

1  **Christianity and the Person**

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2  **Outline**

- God and morality
- Christian roots of liberty and equality
- Theology of the body: Christianity against dualism

3  **The Moral Argument, 1**

- The conscience has an absolute authority -- superior to that of any human being or institution.
- Authority is personal in character.
- The principles of morality, represented by the well-formed conscience, are eternal, immutable and necessary.
- Therefore, the conscience represents the demands of an eternal, necessary and immutably good person (or persons).

4  **The Moral Argument, 2**

- Human life has a natural meaning and purpose, which includes the attaining of wisdom and moral perfection.
- The First Cause of human existence must be have ordered human life to that end.
- So, God is the ground of morality.

5  **The Source of Meaning?**

- It is self-defeating to suppose that human life is meaningless, or that we create our own meaning.
- Meaning cannot come from meaninglessness.

6  **2. Christian roots of liberty and equality**

- Before Christ, all the world's empires and philosophies took it for granted that individual human beings are merely cells in a social organism, resources to be used for some higher end.
- Christ changes that: elevating the status of each individual,

however lowly, and putting the individual's free choice at the center of a cosmic drama.

7  **Some specifics: equality**

- God chooses a nation (Israel), without wealth, greatness, or power.
- God chooses judges and prophets from every class and walk of life, challenging kings, wealthy
- God is incarnate in Christ: born in a stable, in a working-class family among a conquered people.
- Jesus is rejected and condemned by all the worldly powers of his time, as are his followers.

8  **More on equality**

- All created in God's image, all fallen equally in sin, all equally saved by Jesus, sharing equally in the Spirit.
- Looking forward to a perfect equality (no slave or free, no Jew or Greek, no male or female in Christ – Gal. 3:28), already realized now in the Spirit.
- Jesus' parables: God cares about each individual, not the mass: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son.

9  **The centrality of freedom**

- Each of us is a battleground: contested territory, between good and evil.
- Our salvation and damnation depends on our own choices, not on status or connections.
- The Church merely preaches, invites and suffers (the Sermon on the Mount): it does not come in power or glory.
- Jesus' teaching introduces a distinction between Church (with no force, violence) and State.

10  **The Enlightenment Alternative**

- The Enlightenment – Descartes, Locke, Kant, Mill – tries to ground the Christian ideas of equality and liberty in a metaphysical story or myth:

- All human beings have an interior core – an immaterial real self of pure thought and feeling.
- Our bodies, our histories, our social connections and positions are all external to the real self.
- The real self is a being of pure freedom, enslaved by conventions (Rousseau).

#### 11 **Problems with the Enlightenment**

- Dubious philosophical assumptions. How does the immaterial soul inhabit the body?
- Can't account for the fact that we are thoroughly shaped and formed by history, culture. The Enlightenment ideals of reason, autonomy, equality also have external roots.
- Can't deal with the centrality of family and reproduction.

#### 12 **Superiority of the Christian Story**

- Christians don't have to separate the soul and the body.
- We can admit that our souls are shaped by history and culture.
- Our equality and right to freedom is not grounded in some supposed natural independence from history, but in the fact that through Christ the Church transcends the limits of history.

#### 13 **3. The theology of the body**

- Christianity rejected the dualism of the ancient world: Pythagorean, Platonic and Gnostic.
- God created the world, matter included, ex nihilo. He didn't mere re-shape pre-existing stuff.
- The Incarnation: Jesus became truly man, body and soul.
- The Sacraments: the Real Presence, the use of water, oil.
- The Resurrection of the Body, not just immortal souls.

#### 14 **Modern dualism**

- Dualism was revived at the time of the scientific revolution, by Rene Descartes and others. Opened the door to exploitation of the material world as empty and meaningless.
- C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*. Technology as absolute

power.

- Modern 'materialistic dualism': the hardware/software distinction. We are pure information structures, only contingently embodied.
- Trans-humanism. Kurzweil's "singularity".

15  **The goodness of the body**

- Christians embrace the goodness of the body: food and drink, song, music, work, craft, law and politics, marriage, sexuality and family.
- In certain cases and ways we sacrifice these things for heavenly ends, but Christian asceticism is always a means, not an end.

16  **Hillaire Belloc**

Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine  
 There's always laughter and good red wine  
 At least I've always found it so.  
 Benedicamus Domino!

17  **The centrality of reproduction**

- At the very core of our bodily life is the process of reproduction, by which we participate in God's creation of a new immortal being in God's own image.
- Christians hold that process in all of its natural aspects in the highest respect. Not 'mere plumbing'.
- Similarly, we treat the process of dying with equal respect, refusing to intend the death of oneself or another, as a supposed 'mercy'.