

DAILY DOCTRINAL REFLECTION

Objective Natural Law/Moral Law

As we have been noting in our last few Bible class, there really are only two foundations upon which one can build moral law. There is the subjective method and the objective method. Although the subjective method has been the method of choice for most of history, even among believers, it is my contention that it is inherently anti-Christian and anti-God.

The subjective foundation rests upon one's Dasein (historical situatedness). The validity of these laws rests on such things as volition (by arbitrary will man decides what is right), power ("might makes right"), pragmatism, one's culture, and consensus. In sum, man decides what is right based on arbitrary subjective factors. If moral laws were based on these factors, then there is no basis to condemn the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials since the Nazis carefully followed German law that was established by German will, power, pragmatism, culture, and consensus among the rulers.

We are often very quick to condemn the idea that might makes right or that some people are less than human than others without reflecting on our own American history in taking Indian lands and enslaving Indians and Blacks. It is not like there were not colonists at the time protesting this activity based on natural law, which is the only epistemological basis for an objective morality that is universal, timeless, and intelligible. Thomas Jefferson, in his first draft of the Declaration of Independence called out King George III for his support of horrendous slave trade that was against human "nature." The principles of John Locke, the architect of American concepts of life, liberty, and property, clearly granted the right of property to Native Americans. John Winthrop desired to pay the Indians for their land. Many called out the colonists for their hypocrisy. As Thomas Day in 1776 put it, "If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot signing resolutions of independence with the one hand, and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves."

The goal here is not to stir up guilt or push for reparations. The point is that there is a moral objective law and that law was violated with reference to Blacks and Native Americans. The only possible defense for treating them less than humans would be to construct moral law on the basis of volition, power, pragmatism, culture, or consensus, rather than some objective natural law. The fact that this natural law was well known among them is obvious for it was on the basis of natural law that they declared their freedom from the King. It was on the basis of natural law that they claimed that there should be liberty and justice for all men. Of course, only white males were considered men. Other human beings would not get the right to vote for their governmental leaders until after the Civil War and Women's Suffrage, even though all were supposed to have the right to vote after votes were granted to naturalized citizens when the property requirement was dropped. In sum, either Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, and many others were right in conscience when they stated that slavery and taking of another's property was a moral violation of natural law or they were right in practice when they succumbed to others who insisted on slavery and the taking of other's property. If they were alive today, is there any question of what they would say? Now that we have grown up in many respects to natural law, would anyone say

that slavery was a morally right thing at the time? If so, then one's view by definition is not timeless, let alone universal or intelligible.

As far as biblical hermeneutics, understanding natural law has enormous ramifications for biblical interpretation. For one, one cannot justify slavery or taking someone else's land because it is in the Bible. Grasping natural law enables one to properly see God's commands regarding slavery within the context of and subordinate to God's natural law, which itself is ontologically based on Esse's eternal law, and epistemologically known by human nature—which is the exact term our Founders used to establish a government (social contract mixed with natural law) that would protect the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Freedom and justice to all means precisely that. Such a freedom is not morally grounded in power, consensus, or pragmatism. It is grounded in objective human nature as such or it is not valid in the eyes of God.

Thank God that there is an objective, timeless, moral law that we can access and thus escape the American Dasein and our own personal prejudices and thus truly be free. Consider the ramifications if there was no objective moral law that is universal, timeless, and intelligible: there would be no objective true human rights, we could not know justice or injustice, we could not measure moral differences, we could not know what was right or wrong, we would have no basis for political dissent, we could not condemn immorality, and we could not respond to those who criticize the Bible for allowing such things as polygamy or to those who criticize Jesus for never telling his followers that they should fight for political freedom.

Only in Total Truth, Whole Truth, can one see the whole beautiful picture of objective truth and thus true morality that really is objective, universal, timeless, and intelligible regardless of our feelings. Why would any Christian settle for anything else?

Continuously actualized by Esse's eternal law,

Pastor Don