Christ and the Cradle:
The explanatory power of Christian theism
for basic moral sensibilities on the ontology of children

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Doctor of Philosophy

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To Jenn and Noah Jordan,
my precious wife and son,
I love you
A father half apologetic for having brought his son into the world, afraid to restrain him lest he should create inhibitions or even to instruct him lest he should interfere with his independence of mind, is a most misleading symbol of the Divine Fatherhood.

- C. S. Lewis

A “dad” is tenth most popular Christmas list request for children in 2012.

- Hannah Furness

Childlikeness is the foundation for simplicity and truthfulness.

- O. M. Bakke

[Having children] It’s 10,000 times better than anything I’ve ever done.

- Steve Jobs

Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

- Jesus, Matthew 19:14
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Finally, I am thankful to God for the indescribable riches of His grace. Without His work in my life I would never have considered such a project. My prayer is that this dissertation would remove intellectual roadblocks to the gospel. May these pages assist seekers to see why their properly basic moral sentiments towards children make the best sense on Christian theism. I pray the local church is moved to evermore place a high value on children. To God be the glory.
Introduction

With any writing project, even more an academic project as extensive as a dissertation, there should be at least some semblance of an answer to the question, “Why does this matter?” Most persons in contemporary Western culture recognize basic morality when it comes to children. Child neglect or molestation is almost universally viewed, putting it mildly, as a dereliction of moral duty. Yet what best explains these sensibilities? My sincere hope is that this work serves as a window to the operation of our inner moral machinery in how we view children.

Here’s the roadmap: First, establishing basic moral sensibilities on children is an offshoot of the classical moral argument for the existence of God. Whereas, the moral argument speaks generally to moral realism my claim focuses more specifically on how our intuitions on children bear witness to this reality. I am presupposing the veracity of moral realism and confining my application to the womb, cradle, and elementary school. Without moral realism, arguing for basic moral sensibilities would be somewhat unintelligible. If moral realism is false then the claim of basic objective moral beliefs relating to children necessarily falters. In this sense, this study is an offshoot of the classical moral argument for the existence of God.

Second, I will mine the relevant historical data relating to children in several cultures contemporaneous with the biblical world. Third, examine the ontological inferences of current trends in child treatment. Finally, make an abductive case for our deepest moral intuitions as incarnated in Christian theism. At the heart of this project I will focus on how children should be treated, and how Christian teachings imbue our moral sensibilities about children with all the
more weight. The logical flow is as follows: We have excellent reasons to take moral intuitions about the moral treatment of children seriously. In fact, this gives us excellent prima facie reason to believe in God as the best explanation of, say, the inherent dignity of people, including children. But when we look to the past, we see that often children have been horribly treated and not accorded worth. And today, still, there are lots of disturbing trends as to how they’re treated, which invariably reflect deficient worldviews. Ultimately, it’s not just theism we need, but something more, arguably Christian theology, which makes great sense of our best moral intuitions about the little ones. The theology of Christianity, and the special revelation we have in Scripture, gives us even deeper reasons to take with great seriousness our moral intuitions and insights about the humane treatment of children, the most vulnerable of our species. In this way, Christianity can receive some corroboration from our best considered judgments about the value of children, and we can identify the resources we need to battle troubling contemporary trends of child mistreatment.

Since the argument centers upon basic sentiments I recount a number of atrocities and a variety of other troubling accounts about children in hopes of gaining a wider readership than Western academic elites. Historically accurate and emotionally intensive data are not only relevant but also needed or the thesis may well begin with a false start. Basic moral beliefs may be exhaustively discussed with the mind but they are primarily and firstly accessible through an intuitive grasp of what should and should not be.

H. G. Wells writes in his classic, *The Time Machine*, “We are kept keen on the grindstone

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1 Although a popular-level devotional work, Paul David Tripp’s chapter “Big Theological Brains and Heart Disease” is quite relevant. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 41-56.
of pain and necessity.”² In light of rampant global abuse and neglect of children along with efforts on many fronts to stem this heart-rending tide, addressing the pain of children is a moral necessity. Their value and the rightness of their proper treatment cry out for our most arduous attention. It has often been said that all theology is practical theology. Even the most arcane tangents in philosophy and ethics make an impact in the real world of flesh and blood because ideas ultimately drive how one views his or her fellow humans. History is replete with examples of false ideas bearing disastrous fruit. We will observe numerous examples of how worldview matters especially regarding regarding children.

Aristotle penned these words in his classic work, Metaphysics: “By nature, all men long to know.”³ Children can help us, above all, with self-knowledge. As Jennifer Roback Morse writes, “The infant needs adults in order to learn trust. Adults need the infant to learn trust and be trustworthy, if they wish to maintain anything like a free and open society. This places obligations upon the adults. Adults cannot choose [just] any way of life for themselves and expect that the infant will grow up to become a self-governing individual.”⁴ If children are the future then it lies in the hands of adults.

Before we go further, we will briefly survey the literature on the ontology of children. A fair number of purely historiographical works are available on children in the ancient world, particularly in the Greco-Roman setting. Christian Laes’s work, Children in the Roman Empire?: Outsiders Within, predominantly focuses on the psychosocial life of children with one chapter dedicated to pedophilia and pederasty. Any discussion of morality and children is incidental to

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the purpose of the book, as Laes, for the most part, does not delve into ontology or apologetics. Jennifer T. Roberts and Tracy Barrett’s *The Ancient Greek World* is a *tour de force* on the damaging effect of Greek theology on how children were viewed. These works by and large bypass the questions of how theology informed anthropology in these cultures.

However, a few recent commendable works focus on the influence of early Christian thought on children in the Greco-Roman world. Norwegian scholar O. M. Bakke’s, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, contains a superb combination of historiography and Christian ontology. Bakke serves as Associate Professor of Church History at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway. His work aims to answer the following questions: (1) What did Christians think about children and about the nature of children, and what qualities did they ascribe to children? (2) What did they say about the treatment of children, and how did they treat children *de facto*? The reader will see a number

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of references to Bakke’s work throughout this dissertation. Its historical scope on how Christian theology gave children a full human status is quite relevant to our discussion.\textsuperscript{8}

But the literature gap is largely in the area of ontology and moral apologetics. There is a noticeable lack of apologetic emphasis in extant works on children. Here is what I believe to be the missing element: Lack of an abductive approach that incorporates the historical data and then compares it to basic moral sensibilities on children in the form of a philosophically compelling apologetic argument.\textsuperscript{9} Moreover, there is an even wider gap on a work of this sort from a distinctly theologically conservative position. A need exists for a comparison of worldviews in the biblical world, \textit{what} Jews and Christians believed, and \textit{how} those beliefs inform our cherished moral sensibilities towards children.

In order to achieve this end I will attempt a blending of philosophy, ethics, and historiography. The nature of this investigation necessarily carries a broader scope namely because of the historiographical information integral to the thesis. Since the primary argument is abductive the reader will encounter a variety of data intended to lead the reader back to the principal premise. One of these seemingly wide-ranging (but hopefully not random) elements is my eclectic apologetic method. I believe the pages dedicated to methodological eclecticism are vital for the reader to see how I interact with the data throughout the remainder of the dissertation.


\textsuperscript{9} “Abduction, in this context, is an inference to the best explanation, the case for which we hope to build, rather than a case for Holmes to solve.” David Baggett and Jerry Walls, \textit{God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55.
In this project I argue that Christian theism has strong explanatory power for our most basic moral sensibilities towards children. These four criteria serve as properly basic beliefs of sorts about children and will assist in vetting the ontology of children on the respective worldviews: 1) By virtue of their very existence, children have a high intrinsic value. 2) Children, as intrinsically valuable, should be protected from all forms of adult predations whether abortion, infanticide, physical abuse, or excessive physical demands. 3) Protection of children’s sexual innocence is necessary by eschewing the sexualizing or molestation of children. 4) Protection and nurture of the family unit is vital: since the family unit is the surest protection against sexual and physical harm, the family should be highly valued.

I do not wish to imply that only theists or Christians treat children humanely. Non-theists and non-Christian theists may have a better track record than some of their Bible-believing neighbors. Later in the dissertation is a section on how worldview impacts behavior. I will freely admit to the temptation of driving the hard point that if persons frequently find themselves transcending their worldview they should act honestly and fuse their worldview with what they so strongly believe to be true. The line between dogmatism and well-grounded research can often be difficult to find, especially when one believes strongly in a particular point of view. However, a more amicable approach is probably more appropriate here such as encouraging non-Christian interlocutors to allow their sincere and selfless love for their children to soften them to the possibility that something like Christian theism is more likely true than they’d previously thought. Along these abductive lines, I will make a case for the robust explanation provided by
Christian theism for the value of children and the rich implications of Christian theology when it comes to valuing children and raising them well.

Let me be clear: by “Christian moorings” I do not mean the often-misunderstood idea of a “Christian country” which, for some, would necessitate a 100% regenerate society but rather these core standards reflected in law and culture. If I’m even approximately right, we may find at least a partial explanation of why a substantial departure from law and cultural practices that reflect properly basic moral sensibilities (as best explained on Christian theism) will likely result in a significant fading of concern and regard for children.

My treatment has more to do with the broader and more general influence of Christian thought and ethics on culture than individual conversion. In their zeal to focus on the individual, evangelicals often pay insufficient heed to the social impact of the gospel. Social change is a byproduct of individual conversion or, at the very least, a cultural adherence to essential beliefs that stem from the gospel. Evangelicals should be willing to affirm the distinction between the social gospel and the social effects of the gospel. Noting the positive influence of Christian thought and ethics on culture does not lessen or replace communicating the gospel for individual regeneration.

While I write from a Christian worldview I am not advocating that only Christian theism provides a sufficient epistemological grounding for moral realism. In my perspective, the God of historic Judeo-Christian theism suffices for establishing objective moral duties and values. Christian theists do not have an exclusive patent on the classical arguments for the existence of God. Deists, Muslims, adherents of Judaism, and other theists may utilize the ontological

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argument to the miniscule quantum data of the teleological to lead to a generic theistic conclusion. Even so, Christian theism offers a unique incarnational power. Deep theological abstractions and illustrations for the humane view and treatment of children are most exquisitely seen in the incarnational paradigm of the Christian model. By Christianity I include Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and the Orthodox traditions within the classical tent of historic.\(^{11}\) In summary, I argue that non-Christians can have moral knowledge but have greater difficulty explaining its ontological foundations.

**Purpose and Method**

The reader should remember the abductive approach of this dissertation. Chapter one includes a variety of historical examples from an assortment of cultures and times to illustrate the universal nature of the claims about children. Certain projects focus on a very specific period of time so examples outside that epoch may be distracting at best. That is not the case here. Since I am arguing for universal properly basic moral principles about children that transcend culture and chronology, historical examples that range outside of early Christianity or the 21st-century Western world are not only not random but also altogether fitting. If children matter and worldview largely shapes treatment of children, then worldview also matters. Chronic mistreatment of children is nothing less than a humanitarian crisis. Surely limiting or thwarting child abuse should constitute a noble priority and needed endeavor. Children also pose curious philosophical questions: is there a moral distinction between children and adults? If so, what are

\(^{11}\) I do not include the theology of Mormonism or bans on blood transfusions in cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses that have resulted in unnecessary child deaths. Seth M. Asser and Rita Swan, “Child Fatalities from Religious-motivated Medical Neglect,” *Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* 101, no. 4 (1998): 625-629.
those distinctions? There’s also a need for fleshing out moral realism not only as it relates to ontology but to culture. If moral realism is true, then how does epistemology intersect with sociological realities such as family, marriage, children and sexuality, etc.?

The reader should be properly prepared for a lengthy first chapter that will serve as a prolegomenon of sorts for establishing the grounding for arguments presented throughout the remainder of the work. My aim is to strike a balance in providing a sufficient framework for my approach without overburdening the reader with a deluge of seemingly tertiary data. The first division under theology explains how, on Christianity, there exists a moral duty, in the words of Jude, to “contend for the truth” (Jude 3, ESV). Next, I will outline my eclectic apologetic methodology in contending for the truth in which I contrast William Lane Craig’s deductive moral argument with the abductive version of David Baggett and Jerry Walls.

Finally, not all persons consider theology a worthy or even relevant academic subject. A rising cultural perception that theology should be relegated to the privacy of homes and religious institutions has placed theology on the defensive in many ways. On the other hand, a more pragmatic discussion may carry a higher appeal to a broader audience beyond the theologically inclined. Regardless of one’s theological or ethical stance, one reality stands clear: worldview affects the treatment of children, which in turn molds society. Again, regardless of one’s view of truth, moral realism, or ethical absolutes, and epistemic access, history bears witness to the acidic effect of denying or diminishing the intrinsic value of children on society as a whole.

In chapter two I will take the reader through a survey of how children have been viewed by several worldviews contemporaneous with the world of the biblical writers. The chapter begins with a suggestion that worldviews do not arise in a vacuum. Cultural assumptions carry considerable weight in forming what persons take to be true about the world even on children.
Next I mine the ontology of children on Molech worship, and the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and Caesar. Each one is examined by the four criterions on our basic moral sensibilities towards children as previously listed.

Chapter three deals with current trends in child treatment. Enlightened and crass egoism are clearly distinguished, and I show how both devalue children by being unable to give a compelling case for parental duty. Decay of the family covers divorce and single-parent homes, absent fathers and emotionally neglected children, breakdown of the family unit and doubt, increase of virtual communication to the demise of familial harmony and community, acceptance of abortion, rise in anti-human rhetoric, and the normalization of same-sex marriage, and normalization of pedophilia.

Chapter four is the *locus classicus* section in this work: the ontology of children on Christian theism. To begin, I will accentuate the prodigious explanatory power of Christian theism for the intrinsic value and humane treatment of children. The reader will be confronted by historical data that suggests most contemporary Western views about the value of and care for children suggest evidence of a cultural Christian memory. Without conflating important distinctions, this is where I will move from these beliefs as a premise to a conclusion in the sense that Christian theology bolsters and clarifies what we already know to be true. We will see that so much of what shaped our moral views of children has been the Christian tradition. In fact, assigning primacy to the humane treatment of children, the elderly, handicapped, and other vulnerable classes of persons finds tremendous justification on Christian theism, particularly in the Judeo-Christian teaching of the *imago dei*. While general theists of the Judeo-Christian tradition may hold to the *imago dei*, it makes the fullest sense on Christian theism because of the incarnation of Jesus and his explicit teachings regarding the least of these.
Next is a retroactive look at how Moses and the prophets viewed children. Their unified voice cries out in three ways: Parents have a duty to properly train their children in the knowledge of God, denouncement of child sacrifice contra Molech worship, blessings to the helpers of the helpless and judgment on exploiters of the defenseless.

Jesus’s teaching on children follows this section where I will focus on three of its aspects: kingdom of God, gravity of child harm, and the death of egoism on the incarnation. We will see Jesus’s placing a high value on children was a unique position in the ancient world that set the historical precedent for much of the contemporary Western protection of children.

Subsequently is the Apostle Paul’s threefold equal opportunity challenge to both Jews and Gentiles: First, Paul’s idea of adoption as the signature descriptor of salvation is exegetically meaningful to grasping his economy of value. Correlating the concept of adoption to salvation carries theological ramifications for the issue of parenting. His teaching paints a helpful picture of parenting as it relates to the nature of God as father of his children and children raised by those other than their biological parents. Second, is the family of God, which labels adult believers as children, a curious descriptor in the warrior-rabbi-philosopher dominated world of the first century. Third, Paul’s sermon on marriage and child raising in Ephesians 5:23-6:4 where he delineates the duties of husbands to wives, wives to husbands, parents to children, and children to parents connected to the kerygma of the risen Jesus.

Finally, I examine the protective effect of Christian teaching on sexuality for children and how the resurrection offers hope to victims of childhood abuse. Since this dissertation is primarily philosophical theology, it will receive the lion’s share of attention over extensive exegesis. In this chapter, I will attempt to simultaneously accomplish two tasks. The first is apologetic: Christianity provides the ontology of children that sanctions the moral behaviors we
cherish. The other is to spell out, from a Christian perspective, a proper attitude towards children.¹²

The conclusion includes several reflections on how to respond to the current cultural trajectory. These suggestions, I believe, provide a challenge of authenticity to Christians and an honest assessment of the status quo as well as hope for the future. Readers will find a challenge to align their most treasured moral sentiments with the worldview that provides the best explanation.

Chapter 1: Properly Basic Beliefs and Children

Theology

At certain points this section may seem a bit wide-ranging given the specific topic of the explanatory power of Christian theism on our basic moral sensibilities on children. I wish to remind the reader that my methodology draws from a variety of approaches as needed. My abductive eclecticism allows for a large tent so the reader should expect to encounter a diverse collection of data to support the rather narrow thesis.

Uniqueness of Reformed Epistemology

Essential beliefs on children live in the same ecosystem as proper basicality, although I am not assessing properly basic beliefs per se. I believe a brief excursus on Reformed Epistemology (RE) will provide the reader some helpful insight into a main ingredient of my eclectic methodology.

Reformed Epistemologist Kelly James Clark claims “belief in God, like belief in other persons, does not require the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational.”13 This simple but controversial form of indirect reasoning finds its roots in the writings of renowned philosopher, Alvin Plantinga who is credited with sparking a full-scale revolution within the philosophical community leading to a resurrection of theism in the secular academic

establishment. In the era of big shirt collars and even bigger hair, Plantinga’s little book, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, lodged more scintillating questions than definitive answers.\(^{14}\) When the dust settled, it became apparent to all but the most hardened partisan that the logical problem of evil was no longer the nail in the coffin of theism like it was once purported to be. Plantinga’s brilliance can be comparable to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s fictional character, Sherlock Holmes in the sense of not taking claims at face value.

RE’s central suggestion is that theism is exempt from the evidential requirement because theism is a properly basic belief. What is a properly basic belief and what are the criteria? Plantinga explains:

> Theistic belief as produced by the *sensus divinitatis* is basic. It is also properly basic, and that in at least two senses. On the one hand, a belief can be properly basic for a person in the sense that it is indeed basic for him (he doesn’t accept it on the evidential basis of other propositions) and, furthermore, he is *justified* in holding it in the basic way: he is within his epistemic rights, is not irresponsible, is violating no epistemic or other duties in holding that belief in that way.\(^{15}\)

The distinction between reasonableness and absolute proofs is significant. Simply because one may be unable to definitely prove one’s belief in God does not entail that theism is unreasonable. For many, Kant’s *noumenal/phenomenal* distinction leads to shrouding the necessary question in place of one that is neither appropriate nor helpful: the question should be “what is reasonable?” not “what is exhaustively provable?” In philosophy, proofs are about as common as hen’s teeth so the shift from absolute proofs to reasonableness drastically changes the debate. Outside of Plantinga’s concept of “warrant” all dialogue necessarily follows a degradation so extreme that one is philosophically hamstrung from making any substantive statement concerning reality.

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\(^{15}\) Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 178.
Ever since the Enlightenment, theists have largely carried the burden of proof. Craig Keener argues, in reference to miracles, “for miracles . . . Hume presupposes a standard of proof so high that any evidence is effectively ruled out in advance.” Principally unattainable proofs replaced reasonableness. Plantinga identifies two kinds of objections emanating from the Enlightenment: *De facto* objections, arguments against the factuality of God’s existence, and *de jure* objections, “that Christian belief, whether or not true, is at any rate unjustifiable, or rationally unjustified, or irrational, or not intellectually respectable, or contrary to sound morality, or without sufficient evidence, or in some other way rationally unacceptable, not up to snuff from an intellectual point of view.” Where perception is often reality, Plantinga simply sidesteps the high collateral of *de facto* attacks, primarily dealt with through evidential arguments, and addresses *de jure* presuppositions.

William Lane Craig, a confessional advocate of the classical method, used a section out of the RE playbook in his debate with raucous atheist Frank Zindler. Craig so exposed Zindler’s atheistic bias that the debate became somewhat humorous because of Zindler’s ceaseless and arbitrary demands for evidence. Craig simply posited a succinct form of Plantinga’s suggestion to the degree that Zindler’s purely evidential attack was caught in a philosophical broadside.

If this approach is effective in academic debates it is also applicable in apologetics on the personal level where the luxury of uninterrupted dialogue is often rare. Instead of establishing a

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comprehensive argument for the existence of God, the goal is to put a rock in their shoe. RE seeks to question entrenched a priori naturalistic assumptions instead of being enticed into a toe-to-toe evidential battle. On the responsibility of the burden of proof, Koukl argues, “Whoever makes the claim bears the burden. The key here is not to allow oneself to be thrust into a defensive position when the other person is making the claim. It’s not your duty to prove him wrong. It’s his duty to prove his view.” Allowing the naturalist to carry his logic to its ending point exposes unwarranted presuppositions.

This stems from Plantinga’s inquiry when pressed for theistic justification. He inquires why an argument is required for warranted theistic belief. When one requires sufficient evidence for certain beliefs to be reasonable, Plantinga asks for specifics. As previously stated, why shouldn’t theism be a properly basic belief? From here, the naturalist is now required to give specific refutations as to why belief in God is not warranted outside of a probabilistic evidential argument. To posit such an offensive question is to run against the academic grain. When stepping into the proverbial ring of ideas with a Reformed epistemologist the atheist is no longer allowed the advantage of the presuppositional high ground. Craig Keener wisely cuts to the heart of the issue:

Rationalism and empiricism often presented themselves as throwing off an older epistemology of revelatory authority, yet these systems demand (by authority) an a priori acceptance of their own epistemologies. Put more simply: everyone has presuppositions. Those who dismiss others’ evidence because those offering it have different

19 Gregory Koukl, Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 46. Koukl’s “Columbo Tactic” does not wear Plantinga’s label but it is in conformity with the RE starting point.

20 Ibid., 59.

21 Alvin Plantinga, interview by Robert Lawrence Kuhn, PBS: Closer to Truth, February 27, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7377iU2a8Y.

presuppositions are being neither charitable nor open-minded, and they short-circuit the possibility of dialogue.\textsuperscript{23}

Plantinga’s deceptively simple suggestive argumentation opens the door for the possibility of dialogue because it gives no preferential treatment to prevalent naturalistic assumptions. The driving idea behind RE is the rejection of naturalism that cannot bear the weight of its own ultimatums.\textsuperscript{24} When one takes a moment to consider human epistemic access to the foundational assumptions upon which virtually all human decisions are based, the paucity of “provable” grounds becomes obvious. Kelly James Clark muses, “Reasoning must start somewhere. There have to be some truths that we can just accept and reason from. Why not start with belief in God?”\textsuperscript{25} Such a question has the potential to throw off balance academicians accustomed to operating largely upon evidential presuppositions.

Jesus used a similar method when confronted with a bizarre hypothetical. A group of Sadducees crafted a scenario where a woman successively married seven brothers after each one died. Then they asked Jesus, “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife” (Lk. 20:33). Jesus responds, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Lk. 20:34-35). Instead of giving a straightforward answer Jesus corrected their assumptions concerning the resurrection (Lk. 20:34-38). The Sadducees’ response is telling, “Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” For they no longer dared to ask him any question” (Lk. 20:39). So instead of fighting a costly evidential war of “our” data against “theirs,” it allows an accurate assessment of

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\textsuperscript{23} Keener, \textit{Miracles}, 199.
\textsuperscript{24} Clark, “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics,” \textit{Five Views on Christian Apologetics}, 269.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, 271.
\end{flushright}
one’s presuppositions. For Jesus to answer a fallacy that begs the question without assessing the premises would be to give such foolish queries tacit support. Jesus had even warned the disciples against unwisely engaging with those who exhibit no desire for truth (Matt. 7:6).26 Jesus answering few questions directly is telling. He often turned hollow inquiries around on the questioners with a pointed discourse on their precarious spiritual condition. Jesus never let those who would use sacred truths as rhetorical bludgeons get away with it.27

Making claims based upon unwarranted assumptions is arguably the least competent manner in which to use one’s rational faculties. On this premise, Plantinga argues that atheism is a sign of improperly functioning rational faculties, rather than a rational conclusion from a paucity of evidence.28 The naturalist/atheist naturally rebuts with questioning whether any postulate can qualify as a properly basic belief. Could properly basic beliefs be akin to an extreme form of epistemological fideism? Plantinga sets up the objection, “According to Dostoevsky, if God does not exist, everything is possible; according to this objection, if belief in God is properly basic, everything is warranted.”29 Plantinga answers, “This objection, of course, is plainly false. To recognize that some kinds of belief are properly basic with respect to warrant doesn’t for a moment commit one to thinking all other kinds are.”30 He splits this pigeonhole by redirecting the examination from the belief itself (in this case, an unwarranted belief such as

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26 D. A. Carson comments, “Holy and valuable things should be given only to those able to appreciate them. No specific application is indicated, but we may remember that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent (Ecc. 3:7). God’s truth must not be exposed unnecessarily to abuse and mockery.” D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” New Bible Commentary, D. A. Carson, ed., 4th ed. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), in Logos Library System [CD-ROM].

27 See Matt. 22:34-45; Mk. 10:2-12; Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 11:37-12:34; 20:1-44; Jn. 18:19-24.


29 Ibid., 344.

30 Ibid.
voodoo), to the proper warrant from which the belief originated. He argues that one’s properly functioning rational faculties are not sufficient to provide warrant, “even if my own cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the conditions propitious for warrant, my beliefs acquired by way of this testimony lack warrant.” Note how Plantinga opens the door to a hint of evidentialism.

One weakness within RE is its lack of a strong, positive apologetic. Its strength of undercutting opposing claims carries with it a lessened emphasis upon establishing positive reasons for believing in Christian theism. Except for his peculiar list of “Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments,” Plantinga would question why such reasons are ultimately necessary in order for theism to be warranted. In other words, to require an evidential component from RE is to beg the question through evidentialist lenses. The perspective of RE towards the necessity of evidential arguments to the intellectual viability of theism is manifest in the relaxed demeanor of the title. That such arguments are supplements, not staples, logically stems from the suggestive claim that theism is a properly basic belief. If non-theists cannot conclusively show theism to be a non-properly basic belief then evidential or classical arguments for theism are altogether unnecessary. Why? Plantinga qualifies his list of arguments:

These arguments are not coercive in the sense that every person is obliged to accept their premises on pain of irrationality. Maybe just that some or many sensible people do

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31 Ibid., 348.
32 Ibid.
34 He writes, “I’ve been arguing that theistic belief does not (in general) need argument either for deontological justification, or for positive epistemic status, (or for Foley rationality or Alstonian justification) belief in God is properly basic. But doesn’t follow, of course that there aren’t any good arguments. Are there some? At least a couple of dozen or so.” Alvin Plantinga, “Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments,” accessed December 16, 2016, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/two_dozen_or_so_theistic_arguments.pdf.
accept their premises (oneself). What are these arguments like, and what role do they play? They are probabilistic, either with respect to the premises, or with respect to the connection between the premises and conclusion, or both. They can serve to bolster and confirm (‘helps’ a la John Calvin); perhaps to convince.\textsuperscript{35}

Therefore, RE does not oppose positive arguments for theism but at the same time does not consider such arguments necessary for a warranted Christian belief.

RE is qualitatively unique in its approach. It reveals a high level of intellectual awareness so as not to take the naturalistic bait so prevalent in the current cultural milieu. Apologists of all stripes would do well to learn the Plantingian method of first assessing the foundations of claims before directly answering their assertions. Even more, apologists should seek to emulate Jesus’s methodology, not in the sense of trying to discern the thoughts of persons (quite a dangerous prospect given the possibility of misreading another’s heart condition), but in not answering spurious questions according to their internally contradictory logic.

**Basic moral sensibilities on children**

So what are these alleged basic moral sensibilities on children? Children’s inability to make fully informed moral decisions is a start as they lack the moral faculties to formulate the necessary *mens rea*\textsuperscript{36} for a crime so we can say children are, in a certain sense, innocent. Whether age appropriate ratings for television or family themed events, the belief that children should be shielded from the fallout of inappropriate and downright dangerous adult behavior is a major segment of Western values. Children are not held to the same behavioral standard as adults

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} *Mens Rea* refers to criminal intent. Moreover, it is the state of mind indicating culpability, which is required by statute as an element of a crime. “Mens Rea,” Legal Information Institute: Cornell University Law School, accessed December 16, 2016, \url{https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mens_rea}.\vphantom{\footnote{Mens Rea refers to criminal intent. Moreover, it is the state of mind indicating culpability, which is required by statute as an element of a crime. “Mens Rea,” Legal Information Institute: Cornell University Law School, accessed December 16, 2016, \url{https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mens_rea}.}
and therefore have a protected status.

On a far broader scale, instances of children being targeted in war bring about the properly basic feelings of horror and moral revulsion. Genghis Khan’s legacy is wholesale extermination of inhabitants throughout wide swaths of land in Central Asia and southern Russia.\(^{37}\) Many were children. Albert Perry recounts, “They hauled the conquered populace into the fields, where they placed the captives on the ground face down—men, women, and children in separate neat rows. The Mongols then marched along the rows methodically cutting off all heads. After a few days they would suddenly return to flush out and kill the survivors who had escaped the first roundup.”\(^{38}\) The Mongol massacre of the ancient city of Merv, the famous Gate to Central Asia (modern day Turkmenistan), did not spare children either. “Pyramids were made of the heads which had been cut off. The heads of the men, women and children were kept in separate rows.”\(^{39}\) Later accounts of Tamerlane’s pyramids built with human skulls, many of whom children,\(^ {40}\) and Josef Mengele’s experiments on children at Auschwitz\(^ {41}\) go beyond mere nationalist conquest or traditional warfare. I dare say we find them so morally atrocious they simply defy explanation. In 2012, the plight of African child soldiers garnered international


attention in the social media movement “Kony 2012.” Marxist groups persistently targeted children for slaughter along with other non-combatants in the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean Bush War,\(^{42}\) turning the stomach of even the toughest battle-hardened soldiers.\(^{43}\) Reports of ISIS killing children or even training them to kill shock our sensibilities.\(^{44}\) In 1994 Kevin Carter, a South African photographer, won the coveted Pulitzer Prize for his gripping photo of an emaciated child being watched by a vulture in the Sudanese bush. Tortured by this memory and the unanswered question of what happened to the child combined with the collective weight of the carnage he experienced, he committed suicide several months later.\(^{45}\) Morally conscious persons can identify with Carter’s internal torment over the unknown fate of the gaunt child. One innately perceives the real issue in these matters goes far deeper than survivalism or cultural preferences.

I’m fairly confident such travesties deeply trouble us not because they are ethically

\(^{42}\) Also known as the Second Chimurenga, Zimbabwe War of Liberation, or Zimbabwe Liberation struggle (1965-1979).

\(^{43}\) Hannes Wessels, *A Handful of Hard Men: The SAS and the Battle for Rhodesia* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2015), locations 2332-2335, 2649. “On 23 June the country was shocked by the chilling news of the slaughter of eight British missionaries and four of their children at Elim Mission in the Eastern Highlands close to the Mozambican border . . . The youngest victim was three-week-old Pamela Lynn. She was found wearing her white smock with large sock-shoes; a bayonet had been rammed through the side of her head. Her left hand was raised, frozen in a fist. Her mother Joyce lay next to her, her head pulped, her arm around her child in a last vain attempt to hold her safe. Alongside them lay another child, her face disfigured by the pounding of heavy boots which had left their prints on what had been a pretty face . . . Darrell Watt’s visceral reaction to ZIRPA revolutionaries shooting down of commercial airliner with a Soviet built SAM and subsequently slaughtering all survivors including children . . . “I’ll never stop thinking about that day and will always regret the fact that I never got to go after them. If there is a hell they deserve a place in it.”


unfashionable but because they are deeply morally problematic. Tragedy is perplexing enough but calamity in the nursery adds another dimension to grief. Feelings of indignation and even vengeance well up as we seek to right the wrongs done to the little ones. Why do these things bother us so? My contention is that these sentiments go far deeper than merely protecting one’s offspring or propagating one’s species. They are a matter of justice. My claim is that revulsion at such atrocities serves as a vociferous internal witness to moral realism. Evil intellectually and emotionally grates against the way we know things should be and I believe Christian theism presents a splendid account of why.

**Christian moral duty: Contend for the truth**

Since Christian theism places a high moral value on children, the duty to contend for the truth affects children. In this section the reader will see a sweeping defense of the Christian moral duty to engage in the marketplace of ideas with the purpose of establishing rational and moral support for a Christian ontology of children.

In his signature work, *Reasonable Faith*, William Lane Craig quotes J. Gresham Machen’s ominous warning: “False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”

Craig concludes, “Unfortunately Machen’s warning went unheeded, and biblical Christianity retreated into the intellectual closet of Fundamentalism.”

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the battle, the vast armaments of the Christian worldview were abandoned. Whether the
Fundamentalist “Read your Bible” (as if the Bible and science are mortal enemies) reaction to
the Scopes Trial or the fideistic seminarian epidemic of clandestinely surrendering to
Bultmannian demythologization of the New Testament, the results were tragic.48

Craig’s personal testimony bears witness to this decline. After earning his doctorate
under Wolfhart Pannenberg, Craig accepted a position at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in
Deerfield, Illinois where he faced a potentially career-threatening set of circumstances that
ultimately propelled him into the international academic spotlight. According to Craig, the dean
of the seminary decided, “apologetics was no longer a useful discipline for the church.”49 Given
Craig’s impressive credentials, the administration’s decision to eliminate the philosophy of
religion department, given the explosion of interest in apologetics over the past couple of
decades, was a bit shortsighted. There is little doubt as to the subsequent influence of Craig upon
the revolution in the rise of interest in apologetics. Nevertheless, Craig was left with two earned
European doctorates, fluency in German and French, and no employment.

Decades later contemporary Christianity is now enjoying a virtual renaissance of
apologetics thanks to the labors of Craig, Plantinga, Gary Habermas, John Lennox, Paul Copan,

48 John G. Stackhouse highlights two pervasive points of resistance to theology: 1) Theology is so academic
and cerebral that it loses sight of the relational aspects of the Christian faith—-aspects, of course, that are of central
importance to spirituality. 2) Within the Western academic tradition, theology is seen as a disinterested and detached
discipline, which inevitably leads to a weakening of the link between theology and prayer. John G. Stackhouse

49 Devastated by this unexpected blow, Craig reached such a point of financial desperation to which he
confesses, “I was reduced to calling churches in the yellow pages for support.” William Lane Craig, “What is the
Meaning of Failure for the Christian?” Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, January 1, 2007, https://youtu.be/n9Ui_Dk_x34. However, Craig identifies this apparent tragedy as the catalyst that eventually led to
the broadening of his influence. Craig states, “It was only by being kicked out of the little evangelical pond that we
were catapulted into this broader world of scholarship and ministry that we have enjoyed since then and that we
continue today through Reasonable Faith. It started because of a seeming disaster.” Being catapulted out of the
evangelical world led Craig to the University of Louvain where he completed post-doctoral work in divine
foreknowledge and human freedom as well as the theory of time. William Lane Craig, “Does God Slam Doors
accessed September 21, 2016.
J. P. Moreland, just to name a few. The current apologetics revival is a restoration of the charge given to the early church to “Contend for the faith” (Jude 3). The Apostle Peter writes, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians are to prepare in order to give a reasoned defense of their faith to those who demand an accounting. Francis Schaeffer recognized the responsibility of contextualizing and communicating the Christian message: “Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting.” As the “wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust” (Prov. 21:22), the outworking of the Christian moral duty to contend for the truth calls for robust arguments that demolish false belief systems.

Why is there a moral duty for believers to strive for the veracity of Christian theism? First, given the immutability of God’s nature and attributes there should not be an asymmetry between belief and practice. God’s unchanging nature and attributes form the template for Christian praxis. Intrinsic to the Christian worldview is a call for honesty in both belief structure and how one lives. The Apostle Paul urges the Philippian believers “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). John the Apostle carries this same theme decades later: “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:18). Few things are more emotionally painful than the unrelenting accusation of the conscience, “Hypocrite.” General unsettlement with personal inconsistency is a healthy sign of normative

52 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 120.
cognitive and moral function. Conversely, systemic dissonance between what one allegedly believes or even preaches and what one practices discredits the message one purports to believe. This in turn creates internal personal misery. When the rooster crowed its warning signal of hypocrisy, Peter “went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75; Lk. 22:62). Traitors, turncoats, and hypocrites are pitied almost as much as they are universally despised.

Second, given the eternal ramifications of the gospel, a moral duty exists for believers to share the message out of compassion for unbelievers. The exclusivity of the Christian message calls for a precise and passionate articulation of the gospel culminating in making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 3:15). The traditional Christian understanding of hell should produce a certain level of compassion that moves one to share the gospel of redemption. Maybe this is in part why the Apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others” (2 Cor. 5:11a). Western culture, by and large, takes issue with the idea of irrevocable punitive reckoning for wrongdoing except, perhaps, in the case of pedophilia. Where there is no objective standard morality finds little traction. When there is no morality, hope for justice is nearly futile. For these reasons, the concept of hell seems foreign to the Western mind. Nevertheless, there still exists a Christian moral duty to contend for the truth out of compassion for the unbeliever.

Third, Christians have a duty to contend for the truth because such faithful witness brings glory to God. The Psalmist writes, “Ascribe to the L ORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the L ORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the L ORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the L ORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!” (Ps. 96:7-9). A major thread of the Christian gospel is the worthiness of God to receive obedience and worship. The idea of “glory” essentially “represents Hebrew kāḇōḏ, with the root
idea of ‘heaviness’ and so of ‘weight’ or ‘worthiness’. R. E. Nixon writes, “The most important concept [in the Bible] is that of the glory of Yahweh.” As will be discussed further on in this dissertation, God’s glory is magnificently seen in the revelation of God’s love through Jesus of Nazareth. Faithful witness in contending for the truth may provide unbelievers a powerful incarnational apologetic to the truth of Christian belief. In summary, the moral duty to contend for the truth exists because the consistency of God’s nature calls for a consistency in his followers, compassion for unbelievers, and God rightfully deserves glory.

Going beyond this to investigate intriguing but intimidating questions, Francis Schaeffer encourages, “The ancients were afraid that if they went to the end of the earth they would fall off and be consumed by dragons. But once we understand that Christianity is true to what is there, true to the ultimate environment—the infinite, personal God who is really there—then our minds are freed. We can pursue any question and can be sure that we will not fall off the end of the earth.”

Christian theism frees the mind to contend for reality in the various aspects of the world because of a proper understanding of where the world came from. Contending for Christian theism frees the mind to function properly. Thus is the call for theological precision. John G. Stackhouse Jr. writes that theological sloppiness can so easily degenerate into a heretical approach to the Christian life echoing J. I. Packer’s warning, “Pelagianism is the natural heresy

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54 Ibid. M. G. Easton writes, “The phrase ‘Give glory to God’ (Josh. 7:19; Jer. 13:16) is a Hebrew idiom meaning, ‘Confess your sins.’ The words of the Jews to the blind man, ‘Give God the praise’ (John 9:24), are an adjuration to confess. They are equivalent to ‘Give God the glory by speaking the truth.’ M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

of zealous Christians who are not interested in theology.”56 Apologetics without passion will likely make little impact on popular audiences and arguments lacking precision will do little to move skeptics towards Christian theism. Passion and precision both have their place in apologetics. They are allies, not enemies because effectively contending for the truth requires loving God with the mind as well as the heart (Matt. 22:37).

Each generation is tasked with articulating the tenets of the faith and defending it against attacks. John R. Franke reminds, “No matter how persuasive, beautiful, or successful past theologies or confessions of faith may have been, the church is always faced with the task of confessing the faith in the context of the particular circumstances and challenges in which it is situated.”57 Apologetics is not a static discipline. Successfully contending for truth requires a working knowledge of the prevailing cultural narrative.58

**Apologetic methodology**

**Eclectic apologetics**

Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie humorously recount, “James I of England was later to say ironically that armor provided double protection—first it kept a knight from being injured, and

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58 Stackhouse suggests that Christian wisdom is the real aim of evangelical theology. *Evangelical Futures*, 90. He defines the task of theology “to assist the people of God in hearing the Spirit’s voice speaking through the text so that we can live as God’s people—as inhabitants of God’s eschatological world—in the present.” Stackhouse, 125.
second, it kept him from injuring anybody else.”

In order for us to be effective apologists our method must not be cumbersome. So what tools does the apologist have at his disposal? Beyond thorough grasp of central theological tenets, I suggest the most effective tool is philosophy, the intellectually nimble handmaiden of theology. William Lane Craig goes so far as to say; “I believe that today the Christian seeking after truth will probably learn more about the attributes and nature of God from works of Christian philosophers than from those of Christian theologians.” Let me be clear: I am not advocating philosophical supremacism. Undergraduate philosophy majors are often susceptible to this temptation not much unlike the way plebe guitar students view mastery of the four guitar chords in the key of G. At first blush, it gives a deceptive air of confidence over the uninitiated. Like any other discipline, philosophy should not be an isolated discipline for the Christian. The goal is not merely philosophical dialogue but to lead persons to Christ through the means of philosophy.

Christianity also carries with it a responsibility that entails extensive cultural ramifications. According to Schaeffer, a Christianity divorced from real life issues is no Christianity at all because, “Truth carries with it confrontation. Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation, but confrontation nevertheless.” Contending for the truth assumes inevitable confrontations. Fulfilling one’s moral duty to contend for the truth assumes one is

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privy to the truth and seeks how to effectively parry opposing arguments. This brings us to the
topic of apologetic methodology proper. That being said, apologetic approaches should be
servants, not masters. An eclectic blend of various apologetic approaches is preferable to
methodological dogmatism.

Apologetic methodologies vary as widely as approaches to self-defense and martial arts.
As previously noted, RE displays incredible undercutting takedown power. Yet upon examining
both RE and presuppositional armory, there’s a noticeable lack of offensive weaponry. This
observation is not necessarily a negative statement against either. If the noetic effects of sin are
as extensive as claimed by Cornelius Van Til, then appealing to evidence through the use of
reason is an exercise in futility.\(^{64}\) On the other hand, the classical apologist brings an astonishing
array of offensive tools that may be useful for an apologetic armor-bearer. Finally, the
evidentialist enters with a devastatingly simple “one step” battering ram through which all the
other biblical data follows. Evidentialism reflects the best of minimalist apologetic warfare
(although minimal strategies can be used by more than one approach).

All these approaches have their respective strengths and apologists should be willing to
use any of them. Regardless of one’s view on the extent of the noetic effects of sin, apologists
should resist the temptation to view persons with whom they speak as merely talking points or
illustrations of the superiority of the apologist’s preferred approach. While the glory of God
should be the ultimate aim of the apologist, in the apologetic arena it is the salvation of
unregenerate persons and the strengthened faith of believers that provide the practical avenues
for God’s glory. Intellectual laziness or bullheaded dogmatism do not glorify God. Francis
Schaeffer says it well:

\(^{64}\) Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian &
I do not believe there is any one apologetic which meets the needs of all people. And, as I said in the text of *The God Who Is There*, I did not (and do not) mean that what I wrote in that book (pages 80-93 of this volume) should ever be applied mechanically as a set formula. There is no set formula that meets everyone’s need, and if only applied as a mechanical formula, I doubt if it really meets anyone’s need — short of an act of God’s mercy.\(^{65}\)

While Schaeffer leaned towards presuppositionalism, he did not see it necessary to pigeonhole himself. Perhaps Schaeffer’s actual apologetic experience, going beyond academic discussion and peer-reviewed publications to arduous conversations with spiritually parched students, caused him to broaden his apologetic horizons.

In what sense am I using the qualifier, eclectic? The rising sport of mixed-martial arts provides a relevant illustration. The idea is that a fight can go in a myriad of directions. Therefore, a fighter must develop all of his or her skills,\(^{66}\) not just the one(s) they prefer.\(^{67}\) To defend the metaphor, remember that the New Testament references related disciplines on a number of occasions. Paul compares the Christian life to a full-scale battle (Eph. 6:10-20), encourages Christians to “fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18), and “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). He also alludes to the brutal Greek practice of boxing to illustrate self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:26), not to mention the Divine Warrior of Revelation chapters 1 and 19 whose bloody exploits are hardly G-rated or, in the catch phrase common on contemporary Christian radio,


\(^{67}\) Bruce Lee, widely acknowledged to be the forefather of mixed martial arts, was famous for advocating the development of all aspects of one’s fighting preparedness. One student of Lee, recounts, “I found his training methods fascinating. His methods changed with every lesson he taught. They weren’t structured—always spontaneous and improvisational.” In a similar fashion, the apologist’s “game plan” must have the capacity to adapt depending upon the challenge at hand. Bruce Thomas, *Bruce Lee Fighting Words* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2003), 106.
“safe for the whole family.” Thus, one may legitimately appreciate the correlation to mixed martial arts. The martial artist that limits himself to one specific discipline, whether wrestling, jiu-jitsu, boxing, or karate, will be ill prepared in a no-holds-barred, full-contact match.

On the other hand, a fighter may have developed a particular strength, but, in order to survive, he adopts other skills because of the uncertainty of the direction of a fight. In what has come to be known as “The Lost Interview” on the Pierre Berton Show, Bruce Lee was asked his views on training for full contact fighting. He responds, “Real fighting? Well then baby you’d better train every part of your body.” Likewise, apologists may certainly have developed strengths but, due to the smorgasbord of worldviews in 21st century Western culture, the effective apologist must routinely add to and refresh his apologetic arsenal. Schaeffer’s warning against “mechanistic formula” is particularly applicable because persons are not machines.

Noetic effects of sin

Most all evangelicals believe in, to some measure, the noetic effects of sin on human reasoning. No apologist is more prominent on this issue than Cornelius Van Til. He holds the noetic effects of sin to be so extensive that “man is blind with respect to the truth wherever the truth

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68 The imagery of Revelation 19 is so spectacular it is difficult to come to a conclusion that the rider of the white horse represents anything other than deity. Eyes like blazing fire (19:12), wearing many crowns (19:12), name being synonymous with the word of God (19:13), thus elevating him above simply a conduit of God’s word, leads the armies of heaven (19:14), strikes down and rules the nations as the unrivaled sovereign (19:15), executes the wrath of God in a direct sense (19:15), seems to single-handedly defeat the beast, the kings of the earth, and their amassed armies, by killing them and delivering them over to the lake of fire (19:19-20). Therefore, based upon Revelation 19 and the interpretation of orthodox Christianity that the rider is the risen and returning Jesus, one finds a gulf of separation between the Islamic and Christian understanding of the culmination of the eschaton and the person of Jesus of Nazareth. See Ben Witherington III, Revelation: New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 239-263.

appears.” The *imago dei* has been irrevocably scrapped. Outside of a move of the Holy Spirit, a person’s reasoning ability is totally flawed.

What Van Til does not answer are the questions surrounding the Apostle Paul’s description of unbelievers in Romans 1-2. If unregenerate persons are without any epistemic access to God then Paul’s reference to the external witness of God’s existence in nature is confusing. But just because unregenerate persons may reject the knowledge of God, it does not follow that they have no ability to reason about God. It is likely that specific, conscious decisions to reject the light of God’s revelation are in view here rather than the fallenness of humanity.

Furthermore, if natural theology is of no use then why does Paul use it? Paul not only recognizes the external witness of nature to God’s existence but also the conscience as the innate witness to God’s essential attributes (Rom. 1:18-21, 2:14-15). The text reads, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (Rom. 2:14-15). Whatever the specific extent of the noetic effects of sin, it cannot be the absence of divine witness, knowledge of one’s own moral guilt, or reasoning about God’s attributes.

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71 Van Til quotes Calvin, “there is great repugnance between the organic movements and the rational part of the soul. As if reason also were not at variance with herself, and her counsels sometimes conflicting with each other like hostile armies. But since this disorder results from the deprivation of nature, it is erroneous to infer that there are two souls, because the faculties do not accord harmoniously as they ought.” *Ibid.*

72 John Calvin goes so far as to acknowledge, “Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraved upon men’s minds. Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 43. James Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 105-106.
Paul’s phrase, “dead in sins and trespasses” (usually referenced by Van Tilians to argue that appealing to the rational faculties is biblically illegitimate), taken together with Romans 2:14-15, cannot refer to a “dead” conscience (Eph. 2:1). Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman write, “This [human fallenness] does not mean that non-Christians know nothing about God. Augustine cited Romans 1:20 to show that some philosophers, especially Platonists, have been able from the creation to recognize the fact of a Creator God.”

According to Paul’s anthropology, persons are sinners by nature and choice and can by no means justify themselves apart from Christ, yet they still have the internal barometer of God’s law inscribed on the heart (Rom. 1:18-21, 3:18-19, 23).

An effective apologetic must ultimately make its way to the human conscience. The moral law of God is the apologist’s internal ally regardless of whether a person claims to believe in moral absolutes or even the existence of God. For this reason, the apologetic approach advocated here emphasizes the need of first appealing to the reason of unregenerate persons as a way to petition the conscience. We see this pattern in Paul’s apologetic. With the Athenians, Paul used the common ground of theism, albeit polytheism, to make an inroad for the resurrection (Ac. 17:22-31). He “reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” with Felix to the point that the ruler became “alarmed” (Ac. 24:25). Paul’s approach is comparable to a “mixed martial apologetic” in his ability to adapt to different audiences yet still press the necessity of repentance from sin and faith in Christ.

All of this is not to say that the noetic effects of sin are minimal. Far from it. Often intellectual arguments against God’s existence or the resurrection serve as smokescreens for a


74 See Ac. 14:6-7; 16:10, 14-15; 29-33; 18:5; 28:23; 2 Cor. 10:5; 9:19-23; Col. 4:6; Tit. 1:9.
guilty conscience. Douglas Groothius labels this, in a noticeable tweak of William James’s famous phrase, “the will to disbelieve.”75 James Spiegel’s brilliant work, The Making of an Atheist, examines the link between immorality and unbelief. Spiegel argues that, in light of the irrationality of atheism, something more than rational exploration is at play since many atheists are intellectually sharp. “When smart people go in irrational directions, it is time to look elsewhere than reasoning ability for an explanation.”76 Secularists attempt to make the case that atheism/agnosticism is a matter of intellect and that those who believe in God have turned off the rational switch and stepped into the uncertain waters of faith. In other words, skepticism equals intelligence. If Spiegel is correct about atheism going deeper than merely the intellect, what are the major contributing factors?

He claims, “The human mind does not neutrally observe the world, gathering facts purely and simply without any preferences or predilections.”77 Inclination towards atheism is not a lack of mental strength “as a selective intellectual obtuseness or imperviousness to truths related to God, ethics, and human nature. But the root of this obtuseness is moral in nature” (emphasis mine).78 Intriguing factors such as the absence of a father figure or an abusive/weak father have a high potential of creating a fertile ground for atheism.79 While “daddy issues” may increase


76 Spiegel, 51.


78 Ibid., 56.

79 Spiegel supports this claim with fascinating details of the lives of famous atheists that served as contributing factors to their atheism. Ibid., 65-66.
one’s proclivity towards atheism, the most shocking figure is the correlation between immorality and atheism.  

Such hardened rebellion to the convicting truth of God’s revelation was repeatedly encountered in the Pharisees’ opposition to Jesus’s ministry. If one’s questions are windows into the soul, then it is safe to assume that the Pharisees were never really interested in the truth. They were merely trying to leverage theological angles in an attempt to discredit Jesus, thus justifying their own hypocrisy in the eyes of the people. It could be that Jesus’s repeated pronouncement of “Woe” against the Pharisees was the result of the way they not only rejected the truth but also tried to shroud it with deceptively formulated theological queries (Lk. 11:39, 42-43). By no means is this to say that all questions represent a mature state of hardened unbelief. But if the Pharisaic red herrings are a cautionary tale then any level of intellectual pretext designed to shield oneself from moral accountability invites the same pronouncement from Jesus.

Role of reason

Do these findings affirm Van Til’s premise that evidential apologetics is a practical exercise in futility? I would respond with a Barthian “Nein.” While all persons are sinners (Rom. 3:23), not all have descended to the same levels of depravity. Justin Martyr sets the *imago dei* and the

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82 Examples include God withholding judgment against the Amorites until their “iniquity was complete” (Gen. 15:16), Jesus’ demarcation between the depravity of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum being worse than that of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (Matt. 11:21-24), and God’s command to destroy specific groups (Deut. 7:1-5). For a detailed study of the command to destroy the Canaanites, see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), and Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).
ability to reason in perspective where he writes, “in the beginning he made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing the truth and doing right so that all men are without excuse before God; for they have been born rational and contemplative.”83 Working with the knowledge that unbelief is not a purely intellectual issue allows the apologist to parry foreseeable attacks. Operating on the basis that persons are not machines and that doubts arise from other sources than just the intellectual is crucial for effective apologetics.84 John Stott notes, “For, although men’s minds are dark and their eyes are blind, although the unregenerate cannot by themselves receive or understand spiritual things ‘because they are spiritually discerned’ (1 Cor. 2:14), nevertheless the gospel is still addressed to their minds, since it is the divinely ordained means of opening their eyes, enlightening their minds, and saving them.”85 Information without discernment is likely to be as ineffective as it is offensive. Thus, the apologist should seek the spiritual gift of discernment when speaking to both doubters and skeptics.

So what is the proper role of reason in this eclectic apologetic approach? The roots of the classical method go back to the earliest Christian apologists.86 Some of these include Justin Martyr, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, C. S. Lewis, Norman Geisler, Peter Kreeft, and William Lane Craig. Other than Craig’s polishing of several classical arguments, namely the Cosmological Argument via the now widely popular Kalam

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85 Stott, 32-33.

Cosmological Argument,\(^{87}\) Thomas Aquinas carries the blue ribbon.\(^{88}\) The classical approach heavily relies upon the viability of reason. Aristotle’s emphasis upon reason significantly influenced Aquinas, as evidenced by way of Aquinas dubbing Aristotle “The Philosopher.”\(^{89}\) Reason, however, must not be confused with pure rationalism. Norman Geisler differentiates rationalists as those who try to \textit{determine} all truth through reason whereas Christians apply reason to \textit{discover} truth.\(^{90}\) For the classical apologist, reason is a tool, not a talisman. When understood in this light, the use of reason in apologetics provides the apologist a considerable amount of flexibility because probability, not certainty, is the criteria of an argument.\(^{91}\)

\textit{Limits of reason}

\(^{87}\) For an excellent application of the versatility of the Kalam Cosmological argument, see James Lynch, “An Argument against the Buddhist Concept of Dependent Origination through William Lane Craig’s Kalam Cosmological Argument” (Masters thesis, Liberty University, 2010).

\(^{88}\) D. J. Kennedy paints Aquinas’s creativity as, “His extraordinary patience and fairness in dealing with erring philosophers, his approbation of all that was true in their writings, his gentleness in condemning what was false, his clear-sightedness in pointing out the direction to true knowledge in all its branches, his aptness and accuracy in expressing the truth—these qualities mark him as a great master not only for the thirteenth century, but for all times . . . were St. Thomas living to-day he would gladly adopt and use all the facts made known by recent scientific and historical investigations, but he would carefully weigh all evidence offered in favour of the facts. Positive theology is more necessary in our days than it was in the thirteenth century.” D. J. Kennedy, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” in \textit{The Catholic Encyclopedia} Vol. 14 (online ed., Kevin Knight, 2002). In Gannon Murphy, \textit{Voices of Reason in Christian History: Their Lives and Legacies} (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2005), 143-144.


\(^{91}\) While outside the lines of evidential apologetics, Plantinga’s work in Reformed Epistemology has significantly advanced the viability of properly basic beliefs. Undercutting logical positivism, Plantinga argues that to require absolute proofs for beliefs is absurd. Why? Rational human decisions are made on the premise of reasonableness rather than absolute certainty. If this holds true, Plantinga has successfully defended theism as having a rightful place within the category of properly basic beliefs. Taken together with the classical wedge strategy, one need not attempt to “prove” the existence of God. One needs only to demonstrate that it is more reasonable to believe in God than not. See Plantinga, \textit{Warranted Christian Belief}, 342-351. Plantinga also provides a scintillating defense against the “Son of a Great Pumpkin” objection.
Van Tilian presuppositionalists vehemently deny human reason the capacity that classicists and evidentialists ascribe to it. They argue that rather than construct illustrious rational arguments apologists should point to Scripture in hopes of the Holy Spirit enlightening darkened hearts. Any approach that deviates from said assumptions is to be rejected.\(^92\) That such evidence can corroborate the rational foundations from which theological propositions are extrapolated, but is unable to effect a genuine change of the will without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, is both accepted and advocated by Craig.\(^93\) To my knowledge, no classicist holds that regeneration is a matter of purely intellectual argumentation. Craig argues the inner witness and work of the Holy Spirit, rather than cold hard rational arguments, is the prevailing catalyst for personal conversion.\(^94\)

The real objection lodged by the presuppositionalist is that the noetic effects of sin are so extensive that the unregenerate person’s ability to reason is essentially dead. In response Gannon Murphy provides a three-fold Pascalian argument. The first is to remove intellectual stumbling blocks by way of a reasoned apologetic.\(^95\) The classicist rejects Van Til’s either-or argument that regeneration is all but divorced from the operation of one’s rational faculties. If regeneration is merely an act of sovereign grace without any leveling work in the mind and conscience then why does the Apostle Paul appeal to common ground in his sermon before the philosophers at the Areopagus (Ac. 17)? Why would Paul quote Epimenides of Crete, a pagan poet, in the middle of

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\(^92\) Mark Horne laments the fallout of Van Til’s apologetic partisanship: “Not only did Van Til’s method tend to make for bad communication, it also polarized the debate over apologetic methodology.” “Presumptuous presuppositions: The Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til,” Christianity Today 40, no. 2 (February 5, 1996): 40.

\(^93\) Craig makes a distinction between “knowing that it [Christianity] is true and showing that it is true. We know Christianity is true primarily by the self-authenticating witness of God’s Spirit. We show Christianity is true by presenting good arguments for its central tenets.” William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 58.

\(^94\) Craig, “Classical Apologetics,” in Five Views on Apologetics, 28.

\(^95\) Murphy, Voices of Reason in Christian History, 159-160.
a sermon if there was no common ground between believers and unbelievers (Ac. 17:28)? Unless one adopts the position that Paul’s apologetic was unbiblical Acts 17 should serve as a prime example of salvaging anything of relevance to make one’s case for Christian theism. Paul later writes, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Does Paul simply abdicate rigorous argument to the mysterious moving of the Holy Spirit in destroying unnamed arguments?

Romans is Paul’s *magnum opus* routinely referenced by Van Tilian presuppositionalists claiming that the noetic effects of sin are so extensive that to appeal to reason is qualitatively unbiblical. Even there one finds an elaborate and systematic approach to the existence of God to the workings of regeneration. At this point, Craig’s classical/evidentialist hybrid incorporates both the use of reason and the evidential data supplied in the biblical account. When the apostolic apologetic contains high-level analytical reasoning over precise prophecies (Ac. 2:22; 3:18-26; 13:27; 26:22-23; 28:23), it seems counter-productive to deny that reason has a primary role in apologetics. Craig suspects whether those who question the role of apologetics in evangelism actually do enough evangelism: “I suspect that they’ve tried using apologetic arguments on occasion and found that the unbeliever remained unconvinced. They then draw a general conclusion that apologetics is ineffective in evangelism.” In other words, practice demonstrates the effectiveness of the classical method.

Some may claim the wide-ranging classical method foreign to the teaching of Jesus. Such a claim neglects to take into account the worldview of his hearers. For example, first century Palestinian Jews were thoroughly monotheistic. So for Jesus to unleash a finely tuned teleological argument in an attempt to demonstrate the existence of God would be akin to presenting a detailed argument to die-hard Dallas Cowboys football fans as to why their team

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deserves the coveted sobriquet of “America’s Team.” It would be to argue for an already assumed and accepted premise. Rather, Jesus confronted a degenerate form of monotheism, not a concoction of scientism and postmodernism. On the other hand, in 21st century Western culture, a classical approach may be necessary. Postmodern hearers may need supplemental groundwork in order to accept Jesus’ claim to be “the truth” (Jn. 14:6).

Murphy’s second plank is “to ground believers in their faith so their witness may be fearless and bold (Ac. 19:8; Eph. 6:19) and so they themselves are not deceived by worldly philosophies” (Col. 2:4, 8). The devastating statistics on the number of students leaving the church should serve as a clarion call for increased training in apologetics in order to ground the “why” of belief. John Stott puts it well: “God has revealed himself in words to minds. His revelation is a rational revelation to rational creatures.” For one to deny the need for a reasoned defense of Christian theism in the nihilistic waters of secularist Western culture accounts to little more than fideism. Classical apologetics presents a powerful rebuttal against the claim that Christianity is merely an appeal to blind faith. For the good of their children parents should take apologetics seriously. Devoting no small amount of energy in preparing one’s child for the labyrinth of 21st century competing viewpoints is not only noble but also necessary.

Murphy’s third and final premise for a reasoned apologetic: “is to silence the attacks of the unbelieving world, which attempts to place reason and science at enmity with faith.” The beauty of the classical method is its ability to cover the breadth of the academic disciplines

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97 Murphy, 161.


100 Murphy, ibid.
including the scientific world. Craig Keener’s recent groundbreaking work, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, contains a mountain of data that lodges a stinging indictment: “It is arrogant and unprofessional for Western scholars to outright reject the miraculous, totally ignoring the testimonies of thousands of people, based simply on their own lack of such experience.”101 The sources are too many to enumerate. From John Lennox’s debunking102 of Stephen Jay Gould’s deceptively dangerous NOMA to William Lane Craig’s use of standard Big Bang cosmology as a springboard for God’s existence,103 classical/evidentialist apologists are working wonders in the secularist-dominated halls of academia.

*Value of cultural awareness in apologetic methodology*

Gordon R. Lewis recognizes that while rational argument does not manufacture faith, it may create “the atmosphere in which belief can come to life.”104 Rational arguments, to use a previous metaphor, serve as a tool to unlock areas of the mind that would otherwise remain closed against the claims of Christianity. Nevertheless, apologists should not only receive their “what” from Jesus but also the “how.” Scandals too numerous to list sadly result in a general societal distrust of political and ecclesiastical leadership. To effectively communicate in such a culture, apologists must realize that many of their listeners are guarded against those who expressly or tacitly say, “Trust me.” For this reason, although it is certainly uncomfortable for professional apologists to consider, the apologist himself, especially in a postmodern culture, is


103 Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 126-156.

the most significant aspect of his apologetic. The point is not the proposition but the credibility of the communicator. Trustworthiness (not to be confused with “friendship evangelism”) clears the debris from the hermeneutic of distrust so as to create a necessary receptivity to truth. The apologist is the showcase for that truth.

For instance, Josh McDowell informed the audience at a major apologetics conference of the urgency of an experiential/evidential approach, “Years ago I would give the evidence and people would get saved. Now, I have to incorporate my testimony in order for people to ‘connect.’” Douglas Groothius advises presenting a case for Christianity in a postmodern culture, “carefully, slowly and piece by piece.” It does seem that the time from initially hearing the gospel to conversion takes longer today than years ago.

Another factor is one’s likeability. The apologist who presents an excellent case for the gospel yet lacks winsomeness (the fruit of the Holy Spirit translated through one’s personality) has little hopes of being effective. Groothius, warns, “The bad man with a good argument is only half clothed. One may have a sword (arguments) but lack a shield (godly character), and thus become vulnerable and ineffective. Therefore, it is wise to consider briefly the spirituality and character of the apologist before looking at the details of apologetic method.” Thomas Manton, the Puritan minister, exclaimed, “rickets cause great heads and weak feet. We are not

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105 For one to begin so-called “friendship evangelism” is evidence of a possible misunderstanding of the Great Commission as well as an unhealthy social life. A professing Christian should already have non-Christian friends. A Christian who has not taken the time to personally invest in lost persons is hardly a model disciple-maker. A normal and healthy Christian social life includes interacting with the same classes of persons that Jesus targeted: “sinners.” The danger increases when Christians are told they must become close friends before they can share the gospel. While a person’s receptivity to the gospel may increase after having come to trust the Christian, it is also possible that valuable time could be lost in waiting for the right moment. In other words, “friendship evangelism” should be assumed within the normal modus operandi of a Christ-follower.


107 Groothius, 50.

108 Ibid., 37.
only to dispute of the word, and talk of it, but to keep it. We must neither be all ear, nor all head, nor all tongue, but the feet must be exercised!”

William Lane Craig exemplifies such winsomeness by his reasoned apologetic as well as the joy and calmness he exhibits in debates against opponents.

Just to clarify, there is a difference between personal and public apologetics. Personal apologetics, on a greater level than public, rises and falls with one’s ability to relationally connect with others in a meaningful way. Personal skills cannot be overestimated for disarming persons holding biases against Christianity that prevent serious dialogue. Demeanor and character are important. Jesus speaks to the importance of good reputation formed by good works within one’s culture (Matt. 5:14-16). There has never been a time when the fruit of the Spirit has been out of fashion. Paul goes so far as to say that there is no law against Holy Spirit-generated virtues (Gal. 5:23). Even in the most hardened dictatorial regimes, virtues are still heralded as such, although the end may be far from the biblical ethos.

In the 2012 presidential election, a driving theme for many American voters was whether or not the candidate “understands” them. Likeability is a central ingredient to emotional perception and reception. Though there is no necessary link between these preferences and hard facts such as economic policy or national defense, personality can be powerfully persuasive. A brief flyover of history shows this is nothing new. Yet it could be that a certain level of experiential apologetics could serve as a sort of pre-apologetic/pre-evangelism in order to prepare persons to entertain evidence for Christian theism. Incorporating one’s life story into

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one’s apologetic has deep roots in Christian history and may bridge the experiential/personal divide. Christians down through the ages have consistently pointed to the evidence of life-change. Of early Christian persecutions, Thomas Aquinas observes:

And after considering these arguments, convinced by the strength of the proof, and not by the force of arms, nor by the promise of delights, but—and this is the greatest marvel of all—amidst the tyranny of persecutions, a countless crowd of not only simple but also of the wisest men, embraced the Christian faith, which inculcates things surpassing all human understanding, curbs the pleasures of the flesh, and teaches contempt for worldly things.112

Few will contest the impact of Christian martyrs have had both on encouraging discouraged believers to remain faithful as well as providing confirmation to doubters that Christianity is worth examining. Athenagoras’s plea before philosopher-kings breathes this power:

Allow me here to lift up my voice boldly in loud and audible outcry, pleading as I do before philosophic princes. For who of those that reduce syllogisms, and clear up ambiguities, and explain etymologies, or of those who teach homonyms and synonyms, and predicaments and axioms, and what is the subject and what the predicate, and who promise their disciples by these and such like instructions to make them happy: who of them have so purged their souls as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and, instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them (to abstain from which of itself an evidence of no mean forbearance), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives?113

Athenasius appeals to the transformative power of the gospel through an experientialist-evidentialist exhortation: “Or who has so rid men of the passions of the natural man, that warmongers are chaste, and murderers no longer hold the sword, and those who were formerly mastered by cowardice play the man?”114 Carl F. H. Henry writes, “Contemporary philosophy’s


extremity is historic Christianity’s opportunity.”¹¹⁵ There seems to be a cry for authenticity in the culture, especially among younger persons. Lee Strobel humorously shares his unintended discovery of interest in personal experience in The Case for Christ.¹¹⁶

Francis Schaeffer recounts the surprise of many Christians at his connection with the culture:

Often people say to me, ‘How is it that you seem to be able to communicate with these far-out people? You seem to be able to talk in such a way that they understand what you’re saying, even if they do not accept it.’ There may be a number of reasons why this is so, but one is that I try to get them to consider the biblical system and its truth without an appeal to blind authority—that is, as though believing meant believing just because one’s family did, or as though the intellect had no part in the matter.”¹¹⁷

Schaeffer’s story may be stating the obvious but in order to be an effective apologist one must speak about apologetics with more than other Christian apologists. In order to influence unbelievers one must talk with them not merely talk about how to talk to them. Apologists should be aware of the danger of becoming conversationally isolated inside the Christian community at the expense of becoming distanced from the very persons he or she desires to reach.

Murphy records the stark distinction between a culturally nimble apologist and a professional theorist: “Cornelius Van Til was omitted because he was more an apologetical theorist than an active apologist. In fact, he conceded much in a letter he wrote to Francis Schaeffer saying, ‘You have the advantage over me. You conversed constantly with modern artists, modern existentialists, etc., as they eat at your table, [and] study their literature. Whereas

¹¹⁵ Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 7.

¹¹⁶ Lee Strobel, “The Case for Christ” (lecture, National Apologetics Conference, Charlotte, NC, October 18-19, 2009). During the writing process he lamented that very few young people would be interested in his book. Only later Strobel realized that it was his own personal journey, replete with numerous examples of honesty in combination with a solidly evidential case for the resurrection that fit the cultural thirst for authenticity.

¹¹⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer, Escape From Reason (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 84.
I am only a bookworm.”118 In order to speak a language one must first listen to the natives. Involvement within the culture—condemning the culture within the safety of pulpits or Christian conferences—is a requirement for learning how to speak to the culture.

Given the accessibility of social media and other venues, it is a wonder why more Christian leaders find it difficult to find the cultural pulse. Taking the admonition of James, could it be that being “quick to hear and slow to speak” has application outside the Christian community? Writing in 1968, Schaeffer raises the issue of Christian parents, ministers, and teachers not realizing how out of touch they are with their own students and children as well as unbelievers.119 If this was the case in 1968, the year often identified as the crucial turning point of the Countercultural Revolution,120 then where is it now? Awareness of current scholarship is crucial to engage with professional academics but regular interaction with unbelieving non-academics will equip the apologist in appealing to the larger populace.

Such a simple suggestion may appear as less than scholarly but the Christian apologist should seek to be characterized by the humility of Christ who made it a point not only to associate with but also effectively communicate with the lowest levels of society. Christian apologists, in order to be true to their name, should follow suit. Schaeffer concludes:

It is much more comfortable, of course, to go on speaking the gospel only in familiar phrases to the middle classes. But that would be as wrong as if, for example, Hudson Taylor had sent missionaries to China and then told them to learn only one of three separate dialects that the people spoke. In such a case, only one group out of three could hear the gospel. We cannot imagine Hudson Taylor being so hard-hearted…in a parallel way we are being as overwhelmingly unfair, even unselfish, towards our own generation, as if the missionaries had deliberately spoken in only one dialect. The reason we often

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118 “Letter from Cornelius Van Til to Francis Schaeffer,” Ordained Servant 6, no. 4 (Sheldon, IA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, October 1997), 79, in Gannon Murphy, Voices of Reason in Christian History, 3.

119 Gannon Murphy, Voices of Reason in Christian History, 94. Schaeffer identifies attempting to communicate but “speaking a foreign language” as hard and fast evidence of being out of touch.

cannot speak to our children, let alone other peoples, is because we have never taken time to understand how different their thought-forms are from ours.\textsuperscript{121}

How should apologists bridge such a gap? Schaefferian brilliance simply begins, “I try to approach every problem as though I were not a Christian and see what the answer would be.”\textsuperscript{122}

It is the rare skill of listening that must be evident in any method.

Apologists would do well to remember that persons are not incarnate arguments but whole persons to be lovingly convinced, not coldly and solely intellectually debated without concern for the total person. The \textit{Theologia Germanica} provides a caution for loving the discipline or the fruit of the discipline more than the Author of apologists’ arguments.\textsuperscript{123} If not approached with the appropriate humility, apologetics can become an idol and the persons for whom apologetics is intended to reach become mere means to the apologist’s veiled self-promotion.

Another important point is that doubt does not necessarily equate to unbelief. Gary Habermas rightly distinguishes volitional unbelief as an active rejection of God’s existence as opposed to doubt.\textsuperscript{124} In this exercise of meta-apologetics, a commitment to treating objections to theism as honest does not mean the theist turns a blind eye to the possibility of objections being affected by emotional factors.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Gannon Murphy, \textit{Voices of Reason in Christian History}, 93-94.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Francis A. Schaeffer, “How I Have Come to Write My Books,” \textit{Introduction to Francis Schaeffer} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 35. In Groothius, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{123} “We may come to love knowledge—our knowing—more than the thing known: to delight not in the exercise of our talents but in the fact that they are ours, or even in the reputation they bring us. Every success in the scholar’s life increases this danger.” C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses} (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 50. In David K. Clark, \textit{To Know and Love God} (Chicago: Wheaton, 2003), 211.
\item \textsuperscript{124} “Christian doubt, defined as a lack of certainty concerning the teachings of Christianity or one’s relation to them, is a very common and painful problem affecting many believers. The subject is complicated by the misconceptions and caricatures concerning doubt, which tend to militate against the finding of solutions.” Gary R. Habermas, \textit{Dealing With Doubt} (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 4.
\end{itemize}
In conclusion, apologetic approaches should be servants rather than masters. Keys from virtually every apologetic methodology should be crafted into a relevant approach. Let the apologist remember that the apologetic task is grave. Peter Kreeft and Ron Tacelli identify the present danger facing Western civilization brought about by losing its own heritage. Instead of apologetics rescuing the church it can have the effect of saving the world.\textsuperscript{125} Apologists would do well to heed this clarion call to world evangelism when tempted to spark a tragic tribal war over the customs of apologetic methodology.

**Moral realism: Overview of the moral argument**

In this section I will examine the relevance of moral realism to the ontology of children. My treatment of the moral argument is an attempt to philosophically buttress the ethical framework of this dissertation. Sketches are only so substantive and space only allows for an outline of the deep richness offered by the moral argument. Later in this project I will put flesh on the bones with how it establishes the framework that special revelation fulfills.

If not for an assumed Dao\textsuperscript{126} the gut-wrenching ethical quandaries in popular media, whether it be Jack Bauer’s brutal interrogation methods in order to save Los Angeles from a nuclear terrorist attack or Glenn’s internal struggle of conscience on whether Rick and the group have gone too far on the hit TV series *The Walking Dead*, would be all but unintelligible. Far beyond utilitarian education or pragmatic prison housing, human interaction appears to be permeated by robust moral sensibilities. Justice itself becomes anemic if divorced from an objective standard. Persons seem to intrinsically place an immense value on morality.


Natural law (jus natural) itself drips with moral realism. The classic *Black’s Law* Dictionary paints the parameters of natural law as follows:

[Natural law] was largely used in the philosophical speculations of the Roman jurists of the Antonine age, and was intended to denote a system of rules and principles for the guidance of human conduct which, independently of enacted law or of the systems peculiar to any one people, might be discovered by the rational intelligence of man, and would be found to grow out of and conform to his *nature*, meaning by that word his whole mental, moral and physical constitution . . . In ethics, it consists in practical universal judgments which man himself elicits. These express necessary and obligatory rules of human conduct which have been established by the author of human nature as essential to the divine purposes in the universe and have been promulgated by God solely through human reason.\(^{127}\)

Blackstone’s observation echoes Cicero’s declaration, “What is right and true is also eternal, and does not begin or end with written statutes.”\(^{128}\) John Locke draws three particular rights from it: life, liberty, and property. Locke had experienced the catastrophe of despot-dependent laws. One’s life and liberty might be compromised dependent on the king’s religious views or military ambitions. Locke argues, based on natural law, the State cannot take these liberties without just cause.\(^{129}\) Locke elucidates on law and liberty:

The state of nature has a natural law governing it that everyone is obliged to obey. That law is reason, and it teaches that all human beings are equal and independent and that no one ought to harm the life, health, liberty, or possession of others. All human beings are the work of one omnipotent and infinitely wise maker. They are the servants of this one sovereign master, and sent into the world by his order to do his business. They are his property because they are his workmanship—and that property is there to last during his and not some other person’s pleasure.\(^{130}\)

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\(^{129}\) “It is also evident that absolute dominion (whoever exercises it) is completely incompatible with civil society just as slavery is completely incompatible with rights to life, liberty, and property.” John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government: A Translation into Modern English* (Manchester: Industrial Systems Research, 2009), 220.

Locke’s writings heavily influenced Thomas Jefferson whose fleshing out of this theme is showcased in the *Declaration of Independence*, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Moral realism, already enshrined in the sharpened writings of Enlightenment philosophers who consistently referenced natural law, thus became codified in American public policy.

*William Lane Craig’s deductive version of the moral argument*

Out of the plethora of arguments for the existence of God the moral argument is quite possibly the most intuitive. Peter Byrne describes moral arguments as “that family of arguments in the history of western philosophical theology having claims about the character of moral thought and experience in their premises and affirmations of the existence of God in their conclusions.”¹³¹ Notice that Byrne includes both moral thought and experience. Although the moral argument boasts a rich intellectual history, much of the apologetic import lies not in academic abstracts but in the divine law written on the heart,¹³² Calvin’s *sensus divinitatus,*¹³³


¹³² The Apostle Paul argues that even the Gentiles who not privy to special revelation still have adequate internal testimony to the character of God: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (Rom. 2:14-15).

¹³³ Calvin argues, “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 43. In James S. Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 105.
and C. S. Lewis’s “the Dao.” Craig’s popular deductive version of the moral argument is as follows:

1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2) Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3) Therefore, God exists.  

I will use Craig’s formulation of the argument as a launching point and will later compare his version of the argument with the abductive case of David Baggett and Jerry Walls.

1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

The reader will note how the argument instantaneously begins with the implications of the non-existence of God. The claim is inexorably strong in that both moral values and duties exist only if God exists. Before investigating the soundness of this premise, apologists should first consider the curious and tacit assumption of objective moral values and duties in the largely secular West. L. Rush Bush flatly states, “Christian consensus no longer dominates Western civilization,” yet presumptions of moral realism dominate mainstream and social media so that any sort of injustice is vociferously decried as a violation of moral duty. Even in the most hostile environments the apologist can tap into basic moral sentiments in making the case for objective moral values and duties. Emmy award winning television program, Breaking Bad, provides a contemporary illustration of the age-old struggle of conscience in the numerous and agonizing ethical decisions of Walter White. Even this sordid series is saturated in moral

134 Lewis, The Abolition of Man, ibid.

135 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 172.


137 Jonah Goldberg brilliantly summarizes, “Walter agonizes over what to do with him. Still the man of reason, he sits down with a notepad and writes up a list of pros and cons. Among the items on the list: “Con: MURDER IS WRONG! Pro: He’ll kill your entire family if you let him go.” Walter ultimately kills Krazy 8, but under circumstances that he can justify as self-defense. Over time, though, Walter’s definition of self-defense grows beyond any moral justification, and his reluctance to kill shrinks to almost nothing. Once you step outside the
realism despite the fact that the scriptwriters assume it without trying to prove it. It’s Morpheus’ cryptic remark to Neo in *The Matrix*, “You’ve felt it your entire life, that there’s something wrong with the world,” played out on the silver screen and in everyday society.\(^{138}\) All great narratives assume objective morality. Is it any wonder that the great sagas would be unintelligible without this presupposition?

Rather than deride opposing claims, the apologist has a pristine opportunity to show why basic moral intuitions are true. Why does it seem properly basic that acts such as rape, murder, child molestation, slavery, and a host of other evils, do not need an argument to prove their evilness? Why does it seem properly intrinsic that the problem of evil is actually a serious problem? As we will see, Christian theism presents a very strong case for our basic moral instincts.

2) Objective moral values and duties do exist.

In the second premise the apologist finds a goldmine of philosophical material. If this premise is true then moral relativism is false. Despite the fact that most persons believe in objective morality, a cultural contingent of moral relativists may reject the moral argument *a priori*. Undoubtedly many persons think they believe in moral relativism until their position is placed under the scrutiny of internal consistency. If individual or cultural moral relativism is true then ethics, as a consequent of morality, becomes profoundly boring. Moreover, the moral relativist is restricted from leveling any moral judgments against the Holocaust, the Indian borders of morality and the law, self-interest becomes self-justifying. Indeed, this is how pragmatism unchained from moral principles simply becomes a Nietzschean will to power. In a very different context, the philosopher Bertrand Russell realized this long ago. When nations shed moral principles and put their stake solely in power and pragmatism, Russell wrote in 1909, “ironclads and Maxim guns must be the ultimate arbiters of metaphysical truth.” Jonah Goldberg, “Breaking Bad Breaks Through,” *National Review Online*, September 23, 2013, accessed October 8, 2016, [http://m.nationalreview.com/article/359223/breaking-bad-breaks-through-jonah-goldberg/page/0/2?utm_source=web&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=091213](http://m.nationalreview.com/article/359223/breaking-bad-breaks-through-jonah-goldberg/page/0/2?utm_source=web&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=091213).

\(^{138}\) *The Matrix*, directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1999), DVD.
practice of *suttee* where the widow is burned alive on her husband’s funeral pyre, or the depredations of human trafficking other than that such actions may be culturally obtuse. Things become even more difficult when faced with questions of historical figures that challenged cultural presuppositions and altered the moral fabric of their own society. Heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr., William Wallace, the early Christian monk Telemachus, and a host of others, on moral relativism, should be disdained for advocating a divisive objective morality.

Yet does not the relativistic rejection of objective morality contradict relativism? If then, relativism holds that there is no objective morality, is that not itself an objective denial of objectivity? If one still maintains this genre of relativism it is in the context of an intellectually free zone where words lose their meaning and precise terms, upon which rational discourse is grounded, degenerate into incoherent babbling. Denying moral realism is usually not without an affirmation of the same.\(^\text{139}\) In order to help relativists see the contradictory nature of their own position, J. Warner Wallace advises using the phrase “just for fun” to accompany horrific acts such as torturing babies.\(^\text{140}\) A quick perusal of this rubric yields frightening results for those who would continue to hold to moral relativism: not only does ethics become extremely boring but categorically anything goes. Cultural critic Os Guinness has repeatedly noted these effects on American culture.\(^\text{141}\) In any case, the apologist will recognize that none of these arguments directly show relativism to be false; they only scrape away the whitewash from the horrific

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\(^{139}\) As Greg Koukl writes, “Usually a person cannot deny moral truth without immediately affirming it. The minute they say, “and it’s wrong to push your morality on me,” they have sunk their own ship.” Greg Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussion Your Christian Convictions*, 125.


\(^{141}\) “With the triumph of this . . . relativism, negative freedom has driven positive freedom from the field . . . For most Americans and for all practical purposes, God is dead, and nothing—no ethics, no identity, no relationship, no revaluation of all values—is now impossible.” Os Guinness, *A Free People’s Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 159.
dungeon of fluctuating morality so that the relativist is logically compelled to admit, torturing babies for fun is not morally wrong.

At this juncture it would be helpful to note Alasdair MacIntyre’s observation of Nietzsche’s response to the “destruction” of separating God from morality: “The underlying structure of his argument is as follows: if there is nothing to morality today but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates. There can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” Nietzsche’s honesty is most refreshing. In fact, he would most certainly agree with the first premise of this argument that without God, objective morality does not exist where he flatly states, “The whole of morality is a long, audacious falsification.” In a moment of existential honesty, naturalist Albert Camus feels his way through the smokescreen of faux morality to the heart of the matter: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.” Ethically coated but hollow relativism aside, the telling admissions of Nietzsche and Camus flay open the core of these relativistic rebuttals to the second premise of the moral argument.

Another side of the objection to the second premise usually takes the form of whether or not the moral argument falls into the trap of the Euthyphro Dilemma. It appears that the moral argument may slide into endorsing ethical voluntarism on the one hand, or a Platonism where moral authority exists outside of God, on the other. Reformed apologists should especially pay

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careful attention to the ethical quandary the moral argument creates if ethical voluntarism is true. The atheist could well argue that God could have willed a reversal of vice and virtue so that rape and other abhorrent acts are not only moral but also morally obligatory. If this is true then there is much to be said for caution of alleged epistemic access to divine commands. Alleged divine commands are as historically common as tragedy. Unless properly articulated, using the moral argument in apologetics paints God as a cosmic despot who commands moral fidelity from his creation but personally behaves as a relativist according to his own whims. History is rife with innumerable illustrations of Lucretius’s ancient observation on a proposed human sacrifice, “How great the evils that religion has been able to inspire!” Such is divine voluntarism.

David Baggett and Jerry Walls provide a helpful correction of the popularly misunderstood DCT such as the possibility that God could have commanded abhorrent acts like the torture of children to be morally obligatory. They write, “There are some things that God, if he’s a God of love and righteousness, simply cannot do. His inability to do these things isn’t because he’s constrained by an external moral standard, but by his perfect nature.” Baggett and Walls provide not only a warranted defense against this critique but also a way to escape the

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146 Ibid., 278. Punctilious scholars will note that Dawkins’s feigned moral of aversion to the Old Testament (and orthodox Christianity as a whole), is little more than a rehash of David Hume’s revulsion at European religious wars. Hume opines, “How happens it then, said Philo, if vulgar superstition be so salutary to society, that all history abounds so much with accounts of its pernicious consequences on public affairs? Factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression, slavery; these are the dismal consequences which always attend its prevalence over the minds of men. If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it. And no period of time can be happier or more prosperous, than those in which it is never regarded or heard of.” David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Section 220, 51. Accessed October 8, 2016, http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/dnr.htm. See Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion (New York: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.

horns of the *Euthyphro*. On a similar note, C. Stephen Evans explains, “The proponent of DCT holds that the obligations generated by God’s commands are precisely the obligations generated by God’s commands are precisely the obligations we call moral obligations. God’s status as all-wise and all-good creator gives him the authority to make moral laws, just as a good government powerful enough to control its territory has the authority to make governmental laws.”

Evans’s point provides a helpful reference back to the classical depiction of God as a maximally great being and, for the purposes of this discussion; one angle of this maximal greatness is morality. Therefore, only a muddled conception of God could result in a rejection of moral realism because of Euthyphro’s false dilemma.

David Baggett and Jerry Walls’ abductive version of the moral argument

At this stage we will consider an abductive approach. While Craig’s formulation is hard and fast as it is popular, David Baggett and Jerry Walls champion an alternative approach as being potentially more effective in at least some contexts. They establish the setting for an abductive case in this fashion:

Consider the world in which we live. Especially if theists are right that this is a rich, fertile world imbued with all sorts of value and significance, and populated by creatures made in God’s image and invested with a range of powerful epistemic faculties, theism would predict that the resources of this world will provide powerful insights into its ubiquitous moral features. It would be altogether surprising if it were otherwise. The reason that morality provides evidence for God is not that the world alone can explain nothing about morality, but rather that the world and theism together can provide the considerably better explanation of those realities. An abductive case builds on the common ground shared by believers and unbelievers alike and invites a conversation about what can better explain the full range of moral facts and can explain them robustly,

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Deduction is a method of victory through an airtight logical case that takes no prisoners. It’s the “strictly follow the syllogism to its logical conclusion or be left out in the cold” tactic. Maybe opening the bomb bay doors of deductive arguments should be used as a last resort, or at least a follow up to trying to establish rapport through common ground, rather than a nuclear first option. All that being said, some fortresses call for heavy artillery, which Craig’s approach generously supplies. Elijah’s method of calling down fire was fitting for the “High Noon” battleground of Mt. Carmel, and Jeremiah’s lamentations still resonate with backsliders.

On the other hand, the abductive argument is a diplomatic approach centered on shared common ground and cultural experience. As opposed to the strict parameters of Craig’s argument, Baggett and Walls argue, “Abduction, in this context, is an inference to the best explanation."\footnote{Baggett and Walls, \textit{God and Cosmos}, 55. Their fuller abductive case is as follows: “This world may well have been created and infused with meaning by God; suspend judgment on that for the moment. Take a look at this world and see what you can do by way of explaining morality and its distinctive features, and don’t be surprised if you find that you can make some progress. But then, remind yourself of the fuller range of moral facts in need of explanation—values and duties to be sure, but also moral freedom, knowledge, responsibility, moral regrets, shame, forgiveness, the prescriptive power and rational authority of morality, the desire for the congruence of happiness and holiness, the needed resources for moral transformation, human dignity and equality and worth—and ask yourself this question: What better explains this full range of moral facts? This world alone? Or the conjunction of this world and its Creator, who made us in his image, created us for a purpose, invested us with the capacity for empathy and rationality and moral apprehension? This world, counterpossibly assuming its existence without God, certainly has the resources to explain some things about morality, but God and this world together better explain morality. So we don’t have to argue that a world like this without God entails no real morality at all in our effort to show that the moral argument is a powerful tool in our apologetic arsenal contributing to a cumulative case for God’s existence. And the abductive approach does not rely on the deductive one. If anything, the argumentation needed to back up the premises in the deductive version relies on a lot of patient background abductive work.” \textit{Ibid.}, 76-77.} Deduction, one might say in this context, declares that moral obligations and values have only one possible explanation whereas an abductive approach inquires into the best explanation without insisting it’s the only explanation. They admit Craig’s argument is valid in the sense that the conclusion follows logically from the premises, but they level a critique to say...
not that it “is a bad or unsound argument, but rather that it is relatively unpersuasive to many committed atheists.”¹⁵¹ They affirm moral realism and argue that theism offers the best explanation for our most vital moral standards and sentiments. I seek to model my approach on this crucial apologetic vein because of its compelling power and relational attractiveness.

Basic shared human experiences, whether in the realm of professional interaction or deep personal friendships, yield a vast trove of experiential material for the apologist. Common ground with unbelievers is important not only in the sense of de-escalating emotional roadblocks to theism, but also in finding agreement on key points. In the realm of morality this is particularly poignant because the abductive approach allows both theist and nontheist to agree on basic moral sentiments such as the protection of and provision for children and their inestimable intrinsic value.

To revisit the previous mixed martial arts analogy, the apologist should look for every possible inroad with nonbelievers, so long as the tactics do not extend past sound ethical or theological parameters. With this methodology I might add that there are times when a deductive approach is altogether appropriate. As the Apostle Paul taught the Corinthian church, “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Arguments should not be an end to themselves but serve the purpose of lovingly clarifying reality and awakening persons to emotional honesty and intellectually vindicated belief. Persuasive power is not always found in merely deductive syllogisms.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 64. They advance a synonymous argument in their previous work: “Even if Craig’s argument works, though, we have reason to believe it won’t be highly persuasive to the committed atheist or as powerful as the positive case for theistic ethics.” Baggett and Walls, Good God, 119.
Pragmatism: Worldview affects treatment of children that shapes society

While the ontology of children may not raise many questions with the non-theist and non-religious, worldviews pragmatically matter for at least two reasons: first, how children are viewed impacts how children are treated, which in turn carries a tremendous positive or negative societal impact. Second, for believers and unbelievers alike, having children produces considerable existential and emotional impact. Both can apprehend the value of children despite not having them themselves, and not just for consequentialist considerations. The societal effect of how children are treated is well captured by John Green’s snarky wit:

Public education does not exist for the benefit of students or the benefit of their parents. It exists for the benefit of the social order. We have discovered as a species that it is useful to have an educated population. You do not need to be a student or have a child who is a student to benefit from public education. Every second of every day of your life, you benefit from public education. So let me explain why I like to pay taxes for schools, even though I don’t personally have a kid in school: It’s because I don’t like living in a country with a bunch of stupid people.152

Green’s observations blend a dash of individual relativism with a pinch of collective utilitarianism to open the discussion on children to those outside the religious or theological community. For Green, the societal effects of producing a sizeable portion of “stupid people” are sufficient to issue a strong call for proper education. The reader will notice Green’s impetus is far from ontological. Theology matters for a majority of the world’s population, but for other non-religious thinking people issues of morality carry considerable weight.153 Regardless of one’s religious affiliation, or lack thereof, thinking persons can unite around the idea that ideas

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153 Keener, Miracles, 98. Keener goes on to note, “It is difficult for those working from a Western Enlightenment paradigm to appreciate ancient claims of paranormal events, and all the more so when such claims are attributed to supernatural causation.”
have power and consequences.\textsuperscript{154} Simply put, worldview powerfully affects basic rights and shapes human society.

Human history yields a myriad of tragic results from denying intrinsic human worth.\textsuperscript{155} Keith Ward warns, “Moral choices are not atomic and isolated decisions, which can be quarantined from the rest of society.”\textsuperscript{156} If a free and virtuous society best facilitates human flourishing, then it follows that a high regard for the intrinsic value of human life is quite possibly the most vital component. Whether on Kantian deontology or raw utilitarianism, persons matter.\textsuperscript{157} Children feel the brunt of societal ills. Robert P. George states, “The root of so many moral failings: Prioritizing the desires of adults over the wellbeing of children and making kids lifestyle accessories.”\textsuperscript{158} In summary, even if on the pure pragmatics of how they interact in society, children matter.

The second point to consider on the pragmatic import of children is the existential or emotional value of raising children. Viewed as a sort of personal fulfillment, procreation could


\textsuperscript{155} Samantha Power observes, “the central insight of the Zimbabwe experience: When a ruler operates without constraint, he can institute a tyranny of the minority, and he can plunder his country’s economy and starve his people without any potential corrective. Democratic accountability is the bedrock concept that no developed or developing state can live without. An outspoken press, a healthy opposition, periodic elections, and an independent judiciary are rightly valued for themselves, but their greatest virtue is practical: they deter and thwart top-down demolition.” Samantha Power, “How To Kill A Country: Turning a breadbasket into a basket case in ten easy steps—the Robert Mugabe way,” \textit{The Atlantic}, December 2003, accessed September 6, 2016, \url{http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/12/how-to-kill-a-country/302845/}.


\textsuperscript{157} Immanuel Kant’s “Kingdom of Ends” presented a thesis that persons are not means to ends but ends in themselves. Stijn Van Impe characterizes Kant’s rejection of atheism as grounded on a belief that, “By rejecting the idea of God as a sufficient cause for the highest good, rules out additional religious incentives for morality, leads to moral despair, weakens respect for the moral law, damages the moral disposition, and has a pernicious influence on society by causing social disorder and by robbing citizens of incentives for morality viewed as commanded and enforced by God.” Stijn Van Impe, “Kant’s Moral Theism and Moral Despair Argument against Atheism,” \textit{The Heythrop Journal}, 55 (2014): 757, accessed October 20, 2016, \url{http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2010.00656.x/full}.

be categorized as a branch of pragmatism. Even in a largely secularized culture the rallying cry of “it’s for the children” or “it’s all about the kids” has become the stuff of mantras and mores. Children routinely used as political props, whether to push stringent gun control legislation, raise awareness of unclean drinking water, or enforce draconian overreaches in teachers’ unions, suggests their value even if in primarily pragmatic ways.\textsuperscript{159} Apple founder Steve Jobs uncharacteristically declared parenting was “10,000 times better than anything I’ve ever done.”\textsuperscript{160} Jobs’s closest relationship to theism is a Zen Buddhist spiritual adviser.\textsuperscript{161} Although there are second order debates on who should take the main responsibility of parenting, everyone from Hillary Clinton to Hitler to James Dobson realizes the crucial role of training children, albeit for vastly different ends.

The point here is rather basic: children are valuable even by pragmatic standards. Even those who deny any sort of intrinsic value but who are concerned with the shape and direction of human society should be able to enter the discussion of the ontology of children and the significance of their treatment. Primarily I’ve argued for the value of children that goes beyond the pragmatic.

Key terms and concepts

Children, ontology, adoption, morality, pragmatism, culture, theism, abortion, paganism.


Conclusion

In this first introductory chapter I have established a prolegomenon for how I will approach the overall argument of this dissertation. In order to establish the foundation I provided two sorts of reasons why the topic of the ontology of children deserves attention: theological and pragmatic. In the theological section I explained the Christian moral duty to contend for truth followed by my apologetic methodology. Subsequently, I proposed a brief overview of the moral argument and moral realism by contrasting William Lane Craig’s deductive argument with Jerry Walls and David Baggett’s abductive approach. Finally, I provide a way for pragmatists to enter the debate on the ontology and treatment of children. The effect of presuppositions and worldview will be fleshed out in the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Ontology of Children on Paganism

Worldview presuppositions

Over 400 years before the birth of Christ, the renown Athenian historian Thucydides observed, “The way that most men deal with traditions, even traditions of their own country, is to receive them all alike as they are delivered, without applying any critical test whatever.”\(^{162}\) Testing the waters of accepted tradition is tricky business.\(^{163}\) Enthusiasm for moral clarity and virtue may be applauded in theory but rarely in application.

So how does one tread through the minefield of longstanding worldview presuppositions? The first step is identifying them. Westerners, whether they realize it or not, are children of the Enlightenment and, regardless of how much they may fight against it, are almost predisposed to think of the world in naturalistic terms. It’s their natural default. The effect of the scientific revolution is one of the silent factors that often go unnoticed in the volleys fired over theology and philosophy. Even with the advances made in recent decades by Christian philosophers, many of the approved products in the wider professional philosophical community are still tainted by Enlightenment presuppositions such that any vestige of supernaturalism should be dismissed \textit{a priori}. John Hare cites an example by pointing out the way ethicist Philip Kitcher’s methodology


\(^{163}\) Brave souls willing to shine the light of conscience on a culture’s treasured traditions will likely find a similar welcoming as David Hume’s “gloomy hair-brained enthusiast” who “after his death, may have a place in the calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself.” David Hume, \textit{An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: Oxford Philosophical Texts}, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford University Press: New York, 1998), 147.
systematically excludes from consideration from the start certain religious convictions, assuming that they fail to make the threshold for conditional mutual engagement. Hare forcefully argues how this significantly detracts from the effectiveness and consistency of Kitcher’s overall pragmatism.  

Gary R. Habermas wisely notes how evidence bows to worldview every time. Such a statement effectively peels back the layers of academic haze so that the elephant in the room becomes visible: all scholars have bias and one could argue that the most biased are those claiming their studies are solely birthed out of a pristine, Platonic quest for truth. Nobody is as blind to biases as those who think they have none. Michael R. Licona claims, “One’s bias is not only difficult to overcome but is often difficult to recognize.” As previously mentioned, current research suggests that many leading atheists of the past did not arrive at their atheism through an intellectual search for the truth but from a combination of deep emotional scarring and/or a long continuation of sordid depravity. Craig Keener takes a more aggressive approach when he argues:

Rationalism and empiricism often presented themselves as throwing off an older epistemology of revelatory authority, yet these systems demand (by authority) an a priori acceptance of their own epistemologies. Put more simply: everyone has presuppositions. Those who dismiss others’ evidence because those offering it have different presuppositions are being neither charitable nor open-minded, and they short-circuit the possibility of dialogue.

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167 Spiegel, 105-106.

Perhaps this is in part what Luke Timothy Johnson recognizes when he writes, “For Modernity, belief in a creed is a sign of intellectual failure. Creeds involve faith, and faith makes statements about reality that can’t be tested.”\textsuperscript{169} Could it be that a great deal of scholarly resistance to Christian theism is presuppositional rather than the product of careful intellectual labor? At this point, one must be careful not to imply that unbelief in Christian theism is always the result of gross moral sin. Still, it’s quite possible that a refusal to accept the moral implications of the risen Jesus, more than an alleged lack of evidence, is just one illustration of the effect of one’s morality on one’s theology and philosophy.\textsuperscript{170}

A presupposition is simply an unproven assumption, something that is brought to the writing table or science lab that affects what follows the \textit{ergo}. This is not to say that presuppositions cannot be corroborated, but rather that they do not appear in the argument’s visible claim structure. One must dive beneath the surface or read between the lines. For example, the conclusion of the ancient chronographer, Thallus, that the darkness during the resurrection account was an eclipse suggests a bias against the supernatural. If one holds to naturalistic materialism, then it logically follows to dismiss \textit{a priori} an historical account of such a widespread darkness. However, if one is convinced that the evidence leads to an explanation that transcends natural laws, then an account that syncs with the biblical record appears plausible. Theissen and Merz provide the following footnote: “According to Phlegon of Tralles (early second century), who derived his knowledge from Thallus, this eclipse of the sun took place in the 202\textsuperscript{nd} Olympiad, which astronomers calculate to be 24 November of the year 29 CE.


Hence, Thallus’s presupposition against Christian theism led him to pose an alternate theory that arguably requires more explanatory creativity than does faithfully following the evidence where it leads.

No one gets a free pass in the area of presuppositions. No matter the level of native intellectual profundity, no one is exempt from the requirement to demonstrate the soundness of one’s exclusion of claims that lie outside one’s inherited or preferred worldview. Although pure objectivity is likely unattainable, the serious thinker must be aware of the recurring need to clear the intellectual chamber of the cobwebs of inadequately principled a priori commitments.

Let me be clear, I am not arguing against presuppositions or strong beliefs about significant issues. To do so would be awkwardly inconsistent. Rather, I’m arguing that claims of neutrality may be a red flag for an attempted cover up of a dogmatic agenda. Feigned neutrality, with a driving agenda to exclude all data that does not fit into a pre-established rubric, not presuppositions per se, holds great potential for hampering valuable philosophical research.

Phillip E. Johnson’s point on Darwinism is quite relevant here:

The last subject I should address before beginning is my personal religious outlook, because readers are bound to wonder and because I do not exempt myself from the general rule that bias must be acknowledged and examined . . . my purpose is to examine the scientific evidence on its own terms, being careful to distinguish the evidence itself from any religious or philosophical bias that might distort our interpretation of that evidence. I assume that the creation-scientists are biased by their precommitment to Biblical fundamentalism . . . the question I want to investigate is whether Darwinism is based upon a fair assessment of the scientific evidence or whether it is another kind of


172 As C. Fred Smith observes, “We often assume the truth of our own worldview without carefully examining it.” C. Fred Smith, Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God’s Way (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), location 74.

Here, Johnson undercuts the charge of those who assume they have the corner on the market of disinterested scholarship. The question is not whether one has presuppositions, but whether one’s presuppositions are sound. Not all presuppositions are equally warranted. All sides must play by the same set of epistemological rules in order for genuine academic debate to be possible.

When it comes to Christian theism and the biblical account of God’s workings throughout the course of human history, one stumbling block for Westerners is a presupposition against pain. For many Westerners a prevailing presupposition is that the point of life is circumstantial happiness given obsession with entertainment and pleasure. If Aristotelian circumstantial happiness is God’s telos for human existence, then a non-theist could make a strong case, compelled by a basic level of intellectual honesty, that God has failed. A cursory reading of world history or a glimpse of the nightly news adds to the cumulative case that the overwhelming majority of persons who have existed could not honestly be considered to have lived circumstantially happy lives. On the contrary, William Lane Craig argues, “The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God.” Hence, to argue against the existence of God on grounds of the existence of suffering is to fundamentally misunderstand the point of life.

In terms of cultural presuppositions, pain and suffering are largely assumed to be an ingredient in the fabric of the universe in eastern thought. Pain is as assumption rather than a problem. Samsara, karma, and cyclical history present little motivational stimulus to assuage

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175 Daniel Mitchell wisely notes, “Bullheadedness in holding to one specific scientific hypothesis is not science; it’s politics.” Daniel Mitchell, “Science in Apologetics” (presentation, THEO 908/APOL 900 Seminar in Creation and Apologetics, Lynchburg, VA, October 23, 2012).

human suffering because the eastern quest, especially Buddhism, is qualitatively internal. The doctrine of rebirth carries no small number of moral and philosophical problems, as Keith Ward argues:

The rebirth hypothesis in the end gives an unsatisfactory explanation of the great inequalities of human birth, and has a morally questionable tendency to blame the disadvantaged for their own condition…. If my karma must play itself out, then any alleviation of my suffering by another—God or creatures—can only postpone it to another life…. In addition to complicating factors based on human freedom in community, the theory of karmic law also stands in tension with much modern scientific understanding of physical causality. Physical and biological laws produce their effects without reference to moral considerations.177

This stems from recognition of eastern philosophical presuppositions rather than Western prejudice.178 My purpose for this section is that it serves as an overview of worldview presuppositions. In the subsequent section I will sharpen the discussion to examine a number of ancient non-Christian worldviews and their presuppositions as they relate to children.

**Molech and children**

Friedrich Nietzsche recounts an old Scandinavian Saga: “‘Wotan placed a hard heart in my breast.’ It is thus rightly expressed from the soul of a proud Viking. Such a type of man is even proud of not being made for sympathy. The hero of the Saga adds this warning: ‘He who has not a hard heart when young, will never have one.’”179 As we will discover, if hard-heartedness were

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178 “There is no strict separation between “is” and “ought” in Hindu ethics . . . The answer to ‘What ought I to do?’ is more complex in Hindu ethics than in the Western religious ethics like Christianity . . . Unlike a single scripture such as the Bible . . . there is no single book or a single authoritative church in Hinduism to interpret what one’s dharma is. Moreover, Hinduism is a pluralistic religion and has no central authority to say conclusively what one ought or ought not to do in moral matters. Each individual is therefore responsible to find out what one’s dharma is and act accordingly.” S. S. Rama Rao Pappu, “Hindu Ethics,” *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, ed. Robin Rinehart (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2004), 166, 169.

179 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, location 2206.
a contest, any plebe devotee of Molech may eclipse Nietzsche’s Wotan-worshipping Viking. As we delve into the details, the reader should remember, “Pathos can be abused. But properly used as a complement to reason, emotion adds to the structure of logic the aesthetic of feeling, creating a deeper structure that only our hearts can know.”

I will specifically critique Ancient Near East (ANE) paganism by criteria two and three as provided in the introduction: Guarding children’s physical well-being contra all forms of adult predations whether they be abortion, infanticide, physical abuse, or excessive physical demands; and protecting children’s sexual innocence by eschewing the sexualizing or molestation of children. Because of the extensive amount of child sacrifice, criteria 1 and 2 are combined using Molech worship as a watershed descriptor. Likewise, because of their intimate connections, criteria 3 and 4 are also merged. The reason for the combinations is because of the stark contrast between ANE practices and commonsensical moral intuitions about how children should be treated. While Greco-Roman perspectives strained credulity enough, certain aspects of ANE paganism turned the stomachs of even the Greeks and Romans.

Criteria 1 & 2: Intrinsic value and protection of physical well-being on child sacrifice

The Israelite conquest of Canaan is arguably the most controversial part of biblical history. Space limitations restrain us from a full-scale defense against charges that the Bible endorses arbitrary genocide. Nevertheless, an investigation of an aspect of the conquest narrative will both shed light on this controversial topic as well as children on ANE paganism.

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I am using the designation “Molech” as something of a penumbral category for cultic practices in the ANE, which includes, but not are not limited to, the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom, Baal, and Molech/Moloch. Since Baal worship tacitly endorses incest and violence, practices the Hebrew Bible decisively proscribes, it is little wonder why one finds repeated diatribes against Baal worship. Child sacrifice is the most notable unifying thread.

The biblical record identifies child sacrifice as one of the pillars of Canaanite religion and especially Molech worship. David P. Wright provides the following association between Molech and child sacrifice:

Molech is a deity, not the name of a type of offering, is clearly indicated by Lev. 20:5. Isa. 30:33 reveals that the word was originally ‘king’ (Heb. melech) but was later given a pejorative vocalization (molech) from ‘shame’ (boshet) . . . What god is intended by Molech is unclear since the title ‘king’ (melech) can be used in many divine names. The names of the gods Adrammelech and Anammelech (2 Kings 17:31) to whom the Sepharvites offered their children by fire contain the element melech and may show more specifically what divinities were intended by Molech. Children were dedicated (‘passed over’) and burned to Molech at the Tophet in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. This practice with Molech specifically mentioned is found in only four passages (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35). This type of offering without mention of Molech is found abundantly elsewhere (Deut 12:31; 18:10; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17, 31; 21:6; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; Ezek. 16:21; 20:26, 31; 23:37; 2 Chron. 28:8; 33:6). 183

181 John Howard Raven observes, “Molech the god of the Ammonites seems to have been but another name for Chemosh and his worship did not differ from that of Chemosh. Even at Mount Sinai the Israelites knew about the corrupt worship of Molech and they were specially forbidden to offer their sons to him on pain of death.” See John Howard Raven, The History of the Religion of Israel: An Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 184-185.

182 Roland De Vaux provides a fascinating insight into the link between the violence and incest in Baal worship, “Baal’s sister and spouse, ‘Anat, has the same sharply contrasting characteristics. She was a goddess of war and of love, sometimes atrociously bloodthirsty and violent, but also a typical woman, young, beautiful, desirable and life-giving.” Roland De Vaux, The Early History of Israel, trans. David Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 149.

John Day suggests the references to “passing over/through the fire” do not refer to actual sacrifice but more of a dedication of the child to the deity. Others see it as “the children were given up by the parents to grow up and be trained as temple prostitutes,” a prospect maybe even more horrifying. Whether outright child murder or religiously sanctioned training for the sex trade, it is safe to say children were far from safe. Children were viewed as valuable but not as persons to be nurtured and protected but as fodder for the advancement of adults, the weak sacrificed for the strong. Wright comments, “Jer. 19:5, however, calls such dedications ‘burnt offerings’ and Ezek. 23:37-39 calls the act ‘slaughter’ and says the children were given to the deity as food. Hence, offerings to Molech must be considered actual sacrifices (cf. Ps. 106:37-38).”

Harry Thurston Peck notes:

The religion of the Carthaginians, like that of the other Canaanitish peoples, was a form of fire-worship. As with all Semites, the rites and practice of religion formed a part of the daily life, and profoundly influenced the development of their civilization. Their chief god, Molech, represented the destructive influence of the sun, and in his temples human victims were immolated with fire. These victims were usually prisoners taken in war, but not always, for when Agathocles besieged the city, we are told that 200 noble children belonging to native families were offered up to secure the favour of the god.

Since child sacrifice was thoroughly integrated into Canaanite culture it suggests children carried a high value in the sacrificial economy.

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186 Ibid. Bruce K. Waltke notes another minority view that suggests Molech is a word describing either a sacrifice or a cultic object dedicated for sacrifice. He instructs, “On the contrary, the references to ‘Molech’ in all the Biblical texts can be understood as a divine name.” Bruce K. Waltke, “Molech,” The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, eds. Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1976), 269.

Fertility was at the core of Canaanite religion. Obeisance to the dictates of Molech was believed to result in favorable weather patterns, which in turn escalated one’s agricultural profit. At the heart of child sacrifice was the great exchange of one’s offspring for the prospects of a better economic tomorrow. This was the ancient equivalent of blood money. Yet this generational tax came not from the shining excess of royal treasuries or the armory of warlords but from the innocence of the cradle.

One of the reasons why God commanded the eradication of those who practiced human sacrifice was to prevent the Israelites from mimicking their behavior. The Hebrew king Josiah is lauded for his fight against idolatrous child sacrifice (2 Chron. 34:3-7). As early as Genesis 15:16 God states that “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” It was not until 430 years later that God commanded the conquest of Canaan. God’s judgment was not premature as He granted 430 years of mercy for a particular Canaanite group to turn away from such practices. By the time of the conquest it had become impossible to separate child sacrifice from Canaanite culture and religious practice. If children have intrinsic value then multiculturalism and pluralistic tolerance have their moral limits.

Clay Jones opines, “What happened to the Canaanites was not genocide, but capital punishment.” Space limitations restrict us from a full excursus into the ethics of the conquest but a few points can be made. Regarding questions surrounding the promises about the land, Ronald Allen argues, “The first instance of the promise is given biblical pride of place” (Gen.

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188 Paul Copan highlights the extent to which Canaanite idolatry had saturated ANE society, “Sometimes God simply gives up on nations, cities, or individuals when they’ve gone past a point of no return. . . . Canaanite idolatry wasn’t simply an abstract theology or personal interest carried out in the privacy of one’s home. It was a worldview that profoundly influenced Canaanite society.” Copan, Is God a Moral Monster? 159, 160.

To counter the charge that the Israelites were little more than theistically driven robber barons, Allen points to “the iniquity of the Amorites” coming to completion and the patience of God being exhausted with Canaanite crimes against nature (Gen. 15:16). In the debate concerning not only questions of the land but also the conquest of Canaan the question of genocide inevitably arises. The question is whether any people group is ever justified in engaging in an offensive war where the objective is commandeering the land along with totally annihilating the indigenous peoples. Craig argues for a version of divine command theory, writing “I find it ironic that atheists should often express such indignation at God’s commands, since on naturalism there’s no basis for thinking that objective moral values and duties exist at all and so no basis for regarding the Canaanite slaughter as wrong.”

Craig further clarifies:

So the problem isn’t that God ended the Canaanites’ lives. The problem is that He commanded the Israeli soldiers to end them. Isn’t that like commanding someone to commit murder? No, it’s not. Rather, since our moral duties are determined by God’s commands, it is commanding someone to do something which, in the absence of a divine command, would have been murder. The act was morally obligatory for the Israeli soldiers in virtue of God’s command, even though, had they undertaken it on their own initiative, it would have been wrong.

For Craig, even the mandate and duty for the Canaanite conquest (the premise for the claim that ethnic Israel had the right to the land at any time) finds its grounding in God’s command and, ultimately, in God’s good nature. Indeed, God’s nature is the very paradigm of goodness on Craig’s account.

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The seemingly harsh language of destruction and judgment, especially in the Hebrew Bible, is a culturally sensitive issue in contemporary Western culture. It is likely that uncomfortability with judgment language is more of a Western cultural bias than anything else. Clay Jones argues that such *a priori* reactions are evidence of a failure to grasp the nature of God and the nature of sin. His contention dovetails with Sandy’s repeated emphasis against rushing to culturally crafted and emotionally driven conclusions. Contemporary Westerners likely have difficulty digesting doctrines like God’s wrath and retributive justice. Social consciousness steeped in democratic egalitarianism makes these doctrines seem even more obtuse.

Quite possibly the greatest travesty of ANE paganism was that children were classified as fodder in order to placate the twisted whims of petty deities for the benefit of adults. Both the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament writers see this as demon worship. The Psalmist writes:

> He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them. They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood (Ps. 106:15, 34-38).

The Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians, “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons” (1 Cor. 10:20). Pagan

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sacrifices are a form of demon worship, which almost universally involves human sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of children.\textsuperscript{196}

So how could the Israelites, having recently escaped a brutal Egyptian culture that embraced infanticide (Ex. 1:16), be so heavily influenced by the same? Ettien N. Koffi claims the impact of the Canaanites on the Israelites was inexorable and comprehensive especially in religion.\textsuperscript{197} Solomon’s construction of a “high place” for Molech worship in Israel is a telltale sign of the land’s moral and spiritual climate (1 Ki. 11:7). Such was the cost of compromise in Solomon’s day. King Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:3), Manasseh (2 Ki. 21:6), and the city of Samaria (2 Ki. 17:17) were also condemned for practicing the same.\textsuperscript{198} Manasseh’s depravity was such that he “seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel” (2 Ki. 21:9, NASB). God’s drastic judgment of Manasseh-led Judah illustrates the seriousness of these devastating Canaanite practices (2 Ki. 21:10-15). It also serves as a rebuttal to the claim that the Canaanite conquest was genocide. To the contrary, it was the execution of capital punishment. God’s equal treatment of the Israelites indicates that race or ethnicity was never the issue. Rather, it was a holistic embrace of moral corruption to the extent that animals were routinely sexually defiled and infants slaughtered for the enjoyment and alleged benefit of adults. J. A. Thompson offers a suggestion on how this troubling reverse influence could have come about:

There was another serious factor causing disunity during these years. This was the tendency of many to follow the religion of the Canaanites. This declension of the Israelites may have been due in part to the subtle attraction of the wealth to the


\textsuperscript{197} Ettien N. Koffi, \textit{Language and Society in Biblical Times} (Bethesda, MD: International Scholars Publication, 1996), 70.

Canaanites. They had fine homes, splendid art, fine literature, good trade connections around the east, and an apparent superiority in every way over the people of Israel. The unthinking Israelite may have been inclined to associate this wealth with some imagined favor of the gods of Canaan, and as a result he may have forsaken the simpler non-sensuous faith of Israel.199

The seduction of wealth and grandeur is nothing new. As the Apostle Paul later warns, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Recent archaeological discoveries have cast new light on the sordid subject of the Canaanite understanding of children. Andrew White argues that child sacrifice was not relegated to backwoods regions of the Near East but featured in the famous North African city of Carthage.200 White’s position serves as a watershed for the majority view that the ancient Carthaginians did in fact practice child sacrifice.201 On a side note, could it be that child sacrifice was a contributing factor in Carthage’s inability to ever numerically match Rome’s armies during the Punic Wars? Hannibal’s military genius was without peer yet even with a massive


200 “In 1921 the largest cemetery of sacrificed infants in the ancient Near East was discovered at Carthage. It is well established that this rite of child sacrifice originated in Phoenicia, ancient Israel’s northern neighbor, and was brought to Carthage by its Phoenician colonizers. Hundreds of burial urns filled with the cremated bones of infants, mostly newborns but even some children up to age six years old, as well as animals have been uncovered at Carthage. They were buried there between the 8th century B.C. and the fall of Carthage during the third Punic War in 146 B.C. On the burial monuments that sometimes accompanied the urns, there was often inscribed the name or symbol of the goddess Tanit, the main Phoenician female deity, and her consort Ba’al Hammon. Infants and children were regularly sacrificed to this divine couple.” Andrew White, “Abortion and the Ancient Practice of Child Sacrifice,” Associates for Biblical Research, January 5, 2012, accessed, November 4, 2016, http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/01/05/Abortion-and-the-Ancient-Practice-of-Child-Sacrifice.aspx#Article.

contingent of mercenary forces Carthage was always dwarfed by Rome in terms of raw manpower. I realize this point may be considered as wandering too far off the ranch. To be clear, my suggestion is that child sacrifice in Carthage could be a contributing factor to consistent Roman numerical superiority. I am fully aware that other factors in addition to child sacrifice play into the Punic Wars but one point is fairly certain: a culture that embraces the destruction of its own offspring will struggle fielding sufficient armies during a major military confrontation with an opposing civilization that lauds virility, the family unit, and civic duty.

Child killing boasts a designated theological category in ANE paganism and this was not something reserved to the eons of primeval ancient history. Records speak to this grisly practice in Carthage as late as 310 B.C.E. according to the first century B.C.E. Greek historian Diodorus Siculus:

> Therefore the Carthaginians, believing that the misfortune had come to them from the gods, betook themselves to every manner of supplication of the divine powers . . . In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly . . . . There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.

Plutarch provides another layer to the horrific scene: “the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people.”

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202 Hannibal was by no means the first Carthaginian general to emphasize engrafting into the regular defense of the State. See Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization* (New York: Viking, 2010), 115.

203 For an impressive exposé of the crucial Roman manpower advantage over Carthage, see Michael P. Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage: Southern Italy during the Second Punic War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.


people.”

If Carthage was a colony of Canaan imagine what it was like in the motherland. These accusations of child sacrifice are hardly confined to anti-Carthage Roman propagandists. Paolo Xella, Josephine Quinn, Valentina Melchiorri, and Peter van Dommelen conclude children were in fact included in the sacrificial economy.

So what sort of anthropology produces a worldview in which child sacrifice is not only allowed but also applauded? According to the Apostle Paul, the first step on the descent of depravity begins with a rejection of natural revelation and the conscience (Rom. 1:18-31). Opposition to these practices came from an entirely different ideology: the Hebrew conviction that even unborn children are fully human. Whether the Hebrew prophets of old or the first-century church, Judeo-Christian morality has stood foursquare against the universal bloodlust in paganism.

In conclusion, the understanding of children on ANE paganism allows for what we may label their high sacrificial value. Children were plundered rather than protected. Instead of laying down their lives for the children, adults in the ANE systematically handed them over to the flames of Molech worship for perceived personal gain. It is safe to say the theology of children on ANE paganism fails to provide the most basic protection of children against adult-initiated exploitation. An ideology that fails to place an elevated value on providing physical protection to children is morally problematic. Such was the state of depravity in the ANE when God


207 “We argue here that the range of sources currently available to researchers beyond the disputed osteology strongly suggest that the tophet was first and foremost a ritual site or sanctuary and that the cremated depositions of infants and animals were sacrificial offerings.” Paolo Xella, Josephine Quinn, Valentina Melchiorri and Peter van Dommelen, “Phoenician Bones of Contention,” Antiquity 87, no. 338 (December 2013): 1202.

commanded the Israelites to wipe out every vestige of Canaanite culture and religious practice. The failure of the Israelites to heed this injunction later led to God’s covenant people adopting and practicing some of the same customs to their own demise.

Criteria 3 & 4: Protection of sexual innocence and the family unit on ANE sexuality

Sexual ethics is a rather broad and potentially confusing category. So for the sake of brevity we could say that our most basic moral sentiments on sexual ethics regarding children are rather simple: children should not be sexualized, whether by exposure to inappropriate content or contact. Guarding children against these dangers is a basic parental and societal duty. We will see that ANE paganism did not pursue sexual safeguards for children. On the contrary, sexual boundaries, what many would classify as perversion, were pushed and accepted as an integral part of ANE society. Such practices could be considered specifically weaponized towards the family as they were so disruptive to the natural order of the family that the end could only be filial and social chaos as reflected in the book of Judges where Israelite culture showcased the full panoply of “Canaanite” sins.

Bruce K. Waltke sees, “The list of unlawful sexual relationships in Leviticus 18, drawn up as a treatise against Canaanite sexual practices, expands the sixth commandment to protect Israel’s purity by excluding coitus outside the bonds of marriage.”209 For starters, incest had become an acceptable form of sexual expression by the time of the Israelite conquest.210 Beyond

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210 “Although early Canaanite laws proscribed either death or banishment for most forms of incest, after the fourteenth century BC the penalties were reduced to no more than the payment of a fine. This decriminalization of incest coincided with the centuries between God’s word to Abraham that the sins of those who lived there had “not reached its full measure” (Gen. 15:16) and the Exodus. By delaying judgment God expressed patience and
incest is the unifying thread of fertility in ANE cultic practice, a belief that all but guarantees widespread adultery and fornication. Martti Nissinen recounts that sexual involvement with a temple prostitute was equivalent to union with the deity.211 ANE records abound with accounts of the gods displaying a disquieting degree of sexual exploits.212 This led to a hyper-sexualized society that did little to protect the sexual innocence of children.

I could provide evidence of rampant homosexuality in the ANE but a large cultural push in recent decades has by and large normalized this behavior that in not so recent times was considered textbook sexual deviancy.213 On the other hand, it is probably far more effective to show the extent of ANE sexual depravity by addressing the issue of bestiality. R. D. Biggs asserts that bestiality was a regular part of ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite life.214 Gwendolyn Leick reports the same findings.215 God’s command to kill even the animals takes on a new light if in fact the Canaanites did not discriminate in their sexual appetites whether in age, gender, or species.216 Raising children in an environment of sexually violated animals raises a

demonstrated His judgment “is neither capricious nor unwarranted.” Jones, “We Don’t Hate Sin So We Don’t Understand What Happened to the Canaanites,” 57-58.


212 Ibid.


215 “An additional feature of the potency rituals is the psychological dimension, the build-up of sexual stimulation through the verbal evocation of intercourse, including a good dose of bestiality . . . Intercourse with mares, interestingly, was not a punishable offence.” Leick, 208, 294.

216 The Canaanites were “having sex with just about every living thing they could get their hand on.” Jones, 66.
dangerous possibility: sexualized animals see humans as a source of sexual pleasure, which creates an unsafe environment. Jones notes:

This would explain why the Hittites needed to clarify that humans might not be at fault: “If an ox spring upon a man for intercourse, the ox shall die but the man shall not die…If a pig spring upon a man for intercourse there is no punishment.” 217 This kind of behavior may explain why God used a flood to destroy what Dawkins called the “presumably blameless” 218 animals in the days of Noah. 219

In conclusion, it is clear that ANE society did not value protecting children from sexually destructive behaviors. They fertilized sexual depravity instead of restraining it. Children grew up in an environment where both animals and humans were hyper-sexualized. The moral apparatus of checks and balances had been dismantled, as they did not respect children’s precious sexual innocence. Moral bankruptcy is nowhere more apparent than when a culture no longer places a high value on protecting children. The infant victims of Molech were the original invisible children. So was the case in the ANE as evidenced by its view of children.

Plato and children

Alfred North Whitehead famously quipped, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” 220 Even the prestigious Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy uses Plato’s name as the antecedent in the URL. 221 The

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219 Jones, ibid.

220 He continues, “I do not mean the systematic theme of thought, which scholars have doubtfully extracted from its writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them.” Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Free Press, 1979), 39.

philosophically soaked sci-fi thriller *The Matrix* is based in part on Plato’s allegory of the cave. Introduction to philosophy is incomplete without serious interaction with Athens’ greatest philosopher. As Whitehead suggests, it is difficult to overestimate Plato’s philosophical impact on Western thought.

Plato’s philosophical pioneering ushered in a boom of intellectual advances in the ancient world. In fact, both Plato and Aristotle were early advocates for what later became known as natural law in Western thought.\(^{222}\) This dynamic duo was fully aware of the rickety foundations of popular Greek theism. Plato’s emphasis on transcendent truths beyond the vacillating squabbles of gods and demigods was a pleasant contrast to the mind-numbing mysticism of both Greek and ANE paganism. His theory of the forms exemplifies the dilemma of sensing moral realism but being unable to give a robust account for it. Attempting to fuse person-dependent virtues with the less than holy members of the pantheon proved an arduous task. Nevertheless, it fell far short of what we will see as the ontological gold standard on children: the Judeo-Christian *imago dei*.

Even though I’ve been open about my Christian worldview the reader should be assured this does not warrant investigative cherry picking. There is a bit of overlap between Plato and Aristotle’s understanding of children, but I will make sure to point out the differences where and when they arise. My intent is to give both Plato and Aristotle a fair reading rather than strive to paint them as Hellenistic hellions lacking even minimal adherence to basic morality. No firm category emerges from *The Republic* for the intrinsic value and protection of children outside their utilitarian value to the *polis*. On this point in particular, the reader will notice a similarity between ANE and Greco-Roman views of children. Despite their valuable contributions to

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Western philosophy and civilization, we will see more than a few morally troubling arguments that should give us pause in accepting Plato and Aristotle as moral authorities on children.

Though I hold to the historicity of Socrates, in the interest of streamlining this section I will attribute his words to Plato in order to avoid tertiary debates. We have no extant writings of Socrates, and it’s generally accepted that the earlier Socratic dialogues feature a more accurate picture of him than do the later ones—but this issue won’t detain us here. Plato recorded every account we have of Socrates. Socrates was willing to throw off the shackles of corrupt pantheon polytheism but the absence of a clear and superior alternative left him in the shadows. Paul Johnson claims Socrates was a monotheist. Socrates did have a category for monotheism but it was nebulous and nameless, unlike a Christian understanding of the incarnation, which both confirmed and fleshed out the moral commands of the Hebrew Scriptures. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle recognized and rejected the corrupt pantheon of gods who were arguably as, if not more, corrupt than their parishioners. According to Winfried Corduan, polytheism in general is a decayed form of original monotheism that reflects human depravity rather than divine revelation.

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224 Paul Johnson notes, “There was no taint of atheism about it. Socrates was too aware of human weakness and shortcomings to think men could ever substitute themselves for divinity.” Paul Johnson, Socrates: A Man for Our Times (New York: Penguin, 2011), 106.

225 “When accusations were later brought against him, he was charged not with atheism but “not believing in the gods Athenians believed in.” This had perhaps an element of truth in it. Socrates did not believe in the traditional pantheon of Greek religion, with gods specializing in particular services and leading tumultuous lives that were more mythology or fiction than serious religion. When Socrates was at his most devout, he always refers to “god” or “the god,” not “the gods.” He was a monotheist.” Ibid., 107. Johnson is probably right when Socrates was at his best but some believe he was a henotheist and the debate is by no means settled. See John Bussanich, “Socrates’ Religious Experiences,” The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates, eds. John Bussanich and Nicholas D. Smith (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 290.

226 For an excellent treatment of original monotheism, see Winfried Corduan, In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), and Peter J. Leithart, “Original
In the following sections I will specifically evaluate Plato’s appraisal of children using the following criteria: 1) By virtue of their very existence, children have a high intrinsic value. 2) Children, as intrinsically valuable, should be protected from all forms of adult predations whether abortion, infanticide, physical abuse, or excessive physical demands. 3) Protection is necessary of children’s sexual innocence by eschewing the sexualizing or molestation of children. 4) Protection and nurture of the family unit is vital: since the family unit is the surest protection against sexual and physical harm, the family should be highly valued.

1) Intrinsic value

Reason was the foundational principle of value for Plato. O. M. Bakke masterfully illustrates this principle:

From Plato, Aristotle, and Stoicism onward, anthropological debates centered on speculations about the composition and function of the human person and the human soul. Here, the concept of logos (word, speech, reason) plays a central role. There was a broad consensus in the Greek philosophical tradition that the city-state was held together, despite serious conflicts of interest, by the logos that was employed to resolve these conflicts in a peaceful manner. It was the free male citizens who possessed the logos that was the presupposition for rational thought. Women and older men possessed it to some extent, or more correctly, they had the potential for logos, while slaves and barbarians definitely lacked it. Not surprisingly, children were classified along with this last group. The child symbolized the absence of logos, something reflected in the etymology of the word that designated children: nepioi in Greek and infantes in Latin, that is, “not speaking.” Children’s lack of the ability to communicate in an adult manner meant that they were defined as standing outside the rational world of adults.

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229 Ibid., 21-22.

230 Bakke, 250.
Plato’s emphasis on the prominence of reason provides an insight into the vortex of his worldview, one that lacks a category for the intrinsic value of children. Reason provided access to the realm of transcendent truth beyond the mundane physical world. Taken together with Platonic disdain for the body and the physical universe in general, reason then serves as an escape from the nihilistic shadows of carnal actuality.\(^{231}\)

Plato is not shy about highly valuing reason and those who are masters of it. For example, *The Republic* is largely concerned with the structure of an idealized society in which he suggests philosophers should serve as the dictator/leader:

> Until philosophers rule as kings in cities or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils, Glaucon, nor, I think, will the human race. And, until this happens, the constitution we’ve been describing in theory will never be born to the fullest extent possible or see the light of the sun.\(^{232}\)

Notice the philosopher-kings reign supreme over the two lower classes of citizens (Guardians and Workers). Why? Because of their superior native intelligence and ability to wield reason to the end of promulgating the ideal society. Hence, Plato fuses analytical reasoning to practical governing ability. One could say Plato’s *Republic* is a blueprint of unimpeded societal engineering by the elite cognitive intelligentsia. Or one could say that he thought the best political leadership came from those most in touch with transcendent truth about ultimate reality.

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\(^{231}\) While Plato was not a gnostic his emphasis on the ethereal over the physical is intriguing especially in light of the later development of Gnostic thought. The Apostle Paul’s insistence on the value of the body collided with Gnostic devaluing of the physical. For an interesting excursus on early Christianity and Gnosticism, see Birger A. Pearson, “Early Christianity and Gnosticism in the History of Religions,” *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001): 81-106. N. T. Wright jumps into the deep end of Gnosticism in his work, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).

So if reason is the apex of the ultimate value rubric then where does that leave children? Bakke observes, “These manifestations of children’s lack of logos led the classical philosophers to find a comparison with animals appropriate; indeed, Plato asserts that of all animals, it is the child who is ‘the most intractable; for in so far as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is as yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly and most insolent creature.’” 233 Children, women, slaves, and animals all lie in the same classification in contrast to free male adults. 234 For contemporary readers, the descriptors of children as “treacherous,” “sly,” and “[the] most insolent creature” are likely abrasive. This is because we believe that children do not have moral value because of what they can produce or understand, but because of what they are.

Plato’s equating intellectual ability with human value is the primary matter in question. Persons with high cognitive potential are considered more valuable whereas those with limited intellectual aptitude, whether they be mentally handicapped, children, senior adults treading the line between senility and mental health, or anyone else who does not fit into the first-class cerebral category, are a priori relegated to a lower value strata. The hypothesis of each person having intrinsic value regardless of intellectual or pragmatic production potential is foreign to Plato.

Reason is not just an evaluative principle for assigning value; it is also the premise for whether or not one is fit for freedom. Will Durant observes, “Plato condemns the enslavement of Greeks by Greeks, but for the rest accepts slavery on the ground that some people have underprivileged minds.” 235 Gregory Vlastos relates Plato’s characterization of a slave’s condition

233 Plato, Leg. 7.808D. In Bakke, 258.


as “a deficiency of reason. He has doxa, but no logos. He can have true belief, but cannot know the truth of his belief. He can learn by experience (empeiria) and external prescription (epitaxes). But he can neither give nor follow a rational account.”

Again, we see the primacy of reason in Plato’s economy of value. If an adult’s inability to sufficiently reason, per Plato’s standards, disbars one from the category of moral worth, then children also land in this bracket until they show themselves capable of exercising sufficient reason. We can summarize Plato’s thought with the following formula: Limited cognitive ability entails limited value. Age does not matter and diminished reason amounts to practical non-personhood.

2) Protection of physical wellbeing

Plato’s “might makes right” view on slavery sets the stage for this section. Both adults and children found their value in what they had to offer the polis. Visions of an ideal society pave the way for Plato’s insistence on “pure” versus “defective” children. He argues the best warriors are to be rewarded with:

Permission to have sex with the women more often, since this will be a good pretext for having them father as many of the children as possible . . . I think they’ll take the children of good parents to the nurses in charge of the rearing pen situated in a separate part of the city, but the children of inferior parents, or any child of the others that is born defective, they’ll hide in a secret and unknown place, as is appropriate. It is, if indeed the guardian breed is to remain pure.

G. M. A. Grube comments, “There can be no doubt that Plato is recommending infanticide by exposure for these babies, a practice which was quite common in ancient Greece as a method of

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237 Sociologist-historian Rodney Stark outlines Plato’s belief, though opposed to the enslavement of fellow Greeks, that “nature produces a ‘slavish people’ lacking the mental capacity for virtue or culture, and fit only to serve.” Rodney Stark, The Victory of Reason (New York: Random House, 2005), 26.

238 Plato, The Republic, 134, Book V, 459e, 460c.
birth control." Heroism earns sex is the mantra, but the offspring of those unions must still pass inspection or be exposed. Adolf Hitler later adopted a similar strategy except substituted heroism in battle with “pure” Aryan heritage in attempts to produce superior children. Children born to women over 40 (considered to be the latest age for optimal childbearing) should be killed. He goes on to illustrate how producing the best hunting dogs and fighting birds requires allowing the most robust specimens to breed as an introduction to his endorsement of bald eugenics.

Other Greeks, specifically the Spartans, practiced the same. The film 300 depicts an elderly Spartan inspecting a newborn as one would a product in the quality control section of an assembly line as the camera spans to a wide angle of a valley riddled with the skeletons of exposed infants. Rather than strengthening the Spartan military establishment, sustained infanticide eventually led to a strategic deficit of military manpower severely weakening the

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239 Ibid.


241 Plato recommends, “they should be very careful not to let a single fetus see the light of day, but if one is conceived and forces its way to the light, they must deal with it in the knowledge that no nurture is available for it. That’s certainly sensible.” Ibid., 461c-d.

242 Ibid., 459a-b.

243 “To train men to an ideal so unwelcome to the flesh it was necessary to take them at birth and form them by the most rigorous discipline. The first step was a ruthless eugenics: not only must every child face the father’s right to infanticide, but it must also be brought before a state council of inspectors; and any child that appears defective was thrown from a cliff of Mt. Taygetus, to die on the jagged rocks below.” Durant, The Life of Greece, 81.

244 300, DVD, directed by Zack Snyder (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007). The British Medical Journal concurs, “The child was inspected after birth by the elders among his kindred, and if they found him deformed, misshapen, or lean, or pale, they sent him to be thrown in a deep pit of water which they commonly called Apothetas, and as a man would say the common house of office; holding opinion it was neither good for the child nor yet for the common weal that it should live, considering from his birth he was not well made nor given to be strong, healthful, nor lusty of body all his life long.” “Eugenics in Ancient Greece,” The British Medical Journal 2, no. 2762 (December 6, 1913): 1503.
entire societal structure. In Plato’s *Theaetetus* Socrates presents what appears to be a normalized case for exposing infants.

This attitude was not limited to political philosophy. Second century AD Greek physician Soranus’s work *Gynecology* contains a haunting chapter titled “How to recognize the newborn that is worth rearing.” After outlining positive indications of health the chapter concludes “And by conditions contrary to those mentioned, the infant is not worth rearing is recognized.” Hitler repeatedly echoed this sentiment in *Mein Kampf* with warnings against a humanity that “ceases to be true to its pedigree and intermingles with the mongrels.” Let me be clear: I am not saying Plato was a Nazi nor am I plying the trade of parallelomania. My point is that without a transcendent anthropology the slide towards a utilitarian valuation of persons becomes much harder to resist. In one way or another persons are valued with how they rank on the scale of benefitting society. British cleric Thomas Malthus’s (1766-1834) portrayal of certain persons as “useless eaters” illustrates this point well. It was likely the Nazi’s pursuit of eugenics to its logical extreme that caused Westerners to become disenchanted with the concept. H. G. Wells

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246 “Then this is the child, however he may turn out, which you and I have with difficulty brought into the world. And now that he is born, we must run round the hearth with him, and see whether he is worth rearing, or is only a wind-egg and a sham. Is he to be reared in any case, and not exposed? Or will you bear to see him rejected, and not get into a passion if I take away your first-born?” Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2012), locations 1682-1685.


250 “[Persons] should consider the general welfare of the human race, of the society in which they lived, and of their own families, and so not cumber the earth with useless and miserable people.” Hence, the phrase, “useless eaters” stems from Malthus’ fear that overpopulation would destroy the human race. Patricia James, *Population Malthus: His life and times* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1979), 61.
writes over a century ago, “I believe that if a canvass of the entire civilized world were put to the vote in this matter, the proposition that it is desirable that the better sort of people should intermarry and have plentiful children, and that the inferior sort of people should abstain from multiplication, would be carried by an overwhelming majority. They might disagree with Plato’s methods, but they would certainly agree to his principle.”

To most contemporary readers the thought of exposing one’s offspring clashes with deeply held beliefs on parental duty towards children. Just to be clear, Plato may well have been vocalizing the popular sentiments of his day. As Douglas MacDowell comments on the laws of classical Athens parents were under no legal obligation to rear a child. Hence, exposing an infant that did not pass the accepted criteria, especially if female, was not a crime. Elise P. Garrison explains the culling of the cradle in the Greek world:

To announce the gender of a live birth, the family decorated the doorway with wool to designate a girl, and with a wreath of olive for a boy. The household head, the kyrios, had the right to accept the children and could reject them based on gender, size of the family, physical deformity or frailty, economic considerations, legitimacy, or because they were the offspring of slaves. Disposal was arranged through exposure, a process that involved abandoning an infant to its death to the elements.

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254 “This practice, rather than simply killing the infant, may have developed because it freed the household from bloodguilt, or because parents truly believed that they were placing their exposed infants in the care of the gods. Exposure remains a topic of continuing controversy. In Sparta, exposure of physically weak or sickly infants was demanded by law and determined by the elders of the tribes rather than the household head. Acceptance of the child by the household head was celebrated in a ceremony on the fifth day after birth called the Amphidromia (literally, a walking around). The ceremony took place in the home, and marked the infant’s official entry into the family with the right to live.” Elise P. Garrison, “Ancient Greece and Rome,” Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society, 54.
Expositio was part and parcel of a titanic attempt to establish the ideal society. Producing a sufficient number of able-bodied and sound-minded young men who could defend the republic was integral to this vision. In an egalitarian shift, Plato argues that men and women should campaign in war together with the children watching at a distance so as to harden the children to the realities of warfare and spur the adults on to intensified battlefield aggression.²⁵⁵ Suffice it to say that Plato’s insistence on children observing real life combat violates most contemporary Western attitudes towards raising children. At the very least, Plato’s view of children did not have a category for intrinsic value.

3) Protection of sexual innocence

Few things, if any, rank higher on the contemporary Western value scale than the protection of children’s sexual innocence, but as O. M. Bakke notes, the modern concern for child welfare had no real equivalent in the ancient world.²⁵⁶ Heavy labor or excessive punishment by current standards is to be expected in pre-modern societies, but sexual exploitation is inexcusable. Even the most oblivious has likely noticed Hollywood’s rather recent glamorizing of Greek warrior culture. Whether 300, Troy, or any other of the epic films recounting the mythological exploits of the Greek gods and demigods, bare chested, bearded phalanxes with British accents are in vogue. Be that as it may, we will discover that there is a glaring omission from these blockbuster films: the sordid secret of institutionalized pederasty, textbook child molestation by modern standards, is conveniently removed from the script. If

²⁵⁵ Plato reasons, “Every animal fights better in the presence of its young.” Plato, The Republic, 466e-467b.

²⁵⁶ “Depending on their social standing, young children were routinely apprenticed, put to heavy labor, sexually exploited, or beaten by schoolteachers.” Bakke, 846.
Baggett and Walls are correct where they opine that there’s nothing romantic or heroic in a song about promiscuity, then surely it calls for a warranted judgment against any culture that normalizes and celebrates child molestation. Not only does Plato’s Republic, allegedly the ideal society, not provide safeguards against adults sexually preying on children, it normalizes the behavior so as to effectively silence any vestige of moral outrage.

If the contemporary Western practice of mandatory registration for sex offenders were applied to the ancient world, a simple look at the citizen roll would have likely yielded the same result. Although there was surely disdain for violators of accepted sexual mores as there is today, the norms of Plato’s day hardly protected children, as Bakke observes:

Pederasty was not considered on the lines of our modern dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual, but in terms of an understanding of sexuality where the fundamental antithesis is active/passive: one partner is to be active and dominating, the one who penetrates, while the other partner is to be passive and submissive, the one who is penetrated. Not only women but also boys belonged to the latter category. Hence, the criterion of normal or natural sex is the extent to which one acts in accordance with the role one has been assigned, as the active or the passive partner. An adult free man’s sexual conduct was “normal” as long as he was the active, dominating, and penetrating partner.

Any call for protection of children’s sexual innocence rang hollow in Plato’s world. On the other hand, it was saturated with a wide-scale cultural acceptance of troublesome behaviors towards children. In ancient Greece patently pedophilic behaviors were accepted as honorable and

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257 Baggett and Walls, Good God, 183.

258 “Consequently, sexual activity in which a free adult man was passive was unacceptable, and this is why a free citizen was forbidden to prostitute himself. On the other hand, a sexual relationship between an adult and a boy in which the boy took the passive role was normal, and widespread. In other words, sexual behavior was understood in terms of a hierarchical pattern of power relationships. As long as these were reflected in sexual behavior, it was considered legitimate and normal. We should however note that sexual activity with under-age children was not accepted societally, although it was relatively common.” Bakke, 653-661.

natural.260 Sexual abuse was the normative experience for children in the Greco-Roman world.261
As will be explored later, the Christian understanding of sexuality stood in stark contrast with
those outside the Jewish community.262 In Plato’s day, Greek society, whether Athenian or
Spartan, collectively accepted what is now legally classified as textbook child molestation a
standard part of normative childhood development.263 Herodotus admits in The Histories that the
Greeks taught the Persians pederasty.264
To be fair, pederasty had a deep grip on Greek society before Plato’s day. Yet as brave as
his philosophical pursuits were it is unfortunate they lacked the necessary materials for a moral
reformation regarding children. Moreover, his view of children not only fails to sexually guard

Antikken, ed. Halvor Moxnes et al. (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2002), 129-73. Okland gives a detailed presentation and
evaluation of Brooten’s book, arguing that “she shows more clearly than earlier authors how fundamental the
antithesis between active and passive was in the way people in late antiquity thought about sexual relations. It was
impossible to think about sex without this antithesis: sex was something one person did with another. Accordingly,
‘penetration’ was the primary image used when people wished to describe what sex consisted of. It was also
customary to employ the active/passive antithesis to give meaning to terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’: the
masculine was associated with the active, the feminine with the passive. When male, female, active, and passive
were joined together in the bodies of individual human persons in this specific manner, the result was good health
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Bakke, 653.

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Lloyd De Mause, “The Evolution of Childhood,” in The History of Childhood: The Untold Story of
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“(1) that most homosexual activity among free urban citizens in Greece took the form of pederastic
relationships between adult men and boys aged twelve years and over; (2) that such relationships were considered
normal and natural; (3) that neither ethics nor legislation forbade or penalized this form of sexual activity, as long as
certain regulations governing propriety were observed; and (4) that this form of homosexual activity was seen as
noble, as a natural part of growing into adulthood, and as mentally and spiritually more estimable than heterosexual
intercourse. In the “grammar school” (gymnasion), it was customary for friendship to be established between an
older pedagogue and a young pupil, and this often involved a sexual relationship.” Kenneth J. Dover, Greek
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“As to love, the young man was permitted to indulge in it without prejudice of gender. Nearly every lad
had a lover among the older men; from this lover he expected further education, and in return he offered affection
and obedience.” Will Durant, The Life of Greece, 83. S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams explain this dark
corner of historical reality: “Suffice it to say that where our society considers pedophilia to be a deviant, sexual
perversion, the Greeks understood pederasty in terms of romance. Platonic philosophers even portrayed it as
superior to the love of a woman because they understood the love of boys as the pursuit of ideals or universals, such
as beauty (as in Amores or Plato’s Phaedrus).” Fortson and Grams, Unchanging Witness, 306.
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children by prohibiting improper contact between adult males and boys but goes so far as to endorse outright child molestation. Because of this, one may surmise that Plato’s perspective on children, in the most basic sense, neglects to protect children’s sexual innocence.

4) Nurturing/Providing for the family unit

Plato’s view of children in relation to the family unit could well serve as a template for communism. Top-down population and social control trumped the value of the family nucleus. As soon as they are born children are taken from their parents by the state and assigned to “officials appointed for that purpose.” The State, not the parents, held the primary rights and responsibilities over all human offspring within its borders. Plato simply did not see forcibly taking children from their parents as wrong. Necessarily this prescribed infant reallocation would lead to a society in which children would not know their parents nor parents their children. In Plato’s idealized society the family undergoes a thorough transformation. Individuality gives way to the good of the collective so that “the very idea of the family, the relationship of brother and sister, must be transferred to the city.” Plato sees this as a way to avoid factions and rivals by creating a situation in which all those born in a particular period would view one another as siblings. The alleged “privatization of pleasures and pains” has a strong potential to “dissolve

269 He writes, “Is there any greater evil we can mention for a city than that which tears it apart and makes it many instead of one? Or any greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?” *Ibid.*, 462a-b.
the city.” All aspects of life, even sexuality, are subservient to the State in Plato’s *Republic*.

To his credit, Plato does recognize the ensuing awkwardness, even by ancient Greek standards, of camouflaging of family units with the potential of incest, but gives it his approval upon the sanction of the priestess of Apollo at Delphi.

Not only were children to be held in common, but houses, property, and possessions as well. Plato believed that dissolving private wealth and the family nucleus would lead to a unified and enlightened society. We will pick up on this point further in the treatment of Christianity, but it may not be too bold to suggest that Plato’s general anthropocy was nowhere near that of Jesus or the Apostle Paul. The Greek model of shared marriages/polygamy/polyamory would have been considered a state sponsored abomination under Mosaic Law. For Plato, the causes of societal evils were external rather than internal.

Another point of note is the absence of the *imago dei* in Plato’s ontology, blinding him from one of the most basic, if not the most basic, needs of children for optimal emotional and mental development: a strong, natural family unit. An inherited depravity or fallenness, too, is altogether absent from Plato’s understanding of what it means to be human. The Apostle Paul’s struggle with knowing the good but not always doing it may clash with Plato’s hard and fast

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271 “Unity is put forward as the greatest good for the city. And the body is defined negatively, as the point of non-absorption into the common; it is treated as a secondary or non-essential feature of being human; sexuality is treated as a mere animal phenomenon.” Hittinger, 7.

272 Plato argues, “The law will allow brothers and sisters to have sex with one another if the lottery works out that way and the Pythia (priestess of Apollo at Delphi) approves.” *Ibid.*, 461e.


274 “They’ll be spared all the dissension that arises between people because of the possession of money, children, and families.” *Ibid.*, 464d.
doctrine that “it is impossible to do anything other than what one truly believes is best.” Later we will see that though Aristotle links reason and value he departs from Plato’s strict tie between knowledge and virtue. Eradicating evil from human society is inextricably linked to a horizontal humanism of rule by the reasonable rather than inward moral transformation.

In conclusion, Plato is willing to exchange whatever benefit the family unit offers children for the alleged cohesiveness of the polis. He does not appear to consider the negative effects of dissolving the family on children.

**Aristotle and children**

By now the reader is probably aware of a considerable overlap of Plato and Aristotle’s respective views on slavery and sexuality: namely that there were few restrictions on either. Philosophers are well aware of the fair share of disagreements between Plato and Aristotle. In both of their ideologies, children had it rough. The family unit is likely to garner the most disagreements among these philosophical cousins.

Let me interject that Aristotle did some brilliant work in the area of virtue ethics. My treatment of him is not intended to be one-sided. His works on ethics and logic continue to serve

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276 “For he [Plato] is quite explicit about the consequences: “No one errs willingly”; that is, if men do what is wrong, it is intellectual error not moral weakness that is the cause. And this, as Aristotle points out, is contrary to what ordinary men take to be an obvious fact of moral experience.” Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A history of moral philosophy from the Homeric age to the twentieth century* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 22-23.

277 Durant notes, “Aristotle looks upon the slave as an animate tool, and thinks that slavery will continue in some form until all menial work can be done by self-operating machines.” Durant, *The Life of Greece*, 280.


278 “We may sum up as follows: children in antiquity were born into harsh living conditions, and infant mortality was high, thanks to appalling sanitary, hygienic, and health provisions, as well as to the lack of food. Perhaps as many as 50 percent of all children died before their tenth birthday.” Bakke, 790-792.
as a fulcrum for academic discussions over two millennia later. My main goal for this section is
to advance the idea that Aristotle’s elevation of reason over basic moral sensibilities toward
children makes his views on children morally objectionable. We will see how his view of reason
affects his view of slavery, which in turn shapes his view of children. Though Aristotle rightly,
in my estimation, rejects Plato’s communization of the family, his thoughts, though brilliant at
certain points, lack the necessary transcendent revelation that I believe Christian theism provides.

1) **Intrinsic value**

The free male citizen was the zenith in Aristotle’s anthropological value chart. Women,
barbarians, and children did not “share in logos in the same way as free men. Clearly, it was
taken for granted that the norm, or normality, was free men’s rationality.” Rationality equals
value was the operative ontology. Logos/reason is intricately interwoven with gender (male)
and one’s social status. All these things aside, Aristotle’s prevailing principle was that man is a
rational animal. His support of slavery and dehumanizing children are closely related. The
argument goes something like this: Reason is what makes man fully human. If a person’s ability
to reason is impaired it corresponds to a lower moral and functional worth. As a result, children
should not be considered fully human because they lack a fully functioning intellectual

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279 Bakke, 282-284.

280 In the philosophical tradition, children were portrayed, along with other weak groups, as the negative
counterfoil to the free male urban citizen. Children lack reason, or at best have a limited measure of reason. They
also lack the physical strength and courage that are typical of men (or at least of the ideal man). This means that
children are portrayed as negative symbols or paradigms for adult conduct. According to Aristotle, children are not
complete human beings. If they are interesting and possess a positive value, this is because they have the potential to
develop those valuable characteristics and qualities that were associated with free men.” Ibid., 339-352.

capability. He compares children to irrational animals\(^{282}\) and “brutes” because they lack reason.\(^{283}\) Children are also associated with the drunk, the insane, and the wicked.\(^{284}\) Aristotle associates children with weakness and thus not a standard of emulation contrary to what Jesus would later establish. Even physically immaculate children are still “the most imperfect of all such animals.”\(^{285}\) Aristotle even calls children dwarfs as to recognize them as less than the ideal human specimen.\(^{286}\) Any form of humanity that lacked strength or reason (at least according to Aristotle’s definition) was less important than free males. Infantile neediness and defenselessness children placed children in the same category as the physically deformed.

Adults with diminished reasoning ability (though Aristotle never specifically defines it) may be legitimately enslaved. It’s the idea that certain persons are unfit for freedom.\(^{287}\) It’s a titanic attempt to use natural law to justify natural born superiors and inferiors.\(^{288}\) He concludes in his *Politics* that some persons are free and others slaves by nature, and that for these slavery is both advantageous and just, is evident.\(^{289}\)


\(^{283}\) Ibid., Book VI.13, 104.


\(^{288}\) Carl J. Richard frames Aristotle’s defense of slavery as “some were born to lead and others to follow: The element which is able, by virtue of its intelligence, to exercise forethought is naturally a ruling and master element, the element which is able, by virtue of its bodily power, to do the physical work, is a ruled element, which is naturally in a state of slavery.” Carl J. Richard, *Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World*, 105.

\(^{289}\) Aristotle, *The Politics*, Carnes Lord trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 41. Book 1, chapter 5.11.1255al. MacIntyre traces this tiered system to the following: “It is because Aristotle conceives of
The exploits of Alexander the Great, Aristotle’s most famous student, show how he forcefully put his tutor’s teachings into practice. David Hume puts it well: “[Alexander] felt in himself such a dignity and right of empire, that he could not believe it possible, that any one would refuse to obey him. Whether in Europe or in Asia, among Greeks or Persians, all was indifferent to him: Wherever he found men, he fancied he should find subjects.” Alexander’s conquests were little more than an egocentric application of Aristotle’s view on slavery. As we will see in the following chapter, Jesus viewed and treated men far differently.

2-3) Protection of sexual innocence and physical wellbeing

Intrinsic value correlates to protection of children’s sexual innocence and overall physical wellbeing. If something isn’t intrinsically valuable it provides little incentive for devoting energy and resources to its preservation. Child molestation didn’t seem to bother Aristotle. He didn’t blush at references to ‘boy-loving.’ Sexual mores and restrictions primarily revolved around “active/passive” roles as they related to free males as opposed to contemporary sentiments that consider adult and child sexual relations a criminal act. In fact, there is quite a bit of overlap among most writers in Greco-Roman culture on matters of abortion, infanticide, expositio, eugenics, pederasty, and human sexuality in general. Aristotle’s case for infanticide is not as

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290 Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, 133.

291 “Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.” C. S. Lewis, “Equality,” Present Concerns (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), 17.

292 “As to exposing or rearing the children born, let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared; but on the ground of number of children, if the regular customs hinder any of those born being exposed, there must
prominent as Plato’s but it is still present. Physical deformity was a definite qualifier for infanticide in Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*.

Callimachus, born a few years after Aristotle’s death, pictures attitudes that neither Plato nor Aristotle would have considered problematic: “Drink now, and love, Democrats; for we shall not have wine and boys eternally.” Aristotle was not likely a promoter of pederasty, as he frowned on allowing one’s passions to run free, but neither was he committed to its eradication.

4) *Family unit*

As previously noted, Aristotle’s major departure from Plato is in the area of the family unit. Family and the *polis* are related but distinct. What I find interesting is Aristotle’s connection of the family unit with weakness of will. As we will see later on, virtually the exact opposite is the case on Christian theism. The popular vein of “Game Over” video game t-shirts that associate heterosexual monogamy as an enemy of the good life fit may not gain Aristotle’s full approval but would not bring his full disapproval either.

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be a limit fixed to the procreation of offspring, and if any people have a child as a result of intercourse in contravention of these regulations, abortion must be practiced on it before it has developed sensation and life; for the line between lawful and unlawful abortion will be marked by the fact of having sensation and being alive.” Aristotle, *Politics*, 1335b.


295 Hittinger summarizes Aristotle’s political philosophy on the belief that “the city and the family are essentially distinct associations, but connected through a natural teleology by which the city completes the family as the perfect society . . . The highest good of the political community embraces the other goods and does not destroy them or absorb them.” Hittinger, 9.

296 Hittinger argues, “Association for reproduction is the most obvious association rooted in nature, a sign of radical lack of self-sufficiency, and sustained by a natural desire or impulse leads to the generation of children of the family.” *Ibid.*, 10.
Unlike Plato, for Aristotle family exists before the polis.\textsuperscript{297} Children serve as relational glue between the father and mother, “But this friendship may be based also on virtue, if the parties are good; for each has its own virtue and they will delight in the fact. And children seem to be a bond of union (which is the reason why childless people part more easily); for children are a good common to both and what is common holds them together.”\textsuperscript{298} Yet this common good is not tied to intrinsic value. Family is a means to and end and the end is the security and longevity of the polis.\textsuperscript{299} Family units are good because they provided a stable environment for producing children who would serve and defend the polis. For Aristotle, the family preceded the polis and for Plato, family was an impractical entity to be dissolved into the society. Utility was the driving factor for both. Both Plato and Aristotle believed that individual rights were not inalienable. Persons existed for the state not vice versa.\textsuperscript{300} On this view, children simply lacked intrinsic value. Children were valued because of what they could provide.

This would be a good place to assess these views against properly basic beliefs on children. As we will see in the last chapter, the question of whether certain sentiments are in fact basic beliefs or vestiges of a Christian understanding is not easily answered. Yet for starters, we may applaud Aristotle’s protection of the family unit against Plato’s communizing even human offspring. As we will see in chapter three, the decay of the family unit has devastating effects on society as a whole. The natural family is the most fundamental unit in society for helping

\textsuperscript{297} Aristotle, \textit{Ethics}, 1162a16-19, \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{298} \textit{Ibid}., 1162a26-28.

\textsuperscript{299} “The superiority and sovereignty of the political regime overshadow the family.” Hittinger, 2.

\textsuperscript{300} “Each held a utilitarian view of the individual, born or unborn, seeing that individual as existing for the state. No rights granted to the individual were absolute. All rights—even the right to life—were subordinate to the welfare of the state (or the family, the religion or the race) and had to be sacrificed if the best interests of the state demanded it . . . this concern at least partially explains the philosophers’ application of their utilitarian and subordinate view of the individual to the newborn or unborn, issuing in admonitions to expose or abort those that might be useless or damaging to the state.” Michael J. Gorman, \textit{Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 22-23.
children properly develop. The Christian theist has a cogent answer for this observational truth: the family is an institution created by God. Aristotle’s numerous correlations of children and slaves to a status less than fully human are morally problematic. To deny that children have intrinsic value because of their inability to process data to the same degree as adults is to open the door for infanticide, a practice that both Plato and Aristotle embraced. Not only does this view raise a number of ethical tensions because of where it leads, it in itself is morally odious. On this point I hope my appeal to the intrinsic value of children finds merit in the reader’s conscience.

Pascal’s commentary in his famous Pensée on Plato and Aristotle is less than complimentary. What is their collective failure? I think it is a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature. But how could Aristotle, whose virtue ethics speak so strongly even in the 21st century world, miss so greatly these basic moral sentiments towards the most vulnerable among us? How could Plato, whose four cardinal virtues (courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom) bear such semblance with the Apostle Paul’s theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, be guilty of endorsing child killing and the essential eradication of the family unit? How could such men known for eschewing vice and lauding virtue err in such a great way regarding children? I believe it was primarily because their worldview lacked the imago dei, the example of the incarnated Messiah (both of which Christian theism models), thus providing limited buffer against human depravity. Worldview may either inhibit or promote immoral practices and behavior.

301 “If they [Plato and Aristotle] wrote about politics it was as if to lay down rules for a madhouse. And if they pretended to treat it as something really important it was because they knew that the madmen they were talking to believed themselves to be kings and emperors. They humored these beliefs in order to calm down their madness with as little harm as possible.” Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112. See Hittinger, 16.
In conclusion, the eminent G. K. Chesterton beautifully illustrates the contrast between the despair of paganism and the hope of Christian theism.

It is said that Paganism is a religion of joy and Christianity of sorrow; it would be just as easy to prove that Paganism is pure sorrow and Christianity pure joy. Such conflicts mean nothing and lead nowhere . . . To the pagan the small things are as sweet as the small brooks breaking out of the mountain; but the broad things are as bitter as the sea. When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates, who are deadly. Nay, the fates are worse than deadly; they are dead.302

Caesar and children

In his classic tragedy, Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare colorfully depicts the assassination of Julius Caesar. An ardent supporter of aristocracy, Shakespeare spoke warmly of Caesar but cast Brutus and Cassius in a disparaging light.303 Far from heroes, they are traitorous anarchists to the might and glory of Rome. To others, Brutus and Cassius were defenders of the Roman Republic built on law rather than whimsical dictatorial decrees. Even if their act was a last ditch effort to save the Roman Republic it was an epic failure. From the tomb of the Roman Republic arose the leviathan of the Roman Empire. Centered on an imperial cult requiring Emperor worship with mantras such as, “Divine Augustus Caesar, son of a god, imperator of land and sea, the benefactor and savior of the whole world,”304 little room is left for rule of law.

302 Chesterton provides this description, “And when rationalists say that the ancient world was more enlightened than the Christian, from their point of view they are right. For when they say “enlightened” they mean darkened with incurable despair. It is profoundly true that the ancient world was more modern than the Christian. The common bond is in the fact that ancients and moderns have both been miserable about existence, about everything, while mediaevals were happy about that at least . . . But if the question turns on the primary pivot of the cosmos, then there was more cosmic contentment in the narrow and bloody streets of Florence than in the theatre of Athens or the open garden of Epicurus. Giotto lived in a gloomier town than Euripides, but he lived in a gayer universe.” G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company: 1946), 294-295. See Hittinger, 17.


America’s Founding Fathers greatly admired and respected the Roman Republic for the honored place it reserved for the rule of law. The Romans disposing of their king in 509 BCE and instituting a republican form of government served as historical precedent for the colonials during the American Revolution. Lord Byron warmly dubbed George Washington the “Cincinnatus of the West” after the famed Roman farmer-general Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus. Washington’s self-control with great power reflected the humble bravery of Cincinnatus who handed control back to the Senate after militarily delivering Rome from the Aequi. Contemporary films such as The Eagle highlight the Romans as the civilizers of the ancient world rather than unblushing militaristic imperialists. Others like Gladiator and Ben Hur illustrate a snippet of the Roman Empire’s disquieting record on human rights. Such is the perennial debate over Rome. Nevertheless, Roman law is the precursor to English common law as Plato’s writings are to Western philosophy. From the Roman alphabet I am using to type this dissertation to the Roman roads that made possible the tactical missionary exploits of the first century church Rome’s influence on the world is undeniable.

This brings us to the narrower topic of the Roman concept of children that we will evaluate by our four criteria. In this section I use “Caesar” as a catchall descriptor for a general Roman view of children before Constantine officially Christianized the Roman Empire. I freely acknowledge the difficulty of addressing such a general topic for a chapter in a dissertation,

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306 “As for the Romans, time has decreed that their most permanent contribution was their law. What can be said of Rome can be said of Justinian. Justinian, like earlier Roman emperors, was a great builder of roads and public buildings. The most splendid of his many churches was the dome-covered Cathedral of St. Sophia. However, history will continue to proclaim his name because he was the Roman Emperor who finally codified the Roman law.” Edward D. Re, “Roman Contribution to the Common Law,” *Fordham Law Review* 29, no. 3 (1961): 494. http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1673&context=flr.
much less a subsection. Even so, we will see familiar threads running through prominent views on children in the Greco-Roman world that connect to the theme of this dissertation.

1) **Intrinsic value**

In this section the reader will notice that the Greco-Roman understanding of children is rather consistent despite a few minor variations. The first salient feature is that children do not have intrinsic value outside bringing the *paterfamilias* honor or service to the Empire. So significant was the power of the *paterfamilias* that it extended over the entire family and was the prevailing hallmark of the family in the Roman world. Sharon Betsworth sees this as the cause for much of the misguided thinking on children in the ancient Roman world. As we will see in the next chapter, Christian theism has much to say on a father’s role. But the Christian paradigm, especially the one specified by the Apostle Paul, is radically different. In the Roman world, virtually everyone except the free adult male was systematically marginalized. Cicero illustrates this concept when he writes, “It is a difficult matter to praise a boy; for praise must then be given to hope, not to achievement.” In other words, children hold potential for value as

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307 Latin for “father of the family.”


309 “In the Mediterranean city of the classical period-republican Rome as well as Greece-the adult male citizen was at the center of activity. Hence those who were not adult male citizens were in various respects “marginal.” Sometimes these groups are discussed by intellectuals who are interested in objectively describing them; but far more frequently they are mentioned, not for their own qualities (positive or negative), but because they symbolize the absence of certain qualities thought to be typical of the adult male citizen. Children frequently appear as one such symbol; others are the old, women, and slaves.” Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 19. In Bakke, 339-352.

310 Cicero, *De Rep.* fragment 285.2 In Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives*, 9. See Cicero, *De Re Publica*, accessed July 12, 2017, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/marcus_tullius_cicero-de_re_publica/1928/pb_LCL213.3.xml. Anthony B. Bradley raises an intriguing prospect, “Moreover, to call someone a ‘boy’ in the Greco-Roman world was perceived as an egregious insult because children were associated with stupidity: *pueritia amentia*. This is a very interesting starting point considering the way in which white
future adults but little or none as children. Famed soldier-philosopher Marcus Aurelius associates children with animals, women, and tyrants. In the last chapter, we will see how Jesus upholds children as the spiritual ideal. Few other comparisons would have been more culturally controversial in the first century Greco-Roman world.

First, advancement of the paterfamilias and Roman imperialism camouflages a hard and fast utilitarianism. Both of these replace the intrinsic value of children. A strong male child carries the potential to bring strength to the family whereas daughters or sickly infants were routinely exposed. Second, childhood does not necessitate personhood. Only after the paterfamilias recognizes a child as a bona fide member of the family was there recognized personhood. If the father chose to reject the child for any reason, it was discarded.

Another indication of utilitarian valuation over intrinsic value is how the Romans viewed the disabled. Children with observable physical or mental defects were wantonly exposed or outright put to death. A number of high-profile American professional athletes now routinely spend time with childhood cancer victims and other special needs children. No such category

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312 “We can tell a lot about a culture’s values by the language it uses. Neither the Greeks or the Romans had a word equivalent to ‘disabled’ but the term that they often use is ‘teras’ (for the Greeks) and ‘monstrum’ (for the Romans). These are the same words they use to describe mythological monsters, such as the Gorgon Medusa. The Latin ‘mutus’ referred to both somebody who couldn’t speak and someone who is stupid. No one could accuse the Roman of being too politically correct, as you can see.” Victoria Brignell, “Ancient world: Smeared in mustard, paraded naked - the curious and often cruel treatment of disabled people in Anci,” New Statesman, April 7, 2008, http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/crips-column/2008/04/disabled-slaves-child-roman.

313 Sharon Betsworth records, “Children with birth defects were often victims of infanticide. Seneca remarks that weak and abnormal children are drowned, while Cicero compares the swiftness of killing the inhabitants of a besieged city to the haste with which one kills a deformed infant.” Seneca, Ira 1.15.2; Cicero, Leg 3.8.19, in Sharon Betsworth, Children in Early Christian Narratives, 10. See Cicero, De Legibus, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/marcus_tullius_cicero-de_legibus/1928/pb_LCL213.293.xml.
existed for such behavior in the Greco-Roman world. Warriors did not mingle with weaklings. Jesus did the opposite and taught his followers to do the same (more on this in chapter four).

2) Protection of physical wellbeing

Brent D. Shaw provides no small amount of pushback to the popular view that the power of the *paterfamilias* extended to killing any member of the family for any reason.\(^\text{314}\) What is clear is that a newborn had to first be accepted by the *paterfamilias* before becoming an actual member of the family.\(^\text{315}\) Routine discarding of infants because they did not receive the *paterfamilias’* approval was an unfortunate but common practice.\(^\text{316}\) Reduced family size due to poverty was an excuse offered to justify exposing one’s children.\(^\text{317}\)

Sociologist Rodney Stark notes the Roman gender inequality as nowhere better evidenced than the lopsided number of infant girls that were exposed.\(^\text{318}\) Until it was phased out in 2015, the best contemporary equivalent was China’s “One Child” policy where many families

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\(^{315}\) “Upon delivery five nonpregnant free women kept guard and inspected the newborn for health or lack thereof. After delivery, an infant was placed at its father’s feet. If he held it up or placed it on his knee, it was fully accepted into the family. If it was not accepted by the father, it was exposed or abandoned.” Elise P. Garrison, “Ancient Greece and Rome,” 55.

\(^{316}\) Ann M. E. Haentjens claims the following about *expositio*, “The more we learn about the Ancient Greek and Roman civilization, the more scholars with different academic backgrounds are convinced of the pagan practice of eliminating unwanted newborn children.” Ann M. E. Haentjens, “Reflections on Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World,” *L’Antiquite Classique* 69, no. 1 (2000): 261.

\(^{317}\) Neil W. Bernstein sees, “financial pressures (actual or perceived) were an important motivating factor for child exposure.” Neil W. Bernstein, “Adoptees and Exposed Children in Roman Declamation: Commodification, Luxury, and the Threat of Violence,” *Classical Philology* 104, no. 3 (July 2009): 344.

\(^{318}\) Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 99. Stark also writes, “The best estimate is that there were 131 males per 100 females in Rome, rising to 140 males per 100 females in the rest of Italy, Asia Minor, and North Africa. In contrast, the growing Christian communities did not have their sex ratios distorted by female infanticide, on top of which they enjoyed an excess of women to men based on the gender difference in conversion.” Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 130.
opted for a son rather than the “liability” of a daughter.\textsuperscript{319}

Absolute power of the \textit{paterfamilias} to accept or reject a newborn child removed safeguards for the child’s very life. Children were at the mercy of the basest human instincts: the father’s naked self-advancement.\textsuperscript{320} Children believed to have the ability to advance the father’s honor had a better chance of survival. Whereas ANE children were sacrificed for the parent’s perceived financial fertility, Roman children were accepted or discarded specifically based on how they affected the \textit{paterfamilias}. Since children were not considered fully human until passing this rite, the Roman philosopher Seneca (4 BCE—65 CE.)\textsuperscript{321} could stoically remark, “Mad dogs we knock on the head; the fierce and savage ox we slay; sickly sheep we put to the knife to keep them from infecting the flock; unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal; Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound.”\textsuperscript{322} Notice the connection drawn between a healthy husbandry and a healthy human population. Seneca’s justification for \textit{expositio} was imperialist utilitarian eugenics at its finest. One would assume a father’s love would insure the protection of his very own offspring but history bears witness to the contrary.

\textsuperscript{319} Donald Engels pushes back against the notion of widespread female infanticide. He contends that female infanticide of even 10 percent would have been highly improbable because of the ensuing effects of depopulation. Engels’ hypothesis seems plausible at first glance but is at odds with the extant Roman sources previously referenced. Donald Engels, “The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World,” \textit{Classical Philology} 75, no. 2 (April 1980): 119-120.

\textsuperscript{320} “The paterfamilias had the right to decide whether to keep newborn babies. After birth, the midwife placed babies on the ground: only if the paterfamilias picked it up was the baby formally accepted into the family. If the decision went the other way, the baby was exposed – deliberately abandoned outside. This usually happened to deformed babies, or when the father did not think that the family could support another child. Babies were exposed in specific places and it was assumed that an abandoned baby would be picked up and taken a slave. See, “The Roman Empire in the First Century: Family Life,” \textit{PBS}, accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/empires/roman/empire/family.html.


Like the Greeks, the Romans did not believe children were fully human. Coupled with hardline Roman militarism, heavy-handedness in childrearing was the norm.\textsuperscript{323} Roman adoption even reflected this pragmatic approach.\textsuperscript{324} While no money exchanged hands, adoption was a socially acceptable method of using one’s children as socio-economic leverage.\textsuperscript{325} Far from their physical wellbeing being guarded, children were sacrificed on the altar of personal advancement and the faux fame of the \textit{paterfamilias}.

3) \textit{Protection of sexual innocence}

Because children were viewed more as commodities than persons, protecting children from sexual exploitation ranked quite low in the economy of ethical values. \textit{Expositio} was deeply rooted in the Roman psyche. Romulus and Remus (Rome’s mythical founders) were exposed as infants, or so the legends say.\textsuperscript{326} If \textit{expositio} was appropriate for their very own renowned originators then practicing the same on their own children was not morally problematic for

\textsuperscript{323} Wiedemann raises a curious point that deserves to be quoted at length here, “Modern scholars agree in expressing their revulsion at the frequency of beating in the ancient world, but they are divided in their attempts to provide an explanation. We may dismiss the view that it was a mark of psychological insecurity, particularly in the supposedly uncertain social world of late antiquity. Rather, socially recognized violence can be seen as an institutionalized symbol of an unequal relationship. It was considered entirely normal for adult Greeks or Romans to beat those whom they could not control through rational discourse, namely children and slaves – slaves, whatever their age, being in a sense children who had not been allowed to grow up.” Wiedemann, 27.

\textsuperscript{324} Neil W. Bernstein writes, “Many of the declamatory texts examined in this paper represent adoption as a practice that risks deforming the normal conventions of thought and behavior that runs contrary to aristocratic ideals of Roman kinship and friendship.” Bernstein, 332.

\textsuperscript{325} “Roman adoption resembles other forms of aristocratic exchange in that the participating families similarly hope to create long-term, affective relationships.” \textit{Ibid.}, 333.

\textsuperscript{326} Savagery follows savagery. After murdering his brother Remus, Romulus later became the first king of Rome. See Thomas A. Martin, \textit{Ancient Rome: From Romulus to Justinian} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 43.
ordinary Romans. Exposed Roman children either died from exposure, animal predators, or were raised by adoptive parents who, more often than not, intended to sell them as slaves or prostitute them in sexual slavery. Not only did the latter category often lead to a traumatic life of child prostitution but also held no safeguards against incest. Once exposed, the parent-child recognition would have been effectively erased. Fathers who visit brothels could literally be having sexual relations with their own children. A number of the early church fathers used this all too real possibility of incest to level yet another criticism against *expositio*.

Contrary to the modern chaste child, Roman society had a robust category for “provocative and eroticized” children. This ideology was extended to female slaves, whether children or adults, whose sexual protection was nonexistent in Roman jurisprudence. A moral

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328 “Even among those who saved the lives of abandoned infants, most were interested in exploitation more than in rescue, and most of the rescued children inconspicuously joined the population of slaves.” W. V. Harris, “Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 3-4.


330 Bakke, 1805.

331 Clement writes, “a father, not recognizing the child he had exiled by exposure, may have frequent relations with a son turned catamite, or with a daughter become a harlot, and the freedom with which license is indulged may lead fathers into becoming husbands [of their children].” Clement of Alexandria, Paed. 3.3.21 (FC 23), in Bakke, 1805. See [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02092.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02092.htm). Justin Martyr warns prostitution, “may possibly be having intercourse with his own child, or relative, or brother.” Justin Martyr, 50.1 Apol. 27. Greek text in E. J. Goodspeed (ET: ANF 1), in Bakke, 1839.

332 Christian Laes argues, “The modern image of the innocent, pure and asexual child is diametrically opposed to the ancient tradition of the experienced, provocative and eroticized boy.” Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 276.

333 “The female slave can lay no claim to chastity or shame, which have no meaning. In the official view she cannot have sensitivity toward chastity. Her honour cannot be violated because it does not exist, though the property rights of her owner over her can be infringed upon for sexual violation, injury or death by another who does not hold such property rights. No legal recognition is granted to the sexual privacy of female slaves.” Carolyn Osiek, “Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, eds. D. L. Balch and C. Osiek (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 257. In Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 96. However, there were bright spots in Roman society for freedom. Daniel
dimension was lacking to adultery as it fit into a social dimension by how it affected the father’s standing in the community. Tatian observes the common Roman practice of collecting a harem of boys. From these data we may conclude the protection of children’s sexual innocence was not a high value in Roman society.

4) Nurturing/Providing for the family unit

Marriage and childbearing do serve utilitarian purposes although Roman marriages reflected this to a greater degree than most contemporary Western ones. High child mortality combined with the frequent wars and epidemics necessitated the urgency of childbearing. Cassius Dio records one of Augustus’s impassioned speeches where he excoriates bachelors and well to do Romans for avoiding the duty of childbearing. His humorous “babies don’t grow on trees” reductio ad absurdum served as a rhetorical whip to flagellate Roman bachelors and

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Darko notes, “The Stoics argued, 'slaves were human beings as everybody else, that they possessed the same natural abilities and rights, and that the true freedom of humanity was independent of social status.’” Daniel K. Darko, No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9, 96.

Michael Kerrigan records, “Dignity was what mattered. As long as adultery didn’t jeopardize the reputation of the house it didn’t count as adultery at all. Slave girls did not count either.” Michael Kerrigan, A Dark History: The Roman Emperors from Julius Caesar to the Fall of Rome (Rochester, Kent: Grange Books Ltd., 2008), 34.

“Pederasty is condemned by the Barbarians, but by the Romans, who endeavor to collect herds of boys like grazing horses, it is honoured with certain privileges.” Tatian, Address to the Greeks 9, 28 (ANF 2:73). In Fortson and Grams, Unchanging Witness, 33.

Kate Cooper notes, “Roman marriage was fundamentally sequential. It served a private purpose, of course, that of producing legitimate heirs to continue the father’s line. But its public purpose, that of producing a new generation of citizens and thus of securing the population against staggering mortality rates for childbirth, disease, and infection, was if anything even more urgent.” Kate Cooper, The Fall of the Roman Household (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), x.

He scolds the unmarried men, “For you see for yourselves how much more numerous you are than the married men, when you ought by this time to have provided us with many children besides, or rather with several times your number. How otherwise can families continue? How can the State be preserved, if we neither marry nor have children? For surely you are not expecting men to spring up from the ground to succeed to your goods and to the public interests, as the myths describe!” Cassius Dio, Roman History: Volume VII, Books 56-60 trans. Earnest Cary (Bury St. Edmunds, United Kingdom: St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd., 2000), 19.
unproductive married men for their dereliction of duty. But his valuation squarely centers on the preservation of the Empire. Family is a means to an end. Family is valuable because it produces products (children) necessary for the health of the Empire. Far from fostering a robust family for the safe and secure maturation of children, nurture of the family unit was exclusively for the father’s advancement within the context of Roman militaristic imperialism. Caesar’s subtle criticism of the Gauls, “Husbands have power of life and death over their wives as well as over their children,” equally applied to Roman culture. The various components of the Roman family existed for the upward mobility of the father and the strength of the empire. Family was a means to an end rather than a valuable entity in and of itself.

Conclusion

A gap between basic moral beliefs and basic moral behavior towards children is evident from ANE paganism to Greco-Roman society. Despite a general Greco-Roman lip service to natural law, there existed no protective theological or objective moral category for the sanctity of children or the family. Therefore, pagan practice towards children was largely predatory and thoroughly pragmatic.

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Chapter 3: Current Trends in Child Treatment

One reason Christianity has failed to exert much influence on the major intellectual institutions of America is that too many Christians hold their beliefs in an uninformed and precarious fashion. Instead of pursuing answers to the toughest questions an unbelieving world can marshal, they attempt to preserve certainty through ignorance and isolation, relying on platitudes rather than arguments. – Douglas Groothuis

It is interesting— and troubling— that we are in an age of human rights par excellence and yet there are forces at work in our world that undermine the ontological claims of human dignity that must ground a robust regime of human rights. – Jean Bethke Elshtain

At this point it may assist the reader to provide a brief overview of what we have covered thus far and how it correlates to the material in this chapter. Chapter one introduced the concept of commonsensical moral sensibilities on children as classified in four specific categories:

1) By virtue of their very existence, children have a high intrinsic value.
2) Children, as intrinsically valuable, should be protected from all forms of adult predations whether abortion, infanticide, physical abuse, or excessive physical demands.
3) Protection of children’s sexual innocence is necessary by eschewing the sexualizing or molestation of children.
4) Protection and nurture of the family unit is vital: since the family unit is the surest protection against sexual and physical harm, the family should be highly valued.

My argument is that these beliefs are basic such that if our deepest moral ideas were allowed to

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339 Groothuis, Christian Apologetics, 26.


341 J. P. Moreland sees morality as involving: (1) the existence of objective value; (2) the nature of the moral law (violation of which produces guilt and shame); (3) the instantiation of morally relevant value properties (unlike entities knowable by scientific means); (4) the intersection of intrinsic value and human persons; (5) knowledge of intrinsic value and the moral law; (6) the nature of moral action (exercises of libertarian freedom in which an enduring self acts teleologically for duty’s sake in such a way that the act is autonomous and not heteronomous in Kant’s sense); and (7) an adequate answer to the question “Why should I be moral?” J. P. Moreland, The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism (London: SCM Press, 2009), 146-156. In Baggett and Walls, Good God, 18-19.
speak we would arrive at these conclusions. To require detailed arguments for why protecting children against adult sexual predators is moral is to signal an ethical problem, for example. Certain things are so integral to our humanity that they should not need arguments such as how we treat and view children which matters for theological, ethical, and pragmatic reasons. Ethical relativists, religious dogmatists, and secularists can unite around the effects of child treatment on society as a whole.

Since this dissertation is from a Christian perspective, and Christians should not remain neutral in matters of morality, I address the Christian moral duty to contend for the truth. Although this is in the realm of academia, the biblical injunction to speak out for the vulnerable and voiceless has significantly influenced the early postulation of this dissertation. Yet this makes it no less academic. To a certain degree, the initial seeds of academic projects trace not to the ivory tower but to an experienced epiphany in the vicissitudes of everyday observational experience.

I then embark on my eclectic apologetic methodology, which may be viewed by some as unconventional. For most apologetic works, it is customary to stay within clearly specified lanes of research. This work is a subtle suggestion that cross-pollinating various streams of research carries distinct advantages. Despite the primary philosophical thrust of this work, the reader will see incorporated gleanings from other disciplines where applicable. The reader should know this is intentional. In my estimation, a philosophical assessment of properly basic moral sensibilities

342 I am fully aware the claim that these notions are basic is by no means universally accepted as Baggett and Walls note, “The way religious convictions historically shaped our understandings of and commitments to basic human rights and the inviolable dignity of men and women is only forgotten to our peril. It should hardly need stressing that, throughout much of the history of the world, categories of intrinsic value and dignity were often seen as far from natural.” God and Cosmos, 117-118. In the next chapter we will touch on Christianity’s influence on how we view other persons and specifically children.

343 See Baggett and Walls’ commentary on Nieman’s explanation of the significance of the Lisbon earthquake and the Holocaust on theology and theodicy. God and Cosmos, 82.
on children that sidesteps the world of flesh and blood provides less than the treatment they
deserve. A substantive study on children should lead us to see them not as merely objects to be
studied but persons to be loved. Proper cognitive philosophical analysis is not divorced from the
affective realm of flesh and blood. As Baggett and Walls reflect, “History is replete with denials
of human rights, which makes this question about the foundations of intrinsic human value no
mere academic question.”344 Ideas have consequences.345 Even so, academic work should resist
substituting a sappy sentimentalism for rigorous investigation. One of the underlying suggestions
weaved throughout this dissertation is how the inverse of properly basic moral sentiments (child
abuse, molestation, infanticide, and the collapse of the family) leads us not to just cognitive
reflection but moral revulsion. Again, we intuitively know that children are not things to be
exploited for adult benefit but precious individuals deserving of our utmost efforts of protection
and nurture. My approach suggests a full portrayal of moral beliefs and behavior towards
children requires more than mere cerebral engagement. For these reasons and because children
cannot be quarantined into just one category, I have blended historical, ethical, philosophical,
thetical, apologetic, and biblical themes (chapter 4) to advance a robust “God and
Cosmos”346 cumulative Christian case for our properly basic beliefs on children.

In chapter two we examined the power of presuppositions in worldview and the morally
troubling practices of several ancient cultures contemporaneous with the biblical authors. We
encountered Plato’s eugenics, Aristotle’s idolizing of the free Greek male and passiveness over
pederasty, along with Roman valuing children for their ability to advance the borders of the

344 Baggett and Walls, God & Cosmos, 117.
345 Sproul, The Consequences of Ideas.
346 “The world, we might say, provides reason to come to terms with morality; but again, God and cosmos
together provide the better explanation of the full range of moral facts in need of explanation, or so we will argue.”
Baggett and Walls, God & Cosmos, 75-76.
Empire or the father’s social standing. All of these hopefully raise moral red flags within the deepest recesses of our minds.

Now we considerably spin the chronological clock forward from the Greco-Roman era to current trends in child treatment. Egoism appears to be the collective descriptor for contemporary treatment of children and thus will be the primary focus of this chapter. First, I will define and distinguish between enlightened and crass egoism; second, differentiate between self-interest and selfishness. Third, I will defend why contemporary Western trends in child treatment can be delimited to crass egoism.

**Enlightened and crass egoism**

Egoism carries more definitions than N. T. Wright has publications. So let me define the sort that I will be critiquing throughout this chapter. Religious language would rank it in the category of idolatry. Crass egoism is the worship of self over the worship of God. Proper obedience to and love for God practically manifests itself in proper love and care for others, especially children and the defenseless. We will flesh this out in further detail in the following chapter.

In a secular index, crass egoism is a sort of relinquishing of one’s moral duties towards others (such as one’s own family and children) for the pursuit of one’s naked, crass, selfish desires. It takes on the form of a predatory or mercenary way of life where moral decency is swamped by lower desires as in Robert Greene’s *The Art of Seduction*: “In a world of disenchantment and baseness, there is limitless seductive power in following the path of the Ideal Lover.”[^347] Basic moral duties of parenting are discarded as life is myopically seen through how any and all decisions affect one’s own self-absorbed cravings. As we will see, current Western

trends in child treatment indicate no small measure of this crass egoism.

Before we go further, it is important to distinguish egoism from self-interest. Care for oneself is an assumed properly basic belief. We will expand upon this idea in the next chapter, but for now we could say that an argument can be made for self-interest even on Christianity, which is widely viewed as the archenemy of all forms of egoism. David Baggett and Jerry Walls give a helpful synopsis of enlightened egoism:

After all, this is a world with creatures like us, creatures who, if we as theists are right, are actually made in the image of God, creatures with the sort of intersubjective moral agreements we have, creatures who derive the satisfactions of morality we do, creatures with the conative, cognitive, and affective capacities of ours, able rationally to apprehend some rather insightful deliverances of enlightened egoism, creatures with the ability for clear moral apprehensions and with the essential properties we have.348

So what are these insightful deliverances of enlightened egoism? They recognize, in the words of John E. Hare, the unattainable “jump to the moon” level of impartiality.349 Hare’s point is that requiring us to never think of ourselves is quite simply too great a gap.350 What captures this insight is the fact that self-interest is a legitimate form of moral motivation. But that’s not egoism yet. Enlightened egoism, as I see it, provides reasons to treat others well, since treating them poorly will hurt ourselves. We can all recognize this to be the case. Again, egoism says self-interest is ultimately all that matters morally. Self-interest alone does not make one an egoist, any more than a judicious concern for the consequences of one’s actions necessarily render one a utilitarian.

We can learn the impact of complimentary kindness and heightened intrapersonal

348 Baggett and Walls, God & Cosmos, 71.
350 They go on to address the implications of trying to close the moral gap without God: “The bottom line is that there is something troubling about efforts to reduce the moral demand. Something about it seems objectionable at a deep intuitive level, but if the moral gap is not to be closed by reducing the moral demand or exaggerating our natural capacities to an unrealistic level, what other options are left for the naturalist?” God & Cosmos, 232.
relationships as well as other moral lessons from egoism. In a mild critique of Kant’s insistence that morality must be “devoid of self-interest,” Baggett and Walls write:

Although we concur that acting on that hope in the sense of assigning considerations of self-interest primacy in egoistic or mercenary fashion is morally impermissible, we retain the conviction that normal healthy human considerations of self-interest are a perfectly legitimate part of moral motivation, a point that Kant obscures, to say the least. Indeed, the very rationality of morality not only allows such motivation, but encourages and fully endorses it.

Such “mercenary morals” fit under the section of crass egoism to which we will come shortly.

Quite possibly the greatest societal contributions of enlightened egoism is the value of self-interest contra the coercion of collectivism. Why mention collectivism? If valuable moral lessons are to be gleaned from the self-interest of enlightened egoism, then Marxism categorically erases them all. Notwithstanding, Marx’s observations about abuses 19th European factory workers endured were telling but his misunderstanding of human nature in turn led to even greater suffering as the 20th century bore out all too well. Up to 100,000,000 deaths lay at the feet of Communist ideology making it the most costly in terms of human collateral in all of history. The connection between atheistic naturalism and Marxist/Communist ideals cannot be ignored as Hahn and Wiker argue, “It is not enough to claim that the cause of these deaths was Marxist ideology and not atheism, because Marxism claimed to be a fulfillment of atheistic principles. If a similar death toll were attributable to Christian ‘ideology,’ it would demand more

351 Ibid.

352 Ibid., 266.

than such a casual explanation and avoidance of blame.” Marx saw any form of economic self-interest that could lead to self-advancement as a societal evil that should be rooted out by the State gaining control of the commanding heights of the economy. Contrary to collectivism, our deep-rooted moral beliefs about the world and ourselves strongly suggest individuals matter and that *homo faber* is far too shallow of a designation for our fellow persons. They are not cogs in the wheel of species-specific propagation for the benefit of the State or powerful interest groups. Collectivism’s fundamental shortcoming is a misunderstanding of human nature. We could say rational self-interest is an antidote for serfdom of the mind, which is the mantra in Ayn Rand's writings, despite her pushing an egoistic approach to its objectionable and problematic limit.

Let me be careful to distinguish selfishness from self-interest, as all forms of egoism require careful analysis of “self-interest” or “welfare” or “well-being.” In a fallen world, uncoerced, free exchanges in both economic and personal realms can help keep human interactions

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354 Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Answering the New Atheism: Dismantling Dawkins’ Case Against God* (Stebenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2008), 96.


358 William J. Miller, *The Meaning of Communism* (Dallas: Silver Burdett Company, 1976), 16. Even left-leaning Bertrand Russell spoke out against collectivism: “The greatest danger in our day comes from the new religions, communism and Nazism. To call these religions may perhaps be objectionable both to their friends and to their enemies, but in fact they have all the characteristics of religions. They advocate a way of life on the basis of irrational dogmas; they have a sacred history, a Messiah, and a priesthood. I do not see what more could be demanded to qualify a doctrine as a religion.” Bertrand Russell, *Understanding History* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 95.

above board. In a fallen world we often do not have the choice between the best and worst idealized social structures, only incremental choices to go from bad to better. Self-interest is a vital ingredient in a free society.\footnote{Harvey S. James Jr. and Farhad Rassekh, “Smith, Friedman, and Self-Interest in Ethical Society,” \textit{Business Ethics Quarterly} 10, no. 3 (July 2000): 659.} Echoing Joseph Butler’s argument, Baggett and Walls opine “a bare but sturdy commitment to egoism would often lead to more humane and empathetic treatment of others, and would do away with much meanness, invective, and animus, too often wrapped with sanctimony.”\footnote{Baggett and Walls, \textit{God & Cosmos}, 119.} Far from C. S. Lewis’s “omnipotent moral busybodies” self-interest can serve as a check and balance against depravity.\footnote{“Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.” C. S. Lewis, \textit{God in the Dock} (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 292.} An authoritative moral law best explains all of this as Baggett and Walls suggest, “Practical reason does not start from the pure maximization of self-interest, and then choose to bring other people into affective ties and finally to value justice for its own sake. Rather, practical reason starts from a recognition of the self and others as under the law, an authoritative moral law.”\footnote{Baggett and Walls, \textit{God & Cosmos}, 234.} Since I write from a Christian perspective, I must add that nothing is more in one’s self-interest than Christianity. There is a profound distinction between rational and healthy pursuit of one’s own welfare, whether temporal or eternal, and a commitment to the mercenary morality of crass egoism. The former requires a complete repudiation of the latter.

Further in this chapter I will critique Ayn Rand’s egoism based on its problematic explanatory power for parental duty. But despite the shortcomings of Rand’s ethics, she does a marvelous job of flaying open the dangers of Marxist collectivism. Her mantra in \textit{Anthem}; “We
are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great we, one, indivisible and forever,” highlights the danger of eradicating the value of the individual.\textsuperscript{364} Rand’s desire to smite socialism with all her literary might is commendable, but I will suggest that she went a bit too far in throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. Again, as helpful as enlightened egoism can be for society it falls short of the robust ethical worldview we need in order to live full and morally satisfied lives. Owing to its inability to ground human dignity and moral standing, beliefs that relate little to mutual benefits and actualized potential, we may level a warranted reservation.\textsuperscript{365}

Mark Linville defines egoism as follows:

Any theory holding that agents have direct duties only to themselves and indirect duties, if there are any duties at all, regarding anyone else…\textit{Do whatever you can happily get away with}. An egoist might pillage and plunder and rifle and loot like a pirate, and, so long as it serves his interests and he is able to sleep nights (and why would he not, since he is acting in accord with the only moral principle he takes to be true?) then he may well be on his way to canonization.\textsuperscript{366}

He subsequently distinguishes between “nasty” and “nice” egoism but even the nice version falls short.\textsuperscript{367} Linville concludes that egoism fails to account for moral standing. For example, egoism can only say rape is wrong because of the damage it causes to the perpetrator, not the victim. It does not acknowledge a duty owed to the victim because to do so abandons the central tenet of egoism.\textsuperscript{368} Linville concludes, “Egoism satisfies the criterion that a theory must countenance the


\textsuperscript{365} Baggett and Walls, \textit{God & Cosmos}, 119-120. “Full moral rationality requires an ontological ground of morality that, among other things, ‘guarantees’ an unbreakable connection between morality and the ultimate self-interest of all rational beings.” 269.


\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{368} \textit{Ibid.}, 420-421.
moral standing of individuals. The trouble is that the only individual who enjoys such standing is the agent. And so we have but to add the clause, in addition to the agent.” He explains, “If “torturing innocents” is “evil” on egoism, it can only be because of some evil that is incurred by the torturer.” Such a view turns our basic moral radar inside out. We intuitively know that we have some level of a moral duty towards others yet, as Linville explains, egoism has no room for these beliefs. Even on enlightened egoism the moral standing of people, including children, is at jeopardy.

Baggett and Walls echo Linville’s critiques commenting on Nielsen’s attempt to civilize egoism:

An enlightened egoist can identify all sorts of reasons to treat people well in order to be treated well himself. But this isn’t to account for the moral standing of others; it is simply, at root, a strategy to be treated well oneself, a far cry from providing a sturdy foundation for intrinsic human dignity and value, from moral standing. Nielsen acknowledges there may be no egoist rationale for respecting others in the case of the powerfully placed egoist who need not fear repercussions for treating people poorly. But this is a costly concession indeed.

The “powerfully placed egoist” is one whose power or position leaves no need for them to “play ball” with fellow persons for mutual benefit. Stretched to its logical end, egoism lacks warrant for the moral standing of individual persons. Baggett and Walls continue, “To treat another human being as merely a means is to ignore the other as a center of agency, which entails that coercion and deception, for obvious reasons, represent rather paradigmatic violations of the principle.” Truly fulfilling one’s duty and loving “one’s neighbor as oneself, as the Bible enjoins, is not to conjure artificial warm sentiments toward them, but to recognize their intrinsic

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369 Ibid., 421.

370 Ibid., 442.

371 Baggett and Walls, God & Cosmos, 119.

372 Ibid., 283.
worth and dignity and honor that obtain irrespective of whether or not there is reciprocation."

Linville offers the following description:

The conjunction of a love for God and neighbor is no coincidence, as the rationale for loving one’s neighbor—humanity in general—is grounded in the very reasons for loving God with the entirety of one’s being. And this is because the value of persons is, in turn, grounded in the personhood of God. Persons qua persons are created in the image of God in that God himself is a person. On a Judeo-Christian worldview, human personal dignity, though intrinsic, is derivative. The value of human persons is found in the fact that, as bearers of the imago dei, they bear a significant resemblance to God in their very personhood. God and human persons share an overlap of kind membership in personhood itself, and human dignity is found precisely in membership in that kind.

Although the subsequent section will focus on crass egoism, Linville, Baggett, and Walls help us see the weaknesses inherent in all forms of egoism. The ethos of “Do whatever you can happily get away with” requires our sense of humanity to pay far too high a price.

From here on crass egoism is more in my cross hairs, but egoism per se, as a consequentialist theory, invariably falls prey to the failure to carve out room for intrinsic human value. Even utilitarianism does, the more decent of the two consequence-based theories—recall Bentham’s notion of inalienable rights as “nonsense on stilts.” The crass version which carries the following characteristics: a worldview driven by one’s lower or whimsical desires at the expense of one’s basic moral sensibilities of parental duty and protecting the vulnerable, namely children. It is a way of life unshackled from decency and recognition of persons as intrinsically valuable. Internally, the crass or unshackled egoist is imprisoned by her fluctuating desires. Self-indulgence takes precedence over self-mastery. Externally, such a worldview wreaks havoc especially on children. As I will seek to show, current Western trends in child treatment indicate

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373 Ibid., 285.
no small measure of this crass egoism. Henceforth, my references to egoism are delimited to this genus.

So why address crass egoism? I suggest it serves as an equal opportunity temptation for all persons whether secular or religious. No matter the worldview or religion one claims to believe the temptation towards practical egoism seems to be internally present more than most of us would care to admit. Christianity has an excellent answer for why vice comes easier than virtue: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Though I believe Christian theism furnishes a strong account for parental duty, intrinsic value of children, and the like, I will wait to address it in the next chapter. Christians sometimes behave little different from unbelievers such as in the Apostle Peter’s denial of Jesus in order to save his own skin (Lk. 22:54-62). Ardent Muslims, Hindu devotees, serious Buddhists, and moralistic secularists, of whom there are many, may find themselves performing far below the lofty standards to which they claim allegiance. Because egoism is common to humanity leaving no one untouched by its pull, I believe it will serve as a helpful philosophical hub from which to analyze behaviors that contest or confirm basic moral sensibilities on children. On a Christian account, it’s arguable that egoism—understood in terms of one’s deepest core commitment as a devoted privileging of oneself—is intimately related to the sinful condition into which we’ve been born, and thus the default position of us all when we resist the light of general and special revelation and God’s transformative work.

We will see trends that, despite popular rhetoric, signify how children are coming to be viewed with decreasing value and how the vital task of parenting fares when put through the filter of crass egoism that exalts self on the altar of self-absorption at the expense of all else. Children’s basic needs are at risk of being overlooked when this deficient “ethic” assumes
primacy for adults. Our foundational moral beliefs point to higher ideals than personal gratification. Virtues such as honesty, loyalty, generosity, patience, and compassion require no small amount of sacrifice. Respecting all children as intrinsically valuable, and guarding the family unit often requires going against the grain of our lower desires. The trends we will observe suggest that egoism inhibits following basic moral sensibilities on children.

Chronological conditioning is also a pivotal historical consideration in providing an adequate contemporary treatment of egoism and parenting. Alasdair MacIntyre chronicles a cultural contrast between the heroic age and contemporary Western culture:

The self of the heroic age lacks precisely that characteristic which we have already seen that some modern moral philosophers take to be an essential characteristic of human selfhood: the capacity to detach oneself from any particular standpoint or point of view from the outside. In heroic society there is no “outside” except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear.376

MacIntyre’s observation reveals how the communal nature of most traditional cultures clashes with the self-absorption prominent in current Western culture. Either way, neither the value of community in ancient heroic culture nor the moral merit placed on the self in the contemporary West377 seems satisfactory to explain our moral beliefs about children. Yet egoism has already seeped into much of popular culture and very well could become the privileged default ethical option where adult “happiness” takes primacy over children’s welfare.378


377 Although a popular-level article, the observation of Paul Piff and Dacher Keltner is illustrative on this point where they note the “broad societal shift that has been widely observed over the past 50 years: People have become more individualistic, more self-focused, more materialistic and less connected to others.” Paul Piff and Dacher Keltner, “Why Do We Experience Awe?” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2015, accessed April 21, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/opinion/sunday/why-do-we-experience-awe.html?_r=0.

378 Prospects for battling egoism almost seem an absurdity in the contemporary West for two reasons. First, life is largely viewed through the lenses of personal gratification via an operating principle based on a warped understanding of the pursuit of happiness. Second, the rise of divorce and the subsequent fracturing of the family have contributed to a colossal shattering of cultural identity and the family unit upon which persons find their most basic identity. Fashioned into the mold of egoism supplemented by a steady diet of consumerism, the average
Societal effects of crass egoism

Contemporary trends on child treatment point to an increasing tide of egoism. Self-sacrificial parenting for the sake of one’s children is replaced by self-absorption exquisitely depicted in Toby Keith’s hit song, *I Wanna Talk About Me*. Instead of focusing on what a full-fledge departure from Christian parenting principles looks like, I wish to emphasize that to the extent there’s a departure children will suffer.

What *does* it look like? “Horizontal” parenting emphasizes only earthly things in contrast with the “vertical” parenting trajectory that takes into account the things of God. Horizontal parenting does not regard heaven or God’s glory in light of eternity as either true or relevant to everyday life and thus they do not play a part in the goals of family life. It is one question to ask why loving parenting produces more secure and stable children thus benefitting society. It is quite another to ask why such parenting is a morally praiseworthy or obligatory. Our focus is on the consistent application of egoism on children rather than those who may at certain times rise above their own worldview. The popular sentiment, “There’s nothing more important than children” rings hollow on egoism.

Devalues children: Parental duty

I will argue that egoism’s lack of explanatory scope of parental duty leads to devaluing children. How would egoism have an adverse effect on child raising? Unlike Christian theism, which grants intrinsic value to every child, egoism tends to spiral down into a subjective, pragmatic Westerner is well versed with the promises and disappointments of personal and collective attempts to achieve happiness at the expense of human relationships.
moral calculus on children that elevates the benefit of adults over children. As we have seen in our historical survey, children have routinely been mistreated for the benefit of adults.

Case in point is Ayn Rand’s notorious struggle to make a case for parental *duty* per her John Galt: 379

Happiness is the successful state of life; pain is an agent of death. Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one’s values. A morality that dares to tell you to find happiness in the renunciation of your happiness—to value the failure of your values—is an insolent negation of morality. A doctrine that gives you, as an ideal, the role of a sacrificial animal seeking slaughter on the altars of others, is giving you *death* as your standard...The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live. 380

Several years later Rand crystallized this sentiment into possibly her most famous claim; “Accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only *moral* purpose of your life, and that *happiness*—not pain or mindless self-indulgence—is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.” 381 For Rand, coercion was the ultimate evil. Her first-hand experience of Soviet collectivism likely was a major contributing factor to her ethical value structure.

At first glance this sounds like rocket fuel for liberty lovers but, when examined a bit closer, shows several noticeable gaps. First, championing personal happiness as the moral purpose for one’s life may sound noble but it is fundamentally arbitrary. Her statement embodies a ruggedly assertive perspective about moral demands without a reasoned foundation for

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379 Although Rand is not a technical academician per se, her burgeoning popularized influence is pertinent to this discussion because it shows the extent to which both an underlying egoism and moralism have been weaved into current Western culture.


381 Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Random House, 1961), 179. Her John Galt continues, “But neither life nor happiness can be achieved by the pursuit of irrational whims. Just as man is free to attempt to survive in any random manner, but will perish unless he lives as his nature requires, so he is free to seek his happiness in any mindless fraud, but the torture of frustration is all he will find, unless he seeks the happiness proper to man.” 123.
morality. Rand would be forced to answer Arthur Allen Leff’s “Sez who?” with “Me.”\textsuperscript{382} Who is Rand (or anyone for that matter) to pontificate so authoritatively on matters of purpose? Whether Epicurean, Randesque, or fulfilled neurotic appetites, happiness may be largely comprised of subjective, whimsical fluctuations. Rand’s moralistic dogmatism is paralyzed unless one is willing to adopt the Nietzschean ethics\textsuperscript{383} expressed in Eric Hoffer’s striking statement that the “quality of ideas seems to play a minor role in mass movement leadership. What counts is the arrogant gesture, the complete disregard of the opinion of others, the single-handed defiance of the world.”\textsuperscript{384} Ironically, it was precisely this sort of arrogant totalitarianism exemplified by the Soviet Union that Rand reacted so strongly against.

Second, when applied to parental duty, Rand’s position carries troubling implications for children. We may pose the following challenges: Since child raising is physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially challenging, then would abandonment not be ethically permissible? Being awakened at 3 a.m. by infantile shrieks, finding Cheerios in seemingly inaccessible places, or changing Chernobyl-esque diapers are unlikely roadmaps to happiness for most persons. One could counter with an argument for delayed gratification but that falters if the child grows up to lead a life of crime and brings shame, financial disaster, and even physical harm or death to the parent. Arguing for parental duty based on the delayed gratification of the child’s future success is more of a shot in the dark than a serious philosophical argument.


\textsuperscript{383} Nietzsche argues for “a reversal of values for a certain strong kind of man of the highest spirituality and strength of will and to this end slowly and cautiously to unfetter a host of instincts now kept in check . . . I write for a species of man that does not yet exist: for the ‘masters of the earth.’ Religions, as consolations and relaxations, dangerous: man believes he has a right to take his ease. In Plato’s Theages it is written: ‘Each one of us would like to be master over all men, if possible, and best of all God.’ This attitude must exist again.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Walter Kaufmann, eds. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1967), 503.

Her comments on “A morality that dares to tell you to find happiness in the renunciation of your happiness” are likely aimed at Christian theism. Rand adamantly stresses the moral necessity of rejecting any ethical structure that impinges upon one’s happiness. Rand’s egoism carries a sampling of utilitarian ideals: the privation of pain and the promotion of happiness, only delimited to the individual level. Rand advocates an egoistic version of happiness more akin with rational hedonism than collectivist utilitarianism. However, her interpretation is grounded upon the privation of pain and the flourishing of human happiness. I dare say properly basic parental duty demands sacrifice for one’s children rather than the reverse.

In summary, egoism devalues human life because parents lack a transcendent model beyond their own self-absorption on which their children have intrinsic worth. On this view children lack *intrinsic* value and parental duty is subjective. In the following section we will examine egoism’s detrimental effect on the family.

**Decay of the family**

We see family decay most clearly evidenced by several crises: (1) Divorce and single parent homes; (2) Absent fathers and emotionally neglected children: Rising instances of neglect of children allowed to be born; (3) Breakdown of the family unit and doubt in children; (4) increase of virtual communication to the demise of familial harmony and community; and (5) widespread acceptance of abortion.

Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop write, “Cultures can be judged in many ways, but eventually every nation in every age must be judged by this test: *How did it treat people?*” If children are any nation’s most vulnerable then treatment of its children is a realistic evaluation of

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that culture’s values. Both religious and secular persons can agree on the dangers of decaying societal integrity. Shifting social mores signal a shifting cultural anthropology as noted by Millard J. Erickson:

Our approach to the problems of society will also be governed by our view of sin. On the other hand, if we feel that humanity is basically good, or at worst, morally neutral, we will view the problems of society as stemming from an unwholesome environment. Alter the environment, and changes in individual humans and their behavior will follow. If, on the other hand, the problems of society are rooted in radically perverted human minds and wills, then the nature of those individuals will have to be altered, or they will continue to affect the whole.  

By and large, the first view has become the cultural narrative to explain the source of societal problems. On the surface, there seems to be an increasing emphasis placed on the inherent value of children. On digging deeper, there also appears to be a deep undercurrent leading the Western world back to its pre-Christian roots. While abortion, infanticide, and pedophilia have always been present in Western culture there has been a concentrated push towards rationally and legally excusing these socially destructive behaviors since the 1960s. One could say the latter 20th and 21st century Western ethos towards children is once a child has been born (they’re fair game before that) it is morally obligatory on society to both protect and provide for them. Even here, though, as we’ll see, society is falling woefully short. In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that a parenthood crisis is reflective of a worldview predicament upon which humans are exponentially devalued as evidenced by exchanging child welfare for adult happiness.

Divorce and single-parent homes

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386 Erickson, Christian Theology, 581.
The economic impact of divorce is tremendous: over $112 billion annually in the U.S.\textsuperscript{387} As divorce is emotionally devastating for children, its negative effects are well known. Regarding single parent homes, Morse reminds us that there is “literally no such thing as a ‘single parent’” because some third party helps fill the gaps left by an absent father and husband.\textsuperscript{388} Often this comes through government assistance via additional taxes on goods and services.

In his book, \textit{The Children of Divorce}, Andrew Root argues against the prevailing cultural narrative that children are resilient and quickly bounce back from divorce so long as the parents remain loving. “Divorce leaves an indelible mark on children, and such a mark that it strikes those who experience it (myself included) at an ontological level.”\textsuperscript{389} Children experience the walls of their security receding at the behest of adult quest for personal gratification.\textsuperscript{390} This drive for radical individualized pleasure at the expense of all else is indicative of a value system that eschews anything perceived to be a threat to this end. The tension is that “restrictions” like heterosexual monogamy and sacrificial parental love are the very things that protect children.\textsuperscript{391}


\textsuperscript{388}“The third party may be her biological family, but more often the third party is an impersonal institution. The person who appears to be raising a child all by herself has substituted for the other parent some combination of market-provided child care, employment income, and government assistance.” Morse, \textit{Love & Economics}, 89.

\textsuperscript{389}Andrew Root, \textit{The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), ix.

\textsuperscript{390}Roosh V’s “neo-masculinity” is a new packaging of an old egoistic calculus where he argues, “A woman’s value significantly depends on her fertility and beauty. A man’s value significantly depends on his resources, intellect, and character.” “About Roosh V,” \textit{Roosh V}, accessed May 3, 2017, \url{http://www.rooshv.com/bio}.

\textsuperscript{391}Aaron Earls laments, “Today, affairs are glamorized. Divorce is normalized. And the enjoyment of sex is rooted purely in temporary pleasure, not deeply committed joy. Very rarely do you see monogamy celebrated or even acknowledged as a worthwhile option. So why are we so surprised thousands of men, married or not, sought to find the ever elusive pleasure derived from casual sex?” Aaron Earls, “Jared Fogle, Ashley Madison, Planned Parenthood, and Our Men Without Chests,” \textit{The Wardrobe Door}, August 20, 2015, accessed May 3, 2017, \url{http://thewardrobedoor.com/2015/08/jared-fogle-ashley-madison-planned-parenthood-and-our-men-without-chests.html}.
Marriage on egoism is a dressed up form of survival of the fittest. The individual is left to her own subjective reasoning bereft of transcendent guidance. If history shows anything it is the ingenious ability of humans to justify virtually any action so long as they are the ones who benefit. The social cost of the egoistic family is high. Even though over three quarters of the U.S. population claims belief in God there is evidence that even professing Christians have been influenced by egoism.392

As David Bentley Hart laments the declining intellectual culture, “We live in an age of idle chatter. Lay the blame where you will: the internet, 940 television channels, social media, the ubiquity of high-fructose corn syrup, whatever you like. Almost all public discourse is now instantaneous, fluently aimless, deeply uninformed, and immune to logical rigor.”393 To use Vanhoozer’s words, the naturalistic/quasi-postmodern sitz em leben experiences a perennial wrestling match with “an anxiety of truthlessness.”394

Absent fathers and emotionally neglected children: Rising instances of neglect of children allowed to be born

In their study on the importance of fathers for the healthy development of children for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox note the correlation between fathers and child development including cognitive ability,


educational achievement, psychological well being, and social behavior. Their assessment is worth quoting at length here:

One of the most important influences a father can have on his child is indirect—fathers influence their children in large part through the quality of their relationship with the mother of their children. A father who has a good relationship with the mother of their children is more likely to be involved and to spend time with their children and to have children who are psychologically and emotionally healthier. Similarly, a mother who feels affirmed by her children’s father and who enjoys the benefits of a happy relationship is more likely to be a better mother. Indeed, the quality of the relationship affects the parenting behavior of both parents. They are more responsive, affectionate, and confident with their infants; more self-controlled in dealing with defiant toddlers; and better confidants for teenagers seeking advice and emotional support.

Here we have a practical illustration of a theological truth. A telling indicator of moral decline is absent fathers. Abandoning one’s children is an abdication on the responsibility of manhood. No greater responsibility exists than to provide for the basic needs of one’s children. A recent documentary The Mask You Live In warns against “toxic masculinity” in a not so covert war against manhood itself. How little time fathers spend with their children is a worldview indicator and can be explained on a self-absorbed, egoistic outlook. One devotes time to what one values. If fathers valued spending time with their children then they would take the necessary measures to ensure regular interaction. Children are left without protection from themselves and the fickleness and shortsightedness of childhood. Practical orphan-hood is the result. Fathers are faced with whether or not they believe in the intrinsic value of their children.

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396 Ibid.

397 The Apostle Paul levels a dire pronouncement on men who do not provide for their own (1 Tim. 5:8).

Physically or emotionally absent fathers can cause children to experience excessive separation anxiety and also leaves them with a toxic association to a father figure or without one altogether. This can, among other things, even make belief in a loving God more difficult for many of them. According to the National Center for Fathering, over 20 million American children live in a fatherless home.\footnote{399} Children raised in fatherless homes are subject to the following: forty-four times more likely to be under the poverty line, 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances (71\% of all adolescent substance abusers come from a fatherless home), two times more likely to commit suicide (80\% of adolescents in psychiatric hospitals and 70\% of teen pregnancies come from fatherless homes), and twenty times more likely to be incarcerated.\footnote{400} According to the National Institute of Mental Health, over 20 percent (or 1 in 5) children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental disorder.\footnote{401} From 2003-2011 there was a 42\% increase in ADHD diagnoses among children.\footnote{402} Quite possibly the most disturbing is the admissions to children’s hospitals for suicidal thoughts or actions doubled in the past decade.\footnote{403} I contend this, in large part, flows from a dysfunctional home life that gnaws away at the emotional security necessary for childhood psychological health.


\footnote{400} Ibid.


High divorce rates, absent fathers, and breakdown of the family unit have a cumulative potential to create distrust within children of not only their parents but of authority figures in general. Such suspicion, unless counteracted by trustworthy relationships, can calcify into one’s adulthood evidenced by a nihilistic misanthropy; persons are to be treated with suspicion and skepticism. Since persons cannot be trusted, healthy relationships become practically unachievable. Sartre’s character, Garcin, captures this sentiment well in the play No Exit, where he exclaims, “Hell is—other people!” Such cynical presuppositions render healthy familial and communal dynamics nearly impossible. Contrary to divorce being a mark of shame as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Scarlet Letter, George Barna reports:

There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage . . . Interviews with young adults suggest that they want their initial marriage to last, but are not particularly optimistic about that possibility. There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life.

Such a view of marriage and divorce leads to anything but security for children as to the parents’ commitment to the survival and prosperity of the family unit. When a child doubts whether the relationship between her father and mother is grounded upon an unwavering commitment to one another, the propensity for a variety of anxieties and emotional disorders increases exponentially.

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Likewise, many children from home environments where affirmation and love are scarce or absent altogether have a lingering sense of inferiority added together with a hesitancy to exercise properly basic trust in others. Instead of healthy social skills they may exhibit a crippling degree of social awkwardness. Strong friendships and normative human interaction become even more labored for children who become misanthropically jaded. Thoughts such as, “What if I had been a better son/daughter? Would Mom and Dad have stayed together? What if my step-Dad, whom I have grown to love, one day leaves like my biological father?” have tormented countless persons ravaged by family splits. For “natural doubters” who find themselves plagued by nagging thoughts of “what if?” constant reassurance from other persons who act as a “surrogate frontal lobe” is of great assistance. At the very least, such experiences, while not necessarily determining an entrenched hatred of father figures or a reticence of filial trust, doubtless forge a proclivity towards skepticism and doubt. When asked the percentage of students enrolled in her alternative school due to issues arising from a broken home life, the director replied, “100%.”

Persons with a background of deficient fatherhood may project the same fractured view onto God. Although they may cognitively consider God as the rightful ruler, to view Him as “father” is, at best, confusing and at worst, morally repugnant. On the other hand, as we will see in the next chapter, Christian theism provides a strong family model that systemically contributes to child welfare. Despite the challenges of one’s upbringing, Christian theism offers hope for children born into the direst situations. The biblical narrative is pregnant with redemptive accounts of orphans, children raised in abusive situations, and family or societal outcasts. We see


in the Bible that God uses messy people with messy pasts. Children raised in undesirable circumstances should not feel determined to a bad life because there is redemption in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Increase of virtual communication to the demise of familial harmony and community*

Isolation routinely follows family breakup. A multiplicity of technological advances provides unparalleled opportunity for greater connection but often leads to depression and the loss of familial harmony and community. Epitomized by Brad Paisley’s song, “I’m So Much Cooler Online,” there is a growing awareness in popular culture of a bifurcation between who one truly is and one’s online perception.  408 While social networking has allowed for persons to reconnect, the association may still only stay in the virtual world. It goes without saying that not every Facebook “friend” or Instagram follower necessarily qualifies as a genuine relationship.

Research documents a high level of online social networking usage among college students. The University of New Hampshire’s Whittemore School of Business & Economics conducted a study tracking the correlation of the use of social networking and grades among college students. 409 An overwhelming 89% of the students surveyed use social media for “social reasons” and 96% claim that they use Facebook. 410 Yet with the ever-expanding technological

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avenues to bring people together data suggests that we may be growing further apart.411

Cacioppo and Patrick document this epidemic of loneliness:

When people are asked what pleasures contribute most to happiness, the overwhelming majority rate love, intimacy, and social affiliation above wealth or fame, even above physical health. Given the importance of social connection to our species, then, it is all the more troubling that, at any given time, roughly twenty percent of individuals—that would be sixty million people in the U.S. alone—feel sufficiently isolated for it to be a major source of unhappiness in their lives.412

Although the replacement of true friendships with virtual acquaintances has exacerbated many persons’ sense of loneliness, the state of loneliness is nothing new. Sartre’s existentialism predates social networking but expressed well the deeper stages of isolation:

We are isolated from others, from past and future, from meaning and value. We can count on nobody but ourselves, because we alone, abandoned on the earth, and without help. Life is absurd and love is impossible. So, we are condemned to futility in an impersonal world and in a universe with neither heart nor meaning.413

Sartre’s pessimism bleeds through on even the most sympathetic read, as the despair seems to map the lonely soul. Absence of genuine friendships in a virtual world boasting of incessant media of happy people with picture perfect lives, family breakdown, and the accompanying emotional drain, one can see the existential danger of loneliness and isolation. As Alfred Noyes’s urban poem goes, “They are crammed and jammed in buses and—they’re each of them alone.”414

Loneliness is not conquered by incessant activity, recreation, or entertainment. It is overcome by

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a robust family life and genuine relationships. As we will see in the next chapter, Christian theism gives a strong prescriptive and descriptive case for the family and friendships.

Acceptance of abortion

My position is that societal acceptance of abortion is antithetical to our basic moral knowledge. There is no shortage of substantive critiques of abortion so my treatment here will be largely a worldview excursus on the implications of abortion: What does it say about a culture’s beliefs on children? What worldview indicators can be extracted from a tolerance or advocacy of abortion?

A nation’s economic policy and financial choices reflect both their theology and anthropology. As Os Guinness puts it, “There is always a moment in the story of great powers when their own citizens become their own worst enemies—not so much in the form of homegrown terrorism as in the form of the citizenry thinking and living at odds with what it takes for the nation to thrive.” In democracies and democratic republics, public abortion funding indicates a majority cultural commitment to allocate a certain amount of its resources to the destruction of its own citizens. At the very least it signals a devaluation of children. Fairly recent acceptance of abortion in the West as a staple of contemporary society is a monumental shift from the Judeo-Christian belief that unborn humans are in fact persons. Nevertheless, data suggests a rise in percentage of Americans who consider themselves pro-life.

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415 Guinness, A Free People’s Suicide, 13.

416 Craig Mitchell states, “You cannot separate economics from ethics.” (CNETH 4373, Ethics and Public Policy, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, January 2007).

417 “The 41 percent of Americans who now identify themselves as ‘pro-choice’ is down from 47 percent last July and is one percentage point below the previous record low in Gallup trends, recorded in May 2009. Fifty percent now call themselves ‘pro-life,’ one point shy of the record high.” Ashley McGuire, “Why Americans are becoming more pro-life,” May 24, 2012, accessed May 7, 2017,
I am suggesting that legalized abortion on demand is a sign of a society in conflict with proper moral sensibilities and fundamental self-preservation. Whether ancient Carthage or contemporary Italy, a population that does not value children, even for the purpose of utilitarian conquest, will necessarily give way to a culture that does. The plummeting birthrates of Western Europe may be indicative of this sort of cultural decline and loosening of moorings from a Christian memory that values children.\textsuperscript{418}

As in the ancient world, unborn females and the physically challenged have the most to lose in an abortion culture. Steve Connor reports that gender selection may account for a global shortfall of up to 200 million girls since 1990.\textsuperscript{419} An abortion culture is a practical war on women and the weak. Plato would give a standing ovation for eugenics-esque selective genetic testing.


\textsuperscript{419} Steve Connor, “The Lost Girls: It Seems That The Global War on Girls Has Arrived In Britain,” \textit{The Independent}, January 14, 2014, accessed June 28, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/the-lost-girls-it-seems-that-the-global-war-on-girls-has-arrived-in-britain-9059610.html. Connor notes, “In parts of India, notably the relatively affluent north-west states of Punjab and Haryana, the sex ratio of certain age groups is now about 1.2 or above - meaning there are 120 boys for every 100 girls. While in some parts of China, especially those where the Han Chinese form the main ethnic group, sex ratios among children have reached as high as 1.4 or even 1.5 - one-and-a half times as many boys as girls. In both these regions of the world, the vilification of girls is deeply engrained within some elements of the population. A Punjabi proverb, for instance, likens raising a daughter to watering your neighbor’s garden, while an old Chinese saying states that it is better to have one crippled son than eight healthy daughters.”
that allows parents to deliberately weed out unborn Down Syndrome children.\textsuperscript{420} All Canaanite, Greco-Roman, and contemporary pragmatic rationalizations aside, the selective termination of females and special needs persons should grate against our essential moral sensibilities. In the haunting words of Kevin DeYoung, “Where in the progression does our humanity begin and end? Where does life become valuable? When are we worth something? When do human rights become our rights? What if Dr. Seuss was right and a person's a person no matter how small? Why celebrate the right to kill what you once were? Why deny the rights of the little one who is what you are?”\textsuperscript{421}

The slippery slope from abortion to outright infanticide is well documented as in the abstract of a British \textit{Journal of Medical Ethics} article:

Abortion is largely accepted even for reasons that do not have anything to do with the fetus’s health. By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call ‘after-birth abortion’ (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.\textsuperscript{422}

David Boonin is more honest than many in the pro-abortion movement when he chillingly writes of his son in the foreword of his \textit{A Defense of Abortion}:

\begin{quote}
In the top drawer of my desk, I keep [a picture of my son]. This picture was taken on
\end{quote}


September 7, 1993, 24 weeks before he was born. The sonogram image is murky, but it reveals clear enough a small head tilted back slightly, and an arm raised up and bent, with the hand pointing back toward the face and the thumb extended out toward the mouth. There is no doubt in my mind that this picture, too, shows [my son] at a very early stage in his physical development. And there is no question that the position I defend in this book entails that it would have been morally permissible to end his life at this point.423

To talk so calmly, yet cold-bloodedly, of executing one’s own infant is unnerving.

Quite possibly the strongest argument made in favor of abortion is from rape or incest. Yet even MIT professor Judith Jarvis Thomson, arguably one of the most influential pro-abortion philosophers in recent American history, argues, “Surely the question of whether you have a right to life at all, or how much of it you have, shouldn’t turn on the question of whether or not you are the product of rape.”424 In cases of abortion to save the life of the mother, Thomson acknowledges the Good Samaritan (or Minimally Decent Samaritan) argument: “Perhaps he (Jesus) was urging people to do more than is morally required of them.”425 For Thomson, the unborn child’s right to life should not depend on the whims of others. Instead, she claims the morally praiseworthy act is giving birth to an unborn child conceived in rape or incest but that the law should not require such self-sacrifice. That life begins at conception is as accepted in the scientific community as the claim that the earth is not flat.426 If life and personhood are two separate events then the question of when an unborn child has basic human rights requires herculean ethical gymnastics.

Moreover, data suggests abortions from rape or incest account for a mere 1% of all U.S.


424 Judith Jarvis Thomson, “In Defense of Abortion,” Philosophy & Public Affairs 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971), 5. To punish the child for the crime of the father is morally problematic.


abortions. So the argument on these grounds is far more a paper tiger than a widespread health epidemic. Pro-abortion arguments are largely emotional in nature, divorced from scientific data and our most treasured moral beliefs that human life is intrinsically valuable and worth protecting.

By and large, the acceptance of abortion is a worldview, rather than a scientific issue. The data seems to suggest the vast majority of abortions are not for health reasons but personal convenience. Abortion on demand is quite possibly one of the greatest cultural indicators of crass egoism. I submit this is a focal reason why abortion has remained at the forefront of ethical and political debates for the past 40+ years. Here we find a plausible parallel between the ancient practice of child sacrifice and contemporary abortion culture: both sacrifice children for the benefit of adults. Handicapped or inconveniently timed children are not needed so they are not wanted. Even so, in ancient pagan human sacrifice there was still a reverence for spilling blood whereas contemporary aborted children are discarded or sold for research. Such


428 “Historically, the greatest evils in the world have occurred when those in power have made their own interests supreme at the expense of other human lives, and then dehumanized said human beings to justify their actions.” Addison Merryman, “Abortion in Worldview,” The Chronicle, March 24, 2016, accessed May 16, 2017, http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2016/03/worldview-in-abortion.


431 One example is from the Mayan’s lack of distinction between human and non-human animal life: “Any form of death was defilement. The greater social uncleanness came from the shedding of blood. The Maya had even to atone for the killing of an animal. That is why he hung up something of the animal and usually pierced his own tongue and/or penis and spread a few drops of his own blood over the recently killed animal. Killing an animal
measures are not customary for modern day Westerners but one can observe the visible emotional turmoil expressed by certain animal rights activists over animal mistreatment. Compared to the silence from many of the same groups over abortion, the so-called "respect for all life" rallying cry becomes radically inconsistent.\textsuperscript{433}

Egoism offers a precedent for practical eugenics as far as the weak and helpless is concerned.\textsuperscript{434} Consistently claiming to be an advocate for children while simultaneously supporting abortion on demand is contradictory. The ontology of abortion categorizes unborn children not as persons but as excess biological matter so the claim must be qualified: "Children who are allowed to be born have intrinsic value." However, egoism can’t make sense of the category of intrinsic human value so the egoist is unable to affirm the intrinsic value of born or unborn children.

In the words of the great Austrian economist F. A. Hayek, "I doubt whether it is possible to overestimate the influence which ideas have in the long run."\textsuperscript{435} Public policy inhibits or promotes human suffering. Take for example the economic policies of the Soviet Union, which


\textsuperscript{434} Michael S. James, “1900 Predictions of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century,” \textit{ABC News}, December 31, 2000, accessed May 16, 2017, \url{http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=89969}. Carolus Duran, a French artist with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch muses in an eerie, pre-WWII eugenics-laced absorption, “The majority of people will go from ‘hideously malconformed’ to beautiful … Already the present adult generation is, as a whole, more handsome than the one that proceeded it; and again, the children of today are a far more comely lot than those of thirty years ago. Another hundred years and no imperfect being will be allowed to reproduce itself and inflict upon society a spreading perpetuation of his taints.”


Cavalier acceptance of abortion within Christian circles indicates an enormous post-Christian shift. It is unlikely it has not affected how we raise children. For those strongly in favor of abortion on demand G. K. Chesterton’s warning is fitting: “It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong.”\footnote{G. K. Chesterton, “The Catholic Church and Conversion,” The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton, Vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 70.}

\textit{Rise in anti-human rhetoric: The argument from speciation}

Because there is no principled reason to insist that egoism by its nature can’t sustain the category of intrinsic human value, one of the practical implications is anti-human rhetoric. Here’s how it plays out: Since billions of humans inhabit the planet, and they are just one of many species, preserving endangered species takes precedence over saving human babies. Speciation trumps humanitarian mercy. Humans are the cause of earth’s woes and so those whose humanity can be denied or cut short should therefore be viewed as culprits lest their existence be allowed to exacerbate our problems.

The controversial Peter Singer claims, “Surely there will be some nonhuman animals whose lives, by any standards, are more valuable than the lives of some humans,”\footnote{Peter Singer, Animal Liberation: A New Ethic for Our Treatment of Animals, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 19.} and “Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not
persons; therefore, the life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee.\textsuperscript{439} If there is no moral distinction between humans and animals then Singer’s conclusions are chillingly consistent.

In popular culture this entails ranking animals over babies as we saw in the massive public outcry when American dentist Walter Palmer harvested Cecil the lion.\textsuperscript{440} Jimmy Kimmel shed tears on live television and the hunter was forced to close his practice for a number of weeks due to numerous death threats.\textsuperscript{441} Yet many in the celebrity community by and large strongly advocate abortion on demand and sexual antinomianism that shatters a sustainable family model that best protects children.

Still yet, for some, speciation (not to be confused with human welfare) is the zenith of existence. A contingent of thinkers believe a massive Malthusian\textsuperscript{442} decrease in human population is the remedy for humanity’s woes.\textsuperscript{443} Humans are understood as the nemesis of the


\textsuperscript{442} This sort of anti-human thinking finds much of its philosophical roots in the work of British cleric, Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) who unashamedly advocated, “[Persons] should consider the general welfare of the human race, of the society in which they lived, and of their own families, and so not cumber the earth with useless and miserable people.” Hence, the phrase “useless eaters” stems from Malthus’s fear that overpopulation would destroy the human race. Patricia James, \textit{Population Malthus}, 61.

\textsuperscript{443} Peter Huber paraphrases, “Pentti Linkola, an amateur biologist, eco-fascist, and one of Finland’s most celebrated authors…the West must end all aid to refugees and the Third World. Abortion should be mandatory for women who have already borne two children. We occupy a sinking ship with one hundred passengers, and a lifeboat for only ten. ‘Those who hate life try to pull more people on board and drown everybody. Those who love and respect life use axes to chop off the extra hands hanging on the gunwale.’” Such policies presuppose a false zero-sum game in the environment and economics. Peter Huber, \textit{Hard Green: Saving the Environment from the Environmentalists-A Conservative Manifesto} (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 160.
planet and, if allowed to procreate freely, will spell almost certain destruction.\footnote{Malthus’s thoughts are best popularized by Paul R. Ehrlich’s 1968 bestseller, \textit{The Population Bomb}. Ehrlich’s ominous foreword reads, “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now.” The fear of overpopulation, and its alleged contribution to pollution and ravaging of natural resources remain a driving thought within much of current environmentalism although Ehrlich’s ominous prophecies have systematically been proven false. Paul R. Ehrlich, \textit{The Population Bomb} (New York: Ballatine Books, 1968), xi.} Even esteemed scholar Sir David Attenborough joins the ranks of the anti-human movement with his stark confession:

\begin{quotation}
We are a plague on the Earth. It’s coming home to roost over the next 50 years or so. It’s not just climate change; it’s sheer space, places to grow food for this enormous horde. Either we limit our population growth or the natural world will do it for us, and the natural world is doing it for us right now…We keep putting on programs about famine in Ethiopia; that’s what’s happening. Too many people there. They can’t support themselves — and it’s not an inhuman thing to say. It’s the case.\footnote{Sir David Attenborough, interview by Louise Gray, “Humans are Plague on Earth,” \textit{The Telegraph}, January 22, 2013, accessed May 27, 2017, \url{http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/earthnews/9815862/Humans-are-plague-on-Earth-Attenborough.html}.}
\end{quotation}

On this view, not only is basic assistance to be withheld, altruism is a roadblock to environmental sustainability. Humanitarian aid, an almost universally accepted virtue in the West, becomes fundamentally counterproductive where the strong deplete themselves in order to sustain the weak in their time of need. Humanitarianism makes sense so long as there is an intrinsic equality and value attributed to human life, a belief difficult to establish on egoism, which has no place for such a benevolent anthropological link. A glimpse into this egoistic landscape guts the impetus to strive for mercy. How can one rationalize our most basic instincts of pity and human equality on this view? One helpful aspect is to remember that logic does not exist in an ethical vacuum. Ethics inform logic. Attenborough’s commentary, though seemingly heartless, is thoroughly consistent on egoism; but spells disaster for the most vulnerable of our species, especially children.
Normalization of same-sex marriage

Normalizing same-sex marriage is another stage of the degradation of the family and thus heightened risks for children. If propagation of the species is equated with moral goodness then homosexual unions go awry because they run counter to this survivalistic telos. Obergefell v. Hodges is the watershed moment in the cultural trend towards normalizing homosexuality. A 2015 poll notes a shift in public attitudes: Americans approved more of gays and lesbians (53 percent) than of evangelical Christians (42 percent). This is a worldview indicator because it elevates adult sexual expression over the health of families and children. Egoism exalts the self at all costs, even when it means adult preferences take precedence over children. In the frantic rush of adults expressing their sexual appetites, proclivities, and orientation, the question of how children are affected seems to be left somewhere far in the background. Furthermore, SSM carries threatening overtones for parental rights.

SSM is the fruit of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and did not blossom in a legal vacuum. It’s the reverse pinnacle of a culture in decline. Karen Swallow Prior notes, “Gay

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448 Melissa Moschella notes, “In an MSNBC promo spot a couple of years ago … [Melissa] Harris-Perry claimed, ‘We have to break through our kind of private idea that kids belong to their parents or kids belong to their families and recognize that kids belong to whole communities.’ Her claim reflects the troubling but not uncommon view that the education of children, particularly their formal education, is first and foremost the task of the state rather than parents… If Gutmann, Macedo, Harris-Perry and others are correct, and children do belong to the larger community at least as much as they belong to their parents, then the state’s views about the best way to raise and educate children should trump the parents’ views, and there is no principled basis for opposing the sorts of intrusive state actions described above. By treating marriage and family as a mere construct of the state, and denying the normativity of the intact biological family, the majority in Obergefell have effectively enshrined this statist vision of childrearing in our law.” Melissa Moschella, “To Whom Do Children Belong? How Same-Sex Marriage Threatens Parental Rights,” The Witherspoon Institute, October 5, 2015, accessed May 21, 2017, http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/10/15407/.
marriage is but one characteristic (and a statistically insignificant one at that) of a culture whose understanding of sex and marriage has long been unmoored from biblical principles.\footnote{The abortion rate among Protestant women is slightly higher than the overall rate. Co-habitation rather than marriage is ‘the new normal.’ Over 40 percent of US births are to unmarried mothers. Between 40 and 50 percent of married people in the United States divorce. The divorce rate for subsequent marriages is even higher. About two-thirds of men view pornography at least monthly; the figures for Christian men don’t vary significantly from the general population.” Karen Swallow Prior, “Gay Marriage, Abortion, and the Bigger Picture: Living out God’s will requires us to look beyond single issues,” 

1. Human sexuality is an objective biological binary trait: “XY” and “XX” are genetic markers of health—not genetic markers of a disorder. 2. No one is born with a gender. Everyone is born with a biological sex. 3. A person’s belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking. 4. Puberty is not a disease and puberty-blocking hormones can be dangerous. 5. According to the DSM-V, as many as 98% of gender confused boys and 88% of gender confused girls eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty. 6. Children who use puberty blockers to impersonate the opposite sex will require cross-sex hormones in late adolescence. 7. Rates of suicide are twenty times greater among adults who use cross-sex hormones and undergo sex reassignment surgery, even in Sweden, which is among the most LGBTQ – affirming countries. 8. Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse.\footnote{Michelle A. Cretella, Quentin Van Meter, and Paul McHugh, “8 Points from the American College of Pediatricians on Gender Identity in Children,” \textit{The American College of Pediatrics}, March 18, 2016, accessed May 19, 2017, https://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/gender-ideology-harms-children.}

Normalizing aberrant sexuality simply neglects to warn children of a lifestyle that carries similar life expectancy as straight-lining heroin or other hard drugs. In their haste to remove allegedly restrictive sexual mores, progressive egoists have demolished yet another level of protection for children. The time has come that sexual expression has come to be seen as more important than child welfare.

*Normalization of pedophilia*

In chapter 2 we saw how children were largely not considered fully human in the ancient world and thus subject to a wide range of abuses. Pederasty was part and parcel of Greek education. Other than what they could provide for adults, children were not a protected class in the ancient world. As we will see, Christianity brought a rational and incarnational challenge to the *status quo*. Yet the contemporary Western world continues to manifest a number of worldview implications that run counter to the revolutionary idea that children are fully human and thus worthy of robust legal and societal protection. As these protective fortifications are challenged by egoism we come to quite possibly the darkest chapter so far in the departure from our most cherished moral sentiments towards children: the push to normalize pedophilia.

Before we delve into this issue we should note that pedophilia and child molestation are not technically one in the same. Pedophilia is sexual attraction towards children whereas child

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http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/13/5-key-findings-about-lgbt-americans/.
molestation is acting on those desires, though both feature obvious moral problems. However, we are seeing a push to normalize pedophilia within the amoral catalogue of mental and/or physical disabilities. For example, Janet Upadhye writes of Todd Nickerson, who finds himself attracted to underage girls but has never acted on his impulses. 

Nickerson even runs a website called “Virtuous Pedophiles” for “inactive” or “non-practicing” pedophiles. Upadhye pleads Nickerson’s case for a hard and fast distinction between “pedophile” and “child molester.”

Writing for the New York Times, Margo Kaplan, associate professor at Rutgers School of Law, seeks to remove the moral dimensions of pedophilia by erasing the “misconception that pedophilia is the same as child molestation. One can live with pedophilia and not act on it.”

Although she states, “A pedophile should be held responsible for his conduct — but not for the underlying attraction,” she still seeks to include “non-practicing pedophiles” in the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Bias against non-reductive causes of behavior impedes studies attempting to find what makes pedophiles “tick.”

_A priori_ rejection of a moral dimension of human fallenness hampers the search for cause and cure from the very start. But our most basic moral sensibilities testify

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456 _Ibid._

457 _Ibid._


459 _Ibid._

that the prevailing problem with child molestation is not pragmatic but moral in nature.\footnote{The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network provides a helpful list of symptoms and next steps for adults experiencing trauma from abuse that occurred sometimes decades ago. However, the wrongness of sexually abusing children lies not in lost economic productivity but in the violation of the most basic moral laws as revealed in the conscience and demarcated by special revelation. See “Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse,” RAINN, accessed May 26, 2017, \url{https://www.rainn.org/articles/adult-survivors-child-sexual-abuse}.}

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have investigated a few of the current trends in child treatment. We discovered the extensive effects of egoism on children whose welfare is categorically and surreptitiously supplanted by the selfish desires of adults. An unqualified quest for personal happiness above parental duty leads to a rise of divorce, single parent homes, absent fathers, breakdown of the family unit, and emotionally neglected children who find more familiarity with doubt than normative human relationships. Egoism has an acidic effect on parental duty, which in turn spawns a number of societal challenges that intersect with everything from social services, public policy, mental health services, to incarceration and law enforcement. We also encountered how an increase of virtual communication may contribute to the further demise of familial harmony and community in the absence of healthy normative relationships. Acceptance of abortion, anti-human rhetoric, and normalization of SSM and pedophilia all indicate a trend away from intellectually and practically embracing healthy societal structures that best promote the flourishing of children. In the next chapter we will look at Christianity on children, which can both help diagnose the problems we’ve been seeing, but also offer a message of grace, hope, and redemption, a powerful prescription that is both good news and the sort of deep solution that the dire diagnosis we have articulated requires.
Chapter 4: Ontology of Children on Christian Theism

In this chapter we will investigate a number of reasons why Christian theism seems to provide a more sustainable case for our basic moral beliefs about children. As I mentioned in the introduction, the approach of this dissertation is primarily philosophical rather than exegetical. Even so, to make a case for Christian theism in any regard necessitates interacting with the biblical text at some point. The goal is not to engage in extended exegetical analysis; rather my hope is that the limited but sufficient exegesis of these texts be rationally persuasive as it is faithful to the original intent of the biblical authors.

More than general theism: The explanatory power of Christian theism for the intrinsic value and humane treatment of children

At this point we will turn a corner from a philosophical analysis of the historical and theological data to a sharpened apologetic argument for the strong case of Christian theism for our most treasured notions towards the little ones. The suggestion is that parenting that isn’t adequately formed and informed by a Christian understanding of the human condition contributes to trends in child treatment that are less than ideal. Furthermore, we have excellent reasons to take intuitions about the moral treatment of children seriously. In fact, this gives us excellent prima facie reason to believe in God as the best explanation of, say, the inherent dignity of people, including children. But when we look to the past, we see that often children have been horribly treated and not accorded worth. And today, still, there are lots of disturbing trends as to how
they’re treated, which invariably reflect deficient worldviews as covered in previous chapters. Again, let me emphasize that theists or Christians are not the only owners of moral stock. As Baggett and Walls observe:

The theistic defender of human rights need only argue that respect-for-persons is best explained by theism, not supportable only on religious grounds. Again, it would be rather unlikely, if this world were a theistic one inhabited by creatures made in the image of the eternal God, that absolutely no progress could be made, using the fertile resources of this world, to explain human dignity. The question is whether this world alone can explain it as well as God and the world can.\footnote{Baggett and Walls, \textit{God & Cosmos}, 118-119.}

My abductive approach, centers on the claim that the vast explanatory scope of Christianity on children deserves its day in court. Ultimately, it’s not just theism we need, but something more, arguably Christian theology, which makes great sense of our best moral intuitions about kids. The theology of Christianity, and the special revelation we have in scripture, gives us even deeper reasons to take with great seriousness our moral intuitions and insights about the humane treatment of children, the most vulnerable of our species. In this way, Christianity can receive some corroboration from our best considered judgments about the value of children, and we can identify the resources we need to battle troubling contemporary trends of mistreatment of children. Throughout the remainder of this chapter the reader will notice the extension from theism to Christianity by way of the reflections about children that give evidence for more than generic theism.

\textit{General and special revelation}

One of the questions raised in the last chapter was the relationship between general and special revelation. While I do not wish to oversimplify this complex issue, natural theology does supply a number of moral reference points for Christian theism. General revelation can reveal
moral law whereas special revelation provides the identity and character of the lawgiver. General revelation is exactly that, general. Scripture, rather than tradition, is the clearest barometer for clarifying our perceived sense of moral realism.\footnote{Kevin J. Vanhoozer paraphrases Nicholas Healy’s remarks, “Neither tradition nor practice can be the supreme norm for Christian theology, because each is susceptible to error. Practices become deformed; traditions become corrupt.” Nicholas M. Healy, Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9-13. Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 22.} But delineating between general and special revelation, especially with properly basic beliefs on children, is far more challenging than it appears at first glance. As we have observed throughout this dissertation, a number of cultures have both permitted and practiced morally problematic behaviors. Just because one behaves in a morally objectionable fashion does not entail they always do so with the endorsement of their conscience.

Suppose a scenario where the converse was true: adult abuse of children or violating a child’s sexual innocence was morally permissible: Would it be morally permissible if the reverse of these values happened to you as a child? Would it be morally unobjectionable for an adult to physically and/or sexually abuse you as a young child? If a person has physical or mental limitations it may be helpful to inquire whether you would have a moral objection if you were exposed to the mercy of the elements or child traffickers as an infant? Do you believe your worth as a human being depends upon your pragmatic value? Do you believe that those with superior strength and resources should be able to arbitrarily choose life or death for you?\footnote{I’m thankful to Greg Koukl for the following robust illustration of this point: As I have written elsewhere, “A person can wax eloquent with you in a discussion on moral relativism, but he will complain when somebody cuts in front of him in line. He’ll object to the unfair treatment he gets at work and denounce injustice in the legal system. He’ll criticize crooked politicians who betray the public trust and condemn intolerant fundamentalist who force their moral views on others.” I think this was Paul’s point in Romans 2:1 when he wrote, “Therefore you are without excuse, every [one] of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” Paul argued that those who set up their own morality are still faulted by their own code. Their “excuse” commits suicide.” Koukl, Tactics, 125.}

Jesus summarizes the law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second...
is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). Tied together with the Apostle Paul’s claim that the law is written on the human heart (Rom. 2:14-15) we see several things. First, properly basic beliefs on children find their grounding in the moral law of God available to all persons via the conscience. Second, Jesus’ admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself” assumes self-love. The Apostle Paul recognizes natural self-love where he writes, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” (Eph. 5:29a). Paul appears to include it as altogether proper and right as this follows his premise of marriage bringing a husband and wife together into one unit; “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28). Paul exhorts husbands to nurture their wives as they do themselves. He sees no need to instruct husbands to care for themselves because self-love comes naturally. Jesus also assumes persons love themselves thus the admonition to love others as one loves oneself. Self-love is the gold standard of care and Jesus and Paul both use it to call for loving others to the same degree. Therefore, if reasonable persons object if the reverse of these properly basic beliefs were acted out upon them as a child then we can appropriately argue that such beliefs are accessible through general revelation.

Furthermore, general revelation is sufficient for recognizing these properly basic beliefs because they are *generally available to mankind as a whole*. On the other hand, special revelation serves to enlighten further why discarding physically handicapped children or sacrificing infants is morally wrong and why protecting toddlers from physical or sexual abuse, even if it costs one’s life, is morally praiseworthy. Special revelation is needed to fill in the outline provided by the general revelation. General revelation provides the form and special

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revelation provides the substance. Both are revelation from God and about God. For instance, following the fine-tuning of the universe to a design inference that God exists is reasonable. The first points to a creator whereas the second leads to the creator’s identity. These overlapping magisteria are thoroughly complementary.

As we will see, Christian theism weaves both together in a beautiful tapestry of redemption. Taken together with chapter two, we often discover a higher degree of moral development, healthier environment for human rights, more advanced laws to protect children, and a foundational rule of law among both individuals and cultures that have even a rudimentary regard for special revelation (Christian Scripture, life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, *imago dei*, etc). Whereas we frequently find higher repression of basic human rights (especially for children) among cultures that lack or categorically reject special revelation. I am not arguing for the popularized notion of a “Christian nation” but more of a cultural respect for or memory of the essential tenets of a Christian worldview. There seems to be a general trajectory between a culture’s access or response to special revelation and its view and treatment of children. Stated succinctly, general revelation alone is adequate to access these beliefs but special revelation


468 Article XII of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* is helpful here: “We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.” *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf. In Keith Mathison, “General and Special Revelation – A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture,” *Ligonier*, http://www.ligonier.org/blog/general-and-special-revelation-reformed-approach-science-and-scripture/.
helps chart the why behind the what (imago dei: all persons are worthy of respect, dignity, and have intrinsic value regardless of mental or physical limitations). 469

So how does all this relate to moral apologetics? The reader will remember a very brief defense of moral realism in chapter one but here’s an extended suggestion: the intrinsic value of children should serve as evidence for theism generally and Christianity in particular. Why Christianity in particular? Our basic moral sensibilities are so real and substantive that they call for a robust exposition, which Christianity plentifully supplies. As we will see, Moses, Jesus, and Paul on children provide unparalleled vantage points when compared to other worldviews and religions. While the central claim of this dissertation is that Christianity provides a strong explanatory case, I do believe that a stronger claim is warranted. Christianity is simply in a class of its own both in ratiocinative power and incarnational example. Again, I believe our basic moral beliefs lead us to theism and upon further examination of Christian Scripture and teachings, steer us towards Christianity.

H. P. Owen’s “Morality and Christian Theism” is very helpful in tracing the link from general theism to specific Christian orthodoxy. 470 Owen lays three ground rules: All persons have access to what can be loosely termed “natural law,” Christian morality does not lack non-Christian parallel, the concept of moral autonomy must be maintained. 471 He claims Christianity doesn’t generate new virtues and principles but gives them a new “quality” or “direction.” 472

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469 I am grateful for Dr. Larry Starkey’s assistance on this point.


471 Ibid., 5-6. “Moral autonomy is itself a gift that God bestows on men in order that they should respond to him, not by blindly obeying his dictates, but by rationally making his will their own and so fulfilling their status as personal (spiritual) creatures.” 6.

472 Ibid., 7.
These specific dimensions come through the supreme revelation of the incarnate person of Jesus Christ and the supernatural reality of grace.\footnote{Ibid., 8, 10.} In imitating the example of Christ through faith, persons are enabled to reflect not only the tenets of moral goodness but of transformative grace. Christ is the model of impeccable righteousness that Christians are compelled and empowered to follow. Owen beautifully paints Christianity’s fulfillment of the quest for human goodness:

The ideal of ‘the good man’ has constantly haunted the human race. Christianity provides the ideal with a perfect embodiment in Christ as God incarnate. And thereby it confers on the pursuit of goodness as a wholly new motivation. Thus while Plato held that personal goodness was derived from an ‘imitation of’ and even ‘participation in’, the Forms of value culminating in the Form of the Good he had no concept of a personal Creator who would confer goodness on his human creatures by evoking response to his love in becoming one of them.\footnote{Ibid., 13. Owen goes on to showcase the centrality of humility in Christianity: “In humility, I think, we reach the most distinctive ingredient in the Christian character. Christian humility cannot be reduced to natural modesty (even when this is interpreted in terms of a reluctance to claim much for one’s moral achievements). It cannot even be equated with the theist’s natural self-abasement before God as the mysterium tremendum. It stems from the realization, so poignantly described by Augustine, that we are saved by the humility of God in living a human life and dying a human death for our sake.” Ibid.}

In summary, Christianity exquisitely personifies our commonsensical moral notions. Yet it goes far beyond in clarifying them in the person of Jesus Christ.

\textit{Idolatry and children: Incarnation of egoism}

As we saw in chapter two, ANE idolatry involved a number of sexually illicit practices including the sexualizing and sacrifice of children. I thought it helpful to provide a snapshot of the Judeo-Christian perspective on idolatry. The conquest of Canaan, quite possibly the most controversial epoch in the Hebrews Bible, is a practical response to the practices of this particular form of idolatry.\footnote{I am not saying sexualizing and sacrificing children was the only reason for the conquest of Canaan but that it was morally significant in God’s economy of judgment as expressed in the Pentateuch.} According to the biblical writers, a rejection of the biblical God...
gives a platform to anthropologically centered gods that loosen restraints and even provide a license for the basest of human desires. For the Apostle Paul, a rejection of God inexorably leads to some sort of idolatry, which dims the moral and intellectual sensibilities. Refusing to acknowledge God and embracing instead manmade religious practices leads to cultural moral collapse (Rom. 1:18-32). Children and other vulnerable members of society suffer disproportionately in a society on this course.

From what we know of ANE religious practices, they reflect behaviors that the Western world has now largely accepted except for public child sacrifice and outright child molestation. Clay Jones provides a fascinating insight on why so many in the Western world have difficulty with the biblical account of Canaan’s conquest: because the West has adopted many “Canaanite” sins as his abstract soberly outlines:

Skeptics challenge God’s fairness for ordering Israel to destroy the Canaanites, but a close look at the horror of Canaanite sinfulness, the corruptive and seductive power of their sin as seen in the Canaanization of Israel, and God’s subsequently instituting Israel’s own destruction because of Israel’s committing Canaanite sin reveals that God was just in His ordering the Canaanites’ destruction. But Western culture’s embrace of “Canaanite sin” inoculates it against the seriousness of that sin and so renders it incapable of responding to Canaanite sin with the appropriate moral outrage.476

To think that an arbitrary age requirement of 18 for viewing adult content or engaging in sexual acts with other adults somehow insulates children from a society that is otherwise saturated in hyper sexualized content is at best naïve. Boulevards are not lined with primitive-fired statues of Molech where parents deposit their children in hopes of receiving favorable agricultural weather patterns. Children are not raised with the intent of becoming temple prostitutes. Differences in form are too numerous to count, but the essence of children losing their sexual innocence or even their lives for the benefit of adults is still very much a reality. Paul Copan draws a plausible connection between the contemporary West and the ANE; “Despite many gains over the

476 Jones, “We Don’t Hate Sin So We Don’t Understand What Happened to the Canaanites,” 53.
centuries in the areas of human rights and religious liberty, due to the positive influence of biblical ideals in America and other Western nations, Westerners have their own share of decadence, and we may resemble the Canaanites more than we realize.477

Consider the following ways in which children were treated and categorized in the ANE. First, children were thought to have a high value but the appraisal was grounded on a very different moral algorithm. This approach was not enough to restrain their parents from swapping them as an actual sacrifice for greater fertility of the land and favorable weather patterns resulting in bumper crops and multiplication of one’s flocks. Sacrificing one’s own offspring is a high price to pay in any culture, but if the swap resulted in economic advancement or staving off professional disaster it doubtless posed a real temptation to many parents. At the very least, we could say that children carried a very high exchange rate. Systematic exploitation of children by adults would become the cultural norm. Children’s very lives and sexual innocence were sacrificed for the benefit of adults. Children were plundered instead of protected.478

Second, children’s value was largely viewed in terms of utility.479 Where the Canaanites saw children as having great sacrificial potential, the Greco-Roman world saw children’s worth largely in terms of what they could contribute to the polis or empire. On an individual scale, parents valued children based on the level of honor they brought the family and for their assistance to the parents in their dotage.

Third, the idea that children were in fact people and so bearers of inestimable intrinsic

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477 Copan, Is God a Moral Monster?, 160.

478 A thorough investigation into ANE religion may assist in understanding the repeated diatribes of the Hebrew prophets of God’s indignation against these religious and cultural practices.

479 Bakke records a stark evidence of this utilitarian grind where he notes how boys were reckoned to have a far higher value than girls: “The words of an Egyptian man in the first century B.C.E., in a letter to his wife who was soon to bear a child, have become well-known: ‘If you chance to bear a child, and it is a boy, let it be; if it is a girl, expose it.’” Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 744. In Bakke, When Children Became People, 489.
value was foreign to the ancient mind. Rather than biological birth officially ushering an infant into full membership in her family, a number of stipulations had to be satisfied before the child was accepted as such.

Fourth, Christian theism provided an incarnation to a radical concept found in the Mosaic Law, namely, that children were fully human. Not only does Christian theism best explain our basic moral sensibilities on children; the protection of children’s sexual innocence—that they should not be sacrificed for the benefit of adults—is a thoroughly Christian concept. If a case is to be made for the plight of children it is best predicated on a Christian premise.

The Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament speak with a univocal voice to condemn idolatry. Contrasted with biblical monotheism the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk depicts idolatry as the apex of absurdity:

What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him (Hab. 2:18-20).

This text labels idolatry an exercise in ignoring the gnawing demands of contingency. G. K. Beale defines idol worship as revering anything other than God.480 Worship encompasses far more than tossing a pinch of incense into a fire or prostrating oneself before a gold-saturated idol. Worship is an expression of what possesses the deepest affections of the heart. John Piper defines an idol as, “The thing loved or the person loved more than God, wanted more than God, desired more than God, treasured more than God, enjoyed more than God.”481 Idolatry is a

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480 G. K. Beale, We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 133.

practical declaration of God to be insufficient or anemic thus replacing divine order with teleological chaos.

Idolatry is steeped in ritual: if I perform certain functions then the idol/god will respond in such and such a way. Far from a dynamic relationship, the mechanics of idolatry are rigidly robotic. There’s a strong resemblance between magic and idolatry. Like black magic, idolatry centers on control. Leveraging power for one’s personal benefit is the heartbeat. It is little wonder why a historiographical survey yields a tight connection between idol worship and a shocking level of human carnage. Beale’s title is poignant: we do come to resemble what we worship.

From the Shema of the Mosaic Law (Deut. 6:4-9) to the Apostle Paul’s gutting of polytheism when he writes to the church in Corinth, “we know that an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4b), both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament speak with one voice in condemning idolatry as an egregious breach of the most basic foundations of the moral order. It convolutes basic moral values and casts a spiritual hypnosis, namely that God is the creator of all things from whom all living things have their source. Again, God alone is the proper recipient of worship and any other order introduces inevitable cultural decay that directly impacts the most vulnerable.

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482 Richard Cavendish writes, “The driving force behind black magic is hunger for power. [It] is rooted in the darkest levels of the mind . . . but it is much more than a product of the love of evil or a liking for mysterious mumbo jumbo. It is a titanic attempt to exalt the stature of man, to put man in the place which religious thought reserves for God.” Richard Cavendish, The Black Arts: A concise history of witchcraft, demonology, astrology, alchemy, and other mystical practices throughout the ages (New York: Penguin, 1968), back cover-page.


484 Clay Jones reflects, “Concerning idolatry, Joseph Gorra made this comment to me: ‘Yet how tragically ironic, but not accidental, that in the very way of ascribing worth to worthless things, the worthless confers worthlessness to the very ones ascribing due worth. What cyclical emptiness! . . . Idolatry ends up mugging people
Cultural decay plays out practically by persons whittling away their time on empty things and essentially wasting their lives in the process. In the last chapter we saw the ravages of egoism where even one’s children are neglected in the naked pursuit of one’s own oscillating desires. In a culture where idolatry replaces worship of the true God, anthropology shifts to persons having largely pragmatic value rather than intrinsic value. The practical result is that persons begin to view other persons largely as things to be used and then discarded rather than persons with intrinsic value and ends in themselves contra Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen’s admonition, “You must remember to love people and use things, rather than to love things and use people.” Due of their vulnerable status, children disproportionately feel the brunt of a moral economy whose values are graded on this scale. In the previous chapters we’ve seen the deleterious effects of idolatry on children. Now we turn to the Christian case for the inherent value of children.

*Imago dei*

Here’s the suggestion: the concept of the *imago dei*, while maybe not a *sine qua non*, does supply a cogent case for explaining our indispensable moral beliefs on children. This Judeo-Christian idea distinguishes humankind from the animal kingdom and has served as the

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487 An essential condition; a thing that is absolutely necessary.
fountainhead for what is popularly known as the “sanctity of life.”

One of the most formidable challenges surrounding the *imago dei* is a precise definition because of the paucity of scriptural specificity. Steve Lemke offers the following definition that may function for the purposes of this discussion, “The image of God is the reflection/likeness/similarity of God’s essence which He created in human beings, and is reflected most noticeably in the personal, spiritual, relational, rational, volitional, moral, responsible, and emotional aspects of human life.”

Central to this topic is that humans are unique and thus have a distinct moral knowledge and responsibility from animals. Scripture nowhere definitively unpacks what the image of God is and scholars are by no means settled on it (big surprise on the latter). So I will focus on two aspects of the *imago dei*: reason and knowledge of properly basic moral beliefs, and then briefly discuss the implications.

First, though reason is one of the facets of the *imago dei* it is not the sole factor that separates humankind and animals (contra the Greek view). Alvin Plantinga sees likeness of

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491 John Stott writes, “One of the noblest features of the divine likeness in man is his capacity to think.” John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, 22. James Sire concurs, “Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.” James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 36.
God only in rational creatures\(^{492}\) and, outside of unintentional participants in the popular-themed “Darwin Awards,” it is fairly self-evident that humans have capability for rational thought. This is not to say reason is the exclusive qualifier but rather a facet of the *imago dei*. If reason were the sole component then one could argue infants and those with mental disabilities whose rational faculties do not function properly are less than fully human. Such a contention is more Greco-Roman than Christian in origin.

Carl F. H. Henry describes man as a “belief-ful” creature.\(^{493}\) If reason is a divinely ordained part of what it means to be human then Christians have reason to value the rational enterprise.\(^{494}\) Though higher primates do show capability of inference the exercise of the particularly human reasoning capacity shows distinctiveness from the animal kingdom. Applied reason sets humanity light years apart in medical discovery and technological innovation. Apes using sticks for tools is a far cry from the seven wonders of the ancient world, Sistine Chapel, Macchu Picchu, Hubble Telescope, Macintosh computers, modern aeronautics, submarine

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492 “Only in rational creatures is there found a likeness of God which counts as an image… As far as a likeness of the divine nature is concerned, rational creatures seem somehow to attain a representation of [that] type in virtue of imitating God not only in this, that he is and lives, but especially in this, that he understands.” Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 220.

493 “The fact of man’s divine creation nourishes his ongoing quest for an apprehension of ultimate reality. In his divine givenness man is a creature of faith. Unlike the lower animals, his life and hopes are shaped by an ineradicable sense that he somehow is related to the ultimately real world. He is a ‘belief-ful’ creature; he does not and cannot live in a faith vacuum. The decisive question is not whether faith is a necessary condition of human life but rather in whom or in what that faith reposes. If he does not trust the living God, false gods and fake divinities preempt Yahweh’s place.” Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, “The Meaning or Myths Man Lives By,” *God Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 1 (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999), ebook.

494 Plantinga notes, “Science does or should enjoy particularly high regard among Christians. A central feature of Jewish, Christian, and at least some strands of Islamic thought is the doctrine of the *imago dei*; we human beings have been created in the image of God. A central feature of that idea is that we resemble God not just in being persons, beings who can think and feel, who have aims and intentions, who form beliefs and act on those beliefs, and the like; we resemble God more particularly in being able to know and understand something of ourselves, our world, and God himself.” Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, & Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.
technology, and Dr. Pepper.⁴⁹⁵ We see in humanity’s breathtaking works of art and construction of majestic edifices a pattern of innate inventiveness. Andrew Schuman comments on J. R. R. Tolkien’s belief in human creativity as connected to God: “Made in the image of the original Maker, Tolkien believed that humans have the ability to create new worlds by redistributing nouns and adjectives to introduce things such as the terrible blue moon, silver leaves, and rams with fleeces of gold. Even still, our secondary worlds remain rooted in the created reality that we know.”⁴⁹⁶

Millard J. Erickson carries the theological connection from the *imago dei* to the incarnation of Christ, “The image of God and human nature are best understood through a study of the person of Jesus, not of humans per se.”⁴⁹⁷ Continental philosophers inquire, “What is a human being?” not unlike the Psalmist, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:4) Desmond Morris’s answer, “[Man] He’s the naked ape” differs from the Psalmist’s response that God made man “a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5).⁴⁹⁸

Second, the *imago dei* gives a lucid explanation for the basic moral belief in the intrinsic

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value of persons including children.\textsuperscript{499} Failure to recognize the value of persons by denying or acting against it degrades our humanity. Earlier I touched on this briefly but according to the Apostle Paul, the conscience reflects God’s moral law despite one’s lack of exposure to Scripture (Rom. 2:15). Paul advances a notion that makes sense of recognizable, universal, basic moral notions without the need of prior philosophical argumentation to arrive at those beliefs. For Jesus, the pinnacle of moral goodness is to love God with all one’s being and other persons as oneself (Matt. 22:37-40). In other words, Jesus inextricably links moral values and duties to the very person and nature of God. Edward Martin sees Jesus’ exposition of the Mosaic Law as the zenith of ethical theory:

\begin{quote}
[An ethical system] must have a motive, standard, and a goal…“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength” appears to be duty-based ethics. If one only stays here then one is a Pharisee. “… and the second is like it, Love your neighbor” implies a certain sense of virtue ethics with a focus on other persons. If one only stays here then one is a secular humanist “[A]s yourself” implies consequentialism. If one only stays here then one is a narcissist.\textsuperscript{500}
\end{quote}

Jesus’ understanding of moral values and duties not only satisfies the principal qualifications of major ethical theories but also grants the hope of personal transformation.

F. F. Bruce explains the far-reaching ramifications of the biblical doctrine of man: “[it] demolishes all fancied justification for claims to superiority based on class, race or colour”\textsuperscript{501}

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\textsuperscript{499} I believe it provides a more compelling account for basic moral beliefs than materialistic alternatives as C. Stephen Evans elucidates, “Identifying moral obligations with God’s laws explains many features of moral obligations that rival, naturalistic accounts do not explain or do not explain so well.” Evans, Natural Signs and Knowledge of God, 134.

\textsuperscript{500} Edward Martin, Ethics Foundations (lecture, APOL 930: God, Suffering, and Evil, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, July 2012).

\textsuperscript{501} “The Greeks might take pride in their innate superiority to barbarians; the Athenians might boast that, unlike their fellow-Greeks, they were autochthonous, sprung from the soil of their native Attica. Paul, on the contrary, proclaims that all mankind is one in origin, all created by God and all derived from a single common ancestor. Before God, we all meet on one level. It is hardly necessary to point out the relevance of this truth today.” F. F. Bruce, The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 41.
since Christian theism teaches that all persons, born and preborn, share in the *imago dei*.\(^{502}\) It establishes a rational and cultural bulwark against racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Marxist guerillas, MS-13 members, and calloused killers who wave the black flag of ISIS all bear the image of God, however marred.

The question here is whether or not the *imago dei* applies to children. On the biblical model children are fully human so all of these descriptors apply to them as well minus the moral culpability of adults. To make this point, we turn to the following sections where we examine Moses, Jesus, and the Apostle Paul on children.

**Moses, the prophets, and children**

In the appendix to his classic work, *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis provides an engaging treatment of what he calls “Illustrations of the *Tao.*” Lewis notes numerous examples of moral realism throughout various cultures and eras, such as the law of general and special beneficence, duties to parents, elders, ancestors, children, along with the law of sexual justice, honesty, good faith, mercy, and magnanimity.\(^{503}\) That cultural mores are as varied as ice cream flavors are well established\(^{504}\) yet there *seems* to be a moral reality that both permeates and transcends societal

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\(^{502}\) Gen. 1:27; Job 10:8-12; 31:15; Ps. 127:3; 139:13-16; Isa. 44:2; Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15.

\(^{503}\) Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 83-102. Lewis, not wanting to give undue credence to this argument, gives the disclaimers, "(1) I am not trying to prove its validity by the argument from common consent. Its validity cannot be deduced. For those who do not perceive its rationality, even universal consent could not prove it. (2) The idea of collecting independent testimonies presupposes that 'civilizations' have arisen in the world independently of one another; or even that humanity has had several independent emergences on this planet. The biology and anthropology involved in such an assumption are extremely doubtful. It is by no means certain that there has ever (in the sense required) been more than one civilization in all history. It is at least arguable that every civilization we find has been derived from another civilization and, in the last resort, from a single centre—'carried’ like an infectious disease or like the Apostolical succession.” Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 83.

\(^{504}\) See Alasdair MacIntyre’s intriguing explication of culture and preferences in Captain James Cook’s encounter with Polynesian culture. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 111-112.
conventions. Let me reiterate this work is primarily philosophical, not exegetical, but there is ample material in the Old Testament that allows for warranted inferences.

Moses’s case for morality, better yet holiness, as grounded in the nature of God, is the ancient apex of moral realism. We could say both Moses and the Prophets were unique not in their assumption of moral law but in distinctly rooting it in the character of an immutable God. Our four properly basic moral beliefs on children are firmly ensconced in the Mosaic Law. The watershed Leviticus 20:26 reads, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” Not only is God qualitatively holy but also calls His people to mirror those noble attributes to the surrounding culture. We will see Moses and the Prophets’ view of children from several angles: parental duty to train one’s children the knowledge of God, contra Molech worship, and praise for protection of innocents and judgment on oppressors.

Parental responsibility to train children in the knowledge of God

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 contains the Shema, a confession that is hard to overestimate in importance.\(^{505}\) It is quite simply the Jewish confession of faith:\(^{506}\)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

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As God exercises loving fatherly care for His people so parents should reflect that love in caring for their children. In this passage we see: 1) the identity of God (God is one, contrary to the numerous gods that dotted the religious landscape of the ANE), 2) the duty to love God with all of one’s being,\textsuperscript{507} and 3) the responsibility to intentionally train one’s children in the knowledge of God. Notice again the schedule, “When you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” Training one’s children should be the primary focus of family activities.\textsuperscript{508} Quality family time is assumed to have a priority in the home. Parents are to be intentional in implementing observational wisdom in otherwise mundane outings.\textsuperscript{509}

Responsibility for a child’s emotional and spiritual wellbeing also rests primarily with the parents. That an injunction to train one’s child immediately follows the weighty Shema is theologically and exegetically significant for at least two reasons: First, the God of Genesis 1:1 who created the cosmos is deeply mindful of children. One may expect a slew of palatial prognostications following the grandest theocentric claim about the nature of God in the Hebrew Bible. But Moses presents a God quite different from vacillating Canaanite storm gods or egotistic members of the Greco-Roman pantheon: the Hebrew God attributes great value to little persons. Because of this parents are accountable to train their children to reflect God’s moral character and nature.

\textit{Contra Molech: denouncement of child sacrifice}

\textsuperscript{507} Patristic scholars may be interested in Robert F. Shedinger’s four page brief, “Notes and Observations: A Note on the Variant Form of the \textit{Shema} in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” \textit{The Harvard Theological Review} 93, no. 2 (April 2000): 161-163.


\textsuperscript{509} This is mirrored in the Proverbs: 1:6, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1; 6:1, 20; 7:1.
As we saw in chapter 2, the ANE was hardly a safe haven for children. Yet this was the world in which the Mosaic scriptures were given and they clashed violently with the prevailing worldviews. One of the main points of contention was the belief that destroying one’s offspring, “godly seed” for the Jews, was barefaced rebellion against God. Godly seed is associated with the idea of image-bearers. Parents are to reproduce themselves through childbirth and train their offspring in the ways of God for these image bearers to fill the earth with God’s glory (Gen. 1:28). Therefore, to kill one’s progeny, through abortion or infanticide, was to upset the divine created order. Weak persons sacrificed for the strong ran contrary to both Moses and the Prophets. Molech worship was little more than a declaration of war against God.

God claims to set Himself against those who sacrifice their children to Molech (Lev. 20:3), which accords with God’s concern for those who cannot protect themselves. The Psalmist Asaph later expresses this sentiment: “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:3-4). Molech worship amounted to a systematic slaughter of little ones (Jer. 32:35). Since children are intrinsically valuable, God exercises His protection for children by instituting the death penalty for Molech worship; i.e., child murder (Lev. 20:2). On the religious level, the child-killing practices of Molech worship are set in terms of spiritual adultery: “whoring after Molech” (Lev. 20:5b). Rather than some esoteric mishmash of cultic traditions with no real-world implications, the faithful worship of God was a matter of life and death for the most vulnerable persons in the ANE.
The all-too-popular cliché “Christianity is not a religion, it’s a relationship” carries the overtones that rules are restrictive in contrast to a vivacious relationship. At a certain point it comes down to semantics but it is helpful to remember that civilization requires a certain level of organization, which necessitates rules. Humans do not have the best track record when each person does what seems best in his or her own eyes like in the egoistic heyday of Israel’s judges (Judg. 21:25). Furthermore, contemporary Western Christians would do well to consider the chaos of the ANE and the accompanying need for laws rooted in the nature of God to govern human interactions in order for law-based civilization to have a chance to develop. Sexual restrictions in the Mosaic Law actually provided legal and theological protection for children in a world where they were marginalized, sexualized, and routinely discarded when no longer considered usable for perceived adult benefits. With issues ranging from infanticide to bestiality, the Hebrew worldview of sexuality and the family was firmly entrenched in a moral realism rooted in a monotheistic creation narrative. Moses’s laws are beautiful because they express God’s holy character.

Blessings to the helpers of the helpless and judgment on exploiters of the defenseless

The Prophets reveal important truths about children in three specific areas: First, God

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511 Josephus recounts the spirit of the Mosaic protection of children: “The law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the foetus; a woman convicted of this is regarded as an infanticide, because she destroys a soul and diminishes the race.” Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.199-203. In Mark Harding, *Early Christian Life and Thought in Social Context* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 213. See “Against Apion,” accessed July 12, 2017, [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/apion-1.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/apion-1.html).

is the defender of the helpless. Second, God blesses those who reflect His holy character by defending the vulnerable. Third, God is concerned for justice for the innocent and executes judgment on oppressors. Divine defense of the weak is assiduously holistic and encompasses both our properly basic moral sensibilities on children and on the wider community of vulnerable persons.

First, God is defender of the helpless. Since children are qualitatively helpless they are a paradigmatic case in point in this discussion. In vivid contrast to the deities of Canaan and Egypt who favor the powerful, God is a voice to those without an advocate. He is a stronghold to the poor and needy in their distress (Is. 25:4). God helps Israel (Gen. 49:25; 1 Chron. 12:18; Ps. 37:40; Is. 50:7, 9), the weak (Job 26:23), and demands that Israel replicate that same assistance to the most vulnerable members of the covenant community. One characteristic of the future eschatological community is even that the weak will be as a warrior (Joel 3:10).

Second, God blesses those who reflect His holy character by defending the vulnerable. Psalm 41:1-2 is worth quoting in full: “Blessed is the one who considers the poor!513 In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.” Lending to the poor is equated with giving to God because God identifies with the poor (Prov. 19:17). Jesus later echoes this idea in his famous sermon on “the least of these” where he equates acts of mercy to prisoners, foreigners, the physically ill, and those lacking basic necessities with those personally offered to him (Matt. 25:31-46). This passage brings the teachings of Moses and the Prophets full circle: God Himself identifies with the weakest members of society. How we treat them is how we treat Him.

Third, those who forsake the voice of conscience and commit atrocities, whether crossing

513 “Poor” is often a synonym for “helpless” in Scripture.
the line of just warfare by ripping open pregnant women or trampling the poor, will not escape God’s retributive judgment (Am. 1:13, 2:7). Running roughshod over the needy brought such judgment in Amos’s day that the land of Israel would tremble and mourn (Am. 8:4-8). God’s hand is against exchanging quick earnings from bribes that squelches justice for widows and orphans (Is. 1:23-25). Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet,” connects persons who “know no bounds in deeds of evil” with refusing to defend the rights of the needy or render justice to orphans (Jer. 5:28). The prophet Micah excoriates rich powerbrokers that pursue predatory financial arrangements to the point of separating mothers from their children (Mic. 2:9). Some question how imprecatory texts square with the claim that God values children. For a cogent response, see the work of Clay Jones who has written extensively on this delicate issue.514

What about accounts such as Menahem who ripped open the pregnant women of Tiphsah and was later able to avoid a similar retributive atrocity by paying off Pul, king of Assyria (2 Kin. 15:16-22)? How does his avoiding a similar or greater atrocity than he committed square with God’s justice? On one hand, there is a lack of scholarly agreement on whether the Hebrew Bible teaches eternal punishment or even life beyond the grave,515 but this dissertation is written from a distinctly Christian perspective. That being the case, I think it behooves the reader to see the various options available within the quiver of Christian theism that make sense of texts that seem at first glance a moral Gordian Knot.

I do believe the Christian doctrine of hell provides some level of moral explanation to the question of justice with atrocities on children and other defenseless persons. Justice may be

514 Many treat certain Old Testament passages with a certain level of moral suspicion, especially those dealing with the execution of entire groups, including their children. For a cogent analysis of this tedious issue see Clay Jones’s multiple writings on the subject. For example, see Clay Jones, “Canaanites,” Clay Jones, accessed March 30, 2017, http://www.clayjones.net/category/canaanites/.

515 See Philip Johnston, Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).
perceived as a problematic theological category because of the frequent confusion between justice and revenge or excessive punishment motivated by an emotionally driven irascibility. Justice should not be understood as an undesirable thing in itself or the “dark side” of God. On the contrary, it is a comprehensive and proper moral re-ordering of a world fractured by human evil.

Mosaic Law gives a blueprint for comprehensive justice in every dimension of human society, but if we look for a complete righting of wrongs, whether in ancient Israel or 21st century America, we will be sorely disappointed. On the massacre of the children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, R. Albert Mohler reminds us, “Human justice is necessary, but it is woefully incomplete.” Despite our passion for justice we find a full reckoning frustratingly elusive. Even at 95 years old, a former medical attendant at Auschwitz was tried for his involvement in at least 3,681 murders over a one-month period in 1944. Christian theism is particularly comforting here with the promise of ultimate justice at a future realized eschatology: the final judgment and the separation of the wicked from the righteous.


517 Mohler writes further, “No human court can hand down an adequate sentence for such a crime, and no human judge can restore life to those who were murdered. Crimes such as these remind us that we just yearn for the total satisfaction that will come only on the Day of the Lord, when all flesh will be judged by the only Judge who will rule with perfect righteousness and justice.” R. Albert Mohler, “Rachel Weeping for her Children: The Massacre in Connecticut,” Albert Mohler, December 14, 2012, accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.albertmohler.com/2012/12/14/rachel-weeping-for-her-children-the-massacre-in-connecticut/.


519 Brian E. Daley recognizes the relevance of eschatology to theodicy: “So eschatology includes, among other things, the attempt to construct a theodicy: a justification of faith in God, a hope in the final revelation of God’s wise and loving activity throughout history, with a longing for final reckonings. It is the logical conclusion of the biblical doctrine of creation, in the attempt to foresee the fulfillment of creation’s purpose.” Brian E. Daley, The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 2. Discussing eschatology without its ramifications to the age-old question of God and evil is to stumble over the major
Unrepentant evildoers are relegated to the “lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8b).

Evangelicals often prematurely react in the debate over whether the fires in hell are literal or metaphorical. Evangelicals need not necessarily be threatened by the claim that the flames in hell are best understood metaphorically, even if the claim comes from liberal scholarship. Often metaphors serve to express a greater reality or a deeper meaning than simply a one-for-one literal description. Attempting to discount hell via a metaphorical delineation actually advances the opposite implication: if the most unambiguous metaphor for the torment in hell is everlasting fire then the horrors of hell are beyond bounds of language or human understanding. God’s retributive justice need not be confined to physical suffering only. For the sake of argument, even if the various New Testament descriptions of hell are not strictly literal, the picture is still by far terrifying. If these explanations are simply markers of the bounds of language then the verdict is sobering: human language is insufficient to illustrate the magnitude of God’s punishment of human depravity. Mistreatment of children is a moral offense to God’s character and Christian theism has a response to the injustice of every form of child abuse: God values children to such a degree that persons who molest, abuse, or kill children will not get away with it. Unmitigated justice eternally separated from the life and mercy of God awaits the unrepentant. In the words of the famous Johnny Cash hit, “God’s gonna’ cut you down.”

We may suggest human language is insufficient to exhaustively communicate the eschatological theme of the Divine Warrior’s triumph over the dragon and his followers (Rev. 19). Eschatology is the “how” of God’s reckoning with evil.

520 C. S. Lewis’s illustrious statement on human depravity is appropriate here: “When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork.” C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 86.

knowledge of God. At the same time, the Christian can anticipate even greater realities lie beyond revelatory language that is already linguistically and epistemologically bursting at the seams.⁵²² Not that these realities would contradict the plain teaching of Scripture, but in our earthly spiritual experiences and knowledge of God may be akin to C. S. Lewis’s “Shadowlands.”⁵²³ Even the Apostle Paul claims that our present grasp of spiritual realities is like seeing in a mirror dimly ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι’ (1 Cor. 13:12).⁵²⁴ To be clear, I am not advocating unbridled subjectivism or an emaciated epistemology. My point is that we can have sufficient knowledge about the character of God to trust Him in matters of justice when it comes to children. As with any theological issue, a robust understanding of the parameters of orthodox Christianity is necessary before extrapolating on minutia.⁵²⁵

In this section we encountered how Moses and the Prophets raised a theological and social wall of protection for children and other vulnerable persons. Children were guaranteed full membership in the covenant community and ascribed divine protection. Contrary to the

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⁵²² Theologians of all stripes would do well to distinguish between issues of interpretation and inspiration. To deny the inspiration of Scripture is to step out of the bounds of orthodoxy whereas various positions on what the inspired text means is an altogether different issue. Noting the debate upon the interpretation of Genesis 1, while not within the prophetic genre, Norman Geisler provides a helpful point of clarification, “There is no demonstrated contradiction of fact between Genesis 1 and science. There is only a conflict of interpretation . . . but in either case it is not a question of the inspiration of Scripture, but of the interpretation of Scripture.” Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, Making Sense of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 34-35.

⁵²³ C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle (New York: HarperCollins, 1956, 1984), 210. Lewis writes, “There was a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

⁵²⁴ ’αἰνίγματι’ literally means ‘riddle’ (although I’m well aware of the exegetical fallacies of attributing so-called “literal” meanings to words to the detriment of context. Alleged literal meanings of words always gives way to context). According to BDAG it carries the notion of “puzzling reflections.” In context, the idea of confusing or indirect perception seems to be the driving thought. Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature, 27.

⁵²⁵ Otherwise we will resemble Stanley J. Grenz’s remark: “Having rejected the aid of the community of interpreters throughout the history of Christendom, we have not succeeded in returning to the primitive gospel; we have simply managed to plunge ourselves back to the biases of our own individual situations.” Stanley J. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism,” in Stackhouse, Evangelical Futures, 109.
prevailing cultural winds of the ANE the societal influence of Moses and the Prophets was little short of a revolution in basic human rights. In the following section we will see how Jesus’ teachings and actions provide a full incarnation of our most cherished sentiments on children.

**Jesus and children**

Viewed from a 21st century Western perspective Jesus’ sentiments on children do not appear unique because the Western view on children is largely based on Jesus’ view on children. With the exception of abortion, our beliefs on children have been codified in law. We will see how Jesus’ teachings clashed with the existing Greco-Roman notions and established a view of children that can be traced to how we see them today. We are addressing why Christian theism makes such a difference and how Christianity provides the rational foundation for treating children as people. We will touch on three specific areas of Jesus’ doctrine: the kingdom of God, the gravity of child harm, and the incarnation.

**Kingdom of God**

C. S. Lewis remarks, “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.” One of the ways we see the distinctiveness of Jesus of Nazareth is in his vision of the ideal citizen in the unrivaled kingdom of God:

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them (Mk. 10:13-526 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, HarperCollins: 2000), 177.
There are several significant points here: First, the disciples appear to reflect at least something of the attitudes of Greco-Roman thought where children were not considered to be worth the time of a famous man. Second, Jesus considered children more than worthy of his time. Third, Jesus uses a child as the prime example of the ideal citizen in the ultimate kingdom.

As we saw in chapter two, the Greco-Roman world did not consider children to be fully human but tools to advance the boundaries of the empire or fatherly prestige. It seems the disciples reflected a bit of this attitude by their curt dismissal of children and guardians. In fact, this is one of the few times where Mark records Jesus as *indignant* (*ἡγανάκτησεν*). Based on Jesus’ response, we can safely say he considered children intrinsically valuable. He strongly advocated for their inclusion in the circle of worth. A change was needed in the disciples’ thinking. Instead of looking out for number one they were to look out for those who didn’t register on the scale of cultural value. Regarding and serving such ones imitates Jesus’ example as he consistently looked for the overlooked. The Gospel writers reveal internal power struggles among the disciples as to who was going to hold the greatest authority in Jesus’ kingdom (Mk. 10:35-42; Matt. 20:20-28). Ironically, the disciples’ thinking reflects a misdirected quest for greatness. Childish egoism sees self-generated power as the pathway to notoriety rather than childlike faith that trusts in the greatness of Christ. Jesus tells them how to be the greatest: be servant of all: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the

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527 Similar accounts are found Matt. 19:13-15 and Lk. 18:15-17.

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25b-28). Humility is a steppingstone not a stumbling block in Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus also states “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven ” (Matt. 18:10). Whether or not this means a popularized notion of a personal guardian angel, a general protectorate, or something else altogether the point suggests a prioritization of children in God’s economy to the extent that their value warrants angelic assignment.

Second, the fact that Jesus cleared a spot in his schedule for children leads us to believe that he considered them important. The pericope shows that Jesus considered children of great value and thus worth his time. Jesus, the rabbi quickly rising in popularity, was willing to spend time with children rather than just preach another sermon.

Third, and most remarkably, Jesus elevates children as the prime specimen of the ideal of the ultimate kingdom: the kingdom of God. We must remember Jesus was addressing a primarily Jewish audience in the Greco-Roman world. Looking back in retrospect one may expect a more robust belief in the intrinsic value of children from the disciples given their familiarity with the Hebrew Scripture but, then as now, there was no shortage of conveniently ignored ideals. The ripple effects of Jesus’ elevation of children found in the writing of the church fathers are numerous. Augustine later wrote, “It was, then, the stature of childhood that Thou, O our King, didst approve of as an emblem of humility when Thou saidst: ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven.’” St. Ambrose identifies Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego as

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529 “Jesus used children as positive examples for the appropriate attitude of the members of the kingdom. In the Synoptic Gospels children are presented as paradigms of the proper response to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of heaven.” Bakke, 173.

“children.” Unless intended as an insult, one will likely search in vain for a Greco-Roman writer referring to one of their cultural heroes as a child. Pagan leaders identify as strong and powerful as opposed to Jesus who dared associate “child” with the ideal citizen of the greatest kingdom. Therefore, it is not surprising when a post-Nicene church father depicts Old Testament heroes as children. For Christians the explanation is quite simple: biblical “hero” characters serve to point to the surpassing greatness of the real hero, the Messiah.

Why did Jesus use children as the exemplars of kingdom virtue? Clement thinks it is their simplicity, truthfulness, indifference towards status and wealth, moral innocence, and purity. Jesus set forth a child as the ideal because he was “the type of character he had come to create.” Jesus’ mercy towards children is frequently applied to the wider audience of childless parents. Eusebius instructs on how to relate to the childless: “Surely those whose bodily infirmity destroys their hopes of offspring are worthy of pity, not of punishment: and he who devotes himself to a higher object falls not for chastisement, but especial admiration.” Peter Fuller notes the uniqueness of Jesus’ view: “[Christianity] exalted childhood and held it up as an exemplar for living . . . that a child should be put forward as an example is something quite new in the history of religions, and equally new in the history of cultures.”


532 Bakke, 884, 900, 972, 1586. Clement also excoriates weak men who try to “escape from partnership in life with wife and children.” He also makes an etymological argument associating education and culture with the root word for child. 928.

533 Charles Richmond Henderson, “Christianity and Children,” The Biblical World 8, no. 6 (December 1896): 475.


declared, “Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared,” Jesus softly said, “Let the little children come to me” (Mk. 10:14).

Poets and historians have routinely disparaged Christianity for robbing the ancient world of its luster as in the words of Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath.” Such a view is historically naïve. Rather than restrictive, the teachings of Jesus led to societal and eventually legal pressures against discarding live infants to the elements or child traffickers. Anthony B. Bradley notes, “Respecting the dignity of a child in antiquity was socially counter-cultural.” Jesus instantiated our most treasured moral sensibilities on children in a world that had little use for mercy. Church history abounds of accounts of Jesus’ early followers applying his tender teachings to the least of these. The church fathers expounded on Jesus’ teachings in a variety

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536 Aristotle, Politics, Book 7, 1335b. Nicholas Wolterstorff sees a stark difference on suffering between Jesus and the rest of the Greco-Roman world: “The Stoics of antiquity said: Be calm. Disengage yourself. Neither laugh nor weep. Jesus says: Be open to the wounds of the world. Mourn humanity’s weeping, be wounded by humanity’s wounds, be in agony over humanity’s agony. But do so in the good cheer that a day of peace is coming.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 86.


538 Bradley, “Contemporary Culture,” Something Seems Strange, 262.

539 Christian Laes highlights a significant redefinition of Christian philanthropy that is worth citing at length here: “In Christian sources, we encounter greater empathy with the psychological welfare of the underprivileged, an observation which is entirely in line with the difference between the ancient notion of philanthropia and the Christian principle of caritas. While Christians refer to a religious command to show charity, pagan philanthropia was motivated more by considerations such as the honour of the city or personal glory. Philanthropia was preferentially directed at poor citizens. As in Christian charity, this redistribution of wealth was well organized. However, the generous benefactors would give, not so much according to the need of the beneficiary, but on the basis of his or her social status. In other words, they reaffirmed the class system (for example, in the case of free meals, the prominent members of society would be served first). Christian charity, by contrast, worked according to need: the poorest within the religious community would receive the most generous assistance. This principle would prove to be one of Christianity’s great strengths as a religion.” Laes, Children in the Roman Empire, 206.
of ways. Jesus woke the human consciousness to the unique dignity of all children by holding them up as “positive paradigms” for adults.\textsuperscript{540}

Consider how the men in Jesus audience could have felt insulted, especially the disciples. In a time steeped in Roman conquest and Jewish hopes for a deliverer, Jesus declares to everyone present that they will have no part in the greatest kingdom if they do not receive the already challenging teachings like a little child. Attitude matters.

\textit{Gravity of child harm}

Jesus declared, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire” (Mk. 9:42-43). In a time where children were routinely abused in a variety of ways Jesus was a bit out of fashion to prescribe such a heavy penalty. Margaret Y. MacDonald raises an intriguing textual possibility on this text, “With respect to the Jesus tradition, for example, it has recently been argued that the reference to ‘cause to stumble’ (\textit{skandalizo}) of the little ones in Mark 9:42 followed by mention of body parts in 9:43-48 (which in some contexts carry sexual connotations) actually refers to pederasty.”\textsuperscript{541}

While we do not wish to read into the text something that isn’t there, the Greco-Roman world was steeped in all manner of deviant sexual practices. Death by drowning via a millstone being


tied around one’s neck while being dropped into the sea was indeed a heavy penalty but it is quite suggestive of the value of little boys and girls.

Ancient writers were well aware of children’s impressionability.\(^542\) Perhaps this is why Jesus leveled such invectives towards those who harm or mislead them. Yet in this we see how highly Jesus valued the innocence of children. If Jesus valued their innocence to this degree then it would follow that child killing would carry an even steeper penalty than mere child mistreatment. Historically, we see this in the early church fathers’ abhorrence towards abortion and infanticide.\(^543\) Michael J. Gorman notes the support of Plato and Aristotle for abortion and attributes the declines in population of the Roman Empire at the time of Augustus and again after Hadrian to this epidemic.\(^544\) Aristides of Athens points out how Greco-Roman pagans who harm their children are merely mirroring the behavior of their own gods.\(^545\) Mercy for others was in short supply as the Greco-Roman world exemplified Tyrion’s quip, “It always seems a bit abstract doesn’t it; other people dying.”\(^546\) On the contrary, Christians have extensive explanatory power for why it’s right to prize their children: they are precious gifts from the one true God, bearers of moral significance, beings of infinite worth, persons of unspeakable

\(^{542}\) “For just as seals leave their impression in soft wax, so are lessons impressed upon the minds of children while they are young.” Bakke, 317-321. “Jerome believes in the possibility of changing and molding children. ‘One of soft and tender years is pliable for good or evil; she can be drawn in whatever direction you choose to guide her’” (Ep. 128.3a), in Bakke, 1328.

\(^{543}\) Bakke, 1706, 1740, 1750, 1768. Even the pseudepigraphal *Apocalypse of Peter* pictures women who have had abortions swallowed up to their necks with every foul thing. See *Apocalypse of Peter*, 8, Ethiopic text, in Bakke, 1769.


\(^{545}\) “Herakles next they bring forward and say that he is a god, who hates detestable things, a tyrant, and warrior and a destroyer of plagues. And of him also they say that at length he became mad and killed his own children, and cast himself into a fire and died. If then Herakles is a god, and in all these calamities was unable to rescue himself, how should others ask help from him? But it is impossible that a god should be mad, or drunken or a slayer of his children, or consumed by fire.” *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher*, trans. D. M. Kay, accessed April 4, 2017, [http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html).

Justin Martyr condemns *expositio* on the very real possibility of having intercourse with one’s “own child, or relative, or brother” as exposed infants were routinely nabbed by traffickers and raised as sex slaves.\(^{548}\)

Bakke notes how Jesus’ long-ranging influence significantly pushed back culturally accepted depravity, thereby considerably lessening the harm perpetrated on children:

Another change that came in the wake of Christianity was a great reduction in the number of children (especially boys) who were involved in sexual acts with adult men. A long tradition of pederasty, that is, intercourse between boys and men, existed in Greco-Roman antiquity, where this was seen as normal or natural sex, since the fundamental dichotomy in people’s understanding of human sexuality was not heterosexual/homosexual, but active/passive. It was also relatively common for boys and girls to be put to work as prostitutes.\(^{549}\)

At this point I would ask the reader to consider the extent to which Jesus’ view on children dovetails with our normative beliefs about children: he denounces all forms of harming children. Compromising their innocence in any way warrants stringent penalty so it would follow that any sort of sexual advance on children is morally abhorrent and deserves swift justice. Regardless of any present or future pragmatic value they may hold, children are indelibly valuable.\(^{550}\)

Christians followed Jesus’ example in considering children complete human beings unlike their fellow Greco-Roman citizens.\(^{551}\) Jesus drew clear lines buttressed with guarantees of divine dignity.\(^{547}\) “Among other things he notes that Heracles became mad and killed his own children and that the worshipers of Chinn (Saturn) practice the sacrificing of children and that ‘they burn some of them alive in his honour.’” Bakke, 1027.

\(^{547}\) Ibid., 1839. Even with animals, humane shelters do not simply give them away. There is also a grassroots movement to discourage the giving away of pets on websites like Craigslist because they’re often adopted to be used as cannon fodder in the world of underground dog fighting.

\(^{548}\) Ibid., 4276.

\(^{549}\) Ibid., 4276.

\(^{550}\) “Even the weakest son of Adam has in him the possibilities of full citizenship in the kingdom of God.” Henderson, “Christianity and Children,” 474.

\(^{551}\) Bakke, 4271.
retribution in a time where few, if any, boundaries existed to protect children. According to Jesus, child abusers and killers are ultimately guilty of violating divine moral law that calls for sheltering the innocent.

We also see how Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce was a back-door protection of children. His robust defense of natural marriage and criticism of divorce would be considered rather restrictive by many in the West (Mk. 10:2-12; Mt. 19:1-9). Before kicking against the goads of Jesus’ allegedly archaic doctrine on divorce, we would do well to remember that children are the ones who have the most to lose in the dissolution of family. Parents would do well to place the interests of their children before their own. Yet often we see the opposite in a renaissance of paganism and a prevailing egoistic paradigm.

Despite the consternation some may feel over his alleged sexually restrictive injunctions for adults, we will come to grips with natural marriage as a robust safeguard for healthy emotional and mental development, especially for small children. In one study of the effects of divorce, Dr. Judith S. Wallerstein laments, “At the time of divorce . . . the preschoolers were the most devastated. They regressed and were profoundly upset about the very logical possibility that both parents would abandon them.”

Jesus called out those seeking loopholes for divorce as having “hardness of heart” (Mk. 10:5). Christian theism makes exception for divorce on the grounds of abandonment or adultery but not for adult convenience because they found someone else who seemingly meets their emotional needs better than their current spouse (Matt. 5:32,


For Jesus, Genesis was the starting point for all discussions pertaining to marriage (Mk. 10:6-9). The creation narrative was foundational for understanding the family unit and thus the value of children. Rather than hardline legalism, the Christian concept of marriage is expressive of Christ’s voluntary submission to the Father and sacrificial love for the church (Phil. 2:4-9; Eph. 5:25-26). Protection of children is a natural byproduct of the staying power of parental sacrificial love. Christian marriage, grounded on this theologically fueled love, erects a showcase of divine love and domestic security for children. Jesus elevated children to the ideal in the kingdom of God and warned of frightening penalties for child abusers. He also exemplified the Mosaic Law in defending the helpless and warning of judgment on oppressors.

Exposing children to the ravages of the wild or child traffickers, sexual abuse, and crushingly oppressive family structures more than likely activates a sense of moral outrage deep in our hearts. What best explains why reports of children being terribly abused or even killed bother us so? That epistemic question is closely connected to an ontological one: What best explains why such hideous behavior is wrong? To reduce or quantify a child’s life in terms of dollars and figures is callously cheapening. Biological or financial disappointment falls short. Certainly child abuse or even murder means squelched potential or unrealized future productivity but these are not why we find them so egregious. There is something else altogether that goes beyond the bounds of statistical losses spelled out in Excel spreadsheets. Sure, many moral realist non-Christian theists, atheists, and naturalists would agree, but I suggest the incarnational strength of Christian theism gives moral outrage the most traction. It is quite simply the innate sense we carry that every child has intrinsic value because each one of them is fearfully and wonderfully made creation of God. Children are defenseless and lack a level of moral

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555 Consider the following points: 1) Humans have value because all humans are created in the image of God – Gen. 1:27-28; 9:1-7, 2) Human value does not depend on mental or physical functionality – Gen. 9:5-6, 3)
culpability that adults carry. Because their precious trust in their parents mirrors how we should respond to God, Jesus upheld children as exemplars of the kingdom of God.

Minus God, Baggett and Walls classify moral outrage as a “futile emotion.”\textsuperscript{556} Liam Neeson’s brilliant portrayal of Ottoway, an atheistic, wolf-killing security contractor employed by an Alaskan gas company in the film, \textit{The Grey}, showcases this futility. The message of the film is as cold as the Alaskan weather it was filmed in: There is no hope or redemption. At best, one can strain for the momentary gratification of defying the indifference of the universe through tenacious self-reliance. As the only one left alive after a terrifying plane crash in the tundra, Ottoway, succumbing to hypothermia and surrounded by wolves, looks to the heavens with a tortured look and screams, “Do something. Do something. You phony prick fraudulent motherf*ck*r. Do something! Come on! Prove it! F*ck faith! Earn it! Show me something real! I need it now. Not later. Now! Show me and I’ll believe in you until the day I die. I swear. I’m calling on you. I’m calling on you! F*ck it. I’ll do it myself.”\textsuperscript{557} Sadly, this heartbreaking and caustic script expresses the thoughts and emotions of untold masses of persons disillusioned by the inescapable pain that life brings yet without any vestige of hope.

The theology to which this dimension of morality points has powerful societal implications. Reverence for the \textit{imago dei}, by way of not violating the sanctity of personhood, is the best method of fostering a free and virtuous society. History bears testimony to the fact that a culture’s respect for the intrinsic value of human life has a direct correlation to its record on

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Human value can only be devalued through a hardened heart in rebellion to God’s moral commands – Gen. 6:5, 11-13. For those considering taking their belief in human value from the theoretical to the practical, the following points may be helpful: 1) Consider volunteering at a crisis pregnancy center or financially supporting such ministries, 2) Consider becoming involved in the Pro-Life movement, 3) Refuse to support politicians or political groups that advocate abortion or euthanasia, 4) Look for ways to show grace of Jesus Christ to women who have had abortions, 5) Look for ways to encourage the ill, aging, or unemployed who feel their value is diminished.

\textsuperscript{556} Baggett and Walls, \textit{Good God}, 224.

\textsuperscript{557} \textit{The Grey}, directed by Joe Carnahan (2011; Hollywood, CA: Open Road Films, 2012), DVD.
\end{footnote}
human rights. Robert Merrihew Adams writes, “I think the moral horror or abomination there (Nazis making lampshades out of human skin) is not to be found in the blurring of a socially recognized boundary but in what is done to images of God.”\textsuperscript{558} A respect for inalienable rights creates the potential for a free and virtuous society while simultaneously restraining vice. As we’ve mentioned before, ideas take on a life of their own as they trickle down into popular culture and politics. Marx’s dialectical materialism exacerbated already nightmarish human suffering from the borders of Eastern Europe to the frigid shores of North Korea. On the other hand, the ideals of Bonhoeffer’s radical Christian ethics and Wilberforce’s social compassion for both humans and animals, rooted in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, still attract the youthful zeal of young Christ-followers to give their finest years in the stench of fetid slums and Third World orphanages.

\textit{Incarnation: The death of egoism}

The incarnation provides a fuller picture of the filial and familial relationship between God and persons He has created. God as a husband pursuing his unfaithful wife (Israel) in the book of Hosea is all part and parcel of Judaism. However, Christians believe Jesus is the embodiment, literally the incarnation, of these attributes which provides deliverances from egoism. Several inferences from the incarnation are relevant here: First, Jesus chose to identify with a race of beings unable to deliver themselves. Second, children are valuable because of what they are, not just because of their potential. Third, Jesus identified with and experienced human suffering.

In the gospel narratives the incarnation was ground zero in a life destined for death. In

addition to the crucifixion, we should remember that Jesus was not unaccustomed to suffering. A brief reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus’ actions toward human suffering were anything but indifferent. He showed mercy to a woman accused of adultery, ministered to the physically handicapped, welcomed societal outcasts, ministered to the ill, wept over his friend’s death, was rejected by his own family, falsely accused, betrayed by a close friend, and suffered a tortuous death.\textsuperscript{559} In Jesus we see egoism conquered by compassion.

If Jesus had an experiential knowledge of human suffering via personal experience, rather than a merely cognitive one, then the gravity of his words about these realities deepens tremendously.\textsuperscript{560} He did not speak of suffering from an Athenian ivory tower but from under the iron heel of Roman oppression and fanatical intolerance from a religious establishment that sought his death. Even the agnostic Albert Camus notes the extraordinary implications of Jesus’ death concerning the enigma of evil and suffering:

His solution consisted, first, in experiencing them. The god-man suffers too, with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to him since he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadows, the divinity, ostensibly abandoning its traditional privileges, lived through to the end, despair included, the agony of death. Thus is explained the \textit{Lama sabachthani} and the frightful doubt of Christ in agony.\textsuperscript{561}

Solidarity with humanity by entering the totality of the human experience is a salient feature of the incarnation. Jesus entered the fray in human flesh, not in a quasi-angelic form immune to human frailty and experienced the full range of human temptations while retaining his

\textsuperscript{559} Matt. 12:46-50; Mk. 7:32-34, 14:56; Lk. 7:34, 18:39, 22:47-48, 23:1-49; Jn. 8:1-11, 11:35.

\textsuperscript{560} “Loving us, God does not give us something, but Himself; and giving us Himself, giving us His only Son, He gives us everything.” Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God}, Vol. II, Part 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 276.

moral purity.\textsuperscript{562} Keith Ward notes, “Perhaps the central distinctive teaching of Christianity is that the Divine shares in creaturely suffering, in order that the material order may be liberated from bondage to selfish desire, and transfigured to share in the life of eternity.”\textsuperscript{563} This is the death of egoism. It was the proverbial actor coming out of the director’s chair and playing the lead part in the drama that led to the ultimate sacrifice of the director.\textsuperscript{564} Baggett and Walls describe the incarnation as “a picture of the divine condescending to take human flesh, one person both wholly divine and wholly human. No greater portrait of integration and rapprochement of the natural and supernatural, God and cosmos, is easy to envision.”\textsuperscript{565} Therefore, the claim that God set the parameters of universal operations does not detract from the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain endured by Jesus.\textsuperscript{566}

For Christians, the incarnation and passion of Jesus provides an even deeper consolation in the face of evil. Jesus’ hard-hitting sermons on children and the penalties for those who harm them avoid the scythe of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s words, “Those who have continued to live on in comfort scold those who suffered”\textsuperscript{567} intended for hypocritical pedantic naggers. On the contrary, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,” is a merciful act of pointing to the

\textsuperscript{562} “For certainly no seed ever fell from so fair a tree into so dark and cold a soil.” C. S. Lewis, \textit{Miracles: A Preliminary Study} (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 149. This is one of the main points of the letter to the Hebrews and is eloquently expressed by William L. Lane in his commentary, \textit{Hebrews: A Call to Commitment} (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2004).

\textsuperscript{563} Ward, \textit{Religion and Human Nature}, 5.

\textsuperscript{564} Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, \textit{Handbook of Christian Apologetics}, 150-174. N. T. Wright writes, “What the Gospels offer is not a philosophical explanation of evil, what it is or why it’s there, nor a set of suggestions for how we might adjust our lifestyles so that evil will mysteriously disappear from the world, but the story of an event in which the living God deals with it.” N. T. Wright, \textit{Evil and the Justice of God} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 93.

\textsuperscript{565} Baggett and Walls, \textit{God & Cosmos}, 52-53.


way of deliverance in lieu of the coming judgment (Lk. 13:1-9). Obedience to Jesus’ commands is holistic. Mere verbal confession to a collection of theological abstractions is foreign to the New Testament. In addition to fulfilling the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus’ uniqueness can be seen in his prescribed ethical norms that, in the words of L. Rush Bush, “will improve our life if followed, but that will crush us if they are rejected and ignored.” Jesus’ regard for the weak and mercy to the downcast provided a new paradigm of human-to-human relationships where egoism is overcome by love.

At the cross we see God’s wrath against sin not poured out against the wicked but on an innocent, voluntary substitute. “Or, as the old evangelistic tract put it, the nations of the world got together to pronounce judgment on God for all the evils of the world, only to realize with a shock that God had already served his sentence.” Christians believe the resurrection was necessary for salvation but incarnation and death are required ingredients in the economy of resurrection. J. R. R. Tolkien puts it this way, “The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy.” Alvin Plantinga paints the beautiful brokenness of the passion as follows:

He was subjected to ridicule, rejection, and finally the cruel and humiliating death of the

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568 In the words of Gordon Kaufman, “Believing in God is not simply a matter of the confession of a few words: It involves a reordering of our whole existence in its socio-cultural as well as its individual and personal dimensions.” Gordon Kaufman, “What Shall We Do with the Bible?” Interpretation 25, no. 95 (1971): 112.


570 Jesus went where others would not and associated with forgotten as Gerald L. Borchet comments, “When Jesus went to Jerusalem, he did not spend his time in elite hostels; nor did he concentrate his ministry merely in the temple or give attention to the rich and famous who could help him politically and financially with his ministry. He concentrated on people in need, which for the elite of society was part of his problem. In this story [John 5] he visited the pool below the temple where the helpless dregs of society lay in a pathetic state.” Gerald L. Borchet, The New American Commentary: John 1-11, Vol. 25A (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 231.

571 Wright, Evil and the Justice of God, 94.

cross. Horrifying as that is, Jesus, the Word, the son of God, suffered something vastly more horrifying: abandonment by God, exclusion from his love and affection: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” All this to enable human beings to be reconciled to God, and to achieve eternal life. This overwhelming display of love and mercy is not merely the greatest story ever told; it is the greatest story that could be told. No other great-making property of a world can match this one.573

According to Christian theism, the incarnation to the resurrection of Christ is not just a source of revelation by which we can know God but a medium through which we can understand our own humanity and find hope for overcoming the destructive pull of our lower desires.574

Paul and children

Before examining Paul’s specific views on children I believe it may be beneficial to revisit the topic of idolatry and briefly examine his view and its connection to our present discussion. Idolatry is patent demon worship according to Paul. He warns the Corinthian church that demons are the force behind the rites of idol worship, including meat sacrificed to idols. “I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor. 10:20-22). Christian communion is exclusive as should be the religious affections of Christians.575 Why is this significant? First, spiritual communion with

573 Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies, 975.

574 Kierkegaard somberly pleas, “But even if it is very pleasant for flesh and blood to avoid opposition, I wonder if it is a comfort also in the hour of death. In the hour of death, surely the only comfort is that one has not avoided opposition but has suffered it.” Soren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995), 84.

Jesus: He alone deserves one’s allegiance and worship. Idol worship turns one away from God and His principles. Second, the societal aftereffects of spiritual communion with Jesus Christ are profound. Regardless of whether one believes in a supernatural reality behind New Testament doctrine, the more one practices Jesus’ ethical teachings the more one will exhibit love, mercy, honesty, patience, and chastity. The more who behave this way the greater the potential for a cultural renaissance resulting in a more virtuous society.

Earlier in this chapter we saw how idol worship in the ancient world often involved sexualizing children and even outright child sacrifice. Because idolatry amounts to masked demonism it is not a stretch to correlate paganism with a low view of children. Participating with such malevolent spiritual forces poses a very real threat to children.

Pagan idolatry was also corrosive to basic human rights and spiritual health. Human sacrifice, infanticide, and cultic orgies are at the nadir of human degradation. So for Paul, continuing the Old Testament corban on pagan ecumenism, idolatry, and religious syncretism is not a sign of xenophobia, but rather a warning of love against spiritual and cultural ruin. While child sacrifice was by and large not in vogue in the 1st century Roman Empire, it was part and parcel of the biblical metanarrative into which Paul spoke. We see evidence of Paul’s crusade

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577 For a treatment of Paul’s use of Exodus 32:6 to show a correlation between idolatry and immorality, see Jerry Hwang, “Turning the Tables on Idol Feasts: Paul’s Use of Exodus 32:6 in 1 Corinthians 10:7,” *JETS* 54, no. 3 (September 2011): 573-587.


579 An Aramaic text from Qumran (Pseudo-Daniel) states the ancient Israelites sacrificed their children to “demons of error.” This may provide a glimpse into a Hebrew view that correlates here: idolatry was demon worship and children sacrificed were flesh and blood offerings to demons. See Bennie H. Reynolds, “What are Demons of Error? The Meaning of תְּמוֹנָה תְּמוֹנָה and Israelite Child Sacrifice,” *Revue de Qumrân* 22:4, 88 (December, 2006): 593-613.
against idolatry in the undermining of the Ephesian economy resulting in a violent citywide riot of which he was the prime target (Acts 20).

Christian theism’s intolerance of idolatry may seem a bit out of touch with 21st century multiculturalism but it actually rolled back the tide of practices harmful to children in the first several centuries after Jesus. Idol worship was not practiced in a vacuum but was locked in with society across the board so that the devaluing of children had religious and cultural endorsement. I am not arguing that idol worship was solely centered on the sexualization of children and child sacrifice, but rather that these are salient byproducts of a diminished estimation of children. To be clear, this is relevant because Paul’s message of building the family followed his destruction of pagan ideals not least of which was the cultural and religious obsession with demonic occult activity.580

Mark Harding puts the Apostle Paul’s influence as follows: “Paul took the radical message of Jesus and translated it into the urban context of the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean basin. Like Jesus he sought to build up communities that reflected the radical egalitarianism of the dawning Kingdom of God.”581 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks labels the natural family “the most beautiful idea in the history of civilization” because of its stabilizing influence on children and overall society.582 Christian theism gives a compelling account on why this is the case. We will concentrate on two aspects of Paul’s teaching as it pertains to children: adoption and the question of parenthood and the way he connected marriage to the kerygma of the risen


Jesus, which encompassed the family via spousal relationships and child raising. We will see how the cumulative teachings of Moses, Jesus, and Paul on the family and children provide a compelling case for the plausibility of the Christian metanarrative.

*Adoption: What is a parent?*

Out of all the metaphors available to the Apostle Paul to describe the redemptive act by which God claims persons for His own, adoption receives honored prominence. Romans 8 is ground central for Paul’s theological exposition of adoption:

> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him…but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:14–17, 23b).

These texts are informative in answering the question of what it means to be a parent. Through its adoptive metaphor for salvation, Christian theism has a response that includes biological and filial protection. But it stretches far beyond to make sense of the strong sentiments parents have for their adopted children they have no biological relation with. Parenthood is most often synonymous with biological replication and the accompanying natural assumption of responsibility for the child by his or her birth parents. Next, there is adoption where the parent intentionally chooses a specific child. So at what point does one become a child’s father or mother? I propose that parenthood involves the assumption of responsibility for a child’s welfare. It is that seminal moment in which the adult looks to the child and says, “He/she is my responsibility.”

Parenthood is not merely a biological outcome but a divine commitment. Since adoption
language is so deeply integrated into the *kerygma* we may say that the Christian gospel takes pains to build a case for the nobility of adoption. If God has adopted His people through Jesus’ redemptive work then His followers make much of him by modeling divine-sanctioned adoption. Assuming protective responsibilities for helpless orphans reflects God’s divine adoptive love for those unable to save themselves. Parental sacrifice for their biological or adopted children is beautifully modeled in the Bible. Christian thinkers, most notably Augustine, lauded the “institute of adoptive parenthood.”

Paul’s picture models a relationship with God on the most basic filial grounds: as children naturally trust parents, believers can trust God because a good father loves his children. Child-parent trust is therefore illustrative of a greater divine-human reality. Here is where seekers may find the explanatory power in Christian theism for why adoption is for so many a paradigm of love. Theologically, the Christian message may serve as a bridge to non-Christian but morally sophisticated foster and adoptive parents.

Christian parenting goes beyond caring for mental, physical, and emotional needs: it is a proactive commitment to a child’s spiritual welfare. It transcends training upstanding moral citizens. The end is preparing them to be ambassadors for Christ and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Christ-centered parenting is far more difficult because it stirs into the dregs of the human heart. Humiliating humility fuels it. It requires continual checks for any vestige of vice in the child not because badness is socially or financially disadvantageous but because it causes

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583 Augustine writes, “Look, brothers, look at the laws of adoption, by which means a man becomes the son of someone from whose seed he was not born; so that the will of the one adopting has more of a right over him than the nature of the one producing. Therefore Joseph must not only be reckoned a father, but most greatly so.” Augustine, Sermon 51:16 (PL 38.348), in Joshua C. Tate, “Christianity and the Legal Status of Abandoned Children in the Later Roman Empire,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008/2009): 127-128. Augustine goes on to reference Moses being exposed as an infant and adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. Also see http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160351.htm.

brokenness in one’s relationship with God. Certain early church fathers believed that children showed the soundness of their parents’ faith.585

Christian child raising is vertical rather than horizontal in scope. It is a “God-ward” model but the byproduct encompasses and exceeds all the goals that moralism encourages. Christian parenting ultimately gains wisdom, stature, and favor with both God and man whereas moralism only attains the latter, which, according to Jesus, results in losing everything (Luke 9:23-26). So we could say, according to Paul, adoption is as natural to the Christian view as infanticide and abortion are anathema. Because of these data, we can surmise that children held a high degree of importance in Paul’s value strata.

Marriage, child-raising, and the kerygma of the risen Jesus (Ephesians 5:23-6:1-4)

Paul advances a new paradigm for marriage and child raising based on the kerygma of the risen Jesus, most notably in Ephesians 5:23-6:4. By this point we have seen how Greco-Roman culture valued the family unit on pragmatic rather than theological or intrinsic grounds and how the father was the functional dictator. Now we will catch a glimpse of how Paul’s connecting the family unit to the nature of God via Jesus’ resurrection was so qualitatively different.586

First, spousal relationships should be grounded on sacrificial love and respect rather than personal advancement. Wives are to follow the leadership of their husbands who are in turn commanded to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:22, 25). Let us not miss the significance of Paul’s command to husbands: they are to willingly lay down their lives for their wives. This is a far cry from the pagan concept of the paterfamilias

585 Bakke, 2587.

who held the power of life and death over his family, a power that was more often leveraged for personal advancement.\textsuperscript{587}

Husbands are also to love their wives “as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body” (Eph. 5:28b-30). One of the most effective ways to love a child is to love his or her mother. Jennifer Roback Morse writes, “In Christian cultures, the responsibility for the care of children is assigned to the mother, and the care of the mother is assigned to the biological father.”\textsuperscript{588} Specifying such a high degree of care for the wife also creates safeguards for children.\textsuperscript{589} Heterosexual, monogamous marriage grounded on the principles of Christian theism affords children security. We may say that the war on marriage is an attack on children. Thus, Paul’s family order contrasted with the “Law of the Jungle” that rules some families; whoever can threaten the most, scream the loudest, pout the longest, or intimidate the strongest ends up the winner in the home. Rather, the Christian home is to be one of order and submission to the \textit{kerygma} of the risen Jesus.

Paul then refers to the “one flesh” of the marital union: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32).\textsuperscript{590} He goes on to exhort couples:

\textsuperscript{587} F. F. Bruce comments, “By setting this highest of standards for the husband’s treatment of his wife, Paul goes to the limit in safeguarding the wife’s dignity and welfare. For the love of Christ is a self-giving love: He gave Himself up for His Church, and the natural inference is that there is no sacrifice, not even the sacrifice of his life, which a husband should not be prepared to make, if necessary, for his wife.” F. F. Bruce, \textit{The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition} (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961), 115.

\textsuperscript{588} Morse, \textit{Love & Economics}, 30.

\textsuperscript{589} Mark Harding notes, “Early Christianity was based on the household, especially in the ministries of Paul and his colleagues. The household provided a sense of belonging for the poor and dispossessed who were otherwise ground down by the rigid hierarchies and authority structures of the wider society.” Harding, \textit{Early Christian Life and Thought in Social Context}, 312.

\textsuperscript{590} Paul jumps from this “great mystery” “to the relationship of Christ and the church, in order to demonstrate how deeply this unity is anchored and in what a close, spiritual communion it is realized.” Herman Ridderbos, \textit{Paul: An Outline of His Theology} (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 379.
“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33).591 It’s an intentional move from male domineering to mutually shared humility in Christ.592 The marriage relationship is far more than a social union. It is a reflection of divine self-sacrificial love. John R. W. Stott comments “The truth is that all self-sacrifice, although the way of service and the means to self-realization, is also painful. Indeed, love and pain appear to be inseparable, especially in sinners like us, since our fallenness has not been obliterated by our re-creation through Christ.”593 Paul sees marriage as a sanctified path to Christlikeness that necessitates the mortification of egoism, a painful process indeed.

How is this relevant to the topic of children? One can understand how vast the chasm is between Paul’s Christocentric, egoistic-crushing union and the Greco-Roman model where women and children were routinely sacrificed on the altar of male narcissism. Reasonable persons willing to consider widely available historical data will see how Christian marriage creates and conduces to an environment where children can flourish. Under the iron-fisted rule of the paterfamilias children’s value was viewed primarily through the lens of the father’s social advancement rather than the child’s health. John Chrysostom sees parental and accompanying familial unity as an opportunity to extend Christian witness into the larger culture: “When they are in harmony, and their children are being reared well and their household is in good order, their neighbors will smell the sweet fragrance of harmony, along with all their friends and


relatives. But if the contrary is true, everything is overturned and thrown into confusion.” In
the building of a Christocentric family fathers play a huge part in protecting their children since
the family unit is a sturdy sanctuary against sexual and physical harm.

Second, we see Paul’s injunction for fathers not to provoke their children to anger as
setting a new paradigm of child raising. Contrary to the heavy-handed Roman model, Christian
parents, especially fathers, were to “nurture” their children. The ESV translates the key word
ἐκτρέφετε “discipline” but the KJV “nurture” may be closer to the original idea. It’s the same
word in Ephesians 5:29 “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just
as Christ does the church.” Paul’s parenting paradigm has no lack of descriptive power for a
loving yet focused outlook. Practically absent or emotionally distant parenting has no place in
the home because it reverses Jesus’ incarnational example. Margaret MacDonald puts it as
follows: “Ephesians promulgates a vision of the unified family that serves as the perfect
representative of the setting for bringing up children in the instruction and discipline of the
Lord.”

Paul warns overbearing fathers: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become
discouraged . . . Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” (Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). There
exists a clear line between discipline that exasperates children and the kind that brings them up
“in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Parental demands should not be

594 John Chrysostom, “Homily on Ephesians,” Interpretatio ominum epistularum Paulinarum, ed. F. Field
Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, eds. Thomas C. Oden and Mark J. Edwards (Downers Grove: InterVarsity,
1999), 184.

595 The basic idea is to provide for and nourish so as to bring up from childhood. BDAG, 311.


597 Craig S. Keener comments, “Paul is among the minority of ancient writers who seem to disapprove of
excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was
excessive because Jesus’ commands are not so.598 Paul is institutionalizing pity within the Christian home. Chrysostom paints Paul’s point on child raising with exquisite detail that is worth quoting at length:

Let everything be secondary with us to the provident care we should take of our children, and to our “bringing them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” If from the very first he is taught to be a lover of true wisdom, then wealth greater than all wealth has he acquired and a more imposing name. You will effect nothing so great by teaching him an art, and giving him that outward learning by which he will gain riches, as if you teach him the art of despising riches. If you desire to make him rich, do this. For the rich man is not he who desires great riches, and is encircled with great riches; but the man who has need of nothing.599 Discipline your son in this, teach him this. This is the greatest riches. Seek not how to give him reputation and high character in outward learning, but consider deeply how you shall teach him to despise the glory that belongs to this present life. By this means would he become more distinguished and more truly glorious. This it is possible for the poor man and the rich man alike to accomplish. These are lessons which a man does not learn from a master, nor by art, but by means of the divine oracles. Seek not how he shall enjoy a long life here, but how he shall enjoy a boundless and endless life hereafter. Give him the great things, not the little things.600

As we are seeing, marriage is intensely theological because it reflects the nature and attributes of God along a myriad of practical avenues. Father-led nurture serves as a window to God’s relationship to His children. Self-sacrifice for one’s own heirs is seen in nature but most visibly in the passion of Christ. Christian theism values persons as such rather than as things to be used. We see this in Paul’s injunction for spouses to care for one another and their children. Marital fidelity provides the little ones far more security than does a hook up culture.

accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment. This text, however, addresses the discipline of minors in the household.)” Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), in Logos Library Systems [CD-ROM].

598 F. F. Bruce, “It is possible, even for Christian parents, to be so unreasonable in their demands on their children that the children are irritated beyond measure and wonder whether it does any good to try to please their parents and do what they say.” F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians, 122.


600 Ibid.
On Christianity, parenting is the paradigm for self-sacrifice. Joy is a byproduct of altruism, something for which marriage makes ample room. For Paul, benevolent parenting is the altruistic safeguard against barbaric egoism. Moses and Paul’s prayer to be accursed for the sake of their fellow Jews reflects altruism, albeit to an extreme degree (Ex. 32:30-32; Rom. 9:1-5). Why would one adopt a belief system that demands this level of personal philanthropy? Reciprocated divine love gives the reasoning and staying power for this sort of love.\(^{601}\) Contrary to this call of self-sacrifice is the progressively diminishing trajectory of self-worship. C. S. Lewis writes, “The characteristic of lost souls is their rejection of everything that is not themselves.”\(^{602}\)

Purely selfish familial relationships are anemic compared to Paul’s model where the father lays down his life for the children’s mother with the sacrificial love of Christ and treats the children with gentleness and patience (Eph. 5:25-Eph. 6:4). Morse argues, “A family held together by a series of contractual understandings, even the most reasonable and elaborate, turns out to be less stable than a family held together by that vague, much misunderstood, intangible quality called love.”\(^{603}\) In the words of *The Princess Bride*, “Love, true love, is what brings us together today.”\(^{604}\) A model of true love as epitomized by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth has powerful keeping potential for parents tempted to stray from challenging but stately

\(^{601}\) Jennifer Roback Morse explains it like this: “Let me illustrate the principle of love as commitment with a very different kind of example. My husband is an engineer—a prime candidate for a materialist. He also happens to be a sailboat aficionado. If you ask him what keeps a wooden sailboat afloat, he will answer without hesitation, ‘Love.’ He is obviously not making a statement about physics but about human motivation. Wooden sailboats require an enormous amount of maintenance. Without a person to pour money, time, and attention into it, a wooden boat will sooner or later sink into the harbor. And why would a person pour all of those resources into a wooden boat when he could have a fiberglass boat at a fraction of the cost in time and trouble? He loves the boat.” Morse, *Love & Economics*, 20.


\(^{603}\) Morse, *Love & Economics*, 3.

parental duties. Egoism is insufficient to explain parental duty.\footnote{Morse, \textit{Love & Economics}, 10.}

In conclusion, Paul’s family structure is informative of his perspective on children. The gospel message creates a platform for families to learn to love one another unconditionally as they are enabled to do so by the sustaining power of supernatural grace.

\textbf{Christian teaching on sexuality and children}

Christianity has historically pushed back not only the superstition of paganism but also its sexual deviancy. Egoism and progressivism unwittingly erode this protective boundary.\footnote{See Rita Lee, “Health care problems of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender patients,” \textit{Western Journal of Medicine}, 172, no. 6 (June 2000): 403-408. \url{https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1070935/}.} In this section I will examine the attempt to normalize homosexuality within historically Christian circles. Such trends highlight the importance of clearly explicating a biblical view of sexuality.

S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams set their sights on progressive claims that homosexual activity and orientation are well within the scope of orthodox biblical sexuality. They give no small amount of pushback by not only claiming that such assertions are a misinterpretation of Scripture but that “Homoerotic behavior is ultimately a profession of atheism and a declaration of war on Western society’s heterosexual norms inherited from historic Christianity.”\footnote{Fortson and Grams, \textit{Unchanging Witness}, 23.} Their claim that ‘mere’ “homoerotic behavior” correlates to a subtle but profoundly presuppositional atheism may initially seem radical but the authors provide no small amount of supporting data.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}

\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}
David Gushee, a Baptist minister and professor of ethics at Mercer University and emergent church leader Brian McLaren showcase the growing rift among evangelical scholars in their urging conservative church leaders to change their mind regarding the historic Christian view of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{609} Published in 1980, John Boswell’s \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, is one of the seminal works in the gay Christian movement. Boswell died from AIDS sixteen years later at the age of forty-two.\textsuperscript{610} Gay theology argues the following: the early church did not actually oppose homosexual behavior, the ancient world had no concept of homosexual proclivity, and the church has historically misinterpreted Jesus, Paul, and the Old Testament on sexuality. Finally, only after the sexual revolution of the 1960’s was the church able to rediscover the true biblical teaching on love and sexuality.

Fortson and Grams disagree: “The sexual ethics of Paul the apostle and the early church which followed his teaching turned the Roman world upside down. In a radical reversal of Greco-Roman values, Christian leaders instructed believers that sexual relations were only acceptable in heterosexual marriage.”\textsuperscript{611} Historic Christian teaching on homosexuality is not a unitary focus on denouncing homosexual behavior but also in offering restorative ministry.\textsuperscript{612} A


\textsuperscript{610} \textit{Unchanging Witness}, 23.

\textsuperscript{611} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{612} Ibid., 92-94.}
refusal to speak truth regarding sinful sexual acts is a betrayal of the most basic pastoral duties. 613

With a rare but singular voice the church fathers denounce various forms of sexual immorality (adultery, pederasty, bestiality, fornication, prostitution) and homosexuality.614 Most notably, the destructive effect of the homosexual lifestyle is captured by Damian in his 11th century “diatribe against practicing homosexuals who had infiltrated holy orders,” inflammatory treatise, Book of Gomorrah where he opines:

Truly, this vice is never to be compared with any other vice because it surpasses the enormity of all vices. Indeed, this vice is the death of bodies, the destruction of souls. It pollutes the flesh; it extinguishes the light of the mind. It evicts the Holy Spirit from the temple of the human heart; it introduces the devil who incites to lust. It casts into error; it completely removes the truth from the mind that has been deceived. It prepares snares for those entering; it shuts up those who fall into the pit so that they cannot get out. It opens hell; it closes the door of heaven. 615

Damian’s denouncement carries more than a medieval Roman Catholic diatribe against unfashionable sensuality. Even during the Reformation both Protestant and Roman Catholic sources uniformly denounce the “unchristian acts” of “the heresy of sodomy” because it flaunts an abrogation of divinely ordained sexual activity.616

Why have views shifted in the Western church over the past few decades? Fortson and Grams attribute the shift to three primary causes: 1) An increasing number of Western biblical illiterates, 2) theology separated from biblical studies in seminary training, and 3) church leaders ignorant of church history.617 Disagreement with traditional sexuality could be warranted if

613 Ibid., 95.
614 Ibid., 42.
615 Ibid., 55.
616 Ibid., 76.
617 Ibid., 167-168.
homosexuality were a controversial topic among theologians throughout church history. However, against the overwhelming condemnation from diverse streams of historic Christianity, whether Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Protestant, the claims of gay theologians fall short of historical or exegetical merit. In this “new” sexuality one finds not the fruits of diligent exegesis but an unfortunately forced attempt to subjugate theological truth to subjective sexuality.\textsuperscript{618}

The objection that Jesus never spoke about homosexuality neglects to recognize that Jesus ministered primarily in a first century Palestinian Jewish context. Jesus’ disciples were Jews as were the large majority of his hearers who accepted the teaching of the Hebrew Bible on sexuality. One may reasonably assume that Jesus’ hearers considered homosexual acts pagan and sinful. Because Jesus considered the Old Testament authoritative, Jesus’ view on sexuality is the Old Testament position unless he indicated otherwise. In fact, Jesus tightened rather than loosened the law. Therefore, Jesus condemns homosexual acts via His trust in the Hebrew Bible as authoritative Scripture. Damien Martin argues, “Since Jesus had nothing to say about homosexuality, we cannot know if he thought it was right or wrong. We can infer, however, that it was not high on his list of social or ethical concerns.”\textsuperscript{619} He later slaps the “homophobic” label on Jews and Christians who believe homosexual acts are inconsistent with Scripture.\textsuperscript{620}

Egoism offers little hope for those with undesired sexual inclinations. As to the question of whether persons are born homosexuals, proclivity is not determinism. On Christian theism the tendency towards temptation does not mean there is no escape. Even advances in epigenetics

\textsuperscript{618} The degree to which the authors wield an undercutting defeater against these claims is one not often found in scholarly dialogue. It is unequivocally devastating.


\textsuperscript{620} \textit{Ibid.}
suggest that learned behavior can cultivate the proclivity of our genes. Nevertheless, as Robert A. J. Gagnon reflects, “The bottom line for biblical authors: it did not matter why people willingly engaged in same-sex intercourse, just as it was unnecessary to parse the motivation of those who participated willingly in incest, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or heterosexual prostitution.”

Given the paucity of research in landmark gay theology works taken together with the mountain of primary sources in church history denouncing homosexual behavior, gay theologians may do well to practice intellectual honesty and admit their aversion to traditional morality is cultural and emotional in nature rather than theological. Theological dialogue would be more productive if gay theologians were intellectually honest about their presuppositions. Instead of trying to make the Bible affirm homosexuality a much clearer option is available: Create a new religion that holds sexual egoism as the foundational authority or simply denounce sexually restrictive religion altogether. Fortson and Grams give an ominous prediction:

If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical grounds but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

To claim that the grounds for normalizing homosexuality emanate from the pages of Scripture is to advance an ill-defined ethos of love that claims to replace the law.

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621 The Epi Genome has to do with one’s lifestyle and the toxins one comes into contact with and can “turn on/tturn off” certain genes that can actually carry to one’s progeny. John Cloud, “Epigenetics: Why Your DNA Isn’t Your Destiny,” Time, January 6, 2010, accessed May 21, 2017, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1952313,00.html.


623 Ibid., 163.

624 Ibid., 170.
One must first understand the purpose behind the divine design of human sexuality before we can assess homosexuality as a sin or simply an alternative preference. As C. S. Lewis says, “And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled. We called sadism a sexual perversions; but you must first have the idea of a normal sexuality before you can talk of its being perverted; and you can see which is the perversion, because you can explain the perverted from the normal, and cannot explain the normal from the perverted.”625 Karen Swallow Prior argues, “What abortion and same-sex marriage have in common is that they each attempt to deny the procreative nature of the sexual union. Each forms a deep crack in the mirror of nature that reflects the image of God.”626

In conclusion, acquiescence to gay theology pushes the church to resemble more pre-Christian paganism than biblical orthodoxy. As we have seen, Christianity’s teachings on sexuality established a category for sexual deviancy: anything other than monogamous, heterosexual activity. The so-called boringness of this traditional Christian sexual ethic is precisely what strengthens and maintains the family unit. Husbands and wives staying sexually faithful to one another drastically reduces the chances of marital strife and divorce thus providing a hallowed family sphere where children can develop into emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy adults. Exchanging the natural family for the egoism of sexual anarchy is a poor exchange and children receive the worst part of the deal. As Baggett and Walls write: “If Trinitarian love is primordial reality, we can never advance our true self-interest by selfish behavior, but when we selflessly return love to the God of perfect love— one form of which

626 Prior, “Gay Marriage, Abortion, and the Bigger Picture: Living out God’s will requires us to look beyond single issues,” *ibid*. 

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consists of love for other human beings—we thereby inevitably promote our own ultimate well-being and highest happiness.”

Concluding thoughts

As we bring this dissertation to a close let us look back at the logical flow of the whole argument from beginning to end. Here’s the roadmap: First, we suggested basic moral sensibilities on children are an offshoot of the classical moral argument for the existence of God. Whereas, the moral argument speaks generally to moral realism my claim focuses more specifically on how our intuitions on children bear witness to this reality. Without moral realism, arguing for basic moral sensibilities would be somewhat unintelligible. If moral realism is false then the claim of basic objective moral beliefs relating to children necessarily fails. Second, we mined the relevant historical data on children in several cultures contemporaneous with the biblical world. Third, we examined the worldview implications of egoism in current trends in child treatment. We discovered that egoism fails to categorically account for human value and thus is insufficient to explain our commonsensical moral notions on children. Finally, I presented an abductive case for our deepest moral intuitions as strongly evidenced on Christian theism. At the heart of this project we focused on how children should be treated, and how Christian teachings imbue our moral sensibilities about children with all the more weight. The logical flow is as follows: We have excellent reasons to take moral intuitions about the moral treatment of children seriously. In fact, this gives us excellent prima facie reason to believe in God as the best explanation of, say, the inherent dignity of people, including children. But when we look to the past, we see that often children have been horribly treated and not accorded worth. And today, still, there are lots

627 Baggett and Walls, God & Cosmos, 298-299.
of disturbing trends as to how they’re treated, which invariably reflect deficient worldviews. Ultimately, it’s not just theism we need, but something more, arguably Christian theology, which makes great sense of our best moral intuitions about kids. The theology of Christianity, and the special revelation we have in scripture, gives us even deeper reasons to take with great seriousness our moral intuitions and insights about the humane treatment of children, the most vulnerable of our species. In this way, Christianity can receive some corroboration from our best-considered judgments about the value of children, and we can identify the resources we need to battle troubling contemporary trends of mistreatment of children. The reader will remember the work of H. P. Owen that serves as a connection between generic theism and Christian theism.

I also wish to reiterate the cumulative-eclectic approach and the extra fruit it yields. First, my eclectic methodology allows us to treat person holistically. Tapping into commonsensical moral notions on children sets an expansive motivational power when combined with cerebral apologetics. Such an approach acknowledges that we are complex beings, not biological cyborgs. Besides, how could one address child abuse without tapping into the affective side of human nature?

Second, it focuses on moral transformation rather than mere academic theory. David K. Clark issues a dire warning: “If a theology does not transform a Christian’s heart and her church, it fails calamitously. Theology misfires if it fills a believer’s head with Christian knowledge without affecting his character and demeanor. Mean spirited but theologically correct Christians are a plague. So if theology only defines boundaries, it easily falls into dead orthodoxy.” The reader encountered the motivational nature of the data. For example, child mistreatment is not merely a rational contradiction with our moral sensibilities but an evil blight deserving of our utmost eradicative efforts.

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628 Clark, To Know and Love God, 232.
Third, it holds the potential to reach those outside the academy. Vulcenesque myopic approaches routinely find hearty reception in academia but likely encounter lessened traction elsewhere because most persons do not live in a world of strict evidential lanes. Disallowing the strategic cross-pollination of disciplines may hamstring academic research from formulating a more expansive approach. Life is not a singular issue and neither is the ontology of children. In addition, given the emotivism rampant in the West, there exists legitimate opportunity to speak on children, a topic grounded in deep intuitive beliefs. Few topics are more heart touching than children. Therefore, this dissertation intentionally makes intersections between historical, theological, and philosophical insights.

*The Resurrection of Jesus: Hope for the lonely and emotional stability*

We are reaping the crop of the sexual revolution, and the damage to children has been catastrophic. Evidence of this is widely available both in this dissertation and general observation of present culture. In light of the evangelical perspective of this dissertation, I think it is altogether appropriate to offer a few words to those carrying the scars from abuse, neglect, or parental divorce. Often childhood trauma can cause a profound sense of loneliness throughout one’s adult life. The implications of Jesus’ resurrection speak to trauma that can cause us to feel

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629 Kevin King, “Contemporary Ecclesiology” (lecture, THEO 945: Contemporary Ecclesiology, PhD seminar, Lynchburg, VA, October 22, 2013). King’s assertions that American culture is highly emotive finds external support. One article reads, “But when Oprah entered the talk show scene in 1986, she ‘just blew the whole thing open,’ McNamara said. ‘The only thing she was interested in was what made you feel, what made you cry, what you were scared of, what you were proud of. She was interviewing people as if she was talking to a child, getting to the bare emotional core.’ . . . Oprah didn’t just transform daytime talk shows from gossipy to intimate, after all. She also broke down the traditional barriers of journalism.” “How Oprah Winfrey Changed America,” *Discovery News*, May 25, 2011, accessed May 27, 2017, [http://news.discovery.com/human/oprah-winfrey-changed-america-110525.htm](http://news.discovery.com/human/oprah-winfrey-changed-america-110525.htm).

isolated.

The resurrection of Jesus is the oasis where hurting persons can find solace in the midst of emotional or physical isolation by way of a sound premise for proper thinking about oneself in relation to others and emotional stability. Loneliness and bitterness are cancers plaguing the human condition but according to the biblical account it was not always this way. According to Genesis 1:31, God’s initial creation was “very good.” God goes on to provide Adam with the companionship of a wife (Gen. 2:18-25). Yet human rebellion caused a wedge between God and others (Gen. 3:1-19). Loneliness and bitterness have plagued most, if not all, persons at some point.

Taking into account the biblical metanarrative helps tracing the source of the loneliness-producing grief. Even still, the data on loneliness in the U.S. is disturbing. Harvard’s Robert D. Putnam reports various evidences of declining social capital in U.S. culture from 1974-1997. Some examples include a 58% drop in attending club meetings, 43% drop in family dinners, as well as a 35% drop in having friends over. Long-range human interaction is now made more accessible via technology but certain data suggest that the other side of the coin is a loss in the quality of relationships.

Jesus’ incarnation represents God’s ability to identify with humanity and bridge the gap of isolation brought about by sin. The resurrection champions Jesus’ victory over death, the ultimate separator of human relationships (2 Tim. 1:10). It also demonstrates that Jesus is not merely a mere historical figure relegated to the pages of ancient history but a living person.


According to the logic of the Apostle Paul, if Jesus is not raised then death is the final period on the last page of one’s life (1 Cor. 15:32b). “Hope” is a phantom mirage in a universe that will one day be stripped of any chance of even primitive life as it expands into the horizon of a silent and permanent heat death of zero degrees Kelvin.\(^{633}\) Bertrand Russell’s anguished words are a fitting epitaph:

> I look out upon the night of nothingness. The revolutions of nebulae, the birth and death of stars, are no more than convenient fictions in the trivial work of linking together my own sensations, and perhaps those of other men not much better than myself. No dungeon was ever constructed so dark and narrow as that in which the shadow physics of our time imprisons us, for every prisoner has believed that outside his walls a free world existed; but now the prison has become the whole universe. There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness, anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing. Why live in such a world? Why even die?\(^{634}\)

Yet Russell goes on to give an encomium to facing the ultimate absurdity of life with bravery grounded in “the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”\(^{635}\)

Outside of death-conquering resurrection, the best one could hope for is a temporary collage of relationships only to be permanently shattered when the icy grip of death drags the dead away from the living. If the resurrection did not happen then hope becomes a vacuous concept at best. Momentary Epicurean distractions do little more than exacerbate the intrinsic absurdity of life. Yet, because Jesus was raised, the Apostle Paul could confidently speak of joy even during the isolation of imprisonment (Phil. 1:4, 1:25; 2:2, 17-18, 29; 4:1). Such joy is a rational consequent of Christ-centered hope, biblical hope, somehow on a par with faith and love, and far from the degraded notion of “hope” that’s little more than wishful thinking.

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\(^{633}\) Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 141.


Though friendships often begin through mutual interests, the ones that align with eternal values show the best chances of survival. Acquaintances solely based on trivialities intensify grief and loneliness when “friends” fade after one’s health incapacitates them and keeps them from involvement in the activities that held the relationship together. On the other hand, the resurrection provides for true camaraderie in fulfilling an eternal goal.\textsuperscript{636} Strictly horizontal relationships appearing to encapsulate the whole world of fame and friendship yet without an eternal reference point result in loss (Lk. 9:23-26). It is helpful to remember that conquering loneliness is not so much trying to fill the void in one’s own life but rather pouring out one’s life in service to others (even to the ungrateful and unloving). Jesus goes so far as to say, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk. 9:24). Loneliness is not conquered by incessant activity, recreation, or entertainment. It is overcome by gospel-centered relationships that naturally flow out of investing one’s life in Jesus’ teachings.

Even in cases when gospel-centered friendships are nowhere to be had either due to illness, death, or persecution, the power of Jesus’ resurrection is still able to stave off the attacks of debilitating despair. The resurrection allows persons dealing with past childhood trauma to center their life-focus upon Jesus so that he is the staple of their life and friendships, though they may be healthy and encouraging, are supplementary. While imprisoned, the Apostle Paul wrote, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil. 3:10).

The resurrection of Jesus offers a balm for systemic emotional instability. Through times of painful suffering or residual effects of childhood trauma, the reality that Jesus lives has the

\textsuperscript{636} A brief survey of Paul’s letter to the Philippians yields a powerful portrait of how genuine, gospel-centered friendships can sustain one experiencing the loneliness of unjustified incarceration.
potential to keep one afloat in the roughest nihilistic waters. The call of Christ is to follow the lonely one who was “despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces” (Is. 53:3a). Even when experiencing betrayal as Christ did with Judas (Matt. 26:49) and the Apostle Paul with “false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:26), the resurrection is a reminder that loneliness is only temporary. Jesus’ finished work is the guarantee of the ultimate reunion for all who will be saved.

Unresolved guilt is a scourge that psychotherapy is only recently coming to grips with. The polluting power of a burdened conscience can permeate an otherwise circumstantially happy life. Such data suggest a transcendent moral law that persons transgress at the peril of their own moral sanity. Untold amounts of time and money have been poured into unsuccessful attempts to sanitize the conscience from the contamination that inevitably flows from violation of the moral law as reflected in the conscience.

Trauma, healing, and the church’s response

Now I wish to focus on healing for trauma and the church’s response. Sure, the statistics are horrible for children raised without a father but the Heavenly Father can fill that need. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers the possibility of forgiveness to offenders and comfort for the abused. Keith Ward writes, “It is friendship with God that transforms lust into love, possessiveness into stewardship, and aggression into creativity.” Healing and hope are

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637 Psychology and psychotherapy are not the foundational disciplines for the arguments of this paper. Nevertheless, findings from these specialties can serve as illustrations of the reality of moral law evidenced by human conscience. Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca, professor of psychiatry at the Medical School of the University of Genoa, observes, “The sense of guilt is always lying in ambush.” Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca, Guilt: Revenge, Remorse and Responsibility After Freud (London: Routledge, 2004), 23.

possible. I suggest that the church is God’s plan for working this healing in the world by meeting basic needs that springboard into spiritual conversations.\footnote{\textsuperscript{639} Even though church involvement has shown a fairly consistent pattern of decline over the past several decades as noted by Al Mohler in his work, \textit{The Disappearance of God} one should exercise caution, given the diversity of American regional cultures, in generalizing about the death of Christianity in the West. See R. Albert Mohler, \textit{The Disappearance of God} (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009). With his usual clarity, George Barna pinpoints what he calls, “The most post-Christian cities in America.” See George Barna, “The Most Post-Christian Cities,” \textit{Barna: Cities: Knowledge to Navigate a Changing World}, accessed July 11, 2017, \url{http://cities.barna.org/the-most-post-christian-cities-in-america/}.
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Karl Barth’s warning against “sacralization” should give us pause:

“Sacralization” means the transmutation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ into the vanity of a Christianity which vaunts itself in his name but in reality is enamored only of itself and its traditions, confessions and institutions. Sacralization means the suppression of the gospel by a pseudo – sacred law erected and proclaimed on the supposed basis of the Gospel. Sacralization means the setting up of an idol which is dead like all other images of human fabrication; which cannot hear or speak or illuminate or help or heal; in which the man who has discovered and created it cannot in the last resort admire our worship anyone or anything but himself.\footnote{\textsuperscript{640} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation}, Vol. IV, Part 3.2, trans. G. W. Bromiley, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 670.}

Such is the state of both liberal churches that have ceased to preach the gospel as well as conservative churches who are more enamored with their traditions than with living out the gospel they claim to believe. Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider argue, “Yes, individuals have to be transformed. That’s the only way real change happens. But transformed people transform the social environment in which they function.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{641} Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, \textit{Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 180.} A regenerative, transformed church on mission squares with Jesus’ words: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Karl Barth writes, “The church of Jesus Christ can never – in any respect – be a pompous church.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{642} Barth, 648.} As the Apostle Paul stresses, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty,
but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” (Rom. 12:16). Association with the lowly, whether they are refugees, fatherless, poor, drug addicted, or homeless, mirrors Christ’s incarnational humility (Phil. 2:5-11). Due to a Christian memory, American culture values benevolence. We previously noted the routine practice for professional athletes to sponsor children with disabilities or make special visits to children’s cancer wards. American media thrives on stories that touch the affections. What more heart touching story than the gospel and its effect on the least of these, most notably children?

In one instance, a local church offered to host a Thanksgiving meal for local inmates. Upon approval by the Sheriff’s office, the church’s auxiliary hall was filled with inmates and law enforcement officials. A meal was served and a message was shared. After taking a poll, less than 10% of the inmates reported a local church ever extending a ministry of any sort to them. Throughout the following weeks, social media was abuzz with an abundance of positive feedback from persons in the region who were both surprised and encouraged that a church would take the chance of hosting inmates on its church campus. Given the troubling statistics on the percentage of inmates who grew up without a father, jail and prison ministry is one avenue the church can demonstrate its belief in the intrinsic value of every person.

One point the church would do well to emphasize in a burgeoning secular society is the social and financial impact of social ministry. If secular persons see churches providing substantive ministry to inmates or the poverty-stricken then the practical results are undeniable.

Except for a radical, Mad Max, Anarchist fringe, morally sane persons can agree that reducing...
recidivism is both financially and socially beneficial. Seeing a consistent and effective pattern of transformation in marginalized persons may dispel some of the ungrounded prejudices against evangelicals.

It is, for lack of a better term, “hands on” ministry that must accompany an apologetically nuanced preaching of the gospel. Richard Wurmbrand comments, “In the United States and other countries there are not so many poverty programs which do not work. St. Francis of Assisi’s program worked. He became poor and influenced many rich men to give away their money, not in heavily borne taxation, but in jubilating love.” 644 Jesus’ call, reiterated by Bonhoeffer and Platt, highlights the primacy of sacrifice. 645 A social ministry-intensive model of pre-apologetics does not allow apologists selfish study by completely divorcing themselves from contact with “the least of these.” At this point, Bonhoeffer’s convicting words are quite appropriate: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” 646 Christ’s call in Matthew 25:31-46 smacks of anything other than cheap grace.

Feeding, clothing, and visiting unclean persons in rank prisons and unsanitary Third World hospitals is not exactly a draw for persons whose religious commitment goes no deeper than sitting in clean seats in nice buildings for an hour on Sunday mornings. Neither does it appeal to those who consider apologetics strictly a rational discipline. Genuine apologetics calls for arduous efforts from those who have experienced supernatural, transformative grace to those

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who have lost hope.

Barth explains the dynamic power behind effective Christian service:

The decisive work and the driving force in their daily defensive and offense of action will consist in their surrender; the decisive work of their hands and the fact that they lay all things, both great and small, in the hands of God. They know that all that men can do can be helpful only in the renunciation of all self-help, and the cry to God that he will be the helper and health of man and all men.\(^{(647)}\)

As Spiegel so aptly writes, “Let’s not give atheists moral ammunition for their skeptical cannons. Let’s demonstrate patience and long-suffering with them.”\(^{(648)}\) Ministry to the least of these has the potential to deprive skeptics of this ammunition, but will expose their unwarranted bias against evangelicals. Would not Dawkins’ championing of intolerance seem absurd if the ones mocked were pursuing inmate rehabilitation, adoption, foster parenting, brokering peace between families separated by court order, encouragement to single mothers, providing hope to the ill, and assistance to the poverty stricken?\(^{(649)}\) 21\(^{st}\) century Western Christians would do well to remember the words of Tertullian, “If then (as I have elsewhere declared) we Christians are expressly commanded by our Master to love our enemies, whom then have we left to hate?”\(^{(650)}\)

Given the massive and often unspoken influence of emotive stimuli, a robust ministry to single mothers and their children, rather than constantly be reminded how deleterious it is for their children not to have a father, may be a reservoir of untapped evangelistic potential. Such a

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\(^{(648)}\) Spiegel, 127.

\(^{(649)}\) LaShawn Barber, “Richard Dawkins encourages atheists to mock and ridicule Christians,” *World Magazine*, March 28, 2012, accessed July 11, 2017, http://www.worldmag.com/2012/03/richard_dawkins_encourages_atheists_to_mock_and_ridicule_christians. Barber writes, “Dawkins called on atheists and agnostics to "ridicule and show contempt" for the religious and their doctrines. The example he used was the Roman Catholic belief that the bread and wine of communion turns into the actual body and blood of Christ. He encouraged atheists to mock and ridicule the religious in public.”

local church emphasis could navigate doubters past emotional barriers to an actual assessment of Christian truth claims. Finally, let it be known that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope not only for single mothers and their children but also for egoists and pagans. The Christian emphasis on dignity and worth applies to them as well (Matt 5:45b-47). Paul shows the extent of God’s love through Christ: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8). So if Christ died for the ungodly so that they may become righteous, the redeemed must freely extend the grace they have been given…even to their enemies.

Once a person truly realizes the gravity of their own transgressions in light of an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent God, prideful demands and intellectual arrogance melt away. Repentance bows the knee and lowers the arrogant. Regeneration gives life and divine grace infuses the power to live a life of service and gratitude for the undeserved boon of salvation. The gospel of Jesus Christ has the potential to transform egoists, hedonists, and pagans into former egoists, hedonists and pagans. Once a person truly realizes the gravity of their own transgressions in light of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God, prideful demands and intellectual arrogance will melt away. Repentance bows the knee and lowers the uplifted chin. Regeneration gives life and divine grace infuses the power to live a life of service and gratitude for an undeserved boon. Sinners of all stripes and victorious believers can take comfort in the responsiveness of the incarnate Christ as Charles Spurgeon puts it so beautifully:

Our Lord and Master hears with joy the shout of a believer who has vanquished his enemy and, at the same hour, He inclines His ear to the despairing wail of a sinner who has given up all confidence in self and desires to be saved by Him. At one moment He is
accepting the crown that the warrior brings Him from the well-fought fight, and at another moment He is healing the brokenhearted and binding up their wounds.  

In closing, as Robert Jastrow famously declared, “For the scientist [or egoist] who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

Let the theologian/apologist gently, and in profound epistemic humility, resist the urge to establish the mastery of intellectual superiority. Rather, in sincere epistemic humility, let her extend the hand of reconciliation to the skeptic dangling from the cliff of existential despair. Wise persons proportion their belief based on facts, no matter the extent to which those facts challenge individual or cultural presuppositions. To paraphrase Baggett and Walls, the force of this thesis that Christian theism best explains our basic moral sensibilities on children “is no more outlandish or outrageous than many of our most cherished moral convictions.”

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