"Just" Human?

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Megan Almon, Apologetics Inc. (www.apologetics.org)

Overview: We live in a world that suffers from "just a" syndrome, reducing our God-soaked universe to just pieces and parts. That kind of thinking has been devastating to the way human beings view one another. If we're all "just human," with no *real*, underlying dignity that we share in common, of course human beings are disposable, sellable, commodified, and only worth something if they're useful. With flawed anthropologies leading the public discourse about bioethics, it's no wonder we face severe injustices across the spectrum from the beginning of life to the end. However, Christianity has championed human dignity all along. Flying in the face of the popular views of what it means to be human, it soundly says that to be "just human" is more than enough. We desperately need to channel our focus into being *more* human, not less.

Intro/Digging deeper: Today, society suffers from what a great professor of mine called "Just a" syndrome. The enchanted world we live in has been stripped of its mystery and wonder. We have become disenchanted people. What once was a home is now *just a* house. A meal is *just* food to be scarfed down alone. The Church is *just a* building, and Jesus — *just a* wise teacher who lived long ago. A human being in utero is *just a* clump of cells. An abortion is *just a* medical procedure. We live like Harry Potter before he knew he was a wizard, except we're already living at Hogwarts. We've lost something, and we only know part of the story. Why? Because of a battle we can't see. A battle that takes place in the realm of ideas. As Leonardo DiCaprio's character in the film "Inception" said, "An idea can be the most dangerous thing." (See Paul, 2 Cor. 10:3-5) If history was a tapestry, we could pull on a couple of major strands and see the battle of ideas in the ways people have answered two key questions that our culture is struggling to answer right now: "Is moral truth real, and can we know it?" And "What does it mean to be human and valuable?" People are answering those questions today, and we are seeing the effects play themselves out before our eyes.

Preview of main points: The givenness of life in God's world. How did we get here? (A brief overview of the breakdown.) Is morality real and knowable? (Two kinds of truth and how why we confuse them.) What does it mean to be human and valuable? (A look at the leading anthropologies driving the public discourse over bioethics issues, and why neither works as well as Christianity) And, what do we do with all of this?

I. **Is truth really true?** (And particularly moral truth)

   A. **"Subjective" vs. "Objective"**

      1. Subjective truths
         a) Truth statement is about the subject
         b) Subject creates these, so they are matters of preference

        c) All are equally valid
    2. Objective truths
        a) Truth statement is NOT about the subject, but is about the relationship of the "objects" in question
        b) Truth of the claim exists independently of the subject (not a matter of preference); these statements are true even if you're not aware of them
        c) We discover these instead of create them
        d) Objective claims, by their very nature, can be right or wrong, true or false
    3. Quiz over the differences…but what about religious, moral, and value claims?
        a) Our culture views these as subjective in nature (things we create, matters of preference, not really *real*)
        b) When we make religious, moral, and value claims, the claims are not about us, the subjects. Rather, they are about the nature of reality. Thus, those claims are objective in nature.

B. Our posture in light of this…

1. Understanding these as objective truths puts you on humble ground. When you state your objective view, you submit to the person/people in front of you (because of the nature of objective truths) that you *could be* wrong. Subjective truths can't be wrong.
2. Objective truth isn't "ours," so we don't have to act like it is. In a world that views these truths as subjective, a criticism feels like a personal attack (after all, individuals view these as "mine"). Those who understand that these are objective in nature be objective about criticisms and receive them as an opportunity for dialogue. These individuals are free to be curious about the other, and open to meaningful conversation. This is surprising to people unaccustomed to this kind of Christlike reaction.

II. How did we get here?

A. What happened?

1. For the majority of history, morality was viewed as objective. Certainly the Old Testament writers understood it to be so. As did the New Testament writers, who further demonstrated that adhering to objective morality could be transformative. But Christians weren't alone in this view. The Greek philosophers (i.e. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) also understood morality to be real and knowable apart from personal preference. The notion that morals are subjective is a modern one, and is, itself, the consequence of ideas.
2. The thread of objective morality continued on to historically great thinkers like Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas.
3. Renee Descartes' attempts to make philosophy more efficient inadvertently started a crack in the foundation, and his contemporary, Blaise Pascal, saw it.

B. A *major* shift and rift:

1. Though the strands of ideas that led to this point are many and complex, a major shift in thinking happened during the Enlightenment of the 17th century. The Enlightenment was an exciting time, marked by huge scientific and technological advancements. Many, like atheist thinkers Thomas Hobbes and David Hume, saw the concept of God as useless, and developed other ideas about what we can know as real. They, and others, decided that science and facts should be the basis of reality. Hume posited one of many "isms" that came from this time, Empiricism, which said that the only things that count as real knowledge are things we can study *empirically* (using one or more of the five senses). This idea was devastating to things like religion, morality, and values (such as beauty), which aren't understood empirically. Thus, religion, morals, and values were relegated to the realm of the *unknowable* and came to be understood as purely subjective. Some call this the "**fact/value split**" (Francis Schaefer, Nancy Pearcey). We live with the consequences of these flawed ideas, and it has even seeped into our churches, where individuals tend to draw an arbitrary line between what they do in public (work, play), and what they do in private (morality, religion).
    (1) Note: For more on the particulars of this lecture, see Nancy Pearcey's *Love Thy Body*)
    b) My question for David Hume is: "Can you demonstrate *empirically* that science/empiricism should be the basis of all knowledge?"
    (1) He cannot. He has to do the metaphysics just like everyone else. His empiricism simply swept the rug out from beneath him and others who adopted it.
    c) Other "isms" that came from this time: Rationalism, Modernism

C. Physicalism and its effects:

1. Empiricism created a strand of thinking that inevitably came with an anthropology — Physicalism.
2. What is physicalism?
3. *"Just a" body*
4. What happens to moral questions surrounding bioethics when the immaterial doesn't count?

III. The Secular Split...the other side

A. The "Reaction" to the shift/rift that divided the secular

1. As the West looked on to the shift to Empiricism, they saw significant changes in the ways we understood the world and lived in it. For example, the word "space" was not in our vernacular to describe "the heavens" until this time. The world, which the Medievals had understood as nothing short of magical (they expected to encounter the supernatural, even if their ideas about the

supernatural were misguided) became "just matter," meaningless, purposeless.
2. Many reacted to this notion by rejecting it and riding the pendulum all the way to the other end. Romanticism was the movement that sprang to the forefront. However, in their reaction, they never rejected Hume's premise. This group decided that values were to be the grounding of all that we know about the world — *but those remained subjective.* Thus, if we follow the seedling idea to its logical conclusion, the individual could define (or redefine) reality itself — including biology. One could reject the givenness of life and remake it to suit the "person."
a) Other "isms" that came: Existentialism, Marxism, Post-Modernism

B. Body-Self Dualism

1. Defined: The elevation of the mind/emotions/"psyche" over the physical body, such that the body becomes a mere machine that the "person" *uses* in order to gain satisfaction
a) *"Just a" Person* (meaning just the immaterial)
b) A new manifestation of Gnosticism
(1) See the work of Robert P. George on Body-Self Dualism

C. Body-Self Dualism and Bioethics

1. Making life: Sexual ethics; Abortion; Artificial Reproductive Technologies
2. Taking life: Physician-Assisted Suicide; Euthanasia
3. Faking/Remaking life: Biotechnology; Enhancements; Transhumanism

IV. The Christian Response

A. Christianity never split, thus it never separated the "person" from the "body." All along, it has championed human beings as body AND soul, composite individuals who bear the image of their Maker.
B. The Christian view makes sense of the givenness of life, and of the fallout we observe now for those who reject it.
C. Becoming "more than" human really just means becoming "less human."
D. Those who long for an idea human existence cannot achieve it if they leave humanity behind...they won't be human any more.
1. Wonder Woman
E. Christianity promises a better future — human beings who can be rescued in order to flourish as they were meant all along. *We were always meant to become more human, not less.*
F. God is making us fit for a world fit for us, but the terms are His. It's often hard, tedious, inefficient, but worth it.
1. Love vs. efficiency; God loves the process of us
2. Note: Kelly Kapic's *You're Only Human*

Tell others a better story about who they are and why they matter, and it starts with the fact that to be "just human" is more than enough.