

Lesson 12

**“Personal Freedom and Dignity”**

Based on Lecture 5 of

Greg L. Bahnsen’s *Basic Training for Defending the Faith*

**“What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him?**

**And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?**

**Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God,**

**And dost crown him with glory and majesty!”**

**(Psalm 8:4–5)**

We now arrive at our last lesson in our study of Dr. Bahnsen’s lectures, “Basic Training for Defending the Faith.” We have come a long way in our study, having learned about the fundamental idea of and biblical warrant for the proper apologetic method; the impossibility of neutrality in thought; the meaning, importance, basic elements, and universality of worldviews; several alternative worldviews held among men; metaphysics, epistemology, ethics; and some of the basic problems crippling the unbelieving worldview.

This lesson will conclude our focusing on the problems inherent in non-Christian worldviews. In the three previous lessons we noted Dr. Bahnsen’s analysis of the problems of moral absolutes, the uniformity of nature, and the laws of logic. These are obviously issues of enormous significance, whose problematic character are catastrophic

for the unbeliever's outlook on the world and life. We are now ready to consider their problem in accounting for personal freedom and dignity.

As we survey this problem area you should be encouraged to see once again that *only* the Christian truth claims can *account for* these huge worldview necessities. Remember: the fundamental argument for the existence of God and confirmation of the Christian system is “the *impossibility* of the contrary”—*not* “the *superiority* of Christianity in handling discrete facts.” The unbeliever can't account for the fundamental issues of life *from within his own system of belief*—indeed, he can't account for *anything*. Were he to be “epistemologically self-conscious” he would be totally incapacitated.<sup>1</sup> As Van Til puts it:

It is the firm conviction of every epistemologically self-conscious Christian that no human being can utter a single syllable, whether in negation or affirmation, unless it were for God's existence. Thus the transcendental argument seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is.<sup>2</sup>

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It is our contention that only the Christian can obtain real coherence in his thinking. If all of our thoughts about the facts of the universe are in

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<sup>1</sup>One who is “epistemologically self-conscious” engages life in a way that fully comports with his theory of knowledge. That is, his behavior and reasoning are perfectly consistent with his basic commitments regarding the world and knowledge. Dr. Bahnsen calls on Christians themselves to be “epistemologically self-conscious about the character of their epistemological position, letting its standards regiment and regulate every detail of their system of beliefs and its application.” Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 4

<sup>2</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932) 11.

correspondence with God's ideas of these facts, there will naturally be coherence in our thinking because there is a complete coherence in God's thinking.<sup>3</sup>

So then, the Presuppositional Apologetic is not content to declare himself *neutral* and to argue for the *possibility* that *a god* might exist (as so many popular apologetic systems do). Rather it boldly declares that the God of Scripture *does exist* and is the *necessary precondition* for all reality and knowing. Therefore, Christianity is the *only* rational view available to man. Dr. Bahnsen rightly calls this "nuclear strength apologetics." It is a take-no-prisoners approach to the war of the worldviews.

## I. Central Concerns

In this lesson we will note that Dr. Bahnsen highlights matters of personal freedom and human dignity. He already touched on the problem of personal freedom in his second lecture. In our fourth lesson (based on that lecture) we gave sufficient attention to the problem of personal freedom. You are encouraged to review that material in this connection. Here we will just briefly summarize his argument regarding human freedom in the current lecture, then we will turn our attention to the problem of human dignity.

Dr. Bahnsen points out that the naturalistic worldview cannot account for freedom. If naturalism is true, then naturalists have no reason to believe in naturalism. The naturalist says that all thinking is but the electro-chemical response of the gray matter in the material brain, and that these responses are determined by our environment.

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<sup>3</sup>Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 2.

Human thinking is on the same order as weeds growing. If naturalism is true, then the advocate of the naturalistic approach is only saying he affirms naturalism because nature has determined that he would. Naturalism contradicts freedom (and dignity). He has no reason for declaring naturalism to be true; he is just forced to say so.

### **The Worldview Importance of Dignity**

Human “dignity” deals with notions of the ethical value, personal respect, and inherent worth of human life. The question of human dignity is of enormous practical significance in both our mundane lives and our theoretical worldviews. It not only impacts our daily attitudes and our interaction with others but serves as the very foundation for human rights and a stable society.

In this portion of Dr. Bahnsen’s lecture he notes that at the practical and social levels, basic assumptions about human nature lead most unbelievers to distinguish man from the animals. In doing this they are tacitly affirming the dignity of human life. They even attempt to do this from within their evolutionary viewpoint which places man on a continuum with the animals, just higher up the ladder. Or as Aristotle would express it: higher up the “scale of being.”

One insightful way by which Dr. Bahnsen demonstrates our inherent sense of dignity is in our funerals. Throughout history and around the world burial services have been used to show love, respect, and appreciation for the deceased, as well as sympathy, concern, and affection for the family left behind. The services themselves are almost invariably attended with some sort of ceremony reflecting the belief system in the prevailing culture. According to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* “funeral rites are as old as

the human race itself. In the Shanidar cave in Iraq, Neanderthal skeletons have been discovered with a characteristic layer of pollen, which suggests that Neanderthals buried the dead with gifts of flowers.”<sup>4</sup>

Another significant way in which we see the human race’s assertion of dignity is through the establishment of law courts. Our legal system shows our inner realization of human dignity (believe it or not!). We underscore our sense of dignity and honor by creating social structures and framing legal codes designed to protect and encourage life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, property rights, reputations, and so forth. In fact, “the science of law . . . is but one of the several sciences that are concerned with men living in a social State. Sociology, ethics, politics, political economy, as well as history, biology and psychology, all have a common ground, for they are all more or less related to each other, and all are necessary to a proper understanding of each science.”<sup>5</sup> Our sense of dignity has enormous, wide-ranging implications for human culture.

Now how does this impact the apologetic argument? How shall we use this piece of information in order to perform an internal critique of the unbeliever’s worldview?

### **The Unbelievers Problem with Dignity**

Dr. Bahnsen sets up his Presuppositional critique of the unbelieving worldview with an interesting observation. He notes that only humans have a sense of dignity and that when we investigate the animal world, we do not see anything like a funeral for the deceased.

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<sup>4</sup>The *Wikipedia* entry on funerals surveys funeral customs in Ancient Rome, Japan, Africa, Scotland, and the United States. The study of funeral ossuaries (burial chests) are of great interest to archaeologists who have found innumerable ossuaries documenting funeral rites in ancient Persia, Babylon, Israel, and other cultures.

<sup>5</sup>John Maxcy Zane, *The Story of Law* 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Liberty Fund 1998), 2

Lions, for instance, have been known to sniff their dead relatives then consume them. Respect for the dead as evidenced in funerals and memorials is a distinctly human experience lacking any correspondence to animal activities.

As a Presuppositional Apologist, Dr. Bahnsen now asks the penetrating question: If man is an advanced animal and if our practices may be traced back to our animal ancestry, why can't we discover any primitive behavior in the animal response to death that evolved into our more advanced ceremonies? Why have humans universally expressed the dignity of human life in this way? Funerals are not examples of man being a "superior" animal with an advanced intelligence, as with our developing calculus, building aircraft, producing written literature, composing music, and other such intellectual activities. Neither may we claim that funerals have any survival benefit for the species of *homo sapiens*, as per evolutionary views of animal instincts. Rather, funerals point to our sense of dignity and recognition of personal values, which are wholly lacking in animals.

As is invariably the case, Dr. Bahnsen shows us that the non-believer can't *account for* human dignity. If there is no God in whose image we are created (animals are not images of God), why do we have a sense of human dignity? Why have we developed social practices emphasizing our inherent worth? Why have we established rituals confirming it or legal codes defending it? What *accounts* for human dignity?

The unbelieving world today *generally* affirms the dignity of all human life. We say "generally" because in recent times and up into our own day, large groups have denied the universal dignity of man. The Nazis in World War 2 obviously did not affirm

the inherent dignity of the Jews, denigrating them as “useless eaters.” Japan’s racist history is well-known.

The justification for chattel slavery as practiced in many Muslim lands today demonstrates their denial of universal human dignity. According to leading government cleric Sheikh Saleh Al-Fawzan: “Slavery is a part of Islam . . . . Slavery is part of jihad, and jihad will remain as long there is Islam.” This article went on to note: “Al-Fawzan is member of the Senior Council of Clerics, Saudi Arabia’s highest religious body, a member of the Council of Religious Edicts and Research, the Imam of Prince Mitaeb Mosque in Riyadh, and a professor at Imam Mohamed Bin Saud Islamic University, the main Wahhabi center of learning in the country.” Serge Trifkovic continues:

Contrary to the myth that Islam is a religion free from racial prejudice, slavery in the Moslem world has been, and remains, brutally racist in character. To find truly endemic, open, raw anti-Black racism and slavery today one needs to go to the two Islamic Republics in Africa: Mauritania and Sudan. Black people have been enslaved on such a scale that the term black has become synonymous with slave. The mixed-race, predominantly Negroid but self-avowedly “Arabic” denizens of the transitional sub-Saharan zone have been indoctrinated into treating their pure-black southern neighbors with racist disdain. (To this day it can be dangerous to one’s life to ask a dark-looking but Arabic-speaking Sudanese or Mauritanian Moslem if he is “black.”).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Serge Trifkovic, “Islam’s Wretched Record on Slavery,” *FrontPageMagazine.Com* (November 9, 2003) (<http://www.jihadwatch.org/archives/000081.php>).

But almost certainly any person with whom you may come into contact in our culture today will have some general notion of human dignity, even if he breaches it by subtle racism or some other sinful attitude. We need to press home the problem of human dignity to the unbeliever. Is it simply a human convention? If so, it may be changed by society. Then on what stable basis may we establish our law system which is designed to protect our lives and our rights?

### *Uncontrolled principle*

On the unbelieving principle the notion of dignity can't be reasonably controlled. Many popular views have even declared that *all* living things have dignity. For instance, the great humanitarian, theologian, and philosopher Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) wrote *Reverence for Life* wherein he declared this very principle even in his title. In his *Philosophy of Civilisation* he succinctly stated his view: “True philosophy must start from the most immediate and comprehensive fact of consciousness: ‘I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live.’” His respect for “all” life led to absurd conclusions. Jack Coulehan, who annotated Schweitzer’s biography, noted that “Schweitzer resisted modernization and didn’t keep his hospital as cleanly as his critics would have liked, but this resistance was based largely on his philosophy of ‘reverence for life,’ which had apparently led him, insofar as was possible, to respect even the lives of insects and bacteria.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>“Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database” (emphasis mine): <http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/lit-med-db/webdocs/webdescrips/schweitzer11876-des-.html>.



Mahtma Gandhi (1869–1947) was committed to Ahimsa, which still remains as a principle of the Jainist religion:

Literally translated Ahimsa means to be without harm; to be utterly harmless, not only to oneself and others, but to all forms of life, from the largest mammals to the smallest bacteria. . . . In following this discipline Jain monks may be observed treading and sweeping in their temples with the utmost of care so as to avoid accidentally crushing crawling insects, or wearing muslin cloths over their mouths in case they should accidentally swallow a fly.<sup>8</sup>

Extreme environmentalists often fall into this camp when they state such things as: “Respect for all life is also very important. This means you respect Planet Earth. You care for the environment, and you are *kind to all living things*.”<sup>9</sup> But, as Dr. Bahnsen observes, if that were true then even being a vegetarian wouldn’t make sense, for what of the dignity of carrots?<sup>10</sup>

Animal rights advocates are complaining against our limiting the notion of dignity to humans. They are calling for laws that affirm dignity for *all* animal life:

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<sup>8</sup>“Jain Living,” on the BBC website:  
[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/jainism/living/living2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/jainism/living/living2.shtml)

<sup>9</sup>World Youth Network International, “IQ-EQ-SQ”:  
[www.worldyouthnetwork.com/PDF/5th.pdf](http://www.worldyouthnetwork.com/PDF/5th.pdf) Emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup>A comedian once said: “I am not a vegetarian because I love animals but because I hate plants.” Another pondered: “If God did not mean for us to eat animals, why did he make them out of meat?”

The most commonly stated basis for international human rights is human dignity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set the stage with Article I, to which all subsequent human rights treaties refer. Article I states, “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” . . .

Human dignity traditionally has been defined by legal theorists and philosophers in a manner that derives from arrant human chauvinism. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, relying on a speciesist definition of human dignity undermines the cogency of human rights because it is scientifically and philosophically untenable. Second, basing human rights on irrational or metaphysical concepts makes it more difficult to debunk speciesism because of the subsequent recognition that legal rights are manufactured. With the goal of scientific and multi-cultural legitimacy, international human rights law might otherwise refer to non-metaphysical and permanent bases. This requires eradicating the species-based element.<sup>11</sup>

This article in a prominent law journal complains that “throughout most of documented history, humans have denied other animals legal rights and recognition as legal persons with two justifications: the ‘theological basis’ and a ‘secular expression of species

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<sup>11</sup>Kyle Ash, “International Animal Rights: Speciesism and Exclusionary Human Dignity,” *Journal of Animal Law*, Michigan State University College of Law (11) 196: [www.animallaw.info/journals/jo\\_pdf/vol11\\_p195.pdf](http://www.animallaw.info/journals/jo_pdf/vol11_p195.pdf)

pride.”<sup>12</sup> Notice the slam against our Christian worldview and its basis for human dignity. He laments that metaphysical considerations have not allowed for a proper valuation of animal worth, and calls for laws that meet evolutionary expectations in this regard: “Until recently, the metaphysical presupposition that humans are not animals has inhibited the interplay between human psychology, anthropology, and sociology with primatology and biological evolution— and vice versa.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Materialist Impediments*

In the materialist worldview we are just bundles of genetic information. What dignity inheres in a collection of DNA strands? Once again we are seeing the enormous (and dangerous!) complications arising from the disavowal of metaphysics and the dominance of pure empiricism in science, as we will now note. In reviewing a book by a biogeneticist, Dinesh D’Souza observes that:

In this view, the subjective preferences of those who seek to mystify human life do not square with the truths about human biology taught by science. The cells of human beings, Silver points out, are not different in their chemical makeup from the cells of horses and bacteria. If there is such a thing as human dignity, Silver argues, it derives exclusively from consciousness, from our ability to perceive and apprehend our environment. “The human mind,” Silver writes, “is much more than the

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<sup>12</sup>Ash, “International Animal Rights: Speciesism and Exclusionary Human Dignity,” 197.

<sup>13</sup>Kyle Ash, “International Animal Rights: Speciesism and Exclusionary Human Dignity” *Journal of Animal Law*, Michigan State University College of Law (11), 206.

genes that brought it into existence.” Somehow the electrochemical reactions in our brain produce consciousness, and it is this consciousness, Silver contends, that is the source of man’s autonomy and power. . . . Genes fully control the activity of all life forms.<sup>14</sup>

This problem can be demonstrated over and again throughout the technical literature. Cornell University Professor of Biology and leading historian of biology, William Provine writes: “The implications of modern science, however, are clearly inconsistent with most religious tradition. . . . No inherent moral or ethical laws exist, nor are there absolute guiding principles for human society. The universe cares nothing for us and we have no ultimate meaning in life.”<sup>15</sup> His atheist worldview comes clearly to expression in this statement. This certainly precludes any justification of human dignity.

J. D. Bernal (1901–1971), past Professor of Physics at University of London and pioneer in x-ray crystallography, gave the following evolutionary definition of life: “Life is a partial, continuous, progressive, multiform and continually interactive, self-realization of the potentialities of atomic electron states.”<sup>16</sup> Are electron states dignified?

In his famous letter to William Graham on July 3, 1881, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) wrote: “But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has always been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s

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<sup>14</sup>Dinesh D’Souza, “Staying Human: The Danger of Techno-utopia,” *National Review* (January 22, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>William Provine, “Scientists, Face It! Science and Religion Are Incompatible,” *The Scientist*, 5 (September 1988), 10.

<sup>16</sup>J. D. Bernal, *The Origin of Life* (New York: Universe Books, 1967), xv

mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”<sup>17</sup> Renowned research psychologist B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) put the matter pointedly: “To man qua man [man as a human being] we readily say good riddance.”<sup>18</sup> So much for human dignity.

Well-known biologist William Etkin writes that: “We are but fish made over . . . somewhat like the original design of a house that has been remodeled.”<sup>19</sup> The more consistent unbeliever presses for a more fully self-conscious naturalism when *urging the removal of ethical constraints* upon scientific research. In the materialist worldview, life is not sacred and ethics is contra-scientific. Dinesh D’Souza explains:

Nor are the techno-utopians worried about diminishing the sanctity of human life because, they say, it isn’t intrinsically sacred. “This is not an ethical argument but a religious one,” says Silver. “There is no logic to it.” Biologist David Baltimore, a Nobel laureate, argues that ‘statements about morally and ethically unacceptable practices’ have no place in the biotechnology debate “because those are subjective grounds and therefore provide no basis for discussion.” Silver and Baltimore’s shared assumption is that the moralists are talking about values while they, the hard scientists, are dealing in facts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Nutley, N. J.: Craig, 1967).

<sup>18</sup>Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 229.

<sup>19</sup>Davidheiser, *Evolution and Christian Faith*, 157.

<sup>20</sup>Dinesh D’Souza, “Staying Human: The Danger of Techno-utopia” *National Review* (January 22, 2001).

### *Chance Confusion*

In the final analysis, we must ask our standard apologetic question: What meaning does dignity have in a chance Universe? In a review of a book on the possibility of extra-terrestrial life (which was written by a Professor of Natural History, Paul Davies) we find a telling comment. Reviewer Gregory Kouki writes that: Davies “has some interesting thoughts about the impact of the idea of evolution on the notion of human value and dignity. If you believe that we are the result of the natural processes of cause and effect, you end up with a serious problem with value, purpose, worth and dignity. *It is hard to argue that someone who is an accident of the universe has some kind of special destiny.*”<sup>21</sup>

Renowned Harvard University Professor of Paleontology, Stephen Jay Gould (1941–2002) declared: “human existence occupied but the last geological millimicrosecond of this history—the last inch of the cosmic mile, or the last second of the geological year . . . . If humanity arose just yesterday as a small twig on one branch of a flourishing tree, then life may not, in any genuine sense, exist for us or because of us. Perhaps we are only an afterthought, a kind of *cosmic accident*, just one bauble on the Christmas tree of evolution.”<sup>22</sup>

Evolutionist J. W. Burrow, Professor of European Thought, Oxford University, wrote the introduction for a new edition of *The Origin of Species*: “Nature, according to Darwin, was the product of *blind chance* and a blind struggle, and man a lonely, intelligent mutation, scrambling with the brutes for his sustenance. To some the sense of

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<sup>21</sup>“Chance and Dignity” ([www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5202](http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5202)). Emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup>Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 44. Emphasis add.

loss was irrevocable; it was as if an umbilical cord had been cut, and men found themselves part of “a cold passionless universe.” Unlike nature as conceived by the Greeks, the Enlightenment, and the rationalist Christian tradition Darwinian nature held no clues for human conduct, no answers to human moral dilemmas.”<sup>23</sup>

Bertrand Russell saw man as a cosmic accident, devoid of meaning:

Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief. Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of *accidental collocations* of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>J. W. Burrow, introduction in J. W. Burrow, ed., *Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1974), 43. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup>Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man’s Worship: Mysticism and Logic* (New York: George Allen and Unwin, 1917), 46

Nobel Prize winning, Harvard University Professor of Biology George Wald (1906–1997) was once asked who in his view was Shakespear? He answered: “A *chance* collection of molecules that existed 400 yrs ago.”<sup>25</sup> Highly respected anthropologist Loren Eiseley (1907–1977), who headed the Anthropology Department of the University of Pennsylvania, once commented: “Man did not have to be any more than a butterfly or a caterpillar. He merely emerged from that infinite void for which we have no name.”<sup>26</sup>

We must recall that chance can’t account for morality or universals.

Consequently, it can’t affirm human dignity. What is the meaning of dignity in a chance Universe? Chance destroys the very possibility of meaning and significance, taking down with it the notion of dignity. Gregory Kouki highlights the problems of materialism and chance in accounting for human dignity:

Why does science rob human beings of their dignity? Science has limited its area of study to the area of natural occurrences. Not only has it limited its search to that area, but it has essentially said that that is the only area that really exists. This is called philosophic naturalism. If only nature exists, then it turns out that we are merely parts of the machinery in the workings of nature, and we are the unwitting victims of the machinery of cause and effect happening over time without any plan. That robs human beings of their dignity. Clearly, if we are the product of chance, then we

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<sup>25</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1967), 164. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup>Cited in Bolton Davidheiser, *Evolution and Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 149.



have no purpose. It seems hard to argue that we are anything different than anything else on this earth that has resulted from the process of evolution.

The claim that we have some kind of peculiar dignity turns out to be a kind of species-ism. We arbitrarily view our species as qualitatively more valuable than other species, but the fact of the matter is that in nature that just isn't the case. Davies acknowledges that if we are stuck with philosophic naturalism, we are robbed of unique value and dignity, and we become one of many living organisms that are qualitatively indistinguishable.

One might argue that we are more sophisticated in our evolutionary accomplishment, but what separates us from the rest? Nothing. That's a value judgment, and there are no value judgments like that that make any sense in nature because nature is value-less. Values are a philosophic construct. They are a theological and moral notion and have no place, strictly speaking, in a world that is simply defined by scientific law.<sup>27</sup>

Dignity does not rest on anything in the evolutionary Universe. It defies the law of gravity, so to speak, and just hangs there—if it is affirmed at all. As it has been put, an atheist is someone with no visible means of support. At best, dignity is simply a human convention. And when affirmed, it becomes a contradiction in the unbeliever's worldview. Our Presuppositionalist challenge must point out this dialectical tension.

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<sup>27</sup>Gregory Kouki, "Chance and Dignity":  
[www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=520](http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=520)

Nancy Pearcey observes the destruction of freedom and dignity in the evolutionary worldview, mentioning its contradictory implications:

Similar self-contradictions are endemic in the literature on evolutionary psychology. A prime example is *The Moral Animal*, where author Robert Wright spends hundreds of pages describing human beings as “robots,” “puppets,” “machines,” and “Swiss watches” programmed by natural selection. He insists that “biochemistry governs all” and that free will is sheer illusion. He unmasks our noblest moral impulses as survival “stratagems of the genes,” as mere devices “switched on and off in keeping with self-interest.” But then, in a grand leap of faith, Wright insists that we are now free to choose our moral ideals, and he urges us to practice “brotherly love” and “boundless empathy.”

This persistent inner contradiction stems from the fact that evolutionary psychology is essentially a search for a secular morality. Darwinism cut the modern world loose from religious traditions and systems of meaning; the result is a culture adrift in a sea of relativism. Now Darwinism is itself being plumbed as a source of meaning, a cosmic guide for the problems of living. Yet the Darwinist view of human nature is so negative, so counter to traditional notions of human dignity, morality, and reason (not to mention common sense), that there is an almost irresistible impulse to take a leap of faith back to those traditional notions, no matter how unsupported by the theory. For who can live with a theory

that tells us that “ethics is illusory,” and that ‘morality is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends,’ in the words of Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson? Who can live with a theory that tells us that if ‘natural selection is both sufficient and true, it is impossible for a genuinely disinterested or “altruistic behavior pattern to evolve,” in the words of M. T. Ghiselin?<sup>28</sup>

### **The Christian View**

The Christian view of man’s dignity is affirmed in our Declaration of Independence which rightly declares that men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Scripture repeatedly establishes the firm basis of human dignity, declaring that man exists as the image of the eternal God (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; James 3:9). The psalmist declares that God made man “a little lower than God” (Ps. 8:5).

Our value is underscored by the fact that the Son of God took upon himself true humanity in order to redeem us from our sins. “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14–15; cp. Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7–8).

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<sup>28</sup>Nancy Pearcey, “Singer in the Rain,” a review of Peter Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation in First Things* 106 (Oct., 2000), 57–63: [www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0010/reviews/pearcey.html](http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0010/reviews/pearcey.html)

Our holy God even provided for us in Scripture a system of morality and of law that establish special protections for man, affirming his dignity. The fundamental law in this regard is the Sixth Commandment: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). This law is specifically established on the underlying reality of the image of God within: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6). This core law is applied in numerous ways in the case laws of the Old Testament and the moral principles of the New Testament. Jesus even applies it to hatred of another human (Matt. 5:21–22).

The Scriptures speak of the high value of reputation and a name, even preferring them over gold. “A good name is to be more desired than great riches, favor is better than silver and gold” (Prov. 22:1). “A good name is better than a good ointment” (Eccl. 7:1). It also laments shame, which strikes at one’s dignity and honor (Ps. 31:17; 69:19; Prov. 13:18; 1 Cor. 11:22).

Robert Reilly expresses the unbeliever’s problem well in *Intercollegiate Review*: “The problem is that, by denying the possibility of a relationship between God and man, atheism also denies the possibility of a just relationship between men. . . . Human life is sacred only if there is a God to sanctify it. Otherwise man is just another collection of atoms and can be treated as such.”<sup>29</sup> Philosopher Patrick D. Hopkins summarizes the non-believing view of man:

This view essentially represents humans as moderately smart, moderately conscious, moderately creative, physically weak, emotional, social, and

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<sup>29</sup>Robert R. Reilly, “Atheism and Arms Control,” *Intercollegiate Review*, 24 (Fall 1988), 15.

mortal animals participating in an ongoing evolutionary process absent any grand purpose or design. We are born, live, eat, excrete, think, feel, create, emote, organize, rank, compete, cooperate, and die. Although we are certainly more intelligent, and probably more conscious and much more self-conscious than other animals, we are essentially the same as animals, differing only in degree and not kind, and not differing as much as we typically think. We are not metaphysically unique; we do not rank between angels and beasts; we are not embodied souls.<sup>30</sup>

In short, we can see clearly “the impossibility of the contrary.” Only Christianity provides “the preconditions for intelligibility.” The unbelieving worldview destroys even the dignity of human life, thereby undermining even the motive to argue against the Christian. In fact, he can’t even account for his argument with the believer over the matter of human freedom, for in his view we are just subject to the laws of physics.

## **II. Exegetical Observations**

In our twelve lessons we have had many opportunities to refer to Genesis 1 and the creation of man. The book of Genesis is extremely important to the Christian worldview in that it declares the origin of man and the Universe by the sovereign power of God. It also speaks to the very essence of what it is to be human and to possess dignity. Let us reflect briefly upon man’s creation and its implications for his exalted personal dignity.

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<sup>30</sup>Patrick D. Hopkins, “Transcending the Animal: How Transhumanism and Religion Are and Are Not Alike,” *Journal of Evolution Technology* 14:1 (August, 2005), 13–14: [www.jetpress.org/volume14/hopkins.html#\\_edn2](http://www.jetpress.org/volume14/hopkins.html#_edn2)

In Genesis 1 and 2 we find the Creator's account of man's origin. Rather than researching the genetic code for his ascension from mud, you should be reading the Genesis record for his creation by God. Genesis speaks eloquently of man's honor and dignity as the creation of the rational God contrary to his evolution by irrational chance. Let us survey some of the angles in Genesis pointing to man's dignity.

*Man is the apex of creation.* In the creation account we discover a well-ordered, flowing narrative outlining six days of God's creative activity. Old Testament commentator Derek Kidner states that "the march of the days is too majestic a progress to carry no implication of ordered sequence; it also seems over-subtle to adopt a view of the passage which discounts one of the primary impressions it makes on the ordinary reader."<sup>31</sup> In fact, Days 1 through 5 establish the environment for man in which he will live. The vegetation is for his food (Gen. 1:29); the animals are for him to rule over (Gen. 1:26).

Day 6, then, appears as the last stage of the rapidly unfolding creation process. Man forms the special climax to God's creative activity. The sixth day is therefore the grand finale of creation, setting man off as the goal and high point of God's labor of love.

*Man is created after the inter-Trinitarian counsel.* After God creates all else by his mere spoken word, he prepares to create man. And he does so with a distinctive inter-Trinitarian counsel: "Let us create man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). The plural expression "let us" alludes to persons of the Trinity and not to angels, in that: God alone is the Creator (Gen. 1:1; Neh. 9:6); man is created in only God's image (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9); God the Son (John 1:3; Col. 1:17) and God the Spirit (Gen. 1:2) are associated with God

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<sup>31</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 54–55.

the Father in creation. This deliberative counsel underscores the significance of man's creation for the narrative.

*Man is created as the image of God.* The text clearly establishes man's distinctiveness in his being the very image of God: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:26–27).

The Scripture shows various ways in which man images God. God speaks ("then God said," 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, etc.); man speaks (Gen. 3:9–10). God makes things (Gen. 1:7; 16; 31; 2:3); Adam cultivates the garden (Gen. 2:8) and his sons make things (Gen. 4:20–24). God "names" the elements of creation ("God called," Gen. 1:5, 8, 10); man names the animals (Gen. 2:19) and his wife (Gen. 2:23). God exercises dominion (Gen. 1:1, 31); man is given dominion over the creatures (Gen. 1:26, 28). God rests from his labors (Gen. 2:2; 31:17); man specially follows that pattern of rest (Ex. 20:9–11). Man images God.

*Man is created in intimacy by God.* In Genesis 1 *Elohim* (translated "God") appears throughout the creation account. *Elohim* acts as "the mighty one" who accomplishes the creation of the entire universe (Gen. 1:1; 2:1, 4) effortlessly by his mere word (eight quick *fiats* spread over six brief days). But in Genesis 2, rather than emphasizing the power of the Creator, Moses emphasizes his intimate relationship: God and man are in covenant. This is indicated by Moses' importing the covenant name ("Jehovah," translated as "Lord") into the context of the creation of man (Gen. 2:7).

Furthermore, God lovingly forms man's body and breathes into him the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), whereas animals were massed produced (1:20, 24).

*Man is created to commune with God.* In Genesis 3 we find the casual remark that God was "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" and looking for Adam (Gen. 3:8–9). God conversed with man, when he informed him of his abundant provision (Gen. 2:16) and his moral limits (Gen. 2:17). Also when he sought him out in the garden (Gen. 3:9–11). As the psalmist effused: "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?" (Ps. 8:4)." Throughout Scripture we see God not only communing with man, but preparing a means whereby man might approach him in worship, prayer, and fellowship (e.g., Ps. 42:2; 96:8).

*Man is created as a moral person.* With creation accomplished in Genesis 1:1–2:3, we read Genesis 2:4. The first words of Genesis 2:4 introduce a new section that focuses on man and his moral probation in the garden: "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created." Genesis 2:4b begins with the Hebrew expression, "in the day that" which is an idiom for "when." Thus 2:4b reads: "When Jehovah God made the earth and the heavens." The author is assuming the creation of the earth and heavens has been completed. Indeed, he has just finished narrating the account of the creation in chapter 1. So with the creation in the background he begins to set up the story of man—and his moral fall.

Rather than plunging right into the story, though, he begins by giving some background information about the events of Day 6. The first thing he tells about the creation up through Day 5 is that there were no wild desert shrubs growing on the earth nor was there any cultivated grain. A reason is given for the absence of both. There were



no wild shrubs because God had not sent rain and no cultivated grain because there was no man to work the soil: “Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground” (Gen. 2:5).

In Genesis 2:5 Moses is not saying that there was no vegetation at all during this time, but that there was an absence of *specific kinds* of vegetation. He had previously told us that God created seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees on the 4th day (Gen. 1:11–12). Here he informs us that there were no wild desert shrubs and cultivated grains. When Adam’s creation is narrated just after this remark, we discover that he did not have to hack through wild weeds and brambles, nor did he have to break his back by hoeing. Rather, God created a productive, peaceable, pleasant environment for Adam (Gen. 2:8–14). Only later will brambles appear and hoeing become necessary—*after Adam rebels against his Creator* (Gen. 3:17–18). God had warned him of the death-dealing consequences of moral failure (Gen. 2:16–17).

*Man is created to rule responsibly.* In Genesis 1 we note that the animals are not appointed to “rule.” Only *man* is to rule. In fact, he is to rule *over the sea, air, and land creatures* (Gen 1:26, 28). God *expressly* declares this. The psalmist praises God for putting man over the creatures (Ps. 8:6–8). Nowhere is man to share rule with the animals; man names the animals (exercises authority over them) as he begins ruling them (Gen. 2:20). In fact, an important feature in the historical fall of Adam is his allowing an animal (the serpent) to exercise rule over him (Gen. 3:1–7, 14–15).

Thus, man has both a basic constitutional urge to exercise dominion as a result of his being created in God’s image *and* a fundamental responsibility to do so as a result of

his being commanded in the Creation Mandate. Man's distinctive task in God's world in accordance with God's plan is to develop culture. Therefore, we learn that:

*Man is created as an inventive being.* Interestingly, early fallen man was driven to cultural exploits well beyond the expectations of humanistic anthropologists and sociologists. We see the effect and significance of the Creation Mandate very early in history in the culture-building exploits of Adam's offspring. In the Bible man is seen acting as a dominical creature, subduing the earth and developing culture, even despite the entry of sin. Man quickly developed various aspects of social culture: raising livestock, creating music, crafting tools from metal, and so forth (Gen. 4:20–22). Upon his very creation, not only was man commanded to develop all of God's creation, but he actually began to do so.

In all of this, we uncover clear and compelling evidence of man's *dignity*. He is the God-intended apex of creation. He is created after special inter-Trinitarian counsel. He is created as the very image of God and for the purpose of communion with him. He is distinctly a moral person called to rule in the earth and develop culture to the glory of God. Christianity affirms man's dignity and provides its necessary preconditions for intelligibility.

### **III. Questions Raised**

1. What does the phrase "epistemological self-conscious" mean? Why is it significant as an apologetic tool?
2. Define the concept of "dignity" as involved in the concept of "human dignity." How is it important for our daily lives? For our social lives?

3. What two illustrations of our dignity does Dr. Bahnsen present? Explain his use of them in apologetics.
4. Though most Americans accept the notion of human dignity, not all people do. List some samples of widespread disavowal of human dignity.
5. State some historical examples of the problem of overstating the dignity of life (without Christian worldview constraints).
6. How does materialism destroy the notion of human dignity?
7. What is the ultimate problem the unbelieving worldview has in attempting to affirm human dignity?
8. Outline the Christian case for human dignity.

#### **IV. Practical Applications**

1. Try to think of some contemporary issues that are affected by one's view of human dignity. Jot down a list and write a paragraph on how the Christian view resolves the issue. Samples would include euthanasia and abortion.
2. Read a few of the news items at The Center for Bioethics & Dignity. Copy three articles for your files that are directly related to the worldview debate over the dignity of man. (<http://www.cbhd.org/news/index.html>).
3. Research the Internet and find evolutionist statements that affirm human dignity. Read the articles and draw out from them the means by which the evolutionist attempts to establish human dignity. Jot down some of the problems you see in their reasoning. File these into your apologetics file.

4. Review our “Exegetical Concerns” above. See if you can draw up other lines of evidence underscoring the Christian foundation for human dignity.
5. Research various websites calling for human rights as a concern for civil government. Develop two lists. In one list include all those sites that bring God into the equation. In the other list include those that make no mention of God or religion. File these into your apologetics file.
6. Using your research from point 5 above, read over the statements that do mention God and religion. Jot down the type of religion or “god” mentioned in the statements. Make a list of the problems in trying to establish human rights on a generic view of God or religion in general.

## **V. Recommended Reading**

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