

Toward a Coherent View of Life and Death



Starting point: Biblical ethics vs. theoretical ethics

“All violence is bad.”

“All killing is bad.”

“The natural way is always the best.”

“Maximize the greatest good for the greatest number.”

“Free choice is the greatest good.”

Premise: the entire Bible (Old and New Testaments) is revelation from God and is the basis of Christian ethics.

1 Tim 3:16-17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

The Bible's view of mankind:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:27-28)

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (Psalm 8:4-8)

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.
Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. (Gen 9:1-3)

Humans as "image of God."

Humans as "lords and caretakers of earth."

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)



Immediate consequences:

Killing and eating animals is permissible.

You may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, as much as you desire (Deut 12:15)

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (1 Corinthians 10:25)

But we are not to wantonly destroy or be cruel to animals

Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel. (Prov 12:10)

If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long. (Deut 22:6-7)



Immediate consequences:

Killing humans is not the same, and highly proscribed. We are even held accountable for endangering humans, and even for thinking of endangering them.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." (Genesis 4:8-10)

When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be liable.

But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. (Exodus 21:28-29)

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21-22)

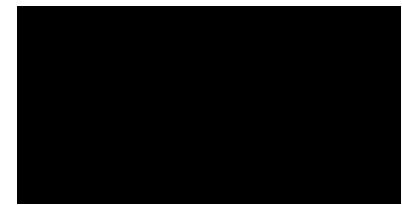
Note that the criminality of murder is not violence *per se*, but violation of “holiness” since people have the image of God.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but **they must not touch the holy things, lest they die**. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry. ... deal thus with them, that they may live and not die when they come near to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint them each to his task and to his burden, but they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment, lest they die. (Number 4:15-20)

“holiness” = set apart for God’s purposes
 (“outside” the natural way of the world)
 R.C. Sproul, *Holiness of God*

predators are cool!



General agreement of Christians that people are different from animals (contra neo-pagan spirituality).

Areas of disagreement among Christians:

Who and what do we count as human?

Who enforces, and how do we enforce these principles?

Past debates:

Are Africans human?

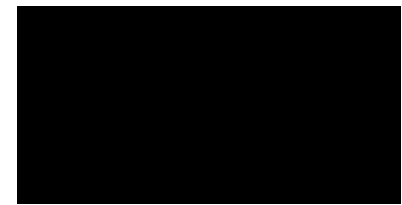
Are women and children?

Are mentally challenged people?

Are Jews?

The fact that something is debated does not excuse us.

F. Schaeffer/ C.E. Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*: eugenics concept of “life not worth living” as origin of Nazism



Who and what do we count as human?

“Attribute” humanness

intelligence? independence?

“personhood”?

animals share many of these attributes.

less of these attributes = less human?

“Holiness” of human life at all stages

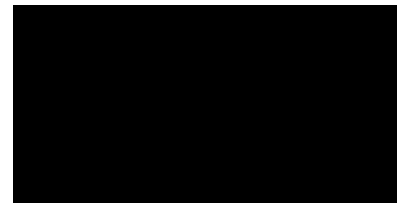
reverence for beginning of life processes

respecting all people, not treating any as objects

saving/protecting human life at all stages

treating people as morally responsible

respect for dead bodies



1. Respect for beginning of life

Scientific facts:

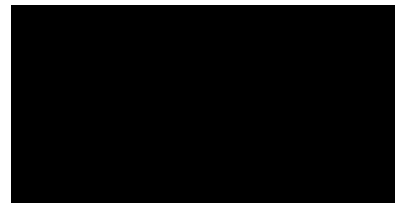
About 2/3 of fertilized eggs do not implant, naturally.

The “mini-pill” works partly by preventing implantation of fertilized embryos.

Many fertility clinics routinely destroy fertilized embryos.

Some stem cells are taken from destroyed fertilized embryos.

*Question is not: “Are they people?” or “Is it natural?”
but “Are we venerating human life with utmost care?”*



Church's view of abortion

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life (Exodus 21:22-23)

The Didache -- ca 120 A.D.

"Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion."

Athenagoras -- ca 165


"We say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God. For the same person would not regard the child in the womb as a living being and therefore an object of God's care and then kill it...But we are altogether consistent in our conduct. We obey reason and do not override it."

Tertullian -- ca 160-240

"For us [Christians] we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter when you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth." - Apology 9:6

Ambrose of Milan -- ca 339-397

"The wealthy, in order that their inheritance may not be divided among several, deny in the very womb their own progeny. By use of parricidal mixtures they snuff out the fruit of their wombs in the genital organs themselves. In this way life is taken away before it is born... Who except man himself has taught us ways of repudiating children?"



John Calvin, Commentary on Exodus

"...the unborn, though enclosed in the womb of his mother, is already a human being, and it is an almost monstrous crime to rob it of life which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his most secure place of refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy the unborn in the womb before it has come to light."



Systemic or societal sins-- why is it so hard to change?

Slavery: society based on slave economy

Abortion: almost no women get abortions as “free moral choice” -- they grieve deeply over it.

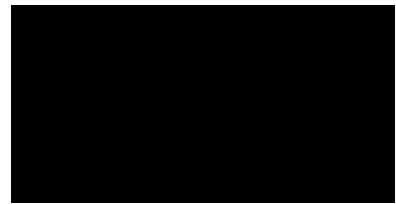
Unspoken premises of society:

alienation: “Your problems are your own”

image: you are a failure if no sex

barter instead of covenant:

“Free to love who you can keep” (Keller)



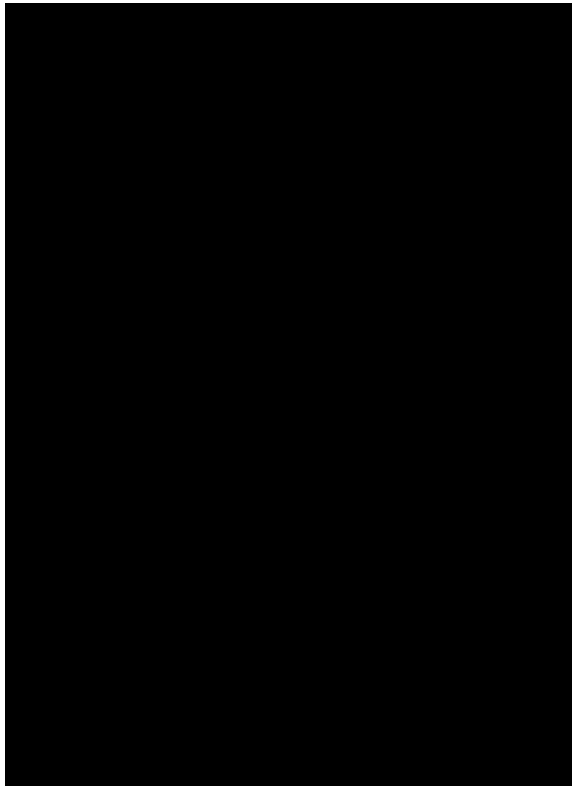
2. Respect for end of life

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, **his body shall not remain all night on the tree**, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut 21:22-23)

“desensitization”

WARNING!

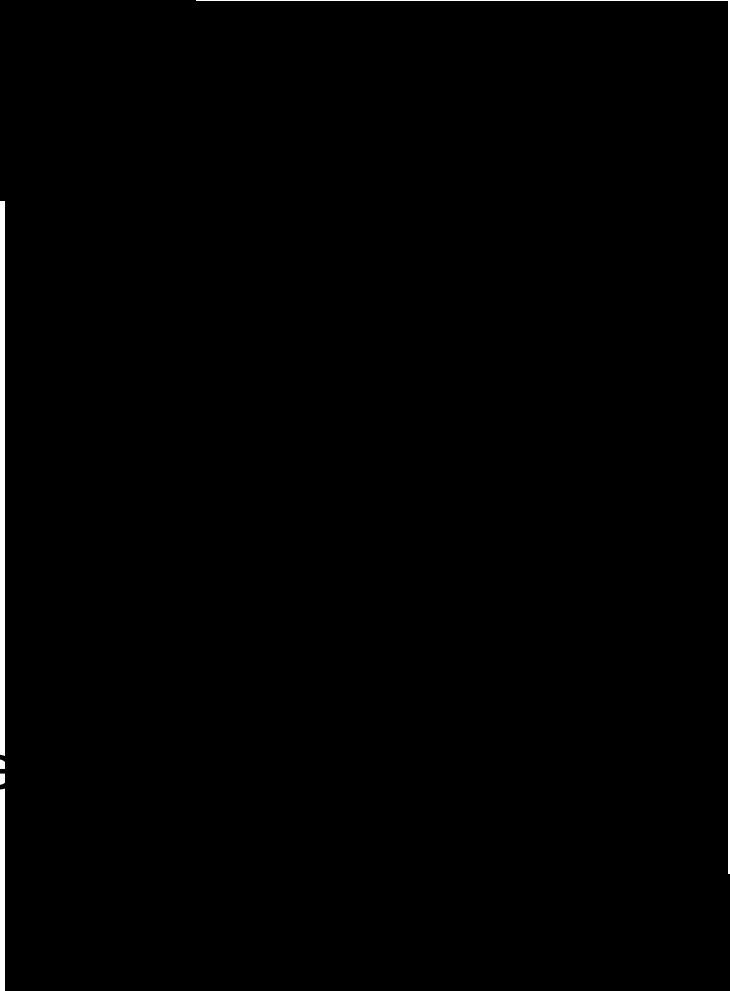




seven weeks



nine weeks



respect for holiness of human life

3. Saving/protecting life at all stages

Death as an “enemy”

Jesus wept. (John 11:35)

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:25-26)

Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter”; therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’ And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter.” Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it. (Isaiah 28:15-18)

*“circle of life” vs.
“culture of life”*

Freedom to commit suicide?

alienation: frees us of responsibility to relieve suffering, comfort the depressed

right of self harm? ignores the **role of the salesman** in choices.

Does anyone make a free informed choice?



Caring for all people

Westminster Larger Catechism, 1648

Q. 134. Which is the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.

Q. 135. What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labour, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behaviour; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succouring the distressed and protecting and defending the innocent.

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker,
but he who is generous to the needy honors him. (Proverbs 14:31)

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, and the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

Ron Sider, *Cry Justice*



Caring for all people

Respecting all people, not treating any as objects

freak shows

racism

sexual objectification

mocking homeless, foreign, or stupid people

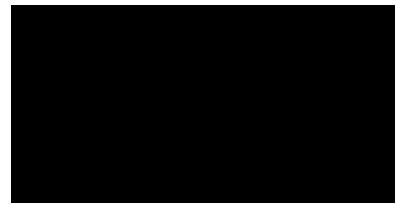
different laws for poor and rich (either way)/ demonizing classes of people

You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. (Lev 19:14)

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall **not be partial to the poor** or **defer to the great**, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. (Leviticus 19:15)

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and **loves the sojourner**, giving him food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:18)

You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, **siding with the many**, so as to pervert **justice** (Exodus 23:2)



“*Seamless garment*” or “*Consistent pro-life*” ethic

Catholic bishops of North America

Jim Wallis (Sojourners)

Tony Campolo

anti-abortion

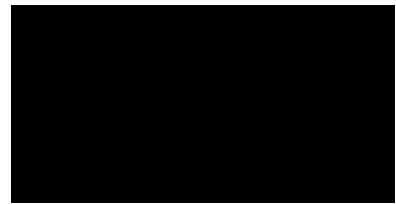
anti-capital punishment

anti-war (pacifist)

pro-socialized health and welfare

“**God is not a Republican**”

Is God a pacifist?



4. Treating people as morally responsible

Biblical concept of *justice*

revenge: when hurt, I act on my own behalf, as I see fit.

justice: when hurt, I cry out, and another acts on my behalf.
Third party is more objective

Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:20)

Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not answered; I call for help, but there is no justice. (Job 19:7)

But the LORD sits enthroned forever;
he has established his throne for justice (Psalm 9:7)

Justice assumes actions of people are *significant*

- we do not enforce justice on worms



“Thou shalt not kill” = an absolute?

context is Law of Moses

Whoever sheds the blood of man, **by man shall his blood be shed**, for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

Whoever takes a human life **shall surely be put to death**. (Lev 24:17)

And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, **and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan** and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech. (Lev 20:4-5)

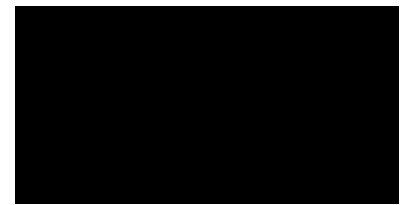
An “Old Testament” ethic?

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. **For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer**. (Romans 13:1-4)

... who through faith **conquered kingdoms, enforced justice**, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions... (Heb 11:33)

Jesus answered [Pilate], “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been **given you from above**.” (John 19:11)

Jacques Ellul - earthly authority is from Satan



The wrath of God - an embarrassment?

Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity **will not go unpunished.**
(Proverbs 17:5)

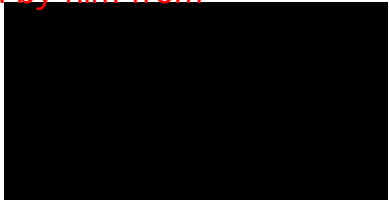
He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.
And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.
From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.
(Revelation 19:13-15)

The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation...
The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name. (Exodus 15:2-3)

If we say violence and killing are *intrinsically* evil,
we either say God is evil or God has changed his character
(or Bible is false)

Essence of Gospel is that wrath is righteous

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, **much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.** (Romans 5:9)



Pragmatic arguments against death penalty

kill too many people off

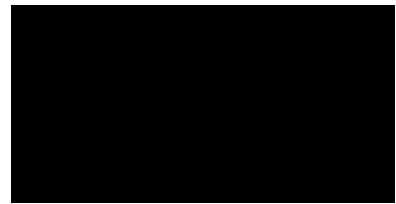
not sure if evidence adequate

no legitimate authority to enforce it

Symbolic reasons for death penalty

teaches holiness of human life- no payment of money or time can equal it.

killers = “macho” culture or “loser” culture?



War?

Legitimate authority?

Biblical concept of *rescue*:

“savior” who intervenes where oppressors rule

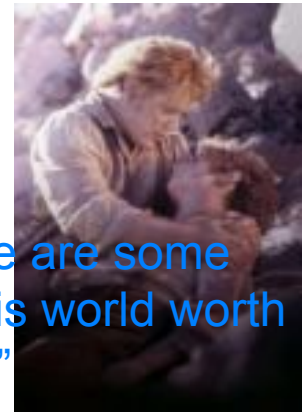
Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (Proverbs 24:11-12)

The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation...
The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name. (Exodus 15:2-3)

“Just war theory” (e.g. Augustine)
just means
just ends
last resort

Deut 20: rules for war (offer peace, don't destroy land, no draft)

LoR: “There are some things in this world worth fighting for.”



Summary

“A Coherent View of Life and Death”

Human life is treated differently from other life at all stages, because of “image of God”

General disposition of “culture of life” is to fight death, because humans were meant for eternity

All of human life is “our problem”- we must fight culture of alienation

Justice, including death penalty, indicates high regard for human life and high regard for moral responsibility.



