The Great Subversion: The Scandalous Origins of Human Rights

Ronald Osborn

WHEN BRITISH COMEDIAN STEPHEN FRY declared in a January 2015 interview on Irish television that if God exists, he is "utterly evil, capricious, and monstrous," his remarks drew headline attention in newspapers and nearly four million views on YouTube within less than a week of the video's posting.[1] Fry was repeating an argument with a very long history, extending back through David Hume to the Epicureans of ancient Greece and Rome (at least according to the Christian apologist Lactantius, writing in the fourth century).[2] He was also echoing sentiments that may be found in one form or another in any number of recent books and articles, both scholarly and popular, whose authors declare that religious beliefs are at best unnecessary and at worst antithetical to humanistic values, human rights, or even morality in general.

In a 2011 article in the *New York Times* titled "The Sacred and the Humane," for example, Israeli philosopher and human rights activist Anat Biletzki wrote, "There is no philosophically robust reason to accept the claim that human dignity originates with God."[3] If anything, Biletzki argued, belief in God is a threat to humanistic values and to concepts of human dignity. Religion should not even be admitted "as a legitimate player in the human rights game," she wrote, since those concerned with defending rights out of a sense of religious duty are not concerned with rights but only with a kind of slavish obedience to the arbitrary commands of the deity.

Other non-religious thinkers, however, have called into question the philosophical coherence and long-term viability of secular humanism and accompanying rights ideals in the wake of the "death of God." According to British political scientist Stephen Hopgood, "The ground of human rights is crumbling beneath us," both in theory and in practice: "The world in which global rules were assumed to be secular, universal and nonnegotiable rested on the presumption of a deep worldwide consensus about human rights—but this consensus is illusory."[4] What is

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Left: *The Rape of the Sabine Women,* 1962, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images.

more, Hopgood argues in *The Endtimes of Human Rights*, notions of inviolable human dignity, rights, and equality as universal norms must now be unmasked as a historically contingent and metaphysically dubious inheritance of Christianity:

> It is only as a strategy for coping with what Nietzsche called "the death of God" in the West that we can begin to understand the real social function of humanitarianism and human rights in the twentieth century…. [The International Committee of the Red Cross] was, I argue, the first international human rights organization. It was a secular church of the international. The laws it wrote and the humanitarian activism it undertook were grounded by a culture of transcendent moral sentiment with strong Christian components. At the heart of this was the suffering innocent, a secular version of Christ. In other words, bourgeois Europeans responded to the erosion of religious authority by creating authority of their own from the cultural resources that lay scattered around them. And they then globalized it via the infrastructure that the imperial civilizing project bequeathed to them.[5]

Hopgood's bracing critique of rights talk and his call for a less lofty, more pragmatic dispensation forces us to face the implications of the loss of theological anthropology for concepts of human equality and dignity. Can we have a rationally coherent, morally compelling, and historically sustainable discourse as well as a practice of humanistic values and human rights absent a "thick" metaphysical or religious framework, such as the one provided in the Western tradition for some two millennia by Judeo-Christian sources?

Put another way, the question "Can we be good without God?" does not strike nearly deep enough. The urgent question is: *Will* we still be good to the stranger in our midst, or good in the same ways, once we have fully grasped the contestable character of humanism and once we have utterly abandoned the essentially religious idea that every person is made, in the enigmatic language of Scripture, *in the image of God*? It is a question that even committed atheists, for the sake of good atheism, should find worthy of consideration.

Doctrines of Inequality

Answering this question requires that secular humanists attend more closely to the scandalous particularity of the story of the God made visible as a manual laborer from a defeated backwater of the Roman Empire, who was tortured to death by the political and religious authorities of his day on charges of sedition and heresy. We can imagine other religious narratives that could have provided an equally powerful vision and inspiration for humanistic values, but it was this narrative that actually *did* provide the moral and intellectual foundation for the rise of humanism, and finally liberalism, in the Western tradition.

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In classical antiquity, dignity was an acquired rather than inherent trait. Some persons were always deemed more fully human than others.[6] Infants born with mental or physical defects, Plato and Aristotle both declared, have no right to share in the life of the community and indeed have no right to life at all. In *The Politics*, Aristotle writes, "let there be a law that no deformed child shall live."[7] In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates says that those

"born deformed, [the Guardians] will hide away in an unspeakable and unseen place, as is seemly." He goes on to encourage free sexual intercourse among adolescents on one condition: that they not "let even a single foetus see the light of day," and, "if one should be conceived, and, if one should force its way," that they "deal with it on the understanding that there's to be no rearing for such a child."[8] In both Greek and Roman thought, slaves, women, and children possessed less dignity than free males, while philosophers capable of attaining heights of speculative philosophy possessed more *dignitas*—prestige, status, or worthiness—than those who labored with their hands.

The assumption of a rank-ordering or natural hierarchy of human types, with only a few individuals possessing true dignity and so full social standing, may actually represent the most nearly universal political morality that we can identify.

Similar ideas about human inequality pervaded (and continue to pervade) non-Western belief systems. The caste system of Hinduism and classical Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation (according to which the less fortunate or "weak" members of society—the poor, the physically handicapped, and women in general—are born into "lowliness" as a punishment for sins in previous lives) run directly counter to concepts of inviolable dignity and shared human rights. The assumption of a rank-ordering or natural hierarchy of human types, with only a few individuals possessing true dignity and so full social standing, may actually represent the most nearly universal political morality that we can identify. These classical beliefs in the natural inequality of persons did not give way to the idea of shared human dignity and equality as a result of detached philosophical reasoning. Rather, they were radically subverted by the theological account of personhood unfolded in the Hebrew Bible and culminating in the Christian narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ—the climax of the Jewish prophetic tradition with its radical insistence that the Creator God of the universe stands with the weak, the suffering, and the lowly, judging rulers and nations according to whether they have acted justly toward widows, strangers, and orphans.

Sex, Lies, and Conquest

To grasp what Christianity opposed, and what it historically overcame, we might consider a seemingly trivial detail of life during the Pax Romana: coins on which defeated nations were depicted as violated women being trampled underfoot by deified emperors or Roman gods. To comprehend the deeper meaning of these symbols of imperial consciousness, we must recall the foundational myth of the city of Rome to which they alluded. Central to the legend of the founding of Rome by Romulus is "The Rape of the Sabine Women," a story whose theme is celebrated in Roman art and literature. As told by Livy in his *History of Rome*, written about thirty years before the birth of Christ, the tale begins with Romulus offering asylum to male refugees from other nations, who quickly swell the city's population and transform Rome into a "match for any of the neighboring states in war."[9] The sudden increase in the number of males of fighting age leads, however, to a pressing dilemma: There are not enough women to repopulate the city. Romulus sends ambassadors to neighboring states asking them to give their daughters as brides to the Romans, but this request is met with refusals, and, as a result, tensions rise. "The Roman youths were bitterly indignant at this, and the matter began unmistakably to point to open violence."[10]

Romulus, "dissembling his resentment," according to Livy, nonetheless tricks the young

women of Sabine (one of the states that rebuffed him) into coming to Rome. At a prearranged signal, the Roman men pounce upon the Sabine maidens and carry them off, those of "surpassing beauty" being reserved for "the leading senators." Romulus attempts to mollify the traumatized women by assuring them that they will "be lawfully wedded, and enjoy a share of all their [Roman] possessions and civil rights, and—a thing dearer than all else to the human race—the society of their common children: only let them calm their angry feelings, and bestow their affections on those on whom fortune had bestowed their bodies."[11] The kidnapped women do not embrace their captors, however, and the Sabine men soon launch a counterattack. After some back-and-forth fighting, the Romans gain the upper hand. Seeing their loved ones on the verge of being slaughtered, the Sabine daughters rush onto the battlefield, pleading that the combat cease, lest they become widows through the deaths of their Roman husbands or orphans through the deaths of their Sabine fathers. Livy relates that the "leaders thereupon came forward to conclude a treaty; and not only concluded a peace, but formed one state out of two…. They united the kingly power, but transferred the entire sovereignty to Rome."[12]

Rape was the perhaps painful but ultimately glorious way by which Rome incorporated the Other within its civilized laws and "civil rights."

This story of the rape of the Sabine women, religious studies scholar Davina Lopez writes, was the paradigmatic model of, and justification for, Roman expansionism. Its purpose as an origins myth was to make imperial violence appear noble and "like the natural order of the world."[13] Rape was the perhaps painful but ultimately glorious way by which Rome incorporated the Other within its civilized laws and "civil rights." The story was "truly foundational to Roman imperial ideology as it expresses relationships between self and other on an international scale…. Conquest rendered in these terms reflects gendered difference in hierarchy: the impenetrable masculinity inherent in Roman rule is chosen to penetrate the femininity of other lands and peoples."[14]

The Shape of the In-Breaking Kingdom

In an article in the *Boston Review*, historian Samuel Moyn writes that neither Jesus nor Paul had "any truly political vision."[15] But John Dominic Crossan, N.T. Wright, Richard Horsley, and a host of other biblical scholars have shown in great detail that the New Testament is in fact intelligible only when read as a highly subversive and politically charged collection of texts against the historical backdrop of Roman imperial conquest and occupation and the crushing social hierarchies of the ancient world that find virtually unanimous support in the canons of Greek and Roman philosophy, religion, and myth.

According to the earliest Christian documents, God had not only taken on human flesh but was also incarnated in the person of a poor, provincial laborer in the occupied territories of the Roman Empire. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a tiny village about four miles from the town of Sepphoris, which was struck by Varus's legionary troops in 4 BCE. Josephus records another attack, led by Lucius Annius at Gerasa just across the Jordan River, and his account makes apparent the atmosphere of violence and national trauma in which Jesus was raised:

> [Lucius Annius] put to the sword a thousand of the youth who had not already escaped, made prisoners of women and children, gave his soldiers license to plunder the property, and then set fire to the houses and advanced against the

> surrounding villages. The able-bodied fled, the feeble perished, and everything left was consigned to the flames.[16]

We can perhaps now better appreciate the scandalous, as well as dangerously "unpatriotic," political significance of Christ's declaration in the Gospel of Matthew—at time of foreign imperial occupation punctuated by periodic massacres, mass crucifixions, and insurgency—that God's kingdom was breaking into history through his own words and actions, and that the shape of God's in-breaking kingdom entailed an ethic of radical love of one's enemies *beyond good and evil*:

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43–48, New American Standard Bible)

Lest anyone interpret Christ's words as a retreat from the burning political matters of his day or as capitulation to Roman imperialism, however, we might ponder the *Magnificat*, the song of praise by Jesus's mother, Mary, in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, which is presented as a prelude to what her son's entire life will be about: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed" (Luke 1:52–53). The very word the Christian writers chose for the story of Jesus was in fact an appropriation and subversion of Roman political rhetoric; *euangelion*, translated as "Gospel" or "good news," was the word used by the Caesars for their official imperial proclamations. From all we know of Jesus's words and actions, he set his followers on a collision course with the dominant pagan social and political structures of their day, which could only be sustained so long as classical ideas about what it means to be human remained undisturbed.

In the Gospels, Christ is referred to several times as a *tekton* and the son of a *tekton*—literally a "craftsman" or, as tradition would have it, a carpenter. This already tells us much about the revolution underway, for in the Greco-Roman world, to be a laborer was to be inferior. Christ's public career was marked by his ministry to the most marginalized and untouchable members of society, whom he sought to restore to physical wholeness and fullness of community. Prominent among these were women, including one about to be stoned to death by religious zealots for alleged adultery (John 7:53–8:11) and one who had been suffering from a bleeding illness for twelve years, whom, according to Jewish law, no one could touch without becoming defiled (Mark 5:25–34). Jesus's life ended in his torture and execution at the hands of those religious and political authorities possessing the most *dignitas*. The method of execution was an emphatically political one, crucifixion typically being reserved for the most serious crimes against the Roman state.[17]

What is more, the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark both assert that in his final agony, Christ was abandoned by God himself. The cry of dereliction from the center cross is the cry of one who has been not only humanly but even cosmically betrayed: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34) Because Christ bids those who would follow him to take up his cross and share in his sufferings, one can only be a disciple if one has also, paradoxically, experienced the *death of God*. Yet for Christ's followers, the spectacle of Jesus's agony and humiliation—the extreme depths of his identification with the sufferings of humanity, and even with its loss of faith or hope—had ironically unmasked the "principalities and powers" once and for all, stripping them of their sacral authority and revealing them as unjust and oppressive forces.

Followers of the risen Christ were to courageously emulate his example of self-emptying service and reconciling enemy love, even to the point of their own deaths, if necessary, for the sake of others. The political implications of the claim that the Godforsaken God has elevated the weak and lowly to a status of equality and high dignity as adopted sons and daughters through his incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection, are evident in Paul's revolutionary words from Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In a world in which the exposure of newborn infants to the depredations of wild animals and mass executions for public entertainment were regular spectacles, in which slaves—whom Aristotle refers to as "living tools"—were defined by law as *non habens personam* ("not having a persona," or even "not having a face"), and in which a polymorphous polytheism led not to liberal toleration of difference, as some have claimed, but to frequently unrestrained violence against anyone who challenged the gods of the family hearth, the tribe, and the empire, the Christian *euangelion* could only arrive, David Bentley Hart writes, as a "cosmic sedition."[18] Christianity not only offended the patrician sensibilities of Roman aristocrats, as it would Nietzsche, by its undignified concern for the weak and lowly; it also threatened the entire social and political order of pagan antiquity by dramatically redefining what it meant to be human. "What for us is the quiet, persistent, perennial rebuke of conscience within us was, for ancient peoples, an outlandish decree issuing from a realm outside any world they could conceive."[19]

Discovering Dignitas

Even if the language of "rights" was not explicitly or formally used, the New Testament invested every person with a previously unimaginable worth. Instead of struggling to attain *dignitas* as a scarce commodity in competitive rivalry with others, all persons were now summoned to live in generous solidarity with their neighbors as persons of dignity and worth equal to their own. Dignity, in the Christian revaluation of values, could not be *earned*, because it was bestowed as a gift from God, although the gift could be lost or squandered precisely by transgressing the dignity of the Other, whether through violence or by indifference to the Other's welfare—by denying that that person too was the privileged bearer of the divine image, the divine image now being of a man broken, tortured, and executed by the state.

One of the most potent expressions of the Christian invention (if not discovery) of human equality was the way the early believers gathered together for table fellowships without regard for social standing. In the rigidly stratified world of ancient Greece and Rome, in which one's status determined with whom one could and could not break bread, Christians transgressed all decorum and standards of decency in their common meals or communions. Whereas the model for the incorporation of foreign bodies into the Roman body politic was paradigmatically set by the myth of the rape of the Sabine women, incorporation of new believers into the body of Christ was patterned upon the story of Christ's last supper—the memory of how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, the task of a slave, and generously gave of his own body, symbolized by broken bread and wine, so that others might live with abundance.

The new faith proved especially attractive to women, sociologist Rodney Stark has shown from a wide array of textual and archaeological sources. By all accounts, Christianity disproportionately drew in female adherents, whose status and power were significantly enhanced by entry into the Christian subculture.[20] Women held positions of high leadership in the fledgling church. They could marry later in life (Roman families often gave away prepubescent daughters in marriage), and they benefited from Christian condemnation of traditional male prerogatives in regard to

Saint Thecla and Saint Paul with a book, eleventh century; British Museum/Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

divorce, incest, infidelity, polygamy, and female infanticide.[21] Paul's notorious statements about wives' "submission" to their husbands must be read in full context if one is to grasp their radically equalizing message of mutual submission and reciprocity patterned upon Christ's own agape, his selfless love. In Ephesians 5:22–23, Paul writes, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, he Himself being the Savior of the body." Yet these verses are part of an extended discourse on marital relations in which Paul commands husbands and wives to "be subject *to one another*" in reverence of Christ (Ephesians 5:21). He goes on to instruct men, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her…husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body…each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:25–33). However problematic these statements might sound to readers today, it is important to judge their emancipatory force in the social context of Paul's day rather than our own. It was in fact a common slur against Christianity that it was a religion for women. Insofar as women in the ancient world very often had their dignity violated by powerful men, the slur was entirely accurate.

Paul's letters do not include any explicit condemnations of slavery, although in one of his letters of ad hoc pastoral counsel he urges a

Christian slave owner, Philemon, to receive back into his household a runaway slave, Onesimus, in order to be reconciled to him. Some readers have concluded that on the question of slavery Paul therefore endorsed the status quo. But Paul's response was deeply subversive of the practice in other ways.[22] In his letter to Philemon, he redefines the relationship between master and slave in a way that rules out the Aristotelian view of "natural" subjugation and inequality. Because Philemon is now a Christian, Paul writes, he must view Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother" (Philemon 1:16). (Compare Aristotle's *Politics*: "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.")[23]

Deeply ingrained beliefs in human inequality did not go without a fight; nor did Christians cease being people of their time. Evidence of this may be found within the biblical text itself, which frequently lays bare the shortcomings of the early believers. Paul chastises wealthy believers in Corinth, for example, for excluding the poor and uneducated from their common meals. He could not force the churches he had planted to change their ways, but he could appeal to their memories of the Jesus story and to the witness of his own life as a model worthy of emulation by those of high social status, effectively reversing the meanings of "high" and "low" so as to render them meaningless:

> We are fools for Christ's sake…we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now…. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me (1 Corinthians 4:10–13, 16).

A Tragic Double Subversion

The story of the Christian subversion of pagan values would over time become the story of a tragic double subversion. The retrenchment of hierarchy and domination *within* the church—particularly after Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire in the fourth century, reversing several centuries of persecution of believers—means that Christianity is today vulnerable to the charge of being a net force for inequality, hierarchy, violence, and oppression. Yet such an indictment of Christianity can be made, ironically, in large part only because of the very moral and humanistic categories introduced into the West by Christianity itself.

The Christian proclamation of the full moral equality of all persons—revealed not by nature or science but through the *Imago Dei* and the Incarnation of Christ—led gradually but inexorably to a dramatic overturning of the hierarchical values of the ancient world.[24] The early churches and later monastic orders modeled ideals of self-regulation, nonviolence, charity, freedom of discussion, separation of spiritual from temporal power, solidarity with the poor, and limited government in imperfect but unprecedented ways.

With the spread of Christian moral intuitions, the concept of community was decoupled from tribal or ethnic bloodlines as well as from "natural" hierarchies and was redefined as a voluntary association of individuals of all classes and ethnicities. The highest models of heroism were no longer warriors who conquered and subjugated their rivals, but Christian martyrs—both men and women, often of lowly origin—who displayed a form of courage-in-weakness that was democratically open to all. With the increasing penetration

of the Roman state by believers, the rhetoric of *leadership* also changed. Members of the urban elite who aspired to high office were increasingly compelled to speak (whether sincerely or pragmatically) not of their own nobility, but, rather, of their great "love of the poor."[25] *Authority* in the emerging Christian "social imaginary," to use Charles Taylor's phrase, was likewise relativized in decidedly moral terms, not as dominion but as *stewardship*. Rulers would now be held to account by clergy and ordinary people on the basis of the subversive ideal of "slave morality": *servanthood*. To be a true "lord," following the example of Lord Jesus, was, paradoxically, to be a humble servant—indeed, a "slave"—of all.

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Although it would take considerable time for these ideas to permeate European culture to the point that they would come to be regarded as virtually self-evident truths, there is an undeniable link between the story-shaped life of the early Christian communities and the law-shaped life of later Western civilization. The idea of natural rights was inscribed in canon law by medieval Christian thinkers as early as the twelfth century.[26] Principles of religious toleration and liberty of conscience often credited to Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Voltaire were already well established in the writings of believers such as Erasmus, Sebastian Castellio, Roger Williams, and the radical reformers in the Anabaptist tradition.[27]

Legal scholar John Witte writes that the Enlightenment "was not so much a well-spring of Western rights as a watershed in a long stream of rights thinking that began nearly two millennia before." This is not to deny or minimize the contributions of Enlightenment thinkers to the idea of rights, Witte asserts; rather, what these later individuals "contributed more than anything were new theoretical frameworks that eventually widened these traditional rights formulations into a set of universal claims that were universally applicable to all."[28] The religious studies scholar Bruce K. Ward argues that in place of the story that has come to dominate much of the academy as well as popular culture, of how the invention of the secular saved the West from the violence of religion, we should speak in terms of violent forms of religion being challenged by nonviolent ones, with the latter ultimately giving rise to liberal values and legal formulations.[29]

There is nothing in this admittedly outrageously simplified brush-stroke history, of course, that amounts to proof for the metaphysical truth claims of Christianity. One might freely acknowledge the centrality of Christian beliefs to the historical and philosophical rise of concepts of human equality and the overturning of ancient hierarchies while asserting that these beliefs are at best noble fictions and that the values could just as easily have been arrived at by some purely secular path (such that humanism can now float free of its historical past and become, in the words of Thomas Nagel, a "view from nowhere").[30]

Alternatively, we might join Nietzsche and his postmodern heirs in rejecting liberal and humanistic values as masks for resentment and power on the logically consistent grounds that the death of God must also lead to the death of the *image* of God in the Other—and all that went with it. I will not attempt to answer the Nietzschean or postmodern challenges to humanism here except to say that Nietzsche was right: Christianity *is* slave morality—unapologetically and transparently so. Unlike Nietzsche, however, I take this on balance to be cause for celebration. If secular humanists and atheists committed to liberal values cannot believe in theism, they might still find good reasons to be grateful for it.

Endnotes

1 "Stephen Fry on God: The Meaning of Life: RTE One" [video], January 28, 2015; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-suvkwNYSQo.

2 In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume, through the voice of Philo, declares, "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, second edition, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 63; Tim O'Keefe, *Epicureanism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 47.

3 Anat Biletzki, "The Sacred and the Humane," *New York Times*, July 17, 2011; http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/the-sacred-and-the-humane.

4 Stephen Hopgood, "The End of Human Rights," *Washington Post*, January 3, 2014; http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-end-of-human-rights/2014/01/03/7f8fa83c-6742-11e3-ae56-22de072140a2_story.html.

5 Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), x.

6 Darrel W. Amundsen, "Medicine and the Birth Defects of Children: Approaches of the Ancient World," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, eds. Stephen E. Lammers and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 681–92.

7 Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), VII. 1335b.

8 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), V. 460c–461c.

9 Titus Livy, *Roman History*, trans. John Henry Freese, Alfred John Church, and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), 11.

10 *Ibid.*, 11.

11 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

12 *Ibid.*, 15.

13 Davina Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 70.

14 *Ibid.*, 70–71.

15 Samuel Moyn, "Did Christianity Create Liberalism?," *Boston Review*, February 9, 2015; https://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/samuel-moyn-larry-siedentop-christianity-liberalism-history.

16 Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books III–IV*, vol. 2), trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 301; see also John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 110.

17 See, for example, Martin Hengel's classic study of the practice, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 46.

18 David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 124.

19 *Ibid.*, 169.

20 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

21 Stark quotes from a letter dating from 1 BCE written by a seemingly devoted husband, Hilarian, to his wife, Alis, to illustrate the pagan world's casual disregard of female infants: "I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child, if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it. You have sent me word, 'Don't forget me.' How can I forget you. I beg you not to worry." *Ibid.*, 97–98.

22 See Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 40.

23 Aristotle, *The Politics*, I. 1254a.

24 I am especially indebted in this paragraph to Part II ("A Moral Revolution") in Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 51–113.

25 *Ibid.*, 82.

26 See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Modern Protestant Developments in Human Rights," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, eds. John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 155; http://www.cambridge.org/US/academic/subjects/religion/religious-ethics/christianity-and-human-rights-introduction.

27 See Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

28 John Witte Jr., "Introduction," in *Christianity and Human Rights*, 40.

29 Bruce K. Ward, *Redeeming the Enlightenment: Christianity and Liberal Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 122.

30 Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).