

ARISE & BUILD

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION* | SEPTEMBER 2023

MORAL INTELLIGENCE

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



During one of our Chalcedon Podcasts I pointed out how lacking our era is in moral intelligence, dedicated as it is to promoting every form of intelligence other than the most important one. A situation like this has deep roots as well as a long history.

In 1852, Archibald Alexander, first professor at Princeton Seminary, commented on the source of morality in man's being in this way:

The feeling of moral obligation which accompanies every perception of right and wrong, seems to imply, that man is under law; for what is moral obligation but a moral law? And if we are under a law there must be a lawgiver, a moral governor, who has incorporated the elements of his law into our very constitution.¹

Alexander concludes his study illustrating the insufficiency of reason as an aid for man to escape his situation:

It is evident from the slightest view of the character of man in all ages and countries, that he has lost his primeval integrity, that the whole race have by some means fallen into the dark gulf of sin and misery. This, reason teaches; but how to escape from this wretched condition, she teaches not.²

But arrogant humanists bristle at such conclusions and have worked overtime to make human reason the means by which man escapes his wretched condition. More specifically, human reason *as embodied in the state*, and imbued with the coercive power of the state, is held aloft as the mechanism by which man is perfected. But the

actual source for this devil's bargain lies in man's contempt for God's law, as Rushdoony points out:

We are taxed because of our sins; we have made the state our god and our shepherd. Men prefer the state's tax to God's tithe; the state takes far more of our wealth than does God, but God requires moral responsibility of us. We prefer rather to be taxed and to whine than to tithe and be godly men.³

Remarkably, men are willing to pay these high costs for fumigating their moral universe with anti-god spray, and Christians are often willing to help humanists clean house on Biblical morality.

The shift from theology to humanistic morality to socialistic statism is easy to trace, and Dr. Rushdoony summarizes the descent into our current hell with clarity:

Matthew Arnold's answer was one fully in tune with the Victorian era: morality replaced theology ... Most, however, replaced theology with a belief in the absoluteness of morality. Morality, however, is an aspect of theology. God as the Creator has given a necessary moral order to all creation. Moral order is an aspect of theological order, and it soon erodes without it. [In time] the moral realm was now the social and statist realm ... Morality is now socially defined, not theologically.⁴

As a result of Christian dereliction, humanists were able to turn morality (as they taught it) against Biblical faith and those who hold to it. Their toolbox now includes virtue signaling, the pointing of the finger (condemned in Isaiah 58:9), and new Pharisaical standards in support of their evolving, schizophrenic conception of truth.

VISIT CHALCEDONSTORE.COM TODAY!

HUMANISTS WEAPONIZE MORALITY

Humanists *weaponize* morality against their opponents. The same people who vilify Christians that defend Rahab and the Hebrew midwives for hiding the truth are willing to censor the truth when it comes to informed consent in medicine. This issue goes back much farther than the Covid blackouts, it extends back to attempts to hide methadone's impact on male testosterone levels.⁵ This moral schizophrenia means that something higher than morality is governing the discourse: the lust for power.

Humanists, pietists, and moralists aren't interested in hearing the Biblical argument in favor of righteous concealment of the truth. Only *they* are allowed to conceal the truth, e.g., when forcing public policy decisions on the populace. But the Christian interested in developing his moral intelligence would do well to examine the Biblical case for Rushdoony's position (published in 1961 in *Intellectual Schizophrenia*) in articles like the one written by Rev. Peter Allison for *Arise & Build*.⁶

HUMANISM MAKES MORALITY AND FREEDOM INACCESSIBLE

The great irony is that man's attempts to free himself from the alleged oppression that God's moral requirements "inflict" invariably lead to the loss of freedom and growth of tyranny. Much of God's law doesn't even stipulate any human enforcement mechanism, whereas *all* of man's law is, in theory, enforceable. As Rushdoony notes:

God makes mandatory the *moral* obligation to care for widows, orphans, aliens, the needy, the sick, and so on and on, but He does not give either church or state the power to enforce the tithe.⁷

God clearly did not trust men to punish a disregard for His covenant. This is a very important fact that tells us much about God's government. Whereas men will thunder threats and kill, God keeps His silence.⁸

Humanistic enforcement isn't limited to written law, but ultimately to the ideological coin of the realm, launching today's cultures into the brave new world of thought crimes. The trend illustrates the hypocrisy of the humanist claim to be the champion of freedom:

One of the absurdities of our time is the common and intense protest by moral relativists against laws they dislike. In spite of their polytheistic faith in many gods and many truths, such people tend to demand instinctively their version of truth imperialistically! Lacking confidence in its inevitability, they must move imperialistically to force their version of truth onto others.⁹

The path to tyranny is paved with the *rejected* moral requirements set forth by the Creator. The central pivot point of humanistic law is rejection of God's requirement that there "be no respect of persons" in moral or legal judgments.

For the modern state, justice is defined by man and is expressed in humanistic laws and regulations ... This has led to new injustices ... Injustice is corrected by injustice. This is a consequence of the premise of humanistic justice, the satisfaction of man's will rather than God's word. The basic premise of God's justice is no respect of persons in judgment (Deut. 1:16-18). It is God's justice that must prevail, not human factors and considerations. The respect of persons, with the best of intentions, still leads to the warping of justice and the tearing of society's fabric, whoever does it.¹⁰

Thus, when fallen man becomes a lawmaker, he seeks to protect his own ultimacy, his own sin. The laws he then creates have as a given factor his respect of persons. They are highly protective of himself and his allies in sin. The more de-Christianized his system of law becomes, the more partisan and warped it becomes. In time, moral limits are replaced by pragmatism.¹¹

Without the Biblical God, there is no common meaning, and truth is as diverse as the multiverse ... There is then no absolute good and evil, no absolute truth. Every man has thus the option of choosing his own truth and his own values.¹²

If we have a multiverse, there is then no common ground, and a commonality can only be established by imperialism. The decline of Christian thinking has seen the rise of imperialism.¹³

The rise of coercive, imperialistic impulses in the body politic then delivers

SAVE NOW DURING OUR STOREWIDE SALE!

the kind of world that Orwell so famously described.

Ostensibly, polytheism provides for freedom, but this means little when meaning is denied to all things. Under polytheism, definition is eroded because there is no common and universal meaning so that freedom becomes meaningless. Men then live in an Orwellian world where freedom can mean slavery, and peace can mean perpetual war.¹⁴

COERCION REPLACES THE FREEDOM THAT BIBLICAL MORALITY PROTECTED

Many Christians fail to see how Biblical morality keeps coercion at bay, while the erosion of Biblical morality entails an increase in the coercive sector of society and the activities it will target.

The state's logical direction, when non-Christian, is to become increasingly coercive ... *The more the state separates itself from Christianity, the more it resorts to coercion*, and its gospel of a true world order is one of slavery. The problem is compounded when both church and state see coercion as the solution.¹⁵

As the state grows, it begins to exert increasing power over the people, ultimately becoming an earthbound god in the process.

When men play God, they are unable to regenerate any man. They cannot by their fiat will make of any man a new creation. They must rather rely on compulsion, from compulsory education to strict controls on every man. The state seeks to re-create man by means of coercion.¹⁶

Few pulpits are pounding out the critical message that Godly morality, when applied by His people, will shrink the state back down to its proper size. The expansion of Christian self-government is part of this process, but the key is the *content* of the morality being lived out: is it Biblical and thus tending toward freedom and smaller external government, or does it help feed the Beast instead?

Given non-Christian premises other than anarchism, the state will only increase its powers because only so can it increase its power to do good. On the other hand, the state under God's law

diminishes the power it possesses and increases human freedom.¹⁷

What's the catch? Men prefer to be enslaved by other men rather than to live under God in freedom, because freedom entails responsibility while man prefers to claim victim status.

What God's law offers is freedom from man. Man's law has always been one expanding claim to power over man. God's law, however, requires virtue, whereas man's law simply calls for moral behavior ... What churchmen fail to see, the ungodly clearly recognize. God's law requires *holiness* whereas man's law requires *conformity*.¹⁸

Of course, a god with clay feet will finally start to stumble, being unable to even find its way off the stage (so to speak). The bright promise of statism has darkened and it now finds itself outside the circle of trust—deservedly so, since “cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his arm” (Jer. 17:5).

What is now developing is a growing radical distrust of the state. Instead of being the embodiment (or, incarnation) of morality, more and more people see it as the embodiment of immorality. (This is to overlook man's original sin.) At any rate, man must now seek morality from a source other than the state. The state has demonstrated that it is no more moral than man. Man's problem is that he sees himself as a victim, not as a sinner, and as a result he is morally compromised.¹⁹

So that those who asserted that God is dead, in the sense that “God is dead to us,” find their new god engulfed in the stench of its own death. The resulting replay of *Weekend at Bernie's* where the corpse is trotted out to satisfy appearances is the ugly result:

The state's moral agenda is dying of cynicism and corruption. Being internally corrupt because of its separation from God, it cannot create a moral order anywhere. As the remnants of its Christianity recede, so too does its shrinking morality.²⁰

You can only fly so long on autopilot if you've done everything in your power to defeat that autopilot.

MORALITY THE DOMAIN OF “OUGHT” AND “SHOULD”

The words “ought” and “should” entail moral judgment (whether a Biblically justified one or a moralistic façade). We need to have the moral intelligence to discern which judgments are fraudulent.

The Scriptures certainly give us a prime example of a suspicious use of moral judgments respecting the “wasteful” use of spikenard on the Lord Jesus Christ. Judas Iscariot issues a haranguing question against Mary’s use of the expensive spikenard: “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:5) Outwardly, Judas shows he has a heart for the poor, a heart opposed to conspicuous consumption of spikenard. But St. John lifts the curtain on Judas’s hidden motives: “This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:6). His loud protests were driven by self-enrichment *at the expense of the poor*.

So too today, most who claim a heart for helping the poor are enriching themselves instead. False causes outnumber legitimate ones. In Jinja, Uganda, an entire building houses rows of computer workstations manned by young men soliciting funds “for orphans,” not a penny of which ever reaches a single orphan. They have turned the Judas model of John 12:6 into a commercial enterprise, making it difficult to find legitimate orphanages to support.

Worse yet is America’s war on poverty, which eclipses and dwarfs the Ugandan operation by orders of magnitude. America’s poverty-industrial complex is Judas writ large.

NOT INNOVATION, BUT FIDELITY TO THE RECEIVED WORD

In Zechariah 7:7, we read as follows: “Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?” The Holy Spirit is implicated in the transmission of the divine will to His people at verse 12 of the same chapter, which speaks of “the words which the Lord of

hosts hath sent in His spirit by the former prophets.” Not new words, but reverence for the fixed, immutable, eternal Word of God, is what is needed.

But today’s new moralists aren’t shy to innovate. Anything old is, almost by definition, in need of correction: out with the old, in with the new and better morality. The accelerating rate of this process can turn today’s progressives into tomorrow’s oppressors overnight (as exhibited in the backlash against feminists by transgender apologists, one example among many of this cannibalistic process consuming the foundations of our society). As Dr. Rushdoony noted, “the moral warfare underway is more deadly than nuclear war.”²¹ There won’t be peace on these matters under humanism either:

Men talk of wanting peace, but they hate it because it brings them face to face with their emptiness. To be in conflict gives them a sense of empty purpose and a way of evading God.²²

In fact, Americans might discover that their so-called precious rights have already been yielded to the state, as Dr. Rushdoony noted:

The Environmental Protection Agency charges men but allows no defense, only a guilty plea.²³

The deterioration of our current system has increased the workload for organizations valiantly attempting to push back against government and institutional overreach, most notably the Rutherford Institute²⁴ and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.²⁵ What symptomatic relief these organizations provide is welcome, but the root of the problem only grows stronger.

God’s unchangeable Word is therefore an offense to modern man’s preference for new man-generated revelation. The last Person modern man will consult is the Ancient of Days, since absolutes are anathema to man, who is willing to destroy everything to protect his alleged freedom to do as he pleases. Because men misdiagnose the actual source of the oppressions of the past (namely, human sin), their solutions only create more channels for new oppressions to flow in.

SAVE NOW DURING OUR STOREWIDE SALE!

Because of antinomianism, the erosion of the people's morality has been great, and no system of civil government can restore it. There must be a return to the centrality of faith and morality; nothing else will suffice.²⁶

The clear and specific nature of this obvious solution earns Dr. Rushdoony unending hatred from humanists and compromised Christians alike. The reason for this is jarring:

We cannot expect our present-day church and state to be favorable to God's law, because it denies to them powers they claim and use.²⁷

The bottom line is we have both secular and religious Pharisees blocking the path to freedom.

HUMANISM DEPERSONALIZES MORALITY

The state always deals institutionally with its citizens: the personal dimension, where it exists, is not intrinsic to its operations. Antinomianism in the church birthed this depersonalizing trend in society at large.

It is a very serious error on the part of the antinomians to treat God's law as impersonal.²⁸

Morality is first and last a personal fact and duty.²⁹

Dr. Rushdoony discussed how "a crime reported to an agency of state sets the *machinery* of the law to work,"³⁰ involving the "cold, impersonal operation of man's or the state's law"³¹ in contrast to God's mode of operation. There isn't anything wrong with method in itself, but today's distorted moral context creates a problem:

...kings were eliminated and replaced by the mechanics of statecraft in the form of a *method* of government, not in itself wrong, but deadly in the context of cultural depersonalization.³²

"Deadly" is a strong word. Why does Dr. Rushdoony use it here? Because the end result of this process is the expansion of *impersonal power* as a substitute for law.

The association of the word *power* with electricity enforces the separation of power from morality. At the same time, as morality is seen more and more, not as an eternally true form of thinking and behavior, but as a matter of the personal

choice of a life-style suitable to you, power becomes also more and more impersonal and divorced from law. Because the moral foundations, the theological premises, of law have been eroded, power has increasingly replaced law.³³

The end result is that "the twentieth century has dehumanized man and replaced society with the state."³⁴

TODAY'S MORAL CRISIS WAS EXPLAINED IN 1661

A common refrain of mine is that we often forget past victories over error and then stumble back into those errors as if they were a new thing requiring new defenses to be developed. This is no less true when it comes to moral intelligence: we have an enormous legacy behind us that has been essentially squandered, and which we must recapture and reassert. Consider Puritan John Owen's powerful verdict against centuries of false moral theorizing. Owen, unafraid to bash the world's greatest moral philosophers by name, does so from a position of strength, a position worth our trouble to emulate.

The effect that syncretism (the mixing of Christianity with paganism or humanism) has upon moral theory is deep and destructive. Owen puts us on the right footing at the outset, pointing out the danger:

The pastures of ancient philosophy have never lacked the snake to inhabit them. Already in the ancient Church it was the complaint of many that Christians tried to put on Christ in such a way as not to put off Plato. Nor can it be denied that no one has ever twisted the gospel into conforming with pagan philosophy without great loss of truth and harm to the Church.³⁵

In ethics, however, the damage wrought was even more severe:

Truly insane are the basic theorems of pagan, philosophic "ethics."³⁶

Owen provides plenty of examples, and we must but pick one and see how he develops it:

To consider briefly some of the innumerable ills which spring from this ever-changing concept of "virtue" and "vice," let us assume that courage is set

up as the yardstick of virtue. Courage is a good thing—in time of war. But courage is not of itself virtue. If it were, it would condemn not only the best and wisest of the gentiles, but also Christ Himself and all of the holy martyrs. Such reasoning is like an elaborate invention, wrought out with one end in mind—to insult and destroy all religion in man.

Without “absolutes” revealed from without by God Himself, we are left rudderless in a sea of conflicting ideas about manners, justice, and right and wrong, issuing from a multitude of self-opinionated thinkers . . . If the mind of a student is ensnared by these theories and speculations, he will find it a sore task ever to be free of them.³⁷

Recall Judas’s complaint about not selling the spikenard to help the poor. Notice Owen’s assessment of this general trend and his stunning conclusion:

Nowhere is the futility of the human mind more evident than when it is exercised concerning “moral philosophy.” An outward shell of learning, falsely so-called, covers the wicked, thieves, drunkards, the violent, and the coward. Is this moral or virtuous, or a mere parody of these things? I have no hesitation in declaring that not one true virtue is certainly and correctly taught in all of the pages of Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*.³⁸

The key to Owen’s approach lies in this: that he takes seriously the noetic effects of sin,³⁹ which the moral philosophers seek to banish from consideration. They (in opposition to Scripture) propose to find ethics in the natural order, presupposing man in his pre-Fall state with his mind able to extract a substantive morality from the natural world. Dr. Rushdoony certainly echoes John Owen’s view of how paltry the results have been when the world’s greatest intellects try to carve moral theory out of the fog of human autonomy, in words critical of Oliver Wendall Holmes:

The law as a distillation of human experience is a very shallow thing.⁴⁰

The nations are like the dust of the balance, and less than nothing (Isaiah 40:17). Their combined moral output, scraped together from the dust of the balance, is in-

deed less than nothing. Their approach puts moral intelligence far beyond their reach.

MORALITY AND NEUTRALITY

It is at this point that Owen’s arguments and those advanced by Cornelius Van Til merge. By appeal solely to the natural order of things upon which to erect a theory of morality, the domain of special revelation is deliberately omitted from consideration. Van Til points out that this is no benign omission:

Kant, as well as Socrates, is indifferent to what God may say about the nature of the good. But the seeming indifference of both Socrates and Kant to what God may say is, as a matter of fact, hostility to what God says and has said.⁴¹

Man cannot be trusted to erect a moral theory because he is in opposition to the only One who can be called Good, and man makes a point of leaving God in the dumpster when he moralizes. And it is the essence of moral intelligence to recognize this fact and to war against man on the side of God and His revelation of what is good and evil. To allow man to invade the moral domain is to allow him to cover up his sin using smooth words, even intellectual words, to hide the actual nature of his theorizing. In his final comments on Immanuel Kant’s model of moral behavior, Van Til lets the other shoe drop:

When Kant therefore speaks of the moral law as absolute, we must take this to mean that the autonomous man who projects it will allow no law-giver above himself. And when Kant speaks of reverence for the moral law he in the last analysis means reverence for man as the giver of the law.⁴²

Van Til shows how man in Kant’s model only “makes such laws as will promote his covenant-breaking effort in relation to God the Creator and to Christ the Redeemer.”⁴³

Warfield made just as important an observation about the contaminating nature of the Fall upon man and his approach to morality:

Sinful man did not wish to be dependent on God; guilty man was thrown into terror by his sense of responsibility to Him. Refusing to have God in his knowledge,

SAVE NOW DURING OUR STOREWIDE SALE!

he was given over to his own reprobate mind; and developed, now, out of his sense of dependence and obligation, not religion and morality, but religions and moralities. There is an infinite variety of them, worked out in parallel series, reflecting much less what God is as the author, sustainer, and governor of His creatures, than what these creatures had become in their sin.⁴⁴

But Warfield then leads us from this low point to what God is working toward in time and history: the total victory of Biblical morality in this world.

THE MORAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD

Man-made moral systems reflect man's rebellion against God, codifying it, so his rejection of Scripture is a logical conclusion of his devolution, as Warfield explains it:

Sinful man, fearing God because guilty, and hating him because corrupt, would inevitably reject this revelation or distort it to his own mind. It was necessary to cure man's sin, which had "held down the truth in unrighteousness." ... All this god has undertaken to do. But it has pleased Him to accomplish it only in the course of a process which extends through ages ... Thus it comes about that true religion and morality is only slowly made the possession of man. Objectively in the world in an authoritative revelation, it is subjectively assimilated by the world only as the Kingdom of God is built up, step by step, slowly to the end. We are assured, indeed, that the leaven of truth, thus brought into the world and applied by the Spirit in a long process, shall in the end leaven the whole lump. Meanwhile, what is presented to observation is a conflict between the true and the false.⁴⁵

But the end of the process brings victory, whereby all false moralities are shaken and laid in ruins so that only the unshakeable shall remain.

So we perceive a new humanity rising in the world, and by faith may see the day looming on the horizon when the whole world shall live in the full enjoyment of the true religion, practicing in its completeness the true morality, which have been restored to man by God his Savior.⁴⁶

In other words, true moral intelligence will ultimately prevail in fulfillment of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. 🏰

1. Archibald Alexander, *Outlines of Moral Science* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner & Co., 1868 edition), pp. 209-210.
2. *ibid.*, p. 272.
3. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law, Volume 3: The Intent of the Law* (Vallecito, CA: Ross Hoss Books/Chalcedon, [1999] 2023), p. 52.
4. *ibid.*, p. 108.
5. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/why-did-they-do-it-christian-physician-with-a-37-success-rate-for-recovering-addicts-gets-shut-down-by-the-state>
6. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/differentiating-between-righteous-and-deceitful-concealment>
7. Rushdoony, p. 12.
8. *ibid.*, p. 120.
9. *ibid.*, p. 123.
10. *ibid.*, p. 121.
11. *ibid.*, p. 130.
12. *ibid.*, p. 122.
13. *ibid.*, p. 122.
14. *ibid.*, p. 123.
15. *ibid.*, p. 136.
16. *ibid.*, p. 141.
17. *ibid.*, p. 143.
18. *ibid.*, p. 154.
19. *ibid.*, p. 164.
20. *ibid.*, p. 166.
21. *ibid.*, p. 189.
22. *ibid.*, p. 18.
23. *ibid.*, p. 27.
24. www.rutherford.org
25. www.thefire.org
26. Rushdoony, p. 104.
27. *ibid.*, p. 2.
28. *ibid.*, p. 161.
29. *ibid.*, p. 166.
30. *ibid.*
31. *ibid.*
32. *ibid.*, p. 4.
33. *ibid.*, p. 144-145.
34. *ibid.*, p. 199.
35. John Owen, *Biblical Theology* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994 translation of the 1661 Latin original by Stephen P. Westcott Ph.D.), p. xxxviii.
36. *ibid.*
37. *ibid.*, xxxix-xl.
38. *ibid.*, p. 92.
39. The effects of the Fall on the mind.
40. Rushdoony, p. 25.
41. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., n.d.), preface.
42. *ibid.*, p. 248.
43. *ibid.*, pp. 248-249.
44. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Collected Shorter Writings*, Vol. 1, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), p. 42.
45. *ibid.*, p. 43.
46. *ibid.*, p. 44.

Humanism is collapsing, but is the Church ready to govern in Christ's name?

Rushdoony predicted the times in which we live which is why he focused the mission of Chalcedon on the great work of Christian Reconstruction. The only remedy to what we face is a return to Christian faith, character, and obedience.

Rushdoony wrote, "The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man," (*Sovereignty*, p. 31) which means the Christian most needs the resources to equip him for Biblical self-government.

The Chalcedon Foundation is a "think-tank for the self-governing Christian," and our mission is to equip Christian families and churches to apply the faith to every area of life and cultivate faithfulness to God's law and covenant in order that Christ's Kingdom might increase.

Help Support the Mission of Chalcedon

You can help by sending your most generous tax-deductible gift to Chalcedon today. We've enclosed a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to make it easy, and you can also donate online at: Chalcedon.edu/Give



CHALCEDON
FOUNDATION*

P.O. Box 158 • Vallecito, CA 95251-9989

Phone: (209) 736-4365

Fax: (209) 736-0536

email: info@chalcedon.edu

www.chalcedon.edu

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Sacramento, CA
Permit No. 316