

**FOUNDATIONS IN A FOUNDATIONLESS WORLD:
HOW CHRISTIAN THEISM GROUNDS MORAL THEORY**

by

Glenn W. Giles

Doctor of Arts Degree in Biblical Studies
Student ID: 2010819919

Comparative Analysis of World Views

PH 799 SR 04 S2

Dr. Brent Kelly

Module Six Assignment:

In order further to appreciate the theoretical power of (the theory of) Christian Theism, write a 15-17 page paper in which you argue for (and also have a section where you critically respond to at least one significant, anticipated response by the nonbeliever) the following thesis: Christianity is a sufficient foundation, web, or “transcendental point of departure” (a la Stanley Grenz) by which quite satisfactorily to answer **one of the following questions**: 1. *What gives my life meaning and purpose?* 2. *What happens when I die, and how does this reality impact my present life positively?* 3. *What is the nature of moral rights and the moral right vs. the moral wrong?* 4. *What are the fundamental constituents of the universe?* 5. *Is there a God and what are God’s characteristics?* And 6. *How do I know propositions, when I really do know them? (i.e., what is the structure of my knowledge; or, how do I substantiate that I know something to be the case, where my substantiation is good, valid, and sound?).* E.g., if you choose to write on question 3, your paper title might be something like *Foundations in a Foundationless World: How Christian Theism grounds Moral Theory*. Then in the paper, you would show the theoretical strengths of being committed to Christian Theism when you think about answering question number 3.

August 5, 2006
Trinity Theological Seminary
Newburgh, Indiana

CONTENTS

I. Introduction and Thesis	3
II. The Foundations of Ethics in Christian Theism	3
III. The Sufficiency of Christian Theism for the Foundation of Ethical Theory	13
IV. The Insufficiency of Secular Humanism for the Foundation of Ethical Theory	18
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	27

FOUNDATIONS IN A FOUNDATIONLESS WORLD: HOW CHRISTIAN THEISM GROUNDS MORAL THEORY

I. Introduction and Thesis.

How does one determine right from wrong? Is there a sound basis for ethics? In this paper I will show that Christian Theism has a sufficient foundation to satisfactorily answer the question, “What is the nature of moral rights and the moral right vs. moral wrong?” I will also attempt to show that Christian Theism provides a more sufficient foundation than Secular Humanism for moral theory in five different areas.

II. The Foundations of Ethics in Christian Theism

The Nature of God

Although there are various definitions of “ethics” and “moral philosophy”,¹ I will in this paper define “Christian ethics” as “that which is morally right and wrong” for human beings.² Christian Theism grounds ethics in the nature of God as revealed in the

¹ For instance Stanley J. Grenz’s discusses this in *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP, 1997, 23-36) and explains the possible differences in the terms “ethics” and “morality” as well as the concept of “philosophical” ethics and “empirical, normative, and analytical” ethics.

² This definition comes in part from Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 17), where he defines Christian ethics as that which deals with “what is morally right and wrong *for a Christian*” (emphasis mine). I have, however, changed and expanded it to *exclude* his restriction of it to those who are Christians, to apply it to all of humanity. This I believe is necessary if one is to take a thorough Christian Theistic view, since, as will be seen later in this paper, *all* men are made in God’s image and are to reflect his character. This means that Christian ethics (i.e. that which is right and wrong based on the Christian transcendent God) are ethics related to *all* people, whether they accept it or not. Christian ethics, thus, remains the standard for all mankind from the Christian’s point of view. This position taken by Stanley Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 226.

Bible.³ God's nature, in the Bible, is described as infinite, creator, personal (i.e., relational, a characteristic which is grounded in his triune nature), transcendent (otherly, i.e., he is a being which is above, different, and greater than human beings), immanent, omniscient, sovereign (he is the one in charge of all reality), has the capacity of self-determination, is self-transcendent, possesses intelligence, is social, creative, and good.⁴ The *main* character traits I will be concerned with here in this paper on ethics are those of transcendence, immanence, sovereignty, eternity, personhood, and goodness.⁵

The God of the Bible is a transcendent sovereign being and his nature is the starting point of determining the nature of right and wrong in the Christian worldview. In his transcendence, immanence, sovereignty, and his position as Creator, he becomes the one who is ultimately and continuously through out history in charge of his creation, one who is ultimate reality, one who is the ultimate standard for all of creation, and thus one who is the *ultimate determiner* of ethics for the *entire* human race, not just for those who choose to accept the Christian Theistic worldview. He, and he alone, is the absolute standard for determining "good" and "evil". There is none "good" but God (Mk. 10:18; cf. Ps. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1). Since God is also unchanging in his morality and nature (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:21) and since he is immanent (i.e., he is constantly present with humanity in a dynamic way),⁶ that standard of "good" is also unchanging in every situation. It is absolute. Since God is eternal and immanent (i.e.

³ God's character is also revealed in creation as Paul states in Rom. 1:18-21. This *natural revelation* is however secondary and explained or enlightened by God's *special revelation* and thus I am focusing in this paper on God's special revelation, the Bible as the *primary* source for determining his nature.

⁴James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 23-33.

⁵This is not to say that I am considering the other traits unimportant. I am not suggesting that. I am simply stating that I will focus on these traits here as they seem to be the most pertinent to the sufficiency of Christian Theism in grounding ethics.

⁶Note this biblical concept in verses such as Matt. 1:23; 28:20; Is. 7:14; Num. 14:9; II Ch. 13:12; Ps. 46:7.

exists in all places and times), what is good is good in any time period of history for all people and is not situational or cultural. Therefore absolutes, with respect to right and wrong, do exist in the Christian Worldview as they are grounded in God, whose nature does not change and who is himself ultimate eternal infinite reality. Since he is “good”, he is by definition a moral being. As a “moral being”, he is one who can *discern* good from evil.⁷ He however not only discerns good from evil but only eternally *exists and acts* in accordance with himself. He is the great “I AM”,⁸ one who knows (or can experience)⁹ both good and evil (Gen. 3:22) but who actually does only that which is “good”, that which is in accordance with his unchanging nature. Hence, he is the ultimate moral being who determines what is “right” or “good” for all creation. Anything or any action which is contrary to his character would be, by definition and by his being, “wrong” or “evil”. God only does and is “good”. “In him there is no darkness at all” (I Jn. 1:5).

God is also *personal (or relational)*. Christian Theism posits a God who is triune, that is, “within one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three ‘persons’ who are neither three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but

⁷ Note this definition in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (New York: Houghton, 1969), s.v. “moral”.

⁸ Ex. 3:14.

⁹The term **יָדָעַ** (*yada'*, to know or experience) in the Hebrew here does not designate predominately an intellectual concept. Its major emphases include *subjective* dimensions of knowing not just the objective. Thomas H. Groome (*Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Roe, 1980, 141) states, . . . in Greek philosophy *ginoskein* has a predominant meaning of ‘intellectual looking at’ an object of scrutiny and strongly connotes objectivity . . . For the Hebrews *yada'* is more by the heart than by the mind, and the knowing arises not by standing back from in order to look at, but by active and intentional engagement in lived experience . . . the Hebrews had no word that corresponds exactly to our words *mind* or *intellect*.

יָדָעַ for the most part involves knowledge gained through experience and the senses (as indicated by Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 33). The type of “experiencing of evil” God experiences is (in contrast to man’s experience) not his own involvement in evil but that evil which he experiences toward himself through man and man’s being and actions. Hence, whereas man experiences evil in his being through his *own* actions *as well* as through the actions of *others*, God *only* experiences evil through the actions of *others*.

coequally and coeternally God.”¹⁰ This concept of the reality of God is very important for the sufficiency of Christian Theism in determining right from wrong. Sire states:

. . . the Trinity confirms the communal, ‘personal’ nature of ultimate being. God is not only there—an actually existent being—he is personal and we can relate to him in a personal way. To know God, therefore, means knowing more than that he exists. It means knowing him as we know a brother or, better, our own father.”¹¹

The “goodness” within the Trinity is *relational* not just propositional. It is to be lived out, not just known intellectually. The Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) act and exist in a “good” *relationship*. This makes God, a relational being within himself, and thus the standard for determining “good” relationships, i.e., the standard for social and personal ethics. If God were not relational the Christian Theism foundation for ethics toward man would suffer in sufficiency as the *source* of man’s relational nature and social and personal ethics would have to be found elsewhere. However God is relational and hence can and does communicate relationally through his word, his actions, and his presence what that relational standard is for his creation, especially for mankind. He is the source of understanding and determination of “goodness” for all relational interactions of his creation.

As Creator, he created the world and pronounced it “good” (Gen. 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Hence, the world as originally created, reflected God’s nature, at least in some sense of being “good”. The world only *reflects* his nature and is not part of his nature as God is “otherly” or “transcendent” and not *matter*. Rather, God is spirit (John 4:24). Hence the world reflects some aspect of God but is not God or part of God himself.

¹⁰ Quoted by Sire, 24, from Geoffrey W. Bromiley, s.v. “The Trinity”, in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 531.

¹¹ Sire, 24.

Sire states, “God is beyond us and our world . . . Yet God is not so beyond that he bears no relation to us and our world . . . God is beyond all, yet in all and sustaining all”.¹²

Ethics in Christian Theism is thus grounded in God and his nature. His transcendence, sovereignty, eternity, personhood, and goodness provide not only a *source* for understanding “good” and “evil” in general but also the form the basis for *determining* morality for *all* of mankind. He himself is the absolute standard for ethics for all.

But one may ask, if God created the world good, why then does man not always reflect the nature of the God of Christian Theism? The answer lies in Christian Theism’s understanding of the nature of man.

The Nature of Man and the *Imago Dei*

Man, along with the rest of creation, is pronounced “good,” but, unlike the rest of creation, has a special relationship with God in that he is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27). Also, in contrast to the rest of creation, he has the capacity of knowing or experiencing good and evil (Gen 3:22). Man, like God is thus also a moral being. By being made in God’s image, and pronounced “good” by God, man and his nature as originally created, would seem to be intended to reflect God’s nature (or ethics, i.e. moral right), since what is right and wrong is determined solely by God and his nature. Man, however, chose not to reflect that nature and instead disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Through this fall of man, the image of God with which man was endowed became “defaced, though not so ruined as to not be capable of restoration”.¹³ In Christian Theism

¹² Sire, 24-25

¹³ Sire, 32. This image was not lost through sin (NIDOTTE, Vol. 4, 645) as can be noted in its use to defend capital punishment in Gen. 9:6. It is rather marred and impaired, or defaced.

the restoration of that image comes through the work of Jesus Christ, the true image of God.

Traditional Christian Theism teaches that this *image of God* in man consists of man's "personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness,¹⁴ and creativity".¹⁵ Stanley Grenz and others have expanded this concept showing that the term "image" bears more than simply "characteristics" of the nature of God (more than simply a declaration of the ontology which man shares with God) but *also*, and perhaps predominately,¹⁶ carries "the sense of 'representation'"¹⁷ as well as the notion of "community".¹⁸

Man in God's image means "humanity is his representative and agent here on earth"¹⁹. In other words,

. . . humans in the image of God exist to carry out God's purposes on earth as his royal representatives. And their dominion (as male and female . . .) over the earth is connected with its fruitfulness and well-being, not with its destructive exploitation.²⁰

¹⁴ Or social capacity.

¹⁵ Sire, 27. Historically Christian Theism has posited four views of what it means for man to be created "in the image of God": (1) the term as a more ontological declaration of man's being, i.e., that of the physical, spiritual, or personal levels, (2) man having the capacity for relationship with God, (3) man in his mandate to have dominion and rulership over creation, and (4) man as having the role of "mediating within creation the presence of the transcendent Creator" (Stanley Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear Linearity of Theology," *JETS* 47(2004): 621-22). The latter (#4) tends to include the former three and as such seems more comprehensive and is the position followed in this paper. This also seems to be the position of Raymond C. Van Leeuwen (*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 644, hereafter noted as *NIDOTE*) when he states that "image is properly understood as referring to the entire human, not a part or property".

¹⁶Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*", 622.

¹⁷ This is the definition for the Hebrew term **צֶלְמַת** given by Van Leeuwen, 645, where he quotes Clines as saying "since God has no form, human kind is not made *in* God's image but rather *as* God's image. Thus humanity is his representative and agent here on earth." The Greek for this term, "εἰκων", also has this meaning as given by O. Flender in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) sv. "image". C.f., also, Gerhard von Rad, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "εἰκων" where he states that "man in his sphere of rule as God's vice-regent (sic) is summoned to represent the dominion and majesty of God".

¹⁸ Stanley Grenz, "The *Imago Dei* and the Dissipation of the Self", *Dialog* 38 (1999): 185.

¹⁹ *NIDOTE*, 645.

²⁰Ibid.

Being in God's image then does not merely indicate that man possesses some of the characteristics of God's being, but that humankind has been given a "vocation to live as God's representative within creation . . . to be that image through whom God's presence and self-manifestation in creation may be found"²¹ (emphasis mine). Hence ethics, the determination of right verses the wrong, in society revolves around whether one is being a representative of God and his nature in and to the world.

According to Grenz, man also bears God's image in a "community" sense. Man was created as a social being as is seen from woman being created to meet the man's need of deliverance from loneliness. Man in relationship with others is to represent God in relationship within the Trinity.²² Tying this with the "vocational" aspect of being in God's image, Grenz concludes:

The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be. Consequently, in the end each person is related to the image of God only within the context of life in relationship.²³

Thus the "image of God" indicates man's purpose on earth as being God's representative²⁴ in community with the rest of humanity.

God's purpose and ethic for the life of his human creatures is summed up by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 where he states:

²¹ Stanley Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear Linearity of Theology," *JETS* 47(2004):622.

²² Grenz, ("The Imago Dei", p. 186) notes, "It is not surprising that ultimately the image of God should focus on relationality, fellowship, or 'community'. As the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is 'community,' namely, the fellowship of three Trinitarian persons who comprise the triune God."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ This purpose (this basis of ethics) is in keeping with the biblical theology of witness found throughout the OT and NT (i.e., the responsibility of God's people throughout time to be a witness to God concerning (1) his creative deeds, (2) his works of redemption, and (3) the character of his being). (Note my article entitled "The Intentional Corporate Witness of the People of God" at http://www.denverchurchofchrist.org/?page_id=13 and Stephen D. Lowe, *You Are My Witnesses: A Biblical Theology of Christian Education* (Newburgh, IN: Trinity College and Seminary, 2000).

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments* (emphasis mine).

The term “love” referred to here (from אהב in Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) has the primary meaning of “loyalty” and a secondary affective meaning dealing with “feelings”.²⁵ This concept of “affectionate loyalty” Jesus says sums up all the Law and the Prophets. Hence, Christian Theism ethics, based on God’s character, gives mankind direction for his life which consists of a life of loyalty to God by representing him to the world, and a life of loyalty to man representing God in community with one another in the world. Loyalty to God, of course, is first as it is the greatest commandment. It thus governs the second commandment: Loyalty to one’s neighbor (i.e., loyalty to mankind). The Law and the Prophets (and the entire Bible) give mankind guidance as to what that affectionate loyalty (i.e., Christian Theism ethics) entails.

Returning to our question, “If God created the world good, why then does man not always reflect or represent the nature of the God of Christian Theism?” The answer to this lies in another aspect of the nature of man as revealed in the Bible. Mankind, although created in the image of God and pronounced “good” by God, was given the

²⁵Jacqueline E. Lapsley (“Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy”, *CBQ* 65(2003): 350-69) has persuasively argued that “love” (‘hb) in Deuteronomy does have “an affective dimension” but this does not seem to be its main force. The term “love” (אהב) in Deuteronomy has a very strong meaning of loyalty or faithfulness (This meaning is established by my articles, “The Shema’: The Faithfulness of God as the Ground for the Faithfulness of Man: An Exegetical Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4-9,” and “Love in the Greatest Commandment” at http://www.denverchurchofchrist.org/?page_id=13). Of this term and its use in Deuteronomy, William L. Moran (“The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy”, *CBQ* 25(1963):78) states,

Above all, it is a love which must be expressed in loyalty, in service, and in unqualified obedience to the demands of the Law. For to love God is, in answer to a unique claim (6:4), to be loyal to him (11:1,22; 30:20), to walk in his ways (10:12; 11:22; 19:9), to keep his commandments (10:12; 11:1,22; 19:9), to do them (11:22; 19:9), to heed them or his voice (11:13; 30:16), to serve him (10:12; 11:1,13). It is in brief, a love defined by and pledged in the covenant—a covenant love (emphasis mine).

ability to choose to be God's representative on earth and to live in community (relationship) with God and other men or to refuse to do so.²⁶ Adam and Eve choose not to be representatives and sinned against God. They were taken out of Eden and experienced death as a result of their disobedience (Gen. 3). Through them, sin entered the world and mankind was taken captive by it. God was not finished with mankind in making him his representative on earth however. To complete that ideal which he had begun, he chose to send Jesus, God's true image, into the world to save mankind and restore mankind's ability to be God's representative on earth. The New Testament reveals this in several passages, but most specifically in II Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3; and Rom. 8:29. Of Jesus as God's image and of us as conforming to it, the passages state:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (II Cor. 4:4).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Col. 1:15).

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Heb. 1:3).

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29).

Grenz states, "Jesus ultimately fulfills his role as the *imago Dei* and therefore comes to possess this accolade through his historical work in salvation history".²⁷ In the act of accomplishing redemption for mankind, Jesus becomes the head of a "new" humanity by

²⁶ The ability to choose must in and of itself be "good" as it was a part of man which God created and pronounced "good". Hence, God must be able to choose good and evil also. This is further supported by the fact that Jesus also had to choose "good" (i.e., be God's representative here on earth) when tempted by Satan at the beginning of his ministry and in the garden at the end of his ministry.

²⁷"Jesus as the *Imago Dei*", 620.

becoming the “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:12).²⁸ Men who choose to participate in this new creation are placed “in Christ” and transformed into the new man of God’s desire and become God’s representative. II Cor. 3:18 states:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Men who choose to be in Christ are transformed into Christ’s likeness or image, an image which is God’s image, an image that restores God’s representation in man’s being.²⁹ Col. 3:9-10 states:

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the *image* of its Creator (emphasis mine).³⁰

Not only is that *representation* in the process of being restored in Christians but also the *community* aspect of that image is being restored. This community participation is revealed in the church as every Christian participates in *one* body (I Cor. 12:13; Eph 4:25). As Christians relate to one another in a way that reveals God’s image, the community aspect of the image is represented, i.e., the nature of the Trinity is revealed on earth. In loving each other as Christ loved us, the world also comes to experience that we are *his* disciples, radiating his image (John 13:34-35). Grenz states, “Only in community can we truly show what God is like, for God is the community of love—the eternal relational dynamic enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity”³¹ This community nature from God is the basis for moral relationships among men.

²⁸ Ibid., 622-23. Gruenz (623) goes on to comment that “God’s goal is that as the Son, Jesus Christ be preeminent within a new humanity stamped with the divine image. Consequently, the humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*”.

²⁹ This representation, of course is not totally restored in the Christian until the eschatological consummation and the resurrection as I Cor. 15 indicates. Only then will the full transformation be accomplished.

³⁰ Cf., also Eph. 4:24.

Man is thus made new by the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, taught “right” from “wrong” (i.e. God’s character) by God through the Bible, and gradually transformed into the likeness or image of Christ (the ultimate image of God), which in turn restores man as God’s representative on earth *in relationship* with both God and man. In this way one understands from a Christian Theistic perspective how man who was originally pronounced “good” can stray away from the *imago Dei* (i.e., God’s character) and yet be brought back to once again represent him on earth.

Hence, Christian Theism grounds ethics both in the nature of God and his vocational purpose for man to be his expression of that nature (the *imago Dei*) to the world as revealed in the Bible. But does Christian Theism give a *sufficient* foundation for ethics?

III. The Sufficiency of Christian Theism for the Foundation of Ethical Theory

For Christian Theism to be a *sufficient* ground, it must follow the logic of something like the following: “If P, then the possibility of Q”.³² In at least five different areas I believe Christian Theism follows this logic.

A. A Ground for Ethics

As stated above, Christian Theism posits an immanent transcendent *moral* being as the ground for its notion of right and wrong and good and evil. God is the sole standard which determines “good”. Since God is good anything he does is good including his creating acts. Christian Theism also posits that God created man in his image also a

³¹ “The Imago Dei”, 182.

³²It is important to note that I am not attempting to show Christian Theism provides a sufficient *and necessary* condition for ethics (which would be an “If P, then Q” scenario), but only that it provides a *sufficient* condition.

moral being, a moral being who is created to reflect (because of the *imago Dei*) the same morality as his Creator. The logical foundations are solid. If God is a the standard moral being and he creates man in his image (with the purpose of representing God), then man can also be a moral being who reflects God's image. The moral being of man originates in the moral being of God. Moral being ultimately comes from moral being. Since God is one in his morality and has created man as a moral being based on God's morality, then God's morality is the standard and ground for the ethics of all mankind.

B. The "Ought-ness" of a Moral Code

But *should* man be a moral being confined to the morality of God? Is there an "ought-ness" that can be supported? Can the "ought" come from the "is" of man? The answer to this is "yes" because the "is" of man as moral being includes the divine *will* of God. The "is-ness" of man as a moral being in Christian Theism involves the moral "ought-ness" given to man by the immanent absolute moral God. In other words part of what "is" in man (i.e., part of his nature) involves an "oughtness" to be God's representative and reflect his nature and glory on earth. Intrinsic to man is the "oughtness" to reflect God's nature. Hence man ought to be God's representative and behave according to the ethics of God. Again, the logic is sound and one can indeed say that the "ought" can come from the "is". If man is created with an "oughtness" as part of his being, then what he "is" includes that "oughtness".³³

³³ Grenz (*The Moral Quest*, 223-225) argues that the move in Christian Theism from the "is" to the "ought" is different from the same move in Naturalism in that it is a move of the eschatological convergence of the "ought" and the "is". He states (223-24), "The 'is' of the Christian ethic is a 'will be'" as our Christian focus "does not rest exclusively on what God has placed in creation 'in the beginning'" but "the Christian ethic appeals to what ultimately will be, and thus to God's intention for creation". He continues by quoting Rendtorff, "the future good has ontological precedence over the present life" (224). This "oughtness" for man is indicated by Paul in Romans 13:8 where he states "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law". Love (loyalty) is a continual debt, a continual "ought" which "can never be discharged" (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the*

C. A Basis for Moral Order and Social Cohesiveness

If God is absolute “good” and man is created as a moral being based on the morality of God, the Christian Theism ethic can be (and is to be) the universal standard for all men. This provides for a *common* “moral order based on the character of God, which is revealed to man”.³⁴

In addition, the *imago Dei* of man (as was shown above) includes a “community” aspect dealing with right relationships between human beings. Thus man is created a “social” being who is to reflect the social relationship of the three persons of the Trinity in his dealings with other men. Since God’s relationship within the Trinity is good and right there is a sufficient foundation not only for man to be a social being, a *morally* social being (i.e., one who can be morally good in all his relationships with other men), but also one who can (like the Trinity) live in peace and harmony with others. There is thus a sufficient foundation for social cohesiveness and moral order. If God is morally ordered and cohesive in his relationships within the Trinity and man is made in God’s image with the capacity of bearing the Trinity’s character of “community”, then social cohesiveness and moral order are possible.

D. A Basis for Equal Value in all Men

Christian Theism posits *all* men as made in the image of God. The *imago Dei* was not reserved only for Adam and Eve (this is made clear in Genesis 5:1-3; 9:6; and Ps. 8)³⁵ but is passed on to all men. Men have value not because they claim it themselves, but

Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 810). Hence the oughtness inherent in man at creation (as well as in the new creation) is summed up in the concept of love, the boundaries of which are determined by God. “Ought-ness” with God as its reference point and source is bestowed to man by his Creator through his nature.

³⁴ David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 242.

³⁵ *NIDOTTE*, Vol. 4, 645.

because God bestows it upon them. “All value is ultimately determined solely by the Creator God of the biblical narrative”.³⁶ Man has value by virtue of his being made in the image of God. This value comes from God who gives it impartially and thus values *every* human being *equally*.³⁷ Being made in his image, thus, bestows upon *every* man some of the ontological characteristics of God as well as the *vocation* to be his representatives *in community* on earth. This community aspect of the *imago Dei* causes a truly Christian ethic to reject a “sharp bias toward individualism found in the architects of the Western political tradition”, who are “concerned mostly with individual rights rather than with individual responsibilities within society”.³⁸ Christian Theism does not focus on the *rights* of autonomous individuals in isolation from society. In Christian Theism, one is not commanded to stand up for his own rights, but in humility to “consider others **better** than” himself and each one is to “look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2: 3-4). This character of God is represented by Jesus Christ as he bore the ultimate *imago Dei*. Paul states of him,

who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

³⁶ Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 258. Contra Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 258, however, who says that man has **only** derived value (i.e., no intrinsic value) With Van Leeuwen, 645, however, Gen. 9:6 seems to indicate that man *does* have an intrinsic worth, one in which “to harm or kill humans is to injure the majesty of God”. This seems also indicated also by Prov. 14:31 and James 3:9. Thus, man made in God’s image would seem to include *both* intrinsic and derived value from God. Humans then would have intrinsic value based on *imago Dei ontology* and derived value based on the *imago Dei vocational purpose* given by God. All value, however, ultimately comes from God.

³⁷This can be seen in Christian Theism in his sending Jesus Christ to earth to die and resurrect for the salvation of *all* mankind and his will that *none* should perish (II Pet. 2:9) and from God’s concern (as revealed in his word) for the poor, the widows, and the orphans as well as the rich and *every* class or type of people.

³⁸ Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 262-63.

Christian Theism's ethic of the equal value of all men has sufficient foundations for if God made all men in his image and that image bestows from God equal value upon each man, then all men are equally valuable.

E. An Explanation for the Fallen Nature of Man and a Powerful Capacity to Restore the *Imago Dei* in Man

Christian Theism posits God as having given mankind the ability to choose between good and evil, the ability to choose to bear his image of being God's representative or to refuse it. In this way, man is not only a moral being but has been given the ability to be a free moral agent, the ability to choose or refuse. The Bible teaches that all men have chosen at one time or another not to be God's representative. This explains why mankind does not always live in accordance with God's nature even though he was created by God who is good and who pronounced his creation "good". Therefore, if God made man with the ability to choose to do good or evil, then it is possible for man to choose to do evil.

Christian Theism also posits a Second Adam (I Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:15-19), Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate fulfillment of the *imago Dei* and who has power to create and become head of a new humanity, a humanity which restores and fully expresses the *imago Dei* in mankind. Hence Christ becomes the way to free mankind from the slavery of sin and a marred representation of God in their being by transforming them into the likeness of Jesus who is the image of God. This comes through man's submission to Christ as Lord and the regenerative power of God's word, the Gospel³⁹ as revealed in the Bible. Those of mankind who choose to be "in Christ" experience this regenerative power and are transformed into the image of God through Jesus Christ. This choice is

³⁹ Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18; II Cor. 10:4

available to anyone (Jn. 3:16). If, then, Christ is the ultimate *imago Dei*, and has the power to restore the *imago Dei* to anyone who chooses to be “in Him”, and this choice is available to any one, then anyone can have the *imago Dei* restored in their life.

Christian Theism then not only has sufficiency for explaining why all men do not always represent God but also has sufficiency in providing the ability of men to be able to express the *imago Dei* and be rescued from his fallen nature.

Christian Theism offers then a sufficient foundation for ethics and morality (the nature of moral rights, and the moral right verses the moral wrong). Its foundation is based in the nature of God and the *imago Dei* in the nature of man.

III. The Insufficiency of Secular Humanism for the Foundation of Ethical Theory.

Someone may well ask, “What about Humanism? Doesn’t it also offer a sufficient foundation for ethics and right and wrong?” In order to answer this question, I will *very* briefly survey the foundation of the ethics of Secular Humanism as generally depicted by the signers of the *Humanist Manifesto II*⁴⁰ and then consider its sufficiency with respect to the five categories just examined for Christian Theism.

The Foundation of the Ethics of Secular Humanism.

Secular Humanists begin with matter as ultimate reality⁴¹ and assert a theology of atheism.⁴² There is no god, no transcendent being. The mind of man and his personality are simply a function of the “interrelation of chemical

⁴⁰ Non Theistic Humanism has at least three branches: Secular Humanism, Marxism/Leninism Humanism, and Cosmic Humanism, so Noebel, 7.

⁴¹ Sire, 54-55.

⁴² Noebel, 194.

and physical properties” not yet fully understood.⁴³ Ethics are related only to mankind. There is no consciousness prior to humans and no prior sense of right or wrong.⁴⁴ *The Humanist Manifesto II* asserts:

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. . . . Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in a shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life’s enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarization, commercialization, and dehumanization.⁴⁵

In other words, human beings are the sole determiners of ethics, of right and wrong, based on their personal needs, interests, desires, and enrichment.

Human beings are also merely a product of evolution and chance. The origin of human family and social character is nature.⁴⁶ Corliss Lamont states, “Nature itself constitutes the sum total of reality” and “matter-energy not mind is the foundation stuff of the universe.”⁴⁷ But is this foundation sufficient?

A. An Insufficient Ground for Ethics

Secular Humanism posits only matter as ultimate reality. Out of this matter springs forth morality. How can this happen? The scenario would seem to be something like this: If non-personal, non-gregarious, non-self-conscious, non-self-determining matter plus evolution exists, then personal, gregarious, self-conscious, self-determining, moral man comes forth. There is a gap or

⁴³ Sire , 56.

⁴⁴ Sire, 61.

⁴⁵ From *The Humanist Manifesto II* as found in Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism Sixth Edition, Revised and Enlarged* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1982), 293-294.

⁴⁶ Sire, 59

⁴⁷ 116

disconnect here in Humanism's reasoning⁴⁸ as Humanism cannot explain satisfactorily how or why personality and morality suddenly appeared or could come from non-personal, non-moral, non-self-conscious, non-self-determining matter. Secular Humanism, thus, does not seem to have a sufficient ground for the existence of morality or ethics. It has no sufficient explanation for morality coming from amorality.

B. The Insufficiency of the "Ought-ness" of a Moral Code

Asserting that things "ought" to happen is not foreign to Secular Humanism. For instance in the quotation above (p. 19) there is an assumption that there *should* be a goal of enriching or saving man's life. The document states, "No deity will save us: we must save ourselves".⁴⁹ But what is the basis for this claim, why *ought* we or *must* we "save our selves", and what is entailed in that salvation? If non-moral matter is ultimate reality, on what basis can one derive the "ought" from the "is"? The logic seems insufficient and goes something like the following: If man's life can be enriched or saved, it ought to be enriched or saved. Again there is a disconnect, a jump in logic, from the "is" to the "ought". On what basis *should* there be an "enriching" or a "salvation" of man and his life? Even Secular Humanists themselves have a problem with the "ought". Noebel quotes Humanist Mihailo Markovic as stating "it is quite unclear where this 'ought' comes from".⁵⁰ Paul Kurtz, the writer of the *Humanist Manifesto II*, admits that he can "find no ultimate basis

⁴⁸ Man's reasoning is not a satisfactory basis for morality as it leads to circular reasoning. Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 22-58, shows how this happens and calls it "The Ethical Cul-de-Sac". The only way to avoid this circular reasoning is by positing a transcendence of some type.

⁴⁹ Lamont, 293.

⁵⁰ 197.

for ‘ought’”.⁵¹ Noebel summarizes the heart of the problem Humanists face as follows:

If man is going to decide what he “ought” to do, then he must refer to a moral code, or foundation, which dictates this “ought” . . . If there is no ultimate basis for “ought,” then there is no basis for determining right or wrong, which means the Hitlers, Stalins, and Maos of the world are innocent of any wrongdoing.

Without a basis for the “ought”, Secular Humanists have no sufficient basis for asserting that any thing should take place, not even their calls for global agendas such as that of Paul Kurtz in his *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*.⁵²

C. An Insufficient Basis for Moral Order and Social Cohesiveness

The Humanist Manifesto II calls for a “world community” in which all peoples live in peace and harmony.⁵³ But if ethics are situational and one is committed to ethical relativism, how can this happen? There is no moral absolute to fall back upon to make decisions or “judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict”.⁵⁴ Noebel⁵⁵ is correct in stating,

This is the Achilles’ heel of ethical relativism—it leaves mankind with no standards, only conflicting opinions or subjective value judgments that translate into no morality”.

Without a transcendent reference point, there can be no real moral order.

Again the logic is not sufficient. It seems to be the following: If ethics embraced by humanity are relative and situational with no absolutes, then

⁵¹ Ibid. Sire, p. 62, concurs that the main question that Humanists cannot satisfactorily answer is “How does one get from the fact of self-consciousness and self-determination, the realm of the *is* and *can*, to the realm of what *ought* to be or be done?”

⁵² Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000.

⁵³ Lamont, 298-300.

⁵⁴ Noebel, 245.

⁵⁵ 245.

there can be moral order. There is a jump from ethical relativism to an ethical universal norm or a common moral order embraced by all humanity. Secular Humanism does not satisfactorily explain this jump.

D. An Insufficient Basis for Equal Value in all Men

The Humanist Manifesto II asserts that there is a “*preciousness and dignity of the individual person*”, that this is a “central humanist value”⁵⁶ and that there exists a “principle of moral equality”.⁵⁷ The Manifesto also asserts: “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience”.⁵⁸ But if all values are man-made and originate in human experience and each human experience is different, then how can there be a common set of moral values or a common concept of “value”? How can there be moral equality if each person values things differently than the next person? The logic again seems insufficient and seems to run in this manner: If each man creates a different value system through his own individually diverse human experiences, then there can be a common value system for all men and a common understanding of the preciousness, dignity, and equality of each individual person. Without an absolute value standard, however, there can be no guaranteed value for any individual.⁵⁹ Sire states it correctly when he says, “. . . exactly how value is created out of the human situation is . . . up for

⁵⁶ Lamont, 294.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 293.

⁵⁹ Noebel, 240.

grabs.”⁶⁰ Hence, Secular Humanism provides an insufficient ground for holding a position of equal value for all men.⁶¹

E. An Insufficient Explanation of Man’s Nature and a Way for Him to Change for the “Good”

The Humanist Manifesto II has created its own set of values and definitions and has chosen to classify such things as vulgarization, commercialization, and dehumanization as “debasing”.⁶² However this seems arbitrary as there is no common foundation for the valuation of man. Since ethics are based in and made by man and are individual, situational and autonomous, what is the basis of the Manifesto’s classification of these things as “debasing”? There seems to be no basis for it except the *Manifesto*’s own declaration and superimposition of its own chosen ethics upon all others. There is an underlying assumption of what man “should” or “should not” be like, but no basis for determining that “ought-ness”. Man’s lack of knowledge

⁶⁰ 62.

⁶¹ Lamont, p. 248, even seems to counter the Humanist concept of “equal value of all men” by implying that correct moral choices can only be made by “intelligent people” and thus the intelligent would seem to be the logical “moral guides for the rest of society” (Noebel, 209) when he states,

The irrational impulses of human beings have played an enormous role in bringing recurrent disasters upon mankind and remain a sinister danger in contemporary affairs. For the Humanist, stupidity is just as great a sin as selfishness; and ‘the moral obligation to be intelligent’ ranks among the highest of duties”.

The unintelligent then would seem to then be immoral and a failure in society. This would seem to imply that Humanists do not foundationally hold to the equality of all men at least when it comes to intelligence. This would also seem to contradict *The Humanist Manifesto II*’s statement that “*The preciousness and dignity of the individual person* is a central humanist value” (Lamont, 294) and cause one to conclude that the unintelligent are not precious nor have dignity. Thus the intelligent elite would seem to govern the “stupid” and unintelligent creating an elitist ethic for all mankind to follow, perhaps creating what Paul Kurtz calls a New Planetary Humanism based on the intelligent elitist Secular Humanist (and if you will) pontificated ethics. But this is irrational since there does not seem to be a sufficient basis for morality to come from “intelligence”. In addition this admits that men are not all of “equal value”. The rationale seems to be: If one is intelligent, then he is or will be moral. This is a jump in logic. How does one get morality from intelligence?

⁶² Ibid. 294. See also this quotation above.

seems to be the only explanation of man's nature as to why he sometimes deviates from the expressed and desired norm of the *Manifesto*. Lamont states:

For Humanism no human acts are good or bad in or of themselves. Whether an act is good or bad is to be judged by its *consequences* for the individual and society. Knowledge of the good, then must be worked out.⁶³

Knowledge then seems to be the way to access what is "good". The reasoning seems to be: If man gains knowledge of consequences, then the assumption is that he changes for the good. Hence, if man gains enough knowledge, he will cease the bad, which would include ceasing to be debasing, vulgar, and dehumanizing. This would also seem to assume that man by nature is "good" and with enough knowledge will choose the good. But there a jump here from knowledge to morality, a jump for which there seems no foundation. Beyond that, there is no standard for the determination of what "good" is. Can knowledge produce "good"? Perhaps and perhaps not depending on what that "good" is and who or what group decides is "good". Experimentally, even with knowledge, men do not always choose the defined good even of Secular Humanism or we would all be Humanists. Could it be that all who are not Humanists simply lack knowledge? This seems dubious, as many non-Humanists are intelligent and knowledgeable. Hence, Secular Humanism does not seem to have an adequate explanation for how or why "good" morality comes from knowledge.

For the Humanist, a *change* in man to cause him to do the "good" defined by Humanism seems to come only by what the *Manifesto* states is an

⁶³ Lamont, 232.

appeal to human “reason and compassion to produce the world we want”.⁶⁴ But as Grenz has shown,⁶⁵ man’s reasoning (i.e. his knowledge and thinking) is not a satisfactory basis for morality as it leads to circular reasoning which Grenz calls an “ethical cul-de-sac”. Secular Humanism and its ethical relativism then seems insufficient also in this area of giving an explanation for the nature of man and having a satisfactory method of changing him for the “good”. In fact, Secular Humanism does not have a sufficient foundation for defining what the “good” is. Noebel is correct in his statement,

. . . the biggest problem with ethical relativism is . . . that basically anything can be construed as “good” or “bad” under the assumption that it is all relative to the situation in which a man finds himself. Even if individuals are striving to do the right thing, they may honestly disagree about what is the right thing, since there is no absolute standard.⁶⁶

Secular Humanism is thus found *insufficient* in these five areas as a ground for ethics mainly because it lacks a “transcendent vantage point”.⁶⁷ Without positing some type of transcendent being, man is left to wander in his own reasoning, making up his own individual ethics, without a unifying standard for moral order or a source and standard for his ethics.

⁶⁴ Lamont, 299.

⁶⁵ *Moral Quest*, 22-58.

⁶⁶ 207.

⁶⁷ Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 57.

Conclusion

Christian Theism, in this paper, has been shown to have a sufficient foundation to satisfactorily answer the question, “What is the nature of moral rights and the moral right vs. moral wrong?” This sufficiency was shown to be the case in five different areas: As a sufficient ground for ethics, for the “ought-ness” of a moral code, as a sufficient basis for moral order and social cohesiveness, for equal value in all men, and in providing a sufficient explanation of man’s nature and a way for him to change for the good. All these sufficiencies are based in the nature of God (his transcendence, immanence, sovereignty, eternity, personhood, and goodness) and the *imago Dei* bestowed upon man. It is this transcendency of God that makes Christian Theism a sufficient foundation for ethics (the determination of the nature of moral rights and moral right verses moral wrong).

Secular Humanism, in contrast, has no transcendent being in its model of reality. Rather, it posits “matter” as its ultimate reality. That model was shown to be an *insufficient* foundation for ethics and moral theory in the same five areas Christian Theism was found to be sufficient. Hence, in these ways, Christian Theism provides a more sufficient foundation than Secular Humanism for moral theory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auer, J. A. C. Fagginger; and Hartt, Julian. *Humanism verses Theism*. Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press, 1981.
- Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960. S.v. "The Trinity".
- Clines, D. J. A. "The Image of God in Man." *TynBul* 19 (1968).
- Craig, William Lane; and J. P. Moreland, Editors. *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Flender, O. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 Vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979. S.v. "image".
- Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976.
- _____. *Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.
- Giles, Glenn W. "The Intentional Corporate Witness of the People of God", 2005 at http://www.denverchurchofchrist.org/?page_id=13.
- _____. "The Shema': The Faithfulness of God as the Ground for the Faithfulness of Man: An Exegetical Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4-9," 2005, at http://www.denverchurchofchrist.org/?page_id=13.
- _____. "Love in the Greatest Commandment," 2005, at http://www.denverchurchofchrist.org/?page_id=13.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*. Downer's Grove: IVP, 1997.
- _____. "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear Linearity of Theology," *JETS* 47 (2004): 617-28.
- _____. "The Imago Dei and the Dissipation of the Self", *Dialog* 38 (1999): 182-87.
- Groome, Thomas H. *Christian Religious Education*. San Francisco: Harper & Roe, 1980.
- Herrick, Jim. *Humanism: An Introduction*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005.
- Kurtz, Paul. *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000.
- _____, Ed. *Humanist Manifestos I and II*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1980.

- _____. *Living without Religion: Eupraxophy*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994.
- Lamont, Corliss. *The Philosophy of Humanism Sixth Edition, Revised and Enlarged*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1982.
- Lapsley, Jacqueline E. "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy", *CBQ* 65 (2003): 350-69.
- Lowe, Stephen D. *You Are My Witnesses: A Biblical Theology of Christian Education* Newburgh, IN: Trinity College and Seminary, 2000.
- Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Moran, William L. "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy", *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77-87.
- Noebel, David A. *Understanding the Times: The Religious World Views of our Day and the Search for Truth*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1991.
- Richards, Lawrence O. *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd Ed. Downers Grove: IVP, 1997.
- Storer, Morris B. Ed. *Humanist Ethics*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1980.
- The American Heritage Dictionary*. New York: Houghton, 1969. S.v., "moral".
- Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 4. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964. S.v. "εἰκων".

