed by the Buddhist religion,

¹² Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 31.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, (marxists.org, first published 1844), www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/

¹⁵ Gu Chunde, "The Gist of the Marxist View on Human Rights." *Journal of Human Rights* 17, no. 3 (2018): 246, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/jrnlnmch17&i=245>.

specifically in the writings of the Dalai Lama. Beginning with their similarities, both Christianity and Buddhism affirm that being a person involves death. The Dalai Lama's *Little Book of Buddhism* states that, "There is no way to escape death ... there is no escape from these four mountains of birth, old age, sickness, and death."¹⁶ The Bible affirms this fact of death, stating in Hebrews that, "it is appointed for men to die once," (Heb. 9:27). But, although both worldviews affirm the existence of death, they have very different views on how to live. Buddhism encourages its followers to, "Do your best and do it according to your own inner standard - call it conscience..."¹⁷ which seems to imply that one should follow his or her conscience in order to achieve a higher form of being. In contrast, Christians are called to follow God's law and His calling, not for the attainment of a higher state, but instead to live according to His purposed design. Christianity's focus is on growing closer to the Creator, whereas the purpose of Buddhism and other New-Spiritualist ideas is to achieve Nirvana, a state in which the self ultimately ceases to exist in a pain-free existence. Thus, the goal of personhood for these two worldviews are certainly different in their end, providing yet another point of contrast between the worldview of Christianity and the worldviews expressed by other religions.

The Postmodern worldview is, much like New Spirituality, difficult to accurately define. Although, one of their fundamental claims is the denial of absolute truth. This worldview is primarily comprised of reactions to and against other paradigms. Postmodernism, as expressed by Gorgias, is founded upon the idea that, "even if something exists, nothing can be known about it."¹⁸ Thus, even if there was a concept of personhood, we would be unable to know or define it.

¹⁶ The Dalai Lama, *The Dalai Lama's Little Book of Buddhism*, 1st ed. (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2015), 63. <https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/11770062>

¹⁷ Dalai Lama, *Little Book of Buddhism*, 39.

¹⁸ Meyers & Noebel, *Understanding the Times*, 151.

This can lead to all sorts of conclusions that contradict rational thought, including the fact that Gorgias was recorded to have instructed people to “present themselves as virtuous even if they were not.”¹⁹ If there is no concept of absolute truth or personhood, then there is no way to act in accordance with how humanity is designed, and therefore no reason to behave morally or decently. This discussion also leads to a major dilemma regarding human rights. If we can’t prove the existence of human rights, then can violations of those rights exist? If we cannot prove that humans should be treated in a certain way, doesn’t that justify some of the worst behavior in history?

These are questions that Postmodernists have wrestled with for years, yet explanations have been concocted in an attempt to explain this paradox. In his work *Taking Rights Less Seriously: Postmodernism and Human Rights*, author Zuhtu Arslan acknowledges that, although some postmodernists claim that human rights are non-existent, others, “recognize the necessity of the rights, provided that they are not grounded in transcendental or otherwise metaphysical claims.”²⁰ In contrast, the Bible teaches that we can know the truth, and therefore what it means to be a person, through study of the Bible, stating that, “... You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” (John 8:32). Thus, where Postmodernism inherently fails to provide answers, the Bible stands as a rock-solid foundation for truth that can be known and acted upon.

Upon final analysis, one cannot deny the myriad of differences on the topic of humanity and human rights expressed by the six major worldviews. Though some similarities do exist, one being the idea of humanity as inherently valuable expressed by both Christianity and Islam, the

¹⁹ Ibid, 152

²⁰ Zü Arslan. "Taking Rights Less Seriously: Postmodernism and Human Rights." *Res Publica* 5, no. 2 (12, 1999): 203, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/taking-rights-less-seriously-postmodernism-human/docview/763646527/se-2>.

differences and conflicts between the worldviews far outnumber any overlap discerned in this analysis. Each have their own approach to these fundamental questions, and differ widely in their approach on how to live in light of these differences. Though some, such as New Spirituality and Islam, attempt to ground their belief in humanity's value and the importance of rights in some sort of deistic thought, others reject the principle of deism for a system of ideas with no objective grounding for truth. Out of all the worldviews presented, the system of ideas expressed in Christianity stands out uniquely, stating that humanity derives its nature and rights from an all-powerful Creator while acknowledging the fallen nature of man as a result of their own sin. In the end, rational analysis of these worldviews should be encouraged in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each, ultimately leading to the conclusion that the Christian worldview provides the best answer to the questions of human nature and human rights.

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