

WHY DOES HUMAN LIFE MATTER?

You can only get so far in the abortion debate before you eventually run up against the bigger and overarching question of human existence. This is a good thing. We would do well to think more deeply about what it means to be human and why human life is significant. Virtually every pro-life argument hangs on the notion that the humanity of unborn children qualifies them for recognition and protection. Pro-lifers can argue this way because our country, both in law and practice, places a unique value upon human life, giving us rights that transcend those of all other life forms.

Nevertheless, while our society clearly operates on the premise that there is something special, unique and noble in being human, the philosophical basis for such a conclusion grows increasingly vague. Almost everyone lives on the assumption that human life *does* matter, but if you press them, very few are able to tell you why. Even the earth-worshippers who decry the destructive environmental influence of the human species rarely put their rhetoric into action and actually kill themselves. People can say (as some have) that human beings are no more valuable than slugs, but nobody really lives like that. We are all born with the innate conviction that our life does matter. It is only the rationale for such persuasion that we need work on.

Ultimately, human life matters because God matters, and God is the author of human life (Genesis 2: 7). The unique significance of human existence does not stop here, though. Not only did God create human beings, but Genesis 1:26-27 and James 3:9 tell us that God created us in His own image. This is huge. It is an honor and responsibility bestowed upon no other creature in all the universe. Even the angels, while bearing a moral responsibility similar to human beings (though without the opportunity for redemption) are never said to have been made in the image of God.

Those who argue against the transcendent value of human life often do so on a genetic basis, pointing out that humans, in terms of our physical make up, are roughly 95% identical to Chimpanzees. This misses the point entirely. Humans are not physically or genetically superior to the rest of the planet, we are “spiritually” superior, for the simple fact that God made us in His image. It is not an external likeness (God is Spirit and has no body), but rather an internal, moral, spiritual and relational likeness. The very ability to ponder the essence of existence is itself a manifestation of this reality.

It is not the raw genetic material which gives human beings significance, it is the unique attention given to us by our Creator. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is not valued for the pigment that makes it up but rather for the form given it by a master craftsman. Human value, in the same way, is a combination of the supreme worth of Him who created us and the place we hold in the body of His creative work. We can be assured that any painting Michelangelo ever produced, no matter what the aesthetic merit, would be extremely valuable today for the mere fact that Michelangelo painted it. Likewise, everything that God creates has value simply because God is God, but humans, like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, stand out as the pinnacle of God’s creation. As such, human beings have a value which goes well beyond the rest of God’s creative work.

For those who refuse to believe that God is the author and creator of human life, they have no basis for assigning to human beings any special significance. The secular, humanist worldview has no answer for why human life matters. The only answer it can give us is that life doesn’t matter. We are all just random accidents whose life is not a result of thought or design, but rather of blind chance. Human existence could have just as easily never happened as happened. This has been taught in most public schools for

the last few decades, but despite the massive endorsement it receives from the academic community, evolution is a worldview that people can accept in theory but not in practice. Evolutionists the world over still manage to live their lives on the assumption that life matters, that life is good, and there is a reason for their being. Even animal rights advocates expect of humanity what they do not expect from the animal kingdom at large. When they urge their fellow humans to refrain from eating meat and to refrain from hunting or killing animals, they demand a type of behavior which certainly isn't kept among the carnivorous "lower" animals. Such expectation reveals something. It reveals that for all their talk of animal equality, they know that humans are qualitatively different.

The reason that so many people reject the plain biblical explanation of human origins and human significance is because of the moral requirement inherent in such acceptance. Anyone who yields to the authority of the Bible must concede that every human being to ever live is morally accountable to a Holy and perfect Judge. Moral culpability, in fact, is one of the major dividing lines between man and beast. Unlike the rest of the world's creations, humans were created with the freedom to rebel against their Creator, and Genesis tells us that this rebellion began at the very outset of human history. Deep-down, underneath all of the baggage and all of the humanist ideology, all of us, atheists and agnostics alike, know there is a God. Scripture makes it clear.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:18-25

The natural man, man left to his own devices, will always suppress the truth about God, so as to pursue his own selfish appetites. Those whom God does not rescue from such pursuits are eventually given over completely to them. They suppress the truth about God until they cease to believe in Him altogether. Ironically, it is not the hedonistic drive, itself, that has led so many souls to damnation. Souls are condemned not for seeking pleasure, but for pursuing it in the sinful wastelands that have no capacity to satisfy the human soul. Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis notes that:

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the reward promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

In the end, the value of one human soul transcends the value of the whole of the material universe. One human soul is more valuable than the Sistine chapel and all of Michelangelo's other work put together. One human soul is more valuable than all the art and the architecture and jewels and precious metals the world has ever known. This is true not because humans are further along the evolutionary chain, but because we were created in the very image of God and will exist for the rest of eternity either in heaven or hell. If you reject this premise, it is unlikely that you will ever be able to find a sufficient basis for condemning the killing of unborn human children. Of course, such rejection also makes it impossible to condemn the killing of human beings in general. Without an absolute moral standard, even the most heinous "evil" in the universe, by definition, ceases to exist. We can't have it both ways. Either God made us and assigned to us a special value, or God didn't make us, and human life is utterly meaningless.

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1949, 1976, 1980, p 25.