

HUMAN RIGHTS: AN
EVOLUTIONARY AND
CHRISTIAN
PERSPECTIVE

Human Rights: An Evolutionary and Christian Perspective

Loyd L. Fueston, Jr.

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It is a matter of character, not
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Mind* [5], page 156]

Kenneth Minogue

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Preface

I would like to think I were a creature with rights, rights coming perhaps as a grant from my Creator or perhaps being an inborn aspect of my human nature. I would that these rights were truly mine and truly inalienable.

Yet, the Bible gives me no hope that God has granted me any right to life or liberty or happiness or even property in this world. Nor does history support a claim to such rights.

Nor does rational thought give any hope of such rights as inherently belonging to human beings. Man is a creature of flesh-and-blood, a citizen of an empirical world in which there are no such magical intrusions.

So it was that back in 2006, I wrote an article, *Natural and Inalienable Rights*, in which I denied that men have such rights and warned that the rights we had gained over the centuries by hard work and sacrifices might well be endangered by such a misunderstanding.

The problem has remained with me though rarely keeping me awake at night. It probably has kept me awake a few times when I would have been napping, but it's a modest-sized problem relative to the vast task I've undertaken to start building a foundation for a new phase of Western Civilization or perhaps for a new civilization to be founded by some human beings outside the Western countries.

And yet it's a rather important problem, however modest-sized it might appear next to the problem of defining the relationship between abstractions and concrete being. It is in fact a practical example of this problem and it's by way of thinking through these problems that new ways of understanding Creation can be developed. And we need those new ways because we've discovered the universe and the abstractions of mathematics to be far richer and complex than even Isaac Newton would have thought possible.

I'm both driven by some forces and pulled forward by other forces to which I long ago submitted. My own way of understanding Creation leads

me to doubt in many cases a complete differentiation between inside and outside. Maybe those driving forces and pulling forces are the same. Maybe I'm a pushme-pullme which actually can move in one direction or another.

What remains true is my wish to understand my environments at a concrete and fairly detailed level, all human environments at a greater level of abstraction and a lesser level of detail, the earth and the universe and all of Creation at progressively greater levels of abstraction and lesser levels of detail. By responding to reality as best I can, I've made necessity a virtue. This is to say that I've recognized that Creation is the work of the God of Jesus Christ, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. What choice have I but to accept what God has done and then to move on in my pitifully poor imitation of my maker, trying to make creative use of what He's given to us.

Introduction

I want others to respect me by not taking my life and by not placing constraints upon my other rights as generally recognized in the Anglo-American traditions. I certainly want powerful institutions to also honor those rights won by historical accident but also by hard work and sacrifice on the part of our ancestors, some of whom were working for other purposes – such as the noblemen who sought to secure their own rights when they forced King John to sign the *Magna Carta* which was gradually extended to all Englishmen.

I want to be safe not only from attacks mounted by American and foreign criminals but also from attacks mounted by American politicians and government employees who would gain prestige, power, and money by restricting my rights and those of my fellow-citizens. I want to know that if I'm accused of a crime, I'll be treated with respect by police and court officials, that I'll be allowed competent legal counsel, that I would get a fair trial if it came to that. I would like to think I could receive justice if I were wronged by even the richest of financiers or the most powerful of corporations.

I would like to have my rights to life, liberty, and property guaranteed against the inroads of greedy bankers, ambitious politicians, or self-righteous religious leaders.

I also believe this world to be a narrative, a rich and complex story being told by God. As a Christian who has tried to respond to God's Creation in the context of the most basic Christian beliefs as summarized in the various versions of the traditional creeds of the early Christian Church. I think this world to be centered upon the Crucifixion of Christ, the willing self-sacrifice of the Son to His Father. The story is so complex because of the creaturely nature taken on by the Son of God – human by accident though not by necessity nor was this foreordained in any way understandable by the mind

of a creature. Being human as well as God, Jesus Christ has a creaturely nature, a nature of a social being, an apish creature made for life in an overlapping complex of human communities.

Some human beings will be resurrected to part of the complex of human communities which we call the Body of Christ, the home or social environment, if you will, for the Son of God. This Body of Christ is not something that will form only in the world of the resurrected, just as the members of that Body will not form only in that world of the resurrected. Where will those members come from? They are us, at least some of us, members of the human race in this mortal realm. In parallel with that, I conjecture the entire Body is under formation in this world and that raises some interesting possibilities for the members of that Body.

In Part I, *Natural Human Rights: Reality or Dream?*, I develop a sketchy view of man as a mere creature, and mere as well as creature is what man is, what he is born to be. I deny that human rights can be well-founded by the usual ways of modern liberalism, including the loose, question-begging language found in the American *Declaration of Independence*.

In Part II, *Can We Find a True Foundation for Human Rights?*, I move on to claim that we, at least we Christians, are warranted in speculating about rights appearing as the Body of Christ develops in this world of evolutionary and developmental processes.

In Part III, *Created Being and the Foundations of Human Rights*, I provide some of my weblog essays. These are but a sampling of the work I've produced to establish a new understanding of created being, a foundation which allows me to speak, in the way of radical understandings of quantum physics and St. John the Apostle's understanding of God the Creator, of relationships being primary over substance, of relationships bringing stuff into existence and shaping it. This provides the justification for speaking of the Body of Christ as forming in this mortal realm and of developing the sorts of relationships not to be perfected nor completed on this side of the grave. Human rights are one aspect of those relationships proper to the members and organs and entirety of the Body of Christ. I have also included the original article as Chapter 17, *Original Article: Natural and Inalienable Rights*.

Part I

Natural Human Rights: Reality or Dream?

1 What Could ‘Natural Human Rights’ Be?

1.1 A Greatly Prejudiced Historical Perspective

As Etienne Gilson tells the story – with a little elaboration on my part, the modern world allowed and forced men to raise certain questions which the Catholic thinkers failed to answer by 1800. By that time, some very bad answers had been proposed and these bad answers had helped pave the way to a great deal of blood-letting of those who were clearly innocent and those who might have been guilty of some substantial crimes – some of the criminals being themselves leaders of one revolution or another. It was not an auspicious beginning for the socially and politically activist phase of the Modern Age, when efforts were being made to apply the rationality so successful in mathematics and physics to social and political and moral problems. The intellectual and spiritual leaders of the Catholic Church came up with no good answers to the modern questions and no solutions for developing problems not yet expressed as questions. Those intellectual leaders led the Catholic Church on a retreat into a ghetto as Gilson put matters. I’d say they built ghetto walls around the Catholic mind. Thinkers of many a sort, Protestant, Jewish, and secular, did no better so far as I can tell. As a general statement: the various traditions of the West failed to respond properly to what were originally opportunities rather than problems, but those opportunities quickly became problems as hopes regarding

freedom and equality and economic activities were raised only to be dashed to the ground as men found it easier to destroy the old structures than to build new ones.

Our tasks should be to take on that long-delayed project of proposing good answers to those questions, but most Christians remain stubbornly entrenched behind one ghetto-wall or another, a few roam more openly but have taken on the roles of barbarian looters or enslavers of minds, or both, rather than the roles of builders or restorers. And, as we are discovering in the early part of this third millennium after Christ, it is especially easy for human predators to take advantage of their fellow-men during periods of decay of moral and political and economic order.

Optimists tell us there are no problems but only opportunities. A pessimist might claim there are no opportunities but only problems. After all, that pessimist can point to two centuries of:

1. growth in the courage and creativity of explorers of empirical reality along with
2. decay in the courage and creativity of other sorts of thinkers who failed to make greater sense of this extraordinarily rich and complex Creation which has come into view.

Physical scientists, mathematicians, engineers, factory-managers, metal-workers, explorers of jungles and deserts, have done their jobs. It's the political thinkers and doers, theologians and church-leaders, philosophers and general critics, who failed to do their jobs and continue to fail to do their jobs.

I oversimplify, of course, in various ways. For example, poets and novelists have tried hard to follow curving paths as philosophers and theologians and political thinkers have tried to find the non-existent straight and narrow paths. And there have been some others, even some philosophers such as Gilson himself, who have had the courage and faith to deal directly with the modern questions whether forced to find resources in the pre-modern ages of men or in new thought. Some, such as Nietzsche and Sartre, had a half-courage of sorts – capable of seeing the modern emperor no longer even had skin or meat upon his skeletal self but not capable, or maybe not willing, to propose new ways of putting flesh back on that wretched ruler of the modern mind. In line with one of my major themes, those thinkers who

at least were insightful critics knew how to follow the curved paths through established ways of thought, paths actually the straight paths, that is – shortest paths, through reality. See Chapter 10, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*, for a discussion of this general issue.

Some good things happened in the early stages of the Modern Age, some continued to happen – and may yet be happening. One good thing, though not handled well, was the release of the peasantry and even the country gentry from parochial lives. Another good thing has been the emergence of a trend to some sort of self-determination on the part of groups with some political coherence. This is a problem area because that coherence was often due to ethnic and/or religious ties which have weakened over the 20th century so that these groups have melted away into mobs of individuals who are little more than targets for various sorts of exploiters or predators.

Freed into a wider realm, at least into a major part of Western Civilization – say England as a whole, large numbers of Europeans and eventually North Americans and others found themselves somehow become heirs to the specific rights won by warlords and commercial barons by concession of greater warlords. Those rights are currently disappearing and that returns us to the basic modern question: what are the proper relationships between individual human beings and various levels of communities and also the proper relationships between those various levels of communities? I'll ignore, from here, the unsettling fact that not Hobbes nor Locke nor Rousseau nor Jefferson ever saw the true question in its general form, helping to cause a confrontation between state and religious communities, state and family, etc. which served only the interests of predators and those who protected themselves and others by building, in their thoughts, ghetto-walls around one particular form or level of human community or building, in a concrete way, ghetto-walls around one particular concrete community.

What in all of history, what in all that we can observe or otherwise learn about human behavior, what in modern science of evolutionary biology or neurobiology or any other specialty area of the physical sciences, what in the Bible or the traditions of the Christians or Jews or Greco-Roman pagans, could justify this idea that human beings have been given the right to life, liberty, and property as Locke had it or the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as Jefferson had it?

According to my narrow but somewhat deep understanding of the history of human thought, it would seem that all modern liberals, those who use doctrines of 'natural human rights' along with less noble means to spread

rumors that there is such a creature as an individualist with only accidental ties, sentimental ties, to families and other communities, relied upon the thought of the ancient Stoics, a Greek school of philosophy which seemed to produce its greatest and most dangerous thoughts in Rome. One set of dangerous thoughts had to do with the nature of man in community. In a sense, they denied it in their doctrine of natural rights while themselves tending to live noble lives of sacrifice for the sake of a greater community.

I'm going to quote, somewhat out of context, a description by John Dahlberg, Lord Acton, about the birth of natural right doctrine in Stoic thought; Acton's claims being a somewhat unfair but still true attack upon the concept of 'natural human rights' [4]:

The dimness and poverty of their theological speculation caused the Stoics to attribute the government of the universe less to the uncertain design of gods than to a definite law of nature. By that law, which is superior to religious traditions and national authorities, and which every man can learn from a guardian angel who neither sleeps nor errs, all are governed alike, all are equal, all are bound in charity to each other, as members of one community and children of the same God. The unity of mankind implied the existence of rights and duties common to all men, which legislation neither gives nor takes away.
[page 66]

Natural rights theory is an effort to justify or even demand morally well-ordered human relationships of a certain higher type, which effort is made by those who no longer believe in the God of the Jews or the Christians, or at least don't trust Him to live up to the standards of the natural rights theorists. To be sure, Hobbes seems to justify man as an extreme individual and, at the same time, to subjugate him absolutely to Leviathan, the central government, rather than to God. Perhaps the founder of modern liberalism, Hobbes seems to have scared his heirs enough for them to resort to flimsy pretenses that natural human rights are obviously true by some sort of intuition. Stoic thought provided a venerable foundation for these pretenses though human thinkers between the fall of Rome and the rise of Locke seem to have politely ignored this weak spot in the thoughts of the Stoics. This is one of the complications of human intellectual theory I'll pass over, partly because my knowledge of the past is so sketchy relative to the scope of my

current efforts. In any case, I've read little of Hobbes' own works and only a bit more about Hobbes, mostly by those who often admired him but didn't accept his claims. I'm content to let matters rest there.

Only a special relationship with the King of the Universe, the Almighty Creator, could possibly justify human rights, but those would be differently founded than the 'natural human rights' of the ancient Stoics or the modern neopagans or the modern thinkers of mixed pagan and Christian beliefs and attitudes. Modern thinkers, some of high intelligence and moral character, could justify belief in such questionable claims mostly because they were relying on cultural prejudices which were justified only because Jesus Christ Himself had treated human beings as if they had rights. Some followers of Christ, as well as some Jews and Buddhists and Muslims and pagans and atheists and others, have also treated their fellow human beings as if they had these mysterious rights. Strong forms of these 'rights' have been granted most broadly in modern Christian nations. This might well be a coincidence and we must admit that often enough even the very pioneers of implementing rights have in practice and sometimes even in theory excluded African slaves or Catholics or Jews or Gypsies or women or others from the fullness of even the most basic of these rights. Yet, I'll claim, in later sections of this book, that it was not just a coincidence that rights developed most fully in Christian nations.

More modern versions of natural law theory aren't much better than Acton's description would imply, though the context gives some evidence he spoke ironically, not that he didn't mean what he said but there are implied qualifications which I won't bother to disentangle because they're not important to my current line of thought. What's important is that even Acton, a devout Catholic who often showed openly his faith in his essays on historical and political issues but also wanted to ground moral and political principles in a form acceptable to those of different faiths, seemed to see there was no ground for natural human rights but the God who had created nature. This is one reason the Stoics couldn't really ground their belief in natural law theory – they were higher pagans who believed in some sort of a Deity but that God co-existed with the Cosmos rather than being its true Creator. The God of the Stoics couldn't give to creatures what wasn't part of the nature which existed of itself, apart from the God Himself, and there is no reason to believe nature has yet given us anything we'd want to call 'human rights' nor that nature obeys anything which might be called 'natural law theory'. Nature gives hints of these rights, as I'll discuss later,

but nature would need to be far more complete and perfect in moral order to ground those rights in any absolute way.

So it is I’ll claim we have something we can call human rights when we become members of the Body of Christ, for which a precursor form must be found in nature. We Christians, at least some of us, believe God so ordered matters that grace completes and perfects nature rather than destroying or replacing nature. This means that something must exist in this mortal realm, in our mortal bodies and communities, something which corresponds to the ‘rights’ we’ll enjoy when we share the life of God.

In 2009, I wrote a short essay title titled *If We Can’t Understand What We Shall Be, We Can’t Be It*. This essay is included in this book as Chapter 11. I’ll quote from that chapter for convenience:

If I’m an image of God, or a potential image of God, I can understand what I’ll be and where I’ll be, assuming I’m amongst those who are resurrected. That is, I can understand life after death in rational terms and I can understand what Heaven is in similar terms or else I wouldn’t be suited to that life. In terms of modern empirical knowledge, we would probably need to consider what physicists have learned about the nature of matter and how it’s organized – including thermodynamics, what biologists and historians and others have learned about the developmental nature of this world – including the evolution of the human mind and the development of an individual man’s mind, what mathematicians have discovered about the abstract aspects of Creation – including the way in which seemingly chaotic systems can suddenly self-organize. From these piles of poorly integrated empirical knowledge, we can construct philosophical and theological systems worthy of the name. This is what Augustine of Hippo did in laying the foundations for the Western Civilization which rose from the ruins of Roman and Hellenistic civilizations. But that took a lot of courage and faith, one hell of a lot of work, and modern Christian thinkers seem to be missing either the courage or the faith.

This is not to say that any human thinker can reach the complete truth about life after death. After all, we know that Augustine’s system, and the system which Aquinas put together eight centuries later, eventually proved inadequate. Human ad-

ditions to our knowledge of Creation have proved many of their speculations wrong and left many Christian beliefs unsupported – the traditional understandings have eroded.

Christians are always ready to claim, “We human beings are images of God,” but seem to have no sane way of speaking about the meaning of this claim. Christians have a number of doctrines which seem to be no longer expressible in sane language. God has invited us to participate in His life and His work and that implies we have the capability and the responsibility to understand Creation. Our earlier understandings of Creation and of most Christian doctrines no longer make sense because we now know more about Creation, that is, we know more about God’s acts as Creator. We’re capable of higher understandings. We need to respond in our proper way to God’s Creation. We need to be fearless and confident. Some participate in God’s work by dancing or playing the piano, by teaching young children or caring for those who are dying. We who are called to intellectual work participate in God’s work by being the pioneers in a never-ending effort to shape the human mind to encapsulate God’s Creation, to share in the divine thoughts manifested as the stars in the sky or the children playing in the front yard, most importantly – as the story in which the stars and those children play a role.

This is a prologue of sorts toward the effort to understand the fullness of human life, including its political aspects, where the fullness will only be realized in the world of the resurrected when those who are chosen will share the life of Jesus Christ as members of the Body of Christ. I’ve claimed and will continue to claim that any absolutist claims to human rights, any ‘natural rights’ theory we’ve yet seen, are delusionary, perhaps downright psychotic. Yet, I’ve also freely admitted my puzzlement before this issue because something like rights do make their appearance in history in ways no more than tentative and temporary. This indicates rights might have a reality but one which can only be stable and ‘true’ when we are members of the Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected.

I tell this tale differently from what we learned in public school or even the conventional histories of conservatives or liberals or libertarians because I think the story is different from those tellings. Clearly, I think it a

dangerous pretense to see any issue of human nature in terms stripped of Christian belief. Once we Christians have established proper ways to think about human nature in its various aspects, then we can speak to those of other beliefs. Yet, those of other beliefs, even those – Christian and non-Christian – not headed for salvation, are part of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm. All human beings share in rights but only so far as they exist in the Body of Christ as it has developed during the lifetimes of those human beings.

A true story has a purpose and we mortal men can see that purpose, however tentatively, only by posing questions or problems which are to be resolved when that purpose is fully manifest in the narrative which is our best understanding of this world, of this particular story being told by God. One reason to put matters in such a vague way is to try to forestall premature attempts to state the purpose of the narrative which is the universe directed to God's purposes. True it is that a Christian has to believe that the deepest and broadest purpose, the one which contains all other purposes, is to allow the development of the Body of Christ. That is a matter of faith and can certainly lead to a true hope, but it's at a level which gives us little help in answering the question raised by Lord Acton and other serious Christian thinkers: How is it that the God of Jesus Christ could have created a world in which evil men are so disproportionately powerful and influential?

That purpose in which all Christians must believe is itself at too abstract a level to help us much in understanding the very particular, and often evil-soaked, story which is this world. If we can't understand why a moral narrative populated with human beings who are morally irresponsible so very often and sometimes focused upon exploitation of the most evil sort, then we certainly can't find some simple, easily-stated answer to any questions about the proper relationships between human beings and those various levels of communities or the relationships between those communities. Certainly, the Lockean strategy of positing natural human rights to life, liberty, and property is little more than sad desperation when used as a claim to some sort of absolute truth though perhaps reasonable enough as a short-term strategy toward a better-grounded and more sustainable claim.

We can't state in any absolute terms what are the proper relationships between human beings and various sorts of human communities, between those communities, for at least two reasons:

1. It's still too early to be sure what the story really was and is.
2. The entities which are characters or landscape in that story, or rather in the various sub-stories, are themselves evolving and/or developing.

When I consider these problems, I can still speculate on our lives as members of the Body of Christ in the world of the resurrected, but I have a duty as a Christian thinker to retreat in some ways and to consider matters as we can know them and can understand them as men living in this mortal realm in the early part of the 21st century.

And, so, I'll zig back a little. I think the classical liberals and their followers of various sorts were right that some relationships corresponding to 'human rights' are bound up with the existence of naturally developing human communities which care for their own interests and those of its members, individuals or smaller communities, before engaging in activities as members of greater communities. I regard all those natural human communities, even the ones doomed to an end in this realm, as being organs developing within the Body of Christ. From this viewpoint, the only Christian viewpoint I know of which considers what we modern men know of God's Creation, rights as conceived by Locke and Jefferson are an illusion, but they are an illusion in the sense that something real is seen in the wrong terms. What we call 'human rights' are no more and no less than aspects of interpersonal and communal relationships, developing in concrete communities which can grow larger in themselves or can combine in confederations, so to speak, with other communities. These so-called rights are part of the lives of particular communities and rise and fall with those communities.

Optimism is proper so long as we take a long enough viewpoint. There have also been favorable times for the peaceful development of human communities and sometimes those times have lasted for several generations. Probably, if we take seriously Hammurabi's Code, there were good times in the past. I'd even say lots of good times punctuated by abuses of power, growth of human evil, whenever a predatory elite has arisen and gained substantial power over their fellowmen or human communities. Such an elite, whether outsiders or insiders to a given community, will damage the powers of that community and their individual members to protect morally proper human relationships – some of which have those aspects we call 'rights'.

Before going on to discussions of some possible ways of establishing the reality of 'human rights', I'll quickly discuss how men actually behave

toward one another. Do we treat each other as if we have much in the way of an intuition that we and others have some sort of rights which must be respected?

1.2 How Do Men Actually Behave Toward One Another?

I used this quotation as the epigraph for this book:

Freedom depends on how men actually do behave, not upon how they are allowed to behave. It is a matter of character, not of foolproof constitutional devices. For fools are paramount in politics, and there is nothing which they are unable to destroy. [*The Liberal Mind* [5], page 156]

I'll paraphrase it a little:

The reality of natural human rights depends upon how human beings actually do behave toward one another, not upon how they idealize behavior or possible behavior. It is a matter of character, not of metaphysical claims even when embodied in constitutional devices. For fools, often evil fools, are disproportionately powerful and influential in history, and there is no moral principle which they are unable to violate, no moral relationship which they are unable to pervert.

Human rights aren't something to be possessed by an individual human being of the sort assumed in the rights doctrines of Locke and Jefferson and Mill and other serious thinkers in one or another line of liberal thought. Nor can they be possessed by the very similar individual human beings of the sort assumed by the godfather of liberalism, Hobbes. In the view of Hobbes, individuals stood apart from communities in essential ways, forming ties only in accidental ways and needing Leviathan, the sovereign political power, to protect him from the consequences of his relationships with other individual human beings. This has the advantage over the optimism of Locke and Jefferson of seeming to explain the bad behavior of many men toward their fellowmen.

Bad behavior of men toward other men needs to be explained for the simple reason that rights are pretty much useless if not respected, to at least a great extent if not quite perfectly, by other members of the human race. In a pragmatic moral and political sense, rights are the sort of thing which exist only if everyone acts as if they exist, no matter how many or few believe in the existence of those rights. And it's simply true that everyone acts as if the rights of others exists only during certain periods of human history, mostly during periods when Western Civilization was seriously Christian even if quite imperfectly and hypocritically so. In the United States, a country which has expelled immense of gases corresponding roughly to tributes to rights, no one bothers to object when alleged terrorists or even their teenaged children are murdered at the order of the President. Few enough have objected to the brutal treatment of a soldier who reported American collaboration with Iraqi police committing serious crimes only to be told to shut up and get back to collaborating, at which time he allegedly began leaking information about American crimes in Iraq and other countries. From that point, his story resembles those told by Solzhenitsyn in his books about Soviet state terrorism.

The members of the power-elite seek to enlarge their power and to grab a larger share of the pie. The power-elite say, "There's a terrorist hiding in the mountains of Afghanistan," and the American citizens allow their own rights and the rights of others to be taken by men who fondle their young children or elderly parents at the airport. Guys who are tough when they cheer on "Shock and Awe" displays of military power against the freshwater systems of one Asian country or another, who increase their manly self-esteem by cheering on every brutal assault by their favorite defensive end, will stand by meekly as their wives are strip-searched and their genitals are probed in public buildings.

Rights? As Napoleon noted somewhere, so long as he allowed the French citizens to look at dirty pictures, they'd let him take their sons to fight wars across the European continent. In general, do the powerful respect these claims called 'human rights'? In general, do the powerless seek to gain some control over their lives and to gain some truer safety for their children and wives or do they meekly go along with grotesque displays of face-stomping power and then head home on federal highways to pick up their children from government schools and then head home to long for the days when they can receive a government check each month?

Has there never been an industrialist who took advantage of locally

generated capital and then moved the jobs to a place where workers would work for lower pay? Is that not a form of thievery of the property which Locke claimed to be a human right? Even Adam Smith thought this sort of behavior to be immoral and though he didn't think there should be laws against it, so far as I know, he advocated the force of human social pressure even on the industrialist's family to bring him back to a sense of his social obligations – his debts of honor if not of law.

Has there never been a conqueror who killed the innocent as ruthlessly as if they had attacked his family safely guarded so many hundreds or thousands of miles away?

Has there never been a banker or accountant or lawyer who stole from their trusting clients, perhaps trapping them in a form of slavery? Is there no chance that we might return to a state of society where these scoundrels, and others, will be able to sell their neighbors into full chattel slavery?

If the FBI or DEA ever gets an address wrong, or right, and breaks into your house, machine-guns leveled at your children, you might be wise not to further endanger those children or yourself by defending your house in the way that Sam Adams or Daniel Boone or Sam Houston might have done.

Claims to human rights, if you like that language, are as good as the moral order of your community. As good as the granting and as good as the taking and holding. No better.

All paths seem to lead to the Body of Christ by way of lesser communities, some doomed to die in this mortal realm and some to become – in some form – a part of that Body.

2 What Could Establish Natural Human Rights?

When I ask “What Could Establish ‘Natural Human Rights’?” I’m speaking of a general concept of ‘establish’ which might involve a metaphysical space of sorts rather than the spacetime of our world. In my way of thinking, a legitimate metaphysical space, one truly part of Creation, is a more abstract space at least analogous to a physical spacetime in which a universe might exist and the world which is that universe understood in light of God’s purposes for that universe. See the various essays in Part III, *Created Being and the Foundations of Human Rights*, for a bit of discussion on this view of being founded upon both modern science, especially quantum physics, and also upon the theological viewpoints of the school of St. John the Apostle.

I think I’ve made it clear that there is no way to establish ‘natural human rights’ in terms only of this mortal realm, but I’ll try to address a few specific issues by speaking to what I think to be a settled issue, that is, I know of no one who has shown that ‘natural human rights’ correspond to any aspect of this world.¹ Yet, we all tell ourselves, honestly and truly, that we have something like human rights if only because of our instincts and conscious desires to survive and prosper.

To ‘establish’ natural human rights doesn’t require a cause-and-effect relationship nor a founding of the Hobbesian or Lockean sort. It doesn’t

¹Yet, my main claim is that those rights do correspond to the relationships proper to an entity which is developing in this mortal realm – the Body of Christ. It’s understandable that non-Christian thinkers don’t see this but somewhat strange to me that Christian thinkers seem to avoid being Christian by being directly responsive to reality as if truly being the handiwork of God.

require we could ever, even in principle, discover that early *homo sapiens sapiens*, let alone our mostly extinct cousins of the Neandertal or Cro-magon sort, respected each other's alleged rights to life, liberty, and property, nor the modified Jeffersonian triad of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is nearly certain that they had instincts that led to strong biases in favor of respecting the lives of other human beings, though those could be overridden by various factors.

Despite Locke, despite the metaphysically inclined libertarian thinkers of more recent years, man is a creature of the empirical world. His relationships, governed partially by such workaday matters as the shape of his body and the flows of oxytocin and adrenaline, partially by his efforts to respond in the way of a rational and self-interested creature to an inside and outside which encourages him to grow dependent upon communities, are those of an ape with opportunistic tendencies and some raw talent for abstract reasoning.

2.1 Could Desires Establish Human Rights?

I put desires first because it is in desires that we find all that is worthwhile, that is – we barbarian children of West in the 21st century. The desires of a spiritually mature man still exist though some traditions, particularly Buddhist traditions, speak as if a spiritually mature man is emptied out. To some extent, sometimes to a great extent, that spiritually mature man might be burnt out but he would still contain some green wood as well as those ashes. In any case, he isn't empty. Desires continue, if only a supra-human and vague desire to want only what God wants or to become one with some sort of ultimate being. And that's the key to moral understanding of desires – we have a multiplicity of desires. Many of those desires conflict each other or at least somewhat undercut each other.

More generally, a morally mature man isn't so interested in either “freedom from” or “freedom to” but rather that freedom which can't be readily summarized which is part of his own nature including his social nature with all its constraints and duties.

As Bergson told us truly [1]:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Our desires are legitimate to the extent they are a part of this greater unity which brings us into some sort of synchronization with this world as it develops and as lesser creatures evolve and develop. This seems to be part of the problem.

We must discipline our desires to some greater goal and that tells us that desires can help us move toward goals, good or bad, but they can't define what is a necessary or absolute state.

That is, our desires are as much an annoyance as an indicator of some possible pleasures. Our desires also become morally well-ordered as we do, becoming true persons; to become a true person is to come to a state of truer life, of a higher self-awareness, and to take on the properties I've also seen in a world – unity and coherence and completeness. When we become persons in this way, then we can be free in the way discussed by Bergson. The question remains: can we truly become persons in this sense and, if so, when and how?

2.2 Could Metaphysics Establish Human Rights?

In a word: No! As I noted above, man is an empirical creature, a creature set in a grand narrative with numerous sub-narratives. Man's basic stuff is shaped from various sorts of being which can be described at some level in extremely abstract metaphysical and mathematical terms, but man the concrete bipedal ape has been shaped in a narrative and is still being shaped in some of those narratives. More than that, a man's communities, his social relationships and even his relationships with his own various 'parts' are also shaped in some of those narratives.

Narratives are necessarily structured and are purpose-directed, typically the narratives of this world are loosely directed but I suspect strongly directed in the long-term if we were capable of seeing that long-term. Abstract being, metaphysically describable being, contributes to narratives by

not only contributing the raw stuff of the landscapes and characters but also by contributing to the structures of relationships within the narratives. Yet, there are aspects of human relationships which come from more concrete levels of being, more highly-shaped levels of being, just as there are aspects of the human beings themselves which come from these more concrete regions of Creation.

We need good metaphysics, including the most abstract of mathematics and theoretical physics, to help us in understanding this concrete world but metaphysics only takes us so far. We cannot make any absolute claims that human beings have any particular aspects or properties – not even rights – if those can't be found in our concrete regions of being, in our stuff and, most of all, in our communities, our relationships with other human beings.

Those relationships are us as much as our flesh and blood are, truly us unlike the metaphysical and pseudo-theological fictions of soul become a substance. What sometimes amazes me is the growing evidence that relationships create and shape stuff is pushed aside by those who wish to stick to a radical Platonic Realism which would have each man as an instance of some metaphysical entity – see Chapter 14, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives*, for a discussion of this issue along with some graphs which are the result of early efforts to help others to visualize my ways of understanding being. So it is that even reasonable thinkers seemingly aware of modern empirical knowledge will protect their preferred entity, the free-standing individual, by speaking as if there is something that more honest dualists will label the 'soul'. Some, such as the followers of the Libertarian Mises, will not say anything that will lead to questions, choosing instead to simply state as if a well-argued conclusion that man isn't really an empirical creature shaped and limited by the forces of the physical world as well as by...

Relationships. Immaterial but real in the most concrete sense just because those relationships exist between concrete entities or between one concrete entity and a more complex environment formed by concrete entities. Social relationships don't take on quite the law-like form of relationships between electrically charged particles. Nearly all thinkers on all sides will admit this, but some of those who seem reasonable will simply assume there are some sorts of metaphysical laws, such as those which govern 'natural law'.

Baloney. This, in the most charitable interpretation, is no more than hollow-chested Christian views, some sermon on some mount. Christian

understandings of man and his relationships with other men as hijacked by non-Christians and by some Christians who are willing to accept this hijacking of God's story and the transformation of some of their favorite parts of that story into some sort of sloppy pagan metaphysics.

No. Metaphysics provides us with little help in understanding the reality that corresponds to our vague intuitions of human rights, in understanding the reality that corresponds to our quite imperfect respect for the rights of other. The answer is to be found at the level of concrete reality in the story God is telling, the story in which the main character was the Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

2.3 Could the Natural World Establish Human Rights?

As I've already noted, the world, this universe seen as directed to moral purposes, is a narrative told with substances and relationships shaped from more abstract levels of being, right up to those levels which can be considered as the truths God manifested as the primary level of Creation, the raw stuff from which all else is shaped. The universe, the natural world or the world bereft of those moral purposes, is what it is, a world red of tooth and claw.

We should be careful in letting the associated images overwhelm our images of playful children or beautiful sunsets, yet, the point remains that we human beings as a race have been shaped by billions of years of responses to the opportunities offered by nature and those responses have been, still are, often violent and exploitive of members of the same or different species.

We should also be careful not to forget that life was once little more than so many sacs of self-reproducing chemicals. It's even possible that there were once self-reproducing chemicals naked to the environment, not even unified by so much as a sac. Evolution led from some such primitive state to animals with at least the basic moral character to respect, not give absolute value to but only respect, the lives of their own children and then their own mates and then their own fellow-members of a species. All things considered, the evolution toward even social species of a brutal predatory nature is a sign of a movement in certain direction, that is, a

movement toward a greater structure in relationships between members of a hunting or foraging pack, a more complex and more strongly binding set of duties and rights, though those duties and rights be highly qualified, highly limited to the proper responses of others as well as the proper environmental conditions at crucial times.

We can move rapidly over millions of years to primate families and even human families. Yes, we can move even beyond that to the development of tribes and clans, even settled communities with non-members moving in and out, trading and manufacturing and mining and farming along with the more permanent residents. Men do have have instincts not to kill other human beings. Those instincts are generally set in motion by certain perceptions, most strongly a human face, which allow the recognition of the other being as a fellow human being. In the book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman talks of this and the related problem that massacres often occur when one army breaks on the battlefield. The pursuing soldiers will more readily kill fleeing soldiers, not because of cowardice, but because they no longer see faces and their instincts against killing members of their own species are no longer set in motion. Grossman also notes that research tells us that wolves have much stronger instincts against killing members of their own species than human beings do. This leads me to suggest, tongue-in-cheek, that natural law reasoning should tell us that wolves have stronger rights than human beings since they have stronger consciences, at least on this one matter of not killing other members of their own species.

So evolution has provided us with instincts leading to the Fifth Commandment or to recognition of a right of our fellow human beings to life. These instincts are far from absolute and are very weak in some human beings. There are those morally well-ordered men who can kill in a detached way when they think it justified and there are those who kill readily when angry and those who positively like to kill. Most men have to be driven to a state of despair or anger or driven by an overpowering sense of duty before they can kill another human being.

Good community life can help us to structure our lives and can reinforce some of our good instincts. Something corresponding to human rights can be honored, at least for members of that community though non-members might have fewer 'rights' than tribal members. Over the centuries, human communities have grown larger and more complicated and more complex for a variety of reasons, some of which I've written about elsewhere. I'll discuss this issue of communities a little more in the next section and will

make some general proposals in Part II, *Can We Find a True Foundation for Human Rights?*

There is a trajectory to this, an obvious plot – if you will – to this narrative. If you wish, you can consider it a matter of accident rather than God’s will that life on earth entered into this line of development. It remains true that the real world is what’s real and the real world is, in part, that story of life in which there is a trajectory toward the development of communities, of relationships between members of those communities, which relationships can be labeled as moral ties.

Even without the incarnation of the Son of God, even without considering the human race as the Body of Christ under development, we can still see that race and the trajectory of development it has been traveling. We are moving toward moral ties of the sort which include a promise of what could be truly considered as rights, absolute as such things can get in this mortal realm, but far less than absolute in a metaphysical sense.

2.4 Could Human Social Interactions Establish Human Rights?

Man is a social animal, certainly in the view of Christians who are told they are to become members of some undefined entity called the Body of Christ, undefined but not entirely beyond human understanding. St. Paul lets us know we are to be members of this entity which is to be wedded to the Christ, the Son of God who took the human being, Jesus of Nazareth into Himself as a second nature, fully as much the Christ as is the divine nature. In other places, Christ is said to be the head of the Body of Christ. It’s most reasonable for a Christian to think that both descriptions are valid.

Our social natures are as much us as are our individual natures, a thought which frightens me in this day and age when even the once- and future-promising country of the United States stumbles drunkenly across the earth, doing good or evil as the mood strikes our leaders – the general citizenry is ever willing to believe that when we act as a nation-state, we are as pure as the driven snow.

The processes of forming communities involve stresses that lead to de-

formations such as various forms and degrees of bigotry, by which I mean morally wrongful prejudice. Given the passivity of most members of most communities, those stresses can also lead to societies organized as military socialisms or other ways suited to the purposes of those Jefferson considered members of a class of exploiters as opposed to the class of producers.

When I speak of stresses in this context, I'm referring to internal and external pressures caused by various sorts of growth processes, developmental and evolutionary. A failure to respond properly will result in the build-up of those pressures so that they force various sorts of changes upon an individual or a community.

In an idealistic manner of speaking, I could claim that perfect awareness of those various changes in their early stages could allow us to respond properly, moving smoothly toward the greater human community of the Body of Christ and also helping us to develop more smoothly as truer members of that community.

This manner of speaking would ignore some serious problems. First of all, while many developmental paths are smooth enough to be predictable if often only in principle, the evolutionary processes which change individuals and communities in deep ways are essentially unpredictable, not because of randomness but rather because evolutionary processes occur at the intersection of independent systems, a classic set-up for so-called chaos. In any case, it's unlikely that we'll generally see the sort of smooth development which makes it possible to predict the development of a society.

In a sense, the question of predictability is beside the point. In this world, as 'chaos' or – better – non-deterministic or non-linear dynamics tell us, even some well-determined processes are unpredictable. Experts in the dynamics of the solar system have proven that it's essentially impossible to prove the stability of this system for more than some tens of millions of years in the future – not such a long time by the standards of astrophysics. A simpler example of a chaotic system that you can build yourself: two pendula of different oscillation periods can be linked by a rope and the combined system will move in ways which are unpredictable though fully determined.

Yet, even in the case of such systems, 'qualitative' mathematical analyses can analyze the behavior and boundaries of stability of, for example, a system of planets orbiting a star. I've claimed in similar types of problems that generalization to a higher level of abstraction can point to principles of seemingly unrelated concrete systems. Some behaviors of a community

of individuals might resemble the behaviors of these complex physical systems. A graphical representation of what's involved, along with a short discussion, follows shortly.

In Chapter 10, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*, I note:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

“Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life – how to act.”

I'm speaking analogically and the situation is still more complex and more complicated than it might seem.

In Chapter 13, *The Essence of Liberalism*, I write this about Figure 2.1 found on the next page:

Physicists and mathematicians have given us an understanding of the abstractions at Node Y1. I think their work includes at least an implicit understanding of what might be at Node X. If we can clarify that understanding of Node X a bit, we can move to Node Z1 and then to Node Z2. The abstractions at Node Z1 won't be mathematical in terms of quantification, so far as I can anticipate matters. But I suspect that mathematics, even including its quantitative fields, is grounded upon abstract forms of being which are more qualitative than quantitative. Relationships are primary and entities, even mathematical truths, come into existence because of a relationship. (Pending relationships cause the fuzziness of quantum mechanics rather than any absolute uncertainty.)

The language is fuzzy and necessarily so. I'm trying to develop language for talking about more abstract realms of being and am forced to twist and re-use existing language to do so. I think I can do better as this project moves forward but I know there are others out there who will be able to do better, perhaps some reading this essay soon after I post it. In any case, I have a very preliminary list of assumptions about the properties of

that realm of being in Node Z1 and will try to move all the way up to Node X.

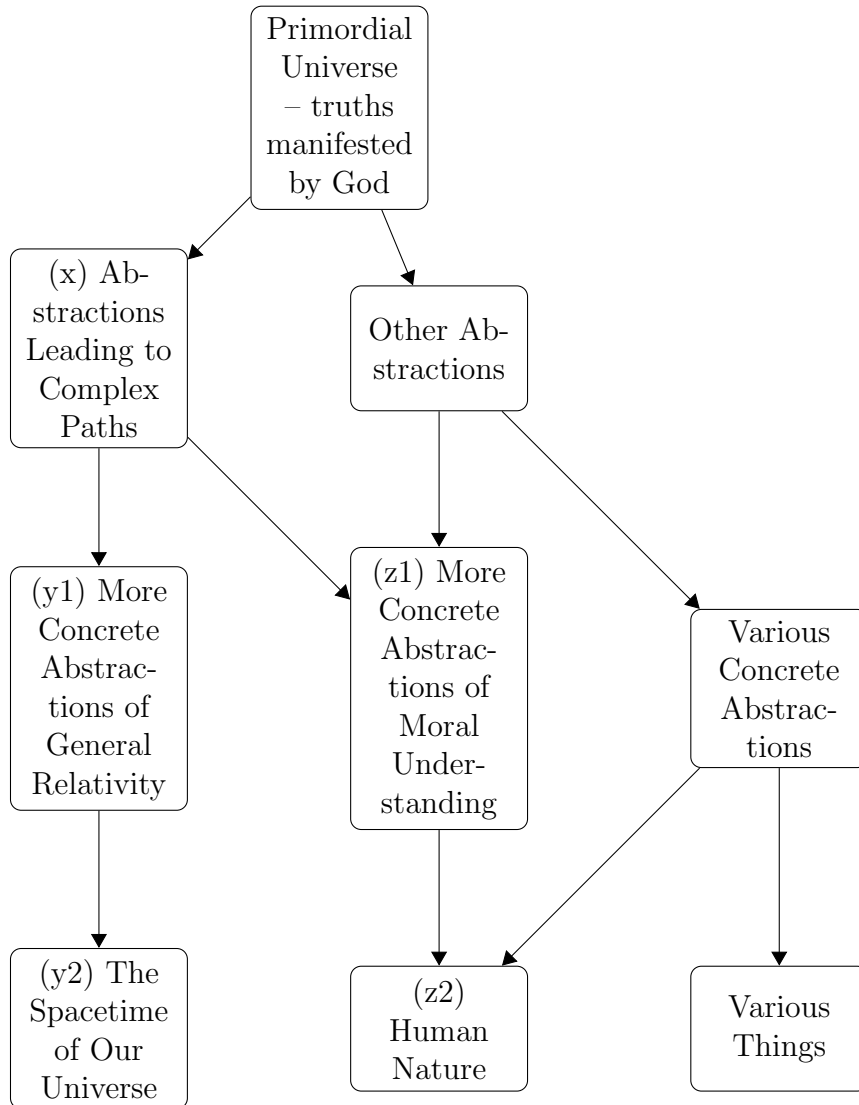


Figure 2.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

To return to the more concrete level of our world: the relationships in a properly ordered human community will be such that we could say the members of that community have ‘human rights’. These rights are ‘natural’ by source, that is, they arise in the context of human animals developing toward the status of personhood and of human communities developing toward an enfolding into the Body of Christ. The path to the solution lies beneath our feet, but only in the sense that the path toward Oregon lay beneath the feet of pioneers setting off from Missouri. There is a good distance and many hardships to go before we reach the goal of having a sufficiently rich and sufficiently complex way of talking about human beings and human communities, that is, rich and complex enough to allow us to speak of what we can be when we share the life of God through our membership in the Body of Christ. And it’s only when we can so speak and understand our own words and live our own words that human rights will truly be established.

2.5 Summary: A Failure of the Liberal Foundations for Human Rights

The claim of many is that such rights come to us as intuitions and can’t be derived from the empirical world, from any empirical understanding of man. That could be okay if those rights, having been intuited as natural to man, could explain anything, anything at all, about man or human communities.

No such explanations come and the reasonable man is forced to fall back to empirical fields of study such as history and neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Looking into man’s past, history can tell us that man is a morally-ordered creature though defectively and incompletely so. Most men are reluctant to kill other human beings and some even have a surprising reluctance to kill any creatures, at least those with soft, wet eyes. Some men kill other human beings easily if they think it morally proper. A very few men kill other human beings for pleasure. Looking into man’s past through the eyes of an evolutionary biologist, we can begin to understand this as a result of an evolutionary shaping of a social ape with a talent for making weapons and organizing war-parties. As a general rule, the more dangerous the social mammal – lions or grizzly bears or wolves – the more reluctant they are to fight against other members of their own species in

such a way as to kill or even maim. There are multiple processes which seem to be involved but this isn't the place to discuss the matter further.

The point is that the ancient pagan tale of men decaying from an age of god-like creatures and the related Judeo-Christian tale of men falling from a less sinful state make some sense. Man's god-like nature or grace-filled nature remains though in a broken form. Man tends to respect at least the lives of other human beings, but imperfectly so. Hungry man, angry man, loses still more of that moral order. The more recent tales of the various forms of liberalism, whether Hobbes' pessimistic liberalism which seems to take 'fallen man' as all or Jefferson's optimistic liberalism which seems to take man as a creature who will rise to a morally well-ordered state if only he is free and self-governing, add little, being as plausible and no more so than a naive understanding of falls from a state of grace or from a Golden Age.

The tales of man as a fallen creature made some sense before we came to understand this universe as a place of evolutionary and developmental processes, but now we know they are wrong. The human race has evolved from a more primitive ancestor species, no more and no less an animal species than is *homo sapiens*. I'll move on to develop a better understanding of human nature and that will give us a reasonable way of speaking of human rights as being real. This better understanding will treat us human beings as animals special in one important way: we are the brothers and sisters of the incarnate Son of God and we are part of a Body of Christ as it develops in this mortal realm. It's our membership in that Body which gives us warrant to claim human rights which are at least potentially absolute in any meaningful sense.

Part II

Can We Find a True Foundation for Human Rights?

3 Can We Move On From Here?

Let me start by repeating the quote from Henri Bergson [1]:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

And now let me paraphrase it:

[W]e have solid possession of human rights when our acts and the acts of our fellow-citizens spring from the entirety of our relationships within a community ordered to the living moral structures of the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Just as Bergson must have realized that even artists only occasionally reach such heights of unity in their personality, so I realize that there have been no such communities, with some possible small exceptions including the communities of Christians during the Apostolic Age. Yet, we can vaguely imagine such communities especially when we consider the more worldly warnings which St. Paul issued to men and communities not yet truly at a Christian level, such as the famous dictum that those who don't work shouldn't eat. It's only in such a community that true human rights could exist, a community formed according to the intention – that is active growth process – to integrate itself fully with the Body of Christ.

And this impossibility of establishing in this mortal realm human communities which are fully a part of the Body of Christ is the reason I refuted

– however inadequately – the modern doctrine of human rights in my earlier and shorter work: *Natural and Inalienable Rights*, included as Chapter 17.

Let me try to move on a little to provide some hope for the recovery of human rights even in this age in which men give over their innermost minds to herd-thought, this age in which the herds move in ever more coordinated ways, this age in which predators separate themselves from the herd but remain close enough for efficient exploitation.

4 A World of Evolution and Development

I've argued in various writings that a human being has no metaphysical essence as such, not in the way assumed in much of the philosophical tradition and depicted in a simple way in Figure 14.2. In fact, human being is shaped from more abstract stuff and I've conjectured there might be multiple stages of abstract stuff being shaped into progressively more concrete stuff, as depicted in Figure 14.3. My conjectures are consistent with modern physics including the model of the so-called Big Bang and with modern biology including the tightly related theories of evolution which involve both selection theories of the sort explored at an early stage by Darwin and also various theories of how genes work and how human beings might pass on acquired traits as explored in the specialty field of epigenetics.

What is most important in all of this is that things, thing-like being in general, comes from abstract stuff with thing-like qualities ¹ but human nature, including the human mind or the characteristics and relationships often grouped together and labeled as 'soul', aren't stuff but rather streams of changing relationships. In a word, the most concrete levels of our world are part of a story being told by its Maker, a story which uses stuff, includes stuff, but it is – in the main – a story, a story taking place in a world of spacetime which seems describable by Einsteinian theories of gravity, a story in which the setting and characters are made of that concrete stuff we call matter which seems describable by quantum physics.

I'm not making the claim that relationships aren't part of the underlying abstract being from which concrete being is shaped. Not by a long

¹As examples of abstract stuff with thing-like qualities, think of the wave-functions of quantum mechanics or the generalized abstract spaces of which Einsteinian spacetime is a particular instance.

shot. In fact, I claim that relationships are primary, that they bring stuff into being and shape stuff. Ultimately, I could claim that it's the relationships corresponding to human rights which shape the participants in those relationships to a true personhood where they can be members of the Body of Christ, partakers in the life of God. In presenting matters as I do – first stuff (including human biological stuff) and then relationships, I'm making a concession to the actual way in which I thought these issues through, the way that human beings in general seem to think. We ascend to truer statements, one rung of the ladder at a time.

Rather than writing a metaphysical thesis at this point of my presentation of my ideas on human rights, I've decided to leave matters as stated in the previous few paragraphs. More detailed discussions, drawn from some of my weblog writings, are in Part III which can be treated as an appendix, that is, optional for the more casual reader.

I've stated the conclusion I'm driving toward several times in this and other writings: what we call human rights are aspects of the relationships proper to members of the Body of Christ. Relationships similar to these can develop in any community which bears similarity to that Body. By at least 1800, some major Western nations were secularizing in the sense of dropping their specific Christian beliefs and behaviors and attitudes. This process proceeded slowly and quietly and those Western nations retained much of their Christian beliefs for generations. This is to say that those nations defectively but substantially embodied the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. After that transition, circa 1800, the defects grew greater and the respect for the teachings of Christ began to shrink after many had shed their belief in Christ. This means that, as one example, greedy and ambitious men continued to use violence to gain what they wanted but the constraints on those sorts of men grew ever weaker until we reached the 21st century which was one brutal world war though sometimes subsiding to a variety of local proxy wars in which the gangsters controlling powerful countries were arming locals to do the fighting on a smaller scale than the two periods in which Europe was engulfed and the periods in which Korea or Vietnam or the Balkans were engulfed as major powers fought alongside and against local forces. The countries which still considered themselves Christian and advanced in a variety of ways fought with the brutality of the worst of the barbarian warriors of history and with far more destructive weaponry.

Meanwhile, as some of us realized at least a couple of decades ago and

some are only starting to learn, economic forces were leading to a great correction of a system which had piled up debts to a level where the interest on that debt threatened to kill productive activity, especially any creative or entrepreneurial activity of the sort which even the most prosperous communities need if prosperity is to continue for the next generations. The great middle-class of the modern world, including the prosperous among the laboring classes, is in the process of shrinking fast, at least in the West. While we should be concerned with the loss of wealth on the part of that middle-class and working-class, we should be even more concerned with the loss of political power, even at the local level, and the loss of rights. We are returning to a state which Hobbes rightly feared though it was less the state of pre-civilized man and more the state of communities falling into states of moral disorder with barbarian peoples pulling up roots and invading wealthy regions while any wealthy regions retaining power are themselves attacking and trying to loot. Many have refused to see the signs of breakdown at the level of Western Civilization when there was maybe time to avoid the worst of the problems and many are still refusing to see the signs of breakdown when we probably don't have time to save ourselves.

As I said above, rights are part of the heritage which is disappearing while most of us remain more concerned about our favorite pro football team and many are still rooting for still one more war to further drain our moral characters and our physical treasuries.

Perhaps I've misled myself and others by thinking it possible to save the West when so many fail to see what the West really was and what is being lost. Western Civilization was a somewhat barbaric, incomplete, and generally defective embodiment of the Body of Christ in this mortal realm. The human rights we've largely lost corresponded to the forms of respect members of the Body of Christ would pay to each other and to other human beings who aren't members of that Body for one reason or another.

Let me try to explain in the next chapter what I really mean by claiming that human rights are an aspect of relationships inside a specific sort of community, the Body of Christ or – sometimes – one resembling the Body of Christ in some substantial way..

5 Human Beings are the Stuff, Communities are the Spacetime

5.1 What is the Body of Christ?

Traditionally, the term ‘Body of Christ’ means either:

- the perfected human body of the risen Christ, or
- the Church founded by the followers of Christ.

I’ve come to believe and to advocate that the Body of Christ is the perfected human body of the risen Christ including as members those who are resurrected by the Lord to share His life. That is to say: those chosen by Christ will share His life in a way analogous to the intimate way that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit share life. Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God while each retaining their individuality.

The members of the Body of Christ will share in the totality, so that those not capable on their own of sharing life with God will be able to do so by getting the help from those who can compensate for any given weakness. Each of us will have weaknesses and each will help to compensate for the weaknesses of others.

The Body will itself be a magnification of sorts of its members, a fractal of sorts. From the dictionary at Yahoo, see <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/fractal>, we learn:

fractal A geometric pattern that is repeated at ever smaller scales to produce irregular shapes and surfaces that cannot be represented by clas-

sical geometry. Fractals are used especially in computer modeling of irregular patterns and structures in nature.

We human beings, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He lived in this mortal realm, are creatures with attributes, needs, behaviors, etc. which are included in those parts of human life labeled as ‘political’ or ‘economic’ or ‘artistic’ or ‘athletic’. There is much that is human which is inseparable from the man or woman who worships God but is added to that man or woman outside the time of rite or prayer. If all these other parts of human life were to disappear, the human being in the world of the resurrected would be mutilated rather than completed and perfected. Remember the ancient Christian principle: grace completes and perfects rather than destroying or replacing. Those parts of our individual selves and our local communities – including our families – which look upward toward higher forms of political or economic or cultural communities will survive into the world of the resurrected. In terms of the particular topic of this book:

Those relationships of this world we label as ‘human rights’ become part of us and our communities. We will not undergo amputation upon our entry into the world of the resurrection but rather completion and perfection.

Human rights in this mortal realm are as poorly established as are the moral commandments that Jesus Christ gave us in the Sermon on the Mount. Human rights are also as well established in the plans of God as are those moral commandments.

5.2 How is a Human Being Made Part of the Body of Christ?

In Chapter 10, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*, I write:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

“Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life – how to act.”

I’m speaking analogically and the situation is more complex and more complicated than the title of this section, *Human Beings are the Stuff, Communities are the Spacetime*, would imply. That’s hardly surprising since even the physical processes of this universe are far too complex in various ways to be fully describable in terms of the best intellectual structures of modern science. Those physical processes are a narrative of sorts though not a morally well-ordered narrative, until they are seen – however tentatively – in the light of God’s purposes for Creation.

This is where we enter what might be called the fever-swamps of modern thought. As a result of a large-scale failure of Christians – as Christians – to respond properly to the problems and opportunities of the modern world, there has been a breakdown of the Christian understanding of God’s story in which we live.¹ For example, intelligent young men and women are being forced to decide between science or faith or – more often – to make some false compromise in which empirical realms of being are separated from some vaguely conceived spiritual realms. The story-line has been disrupted and this means that the communal processes by which truth unfolds have been disrupted. In fact, at that community level, much of the truth has been lost or at least obscured.

A good part of that lost truth, in the form of individual truths, concerns human relationships, individual to individual and individual to community. But some of those lost truths were seen as great goods even by the Enlightenment thinkers most antagonistic to Christianity. So it was that the relationships proper to the Body of Christ² were secularized. It seems nice, even good in a very strong sense, for human beings to hold great, nearly absolute, respect for the lives of others though the moral instincts of the human animal are strong but not nearly absolute³. As I note in Part I, *Natural Human Rights: Reality or Dream?*, there is no way to justify rights

¹By this I mean simply that even Christians who participated, as physicists or historians, in developing the understanding of the empirical world failed to contribute to a more complete understanding needed by the Christian Church.

²But most certainly not to be restricted just to Christians or Christian communities.

³A reminder: human instincts against killing members of our own species seem to be weaker than the corresponding instincts of wolves.

as taught by Locke and Jefferson and many others on the basis of liberal thought.⁴ We can justify rights by considering them to be aspects of certain relationships emerging as God's story moves along driving forward the pilgrim Body of Christ. I speak not of a mysterious emergence but rather one that develops in a way not so different from the particular forms of human relationships which make sophisticated economies possible.⁵ In fact, among the emerging relationships are the laws and habits which underly the property rights which make possible a dynamic economy responsive to the needs and desires of the population.

⁴I use the term 'liberal' in the sense of serious political scientists and philosophers. Roughly, this means that liberals are those modern thinkers who consider a human being to be a free-standing individual whose various communal relationships are of a voluntary and accidental sort.

⁵Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* provides a good introduction to the nature of these economic relationships though he was a bit too much taken by the liberal ways of thought.

6 Summary: Human Rights as an Aspect of the Body of Christ

God is telling a story in this universe which is made of things at first sight but, once we look often enough and thought about those things, we begin to perceive a universe in which relationships are primary. Relationships create and shape things. Ultimately all created being is created and shaped by God's love for His own work, Creation.

As this dynamic story moves forward, more complex relationships begin to develop shaping more complex things which can then engage in still more complex relationships. This process of complexifying relationships is particularly obvious when we consider that part of God's story known as biological evolution. For the sake of simplicity, though there are many unknowns, we can speak of life beginning as little more than self-reproducing bundles of carbon-based chemicals. Complex and dynamic bundles of a more complex sort, cells, developed and, after many an eon, began to join together in loose colonies perhaps similar to the simple slime-molds or the more complex organism-like colonies which are jellyfishes.

Eventually, we had social creatures including mammals which evolved into creatures with relationships which had moral aspects. Some of those creatures were herd-like and their social relationships remained primitive and involved little or nothing of leadership or of judgment upon leadership or any of the more complex elements seen in lion prides and wolf-packs and human communities of all sorts. It would seem that morality developed to richer and more complex and more coherent forms amongst predators. In the case of wolves and human beings, there is a very strong element of opportunism. Unfortunately, human often prey opportunistically on other

human beings and we're in a period when this is increasing as the West is returning to a state of moral disorder.

Human communities have proliferated so that, in large nations, they form an exotic growth similar in a funny way to the strange growths in a tropical rain-forest. We have commercial businesses and rotary clubs, clusters of family farms and grange clubs, governments and Tammany Hall, universities and faculty associations as well as societies of physicists and teachers of foreign languages, Elk clubs and Polish-American clubs, various groups for book-readers and stamp-collectors and fans of Jimmy Buffet. Then there are religious communities and classes formed of loosely organized men and women – who know each other even if they never met – who dominate political or banking systems.

Ultimately, at least as I view matters, we have the Body of Christ. As is true of the individual human being, this Body has a mortal form which – so to speak – travels through this mortal realm of spacetime. Since this mortal Body of Christ falls short of unity, coherence, and completeness, it often displays only crude versions of the most important aspects it will have in the world of the resurrected. History does warn us that this progress toward a state of at least imperfect and partial union with God isn't steady – retreats to states of moral disorder are sadly common.

We need to begin once more the long and difficult construction, or at least reformation, of a civilization. How do we start such a process? We could certainly struggle, as a race, to gain the best possible understanding of Creation by studying Moses and Isaiah and St. Paul, Plato and St. Augustine and Nietzsche, Archimedes and Newton and Einstein, Homer and Shakespeare and Tolstoy, and so on. But don't stop there. Watch good dancers and good soccer-players move about, listen to well-trained singers and strummers of mandolins, learn to appreciate the tight fits of corners when a good carpenter installs baseboard and to actually see the neatness of the joints when a good plumber helps put in a new bathroom. I could go on but I think the point is clear: we have a vast amount of information on how Western Civilization was built and what it really was. We should draw upon that information while looking forward and considering all that has been learned since these greater thinkers and artists and writers and doers accomplished their various and sundry missions. We shouldn't aim to be Elizabethan men, as admirable as many of those men were, but rather aim to be men shaped to opportunities and problems which have emerged in recent centuries, opportunities and problems we've only responded to in

half-hearted ways. We should be courageous and faith-filled where modern man has so often been cowardly and half-hearted.

We shape ourselves by active and proper responses and we should learn from those who achieve human excellence in all honorable and good fields of endeavor. However modest our lives might be, we should learn to be free by living a life such that “our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.” [1]

By so living, we establish proper relationships, or – during bad times – at least offer to do so. We live our proper roles in the story which is this universe directed to the purposes of its Maker.

And if we value these misunderstood relationships labeled ‘human rights’, we should learn to better understand them and to form our communities so that they come into existence – we shouldn’t simply claim them as individuals milling about in some sort of mob. In words perhaps acceptable even to those who don’t hold my strong beliefs in the nature of the Body of Christ:

Rights arise when we live properly in communities, treating others as required for the most highly developed form of that community and its way of living.

Part III

Created Being and the Foundations of Human Rights

7 A Universe and Its Entities, the Stuff of a Moral Narrative

This appendix includes chapters which give some motivation and development of my understanding of created being as a spectrum from abstract forms to concrete forms; it also includes a copy of the short article on rights I published in 2006, *Natural and Inalienable Rights*, which left the matter in an unsatisfying situation. At the very foundation of this spectrum is what I call the Primordial Universe, which I understand as the truths God manifested as the raw and abstract stuff from which He shaped the more concrete parts of Creation. The most abstract forms of created being continue to exist in the most concrete of things, rocks and stars and rattlesnakes. Things are true and truths are thing-like. Things are shaped from truths.

This understanding of being underlies my view of this universe seen as a morally ordered narrative – it is only such when viewed properly as a universe of evolutionary and developmental processes. If we try to see stability in our world as it exists at any given point in spacetime, then we'll have to distort our understanding of relationships between entities and even relationships between relationships.¹

I'm going to somewhat step back so far as an overview goes and let the interested reader make of these chapters what he can. Some who've followed my weblog writings may well know much of what is contained in these chapters on my understanding of created being. There is much more

¹In analogy to modern physics, I'm proposing that moral relationships are like fields which interact with other fields and also self-interact. This isn't a subject I've had time to explore. There is a small number of hours in the day of one man and there is so much ground to make up after two or more centuries of Christian retreat from an honest engagement with Creation.

on my active weblog, *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>, and some still up at my inactive weblog, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at <http://loydf.wordpress.com/>. Nearly all of the relevant essays and reviews and articles can be found in the freely downloadable book: *Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2011* found at <http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf>. I plan on updating this book to include newer postings on a regular basis.

For what it might be worth in this uncertain world, I would hope to write a book giving a short overview of my understanding of created being.

8 A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=10>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/07/19.]

Years ago, I read about this famous debate in which Bohr spoke of objects coming into existence as quantum waves 'collapsed' because of an observation. Einstein refused to believe this could be and spoke as if he were defending common sense.

Years ago, I also read *Critique of Scientific Reason* [3] by the philosopher Kurt Hubner. He talked about this debate but I'd forgotten a major claim he'd made about the debate:

Einstein was claiming that reality consists of substances which remain unaltered by their relationships with other substances while Bohr was claiming that it is the relationships which are primary and those relationships bring substances into existence.

Over the past year, I pulled this book out of storage several times to reread Hubner's discussion of this argument. It occurred to me that this argument puts Bohr's 'radical' interpretation of reality in line with Christian beliefs. Einstein's seeming common-sense is that of a hardheaded pagan who believes that matter exists eternally and independently of its relationships to other material entities and even independently of the will of God. God may be in charge in this world, in Einstein's view, but He couldn't be

the Creator in quite the way that Christians believe Him to be.¹

How did God Create the world? How did the world and all of us come into existence?

Because God loved the world before it existed, loved us before we were conceived, we came to be.

The world as a whole and all that is in the world came to be as the result of God's free-will decision to love it even before it existed.

Pay attention to the line of argument but be aware that time-related language, such as 'before' should not be taken literally. That is, it can denote what philosophers would call an ontological relationship rather than a time relationship. The world could, in theory, be eternal when we consider whatever exists on the other side of the so-called Big Bang – more accurately, the beginning of the current expansionary phase of the universe. The question, "Eternal/infinite or mortal/limited?" isn't so important as some have taught to the issue of God as true Creator. The primary act-of-being by which contingent being, created being, came into existence doesn't have to be located in time.

¹Einstein is, in fact, said to be an atheist by most who've studied his writings though many of his words seem to be those of a pious pantheist.

9 Quantum Mechanics and Moral Formation

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=34>. It was finished and uploaded on 2006/08/02.]

In Chapter 8, *A Christian View of Einstein's and Bohr's Debate on Reality*, I spoke of relationships being primary. It is relationships which bring substance into being, as Bohr was arguing in an obscure way. In a seemingly separate line of arguments in my book *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [2], I also argued that we're not born persons; we're born human animals and become human persons, or not, as a result of our responses to those around us, to our physical environments, and – most of all – to God.

In other words, I was already anticipating my more explicit claim that it is relationships which are primary in the viewpoint of a true and rational Christian Creationism. There are other arguments against Intelligent Design, but this is one of the strongest: Intelligent Design places substances ahead of relationships, static structures ahead of narratives. Good narratives, of course, show a strong appreciation of the importance of relationships. Let us hear the Biblical version of this:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

And again:

We love because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

We know God by way of His self-revelations and also through His effects in His Creation, through everything that exists. And both of those sets of

revelation speak to us of love. If we accept that love and struggle to live up to the demands of that love, we become persons, human beings who are being born of the Spirit, that is, being reshaped to become a God-centered and morally well-structured human person. And we are changed deeply by the relationships we take on. We can accept God's love and try to order our selves in response. On the other hand, we can order ourselves to the satisfaction of our creaturely desires for safety and comfort or perhaps for control of our world.

In responding to relationships, certainly in accepting certain relationships and refusing or slighting others, we are not autonomous, pre-formed persons who remain unaltered. We become different creatures than we would have been if we'd made other choices. And we change others by forming relationships with them, or even offering them relationships.

10 Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=267>. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/11/01.]

Pilgrims travel paths, journeying from one location on earth to another, sometimes those places are fictional but usually quite concrete. To be sure, Dante's pilgrim found (as some of the more recent translations of *The Inferno* attest) that the path could wander away from him. It requires sharp vision and alertness to keep track of that path which seems to often test us in so many ways. That Christian poem, or other such Christian works as *Pilgrim's Progress*, follow in an ancient tradition scouted out by Homer in the *Odyssey* and likely many preceding verbal works that were not recorded in a more lasting form. C.S. Lewis followed a less popular variant of pilgrim literature when he wrote *Pilgrim's Regress* as a highly metaphorical work in which the pilgrim moved mostly, as I recall, from one site representing an inadequate or defective modernist philosophy to another.

Our moral and spiritual and intellectual journeys bear close comparison to physical journeys and there will always be room for concrete journeys in our various tales of our lives, individual or collective. But there's more to be said for modern man because there has been progress of an sort in complexity and richness of human life if not necessarily in quality of life. Moreover, there's at least one way in which the journey across roads or over oceans was always a distortion and oversimplification of the human experience:

There's not so strong a boundary between inside and outside for any creature in this universe though there was an illusion of such during the period that the human mind was evolving

through a stage where our individual existences were coming into somewhat sharper focus.

But there's more:

The number of human beings in our lives, the number of things, the level of abstract relationships in our lives (such as our relationships to far-away, centralized governments), the sheer richness of our relationships in total, demands better ways of examining and analyzing our moral and social lives.

We need metaphors as rich as our moral lives. Seemingly by accident, I've constructed the possibility of such metaphors by my efforts to view Creation from a Christian position while accounting for modern empirical knowledge, including the most theoretical of physics and mathematics. But it's no accident because my major concerns all along have been with the nature of created being and the nature of the human mind.

Modern empirical knowledge has increased by extraordinary amounts in recent centuries. In fact, much of it is really data that hasn't yet been digested enough to call it knowledge. Yet, we've greatly enriched our understanding of being, at least so far as atoms and stars are concerned. Still more importantly, we've come to have some understanding of the universe as an entity in its own right and not just a collection of all that we've observed so far.

We certainly can't claim to understand even the aspects of created reality covered by our most successful theories: general relativity and quantum physics. Yet, our understanding of certain aspects of being in this universe, and maybe a bit beyond, has been greatly enriched. It's been enriched far beyond the understandings of created being which are a part of our philosophical and theological traditions, including our moral traditions. The concepts of created being which underlying the study of black-holes is far richer than the corresponding concepts which underly the understanding that nearly all philosophers and theologians have for their study of human nature.

So, let's get to work.

Under a Thomistic existentialist philosophy, the human mind is seen as forming in active response to the environments of the human being or a multitude of environments or even the entire universe in some meaningful

sense. Our richer understanding of Creation is reflected in an increased richness and complexity of the human mind, at least a mind which is open to this new knowledge while also having a worldview, such as an intelligent Christianity, which allows that mind to make sense of those mountains of knowledge.

The path is not just beneath our feet, it's in our heads. Our minds partake of the slope and surface material of that path. Moreover, we're constantly being jostled about or just generally pushed left or right by the masses of our fellow-travelers – the traditional journeys don't respect the social nature of human beings and portray us as more or less pure individuals when it comes to our moral natures. To be sure, we often spend parts of our journeys in some sort of lonely desert, but we'll then return to more heavily populated regions.

But the journeys of a self-aware moral creature with a complex mind lie beyond our current ways of speaking, beyond metaphors drawn from simple paths across the surface of the earth. In this case, a need for complexity is also linked to a need for greater abstraction. I'm going to use differential geometry as one likely source for useful models for advancing our understanding of our increasingly complex and abstract selves, a change brought about by various factors including the increasing size of the human population but mostly the increasingly complex and abstract nature of our social and political relationships – although we should be careful to realize that this is a case where increasing quantity has caused significant qualitative changes. Differential geometric models are very abstract, but so is the world of a human being living in a complex society and developing a complex mind. Differential geometric models allow a much richer description of possible future paths at each point on a journey. Along with tensors, they also allow ways of speaking about the distortion in a space, say a moral space, caused by the presence or the movements of other creatures. Tensors are typically used along with these models (or separately for some purposes) partly because they allow a concise expression of complicated and complex physical actions, such as stretching or twisting or both at the same time.

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life – how

to act.

Now we're talking. I can relate to moral metaphors that speak not so much of a simple path beneath my feet as a path that merges into me, twisting and stretching me even to the depths of my being. This 'path' is all that I move through or communicate with and all of my own bodily substance.

I can relate to a human world in which, for good or bad, we shape our moral space, the space in which we live our moral lives, including both our lives in public spheres and private spheres. 'We' shape our moral space. Few there are strong enough, brave enough, to move onto a path far from those they've traveled to that point in their lives, far from the path they were raised to travel. But it would be easier for all of us to see the more abstract possibilities and demands of our increasingly complex moral lives if we had better ways to speak and think about those lives. An obvious example of human beings who were, so to speak, in over their heads is the bulk of 'nice' Germans from the 1930s and 1940s who continued to live local lives that were decent and morally well-ordered even as they failed to understand or to respond to the more abstract demands upon them as citizens of a nation which was acting in evil ways at higher and more 'abstract' levels. It's certainly true that some did see and understand their moral responsibilities, but even those had problems, so far as I know, bringing matters into focus.

I can relate to a human nature which is stretched and compressed and twisted as it travels along those paths, paths which can shoot away in unexpected directions without warning and sometimes without giving good indication of what's happening until we're well along a path we falsely thought to understand. Again, those nice, middle-class Germans were doing all they'd been raised to do, hold good jobs and pay their bills and take care of their own children, but the path leading to regions of moral order had veered well away from those simple paths they'd traveled, not because they'd been raised wrong in ways that could have been forecast but because the world had become complex in a way that modern middle-class thought doesn't even perceive. The world had gotten more complex than could be handled by modern middle-class ways of moral thought and behavior.

I can relate to a human life and to a human community life in which the path veers away from us as it did to Dante's pilgrim in which we can find out late in the game that the 'right' path we followed has led us or our children into a state of moral corruption.

Like it or not, human beings don't live in a world which is 'only' concrete – as I've tried to communicate in my various writings on this blog as well as in my first published book: *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [2]. We live in a world in which the abstract is with us always. How else could mathematicians and other thinkers know of such strange entities as transfinite numbers? In my way of thinking and speaking, God shapes the concrete aspects of our world from a more abstract foundation which is the manifestation of the truths He chose for Creation. I call that abstract source of created being the 'Primordial Universe'. We can, so to speak, coax the abstract aspects of our universe, and perhaps those of Creation in general, out of what seems to be only concrete by way of proper tools of thought, such as differential geometry and tensor analysis and metaphors and analogies and so forth.

I say 'proper tools' because they are not merely useful fictions. Good metaphors draw upon more abstract levels of reality where, for example, the moral paths of a mind-ed creature can be more complex than any possibilities seen directly in his concrete world and the visible events of his life. Oddly enough, those complexities – at a proper level of abstraction – seem to bear similarities to the stretching and bending of space and time described in modern theories of gravity and in the sheer strangeness of being, time, and space in the levels of being described by quantum physics. Differential geometry and tensor analysis and other abstract tools developed by mathematicians and other scientists point toward certain aspects of being which I speculate to be thoughts God has manifested in the Primordial Universe, aspects which do greatly affect the lives of creatures which have true minds and which live in complex societies with other such creatures.

11 If We Can't Understand What We Shall Be, We Can't Be It

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=554>. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/07/08.]

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [1 John 3:2 [8]]

I was struck by this verse when I recently saw it quoted because I know that some, perhaps many, of my fellow-Christians will use verses such as this to justify pessimistic assessments about man's ability to understand. Mostly, we human beings tend to be pessimistic about those lines of thought which require great discipline, a lot of time, and a bit of sheer effort before we can make those thoughts our own. They say that mathematics is hard but so is any historical analysis or any theological speculation which is worth much.

If I'm an image of God, or a potential image of God, I can understand what I'll be and where I'll be, assuming I'm amongst those who are resurrected. That is, I can understand life after death in rational terms and I can understand what Heaven is in similar terms or else I wouldn't be suited to that life. In terms of modern empirical knowledge, we would probably need to consider what physicists have learned about the nature of matter and how it's organized – including thermodynamics, what biologists and historians and others have learned about the developmental nature of this world – including the evolution of the human mind and the development

of an individual man's mind, what mathematicians have discovered about the abstract aspects of Creation – including the way in which seemingly chaotic systems can suddenly self-organize. From these piles of poorly integrated empirical knowledge, we can construct philosophical and theological systems worthy of the name. This is what Augustine of Hippo did in laying the foundations for the Western Civilization which rose from the ruins of Roman and Hellenistic civilizations. But that took a lot of courage and faith, one hell of a lot of work, and modern Christian thinkers seem to be missing either the courage or the faith.

This is not to say that any human thinker can reach the complete truth about life after death. After all, we know that Augustine's system, and the system which Aquinas put together eight centuries later, eventually proved inadequate. Human additions to our knowledge of Creation have proved many of their speculations wrong and left many Christian beliefs unsupported – the traditional understandings have eroded.

Christians are always ready to claim, "We human beings are images of God," but seem to have no sane way of speaking about the meaning of this claim. Christians have a number of doctrines which seem to be no longer expressible in sane language. God has invited us to participate in His life and His work and that implies we have the capability and the responsibility to understand Creation. Our earlier understandings of Creation and of most Christian doctrines no longer make sense because we now know more about Creation, that is, we know more about God's acts as Creator. We're capable of higher understandings. We need to respond in our proper way to God's Creation. We need to be fearless and confident. Some participate in God's work by dancing or playing the piano, by teaching young children or caring for those who are dying. We who are called to intellectual work participate in God's work by being the pioneers in a never-ending effort to shape the human mind to encapsulate God's Creation, to share in the divine thoughts manifested as the stars in the sky or the children playing in the front yard, most importantly – as the story in which the stars and those children play a role.

Pioneers are succeeded by those who live more routine lives. Not quite 2,000 years ago, the Egyptian scientist Ptolemy invented trigonometry as part of an astronomical and astrological research project to predict and explain the movements of stars and planets. Though trigonometry still is difficult for many to deal with when presented in the classroom, I grew up knowing men who had entered the mills after sixth grade or so and had

acquired some pretty high levels of skills in trigonometry over the course of their careers as metal-workers. Double-entry bookkeeping was introduced to Europe during the Renaissance and was considered so difficult as to inspire the same sort of awe we 21st century folk feel toward quantum mechanics or general relativity. Nowadays, your corner drugstore has piles of account-books which are intended for use in that form of bookkeeping.

The older discussions of Christian beliefs are no longer tenable and few Christians have responded to the ever-present call of God's Creation – "Talk to me, explore me, wonder at me." What were once rationally defensible doctrines have become mysteries of the sort found in Christian fantasy novels. God is a rational, all-powerful Creator and not a magician who calls upon forces which exist independently of Him. If we are truly His images, or maybe it's better to say – "potentially His images", then we're not magicians nor are we intended by our Maker to be uncomprehending citizens of a world of forces beyond our understanding. We're children who are called to watch our Father and to playfully imitate His actions as He goes about His work in Creation.

If we are to live in the world of the resurrected, the same would hold. The Son of God isn't resurrecting us to put on a never-ending magical act to amuse us. He's resurrecting us to share His life, but we can't share that life if it's a mystery to us. We can share God's life only if we can truly imitate His actions as Creator, if we can think the thoughts He manifested in Creation, if we can have some hope of truly understanding this story God is telling. This understanding is a matter of principle and no particular human mind is capable of understanding so much as a flea, let alone this world, let alone the world of the resurrected. Yet, we have to realize that the human mind is the sort of entity which can shape itself to be a reflection of God's thoughts manifested in Creation. If we truly love the Creator and truly wish to be His images, then we Christians before all others are bound to respond to His world rather than to retreat into a dreamworld which is more comfortable in the short-term.

12 Fictitious Forces in the Moral World

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Slowly do I move forward in my efforts to develop words and grammatical structures and concepts adequate to describing the social and moral setting of man as he learns to shape himself, his societies, his technologies, to better reflect and take advantage of the richness and complexity of God's Creation. This richness and complexity can even be described – to an extent – as being itself a result of the human mind's development as men explore more deeply and more widely into Creation, sometimes managing to respond in ways that seem to be appropriate in practical or moral terms, terms not to be ultimately separated and not to be fully separated even in the short-term by those who wish to be wise, that is, to act and think in ways anticipating a greater and more accurate knowledge than we currently have.

The knowledge we have of Creation, and the wisdom we need to exercise even as we no more than aspire to the true and complete knowledge of which that wisdom is but a pale reflection, can be seen as having developed in our past and to be developing now as man explores and otherwise responds to that Creation, a manifestation of thoughts our Maker wishes us to share with Him. As I've said before, "God is smart." When it comes to the thoughts of God which resulted in spacetime and stuff, God knows more than freshman mathematics and freshman physics. He knows at least as much as the physics faculty at Harvard and so we should expect it to be hard work to understand what God did as Creator.

And so I turn, for a short while, to more prosaic matters of the sorts un-

derstood by those professors at Harvard and many other physicists around the world.

The so-called fictitious forces in physics are the result of forces which don't exist in all frames, coordinate systems, to the perception of all observers. (I'm being loose and colloquial in my language.)

In *The Nature of Science: An A-Z Guide to the Laws & Principles Governing our Universe* [6], the physicist James Trefil provides some technical background for this discussion and does so in clear and understandable prose:

An observer watching from the outside [as the car you're riding in takes a sharp turn, would say] you were simply continuing to move in a straight line, as any object would if not acted upon by an external force, and the car curved away from you. To this observer, in other words, it's not that you are being pushed against the door – it is that the door is being pushed against you.

There is nothing inherently contradictory between these two views. They lead to exactly the same description of events and exactly the same equations describing those events.

...

Because not all observers see a force acting, physicists often refer to the centrifugal force as a *fictitious force* or *pseudoforce*, but I find these terms somewhat misleading. There is, after all, nothing fictitious about the force you can feel pushing you against the side of the car. The reality of the situation, though, is that you are still trying to move in a straight line and the car is turning away from that straight line and so pushing against you. [page 67]

Centrifugal force can be fictitious in that various descriptions can be given of you being thrown against that car door but it's not imaginary, as Professor Trefil tells us. A broken arm or wrenched shoulder is real by any of the various descriptions.

Arguably, the force most often labeled 'fictitious' is the Coriolis force. Professor Trefil has this to say:

It is the Coriolis force that produces the swirling cloud patterns we associate with satellite pictures of storms. Air starts

to flow in a straight line from areas of high pressure to areas of low pressure, but the Coriolis force deflects it and causes it to move in a spiral path. (Alternately, we could say that the Earth rotates underneath it so that it appears to move in a spiral to someone on the planet's surface.)

Again, we can label this force 'fictitious', but anyone who's experienced the damage done by the swirling winds of a hurricane, or even seen it on television, will wonder at the use of this term.

Just to nail down the reality and importance of fictitious forces, gravity is also a fictitious force in general relativity and – so far as I know – all other mainstream theories of gravity. It is 'fictitious' because gravity, in Einsteinian theories, is a result of bending of spacetime, which is itself what is being described by frames of reference. You aren't pulled by the earth but rather do you slide down where the earth has bent spacetime by its relatively large mass. This is why you feel weightless on certain carnival rides or on an elevator which starts its descent rapidly. In that frame of the ride or elevator, you are weightless, you are moving freely in the earth's gravitational field. To "move freely" in this sense is to be standing still in the common-sense understanding.

In the same way, if you were standing on a train flatbed as it curved sharply, you'd be moving freely and feel no forces for a few seconds as you went flying off in a straight-line. You wouldn't feel any force until you slammed into a tree or scraped along the ground. Very suddenly, you would have entered a different frame of reference in which you will feel a great deal of force as you collide with something or the other.

I'll move to my main topic by quoting myself from Chapter 10, *Differential Geometry and Moral Narratives*:

The American physicist John Wheeler once summarized general relativity by telling us that matter tells space how to shape itself and space then tells matter how to move. Maybe we can play around with this metaphor:

"Human beings tell moral space how to shape itself and moral space then tells human beings how to move through life – how to act."

Following Hannah Arendt and others, I've spoken of the modern middle-class which went about its various works, engineering and administration

and chemical manufacturing, oblivious to – or perhaps struggling to suppress – any perceptions that they were helping to commit large-scale crimes against a variety of innocent human beings: the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, the Ukrainian peasants in the same general period, the North Koreans and the Vietnamese and the Iraqis in the period of American self-destruction. We Americans, perhaps the junior-league imperialistic countries of Europe as well, are likely to suffer soon, at least within a generation, from the same emotional humiliations and physical hardships which a harsh reality inflicted upon the Nazi-era Germans and Soviet-era Russians when their imperial carnival rides ended.

I've noted before that Adam Smith retreated from his cheerleading for British-style capitalism long enough to ponder the frightening possibility that the sort of commercial society described in *The Wealth of Nations* might well produce citizens quite genial but lacking moral integrity not because they're willfully immoral but because they have no innards to speak of, just a pleasant smile and gentle habits.

Let me take a look at this situation from a slightly different angle to see if we can learn something or at least start developing a new way of speaking about such matters, a new way that might help us to understand how and why we get into our modern moral messes – such nice men and women sending their armed forces overseas to kill children directly and by way of destroying sanitation systems and hospitals and so forth. Maybe we could even find some possible ways out of these modern moral messes. It's unlikely we can avoid our imminent disaster because we're too cowardly, most of us, to have been riding loosely on the equivalent of a railroad flatbed, but being inside won't protect us because our train isn't just going around a sharp curve; it's being thrown off the rails and heading for a nearby field littered with boulders.

Let's switch from physical spacetime to a different sort of space, the space of social relationships. In these short pieces, I sometimes feel a need to be repetitive and I'll remind the reader again that I consider created being to lie on a spectrum of abstract being to concrete being, of the most abstract truths which are those God manifested as the raw stuff of Creation through the likes of mathematical truths to those more particular mathematical truths we can see in quantum mechanics and particle physics and on to the thing-like being of this world. I speculate that social spaces belong to a more abstract group of spaces which includes spacetime – let's call it spaces

of relationships for now, including relationships of an entity to its context.¹

It's not just that our paths through life start curving beneath our feet as Dante the pilgrim recorded at the start of *The Inferno*. Those paths and the ground around them are twisting as we enter a phase of human history where some complex possibilities of Creation are now appearing, often without our conscious participation in their emergence. The very space in which our trunks and heads move are being twisted in ways often different from the twisting of the ground beneath our feet. And, yet, we're bringing on these changes ourselves by exploring Creation and responding to it, rightly or wrongly. We're bringing on many of these changes by the acts of creating civilization and exploring greater moral possibilities as well as powerful technologies.

I'm still think matters through and will probably outline an entire book on this subject of expanding our language and concepts for describing and analyzing our moral natures and moral lives, but I'm working on general concepts now and trying to set up my explorations of this topic. Let me go wandering about a little, as is my habit.

Assume something like an orthogonal coordinate system, a retreat from the goal of setting up coordinate-free systems as is done in general relativity and also in certain complex but non-relativistic and non-quantum branches of science and engineering. Let's assume that the y-axis is some sort of a measure of the acts of a human being which result from individualistic desires, urges, etc. The x-axis is the measure of the acts which result from communal ties, duties, etc. Be careful about literalizing these natural ways of talking as if desires belong to us as individuals and duties to us as community members. Also be aware that I'm consciously writing in a way not fully in conformity with my claims above about the nature of the individual (stuff or matter) and human communities (the 'spacetime' of our moral and spiritual lives). I'll say no more about these complexities and complications for now. In fact, I may not ever reach the point where I have a set of concepts and words and grammatical structures adequate to the task. There will be plenty of work for future generations of thinkers. And, so, I'll return to the main line of discussion.

Imagine a circle which defines regions of individual-community mixes

¹Lest there be confusion, I'll note that I don't claim that abstract truths are all mathematical, but I'll not go into details here. The main claim of this book is that being lies on a spectrum from the fully abstract – not being just mathematical abstractions, to the fully concrete – not being just physical stuff.

which are proper for a man who is the member of a certain community, say a village of pre-Celtic natives in southern England a few thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ. There is no easy way, so far as I know, to say that the possibilities in that region are “more individualistic” or “more communal” than what I experience in the region of Ludlow, MA, USA in 2011. The ways in which they were individualistic and the ways in which they were communal were different from the ways I experience. The ways of those longfar agoway human beings combined to form a total human situation, so to speak, which was undoubtedly much different – again – from what I experience in my various communities. One obvious difference is that modern men are probably members of a variety and number of smaller communities within larger communities to an extent which would bewilder a man of 5,000 years ago.

I’m about to place a big burden on your visual imagination even though mine isn’t really so strong – it’s one of my weaker cognitive talents.

So, take on the burden as you imagine this graph of individual vs. community moving into a new direction perpendicular to the axes, individual and communal. That region defining an appropriate mixture of individualistic and communal characteristics for southern England moves through the centuries as if it were reflections in a fun-house. Worse. Unlike most assumed spaces for discussions of the physical universe, this space isn’t likely to be well-behaved. Drawing analogies to the analyses of physical space to be found in books about general relativity, post-Newtonian gravity theory in general, there are likely to be rips and tears and other distortions in the shape of that region so that singularities, and maybe other serious problems, will arise. I suspect the definition of causal regions will be far more complex where I consider causal regions for now in terms of timelike regions and spacelike regions and null-lines of special relativity. In any case, there will be great stresses which twist and turn any entity in these moral-social spaces.

I’d like to stay with that image of that region of “appropriate mixtures of individualistic and communal characteristics” as it moves forward in time, twisting and turning, tearing and – in some localities – disappearing into black-holes of a sort. In addition, new regions will appear on that graph. To the extent this analogy works, vague and poorly-defined as it is, our lives are paths through those graphs. And some, including those of us alive in 2011, suffer and enjoy rapid change, that is, great deformations to that region within short periods of time. As we move forward, we might find

ourselves moving from a ‘mainstream’ spot deep in the heart of that region of individualistic-communal characteristics to a marginal spot or even one outside what is considered appropriate in a world which suddenly seems so brave and so new.

As we move into strange regions, we’ll feel forces upon our innermost selves even if we’re moving in the straight lines we might have learned from morally well-ordered parents, teachers, clergymen, Boy Scout leaders, and others. Our moral-social space is twisting about as we try to move through it. And it’s twisting about in a way undecipherable in any but very abstract terms which I believe to be above the level of abstraction of the mathematics used by modern theoretical physicists to describe the various shapes, contorted and otherwise, of possible spacetimes. From that level of abstraction, there are various lines of descent toward concreteness, one line leading to the relationships of spacetime and matter-energy, another line leading to the relationships of human communities.

One point I’d like to emphasize is that abstract being is for real. Abstractions aren’t just descriptions of concrete created being. They are what concrete created being is shaped from and they continue to inhere in that concrete created being. Those moral-social spaces aren’t just a bookish description. They are a reality inherent in our nature and realized by our development as a race, by the development in particular of the human mind and all that comes from the mind: technology and culture and whatever other categories of human civilized life you might like to use.

13 The Essence of Liberalism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1003>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/02.]

In *The Liberal Mind* [5], I think Professor Minogue dismisses the query “What is the essence of Liberalism?” for reasons which are proper, but I’ll discuss it anyway because I think it to be one of those ultimately futile lines of inquiry which can lead us to better ways of understanding human nature, especially in its communal aspects, because of what we’ve learned – or should have learned – from modern empirical knowledge-gathering enterprises, especially physics and mathematics. We can start with Minogue’s warning about some approaches to understanding the modern views of human politics (nearly all of those being ‘liberal’ or other choices which are mostly far worse):

If we seek, rather pointlessly, for some essential liberal position, then we might find it in the belief that happiness and individual freedom are always in harmony. Just as liberals believe that the good of the people may always be identified with what the people want, so they also believe that we can have variety without suffering. [page 78]

Perhaps some who don’t consider themselves to be liberals also share this “belief that happiness and individual freedom are always in harmony.” And perhaps we can guess at one of the reasons many human beings speak well of freedom and do nothing to gain it or maintain it – they prefer to be happy. Happiness to most physical creatures is tied more closely to safety and comfort, to protection against suffering or early death and to a full stomach and a chance to relax and not have to work hard with brain or back. For example, nearly all the American Christians I know seem to think

that God owes them a safe and prosperous life in return for not committing the worst sorts of sins and for praying and worshiping. I'll speak no more of this difficult situation here, though I'd like to see my fellow Americans and others wake up and become aware of the terrible situation we're in, not just created by failures of regulation or some glitches in banking or manufacturing. We've let much of the foundations of Western Civilization decay underneath us and we show little sign now of being capable of dealing with this mess.

The unwillingness of Americans, perhaps most modern human beings of the West, to face reality and to respond to it was a much discussed problem and historians and other analysts, from Tocqueville and Hawthorne through Nock and Ortega Y Gasset through Barzun and Kennedy, have seen the signs and tried to warn us. In recent years, we were too busy watching television and prior generations had excuses just as strong.

We must move on, understanding what we currently are – formless puddings rather than evil brews – and then moving on to better things. If you wish, you can think in terms of C.S. Lewis' image of hollow-chested men. One sign of our decay is that we have absorbed some ideas from liberalism, mostly from the optimistic wing of liberalism and mostly ones which release us from the responsibility of taking care of our own selves and those in our families or other local communities. We believe we can have it all, freedom and happiness and we just assume one of the central powers, political or business or charitable, will be there to make sure we have it all.

But...

I'm going to head in a radically different direction, questioning whether we even understand the components of human nature and human community life well enough to have meaningful discussions based upon such aspects of human life as 'freedom' or 'happiness'. My goal is not to produce another critique of political thought and behavior in the modern world, though I have to engage in those sorts of critiques at times. My goal is to provide a framework and language for discussing human moral communities of all sorts, including political communities. That might not be a goal to be achieved in a single lifetime nor by one man. In fact, this new understanding of Adam in what is truly a new phase of God's story, our world or even the entirety of Creation, is a substantial part of what needs to be attained to build a foundation for a new civilization.

I'm in the process of writing my first list of assumptions for a run at providing for richer and more complex discussions of human social, moral,

political, and economic structures and our paths of development as we respond to these structures and to other realms of being. For now, I'll make public some of my ponderings about the nature of human moral development – key to the entire human organism in so far as he is a potential person, that is, an entity which is unified, coherent, and complete in the way of the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit.

I consider created being as, in one sense, a spectrum running from abstract truths to concrete things. That is: “Things are true,” as St. Thomas Aquinas claimed, and “Truths are thing-like,” as I've claimed. It's also necessary to bear in mind that concrete being is shaped from more abstract forms of being grounded ultimately in truths God chose to manifest for this particular Creation. It's unclear how we can talk about the different layers of created being, that is forms of being with different degrees of abstraction and concreteness.

In line with both Aquinas and modern brain-scientists, I consider mind to be not an entity but rather a set of relationships between the human organism and its environments, including itself in some recursive ways. This mind is shaped, at least in a healthy and robust form, by active responses to its environments, maybe the entire universe which I call this world when seen in light of God's purposes, or even – miraculously, the entirety of Creation.

With that in the background, the idea behind my slowly ongoing efforts to develop these new ways of understanding human nature, in its individual and social aspects, is to borrow from the sophisticated analysis physicists and mathematicians have made of spacetime, matter-energy, fields, and so forth, abstract to an appropriate level where we meet up with the abstract forms of being which we draw upon in forming our minds, abstractions still present in the most mundane of physical things.

I think a good qualitative understanding of our human moral natures has to be built first on the recognition of the true developmental nature of an organism, goal-oriented development, intentional development. This is true not only of the human brain and our skills in moving through the world but also of our social and moral relationships. Obviously, there is a great, almost recursive, mess here with mind and human moral development and social relationships not so separable. Some extreme individualists, especially modern liberals of the left-wing or centrist or right-wing variety, will have problems with my way of speaking now that it's becoming clear that I'm claiming human individuals aren't some sort of free-standing

metaphysically-defined entities but rather complex entities intertwined with their societies and physical environments and formed by active response to specific environments. As I've claimed before: Einstein didn't have a paleolithic mind stuffed with the schematic knowledge of the 19th century but rather did he have a mind shaped to a more complexly considered knowledge of that 19th century. He was more of a German and a European than he himself might have admitted.

I'm writing about qualitative understandings at various levels of abstraction and concreteness. Here's a very crude diagram to make my goals a little more explicit, especially to those who haven't been following my work for the past few years or more:

Something like that.

Physicists and mathematicians have given us an understanding of the abstractions at Node Y1. I think their work includes at least an implicit understanding of what might be at Node X. If we can clarify that understanding of Node X a bit, we can move to Node Z1 and then to Node Z2. The abstractions at Node Z1 won't be mathematical in terms of quantification, so far as I can anticipate matters. But I suspect that mathematics, even including its quantitative fields, is grounded upon abstract forms of being which are more qualitative than quantitative. Relationships are primary and entities, even mathematical truths, come into existence because of a relationship. (Pending relationships cause the fuzziness of quantum mechanics rather than any absolute uncertainty.)

The language is fuzzy and necessarily so. I'm trying to develop language for talking about more abstract realms of being and am forced to twist and re-use existing language to do so. I think I can do better as this project moves forward but I know there are others out there who will be able to do better, perhaps some reading this essay soon after I post it. In any case, I have a very preliminary list of assumptions about the properties of that realm of being in Node Z1 and will try to move all the way up to Node X.

I'll end with a simple warning not to take the diagram itself literally. I don't think there is anything wrong with it so far as such charts of knowledge go, but my own view of knowledge would imply the situation is much more complex, recursive, interactive, iterative. . .

Chose your own favorite buzzword from those which populate serious and popular works telling us about modern empirical knowledge. This essay itself could be considered to be somewhat recursive – I'll now point back to the starting-point. I think liberalism, at least in its more classical form, is

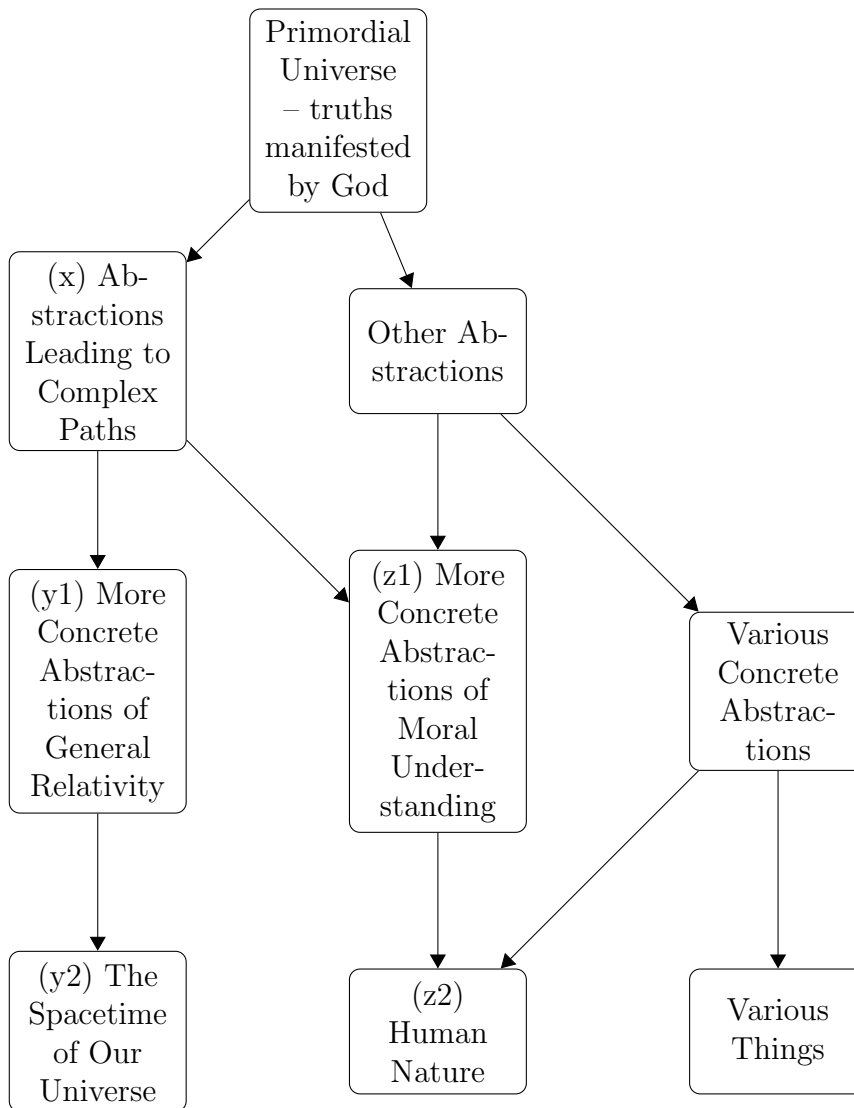


Figure 13.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

composed of efforts to answer questions raised by new empirical knowledge of human nature (Node Z1). However poorly formed some of the questions of liberal thinkers might be, as bad as some of their answers have proven to be, they were intelligent efforts fairly early in this era of great expansion in empirical knowledge. Most of the answers proposed by the other schools of

modern thought were worse, for example, various schools of socialism and fascism. Conservative and traditional forms of thought couldn't, on their own resources, provide direct answers, being so inclined toward protection of what was perceived as good in inherited knowledge and attitudes and ways of life as to be largely closed to new opportunities and inclined to retreat into various sorts of ghettos when facing those opportunities in the form of problems or outright threats.

What we need, in terms set by this essay, are thinkers who can move up to higher levels of abstraction to figure out how our human natures and communities become more complex and richer in possibilities (even the most passive of individual human beings have natures which are more complex just because of our more complex communities). I'm suggesting that we can learn many tricks from modern physicists and mathematicians and might very well be able to borrow directly from what has been learned from the exploration of spacetime, matter and energy and fields, and even the most abstract regions of mathematics.

Slowly, so slowly as to be quite frustrating, I'm moving forward and have already written out a very tentative list of assumptions as to the structure of Node Z1 in the diagram above. It will likely take months, perhaps a year or more, to settle on a good list of assumptions and to do much with them. Don't worry – I'll be pestering my readers with preliminary versions.

14 From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1050>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/09/30.]

I stretch the truth when I sometimes talk as if I were the only one who sees being as a spectrum from the abstract to the concrete. Clearly, there is a sense in which Platonic and Neoplatonic Realists see being in two forms, abstract being (what they call the Real) and concrete being (the real thing, so to speak). Furthermore, modern physicists speak in terms which imply that entities exist which can only be described mathematically, some of those entities existing at ‘deep’ levels of our concrete world and some being part of some sort of precursor stuff to this concrete universe. There is some sort of interesting and potentially fertile confusion about whether that precursor stuff can be said to be still here. Unfortunately, the ‘fertility’ can only be realized if important questions about being are asked more directly and more openly in cosmology than is currently the case.

I’ll provide a few simple diagrams of some potential relationships between the different realms of being, but I’ll be simplifying matters greatly. See Chapter 13, *The Essence of Liberalism* for a discussion of my view of the spectrum of being in the context of human politics.

14.1 Modern Cosmology

Let me start with a short discussion of the view implied by many modern theoretical physicists, and most of the popular interpreters working this field. In this model, abstract being becomes complex and relatively more concrete, more particular, by symmetry-breaking processes, a view which I

find congenial. More importantly, these models have a characteristic which I find disturbing, partly because of my Christian faith. This characteristic of the current cosmological models seems to isolate the universe, separating it from any precursor forms of created being at the moment when expansion of this universe begins. As abstract forms of being, describable in mathematical terms, flow through a bottleneck of sorts – the so-called Big Bang – they form a universe which is then apparently independent of the general realm of abstract being from which the universe came. The universe begins to evolve in time and never, so to speak, looks back at its source in more abstract forms of being.

Here's a simple diagram of the implied 'flow' of being in modern physics:

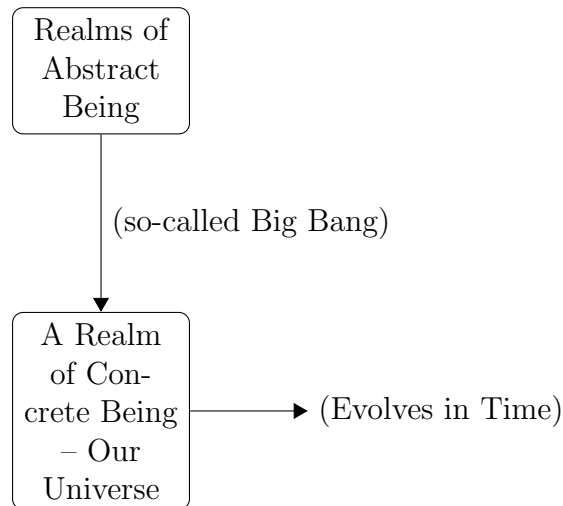


Figure 14.1: Naive Version of Modern Scientific View of Being

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In this view of the concrete being of our universe, of how that concrete being came to exist, of what the universe is, and how the that universe came to exist, we find that something was pushed 'through' the small spigot that was the Big Bang and that something expanded to become our universe, the spacetime as well as the matter. Then the spigot was closed.

Does this leave in place a dualism of sorts? That is, are we left with the problem of explaining how we can access abstract knowledge, such as that of transfinite numbers, without conjecturing some realm of thought-stuff? If our universe is an expansion of what cosmologists and particle physicists

can plausibly conjecture to have spilled in the universe created by the act of spilling – in a manner of speaking – and if that spilling took place for only the early fractions of a second of that expansion, then where do the ‘immaterial’ aspects of our universe come from? It would seem that this standard way of thought implies that matter was separated even from the mathematically describable and very abstract being from which it came.

The above diagram gives a very good backdrop to the mainstream context in which we have to deal with the most basic issues of being. For now, that context gives some inclined strongly to empirical thought a pervasive if radically incomplete foundation for their metaphysical reasoning. A little reading in the accessible literature on modern cosmology will confirm that even those who showed great creativity in their scientific work will simply assume the metaphysical backdrop, which is what it is, that is, a largely unexamined understanding of reality which is read naively out of a literalistic application of the field equation of general relativity, or some similar equation. Most modern physicists would know that mathematics can only describe possibilities and not tell us that an object exists, abstract or concrete, but they assume that what is describable by the basic equations of modern physics is what ‘truly’ exists and other aspects of concrete entities, such as mental activity, have to be simply ignored while we’re slipping it in through the backdoor.

Some empirical thinkers who deal with cosmological issues are reductive materialists and some struggle to maintain a belief in metaphysical entities and qualitative aspects. There are even some who struggle to hold on to religious beliefs or at least vague spiritual beliefs. The non-reductionists, who seem to be greatly in the majority, try to admit other forms of being than what squeezed through the spigot of the Big Bang, but they show no willingness to deal with it directly, that is, by speaking of created being, rather than speaking of physical stuff and then all this other important non-stuff.

Other thinkers, and maybe some trying to escape their human inclination to think, will simply glide over the model of our world as described by modern science and will see the world as awash with whatever entities are needed to readily and comfortably deal with evil or with unlikely recoveries from cancer or with their own feelings that they aren’t ‘just’ flesh and bone.

We can do better in understanding the nature of created being, most abstract to most concrete, without rejecting the understanding of the physical aspects of concrete being which has been given us by modern physics.

To do better, we'll have to muster up the courage to talk in a rational and coherent way of the unity of being so that we don't have to sing fairy-tales or speak gibberish to describe, for example, men and human societies as they really are.

Before I re-present my proposed better way to understand created being, I'll provide a diagram and a short discussion of a very simple, maybe simplistic, form of Platonic Realism.

14.2 Platonic Realism or Idealism

I'm presenting this diagram only as background of sorts:

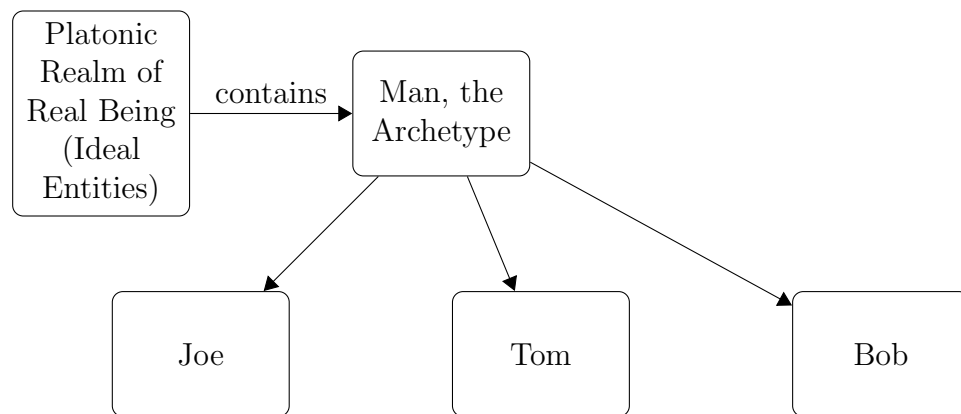


Figure 14.2: Platonist Particular Entities **Do** Come From a Single Archetype

In Plato's metaphysics, there are apparently a set number of types of entities each having an archetype in the world of the Ideals or the Reals. From the archetype Man, come specific men, such as Joe and Tom and Bob. One claim made by some scholars is that Plato's Ideals were the only immortals. For example, any reference to an immortal soul was a reference to the soul of Man. Joe and Tom and Bob were mortal creatures and could have part in immortality only through the species archetype of Man. There are no individual immortal souls in Platonic metaphysics, despite ongoing rumors to the contrary.

14.3 Loyd Fueston's Worldview: Concrete Entities Are Formed by Multiple Streams from Abstract Being

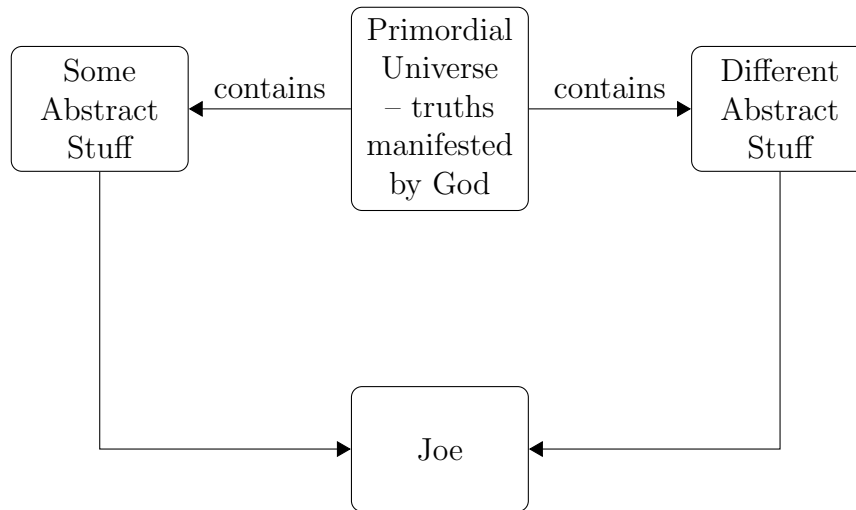


Figure 14.3: Particular Entities Don't Come From a Single Archetype

The main point of this is that there is an ongoing flow of being from abstract realms into this universe, this realm of concrete being. Each thing, no matter how mundane or seemingly simple, is the concrete level of a complex of different forms of being going deep into realms of abstract being.

At the same time, currently available empirical evidence and theoretical arguments tell us there was a special flow of certain fundamental forms related to the beginning of the current expansionary phase of this universe. Did this universe exist as such before it began to expand? If the physical stuff which we know as the matter, energy, and fields of this universe did exist before the so-called Big Bang, was it already embedded in relationships with the forms of abstract being which lead to what might be called the 'immaterial' aspects of this world?

The questions are badly phrased for now, but I think that it's clear what sorts of questions we should be asking to properly enrich the understanding of created being, the entire spectrum from abstract forms of being to the concretized being shaped from abstract forms.

14.4 Loyd Fueston's Worldview From One Step Back: A More Plausibly Complex Model

I'll republish the diagram from Chapter 13, *The Essence of Liberalism* to demonstrate other aspects of my understanding of created being. This diagram was written to help me present my claims that our understanding of our own moral natures can be enriched by borrowing, in a special way, from general relativity. Specifically, I had noticed that we speak of our moral paths through life in Euclidean terms but those terms seem inadequate for human beings who live in societies grown tremendously complex and rich. I hope this makes my claim clearer and more plausible:

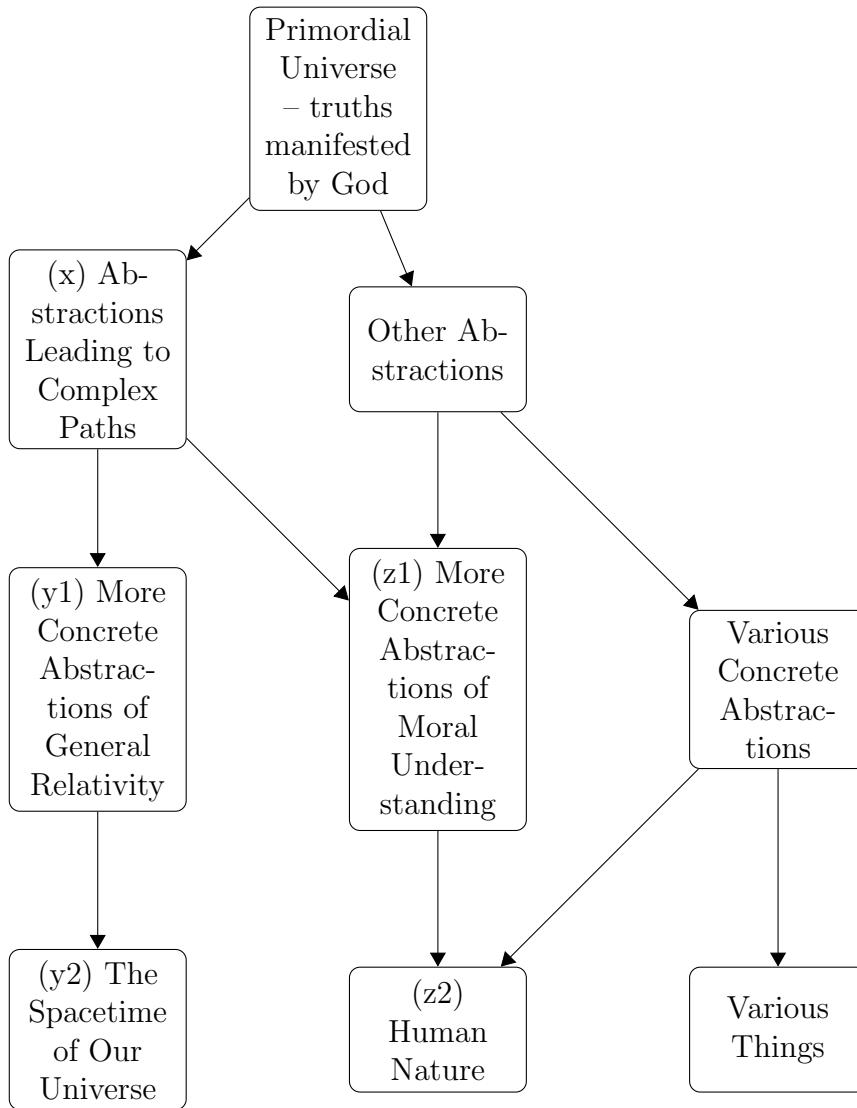


Figure 14.4: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

15 A Proper Sense of Freedom

I'm coming to the end of this scattered series of essays inspired by Kenneth Minogue's profound book on modern politics, *The Liberal Mind* [5]. My thoughts have developed so that my understanding of liberalism has taken on a surprising form, but no form of liberalism seems to me plausible or rational.

I've taken a position that relationships are primary rather than concrete stuff. Even the flesh-and-blood of our bodies are secondary, or greater, forms of created being. God created this concrete world, this world of thing-like being, from some sort of abstract stuff hinted at in the work of physicists and then He shaped this concrete stuff into what He needed to tell His story, the story centered around the Son of God.

When God brought Creation into existence, He was acting with the full power of God.

When He began to shape the primary stuff, the Primordial Universe – which I claim to be manifested truths, He was working within the constraints of His own decision to create a specific Creation. We could say, analogically, that the Almighty was acting as a metaphysician in knowing the primary truths He'd manifested and a mathematician and physicist when He began to shape those truths in levels of increasingly particular being.

When He began to tell a story using this particular universe, the Almighty was acting as an author telling a tale of evolution and development of nonliving and living entities interacting, forming relationships.

Our freedom, and our rights such as they are in reality, are at the level of that story and not at the level of the thing-like stuff, our own bodies, which participate in that story. Our freedom and our rights involve relationships formed by human beings who are the result of a long and complex evolutionary process not yet over and are also the result of the evolution

and development of human communities and also – of course – the result of development of that individual which is ideally dominated by complex, morally guided responses to the opportunities and problems of God’s Creation.

Once again, I quote Henri Bergson [1]:

[W]e are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work. [page 172]

Here’s an interesting statement made by Kenneth Minogue in *The Liberal Mind* [5]:

[I]n considering the circumstances in which free independence is possible, we must observe that it depends to a very large extent on an intellectual interest in how things are, in contrast to the desire to make things conform to a pre-established plan. [page 151]

In making peace with reality and responding to it in such a way that we develop that artistic personality alluded to by Bergson, we achieve freedom. If we are in a community of like-minded human beings, we might well establish strong relationships of the sort which mandate that we acknowledge strong rights on the part of others and others will acknowledge strong rights on our part.

In an essay on the German school of history, John Emerich Edward Dalberg, Lord Acton referred to liberals as “promoters of secondary liberties” and I think he would have at least accepted for discussion my claim that freedom and an artistic personality are deeply connected, that is, my claim that this deep relationship between true art and a free life tells us where lies the primary liberties, those which conduce to a well-ordered human life, one in which the human being has become a person, forming relationships with the world which allow him to become a world of sorts, a morally purposeful narrative. Both world and person are unified, coherent, and complete in meaningful senses, being open to that which is still greater, that which encompasses them on a larger scale without compromising their existences as world or person.

Think of this as a fractal, if you wish. Human beings are a smaller version of a human community, similar to that community in a sense much like that used by mathematicians, that is, the smaller entity is ‘shaped’ the same as the larger. And that community is similar to the world, itself similar to the entirety of Creation. For those who’ve never read about fractal, I use it in the sense of having a complex structure where there are some smaller, similar entities within the largest. ‘Within’ is as important as ‘same shape’.

In this way of thinking, a civilization is something like a work of art just as a human person is. A large community, even if prosperous in some ways isn’t a true civilization without having true unity, true coherence, and true completeness. A human being, in the same way, isn’t a human person if he has not those traits.

Having those traits, that human person is free even if he lives a life constricted in many ways by either his fellowmen or by the environmental or economic or political conditions during his lifetime. That human person is aware of his accomplishments, his talents and limitations, knows of the difficulties of his life in a way that affirms his traits of personhood – unity and coherence and completeness. If political or economic or technological conditions are adverse, he might have only a very constrained freedom, maybe hardly any at all outside of his own thoughts, but his freedom is truly that unlike the false freedom of those exploited consumers who think themselves free because they can watch dirty movies.

I’m going to close my latest effort to plumb the depths of Professor Minogue’s book [5] with a couple of quotes and a quick conclusion:

One cannot organize a work of art; nor write poetry to rule. The man who sets out quite deliberately to maximize his own happiness is likely to fail. Whilst one may, perhaps, be able to create vast pools of technicians at will, one cannot create political stability or a nation of mystics. There are many things in the world which we cannot attain simply because we want them; and some are beyond our grasp precisely because we want them too much. [page 157]

...

There are no means which serve the precise end of freedom, for freedom, like happiness, is not an end that can be pursued.

[page 158]

Happiness of the mundane sort is most certainly not a bad thing in its proper place, nor is freedom of the obvious sort allowing us to move around and do those morally proper acts we should be and wish to do nor is it a bad thing to live in a human community in which we all behave toward each other in a way that corresponds to what traditional liberals labeled as rights of one sort or another. I can't imagine a human life in this mortal realm where happiness is continuous nor one where we each and all move with morally well-ordered freedom. In fact, it's often the case that one man's happiness might conflict with that of a wife who wants the family to take common vacations but doesn't enjoy fishing or hunting. We certainly haven't worked things out so that there are no conflicts between the rights of a landowner who wants to divert much of the flow of a waterway to irrigate his crops and someone downstream who wants to keep a good flow of clean water moving through his swimming hole. The best we can do is perhaps take up the position I came to after reading some of the works of Frederich Hayek and some of the works of Thomas Sowell a number of years ago (I supplement and reword to my own slightly different overall viewpoint):

Some sort of well-ordered system of property rights might always create conflicts because of real and imagined injustices but that system will allow for a peaceful human community.

We can go beyond that, but the issue of property rights are clearly fundamental since they deal with food and mineral resources and other materials and transportation routes allowing us to feed and clothe ourselves.

I believe it to be a commonplace amongst lawyers and legal commentators that tough cases make for bad precedents and, hence, bad law. It's also true that tough, outlying situations can make for bad understandings of human history or of Creation in general. Our Maker has clearly given us a world and a nature which lead to conflicts which must be worked out in non-optimal ways. The story which is our world, the physical universe seen in light of God's purposes, goes on but it's sometimes rough on the good and bad alike, sometimes especially rough on those who are trying to be friends of God, sometimes just as rough on those who are trying to lead virtuous lives for other reasons. Yet, it is possible to live our lives in a way that brings out "that indefinable resemblance [between our personality and our

free acts] which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.” By doing so, we have attained some measure of freedom, perhaps hard-earned freedom, in the strong sense that we have chosen our own moral path, one which embeds us in our own lives. For that is perhaps the real issue underlying this sort of discussion: there are far too many human beings who give little sign of being truly alive, of being active and free participants in their own travels through this mortal realm. This was pretty much the reason for Albert Jay Nock losing his faith in the doctrine of the immortal soul and then his Christian faith – since he falsely considered that doctrine a necessary belief for the Christian view of the resurrection.

While I don’t imagine I can dictate or even predict God’s acts, I speculate that those who will be saved will be those who have enough life, who can live with the dangers and blessings of freedom, so that they can share God’s own life. Those who can’t live freely in this true sense and those who’ve not developed their lives in this way, have remained human animals and may enter the eternal grave along with non-human animals, but the next paragraph raises a different possibility.

As I’ve speculated before: true freedom is beyond the capacities of created natures and can be obtained only if God blesses us with the gift of sharing in His own life. I’ve also speculated that we are saved as members of the Body of Christ and that raises more complicated possibilities of the freedom-lovers, or at least freedom-toleraters, amongst us being capable of providing to their more timid or more close-minded fellowmen what is needed for being part of that Body. This would mean that something of the sort could occur in this world but only by way of strong communities containing some significant percentage of freedom-lovers. In any case, the liberal arguments for some sort of rights, both those of 18th century lovers of freedom and those of 20th century lovers of centralized and intrusive governments, break down for those arguments assume some sort of uniform human nature which has an desire for freedom and for human rights which demand much of all. The percentage of those who love freedom so they won’t compromise even to save their own lives might be far too small to directly support any stable free society and might make for a relatively small Body of Christ.

16 Human Moral Nature: An Overview

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=1079>. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/11/14.]

16.1 Preface

This entry is the core of a larger work. It's sketchy and incomplete but possibly worth the read.

16.2 Introduction

In the Gospel of St. John, we read:

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [John 9:1–5]

And the story continues to tell us that Jesus gave sight to this man who'd been blind from birth.

Sin is strange. The Bible, in various places, misdefines sin and this is the reason for the occasional but strong corrections made by Jesus Christ.

Medical problems are sometimes described as the result of ‘sin’. These medical problems include the likes of what is called ‘leprosy’, probably a skin-problem such as eczema, and blindness and epilepsy. The disorder, deep and ephemeral, of a world in which evolutionary and developmental processes take place is often described as sin in some sense, the result of a world imagined as having been created as a paradise and then some sort of great fall has taken place.

It’s even possible to speak loosely but truly in saying the writers of the Bible, well back to the time of David and perhaps before, were dealing with the question of “nature vs. nurture.” They were also dealing with the limits placed upon our moral freedom by the events of God’s story.

I’ll propose that sin or moral disorder in general is a result of a mismatch between a human being and the world – a deliberately vague way of speaking. In some of my prior writings, I’ve spoken in more specifically Christian terms but I wish to step back and maybe develop a way of speaking that allows non-Christians to engage in this conversation. I also wish to speak in terms general enough that I can more easily adopt new ways of speaking about human moral nature and about our moral journeys through this world. These new ways of speaking will draw upon richer and more complex understandings of being largely made possible by modern science including mathematics.

But what is morality?

From 1913 Webster’s dictionary as provided by The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48, we get the definition:

- morality** 1. The relation of conformity or nonconformity to the moral standard or rule; quality of an intention, a character, an action, a principle, or a sentiment, when tried by the standard of right. [1913 Webster [7]]
2. The quality of an action which renders it good; the conformity of an act to the accepted standard of right. [1913 Webster [7]]

Where do these rules come from? In discussing truths, even those of mathematics, I’ve claimed it makes best sense of what we now know to speak of being in terms of a spectrum running from very abstract forms to very concrete forms. So far as Creation goes, all that can be explored or accessed in any way by a creature, the most abstract form of being is what I’ve called the Primordial Universe, the truths manifested by God as

the basic stuff of Creation, the stuff from which successively more concrete forms of being is shaped.

Moral nature is a set of traits in a living creature, one formed in a very concrete level of being. We can almost speak, in an analogical way, of our moral nature as being itself a separate entity but the truth is that it's a combination of memories, behaviors in the present and in the near-term future, and planning and other cognitive and emotional activities in the more distant future. As I've noted before, our moral freedom in particular lies in the future. Next year, I'll realize my moral freedom in better formed habits that give me a healthier diet. Or so I hope. Few are born with the strong inclination to sacrifice themselves for their children, to die for the cause of liberty, to die for Church and God. For most of us, we anticipate sacrifices, visualizing tough situations and developing the little habits which will allow us to handle those situations – as some top-level athletes are said to do.

Morality can also be seen as the more abstract region of the spectrum which includes what we call 'ethics':

ethics The science of human duty; the body of rules of duty drawn from this science; a particular system of principles and rules concerting duty, whether true or false; rules of practice in respect to a single class of human actions; as, political or social ethics; medical ethics. [1913 Webster [7]]

Careful planning, moral anticipation, allows us to form our ethical habits.

In Chapter 13, I provided a diagram to help me present my claims that our understanding of our own moral natures can be enriched by borrowing, in a special way, from general relativity. Specifically, I had noticed that we speak of our moral paths through life in Euclidean terms but those terms seem inadequate for human beings who live in societies grown tremendously complex and rich. I stated that "I hope this makes my claim clearer and more plausible":

I'll continue to emphasize this issue of the spectrum of being, abstract to concrete, in my writings. Empirical being is one end of a spectrum, the other end being – roughly – what we might call metaphysical truths, the truths manifested by the Creator as the raw stuff of Creation.

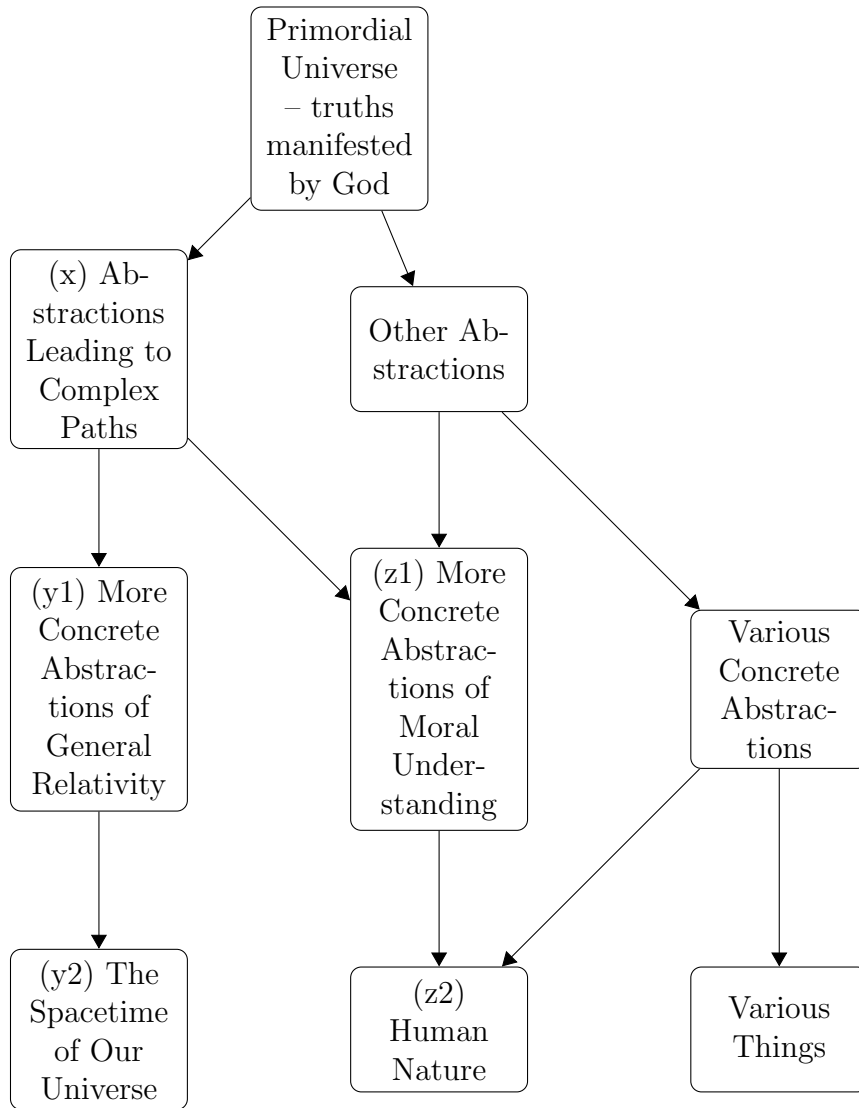


Figure 16.1: Simple Relationships of Abstract and Concrete Levels of Being

The diagram above is misleading in one way. I explained this in Chapter 14 by comparing my way of thought to that of Plato where complex entities had what might be called Ideal Prototypes in a realm of the Real (Ideal in terms of most modern thinkers, philosophical or other types). The diagram for Platonic concepts of being from that entry is:

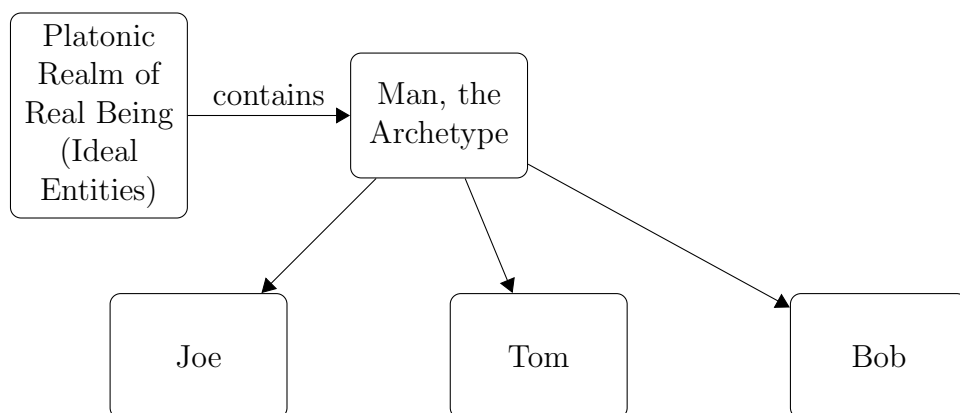


Figure 16.2: Platonist Particular Entities **Do** Come From a Single Archetype

Human beings are more complex than this would indicate and also share aspects of being with other living creatures and even with non-living entities. We can go back to the earlier diagram which shows my way of thinking about being and talking about being. This points to the richer and more complex truth but misleads only because it doesn't show – I don't know how to show for now – the tangles of aspects of being which move from one layer of abstract being to help form the next layer of somewhat more concrete being.

Our moral natures are part of our human natures on the whole, but in a very complex way that can be made clear only when we learn to speak in those richer and more complex terms. For now, try to imagine the clean, simple lines from one layer of being, relatively more abstract, down to the next layer of being, relatively more concrete, as being more like twisted cables which don't really match up from one layer of being to the next in any simple manner. A qualitative mathematical description would be a very good thing, but such a description remains to be developed. Mathematical discussions usually don't involve badly behaved many-to-many functions. I most certainly don't regard man in terms of a 'mapping' similar to those of Platonists – see Chapter 14, *From Abstract Being to Concrete Being and Narratives* for a short discussion of my way of looking at being compared to the ways in which being is implicitly described in modern physics as well as the way that Plato and his followers described it.

Let me shift a little to discuss this issue from a slightly different angle, one which will allow a richer discussion of the nature-nurture controversy in a more complete version of this entry.

16.3 Man as a Creature and Not a Metaphysical Entity

I've argued this point before: we can only speak about and generalize from layers of being we can perceive and explore directly. (Take 'perceive' in a very general way to include the use of much instrumentation and also indirect observations, even statistical analyses.) We should respect God's Creation by taking seriously those layers of being we can perceive and explore directly, by taking seriously analyses and conjectures based upon those layers, and by not committing ourselves to speculations inconsistent with those layers of empirical being. We should also be generally skeptical about making metaphysical speculations not plausible in terms of our best current understanding of realms of being which are directly observable and explorable – where we also recognize that many immaterial relationships and some immaterial entities (such as social groups) do show up in the realms of empirical being.

This doesn't argue that we shouldn't hold religious faith or theological claims, only that we should explain that faith and those claims in terms consistent with our best current understanding of the observable and explorable realms of Creation. Or else: we should remain respectfully silent if we can develop no coherent and rational explanation in such terms.

16.4 Man the Moral Organism

I've claimed that the human mind is formed on two levels: the species and the individual. In some of my writings, I've made a claim consistent with a fairly radical understanding of quantum mechanics:

Relationships are primary over substance. This is to say that relationships come from more abstract realms of being and are the shapers and raw stuff of concrete substance.

We are shaped by relationships and can shape other living creatures by proper relationships. In particular, we can perform miracles of a sort by loving even those who seem so unlovable. By way of love, in its greater or lesser forms – my favorite lesser form of love is wonder, we can shape ourselves and others into members of the Body of Christ. The relationships are real, more abstract than those studied by physics but the various sorts of relationship merge into each other at some higher level of abstraction.

In other writings, I've also begun to separate out social formation, believing the Body of Christ to be a real entity which unites individual human beings. As God is three Persons in one God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit retaining their individuality, so those who become part of the Body of Christ will retain their individuality while being true members of an entity which is such – not just a nominal designation for a collection of individuals. This shows in the claim:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process,

or, equivalently,

The human mind forms in time through a communal process,

I could even add:

Human moral nature forms in time through a communal process,

Through a communal process do we even become truer individuals for we shape a true human nature by becoming part of the process of forming the pilgrim Body of Christ, the Body of Christ as it exists in this mortal realm. We learn how to share the only true freedom, that of God, by learning how to live leaning forward into the future. I'll speak lightly of these communal processes for a while as I learn ways of speaking more truly. As I've noted a number of times, I'm convinced that the proper ways are in terms of the same abstractions from which mathematicians and physicists draw their qualitative and quantitative tools for speaking of the structures of space-time.

The formation of the species mind is what we call evolution and has actually been ongoing since the first self-reproducing organisms appeared on the earth. We could even say that the evolution began with the formation

of concrete being as the universe expanded, beginning with the short and spectacular expansion we call the Big Bang.

In any case, there is what might be called a set of family-lines, lines of creatures of direct genetic relation. This set is the human race.

Geneticists and various sorts of other biologists are working to unwind the complexities of how genes and soma transmit possibilities, constraints, and – how often? – well-defined traits and behaviors. Those aren't proving to be simple problems and there will be plenty of job opportunities for a number of generations to come.

16.5 Man the Responder to Moral Environments

Individual human beings start life with capabilities which are set in a complex way still being unraveled by biologists of various sorts, including anthropologists, and also those who study how we develop in specific social settings. We are born with a set of genes which are a mixture of those from the ovum produced by our mother and the sperm-cell produced by our father, but the way in which our particular possibilities and limitations are determined is more complex than that. See the article on epigenetics at <http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Epigenetics> for some basics on “epigenetics [which] is the study of heritable changes in gene expression or cellular phenotype caused by mechanisms other than changes in the underlying DNA sequence.” For example, in recent years, it's been shown that bad eating habits can have an effect not just on babies in the womb but even on grandchildren and perhaps beyond, even though the underlying genes are not changed in ways other than their level of activity. This is true even if the intermediary generations had better habits.

The individual is constrained. Few of us are Albert Einstein and few Vladimir Horowitz. Not many can dance as did Fred Astaire and not many can impress followers and enemies in the way of George Washington. At the same time, we have to remember that each of these men developed their unique characteristics and talents to a high level by aggressively appropriate responses to their environments, to their opportunities and problems.

Given some rough idea of a human nature with its relatively weak specific characteristics, we can move on to that idea of an individual shaping

himself, perhaps even to become a true morally well-ordered person rather than just a human animal.

16.6 Man the Character in a Story Told by God

Created being gives the stuff of the story but the story is a dynamic movement through time, inherently unpredictable (that is – factual) and – in my opinion as a Christian – under the direction and control of God.

We can think of the universe, the object studied by physicists and chemists, as one realm of created being. When we see the events in and of this universe as a narrative morally ordered to the purposes of God, it becomes what I call a ‘world’.

Morality is a complex and multi-layered concept in my way of thought. It involves a certain ordering of the created being, the very flesh of the human moral actor and the relationships he has formed with other human beings and non-human creatures and with the physical world and with God.

But the actor has to act. He has to respond to the world, learning his role by an interaction of what he is in his created being and what seems to be expected of him by the activity around him. He forms himself as a person, or fails to do so, and can intend – that is, grow as an organism – toward the state of moral person, a human being shaped as a true brother or sister of the Son of God in His human nature.

I’ve not fully developed any of this. It’s still very sketchy in part but it’s necessary, at least to my way of thought, to lay it out this way before filling in the gaps or fleshing out the skeletal parts. To my way of thinking, this is the point where stories are needed to describe this story, the smaller narratives which are our lives with their moral difficulties and moral accomplishments and moral vagaries and the larger narratives – right up to the entirety of Creation – which our lives are part of.

16.7 The Body of Christ Becomes Perceptible

Biology teaches about entities within family lines, the entities developing as individuals and the family lines evolving in what might be called a neo-neo-Darwinist way. So much has been discovered or hinted at since the emergence of the synthesis of genetic knowledge into evolutionary theory. In particular, we're learning that there are effects such as those labeled 'epigenetic' which tie us into our communities, especially to our parents and grandparents, in very direct and observable ways.

In any case, the human race is such a family line, that is, a line of organisms with a shared history as manifested in both DNA and also flesh-and-blood. But something else has come to exist, something which is the home of human beings in most ways. As a Christian, I believe that mysterious something to be the Body of Christ which came into existence in a frail and mortal form with the Resurrection of Christ or perhaps the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ on Pentecost. Non-Christians can think of this something else as the human race becoming a self-conscious entity of a very vague and complex sort.

History since the Body of Christ formed can be described as the biography of that Body. The Body of Christ as it currently exists has been shaped partially by its often disedifying history though it works also, vaguely and indirectly, toward the purposes God has intended for it from its creation. In this way, the Body of Christ is not different from other mortal organisms forming in this world, even saints bound for Heaven.

So it is that the Body of Christ is disease-ridden, drained by parasites, and loaded with cancerous organs. Not a pretty sight, but, it remains alive as do so many human beings, for their allotted time, however much they are also moral and physical messes. We must remember that the opposite of love isn't hate but indifference. I'd add that the opposite of purity isn't lust but rather passiveness in the face of what can be loved properly or improperly. In the end, it's life and not moral purity which drives us or leads us to the Body of Christ and to God.

16.8 A More Concrete Take on the Nature of Morality

Morality is a word which covers some aspects of human nature when it's well-shaped in response to Creation understood in terms of God's purposes. As such, morality itself has some aspects which draw more or less directly upon abstract forms of being and others which draw upon concrete forms of being. Perhaps most importantly, morality has aspects which draw upon the story God is telling in and with this universe, the story which is the world, that is again, the universe seen in light of God's purposes.

We should realize that good men can shape themselves to those purposes even if they don't believe in a personal God who is all-loving and all-powerful. It's also true that those who believe in such a God can be badly malformed in moral character – as a result of their own responses to this world misperceived and misunderstood. Melville came to the conclusion that Americans were willfully so malformed, trying to live in a world they preferred to the one the Creator has given us.

Americans are a nice people, morally well-ordered for a world different from the one in which we happen to live. We are shaped for the world which has been shown in *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and countless movies from Hollywood. As such, we are a dangerous and destructive people when we come into certain types of conflicts. We destroy countries and kill large numbers of people and – just like Hitler's logistical genius, Adolf Eichmann – can't understand why anyone could hate us when we feel so good about ourselves. We go in heavily armed and assuming that good people there will be just like those in television shows about American families living in Plasticsville. When those people don't appreciate our efforts on their behalf, we know there are no good ones amongst them and we fire.

I use this example often, not because I hate my own people, though I'm not exactly a fan of the vast majority of American leaders since the generation of the Founding Fathers. I use this example of my own American people being morally malformed, morally insane as Melville put matters, because we're a good example of a people who seem so morally good when in certain circumstances and are, in fact, quite willing to make a number of sacrifices for others, but are monsters of a unique type when unleashed upon the world with more power than we can even understand.

I think other peoples in the West, including the Germans of the 1930s and 1940s and the British over the past few centuries, are much like us Americans. We stubbornly stick to several wrong ideas, such as the (often implicit) belief that moral goodness is realized or at least confirmed when we feel good about ourselves. In *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene said that we Americans feel the world exists to give us opportunities to feel good about ourselves. Even as those middle-class Germans, so horrified by Hitler's goals as they were revealed, could feel good that they were doing their duty by their families and their communities, holding down respectable jobs and paying their bills and going to church each Sunday.

One major theme in my various writings is the need to make peace with empirical reality. In this context of moral nature, we need to realize that a moral nature formed in response to willfully held illusions of reality will be a psychotic nature of a special sort.

17 Original Article: Natural and Inalienable Rights

[Published originally on 2006/08/06 on the website *Acts of Being* at <http://loydfueston.com/>.]

17.1 Endangering Our Heritage

Does natural law truly support the idea that human beings have inalienable rights? Neither human history nor the facts of human natural life support such a claim. Human history tells us that certain legal rights of a high moral standard were granted to the citizens of the Christian West and only to elite populations in other civilization, such as ancient Greece. Even then, it took historical accidents to establish these so-called rights, such as the accidental expansion of the rights in the *Magna Carta*. Those rights were not intended for the ordinary citizens of England but for the aristocrats who were sick of being abused by the kings.

John Locke was already on shaky ground with the claim that we have inalienable rights to “life, liberty, and property”. In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson made the claim still stranger by changing the trio of rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, a very weird claim in the context of both our biological situation and human history.

Why did we accept such silliness, even honoring it, instead of seeing it for the dangerous clap-trap which it has proven to be?

We modern people, especially Americans, have done our best to show the truth in Psalm 39 (as translated in the Revised Standard Version – I used the Catholic Edition printed by Ignatius Press):

In his riches, man lacks wisdom:

he is like the beasts that are destroyed.

More specifically, we – even many devout Christians – have been seduced into accepting a man-centered view of humanity and human political institutions. In all likelihood, even many conservative Catholics or Evangelical Protestants will read the previous sentence and think, “Yeah, what’s wrong with that?” In the remainder of this article, I’ll take on the burden of explaining what’s wrong with that, though my arguments will be fully meaningful only to Christian believers.

17.2 What is Natural Law?

And why should Christians care?

First, I’ll give the definition of ‘Natural Law’ according to Merriam-Webster’s *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*:

Natural Law A body of law or a specific principle held to be derived from nature and binding upon human society in the absence of or in addition to positive law.

I’m not sure that efforts to reason toward such laws or principles are really appropriate behavior for responsible adults, but everybody needs some sort of hobby and there most certainly were times when such efforts were appropriate behavior even for the likes of Aristotle or Cicero or St. Thomas Aquinas. Notice that this definition from the 1950s states natural law in purely secular terms, where ‘secular’ means without a God active in His own Creation (if He exists at all) or a Church which is more than a purely human institution. In the underlying mindset, there are only two types of laws:

- The laws which are built into the functioning of nature; and
- The positive laws, that is, laws enacted by human governments.

Unfortunately, it would seem this viewpoint is common amongst even Catholic theologians and certainly common amongst Protestant theologians and would-be Aristotelians. Those theologians or philosophers who

claim that revelation has added to human knowledge of morality are typically treated as anti-rationalists to the point of being obscurant (using the Merriam-Webster *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*):

obscurant adj: tending to make things obscure.

There is a still better definition in the 1913 Webster' dictionary where obscurant can still be a person:

obscurant One who obscures; one who prevents enlightenment or hinders the progress of knowledge and wisdom. –Coleridge. [1913 Webster]

In the post-Enlightenment era, the entire content of Christian morality is to be founded upon laws directly accessible to human reasoning or laws enacted by human governments – which have increasingly reflected nothing more substantial than the modern desire for comfort and safety of the voters. In fact, this illusion of natural and inalienable rights has been present, and gradually used to destroy the Christian foundations of Western morality and politics. The acts of vandalism which destroyed so much took place over the past 3 or 4 centuries as men redefined law to be man-centered. And even the most devout of Christian natural-law theorists was moving in this direction with the pretense that laws derived from God's revelations could be found in nature or in man's natural reasoning powers. Of greatest importance is the Christian claim that human life is sacred because God had adopted us in a special way. Our lives are not inherently worth more than chimpanzees or cows; our lives are worth more because the Son of God became our brother in the flesh and His Father adopted each and every one of us in a special way. It is the purposes of God in creating this world and nothing found in natural man that gives us very strong duties to each other which might be labeled as 'rights'. Enlightenment thinkers took God's special claim upon human life and eliminated God, essentially eliminating the substance of the claim, alienating that which they called inalienable.

It's hard for me to imagine in what sense modern sorts of natural-law reasoning can be regarded as a Christian activity. After all, moral behavior is directed to purposes and we know God's purposes in creating this World only by way of His revelations. Still, at least in theory, there is much about us and our moral natures which can be read out of nature. After all, we are contingent creatures subject to empirical investigation. Those empirical

investigations have to be organized and made coherent by speculative forms of reasoning – though the forms of reasoning appropriate to us are also drawn from our empirical experience and the empirical experience of our ancestors over the past 3 billion years or so. This was a major line of argument in *To See the World in a Grain of Sand*, my recently published book (Wipf & Stock, 2006).

I tend to think that the enterprise of metaphysical reasoning has been pushed in idealistic directions partly as a result of Newton's forced decision to ground his physics upon the assumption of absolute time and space and also by a misappropriation of the rigoristic methods used, quite appropriately, by mathematicians to ground the calculus in the past few centuries. Those mathematicians were – initially – working toward of the goal of providing an absolute foundation for Newtonian mechanics and its absolute time and space. By the time the Enlightenment was reaching its peak of optimism in human reason – and probably beginning to decay – this rigorous grounding of the calculus, and the misunderstanding of Newtonian mechanics, were advocated by many as being the true and only form of human reason. The world, including even the work of God Himself, was on its way to being a mere location of rationally controlled efforts. But any natural law theories that do not include explicit recognition of revelation already distort matters by seeing the rational aspects of Creation as the totality.

The World is a story, a story which God is telling. It reflects God's dicta, the free-will decisions of the Almighty, and those are not to be squeezed into a line of rigoristic reasoning. Those dicta are a basic part of our world – as I discussed in *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* and they are not necessary in a way that makes them directly accessible to human reason unaided by revelation or unschooled by empirical observation.

The Almighty is also participating in the story Himself. Stories have purposes but we cannot see the purposes of the Lord God from our position and are thus dependent upon the revelations of God to tell us His purposes and He did so, very emphatically, by sending His Son to die on the Cross. I am certainly not denying the value of metaphysical reasoning and empirical knowledge in understanding Christian morality but it is necessary for us to have at least some small knowledge of God's purposes in creating this World before we can understand what is truly expected of us.

Take baseball. That famous anthropologist from Mars could come down around June or so and start observing games. He could watch the players

and use good reasoning techniques to understand the point of a game is to move runners around the bases and across home-plate while preventing the other team from doing so as often as you do. With the proper attitude, he could even set about understanding the physics of pitching and hitting. However, he would miss the point of it all if he refused to accept revealed knowledge that would tell him the point of it all is to win four games out of seven in October. This is not knowledge that can be derived by mere observation of the players on the field or by general reasoning about the nature of games. True, he could learn about the point of it all by listening to the players, assuming he spoke the proper languages, but that's revealed knowledge from a second-hand source.

How can we understand the point of it all if we don't accept the only information we have about the point of it all? In fact, the information we have is the point of it all, that is, the Cross is the point of it all. We can hope for a bit of bliss on the other side of the grave but we, so to speak, will climb the Cross of our Lord to get out of the grave on the other side.

Let me put it another way. With divine allowance for human weakness and human cowardice, the way to become a companion of God on the other side of death is to recognize that carrying our crosses, living for God and being willing to suffer and die for Him, is the way God has chosen for us to accept His love. We cannot really carry our crosses, Christ must come to us to do most of the heavy lifting, but we do what we can.

The point is that the demands which God placed upon His own Son culminated in the Cross and those demands reflect the main purpose of God in telling this story we call a World. The sufferings of the Son of God as He was humiliated, whipped, and then crucified, tell us something about the nature of a God-centered creature. I'll not discuss that nature here but it's important to note that the submission of Jesus Christ to His brutal fate tells us something that we could not figure out by metaphysical reasoning nor by extrapolating from what we know of human nature. It's something that does make sense in the light of metaphysical reasoning and extrapolations from human nature but only because the answer was given to us.

How did it happen that so many of us Christians came under the delusion that our moral duties could be derived fully from metaphysical reasoning and – to make it still worse – reasoning which is built upon ancient and defective scientific knowledge? How is it that we put pagan forms of natural-law reasoning ahead of our Lord's own teachings, displayed so wondrously

and frighteningly in His submission to a death seemingly so humble? Yet, it was by way of that seemingly humble death that He asserted Himself as the Creator of all.

17.3 A More Christian Natural Law

We need a way of doing moral analysis which is proper to a clever ape raised to the status of a son of God, but raised only by a promise of God that He will complete and perfect our human natures after He raises us from the dead, a promise fully revealed in the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, grace completes nature but we needed a revelation from God to even tell us we can be recipients of His grace. And some of us believe that revelation to be still more important than our knowledge of nature.

Moral analysis from a Christian perspective should be done from two different directions, one which analyses this physical universe created by God and one which tries to understand how that universe becomes a true world when we see God's purposes which He revealed and which we could never have discovered on our own. Some thinkers might be able to move along with one foot on each path, as clumsy as that would seem to most of us.

For one Christian thinker to produce a more coherent and complete moral system, he would have to be an expert in several fields of biology, the history of moral thought, the Bible, and Christian theology. This would require years of study, perhaps decades, and would require a great deal of perseverance and dedication. It would be more reasonable to foresee the formation of a new order of laymen or religious men dedicated to the proper understanding of empirical knowledge in light of Christian revelation. This is merely to anticipate that Christian history tells us something about any possible Christian future.

Morality in a Natural Universe

What could be the general shape of a truer Christian morality? We need to think in terms that respect the nature of man in this Universe and also the revelations of God found in the Bible. For now, I'll be content to pop some balloons which float about the modern skies:

1. Biologists have discovered that primitive mammals, such as voles (similar to prairie dogs), have altruistic behavior which is more self-sacrificing when genetic relationship is closer. This does not tell us that morality is only a matter of the so-called 'selfish gene'. It tells us that moral natures have evolved as much as the brain has evolved. Selfish genes are also embedded in God's story and are not supernatural masters of the organisms in which they are found.
2. There are some animals which have stronger moral natures than human beings in some aspects. For example, wolves are said to have a much stronger instinct against killing members of their own species than human beings do. We should not assume that human beings have a moral nature missing from all other species.
3. Human beings are not unique in our altruism – very imperfect as it is, but we are unique in being able to conceptualize moral rules in such a way that we can, in principle, develop specific moral systems proper to new conditions. As a consequence, an apish creature which has the evolved characteristics suited for small-group living has been able to adjust somewhat to life in cities but very imperfectly. We fight huge wars and occasionally commit mass murder upon populations which we don't approve of. We steal entire nations at one swoop. We persecute people who never invited us into their country. We enslave by various means even after issuing our emancipation proclamations and enacting various constitutional amendments. But from a purely natural standpoint, it's actually quite remarkable that we're able to adjust in our moral behavior so well as we have.
4. Our ability to think abstractly about our own moral place in the world has opened up the possibility that we can absorb and make our own the teachings of Jesus Christ, teachings which reflect God's purposes in making this World, purposes we could never see on our own. Knowledge about Creation is ultimately one and the purpose of God in making this World and the World of the Resurrected could be seen only by beings able to rise above Creation to see it in its entirety. We can never rise above Creation in that way and, consequently, we are dependent upon God's revelations to learn His purposes, which purposes give us a fuller and more perfect morality than any true natural law reasoning could do.

The fourth item tells us we have some inherent flexibility in forming our moral natures. There are many examples in history that tell us how dangerous this flexibility can be. Adolf Hitler was not just a socially mal-adjusted man; he was a man who willfully tried to shape his own moral nature, and the moral natures of others, so that they would be able to commit evils acts beyond what a normal human being can do.

The Wrong Way to Reason About Natural Law

Any natural law reasoning which claims we have inalienable and natural rights is nothing but bad science, bad philosophy, bad history, and bad theology of a Deistic and anti-Christian sort. We should be honest and return to rational analyses of nature in light of God's revelation. Just as important is the need to pray upon those analyses and to contemplate them as we worship the God who has adopted us as His special children.

Appendices

Appendices

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