

#6 What Is Being Human?

Is humankind just an evolved species of animal, or are human beings special creations of God, “made in his image”? What is humanity’s relationship to God? Is life just what we can make out of it, or is there transcendent meaning, purpose and hope? Is there a transcendent “right and just” moral order for our lives, or are all values relative to how we set them up?

Answers to these questions come from two fundamentally opposing worldviews — Theism (God exists and relates with his creation) and Atheism (God does not exist) — or they are incidentally formed by secular culture that tells us that God *may* exist, but that he is not relevant in these matters. Secularism has been adopted by many of the well-educated cultural elite and rests on the Grand Story of Evolution. It tells us that we have evolved sufficiently and are now intelligent enough to make it on our own without the need for the superstitions about a supernatural God and his rules. Humankind is in charge of their own destiny, and human reason alone is sufficiently reliable and just — not only for the individual but for the collective society as well. Secularism says that “humanism” should be the basis of our worldview and following it will build a peaceful one-world global order. The Secular Humanist Declaration of 1980 takes the place of the Bible. It gives secular guidance on all aspects of life — moral, intellectual (including the interpretation of history), aesthetic, and mental. Human reason replaces the Grand Story contained in the Bible which had been followed for centuries by nearly half the world’s population. Truth no longer need be found in a transcendent God, or in a spiritual reality, or in a transcendent ethical system. It can be constructed and reconstructed in nontranscendent terms through human reason alone. Secularism assumes that truth based on Naturalism (nature is all there is) can be reasoned out for every field of knowledge and is or will be perfectly complete without reference to God.

Both the biblical and the secular worldviews are rational — each is based on reasonable assumptions. How should one decide on which foundation to build his or her life? Each is on a different path and leads to different conclusions regarding the Big Questions: “Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here?” I have suggested that we look at the evidence for each worldview, follow each path to its conclusion, and then decide which path best corresponds to reality. In this series we are exploring evidence for Naturalism

(Atheism) versus Theism. Does Naturalism explain reality better than Supernaturalism? Is it conclusive that nature is all there is? Or is it more reasonable that God created nature? Is it more reasonable that dead material brought life into existence based on natural laws, or that God created life? Is it more reasonable that all the living things on earth came into existence by the power of natural selection and random mutation (Darwinism), or is it more reasonable that God created and guided the process of life building? In this session we examine the following Big Question: Is it more reasonable that man and his mind evolved from the lower animals, or does humankind exhibit the genius of the Creator?

Only human beings possess genius. It has been popular among evolutionists to speculate that even genius, like that of Shakespeare, can be emulated by animals. Scientists intent on defending Darwin's theory have posed intriguing scenarios such as: If a million monkeys pounded on typewriters for a million years, they would eventually produce *Hamlet*. In 2002 enterprising researchers set up a computer in a cage at a zoo in England and let six monkeys bang away at the keys for a month. Their work began with *ffvfvvvvss* followed by 300 *g*'s and almost 2000 *s*'s. The lead researcher said, "They pressed a lot of *s*'s... the lead male got a stone and started bashing the hell out of it... Another thing they were interested in was defecating and urinating all over the keyboard." As authors of *A Meaningful World* put it, "Suffice it to say, their literary efforts fall a good deal short of the Bard." Darwin, himself, was skeptical that our minds could emerge from the evolutionary process. He said, "*But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?*"

Only human beings contemplate the BIG QUESTIONS of life. Only human beings can "think deeply" and participate in a Socrates Club and contemplate ultimate issues. As our namesake Socrates famously put it, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Animals don't examine their lives. Only humans are cognizant of their imminent death — that they have an expiration date. This awareness generates personal angst, contemplation of God, and the possibility of immortality. Nearly every one of us pursues some form of spiritual truth and has some deep-seated beliefs of ultimate concern. We are aware of our "souliness,"

even if we say there is no such thing as a soul. Atheists and skeptics as well as religious people are drawn to ultimate questions of meaning, purpose, and hope. We love and want to be loved, even if we're not exactly sure of what that means. And if the source of our identity is not in a personal God, then it probably aligns with a substitute impersonal source, e.g., the state, race, gender, politics, and/or some personal truth or ideal. These are dimensions of our personality that are missing in all other creatures. The Bible calls it being "made in the image of God," which animals are not.

Only human beings communicate at a highly abstract level of reason, logic, mathematics, propositions, arguments, inferences, and invent conceptual languages of highly specified complexity that not only transcend the capability of the animals, but even the categories of such things. Animals don't generate questions and answers to the truth of philosophical, mathematical, psychological, religious, ethical, aesthetic, and historical claims. They don't seek to have a relationship with God, or an image of him, nor to worship him. They don't have "religious" encounters with God such as in prayer, or in experiencing miracles; nor do they have religious experiences such as epiphanies and moments of inexplicable spiritual beauty and ecstasy.

Only human beings are conscious of the grand theater of time and space — the creation of the universe and planet Earth, the origin of life and the myriad of individual species. Only humans inspect the full spectrum of their world from the microscopic intricacies of the atom and the cell, to the astronomical reach of the galaxies. Mankind recollects the past, recognizes the present, and anticipates the future. We even think of living beyond this lifetime. And we live our entire lives aware of these opportunities. We possess an intense curiosity to know what is true and further our quest for improvement through innovation and technology, driven by what atheists and theists alike call "knowing the mind of God." Yes, animals are powerfully instinctive, but they don't have the ability to take dominion over nature with such innovative ideas.

Human beings are individually gifted with genius to express creativity for their own well-being and for the well-being of the society. Many are driven to express their love and devotion to the Creator. Think of an orchestral performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Each individual instrument made by a craftsman for a particular sound. Each individual musician skilled in that instrument. Each individual sheet of music tailored for a particular role. And then the genius of the

composer who visualizes in his or her mind the masterpiece coming together with all the individual parts and musicians coalescing in perfect harmony and timing. Finally, there's the conductor who directs the score so the audience can assimilate the entire revelation in a harmony of majestic mystery and beauty.

Only humans create, recognize, and appreciate beauty on its own merit — art, music, literature, film, and the awe and wonder of the natural world. We are moved by a deep and inscrutable sense of the magnificent, which is not explainable by evolutionary natural selection, nor the need for adaptation and survival. Anthropological excavation has shown that this aesthetic expression dates from the very beginning of humanity's existence. Animals might do creative acts out of practical necessity, but human beings will do it for just the sake of sheer pleasure.

Only human beings are aware of their own being (in a "first-person" sense — "I am aware that I exist"), and aware that other human minds exist (in a "third-person" sense), and further aware that a "super-mind" (the mind of God) may exist. Evolutionists say that this awareness is an illusion and caused by chemical processes within a material brain. Theists say that such an awareness is transcendent and exists only in the immaterial mind (the soul). The mind is not the brain, although the brain is a physical entity that facilitates mind activity.

Only human beings are capable of moral (right and wrong) judgments "about" things, i.e., things that have a subject matter beyond themselves. We call these judgments our values, and we have free will to take action and make decisions based on those judgments. We hold people responsible for their actions. We hold a person accountable for killing another human being, but we don't hold a tiger responsible for killing a zebra. We are intuitively cognizant of moral obligations through our conscience (it is always wrong to murder, and always right to be compassionate). Regarding these value and moral obligations, there is an "oughtness" that transcends our personal preferences and steers us in a direction of "doing the right thing." These values can be discovered and need not be invented by others or the culture. They are implanted in us from the beginning. We experience the psychological pull of moral responsibility and duty.

Only human beings have these transcendent capacities and can speak of dignity, righteousness, and justice for all humankind because we are intuitively privy to the way the world is supposed to be, and subject to a transcendent order. Animals

are not even aware of such capacity let alone endowed with it. As award-winning author Tom Wolfe summed it up, *“To say that animals evolved into man is like saying that Carrara marble evolved into Michelangelo’s David.”*

Psalm 8 puts it this way: *“What is man that You [God] think of him, And a son of man that You are concerned about him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!”*

Human beings are not just another kind of animal. Human beings are the pinnacle of God’s creation — “made in the image of God.”