

The Metaethical Implications of Creation Ordinances

Abstract

It is necessary to answer the metaethical question of foundations if one is to construct an ethical theory resulting in a coherent and workable practice. This work identifies a threefold structure with which to define and delineate the Biblical Creation Ordinances—these constitute decrees ordering nature and man, reappear in the Decalogue and are fulfilled in Christ. This leads to a sufficient definition of ethics. Ethics are: Direction giving (i.e., authoritative), personal in nature, they presuppose moral freedom and are abstract, invariant and universal. Only the Triune God of Scripture can account for these essential elements in defining ethics or morality. Therefore, it is both God's ordering of creation and His personal, holy being that constitutes the metaethical foundation for ethics. Any theory that ignores this will be unworkable or will necessarily borrow from the Christian worldview. Finally, emerging from the divine ordering of nature and consistent with the correlative definition of ethics is the need for an ethical theory that includes the three components of deontology, teleology and virtue that is centered in a Christian theistic context.

Introduction

Why be ethical? Are ethics simply a matter of choice or are they absolute and objective? In the language of philosophy, is there a metaethical foundation for the rules and practice of morality?¹ Is there any universal order from which to draw upon in the sphere of morality?

Mankind has a long history of seeing order in the universe—both in the natural and the ethical realms. In fact, it has been rightly argued that with the “significant exception of the modern West,” this has been true throughout history.² The different peoples of the Ancient Near East used various terms to communicate the idea of cosmic and ethical order—*me, parsu, mesaru, kittu*, and *ma'at*.³ The Greco-Roman world spoke of the *cosmos*, the *logos* and natural law.⁴ We see these last few terms, especially, “natural law,” used by the early and later Church Fathers.⁵ In *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, Augustine wrote, “Sin then, is any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the *eternal law*. And the eternal law is *the divine order or will of God*, which requires the preservation of natural order, and forbids the breach of it” (emphasis mine).⁶

An interesting shift began to take place with the writings of Abraham Kuyper.⁷ While still using the expression, “laws of Nature,” Kuyper hints at his displeasure with the phrase. You begin to see his penchant for using the expression “ordinances” instead. This minor, but significant, word usage continued with Bavinck⁸ and into modern systematic theologies.⁹ You also find with Kuyper and Bavinck (and as far back as John Calvin) recognition of a unique class of ordinances given at creation—what would come to be known as Creation Ordinances. John Murray,

¹ I will be using the terms “ethic” and “morality” (as well as their derivatives) synonymously throughout this paper.

² Albert M. Wolters, “Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage,” 43.

³ See

⁴ See

⁵ See Michael Muñoz, “Creation Ordinances and Culture,” chapter 4, unpublished Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary.

⁶ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, 22.27.

⁷ See especially, his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁸ See Herman Bavinck,

⁹ Muñoz, “Creation Ordinances and Culture,” chapter 5.

in his book, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*, illustrates well the use of Creation Ordinances as foundational to Christian ethics. He wrote that creation ordinances, “furnish us with what is central in the biblical ethic.”¹⁰

While secular ethicists of the late 20th century have attempted to find metaethical foundations in things like happiness, preferences, “enduring meaning in our lives,”¹¹ universalisability or well being,¹² these systems continue to fail. This failure is due to the inability of an atheistic, materialistic and mechanistic worldview to adequately establish any kind of objectivity to this endeavor. What system is adequate to this task?

Decrees of God

Christian theologians and philosophers have long understood the need for an adequate metaethical foundation upon which to construct a coherent and workable ethical practice. This foundation would have to adequately account for the authoritative nature of ethics, its universality and personal application. The concept of creation ordinances, a proper recognition of their source, and a right application to ethical theory can supply the needed metaethic.

Historically, the creation ordinances have been identified as labor and dominion, marriage and multiplication, and Sabbath.¹³ The most obvious reason for this is that these mandates are found in the first two chapters of Genesis in the “creation” account. Two important questions must, however, be answered. First, what is meant by the term “ordinance?” And, second, what is the proper understanding of these ordinances? Because these two questions are so tightly intertwined with one another, we can answer them simultaneously. The creation ordinances of Gene-

¹⁰ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 44.

¹¹ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 332.

¹² See the works of Peter Singer, Sam Harris,

¹³ John Murray delineated them as, “The procreation of offspring, the replenishing of the earth, subduing of the same, dominion over the creatures, labor, the weekly Sabbath, and marriage.” *Principles of Conduct*, 27.

sis one and two have a threefold structure: they are divine decrees ordering both nature and man (thus, supplying the situational context to ethics), they reappear in the Decalogue (thus, supplying the normative context to ethics), and they are fulfilled in Christ (thus, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, supplying ethical ability).¹⁴

In creating man, God established a unique set of creation ordinances. These ordinances—labor and dominion, marriage and multiplication, and Sabbath—regulate man’s nature as well as his behavior (Gen 1:26-28; 2:3). From one perspective, these specific creation ordinances differ little from the other ordinances found in Genesis chapters one and two—e.g., “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). *All* of the ordinances of Genesis 1:1-2:3 order, structure, and dictate the purpose and function of God’s world. God commanded, “Let there be light” and light came into existence, functioning according to God’s purpose and design. These ordinances are constructive in nature; they result in the world being the way it is. Hence, the specific creation ordinances of labor and dominion, marriage and multiplication, and Sabbath structure man’s nature, function, and purpose.

Chapters one and two of Genesis were written, in part, to communicate the sovereignty of God over all of creation. Throughout this entire passage, God is the active agent; He is the primary subject of all but eight verses—He “creates,”¹⁵ He “speaks,”¹⁶ He “sees,”¹⁷ He “separates,”¹⁸ and so on. The use of the Hebrew word *amar* (to say, to speak) is especially instructive in chapter one. In all but four instances in which this verb is used, the Hebrew follows the exact

¹⁴ Note the influence of John Frame here. See his *Medical Ethics & The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.

¹⁵ ברא, used 5 times: 1:1, 21, and 27^{x3}.

¹⁶ אמר, used 11 times: 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, and 29.

¹⁷ ראה, used 7 times: 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31.

¹⁸ בדרל, used 5 times: 1:4, 6, 7, 14, and 18.

same pattern: qal imperfect + jussive (3rd person volitional)¹⁹ (+ result) to express God’s decree.

Table 1 illustrates this pattern.

Table 1

Verse	Qal Imperfect	Jussive	(Qal Imperfect)
1:3	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	יְהִי let it be	וַיְהִי and it was
1:6	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	יְהִי let it be	וַיְהִי and it was (v. 7)
1:9	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	יִקְוּ let it be gathered	וַיְהִי and it was
1:11	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	תִּשְׂאֵא let it sprout	וַיְהִי and it was
1:14	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	יְהִי let it be	וַיְהִי and it was (v. 15)
1:20	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	יִשְׂרְצוּ let them swarm	
1:24	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	תּוֹצֵא let it bring forth	וַיְהִי and it was
1:26	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said	נַעֲשֵׂה let us make	

These jussives do not function as wishes, requests, or acts of permission; but are decreative in nature—they order the creation. Note that in 1:26 a cohortative (1st person volitional) is used.

Of the three remaining passages that use the verb *amar*, one is not applicable (1:29), but the other two are unique and important. In both 1:22 and 1:28 God’s creation decrees are introduced by the Hebrew verb *barak* (to bless). We see the similar pattern: qal imperfect + *amar* + imperative (2nd person volitional). Table 2 compares this sequence with the one above.

¹⁹ The “divine jussive.” Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 568. Waltke and O’Connor cite Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light,” as an example of this usage.

Table 2

Verse	Qal Imperfect		Jussive
1:3	וַיֹּאמֶר and he said		יְהִי let it be
Verse	Qal Imperfect	Use of אָמַר	Imperative
1:22	וַיְבָרֵךְ and he blessed	לֵאמֹר Qal Infinitive - saying	פְּרוּ be fruitful וְרבוּ and be numerous וּמְלֵאוּ and fill
1:28	וַיְבָרֵךְ and he blessed	וַיֹּאמֶר Qal Imperfect – and he said	פְּרוּ be fruitful וְרבוּ and be numerous וּמְלֵאוּ and fill

The slight change in volitional forms (i.e., from jussive to imperative) corresponds to a change in subject matter. God is blessing and ordering animate, conscious beings, whereas previously none existed.²⁰

There is one final blessing passage found in 2:3. God blesses the seventh day. Though the customary jussive/imperative is missing, the overall structure is similar: God’s blessing + God bringing about the result. Table 3 illustrates this sequence.

Table 3

Verse	Qal, Imperfect	The agency and action of Elohim
2:3	וַיְבָרֵךְ and he blessed	וַיַּקְדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ and he set it apart

²⁰ Compare the blessing of the animals in verse 22 with the blessing of man in verse 28.

The absence of any volitional form here is due to the fact that God is not addressing an animate being. Contextually, there is also the element of completion.²¹

It is in the “blessing” passages of Genesis one and two that we find the creation ordinances of dominion and labor (1:29), marriage and multiplication (1:29) and Sabbath (2:3). In these verses, the creation ordinances begin as decrees of God ordering his creation as well as moral imperatives to the crown of God’s creation—man. As Richard Pratt wrote, “He has embedded the ideals of multiplication and dominion deep within the human psyche.”²² The same is true in regard to the Sabbath.

Moral Imperatives & the Decalogue

It is important to note that the ordinances of creation form a unified whole. God commanded man to exercise dominion over all creation. Marriage was ordained to assist him in this task. God gave Adam a wife “suitable” or “corresponding” to him (Gen. 2:18). The fruit of the marital union is multiplication and children. With a family comes the task of training and raising children in “the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4; see also Deut. 6). This task, in part, constitutes humble submission and worship unto God, which reflects overall Sabbath principles. In addition, man, being mortal, needs rest and refreshment to carry out God’s charge. He must also be exercised in the public worship of God. Reflective of this, is the fact that this group of ordinances is also referred to as the Cultural Mandate.

The fact that the special “blessing” ordinances of creation function as ethical mandates and continue to be binding upon man after the Fall can be seen in several ways. First, their binding nature is inherent in the curse pronounced upon mankind. Second, the daily activity and life

²¹ See H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 103.

²² Richard L Pratt, Jr., *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made it Possible for You to Be* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1993), 21.

of mankind illustrate their impact. Third, these ordinances are found in and enforced by the Decalogue.

The curse pronounced by God upon Adam and Eve adversely affected their labor. Because of Adam's sin, the ground was cursed and his work became toilsome (Gen 3:17-19). Nevertheless, while burdening him with much futility, the curse corroborated man's ongoing responsibility of labor. Adam and Eve's perfect union was also spoiled by God's curse. Now they would both desire to perversely rule over one another (Gen 3:16). The affects of the curse touched multiplication as well. The Lord said to the woman, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth" (Gen 3:16). Finally, the Sabbath, a reflection of garden lifestyle, was affected by the curse. Life in the Garden was inherently restful. The Hebrew of Genesis 2:15 can be translated, "And the Lord God took the man and *rested* him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it."²³ This wordplay extends all the way to Exodus 20:11. The same Hebrew word used in Gen. 2:15 is here used to describe God's "rest" on the first Sabbath.²⁴ Even the language of working and keeping the Garden is couched in the language of worship (see Exo). Adam's removal and banishment from the Garden affected his enjoyment of the Sabbath. This explains why the people of God were looking for "rest" (the words of Lamech, Gen 5:28-29).

Man's daily activity and his recognition of evil also reflected the ongoing normativeness of the creation ordinances. Post-Fall cultural activities began immediately—husbandry (Gen 4:2), the building of cities (Gen 4:17; 11:2-5), music, metallurgy (Gen 4:20-22), commerce (Gen 23; 41:55-57), etc. Great civilizations began—the Chaldeans (Gen 11:28) and the Egyptians (Gen 12:10-20). Ownership, the result of labor and dominion, was recognized. Stealing was a crime (Gen 30:33; 31:30-32; 44:1-13). Coveting what belong to another was deemed evil (Gen

²³ Author's translation. The word translated "rested" is the hiphil, imperfect of נָחַ.

²⁴ Here, the qal, imperfect of נָחַ is used.

12:14-17; 37:4ff.). Marriage, though often polygamous and distorted, was honored (Gen 3:16; 4:16-24; 12:11-20; 20:5). Adultery was considered, “a great sin” (Gen 20:9; see also Gen 34:7). Children were prized (Gen 12:2; 15:4-5; 17:2-4, 20-21; 18:19) and bareness was considered disgraceful (Gen 16:1-2ff). Children honored their parents (Gen 9:22-23; 27:41; 49:1-50:3). The evidence of Sabbath celebration is vague, but not entirely absent.²⁵ The recognition of a 7-day week is present in Genesis (8:6-12; 29:27-28). Worship and sacrifice continue throughout Genesis (Gen. 4:3, 26; 8:20; 12:7-8; 13:18; 26:25; 35:6-7). Finally, the Sabbath is explicitly mentioned and observed in Exodus 16:22-30 prior to the giving of the Law from Sinai.

The Decalogue given at Mt. Sinai also confirms the ongoing ethical nature of the creation ordinances. The “words” of this law, like the creation mandates, cannot be interpreted in isolation from one another. Thus, all 10 words interpret, expand and enforce all of the original ordinances that God built into his moral creatures. No action is considered “good” unless done to the glory of God.²⁶

In this study, I will focus only on five of the Ten Commandments—the 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th. The fourth commandment states:

8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exo. 20:8-11).

²⁵ “Sabbath celebration” refers to the recognition of one day in seven set aside for the worship of God and rest from labor.

²⁶ See WCF (?). This reflects the first four commandments, traditionally referred to as the first Table of the Law.

Explicit and conspicuous appeal to the creation ordinance of Gen. 2:3 is made here in verse 11. Certainly, God’s week is a pattern to be followed; but it is more than a mere pattern. The Sabbath is something from the past—the people must remember its significance. By appealing to the creation Sabbath, appeal is made to its original purpose and design for man (cf. Mark 2:27). The people are to “remember” it and “set it apart” for special use. There is to be no labor performed on this day; it is to be a day of rest.²⁷ Nevertheless, and often overlooked, the fourth commandment also *requires* labor to be performed on the remaining six days. The phrase translated “you shall labor” begins with the Hebrew imperfect of instruction or command.²⁸ Thus, included in the Sabbath commandment is the injunction to labor. The relationship between labor and the need for Sabbath (rest) existed from the very beginning.

The fifth commandment instructs to, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exo. 20:12). Thus, reinforcing the well-established role and place of honor that parents—the *married* couple—hold in society. God uses the model of husband and wife as representative of all forms of authority. This reflects the authority given to Adam and Eve at creation and in the ordinances thereof.

The seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exo 20:14), though not actually repeating the creation ordinance, explicitly enforces what was implicit in that mandate. The original creation ordinance limited the marital union to one man and one woman. The “one flesh” nature of the union (Gen. 2:24) indicates that it is for life. This is the very interpretation given this ordinance by Jesus (cf. Mat 19:4-6). The seventh commandment (Exo. 20:14; Deut.

²⁷ See note 22, above. Special sacrifices were also added to this day due to its holy nature (Lev.).

²⁸ For more on this use of the imperfect see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 509-510. The above interpretation is confirmed by comparing the use of the imperfect in verse 9 with the prohibitive use in verse 10, “you shall not do (לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה) any work.” In addition, all but the 4th and 5th commandments begin with an imperfect. All of these must be given an imperatival meaning. Finally, confirmation is found in the imperative of the 5th commandment, “Honor (כִּבְדֹּ) your father and your mother.”

5:18), case law (Exo. 22:16-17; Deut. 22:28-29), and the holiness code (e.g., Lev. 18; Lev. 20:10-13) all teach the same standard of marital sanctity as does the original creation ordinance.

The eighth commandment, “You shall not steal” (Exo 20:15), has direct relevance to the ordinance of labor and dominion. Stealing is no substitute for man’s responsibility to work and rule over creation. “You shall not covet,” the 10th commandment, has the same relevance; its violation tempts one to steal which is contrary to labor and dominion. In fact, the relevance of inward sinful desire is pertinent to all of God’s commands whether given at creation or Sinai. Extreme desire and lust lead to sexual immorality and violation of the marriage bond. Hence, the biblical ethic has remained consistent. Special revelation published what was already contained in the creation ordinances.

Fulfilled in Christ

In God’s redeeming work of mankind, He has chosen to always work within a covenant. It would be a fruitful exercise to walk through each of the covenant administrations in detail and see the unfolding of the Cultural Mandate—the application and relationship of the creation ordinances to God’s work of redeeming fallen mankind.²⁹ For instance, we find in the words of Gen 3:15 traces of all the creation ordinances. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel.” The first marriage would multiply and eventually one would be born who would reverse the work of the devil. There would be competition and strife (dominion and labor) between the two seeds now at enmity. Finally, rest would ultimately come through the one who would crush the head of the serpent.

²⁹ See Michael Muñoz, “Creation Ordinances and Culture,” chapters 8-9, unpublished Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary. Available online at <http://virtual.rts.edu/Site/Virtual/Resources/Creation%20and%20Culture.pdf>.

God's words of covenant renewal to Noah repeat the very words of the creation ordinance, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (Gen 9:1). Dominion over the rest of God's creation is reiterated (Gen 9:2-3). Noah, himself, is an antitype of the rest provided by Christ³⁰ and we read of the cultural accomplishments of Noah's seed in Geneses 10 and 11. In all this we see that the original creation ordinances continued to be an integral part of God's saving purpose. Many a Christian theologian has recognized the redemptive work of God as paradise restored.³¹

The focus here will be on Christ's fulfillment of these ordinances. Christ is the seed of the woman who has come and crushed the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15; 1 John 3:8; Rev 12, 20). As such He has been elevated and is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, "Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph 1:21). The Father has, "put all things in subjection under His feet" (Eph 1:22). Christ fulfills the mandate of labor and dominion by bringing it to its goal (Psa 8; Heb 2:5-9; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rev 5:13; 6:2).³² He is the antitype of the Davidic king. He is the seed of David (2 Sam 7:12-16; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8) who now exercises dominion from His throne in heaven (Psa 2; Luke 1:33; Acts 2:33-36; 4:25-28; 1 Cor 15:25; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Rev 11:15; 19:15-16). There will come a day when, "At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

³⁰ See Gen 5:29.

³¹ See, for instance, the words of C. G. Bartholomew, "At the heart of biblical covenant is 'creation regained,' with the additional historical perspective of the development from the garden to the city." C. G. Bartholomew, "Response to Al Wolters' Paper" in *God's Order for Creation*, ed. B. J. van der Walt (Potchefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1994), 63.

³² Theologians have long recognized an "already and not yet" component to the work of Christ. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). The fact that Christ is seated at the Father's right hand indicates that we are in a "mop-up" operation.

The Savior, as man, has sanctified man's work (Jn. 17:19; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Tim. 4:4-5; Heb. 2:11; etc.) and thus, man is able to participate in His dominion. In Christ, God's elect are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37), their work has relevance and purpose (Mat 22:37; Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 10:5; Eph. 4:28; 1 Thes 1:2-3; 4:11; 2 Thes 3:6-13; Heb 6:10; Rev 5:10; 20:6), and they participate in the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20). In this Commission, man is recommissioned to his creative task with the additional element of redemption. Christ uses the message preached (1 Cor. 1:21) to bring the world into submission. Finally, man will reign with Christ in the new heavens and earth (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5).

Jesus also fulfills the ordinance of marriage and multiplication. The Apostle Paul refers to the intimacy and purity in the marriage covenant as a great mystery, for it pictures, "Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). Christ is the bridegroom who has prepared His bride for a heavenly home (Rev 19:7-9; 21:2, 9-10; 22:17). He is also the *telos* (the end or goal) of multiplication (1 Tim 2:15). He is the seed of the woman (Luke 3:23-38; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12), the seed of Abraham (Luke 3:23-38; Gal. 3:16) and the seed of David (Luke 3:23-38; Acts 2:29-31; 4:25-28; Rom. 1:3; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 5:5; 22:16). In Christ, Christians are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29), the children of God (Isa. 9:6; 53:10; Mat. 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 1:12; Rom 8:16; Phil 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-2).

Christ has sanctified the ongoing institution of marriage and the subsequent raising of children. Hence, man finds fulfillment in this endeavor. The husband-wife relationship ought to mirror that of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-33; cf., Col. 3:18-19). Christian parents are to raise a godly seed (Mal. 2:15; Eph 6:1-4; cf., Col. 3:20-21). They must actively disciple their own children (Deut. 6; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21). In obedience to the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20) disciples of Christ are to labor and bring forth spiritual offspring to the glory of God.

Finally, Christ is Lord of the Sabbath (Mat 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). In Him we find the promised rest that the Sabbath has always portrayed (Mat 11:28-30; Heb 4).³³ The author of Hebrews takes up the subject of Sabbath rest in chapters three and four of his epistle. He wants his readers to know that most of the people who left Egypt failed, for lack of faith, to enter into God's rest (Heb 3:7-19; Psa 95:8-11). Yet, for those who are faithful, "a promise remains of entering His rest" (Heb 4:1). Hearing the Gospel must be "united with faith" (Heb 4:2). The author then connects this continued rest with the creation Sabbath, "For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works"; and again in this *passage*, "they shall not enter my rest" (Heb 4:4, cf. 4:10; Gen 2:2; Psa 95:11). Finally, he concludes that, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9).³⁴

Christ's work of salvation is complete, "He has rested from His work" (Heb. 4:10). He has secured the true Sabbath rest for the people of God and He brings them into that rest (Heb 4:14-16). Both the creational (Exo. 20:11; cf. Gal 6:14-15; Eph 2:10; 4:24) and salvific (Deut. 5:15) aspects pictured by the Sabbath find fulfillment in Christ. Christ did what man is incapable of doing. He fulfilled all the requirements of the covenant on man's behalf. As such, He is the goal and end of all the creation ordinances—they point to Him and are fulfilled in His work of redemption.

³³ It is not my intent here to enter into the argument of how the Sabbath applies to the church today or how it is to be specifically "remembered"—good men and women differ on this theological issue. I do insist, however, because the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, that it has continued relevance and application to the church today.

³⁴ Prior to and after this passage, the Greek words used are *κατάπαυσις* and *καταπαύω* (vs. 4:1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11); here, in verse 9 the Greek word is *σαββατισμὸς* a derivative of *σάββατον*. According to Louw & Nida, this word refers to, "a special religiously significant period for rest and worship" (). Note also the word translated "there remains" (*ἀπολείπεται*) is present tense in the Greek, indicating an ongoing action.

A Sufficient Definition of Ethics

The threefold character of creation ordinances, as recounted above, supplies the situational, normative and personal components of ethics.³⁵ The triune God's decretive ordering of both man and nature provide the situational context. The world was created as a fit habitat for man, an environment where he was free to respond to various stimuli, including the actions of other human beings and the dictates of his Creator. Man's mind and fundamental desires were created to correspond to the world outside of him. The inherent moral nature of the creation ordinances supplies the normative element to ethics. The law of God was first written on the hearts of mankind (Rom 2:14-15) and then republished and confirmed in the words of the Decalogue. The personal element to ethics—the fact that moral imperatives apply to personal beings and not inanimate objects—is due to the personal nature of God. God is a divine person; more specifically, He is tri-personal and He has created other beings in his *personal* image. Thus He supplies the interpersonal element of morality—its other-centeredness.

From this, a sufficient definition of ethics follows. Ethics are: Direction giving (i.e., authoritative), personal in nature, they presuppose moral freedom, and are abstract, invariant and universal. The situational, authoritative and personal elements of morality are objective because they come from a tri-personal, authoritative Creator. Only the Triune God of Scripture can account for these essential elements needed for morality. Because God is a Spirit, immutable and infinite, ethics partake of these characteristics—they are abstract, invariant and universal. Hence, morality is objectively binding on all men, at all times, everywhere. *Therefore, it is both God's*

³⁵ This is language borrowed from John Frame (he uses the term “existential” rather than “personal”). See his *Medical Ethics* and *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. While I certainly agree with Dr. Frame's tri-perspectivalism, I have attempted, here, to demonstrate that the ground of this perspectivalism for ethics is the creation ordinances. To my knowledge, Dr. Frame has not developed this relation in any detail. He does however, acknowledge, approvingly, the work of John Murray. See Murray's, *Principles of Conduct*.

ordering of creation and His personal, holy being that constitutes the metaethical foundation for ethics.

This bipartite metaethic captures both the metaphysical and the epistemological foundation of ethics. Metaphysically, God’s nature—His very being and character—is the *summum bonum*. Epistemologically, man can know *the good* because God reveals it to him—it is intrinsic to his nature and God has given him special revelation rectifying the noetic affects of sin. Thus, the age-old Euthyphro dilemma fails to challenge the Christian ethic.³⁶

The above definition of ethics can also be justified in a *reductio ad absurdum* fashion. If any one of these elements is removed, ethics crumbles. Take, for example, naturalistic accounts of ethics. Consistent naturalists deny the possibility of objectivity in ethics. Ethics cannot be more than choice, feeling or attitude.³⁷ Why? This is because a consistent, atheistic, mechanistic materialist must deny the existence of non-material substances; hence, the abstract, invariant and universal nature of ethics vanishes and, thus, its objectivity. The materialist also rejects the personal nature of the universe, thus the personal nature of human beings—consciousness and free moral agency is ultimately denied. It is seen to be illusory.³⁸ Finally, in the worldview of Natu-

³⁶ “Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods” (Plato, *Euthyphro*). This dilemma faces several problems when brought forth as an objection to the Christian ethic. It can rightly be argued that this is a problem directed toward polytheism and not monotheism. However, because so many philosophers include this in their objections to Christian ethics, the Christian philosopher is wise to deal with it. When directed toward Christianity, this question commits the complex question fallacy. The Christian’s response should split the question. *Does God command what is right because it is right (i.e., objective to God)?* Yes, God commands, “what is right” but, “what is right” is not objective to God. The metaphysical foundation of ethics is the character and being of God. *Is what God commands right because God commands it (i.e., is it arbitrarily subjective to God)?* Yes, it is right because God commands it, but “what is right” is not arbitrarily subjective to God. God’s commanding of “the right” is an epistemological issue.

³⁷ “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human need and interest” (*Humanist Manifesto II*).

³⁸ “The Astonishing Hypothesis is that ‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll’s Alice might have phrased it: ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.’ This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people alive today that it can truly be called astonishing” (Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: the Scientific Search for the Soul*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 3). See also the work of David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* ().

ralism, the fit survive and rule over the weak. Ethics loses its authoritative element and becomes an evolutionary method of survival—nothing more; it possesses no objective, binding authoritative nature. In addition, ethics falls outside of empirical investigation—there is no “ought” to “is.”³⁹ Hence, rightly speaking, no one can actually *know* right from wrong.

This is not to deny that Naturalists of different sorts can be ethical. It is to answer the question why they *can be* and *are* ethical even when their stated worldview renders objective ethics a myth. Atheists can be and often are extremely moral. But, in so being, they necessarily borrow from the Christian worldview. This is both possible and irresistible because they have been created to function according to the mandates of creation (Rom 2:18-32)—they have been created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Man naturally desires intimacy, generativity⁴⁰ and worship.⁴¹

It has been shown throughout this paper that a proper recognition and understanding of the creation ordinances found in Genesis chapters one and two lead to a bipartite metaethic, which is capable of undergirding a coherent and workable ethical practice. The Triune God of Scripture has ordered the universe (both nature and animate beings), He has written his law upon the heart of man and republished its directives in special revelation. Finally, Jesus Christ, the God-man has fulfilled the ordinances of creation thus supplying ethical ability through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Because God is the Ruler and Creator of this world, ethics takes on the characteristics of being authoritative, personal, abstract, invariant and universal—

³⁹ The Naturalistic Fallacy; see Hume and G. E. Moore.

⁴⁰ See Kathleen S. Berger, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, 5th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2001) 511, 528; John C. Cavanaugh, *Adult Development and Aging*, 3rd ed. (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1997), 369.

⁴¹ Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003). Understanding the creation ordinances also explains why non-Christian ethical systems entail parts of the truth. Non-Christian ethical systems are usually divided between deontology, teleology and virtue. Each only consisting of a part of the truth and, as stand-alone ethical systems, they fail. Christian ethics requires all three components--normativity, context and the personal.

hence, objective. The Christian metaethic supplies both the metaphysical and epistemological foundation for ethics as well as the deontological, teleological and virtuous components of the Christian ethical system. This understanding can be demonstrated from both Scripture and from a *reductio absurdum* argument. Thus, Christian ethics along with its metaethic explains the behavior of men—both believer and non-believer alike. It explains why non-Christians recognize various ethical systems (note the discussion of naturalism above), why they can be and often are ethical and what the ultimate foundation of their systems is—man, created in the image of God knows in his heart-of-hearts right from wrong (Rom 1:18-32).