

FOREWORD BY CARL R. TRUEMAN

Faithful Reason



NATURAL LAW ETHICS FOR
GOD'S GLORY AND OUR GOOD

Andrew T. Walker

“Is there one morality for Christians and non-Christians? Is there a shared language between them? Andrew T. Walker gives rational articulation, not brute assertions, of the *reason* for the hope within us, of the morally ordered and intelligible reality created by God. Meet him on Mars Hill, introducing this fabric of reality in which we live and move and have our being called natural law. Walker goes a long way toward helping the evangelical church see reason and faith in harmony, the end of which is Jesus Christ—and thus be good witnesses to the truth.”

—**Adeline A. Allen**, associate professor of law, Trinity Law School

“For a long time, natural law has been considered the exclusive province and preoccupation of Roman Catholic intellectuals. As a result, evangelicals have often approached the idea of natural law with suspicion that such reasoning either seeks to supplant revelation or is a distraction from it. Though other evangelical scholars have sought to generate greater interest in natural law by demonstrating its connection to the work of some of the Reformers, Andrew Walker’s Christotelic approach takes the rapprochement between evangelicals and natural law thinking to a new level.”

—**Hunter Baker**, provost and dean of faculty,
North Greenville University

“We are roughly two decades advanced into a period of significant retrieval of and re-engagement with natural law ethics by Protestants. Andrew Walker’s volume represents a significant step forward in that necessary work as it seeks to articulate and apply the natural law for evangelicals today. While our culture becomes more and more disconnected from reality and a true understanding of God, humanity, and the created order, a rediscovery of the great Christian tradition of natural law thinking is urgently needed. Walker’s work is a worthy entry in that broader conversation.”

—**Jordan J. Ballor**, director of research, First Liberty Institute

“Some contemporary evangelicals have looked with suspicion upon the natural law, viewing it as either a Roman Catholic doctrine or as a rival to a more robust biblicism. This has been unfortunate because natural law remains a necessity for coherent Christian ethics. That is why I am so grateful for the appearance of Andrew Walker’s *Faithful Reason*. This book is a clarion call for Christians—especially evangelicals—to embrace their

Christian inheritance, a part of which is the rich natural law tradition. I hope this book will be widely read.”

—**Denny Burk**, professor of biblical studies,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In *Faithful Reason*, Andrew Walker contributes to the growing project of retrieval in which Baptists are recovering their Reformed and Protestant theological roots. In a day when liberal Protestantism has abandoned its own patrimony in post-Reformation scholasticism, more and more evangelicals are awaking to the need to ground our confession in something older and deeper than revivalism. The recovery of natural law and its grounding in metaphysical realism is one exciting aspect of this project. While this work will not be the last word on the subject, it has the potential of being a door into a premodern world where reason and faith work harmoniously together to discern wisdom. It is to be hoped that many will enter this door and discover the intellectual and spiritual feast that awaits.”

—**Craig A. Carter**, research professor of theology,
Tyndale University

“Many, if not most, pious Protestants would be amazed—perhaps even aghast—to learn that *all* of the magisterial Protestant Reformers affirmed the natural law. Given this witness of the church’s history, Walker’s book is part of a most encouraging trend. Walker joins a growing number of orthodox Protestants who have come to recognize both the inevitability of natural law and its utter necessity in the public sphere. For too long evangelically-minded Protestant types have divorced redemption from creation in their theological and ethical understanding. But because creation is ratified by redemption, moral reality, covenantally speaking, has not changed. ‘Christian ethics’ is in truth ‘creation ethics,’ as Walker properly and wonderfully reminds us. Christians shall need to acknowledge the law ‘written on the heart’ if they wish to engage the world around them responsibly.”

—**J. Daryl Charles**, affiliate scholar, John Jay Institute

“Aiming to be an ‘apologetic for the rational coherence and superiority of Christian ethics,’ Andrew Walker’s admirable and helpful book deftly explores and clarifies the bases and principles needed to achieve that aim philosophically as well as biblically; he does this by calmly critiquing

misguided doubts and skepticisms whether theological, secularist, or simply crowd-following, and comprehensively getting beyond them.”

—**John Finnis**, emeritus professor, Oxford University

“Can faith be reasoned and reasonable? Is a commitment to reasoned truth-seeking, especially in the quest for moral wisdom, compatible with faith? In *Faithful Reason*, Andrew Walker argues compellingly that faith and reason, far from being in conflict or even tension, are mutually supportive and, indeed, mutually required. A person of faith should hold reason and rational inquiry in high esteem. A person who prizes rational inquiry should understand faith as a reasonable response to truths that have been revealed.”

—**Robert P. George**, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University

“Andrew Walker argues that natural law thinking—sometimes dismissed as a tool of Catholic apologetics—is valuable in its own right, and for Protestants. That to affirm the integrity of human reason is not to challenge God’s sovereignty, but to give him glory; not to spurn his gift of revelation, but to cultivate his gift of conscience; not to set aside his law, but to grasp its wisdom. And to those who already embrace natural law thinking, Walker urges that it allows for a wider theological frame and even finds its home there, in reflection on the humanity and reign of the man whom Christianity finds at the center of everything. In these ways, Walker’s philosophical inquiry doubles as prophetic witness. Though born of recent cooperation between Catholics and Protestants, its value is broad and enduring.”

—**Sherif Girgis**, associate professor of law, University of Notre Dame

“Andrew Walker has produced a masterful explanation and defense of classical natural law. He brings new insights and arguments to an ancient tradition. He exhibits the virtue of speaking the whole truth in season and out of season. This text skillfully combines subtle theological and philosophical analysis with an accessible style that speaks to any person of good will. The work skillfully balances necessary theoretical grounding and practical real-world applications.”

—**Brian M. McCall**, Orpha and Maurice Merrill Chair in Law, University of Oklahoma

“Andrew Walker has done for all Christians, but particularly for evangelical Protestants, an enormous service with this book, by setting forward an understanding of natural law that is eminently compatible with their fundamental commitments. If the Christ of grace is no longer set in opposition to the Jesus of nature, but the two are understood as conjoined, it opens the way to think more cogently about the whole range of dilemmas facing us in such dispiriting times. At the same time, it reminds us that, at bottom, the Christian life is not about winning battles, or harvesting fruit, but in steadfastly witnessing to the truth for its own sake, whatever the outcome.”

—**Wilfred McClay**, Victor Davis Hanson Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization, Hillsdale College

“*Faithful Reason* fills a gap that has long needed filling: a fully worked out theory of natural law from a Protestant perspective. Drawing on the historic Christian tradition as well as contemporary writings, Andrew Walker provides a satisfying account of natural law grounded in human nature and God’s moral order, as well as examples of how to apply natural law reasoning in practice. This is an excellent volume which will give Christians greater confidence in the truths of God’s word and the order of His world, and a robust framework for considering complex questions of ethics and policy.”

—**Ben Saunders**, associate professor of law, Deakin University Law School, Australia

“If there is a renaissance of evangelical appreciation and practice of the natural law, grounded in biblical truths, and thoughtfully applied to contemporary challenges, Andrew Walker’s work on these matters will be one of the reasons why. *Faithful Reason* is a comprehensive book that delves into the substance of natural law ethics with an eye toward accessibility and application. Newcomers to natural law thinking, veterans, and even skeptics will benefit from grappling with the themes herein.”

—**Micah Watson**, Paul Henry Chair in Christianity and Politics, Calvin University

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GOD'S GLORY AND OUR GOOD

Andrew T. Walker

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FOREWORD

As Christians, we live in strange times. To an extent, that is a truism. Christians have always lived in strange times: as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we sojourn in the City of Man and therefore find that we are subject both to the division in our own hearts between our new nature in Christ and the remnants of our sin, and to the contradictions of living as Christians in a world that is at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to our faith. That was the same when Paul walked the earth as it is today. And yet each generation faces a world with its own distinctive strangeness and ours is marked both by the volatility and extremity of such. Perhaps never in human history have moral values been subject to such constant, rapid, and unpredictable change. And perhaps never have these changes been marked by such extreme rejection of things that were virtually unquestioned until what often feels like the day before yesterday. What is marriage? What is sex for? What is a woman? These are things that enjoyed broad social consensus until very recently and matters upon which the traditional teachings of the church and the broader views of society at large were largely in agreement.

Given that this consensus has collapsed, and collapsed with dramatic speed, Christians have been left scrambling to find ways of thinking about matters, particularly ethical matters, that in the past they could simply take for granted. Of course, Protestants love to quote the Bible and rightly so: the Bible is the final authority in matters of Christian faith and practice.

But with a generation rising whose minds are shaped by the therapeutic ethics and intuitions of the world around us, and where ghastly TikTok and Instagram “influencers” have emerged as a significant source for social and moral values, it is helpful to show not simply that the Bible is true but that it also makes sense. The young person who asks his pastor why homosexuality is wrong might well be convinced by a Bible verse; but he might also wonder if God wrote that simply because he wants gay people to be miserable. In that context, supplemental arguments can be hugely helpful. And what about those issues that arise today where there is no single Bible verse that addresses the issue: stem cell research, for example, or IVF or surrogacy? And what of the “next big thing” that, by definition, nobody can predict but everyone knows will be controversial and complicated?

In such a world, a return to the Protestant tradition of natural law is vital. Yes, Protestantism, under the influence of unfortunate strands of German and Dutch theology, abandoned this in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the price has been high and is set to go higher. This is why the recent renaissance in natural law among Protestant thinkers is to be welcomed. And it is why this book by my good friend Andrew Walker is so valuable. It is not a naïve presentation of natural law as the cure for all our ills, far less the assertion of an autonomous rationalism as many have (and no doubt will) suggest when the term “natural law” touches that reflexive nerve in their theological imaginations. It is rather an articulate argument both for the biblical authority of natural law and a reflection upon its utility both as a pastoral tool and as a resource for advocacy in the wider sphere. Neither a naïve optimist nor a myopic pessimist, Walker offers realism, practical realism, for Christians as they seek to develop the intellectual tools for tackling our current moral questions and whatever their next iteration might be.

Andrew is to be thanked for his work in this area. He has given us an important book on a subject that will only become more pressing in the coming years.

Carl R. Trueman
Grove City College
July 2023

Introduction

His Glory, Our Good

One of the most important moments in the history of ethics occurred on November 21, 1945, when Robert H. Jackson, Chief Counsel for the United States at the Nuremberg Trials, opened with the following speech before the International Military Tribunal. He had one objective: to prosecute Nazi war criminals for the unspeakable crimes they inflicted upon humanity. In Jackson's famous words:

The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated. That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason.

This Tribunal, while it is novel and experimental, is not the product of abstract speculations nor is it created to vindicate legalistic theories. This inquest represents the practical effort of four

of the most mighty of nations, with the support of 17 more, to utilize international law to meet the greatest menace of our times—aggressive war. The common sense of mankind demands that law shall not stop with the punishment of petty crimes by little people. It must also reach men who possess themselves of great power and make deliberate and concerted use of it to set in motion evils which leave no home in the world untouched. It is a cause of that magnitude that the United Nations will lay before Your Honors.

In the prisoners' dock sit twenty-odd broken men. Reproached by the humiliation of those they have led almost as bitterly as by the desolation of those they have attacked, their personal capacity for evil is forever past. It is hard now to perceive in these men as captives the power by which as Nazi leaders they once dominated much of the world and terrified most of it. Merely as individuals their fate is of little consequence to the world.

What makes this inquest significant is that these prisoners represent sinister influences that will lurk in the world long after their bodies have returned to dust. We will show them to be living symbols of racial hatreds, of terrorism and violence, and of the arrogance and cruelty of power. They are symbols of fierce nationalisms and of militarism, of intrigue and war-making which have embroiled Europe generation after generation, crushing its manhood, destroying its homes, and impoverishing its life. They have so identified themselves with the philosophies they conceived and with the forces they directed that any tenderness to them is a victory and an encouragement to all the evils which are attached to their names. Civilization can afford no compromise with the social forces which would gain renewed strength if we deal ambiguously or indecisively with the men in whom those forces now precariously survive.¹

¹ Robert H. Jackson, Speech before the International Military Tribunal, November 21, 1945, Robert J. Jackson Center, available at <https://www.robertjacksoncenter.org/robert-h-jackson/speech-before-the-international-military-tribunal>

The Nuremberg Trials are one of the most infamous moments in world history. Never had barbarism of such scale been put on trial as were the Nazis who orchestrated the Holocaust. But according to Jackson, the very notion of morality itself was on trial. Were the Nazis to go free, we would be consigning ourselves to the reality that morality has no objective content and injustice can go unchecked. But suffused within Jackson's speech is an overture to a moral law that everyone knows the Nazis violated: the natural law. Its violation had to be answered for on a global stage. How to prosecute the Nazis in the absence of an international law code left the nations responsible for bringing them to "justice" in search of a standard to try them by. It is hard to see the Nuremberg Trials as anything less than the vindication of the existence of the natural law. The world's wrath against injustice and quest for satisfaction against an unspeakable moral evil was the *raison d'être* of Nuremberg. As one atheist public intellectual granted, secularism may have tried to eclipse its concepts of Satan and hell, but it merely replaced them with Hitler and Auschwitz. Our world is haunted by a moral quest that secularism cannot provide.²

While not all considerations of the natural law are as freighted and grandiose as topics like Nazism and Nuremberg, the topic of the natural law reminds us of one of the most important concepts not only to Christian ethics but to humankind in general—the need to live life well; to obtain an end to our existence that allows us to say with confidence and clarity, "This is the well-lived life." The idea that rational beings could direct themselves to necessary ends that complete them speaks to the very essence of what it means to be human. The very notion that God would implant within persons the ability to know right from wrong is the very foundation for meaningful interaction within the world. If there were no natural law, there

hjackson.org/speech-and-writing/opening-statement-before-the-international-military-tribunal/.

² "Does God Exist? A Conversation with Tom Holland, Stephen Meyer, and Douglas Murray," Hoover Institution, January 9, 2023, <https://www.hoover.org/research/does-god-exist-conversation-tom-holland-stephen-meyer-and-douglas-murray>.

would be no personal morality or political morality to speak of. The very notion of Christians sharing in the same sort of moral agency as their non-believing neighbors is an invitation to consider how and whether people can live together in social harmony despite deep disagreement on many (though not all) important matters.

Questions immediately arise regarding the origin, knowability, content, and utility of the natural law. I submit that the natural law, being the very thing that the concepts says it is—“natural”—means that the natural law is all around us in 10,000 ways. Consider a few examples.

The Everydayness of the Natural Law

A few years ago, when I had a longer commute to work, there was a snowstorm that hit the middle Tennessee area where my family was then living. The area was not accustomed to handling large amounts of snow, and it understandably snarls traffic and causes drivers to panic.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation had digital highway signs posted on overpasses that could communicate conditions and warnings to drivers. During this snowstorm, one sign over the highway read “Snow & Ice: Slow Down and Arrive Alive.” The statement hardly needs explanation: everyone, it just seems, knows *intuitively* and *reflexively*, to exercise caution when conditions can deteriorate and endanger lives. We assume that no one in their right mind would wantonly seek to endanger themselves and their fellow travelers. This is hardly a controversial axiom. Whether to simply avoid the prospect of bodily harm or to avoid a costly insurance nuisance, did the Department of Transportation have to go about with prolonged analytical proofs to explain why individuals *ought* to drive safely? No. The oughtness of its directive presupposed axiomatic moral knowledge that requires no other ground for its justification than its own reflexive intelligibility. It would seem *self-evident* that individuals would order their behavior to protect their lives. The routine posting of a message in a snowstorm, however, is packed full of concepts integral to

the philosophical contours of natural law and natural law theory, the topic this book seeks to rehabilitate for a Protestant audience. A routine situation like this invokes concepts such as moral goods (protecting life), norms (drive safely), and the means to apprehend both (practical reason). Natural law, in other words, is quotidian: We act upon its tenets every day without consciously declaring to ourselves, “I am conceiving of the natural law.” It just *is*.

First, there is the most important concept of what the road sign is intending to communicate: life is intrinsically good, valuable, and worth protecting *for its own sake*. Every moment of our day, it seems, is consciously or unconsciously ordered for our safeguarding and self-preservation—from sleeping, bathing, eating, working. Tennessee’s government wants to likewise protect the lives of its citizens by warning them of potential hazards. So according to the logic of the state of Tennessee’s promulgating such a statement, the knowable fact of life’s value has practical implication for one’s conduct: drivers should drive with a higher degree of caution to protect their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens.

The state of Tennessee’s warning has an implicit and explicit moral message: Harming yourself and others is a bad outcome—genuinely bad, not just an apparent bad. Basic categories of “good” and “bad” are pregnant with moral and philosophical meaning. Goodness and badness are moral properties human beings believe correspond to a state of affairs that is either truly and objectively good or bad. When something as horrific as a school shooting occurs, no one goes looking to moral philosophers to discern whether the death of innocent school children is truly bad. It is not just bad, but evil. Airy academic conversations about whether “good” or “bad” exists belies the reality that everyday living requires conformity to judgments that everyone, at their deepest levels, needs in order to live.

Back to our driving example. To prevent such an outcome as personal injury, drivers are encouraged to slow down and be mindful of their speed in order to bring about a situation where as few people as possible are harmed. But the issue of knowing life’s value assumes a particular grasp of its value as

an object worthy of ordering our behavior on behalf of. The fact that drivers can reason, grasp, and order their lives in response to the value of their life is how we understand the existence and operation of the natural law. Merely reflecting on the data of everyday experience gives us reasons to order our actions to obtain beneficial outcomes.

Let's break down the seemingly obvious into its constitutive parts. How do we know such a truth about life and what is required in response to that truth? Based on an innate, reflexive capacity and exercise of our practical reason and our reflective grasp of life's inherent (non-instrumental) value, people (ought to) desire not to harm themselves nor others. Therefore, to not harm others (which is a bad situation), people should drive cautiously. Thus, from the grasp of a good (life), a moral principle (drive safely) is derived. A basic moral good we should strive to achieve (life) established a norm (drive safely). That is all the natural law is at its essence—determining moral goods, moral duties, and moral norms as rational creatures and acting in harmony to obtain them. But the moral message of the snowstorm was no mere private moral law.

Telling passengers to slow down in a snowstorm is an attempt to convey or *promulgate* a message with a morally intelligible meaning. It isn't a statement of preference or condition. Rather, it was an imperative. You "ought" to do "X" in order that desired "Y" be the outcome. How do we know "Y" is desirable and what rule directs us to desire "Y" in the first place? Our capacity for reason. Why are humans reasoning creatures? Because God has implanted within our nature as human beings the ability to perceive and understand, through the capacity of reason, the basic goods that fulfill the nature of our being.

That this message to protect life was broadcast publicly, where thousands of drivers saw it, indicates even more how such a message was an exercise in public morality and public rulemaking. People *en masse* were the recipients of this message, meaning that for such a safe state of affairs to be realized, it would have to be followed by everyone. Such a reality speaks to the aspect of the natural law as *law*; that is, as a rule from which conformity to it applies to all, equally. This message by a political authority

was coordinating all of the drivers' individual activities toward a common good—their continued livelihood and passable roadways. A single person who sees themselves as an exception to this rule and who drives too fast in order to harm those around them shows how one moral infraction can bring great harm to a large number of people. But a person who purposefully and wantonly endangers others and themselves is not only engaging in a criminal offense; they are acting outside of their rational mind, since action that thwarts the good is never truly choiceworthy as an end to be pursued. The common good of everyone's livelihood is at stake in people agreeing to follow principles of safe driving.

Olympic Integrity and the Natural Law

Consider another example of the routine universality of natural law and moral norms. Since 1972, before the start of each Olympic games, coaches, athletes, and judges have all taken an oath. Each in their own respective capacity recites the following:

We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play, inclusion and equality. Together we stand in solidarity and commit ourselves to sport without doping, without cheating, without any form of discrimination. We do this for the honour of our teams, in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and to make the world a better place through sport.³

Consider not only the words themselves, but the setting and participants making this pledge. Before a global audience, global participants who speak different languages from distinct cultures are all unified around the mutually-agreed-upon need for basic justice in their competition. There is a mutual assent to a principle which then entails a mutual commitment to

³ "What is the Olympic oath?" International Olympic Committee, <https://olympics.com/ioc/faq/games-ceremonies-and-protocol/what-is-the-olympic-oath>.

standards of action. Three prongs of natural law are present: *Universality*, *Objectivity*, and *Intelligibility*. Universality is present by virtue of global participants before a global audience agreeing to set terms of competition, whereby each athlete is afforded equal standards of evaluation. Objectivity signifies the brute existence of a principle, whereby its recognized existence implies response and conformity to its standard. Intelligibility is present, wherein the propriety of “fair play” retains intelligible coherence. In other words, each person reciting the pledge knows what “fair play” conceptualizes and entails by their mouths uttering the words. The grasp of a particular good (skillful, competitive play) sets the conditions for action and the practical reason’s grasp of particular goods establishes norms for rightly ordered conduct.

None of the examples above relied on any specific overture to divine revelation for their intelligibility. Regarding the Olympians, each may or may not believe that God exists, but the independent intelligibility of the norm of fair play—even if not perfectly obeyed or maybe even eventually violated—subsists within each athlete. No athlete was present who, in other words, failed to understand the terms of just competition. Of course, the reason such rules are necessary in the first place is because players are prone to cheat in order to perversely benefit themselves. A person may intend to cheat, but the knowledge of violating a standard is itself a testimony to true knowledge witnessed to by self-evident facts. Internal knowledge of one’s own cheating is a function of practical reason’s faculty of conscience setting off an alarm. But a pledge to fair play conditions the event to obtain a just outcome. The natural law does not deny disobedience to it. Rather, as offenses against the natural law take their toll, it is disobedience to standards of justice that make the tenets of the natural law most glaring.

Awareness of Evil and the Natural Law

Consider yet another example: If I were to hold up images of the Auschwitz concentration camp alongside a picture of Mother Teresa and asked

individuals to choose which image signifies wickedness and the other love, I would not need to engage in lengthy rhetorical back-and-forth to explain why Mother Teresa signifies love, charity, and compassion while Auschwitz signifies despair, revulsion, evil, and grief. Why? The response to these images does not call forth immediate action, but it elicits a moral judgment about prior historical circumstances and their outcomes. An internal faculty residing in each person awakens individuals to trigger the conscience to know that one is evil, the other good. The Holocaust stands as one of the vilest events in human history that everyone *just knows* is evil. An innate, seemingly underived moral law consisting of basic knowledge of good and evil seems a fact of human existence.

Are there individuals alive today who celebrate the Holocaust? There are. Racism, ethnic supremacy, and antisemitism are seemingly timeless pathologies locatable throughout human history. But everyone with a rightly calibrated mind believes that individuals who celebrate something as ghoulishly vile as the Holocaust are severely malformed persons. These individuals exist on the margins of society (justifiably so), and individuals of goodwill know that mainstreaming Holocaust defenses is beyond contemptible. Consider an irony, however, in that Holocaust defenders would not want *their* own children subjected to tortuous murder. What this tells us is that even individuals with morally perverted faculties retain some minimal moral knowledge, or else they would be unable to know what evil even is. More will be said later about inexplicable evil and how it is justified.

The fact that humans can be simultaneously capable of evil and capable of good reveals that wars of passion reside internally and socially, but the complete, exhaustive elimination of all knowledge of good and evil is impossible. How one can allow for another's child to be murdered as was the case in the Holocaust but act to spare their own testifies to the ways in which sadistic personality, deceitful reasoning, vicious habit, evil desire, barbaric custom, groupthink, cowardice, and philosophical error (about equality, for example) can obscure the response to the natural moral law inside of persons. Maniacal evil exists, but even maniacal evil exists because it thinks

it is serving some desirable-though-evil end. The natural law tradition does not teach that every desire or perception welling up inside of persons is to be done. Rather, desires and perceptions must be subjected to the power of reason as an instrument to subordinate evil and disordered passions. Such is one reason why Christianity sees true knowledge of things as they ought to be as indicative of salvation (Rom 12:1–2; Col 3:10). As the natural law tradition insists, there are basic moral truths discernible by all, but that can err by way of judgment and application—especially the more remote the implications of natural law are when applied to more granular situations.

Family and the Natural Law

Consider one final situation. My family enjoys going to our local pool over the summer. Several activities will ensue. I may pray quietly, listen to music, or read a book. I might even sit and simply enjoy the beauty of the sky on a cloudless summer day. I may take a nap or swim a few laps in the pool for exercise. I will play with my daughters and converse with my wife. We will eat a meal poolside, perhaps with friends from our neighborhood.

Why do I do any of these actions? Not only that, why do I not need to be convinced or coaxed into doing them? At the risk of being too obvious, the reason I pursue any of these actions is because they are worthwhile—or choiceworthy—things to do *for their own sake*. Resting, conversing with my wife, praying, playing with my children, chatting with a friend, enjoying a delicious Coca-Cola, attaining knowledge through a good book, and listening to good music are intrinsically beneficial activities pursued for their own sake that contribute to my fulfillment as a living person. Playing with my children, for example, is something I do because the fostering of a healthy relationship with my daughters is something beneficial and *good* for its own sake. The good of my family’s well-being is not instrumental. It does not get me a greater good beyond the good of my family’s own well-being. It, and other activities at the pool like I described above, are aspects of what the natural law tradition considers as “non-instrumental goods”

that practical reason grasps as worthwhile activities to pursue that fulfill or complete what it means to flourish as a human being. These goods of my existence are grasped and inform what actions to take and what actions to avoid in order to obtain them. Moral principles are derived based on my understanding of these goods. I should never act, for example, to thwart any of the goods my mind understands as good. To do so would invite an injustice and a moral wrong.

The Heartbeat of Christian Natural Law Ethics: Jesus Christ

As the above examples indicate, natural law is everywhere. From obeying road signs to fidelity to one's spouse, the natural law finds a way to show itself. Moral order and moral goods exist as dispensations of divine grace that a benevolent Creator makes known to his creation, even those who refuse to acknowledge him. As I will argue throughout the rest of this book, natural law is one of the central traditions to Christian ethics, if not its most historic and significant, as far as its impact on culture, civil law, and government.

One aspect of how the natural law has not traditionally been conceived of is in relationship to Christology. The natural law exists to hold human beings accountable to God's moral law and, in that sense, to bring us to the gospel.⁴ It should also point us to Jesus Christ, by whom and for whom—according to Scripture—all reality is ordered, upheld and created (John 1:2; Col 1:15–20). It is Christ who provides the ultimate foundation and ultimate finality of where all moral good is directed. Christ is our *telos*—completion—and it is in knowing our *telos* that we best know ourselves. The natural law speaks to the very pattern of creation that Christ continues to sustain. It explains the orderliness that every person desires to participate

⁴ For more on the relationship between natural law and the gospel, see Andrew T. Walker, "The Gospel and Natural Law," *First Things*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/12/the-gospel-and-the-natural-law>.

in by virtue of the image of God inscribed upon them. It explains our desire for safety, our longing for justice, our knowledge of good and evil, the ends or goals of our existence, and the directiveness of our actions.

We err, of course, but every rational person is acting for an end that they believe completes them. The law written on our heart longs for peace with the Lawgiver. Even though fallen, humans strive for the good and can obtain the good in temporal form, as a shadow of the ultimate and beatific good found in Jesus Christ. As the natural law tradition teaches, moral goods exist with their own integrity such that non-Christians can experience true good; but Christians have a deeper grasp of the story of God's cosmic ordering. We are to choose and obtain these goods as a shadow of the highest good, Jesus Christ.

The glory of Jesus Christ exists for our ultimate good. He is true humanity and the highest good. He is the end or *telos* of our being that lets us be happy and complete beings. The finite human cannot perfectly grasp the infinite God. But the infinite God implants infinite longing and infinite inclination within finite creatures. In Christ, the infinite took on finite form so that the finite might have a manifest comprehension of the infinite's promise to us.

Thus, every grasp of moral goodness is an opportunity for us to live for God's glory and to experience the fulfilling happiness he intends for us as a reflection of his own character. This is what *Faithful Reason* hopes to achieve—a natural law ethics primer written from an evangelical perspective. Christian ethics are teleological ethics: it is by living with the ultimate end in view that we come to know ourselves now. We are to live in ways that bring glory to God (1 Cor 10:31) and as the truth of God's glory reflects back on his creatures, we experience the blessings, benefits, and goods he has made for us to enjoy and to know them at the deepest levels from which they are to be known. By having regenerative insights into the deepest interior realities of the moral law's existence and purpose, Christians are "the people who walked in darkness" but who "have seen a great light" (Isa 9:2). As Col 3:10 tells us, in Christ, we are awakened to the knowledge of what

being made in the image of the Creator fully means. In Christ, humanity comes alive.

Christian ethics, therefore, is not primarily a field concerned with solving arcane debates about ethical dilemmas (important as those are), but about being awakened to how the moral life of the Christian is ordered to the obtainment of goods that simultaneously glorify God and cause us to enjoy his creation. Germain Grisez captures well the goal of this book's approach to ethics:

Aware that they are created, people should acknowledge that they owe their very being and everything they have to the Creator. So, they should be grateful to him. Harmony with this transcendent source of meaning and value is one of the basic human goods. As children grateful to their parents love them for their own sakes, people grateful to the Creator can and should will the Creator's overall good for his own sake. If they do, they will fulfill their moral obligations as their contribution to that overall good. In this way, they will seek not only the harmony of submission to the Creator but the harmony of what can only be thought of as friendship.⁵

Outline of the Book

Faithful Reason has two main sections: (1) The first section explains the theory of natural law by appeals to philosophical, theological, and biblical groundings. (2) The second section seeks to apply a natural law framework to a number of contemporary issues under the umbrella categories of (1) Life; (2) Relations; and (3) Order. The schematic organization of the applied section is very intentional, as I intend to show how the natural law explains the most rudimentary elements essential for survival, not an

⁵ Germain G. Grisez, "Natural Law and the Transcendent Source of Human Fulfillment," in *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis*, ed. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 450.

exhaustive showcase that solves every ethical problem. Natural law thinkers disagree among themselves on all that the natural law entails. The natural law aims to articulate the basic lineaments of creation order necessary for human happiness and cultural survival. This volume will attempt to explain the structure of morality according to Christian natural law theory and how this tradition awakens Christians to both the enjoyment of this world and the obligations it posits for the common good.

In contrast to typical evangelical ethics volumes that I consider to be too long and redundantly formulaic, this volume proposes a different strategy: by laying a more substantive and coherent framework up front, less attention is necessary for explaining particulars of an issue of applied ethics once properly evaluated against an established framework.

The goal of *Faithful Reason* is simple: to produce an ethics volume that generates greater confidence in the Christian's understanding of the moral life. It seeks to (1) *frame* the importance of natural law in how it is conceptualized and utilized; (2) *explain* natural law theory in both philosophical and theological dimensions; and (3) *apply* the natural law in areas of practical application. Natural law ethics may not convince the hardened skeptic, but its approach will enhance Christians' ethical worldview. To that end, the book attempts to offer an apologetic for the rational coherence and superiority of Christian ethics.

Ethics on Offense

The world both borrows from and obscures the ethics necessary for cultural survival from the Christian worldview. From the idea of human dignity to human rights, secularism offers no coherent way forward for cultural survival that will not eventually justify tragedy under its own banner. One goal of Christian natural law ethics, then, is for Christians to understand the enduring coherence and finality of God's creation order and to expose the absurdity of unbelief disguised as counterfeit ideology. For ethics to be Christian, we need Christian theological concepts like sin, kingdom,

mission, salvation, and repentance. However, we need to operationalize those concepts into workable paradigms like human flourishing and the common good, both of which are tangible outputs of natural law ethics worked out in the lives of ordinary Christians who have the confidence and knowledge of the role that Christian ethics has and should play in our culture. We cannot afford to be caught flat-footed in explaining our ethics. Too much of our neighbor's good is at stake.

Because we insist upon the unwavering certainty of this, we must confess that Christianity is a religion of truthful assertion. We should not be embarrassed by what our faith teaches, but boldly proclaim it. If Christianity is indeed true, it means that all of its competitors bear a unique weakness of being false and thus liable to exposure. We are to avoid captivity to “philosophy and empty deceit” and “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5).

Too often Christianity plays defense under a pietistic martyr complex. We valorize our disempowerment, surrendering responsibility to creation order and our neighbor under the belief that piety entails retreat. Since Christians believe the value of their ethics is not determined by their popularity but by their truthfulness, leavening the culture with the fruit of the gospel will necessarily imply seeking to influence it. Commenting on how the church has always sought to interact with the culture it lives in, Philip J. Wogaman writes,

Efforts to influence the course of history entail interactions with centers of power and, if successful, lead to the empowerment of particular views and those who hold them. Efforts to maintain moral purity by sectarian withdrawal from the fallen world contribute to self-righteousness and illusions about the church's own moral perfections.⁶

⁶ Philip J. Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: WJK, 2011), 47–48.

Christians are not promised cultural victory. Indeed, cultural rejection for the sake of witnessing to the truth may be our lot. But to be salt and light in our world implies risk.

We are often inoffensive to a fault, choosing to placate cultured despisers through strategic silence or apologetic nuance, instead of giving “reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). This volume seeks to play offense by giving reasons for the coherence of our convictions, but accomplished, as the apostle Peter instructs one verse later, “with gentleness and respect” (v. 16 HCSB). For better understanding our own ethics and in explaining our ethics to those who disagree with us, the natural law supplies us with reasons that we insist are reasonable in the explanation and defense of Christian ethics. Too much is at stake to stay cloistered in the hallowed halls of quietism. The path before us is a stark binary of options: paganism or Jesus Christ; chaos or order. Absurdity and barbarism can only work for so long as a strategy for cultural dissolution until nature strikes back. While we can never be sure how steep the descent may be, the West looks to be in the throes of a convulsive death rattle. In response, we must insist that apart from Christian renewal, there is to be no renovation to Western order or a confident assertion of Christianity’s place in it, apart from a rehabilitation of Christian natural law ethics. But before we seek to persuade others, we need to be persuaded ourselves.

It is the tempest of cultural conflict that has required the Christian church to articulate its convictions in each age. It is the same today. In his best-selling volume *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, my dear friend and colleague, Carl Trueman, closed his book with an exhortation for how Christians can be faithful witnesses of Jesus in a darkening culture. His admonition was for greater Protestant exploration into natural law. Notice, too, that Trueman does not see the value of natural law only for its apologetical uses, but for internally shoring up our understanding of Christian moral principles. As Trueman writes,

Protestants need to recover both natural law and a high view of the physical body. Some will immediately object that natural law will

not persuade the wider world to change its opinions about anything. I would concede that. My concern here is not primarily for the outside world but for the church herself. She needs to be able to teach her people coherently about moral principles. It is unlikely that an individual pastor is going to be able to shape a Supreme Court ruling on abortion (though he should certainly try as he is able), but he is very likely to be confronted with congregants asking questions about matters from surrogacy to transgenderism. And in such circumstances, a good grasp of the biblical position on natural law and the order of the created world will prove invaluable.⁷

Challenge accepted. As we will explore in this volume, there's no principle of Christian morality, whether decreed in Scripture or attested to in nature, that is not simultaneously ordered to the doxological and anthropological good. Christian natural law provides the most consistent, coherent account of morality necessary for the task of personal and social ethics. It offers God as the source of our ethics, reason as the basis of moral knowledge, and an all-encompassing goal behind it: our good, but chiefly, God's glory.

⁷ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 405.

PART 1



1.

Confidence in Creation

Natural Law as Christian Catechesis and Cultural Renewal

In 2021, celebrity Oprah Winfrey sat down to interview the actress and celebrity “Elliot” Page. Page, born female and originally named “Ellen,” had recently announced a transition to living as a transgender male. The announcement made headlines, including on the cover of *TIME Magazine*.

The look of Page during the interview evokes compassion and sorrow. Once beautiful, Page had undergone “top surgery” to remove her breasts. Her hair was now cropped short. With her small frame, she had the appearance of a young, gaunt teenage boy whose prepubescent voice was beginning to drop to a lower octave. The peace and self-acceptance that “transition” was supposed to offer gender-confused individuals like Page still appeared elusive on Page’s troubled demeanor throughout the interview.

Obviously beset with continued identity issues and looking anguished, the frail and sunken appearance of Page is the result of a civilization like our own creating a worldview whose understanding of fulfillment and moral action are defined solely by the horizons of internal psychology and the

subjective self's preferences and desires. It is achieved by a neglect or even disavowal of the body as an essential element of the "self." The self is merely a ghost inhabiting a machine. We are not our bodies and our bodies are not "us" in any corporeal sense. As the interview unfolds, observers see that Page understands her life's meaning by what her mind and self-chosen identity can impose onto physical reality. And it is, tragically, lauded by our elites as the essence of human flourishing. The question is whether physical reality allows for the body to be acted upon as a blank canvas without an equal and opposite reaction of human nature snapping back.

But in setting up the interview, Oprah opened the show by stating the following:

. . . my hope is that this conversation can serve as an invitation for all of us to understand, for all of us to appreciate, and for all of us to know that inside ourselves that every human born to the planet wants the same thing and that is to be accepted, to be loved, and to live in health and safety as our authentic selves. And I really want to honor and celebrate your courage, Elliot, for sharing your truth on social media, then, on the cover of *Time Magazine*, and now in this conversation with me, so I honor that.¹

It is important to not gloss over Winfrey's words. Three things are worth noticing. First, Winfrey pays homage to something central to this book's argument: a universal longing for goodness and wholeness that she considers built into the fabric of human nature. For Winfrey, there is a *universal, intelligible, and objective* longing for the human person to experience health, acceptance, and wholeness.² She believes the longings and aspirations that Page possesses are the same throughout humanity—that such longings exist to bring meaning that corresponds to how the person in question encounters

¹ "Elliot Page interview with Oprah Winfrey," *The Oprah Conversation*, Apple TV+, April 30, 2021.

² Throughout this volume, the categories of universal, objective, and intelligible will be invoked. I owe this helpful heuristic to the late Joseph Koterski, SJ.

their world. Importantly, Winfrey does not have to prove such an axiomatic truth to her audience; she simply assumes it.

Second, Winfrey proceeds to define those experiences and longings for personal wholeness by Page's own collapsed sense of autonomy and self-will. Such is the paradoxical irony of our age where universal longing is defined by the individual. Such is a feature of what scholars refer to as "expressive individualism," the framework that understands human happiness to be associated with unfettered fulfillment of one's deepest longings. Political philosopher Yuval Levin defines expressive individualism as:

a desire to pursue one's own path but also a yearning for fulfillment through the definition and articulation of one's own identity. It is a drive both to be more like whatever you already are and also to live in society by fully asserting who you are. The capacity of individuals to define the terms of their own existence by defining their personal identities is increasingly equated with liberty and with the meaning of some of our basic rights, and it is given pride of place in our self-understanding.³

It is impossible to overstate just how permeated modern society is with expressive individualism. The highest self is the liberated self from the constraints of oppression and self-doubt. The moral horizon of expressive individualism is unbounded self-determination and self-definition. The worldview is regarded by many as perfectly encapsulated in the now-infamous phrase of Justice Anthony Kennedy where he defined "the heart of liberty" as "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."⁴ High-minded verbal potage of this type is as vacuous as it is unsustainable to govern a civilization when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" becomes the common

³ Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic, 2016), 148.

⁴ *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/505/833/>.

moral currency (Judg 21:25). The collapsing of meaning, morality, and liberty toward subjective self-reference bears the hallmarks of what natural law historian Heinrich Rommen calls “metaphysicophobia”—the fear of moral norms being grounded outside the immanent self.⁵

Winfrey and Page, in turn, are prophets of expressive individualism. On screen, Page is cast as the arbiter of what health, acceptance, and wholeness entail. For Page, it means razing her body to the ground and attempting to re-organize it. Repressing her nature, augmenting her body, and subjecting it to the will are the conditions for her understanding of self-fulfillment. In this paradigm, there is no need to look externally outside one’s own self. The expressive individual’s own sense of self-worth and self-perception is the chief arbiter and chief ingredient to satisfaction.

Third, Winfrey—always quick to be the sagacious practitioner of tolerance—is quick to bow and even genuflect before Page’s sense of self. If one asserts “their truth,” then their interlocutor has nothing else to do but to affirm. This is the moral and social contract of our age: asserting one’s identity silences dissent and requires the interlocutor to affirm or else run the risk of violating a secular blasphemy law. Those are the terms of our moral worldview in twenty-first-century America, and the West more broadly. At least on the issue of a woman willing her existence to be a man, Winfrey cannot invoke any sort of judgment. She wants to “honor” and “celebrate” Page and for Page to feel comfortable “sharing your truth” (one of the most banal phrases used today that captures the solipsistic essence of expressive individualism and moral relativism).

This episode is but a small microcosm of the challenge and opportunities facing Christian ethics at the dawn of the twenty-first century: human nature is eviscerated by emptying it of any normative account to give it grammar and poise, which in turn, invites an unending array of actions through which to tinker with a material substance that has no objective moral value

⁵ Heinrich A. Rommen, *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 142.

apart from its own emotional satisfaction. Late modernism's loss of absolute value has created a cultural vacuum of valuelessness and despair.

Striving against the Created Order

But a moral worldview of this type is an active striving against the world that God has made. As creatures made in God's image with a nature that reflects the natural longings he has implanted upon our inclinations, humans are no less morally animated than what they have been in previous generations, for it is inescapable that we search, divine, or construct systems of meaning. The quandary facing our civilization today is that moral longings have been radically *internalized*, *subjectivized*, and in turn, *relativized*. Objective accounts for morality and moral goodness have been deconstructed. What comprises self-hood in our cultural moment is self-constructing one's own sense of identity and never daring to suggest that one's own self-determination can be, in any authoritative sense, determinative for someone else. Psychological humanity seeks his or her fulfillment at the expense of body and soul's unity.

Meaning and morality have been emptied of teleology and collapsed into the horizon of the sovereign self.⁶ Absent that larger purpose from which to define what human excellence is, we grapple and stumble about after any identity our post-rational society permits, even if the confluence of "identities" that gain mainstream acceptance are incoherent or contradicting of others' identities.

At best, however, we are only partly relativistic because as the individual purports to be the sole manufacturer of their sense of self, we still live in a world where grave evils like the Holocaust or ethnic supremacy remain recognizably evil and thus condemned. We are inconsistent creatures driven by utilitarian accounts of social justice. Progressive canons of social justice give

⁶ For more on the relationship between the disenchantment of secular modernity making possible the construction of personal identity, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

vivid expression to the reality that ours is a deeply anxious, but also a deeply moralistic age. The oddity of inhabiting a world that collapses morality into the subjective experience of individuals while at the same time righteously trumpeting the cause of social enlightenment with universal ideals like justice at every corner yields an inconsistent worldview.

The moral schizophrenia defining our civilizational moment is unrelenting. We are radically autonomous and non-judgmental while ferociously tribal and judgmental—even pharisaical—elsewhere. In this schematic, the only taboo act to commit is intolerance itself. Indeed, we are now living a real-life tale of C. S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man*. In that prescient little volume written in the 1940s, Lewis warned of a looming civilizational crisis where morality is evacuated of objective standards and reduced to emotive self-expression.

When all that says “it is good” has been debunked, what says “I want” remains. . . . My point is that those who stand outside all judgements of value cannot have any ground for preferring one of their own impulses to another except the emotional strength of that impulse. We may legitimately hope that among the impulses which arise in minds thus emptied of all “rational” or “spiritual” motives, some will be benevolent. I am very doubtful myself whether the benevolent impulses, stripped of that preference and encouragement which the Tao teaches us to give them and left to their merely natural strength and frequency as psychological events, will have much influence. I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently.⁷

Lewis's point is that moral judgment of certain stripes is inevitable because God has made us moral beings. We are creatures of judgment and reaction. How we ground and define those judgments, on the other hand, is the difference between a civilization that can form a consistent ethic and

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1947; repr. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 66–67.

one that cannot. It is the difference of morality based on sound reason and morality based on emotional register. What concerns Lewis is the horizon from which moral judgment is issued. For Lewis, if the objective basis for morality (what he calls “the Tao”) is jettisoned, humanity cannot summon a morality outside of its own internal, subjectivized expressions of emotive displeasure. As Lewis avers, filling the void of an objective morality will be a morality that is surreptitiously unstable and, eventually, malevolent.

Pursuing Moral Intelligibility

This explains Oprah and Elliot Page: the admixture of universal longing defined, ironically, by the subjective self’s own sense of happiness. It explains the dilemma of Western culture that everyone, from whatever ideological or religious persuasion, sees as conflict-prone, irreconcilable, and unsustainable. Western peoples lack a shared moral vision and no longer reason together. As a result, cultural fratricide defined by an intractable *kulturkampf* persists unabated. The culture war that plays out around us is little more than rival accounts of metaphysical order, what the non-Christian Philosopher Thomas Sowell refers to as a clash between a “constrained” vision of the world that accepts the imposition of order and human nature and an “unconstrained” vision that allows for unending re-invention of morality and calls into question whether “nature” exists at all.⁸

Winfrey and Page’s moral schizophrenia, however, offers an opportunity for Christianity to begin an important and constructive dialogue with its secular neighbors. Christians also desire that all persons experience blessing, health, and self-acceptance. We are to genuinely love our neighbor and seek their unqualified good (Mark 12:31; Luke 10:25–37). We desire for justice to govern our society. Owing to our common nature, the universal longings for wholeness and fulfillment are the same between the Christian and the non-Christian while the starting point and ending points

⁸ Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, Revised edition (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

are viewed from different prisms. Our doctrine of sin reveals that though humans share the same cognitive faculties, we are now terminally prone to misuse them. Indeed, Christians have a long tradition of moral reasoning that insists upon some common moral agreement and partial epistemological agreement despite there being no foundational neutrality between competing philosophical or religious systems. Even though Christians believe morality ultimately sources back to a divine Being, we do not believe that moral knowledge is exclusive to Christians alone, even despite the descent of humanity into sin. A non-Christian may not be able to account for the grounds of their moral knowledge. But the lack of knowledge about an explicit foundation, however, does not dispel the reality that as creatures made in God's image, every creature retains some minimal awareness of moral principles that direct them to a true grasp of moral goods, even if error is possible or likely in how they grasp and execute their longings for the good.

Acting for the Good

The fact that Page and Winfrey insist upon some understanding of an ideal state of affairs, even if wrongly understood and executed, shows that longing is itself evidence of a remnant morality trying to surface. We call this mode of moral reasoning natural law. I will offer several definitions of natural law throughout this book. I offer the following formal definition of natural law and natural law theory to begin our discussion:

Natural law is the God-ordained, God-upheld system of moral order engraved upon an image-bearer's conscience that enable them to rationally perceive moral goods and moral wrongs by interacting with their world through sapiential investigation. The natural law directs rational creatures to know what actions to do and what goods to fulfill consistent with their natural and supernatural ends, and correspondingly, what actions to avoid and vices to shun. The principles of natural law morality are principles that have no prior proof of their intelligibility

apart from obedience to these norms and the experiences of these goods as goods and ends pursued for their own sake.

This definition does not hold that persons know or execute the natural law perfectly, consistently, or exhaustively. Humans sinfully rebel against the moral law they do know and also err in their application of the natural law. Rather, the natural law demonstrates how human beings have implanted upon their nature the capacity for discerning moral truth from moral error. This discovery is made through an evaluation of our inclinations and the data of human experience that provides meaningful reason for action and for discovering what it means to flourish. The natural law is nothing else than moral obligation for rational creatures. Its terminology assumes the existence of an objective moral order that rational persons can grasp, and which supplies them with the data to attain their proper mode of being (i.e., their “flourishing”).

To speak of the natural law is to speak of a mode of Christian moral reasoning based upon teleology and natural ends. *Telos* derives from “teleology” and the Greek language denoting “end,” “goal,” or “purpose.” In a teleological moral system, actions are evaluated by their ability or inability to serve the purpose or goal of a given object’s nature. That an object would have a particular purpose that fulfills what it means for that thing to complete itself (and its nature) stands as one of the greatest sources of cultural tumult. Indeed, the idea that “nature” resides immutably within a person and that there are actions and goods consistent with this nature is the very idea that expressive individualism (similar to Page and Winfrey) rejects. An identity based not on “nature” but what one *wants*, *wills*, or *chooses* without regard to their nature is appetitive and conflicts with the moral vision of Christianity, where God ascribes who we are as his image-bearers and what actions and goods find concord with the nature given to humanity.

I begin with this episode of Page and Winfrey because it frames the overall goal of this book: understanding the task of Christian ethics as ordered, simultaneously, to *God’s glory*, but also *our good*. As an objective account of ethics, Christian natural law ethics from start to finish is an act of grace. Even the character of goodness—the quality of absolute excellence of X

arriving at what *X* is meant for—is itself of grace. That God creates human beings and lets even fallen human beings experience moral goodness reflects God’s common grace and his creational bounty to his creatures. The goodness that humans can experience is a goodness that reflects God’s own being. Such an approach to Christian ethics is understood within a natural law teleology: In His divine wisdom, God has seen fit to design a universe and a field of moral action consistent with his own nature. God orders creaturely activity to be consistent with the universe he has designed. To the extent we obey God and fulfill what he demands of us within this moral order, we pursue God’s glory by recognizing his authority and majestic creatorship. But we also, simultaneously, pursue our own good as we align ourselves with the Creator’s intentions for our flourishing. All qualities of the “good,” then, are reflections of God’s own nature since God could not impart anything less than a measure of himself in ordering the moral world.

Glory and moral excellence are thus twin pillars of mutual reinforcement. Such a configuration means that it is impossible for good moral action not to reflect God’s glory since both are a product of God’s own goodness. In acting for the good, we act for God’s glory since all goodness is but a mirror of his own being. Pursuing God’s glory thus acts to fulfill our good as well. No action or command in Scripture, then, is cordoned off from implications of God’s glory. Christian ethics is best understood within two simultaneous horizons: the temporal (penultimate) and eternal (ultimate). All creaturely activity, to the extent that it is good, fulfills what it means to be human and accords with God’s own being.

Without God disclosing himself both in nature and in his Word, humanity’s knowledge of its ultimate good and its penultimate goods would be incomplete, speculative, and provisional. The natural, though possessing an integrity of its own consistent with natural excellence as we understand it from general revelation, requires the supernatural for the natural to understand itself in the complete sense. With God and his revelation, humanity comes to understand who it is made *by* and *for*. By “good,” I mean obtaining a moral vision defined by the existence of concrete moral goods that cause human beings to flourish. It is by looking to God (our ultimate good) and God’s special and natural

revelation (that discloses the good each in their own respective ways) that our penultimate and ultimate good, comes into focus. Only in the revelation of Jesus Christ do we come into a true, final, and complete knowledge of who we are and what completes us as rational and embodied beings.

Fixed and Necessary Pathways

In Christ the richness of our nature is unlocked. Augustine famously said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”⁹ By obeying the Creator, the Lord receives the glory and authority due to him. In exchange, we are confronted with the pathway necessary for true flourishing. Therefore, Christian ethics must simultaneously be organized around a concern for ultimate horizons (God’s glory) while reflecting back on penultimate horizons (our good). It is a formula at the heart of Christian ethics. We will never be fully happy unless we are holy. Ethics is thus a measure of our joyful conformity to God’s moral law, a law that is good and teaches us to live in accordance with his holiness. To practice holiness is to reflect the nature of God (1 Pet 1:14–15).

This is the chief theological motif of the book that will comprise our journey. I do this to anchor my vision for Christian ethics within a larger theological horizon that avoids the all-too-typical approach that sees Christian ethics as mere proof-texting. Texts matter, of course, to ground our reflection on the task of Christian ethics. But if texts are strung together in order to arrive at a proper conclusion of “what the Bible says about issue X,” we can do so in an isolated and stunted way that divorces the reader from a richer theological tapestry that puts morality and moral action within focus of the grand sweep of Scripture’s storyline.

At the heart of Christian ethics is the abiding reality of a morally ordered and morally intelligible universe. Christian ethics assumes that morality *exists* and is *knowable*. As Christians, we are moral realists, not

⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

moral agnostics, which means we believe our moral claims are accurate reflections of the way things truly are and ought to be. When we declare there to be a moral injustice, we are saying that an injustice exists, not merely that we feel that an injustice has occurred. This brings us back to our opening scene with Oprah Winfrey and Elliot Page. Winfrey is correct to highlight the universal longing for self-acceptance but is exactly wrong to collapse that longing into a person's own choices, preferences, or psychological frame of mind. We must look beyond ourselves to ground morality. From a Christian vantage point, creatures best know themselves by looking to their Creator. Oprah's exchange with Elliot Page gets this exactly backward. Hers, and the secular morality behind it, is an unsustainable morality that even she does not fully believe in if taken to its logical conclusion.

When erring humans are left to determine the grounds of their flourishing and happiness with indeterminate foundation, it ends, invariably, in some dystopic state of affairs. Human nature is not meant to bear the weight of searching endlessly after its nature, its fullness, and its finality. We should receive these as a givenness bestowed by our Creator. Even still, as fallen as we are, everyone draws limits, at least somewhere. Winfrey would not, for example, endorse rape, genocide, or torturing babies. She would not tell a serial murderer to be true to themselves. Her mistake is not a total lack of knowledge of the moral law *per se*, but the inconsistency, incompleteness, and her own volitional stubbornness to obey it.

What might Christianity have to say to this sense of moral inconsistency or moral incompleteness? Christianity declares that God's divine nature, being wholly and reliably good, encodes the world and his creatures with moral directives that reflect God's fundamental goodness while bringing the creature into blessed fulfillment. A morality ordered toward God's glory leads the creature in the pattern and form of human flourishing.

When God's glory is removed from our horizon, we ascribe glory to human ethical concoctions under the pretense that whatever it is—whether ideology, identity, or creature comforts—will complete us. Under a Christian rubric, false worship results in ethical rebellion and cultural

decay (Rom 1:18–32). The obverse is also true: it is only in knowing God that humans are spared a descent into moral disrepair and cultural suicide. True worship, on the other hand, fuels human flourishing. The insidiousness of Winfrey’s moral script is that non-judgmentalism can wreak havoc on impressionable persons swayed to and fro when morality becomes fluid. Postmodern morality offers individuals no fixed morality while biblical ethics does the exact opposite (Matt 7:24–27). One of the most understated aspects of Christian ethics in our day is that it dares to offer a fixed standard from which to ground one’s center of moral gravity. In Christ, our souls are anchored to the only truth that can set us free to fulfill our callings as God’s beloved and that allows us to reap a harvest of joy (John 14:6; 8:32; 10:10).

Indeed, in the absence of a mutually agreed-upon moral destiny defined by the Bible’s own storyline, the inevitable end of irresolvable moral fragmentation is a world marked by cultural strife, human misery, and civilizational decline. The enterprise of Christian ethics is a lot of things, but it is never less than an enterprise whose goal is aligning ourselves and the places we inhabit with the order of creation and the pattern of morality that God has laid down in His creation. Recognizing the limits and operations of God’s creation is to understand the beauty of His glory over creation. From there, it is an exercise in persuading our neighbor that their own good is bound up with recognizing Christ as their Creator, Lord, Savior, and Sustainer. Christian ethics, then, is ordered to the love of God, the love of one’s neighbor and community, and the rightly ordered love of one’s own self.

As culture continues to grow more secular, it will be increasingly important for Christians to gain greater facility with the foundations and intricacies of the Bible’s moral witness. Morality, today, and even more acutely on matters of anthropology, are the primary theaters of cultural conflict. No Christian I’m aware of in the West is facing the loss of their job because they believe in the Trinity. They are, however, facing a bleak employment outlook in many professional careers if they refuse to affirm the full panoply of sexual and gender identities. This is so because in rejecting any natural ends

to the human creature, we are prone to reject the Creator who inscribes such ends. This represents an opportunity, but also a challenge to how Christians have conceived of Christian ethics. Ethics, then, is as much apologetical in nature as it is anything else. Indeed, the book you are holding in your hands is a work of moral apologetics. But the apologetical nature of Christian ethics must be rightly understood. In any apologetical situation, one must ask: Who am I trying to persuade and why? For if the integrity of our moral apologetics is measured only against its ability to have our interlocutor agree with us, then the enterprise of moral apologetics will, more often than not, fail. We do not witness to the truth only on the grounds that we are successful. We are to witness to the truth for the sake of the truth itself. If, however, we understand moral apologetics to be not only outward-facing in its confrontations with skeptics, but also inward-facing as a method of ethical catechesis, the urgency of moral apologetics as a way of reinforcing the church's witness gains greater focus. A story I will never forget helps explain why I think this book and its methodology are needed.

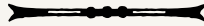
Reality Is Christian Reality

A few years ago, I gave a set of talks to a large, suburban Christian school in Florida. Having recently published a book on the rise of transgenderism, my talks endeavored to explain how we got to this moment in Western civilization, to understand the issue itself, to explain what it is that Christians believe when we confess that God created us male and female in his image, and to defend that confession's intelligibility. I was there to encourage a Christian audience to gain a better understanding of the issue in hopes that it would bolster their confidence to address the issue with others. Now, I believe my arguments provided rational grounds to reject transgenderism. But my goal that evening was not primarily to persuade a non-believer. My primary audience was young Christians who are daily bombarded by a culture peddling a deceitful and harmful ideology under the guise of tolerance and compassion.

Resigned to the possibility that I may not actually persuade the non-Christian of the unreasonableness of gender ideology because of their own



Reason is subordinate to Scripture but never at odds with it.



Natural law is everywhere. It impacts every aspect of daily life, from moral choices, such as obeying road signs, to maintaining fidelity to one's spouse. In *Faithful Reason*, Andrew T. Walker argues that developing a Christian ethic is not only a matter of appealing to biblical authority but also of understanding how God has ordered creation and our place in it. Walker provides a comprehensive and accessible introduction to natural law ethics from an evangelical perspective for pastors, students, and scholars.



“Is a commitment to reasoned truth-seeking, especially in the quest for moral wisdom, compatible with faith? In *Faithful Reason*, Andrew Walker argues compellingly that faith and reason, far from being in conflict or even tension, are mutually supportive and, indeed, mutually required. A person of faith should hold reason and rational inquiry in high esteem. A person who prizes rational inquiry should understand faith as a reasonable response to truths that have been revealed.”

—**ROBERT P. GEORGE**, *McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University*

“Andrew T. Walker gives rational articulation of the *reason* for the hope within us, of the morally ordered and intelligible reality created by God. Meet him on Mars Hill, introducing this fabric of reality called natural law. Walker goes a long way toward helping the evangelical church see reason and faith in harmony—the end of which is Jesus Christ—and thus be good witnesses to the truth.”

—**ADELIN A. ALLEN**, *associate professor of law, Trinity Law School*

“Aiming to be an ‘apologetic for the rational coherence and superiority of Christian ethics,’ Andrew Walker’s admirable and helpful book deftly explores and clarifies the bases and principles needed to achieve that aim philosophically as well as biblically. He does this by calmly critiquing misguided doubts and skepticisms, whether theological, secularist, or simply crowd-following, and comprehensively getting beyond them.”

—**JOHN FINNIS**, *emeritus professor, Oxford University*

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