

Morality and Violence

Creation, Nature, and Virtue

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Theology and Morals

- Christian moral theology begins from the premise that life is God's *gift*, and therefore every thing that exists is meant to be used for God's service.
- Classically, then, Christian Theology understood the *moral* life to have an essentially religious quality.
 - That is not to say that non-religious people cannot be *moral*. But rather that all moral people are in some sense (even if only implicitly) *religious* as well.
 - They explained this predominantly through their Cosmology — their understanding of the *order* of the world.
 - This was often developed by an exposition of the creation narrative of Genesis 1-3.



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God & Creation

- “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)
- “Beginning” here was understood as referring not to the *formation* of material things, but bringing them into *existence*.
- So the first and most important question for Christian Theology is not why God has made the world in the manner that he *has*, but why there is *something* rather than *nothing*.
- Essentially, this came to be seen as asserting the dependence of created being on the divine.



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God & Creation

- God in himself is infinitely full, perfect, and complete.
 - He does not acquire any new qualities — he is unchanging perfection.
 - God's existence is *necessary*: he cannot not exist.
- Creation does not exist *necessarily* but *contingently*. It did **have** to exist, because God might not have created it. So God is independent from the world.
- God elects to create, not to satisfy some need of his own, but out of his sheer goodness.
- This work is divided into two parts:



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Creation Out of Nothing

- Because God is independent from the world, the first act of creation is to call created things into being *ex nihilo*.
- How does this differ from *human* creativity?
 - “Material cause”
 - Time
 - Instruments
 - Power



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The Work of “Distinction”

- God also gives creatures their form.
This is called the “work of distinction”.
- It generally covers the 6 days of the
Genesis creation narrative.
- God here distinguishes creatures into
their different kinds by granting them
their distinct *natures*.
 - This includes all of their
properties, powers, and faculties
that determine the character of its
existence.
 - It is also a “natural impression”,
like an archer places on an arrow,
that directs the creature toward its
final goal.



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Human Nature

- God creates Adam on the 6th day by:
 - Forming him from “the dust of the ground”.
 - Breathing into him the “breath of life”.
- Two-fold character of human nature.
- The rational nature of humankind means it has the powers of intellect & volition to know and will what is good — which is what morality consists in.
- All creatures seek their own perfection. Though they may be mistaken, rational creatures seek what they believe will bring *happiness*.



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Virtue & Moral Vocation

- With some exceptions, Christians have often thought that the good life — the life that leads to happiness — is the moral life.
- The trouble is, adhering to what is good requires both a knowledge of what is a good and will to choose what is good.
- But we often do not know, or fail to choose what is good. As a result we fail to obtain happiness.
- Why? Because, due to sin, our desires are disordered in such a way that we often pursue *lesser* goods in the place of *higher* goods. In short, we lack *virtue* and are prone to *vice*.



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Virtue & Moral Vocation

- Virtue is a perfection of some power (*virtus*) of the soul, either mind or volition. Virtues direct our desires into finding a “balance” — a “golden mean” — between extremes.
- They are distinguished by their ends:
 - Theological virtues, like faith, hope, and love, have God as their ultimate end.
 - Natural/Cardinal virtues, like prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, have some created thing as their end.
- They are opposed by *vices* which deviate from this balance by excess or defect, e.g., mercy/cruelty; sobriety/drunkenness.



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Virtue & Grace

- When these virtues exist together in the soul, they perfect one another, enabling us to know and will what is good.
- Originally, virtue would have naturally incline us to the love of God and neighbour.
- However, as a consequence of the vicious effects of sin, cultivating virtue now is extraordinarily difficult. And we can no longer find our way back to God.
- “Grace” names that loving divine activity by which God makes up for our weakness and directs us toward himself.



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