

DO YOU BELIEVE?
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI

IS CHRISTIANITY GOOD OR BAD FOR THE WORLD?

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 RATIO
CHRISTI

FAITH & REASON are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

WHAT IS RATIO CHRISTI?

Ratio Christi, Latin for the reason of Christ, wants to help reverse this trend of anti-intellectual Christianity. We organize apologetics clubs at colleges, universities, and even for high school groups in order to strengthen the faith of Christian students and faculty and challenge the rampant atheism and secularism on most campuses. Our mission is to fill the intellectual gap, to make Christianity something worth thinking about, both personally and in the public square.

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PART I

THE IMPRINT OF JESUS IS UNMATCHED IN HISTORY

Regardless of one's evaluation of that question, good or bad, the greatest mark of history seems to be the imprint of Jesus. In fact, Yale Historian Jaroslav Pelikan – who spoke eight languages by age 22 – minced no words in the introduction to his book:

Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about Him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost 20 centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super magnet, to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?¹

By contrast, Harvard psychology professor and Jewish atheist, Steven Pinker, authored a recent best-seller, *Enlightenment Now*.² It is so influential that the billionaire Bill Gates provided a cover endorsement dubbing it as his “new favorite book of all time.” The volume is an apologetic — a defense — for secular humanism and science, saying it is these, and not an historical figure like Jesus, which made the world good. Yet, he seems to offer somewhat of a revisionary history compared to the work by Pelikan, an actual historian from Harvard's ivy league compatriot nestled near a tiny inlet off the Long Island Sound, Yale.

Pinker's message is that reason, science, and humanism — which he claims are the key themes of the Enlightenment — have led to mass progress in most areas of life. No doubt they have contributed. He asserts that they are our best means of continuing this progress into the future. His contention is that these ideals are not consistently upheld and are often under attack. Therefore, he calls people to fortify and defend them against counter-Enlightenment enemies like socialism and religion.

The goodness or badness of Christianity isn't the full concern, however. While we should not believe something simply based on how good or useful it is, it is certainly relevant especially in an era where Christianity's critics claim Christianity is not only

1 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1.

2 Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (New York: Random House, 2019)

false, but harmful—and enemy of human flourishing. So, showing Christianity’s net good creates plausibility for its veracity, especially if the reasons for its goodness connect to its truth claims. Hence, goodness and truth aren’t mutually exclusive and they’re both important.

To be sure, Christians have been guilty of harm and evil in the past. We cannot ignore that. But neither should we forget the good that Christians have done. And to be fair, one must also separate malicious actions by professing believers from the teachings of the founder. Such actors may not even be genuine believers. If they are, then such actions often turn out to be the illogical out workings of the teaching of Jesus, i.e., hypocrisy, and thus aren’t properly Christian actions even if performed by actual rather than merely professing Christians.

The existential question about God asks whether God exists, but a different question about God addresses the question of what kind of goodness or “value-impact,” if any, God’s existence has on our world. Two antithetical answers emerge at the top. Pro-theism is the view that God’s existence adds value to our world. Anti-theism, by contrast, is the view that God’s existence takes away from the value of our world.

One way of approaching this question, then, from a God-affirming stance is to locate values or goods whose existence entail God’s existence. That is, such goods couldn’t exist without God. A more modest approach would be to locate such goods or values that are widely considered as such and show how their existence makes God’s existence more likely. That is the endeavor here. The argument is not that some of the goods couldn’t emerge apart from Christian theism, but that they didn’t do so, and that there are good reasons for this. In brief, I argue that Christianity brought the goods of western society into being.”

Most in the West don’t realize the richness of their heritage. Secular humanists like Pinker point to the various goods that made the West great, yet fail to see that Christianity offers the best explanatory power and scope for underwriting the existence of those goods. Such people are, in essence, living on the borrowed capital of the Christian worldview just as Pinker is doing while waxing eloquent from the fruitful perch of Christendom’s first university in the new world. If the Christian God exists, then He would make a substantive difference bringing added value to the world. We will consider some widely affirmed values or goods whose most prominent manifestations are best explained by Christianity.

What is Good?

We often think of “good” as an exclusively ethical notion. But it is broader than ethics. Take health for example. What constitutes good health is neither subjective nor relative; Health is an objective notion providing some normativity in terms of how

humans should behave in order to flourish as a healthy human. Artifacts are like this, too. A pair of scissors is good when it cuts well, when it functions properly as designed in the mind of the artisan.

When considering various goods, it is important to distinguish between something that is good *for us* and something that is merely good *to us*, the first is objectively good and the second only subjectively good. The former is desirable whereas the latter is only desired (a preference). It is a happy occurrence when they're aligned. That is, when we can cultivate our desires such that they align with what is most desirable. Then we discover human flourishing.

For example, parents may wrestle with the same challenge I have, namely, convincing our kids that broccoli is good and cotton candy is — well, not so good. Only the former is good for kids, in an objective sense, leading to their flourishing. Our job as parents is to cultivate tastes such that they harmoniously come to desire what is desirable. In this respect, desire is related to desirable like belief is to truth. Just as it is appropriate that we should want for our beliefs to correspond with what is real in the search for truth, so it is appropriate that our desires correspond with what is desirable, in the search for goodness. Indeed, we want to look at desirable goods as a clue to what is true.

Prosperity, Jesus, and Responsibility of Persons and Societies

Systems that are helpful to human flourishing are desirable for our good, whereas ones that detract from it are not. While absent from the minds of many, Jesus impacted economics before it was a thing. Pinker endorses the capitalist enterprise as a means of greatest prosperity, as a civilizational good, and shows how capitalism has lifted man from abject poverty. While he mentions Adam Smith, the moral philosopher and economist, he fails to see that the father of modern capitalism was a Christian who appealed to the “invisible hand of God” which revealed the brilliance and power of free market systems in his classic work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Over a century later, sociologists were apt to explain the phenomenal growth of wealth in the world. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries most of the world was still in extreme poverty. But now billions have been lifted out thanks in part to capitalism and billions more have still been helped by charity. While Pinker likes to credit this to secularism, his Harvard colleague and Department Head of Economics disagrees. Instead, Benjamin Friedman defends the vital role of Christianity in the birth of capitalism even if the contemporary scene has long since divorced itself from its origin.³ The contemporary scene, we might say, is living on borrowed capital.

Pinker demurs concerning Marxism as a system for social good. Granted, this is

³ Benjamin M. Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Random House, 2021). Here, as often discussed, is Friedman also discusses the seminal work by sociologist, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

disputed by Marxists, but in terms of bringing people out of poverty it is an observable fact that credit goes to capitalism not to socialism. Notably, no Marxist leader ever took his own poison when the revolution occurred, and the dictatorship of the proletariat came to power to “share all things in common.” Leaders like Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, Pol Pot, Kim Jong-Il, etc., never lived in tents of squalor like their people for whom they claimed to liberate. More damnable is this: they killed over 100 million of their own citizens.

Far from Marxism’s socialistic impetus of non-charitable, coercive, statist redistribution, “from each according to their ability to each according to their need,” Jesus modelled giving by himself. The early church followed suit right down the line through history. They gave to the poor via voluntary charity. Marx, despite his Judeo-Christian heritage, did not follow. We might say that Jesus was the more faithful of the two to the principles of Judaism. Judaism (including most of the Jewish authors of the New Testament) taught that if a man doesn’t work, then he shouldn’t eat.⁴ The biblical world embraced private property and the responsibility and fruit of one’s labor. Without property, the commandment forbidding theft is pointless. Abuses notwithstanding in the industrial revolution, which began in the English world and were criticized by the likes of Karl Marx, proper use has revealed great fruit and even spawned certain virtues from self-interest (not selfishness). Among these are innovation, excellence, wealth accumulation, hard work, etc.

The great sociologist, Max Weber, first observed a correlation between being Protestant and being involved in business, such that the notion of (spiritual) “calling” for Protestants shouldn’t be relegated to being a minister or missionary. “Wealth-making” took on a spiritual character. In the 1500’s and later, Reformational thinking broke down the wall between priest and parishioner with its emphasis on “calling,” previously applicable only to pastors and missionaries. The motto was that every member was a minister in his own calling. Weber argues that the modern spirit of capitalism sees profit as an end in itself, and its pursuit as actually virtuous. Protestantism offers a concept of the worldly “calling,” and gives worldly activity a religious character. While important, this alone cannot explain the need to pursue profit.

One branch of Protestantism, Calvinism, does provide this explanation. Calvinists believe in predestination--that God has already determined who is saved and damned. As Calvinism developed, a deep psychological need for clues about whether one was actually saved or elect arose, and Calvinists (as well as their posterity even long after some shed their Calvinism) looked to their hard work and fruitful success in worldly activity for those clues.

Thus, they came to value profit and material success as signs of God's favor. Other Protestant groups had similar attitudes to a lesser degree. Weber argues that this new attitude broke down the traditional economic system, paving the way for modern

⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

capitalism leading to Adam Smith. So, it doesn't matter whether Main Street or Wall Street, today, fail to make explicit reference to Christian heritage, yesterday. They live on the borrowed capital of the Christian worldview and its ethics, morals, and virtues.

The common caricature of capitalistic greed doesn't necessarily apply when grounded in the Christian ethic of love and treating one's workers well ("the worker is worthy of his wages"⁵). However, once capitalism emerged, the Protestant values were no longer necessary, and its ethos took on a life of its own. We are now locked into the spirit of capitalism because it is so useful for modern economic activity for human flourishing. Even if capitalism is sometimes charged as being inspired by greed and socialism by envy, these are spiritual and moral problems, to which the Christian ethic has answers.

Jesus, not secular humanism, is the greatest motivator for charitable distribution of wealth in history. As a Jew, he embraced the sanctity of human life, a high view of humanity and provisional Christian humanism whereby property ownership was a matter of stewardship, and taught about our responsibilities owed to others. He taught and demonstrated the highest form of love. Christianity is the biggest movement in history and its followers have had substantial value-impact on civilization. Hence, there is some natural predictability downstream. The compassionate Jesus community emerged very early on in the first century. This fact is recognized by even the most ardent atheist thinkers. Princeton moral philosopher (ironically, yet another Jewish atheist and also a Marxist), Peter Singer, confesses:

The doctrine of the sanctity of all human life, and the seriousness with which the killing of any member of our species is regarded, mark off the Christian ethical and cultural tradition from almost all others.... That very many different societies have seen no moral objection to abortion and infanticide is, I think, well-known. Even if we restrict our attention to infanticide, the list is almost endless.... Both Plato, in the Republic, and Aristotle, in his Politics, propose that the state command the killing of deformed infants.... We find nothing resembling the doctrine that the lives of all born of human parents are sacred in the pre-Christian literature. There can be no doubt that the change in European attitudes to abortion and infanticide is a product of the coming of Christianity.⁶

Christian Humanism and Organized Charity

Far more impactful than secular humanism is Christian humanism. When the abortion issue is brought up it is common to hear critics claim that Christians — the most prominent defenders of the right to life — are concerned only for the pre-born but not for the post-born. The critics' favorite scathing aphorism of pro-lifers is that "life

⁵ 1 Timothy 5:18 quoting Jesus.

⁶ Peter Singer, *The Unsanctifying of Human Life* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 228-229.

begins at conception and ends at birth.” But nothing could be further from the truth.⁷ There are 600 Planned Parenthood centers in America that offer health services in addition to beheading, ripping off limbs, and burning alive babies—the elaborate results of abortion methods in these “women’s health” facilities. But there are over 3,000 centers that offer only genuine women’s health and not a mixed bag of the grim reaper with medical care. Furthermore, they offer help to mothers and their babies long after birth. Numerous churches offer personal help to young mothers. Given the Christian impetus toward life and loving the poor it is unsurprising that the Christian community is responsible for more than twice that of the general population when it comes to adoption.⁸

Critics should consider that the name of a hospital in which they were born, visited numerous times, and might even die in most likely bears a religious denominational title in the hospital name. Examples include St. Elizabeth, Presbyterian Hospital, St. Jude, Methodist Hospital, St. Mark, Good Samaritan, etc. Hospitals were invented by and exponentially multiplied because of Jesus’ apprentices following the Council of Nicea in AD 325. The idea of the hospital rose to prominence in the 4th century with the building of Basil’s hospital in the city of Caesarea in the Roman Empire. Basil the Great, a monastic leader, church bishop, theologian, and one who suffered sickness himself, envisioned and established the first hospital.⁹ A mere accident of history? I think not. Followers follow.

Today, inspired by Christ, the largest disaster relief organizations in the USA and with operations around the world are the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Southern Baptist Convention. Not only were they founded by Christians, but they continue to be staffed predominantly by Christians, and have given birth to global movements. They work in tandem. For example, every hot meal served by the Red Cross in the USA is prepared by the Southern Baptists.¹⁰ The largest child relief and adoption organizations are likewise Christian.¹¹ The same goes for anti-sex trafficking organizations that help women escape and work with local governments and other agencies to get them help and back into society.¹² America has become the most prosperous nation in the history of the world and also the economic mothership of organized charity across the globe. Notably, America is among the most heavily influenced by Christianity.

7 Helen Alvare and Ryan T. Anderson, “The Lazy Slander of the Prolife Cause,” (Jan 7, 2011) <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2011/01/2380/>. Last accessed Sept 25, 2021.

8 “Five Things You Need to Know about Adoption,” (Nov 4, 2013). <https://www.barna.com/research/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-adoption>. Last accessed Sept 25, 2021.

9 Andrew Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).

10 Sara Zylstra, “How Southern Baptists Trained More Disaster Relief Volunteers than the Red Cross.” (Nov 7, 2017) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-southern-baptists-trained-more-disaster-relief-volunteers-than-the-red-cross/>. Last accessed Sept 25, 2021.

11 Organizations like Compassion International and World Vision help people adopt and serve via child sponsorship more than 5.5 babies, children, and youth in 100+ countries.

12 For example, International Justice Mission whose goal it is to end human sex trafficking.

Private Charity and Mentality

Beyond institutions, when it comes to individual charitable giving, on average, conservative Christians are the most charitable. By conservative, I mean those who tend to see the Bible as God’s Word and the need for personal conversion and apprenticeship to Jesus. Ironically, they’re even more charitable to secular causes than are secular people. This goes beyond monetary charity to other commitments like giving blood.

One professor at Syracuse University, Arthur Brooks, admits that he began as a liberal and skeptic about the thesis that religious conservatives were the biggest givers per capita. But after having spent decades researching philanthropy, in the USA and Europe, he was converted. He writes, “In years of research, I have never found a measurable way in which secularists are more charitable than religious people.”¹³ From his research, he observes:

Religious people were 25 percentage points more likely to give than secularists (91 to 66 percent). Religious people were also 23 points more likely to volunteer (67 to 44 percent)... religious people—who, per family earned exactly the same amount as secular people, \$49,000—gave about 3.5 times more money per year... They also volunteered more than twice as often...¹⁴

Additionally, the data shows that “People who pray every day... are 30 percentage points more likely to give money to charity than people who never pray...”¹⁵ Similarly, “The churchgoer will be 9 points more likely than the secularist to give to non-religious charities... 25 points more likely to volunteer for secular causes.”¹⁶ Nationwide survey evidence shows that “If the workplace has a blood drive and a colleague asks them to donate, the churchgoer is two-thirds more likely to say yes than the secularist.”¹⁷

Brooks shows that even one’s view about the role of government has measurable consequences. Someone affirming strong governmental care for the poor will give far less than someone skeptical about governmental role. Data also shows that people who have children are, on average, more generous than those who don’t. Due to biblical conviction, Christians excel in baby making. They have a theological not merely sociological view of the family. People who were raised in church, even if they don’t attend now, are more generous than those who never regularly attended. Ironically, Bill Gates, who endorsed the Pinker book and whose foundation gives millions to charity, claimed

¹³ Arthur Brooks, *Who Really Cares? The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 34.

¹⁴ Brooks, 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

in his 2014 interview with *Rolling Stone* to believe in God, to have been raised in church, and he currently raises his family with three kids in church... even if he doesn't quite understand the faith or its value.¹⁸

Human Rights

And what of human rights? The holocaust of WWII — the attempted genocide of the Jewish people — provided major impetus for the human rights movement. In the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, we see that humans have a special moral status. It demands "...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family."¹⁹ The grounding of this intrinsic dignity is universally shared by humans in virtue of their being human as such. It is because such rights owed to human dignity is inherent that they are likewise inalienable. One of the key architects of UDHR is Harvard trained philosopher and former United Nations Secretary General, Charles Malik, a devout Christian.

It is this notion of "inalienable rights" that we also find in the *United States Declaration of Independence* two centuries prior. The state cannot take away what it had no authority to grant. It is something transcendentally endowed by our Creator. It is why all lives matter because all lives are sacred. Moral rights are deeper and more durable than civil rights because they are connected to humanity as such. Legality ought not determine morality; rather, morality ought to determine legality. The modern expression "human rights" didn't emerge in a vacuum. Like modern capitalism, it has deeper historical roots deriving historically from "natural rights," whose concept is derived from "natural law," and further derived from "eternal law."²⁰

Few documents have provided as much platform for freedom and human flourishing as the United States Constitution. Significantly, it gives pride of place in the Bill of Rights to the First Amendment. The highest glory of the American Revolution connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government and the principles of Christianity. Our constitutional republican form of liberal democracy was designed to preserve rather than curtail human freedom given the Christian insights on human persons. The seed of the self-destruction of slavery was embedded in thought even though it would take another century. It was Christians in England and then in the USA who were the first in history to oppose slavery — at great cost.

Sparsely is there a nation or people to consider who have been more free, prosperous,

¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹ United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Paris: 1948), accessed March 1 2018, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html.

²⁰ See James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 1-2. Griffin writes, "The French marked the secularization of the concept by changing the name from 'natural rights' to 'human rights' ... The secularized notion that we were left with at the end of the Enlightenment is still our notion today. Its intension has not changed since then: a right that we have simply in virtue of being human."

and charitable than America due to its founders recognizing inalienable human rights. This is not to argue that America was ever a Christian nation, much less one without blemishes. Christ isn't mentioned in the founding documents and we sinners still sin. Indisputably, however, it is a social contract informed and inspired by its Christian citizenry and history.

Darwin, operating from a naturalistic perspective, once said,

*"If ... men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering."*²¹

Examples abound. Our moral sense would be radically different had we developed like lions. Male lions notoriously kill offspring of other males to alleviate competition. Both moral facts and our moral sense depend in this case on evolution. Prominent atheistic ethicist, James Rachels, comments, "we are not entitled — not on evolutionary grounds, at any rate — to regard our own adaptive behavior as 'better' or 'higher' than that of a cockroach, who, after all, is adapted equally well to life..."²² Even if there were moral facts on this account, it isn't clear that we would know them because of the impediment of the account of our minds aimed at survival rather than truth. Pinker, a cognitive psychologist, states, "Our brains were developed for fitness, not for truth."²³ The severity of such is far greater than mere moral knowledge.

It does not appear that this provides a satisfactory ground of human rights, our knowledge of them, and attending obligations—unlike Christianity. The great anti-theist, Richard Dawkins, now concedes that theistic belief seems to have greater moral motivation than not. He announces this much to his chagrin in his recent 2019 book in a chapter titled "Do we need God in order to be good?" He says: "Whether irrational or not, it does, unfortunately, seem plausible that if somebody sincerely believes God is watching his every move, he might be more likely to be good."²⁴

The imprint of Jesus is clear. Jurgen Habermas, an atheist philosopher and one of Europe's leading intellectuals, observed that democracy, human rights, equality, and freedom as we know it are "the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love" and that any other attempted explanation for them is "just idle postmodern talk."²⁵

21 Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 101.

22 James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 70.

23 Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 21.

24 Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God: A Beginners Guide* (NY: Random House, 2019), 99.

25 Jurgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 150-51.

PART II

THE GOLDEN RULE IN COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION AS EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY

Some claim that the major world religions teach the same moral values. In one sense, from a Christian perspective, everyone has knowledge of fundamental moral principles. This is explained by virtue of their being created in God's image with moral knowledge even if suppressed, corrupted, and distorted to varying degrees. Thus, on a Christian perspective, we would expect all people to have some level of moral knowledge which they in fact have even if application of such moral principles differs widely.

The expression "Do to others what you would want others to do to you" is an example of a moral principle or facet that is widely known. It is one of the most well-known ethical principles throughout time and across continents. Since the seventeenth century it has been called the Golden Rule, ostensibly claiming supremacy among ethical principles.²⁶ While most understand the Golden Rule, less known is the evidence it provides for Christianity. It reveals further evidence of a moral law implying a Moral Law Maker.

From science to religion (east and west), we have knowledge of the Golden Rule. Although it has been variously represented across cultures and worldviews for millennia, not all worldviews can equally explain or account for it. Through analysis of representational statements of the rule from various worldviews, and reflection on how these worldviews account for the rule, the Christian worldview seems to best explain or account for the Golden Rule.

Evidence of the Rule's Universality

The rule is pervasively known. Consider the discovery of neuroscientist, Donald Pfaff:

For several years now, I have been reading far and wide in the literature of religions throughout the world, looking to answer just one question: 'Can I find an ethical command that seems to be true of all religions, across continents and across centuries?' Well, I found one, and you'll

²⁶ For contemporary and historical treatments, see Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (Oxford University Press, 1996); *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (Continuum, 2008).

*recognize it instantly. You probably know it as the Golden Rule. Once I found abundant evidence for a universal ethical principle, I was convinced there must be a biological reason for it.*²⁷

He assumes without argument a biological rather than theological origin of the rule, but nonetheless sees evidence for the rule's universality. His tenacity toward a biological explanation seems to stem from his assumed naturalist worldview rather than following the evidence where it leads.

WESTERN RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Of the rule's various expressions, a common one is what some call the Silver Rule because of its negative formulation construed as a do-no-harm principle. In Rabbinical Judaism, the famous Rabbi Hillel says, "That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation."²⁸

In Christianity, we see Jesus a decade later offering a most familiar version of the Golden Rule, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12 NIV).

In Islam, we see a qualified positive version, "None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."²⁹ This saying of Muhammad is in the Hadith, a source second in authority to the Qur'an. The passage stipulates loving only of fellow Muslims. This qualified statement is as close as the Qur'an gets to the Golden Rule.

Thus, among the great western religions we have the Silver Rule, the Golden Rule, and a qualified Golden Rule.

EASTERN RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

In Confucianism, we again see the negative version, the Silver Rule, "Do not impose upon others those things that you yourself do not desire."³⁰

In Buddhism, we find the Silver Rule in a canonical passage by Buddha: "On traversing all directions with the mind, one finds no one dearer than oneself. Likewise, everyone holds himself most dear. Hence, one who loves himself, should not harm another."³¹

In Hinduism we find again the Silver Rule, "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other

27 Donald Pfaff, *The Neuroscience of Fair Play: Why We (Usually) Follow the Golden Rule* (New York: Dana Press, 2007), 3.

28 *Babylonian Talmud* (Shabbat 31a), *The William Davidson Talmud*, www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.31a. For Judaism, while Hillel's statement represents the Silver Rule, one can argue that the ancient Jewish position suggests the Golden Rule roots if grounded in Leviticus 19:18, "love your neighbor as yourself" (NIV).

29 Jami Al-Tirmidhi, Vol. 4, Book 35, *Hadith* 2515.

30 Confucius, *The Analects* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 12.2.

31 John Ireland, *The Udana: Inspired Utterances of the Buddha* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1990), 68.

activities are due to selfish desire.”³²

Eastern religions seem governed by the Silver Rule.

SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVES

Consider the Golden Rule from a naturalistic scientific (i.e., scientific) perspective consistent with the assumptions above by Pfaff. Darwinism can be taken as a worldview describing man’s origin, destiny, and, in the scheme of things, “purpose.” Indeed, one prolific Darwinian author Michael Ruse notes the elastic nature of defining religion, placing Darwinism in that category. He argues that Darwinism is a “secular religious perspective,” a mild statement given the astonishing title of his book, *Darwinism as Religion*.³³

Darwin himself recognized and spoke about the Golden Rule: “The social instincts — the prime principle of man’s moral condition — with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise,’ and this lies at the foundation of morality.”³⁴

Explanation of the Evidence for the Rule

Evidence is one thing, explanation another. Some provide an evolutionary explanation for the Golden Rule from science in terms of cooperation. They observe reciprocal benefit and invoke “kin selection” for an apparently altruistic sort of behavior that seems self-sacrificial. It implies the decrease of individual survival for the sake of one’s kin. Consider the behavior of squirrels or apes when predators are within striking distance. They make sounds to warn their kin, posing a benefit to kin while endangering themselves.

But a problem emerges. This behavior promotes survival and reproduction but does not entail a moral principle. As one atheistic philosopher of science quips, “If Darwinism is true, then anything goes!”³⁵ This seems supported by a famous statement from Darwinian philosopher of science, Michael Ruse:

The position of the modern evolutionist... is that humans have an awareness of morality... because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth.... Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says, “Love thy

32 *The Mahabharata* (Book 13; Anusasana Parvan 113.8), trans., Kisari Mohan Ganguli, Sacred Texts, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m13/index.htm>.

33 Michael Ruse, *Darwinism as Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ix.

34 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 106.

35 Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheists Guide to Reality* (New York: Norton and Company, 2011), 95.

*neighbor as thyself,” they think they are referring above and beyond themselves.... Nevertheless...such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction...and any deeper meaning is illusory.*³⁶

On a naturalistic evolutionary account of ethics, the Golden Rule becomes descriptive, not prescriptive. It reveals that beasts do in fact cooperate to get more by hunting in a pack than by going it alone. But this descriptive behavior doesn't entail prescriptive morality. It doesn't (and can't) tell us what we *ought* to do in a moral sense. It lacks the fundamental normative (“oughtness”) dimension of morality.

EXPLANATORY SCOPE AND POWER

The Christian view has greater explanatory scope and power.³⁷ It is consistent with our ethical intuitions that we owe something to others. This obligatory “ought” is grounded in fundamental human dignity in virtue of being created in God's image (Genesis 1:26; 9:6; James 3:8–9). It accounts for how fundamental morality is pervasively known because that divine image entails a moral imprint (Romans 1:18–20; 2:14–15). Thus, we should expect everyone to have an awareness of certain moral obligations to fellow humans created in God's image with intrinsic dignity.

Christianity explains the Golden Rule better than western scientific naturalism or eastern pantheism. The Greek philosopher Plato famously asked this question, “Why should I be moral?” He offers a story about the Ring of Gyges where we're asked to imagine a magical ring with the power of invisibility. If we had such power, would we use it for good or for evil? He concludes that most people would be moral out of the fear of the consequences of getting caught rather than as motivated by a love for the good because it is the right thing to do. While the naturalist may appeal to cooperation as to why *we* should be moral, the question yet remains: why should *I* be moral if I know I can get away with gain by being immoral?

Unless there are objective moral facts, morality is subjective. But more than mere objectivity, we want some deeper explanation of moral facts. Christian ethics moves from superficial precept on the outside of a concentric circle (like “don't murder” or “don't lie”) to deeper principles underwriting such precepts (like the sanctity of human life or the principle of credulity, i.e., truth telling). Some atheists will assert that such bare objective moral facts or principles just exist as ‘brute facts’, but such an explanation is weak at best. Even if “justice” exists somewhere floating around out there in the ether, to what or whom am I obligated? I don't owe anything to non-personal physical or abstract objects like light bulbs or the number 2. Morality is always a property of persons. I owe something to you and you owe something to me. Hence, the Christian not only

36 Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), 262, 268–9.

37 Explanatory scope pertains to the range of facts or evidence explained. Explanatory power relates to the likelihood of the evidence explained.

has a more sensible option, but has one with greater explanatory power: namely, he goes a step beyond precept and principle to grounding morality in a personal being — God. Because God is life and God is truth, whose person serves as a ground to explain the principle on which moral precepts derive, Christian morality is far deeper — and far greater, than mere precepts. Christians know, love, and serve the living God, and they know, love, and serve their fellow man. They are not interested in mere rules, but in knowing, serving, and loving God, others, and self, per the Golden Rule.

VERSIONS AND WORLDVIEW IMPEDIMENTS TO THE RULE

From the perspectives of the major religions, then, two considerations emerge. First, most of the competing views assume the Silver Rule, which is ethically inferior to The Golden Rule both intuitively and in scope of coverage. To see why, consider the Parable of The Good Samaritan where the first two men coming across a hurt bystander simply pass him by and yet the third man, the unsuspecting Samaritan, is the one who helps (Luke 10:25–37). Upon reading the story most people can easily discern independently from one’s worldview who are the villains and who is the hero. Our natural moral intuitions about the rule when considering the narrative are clear that The Golden Rule is ethically superior to The Silver Rule. It directs us to pursue good and not just avoid evil or do-no-harm. It is about virtue, not merely avoiding vice. The Golden Rule is good for humanity. On the Silver Rule, one would simply pass by the hurt individual because, “That individual isn’t harming me, so I won’t harm him.” So, nothing follows on the Silver Rule that I ought to help the individual. That is captured only in the Golden Rule. Further, it is captured in a robust formulation of the Golden Rule that isn’t merely descriptive, but prescriptive, having moral force or obligation, as in Christ’s command. It therefore follows in a much stronger fashion that the Christian worldview has an objective frame grounded in God that explains why we know The Golden Rule through our created moral conscience. In fact, it is among many objective moral truths that we cannot not know.

Second, there are worldview considerations relevant to understanding and applying the rule. For instance, we indicated that Islam has a qualified The Golden Rule focused on the brotherhood of Islam exclusive of non-Muslims. In confirmation, Muhammad indicated elsewhere something less than the Golden Rule or the Silver Rule: “he who changes his religion (i.e., apostatizes), kill him.”³⁸ In the Quran, Surah 9:4–5 tells us that Allah loves only those who obey, and the text talks about killing certain non-Muslims. Chronologically, this Surah is one of the last passages on Jihad. Per the Islamic principle of abrogation, the most recent comments take precedence. Contrast this with Jesus who taught us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44).

From the Buddhist perspective, it seems incoherent that one ought to treat others the way one wants to be treated. This is because the Golden Rule assumes one is a self.

38 Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 9, Book 88, *Hadith* 6922.

Yet, core to Buddhism is the “no-self” doctrine. Part of the grand illusion said to cause suffering includes self-conception as a self. In fact, “no-self” serves as a major point of contention between Buddhism and Hinduism relative to what it is exactly that is being reincarnated. The Buddha’s view about the self is not just that it is false; rather, holding the false view leads to selfishness and egoism.

Ultimately, Hinduism may not fare much better if all is *maya* (“illusion”). For Hinduism, even if we can make sense of a self, one’s duties to others are hierarchically qualified in a caste system. One isn’t expected to treat members of a lower class the same way (much less those outside the caste like Dalit’s or “untouchables.”) Similarly, one’s *dharma* (“duty”) is relative to one’s caste such that a warrior caste’s dharma seems to run into deep internal conflict with the principle of *ahimsa* (“non-violence”).

Confucianism is a bit different. It suffers from the problem of authority or the moral force of the obligation. If there is no Creator to ground the obligation even with respect to the Silver Rule, then we are left with mere human wisdom without moral force much like getting moral advice from a fortune cookie. To what or whom are we obligated?

From the scientific perspective the Golden Rule is universal and is explained in terms of its being an aid to survival and reproduction. Atheistic philosopher of science, Alex Rosenberg, admits, “there are fundamental principles endorsed in all cultures at all times.”³⁹ Yet, for him, what explains this is simply that “nature just seduced us into thinking it’s right. It did that because that made core morality work better; our believing in its truth increases our individual genetic fitness.”⁴⁰ We are often told by those who reject design in nature or in the moral order that our strong perception of design is simply illusory as evolution has blinded us to reality.⁴¹ But if we cannot adequately know truth about the world, including moral truths, then why communicate this as if it is supposed to be a truth which we should believe?

Naturalistic evolution gives reason to doubt many of our beliefs if our cognitive faculties are allegedly aimed at survival rather than at truth. In a self-defeating way, this undercuts our confidence in the ability of our faculties to produce true beliefs (rather than false beliefs conducive to survival), including the belief in naturalistic evolution itself. This “blind to reality” notion seems shared by the religion of Darwinism and some eastern religions.

UNIVERSALLY KNOWN, UNIQUELY SHOWN

Some might raise the threat of relativism because “Do to others what you want others to do to you” hinges on what we *want* or *desire*, where these refer to person preferences which might be highly dubious in terms of their virtue. Though the Golden

³⁹ Rosenberg, *The Atheists Guide to Reality*, 103.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴¹ Donald Hoffman, *The Case Against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes* (New York: Norton, 2019).

Rule is universally known, it doesn't exist in a vacuum. The immediate context of Jesus' statement includes a robust view of love situated in a broader theological context for understanding good in terms of what is objectively desirable, not merely what is subjectively desired. Christianity claims that the very source of goodness made the world such that everyone can reliably map onto it and intuit the basic moral order, making relatively accurate inferences about reality. Christianity makes the best sense of both the universality of the Golden Rule and its most robust intuited formulation. The Golden Rule is most at home on a Christocentric view of the world.

PART III

RATIONALITY AND THE RISE OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND SCIENCE

Aristotle began his greatest work with this statement, “Man by nature desires to know.” This concept of desire is impregnated with reason. Knowledge is a good. Scarcely would someone deny that education is a good.

The bulk of Pinker’s best-seller is devoted to an empirical analysis of human progress along multiple dimensions (health, quality of life, education, life expectancy, etc.). His data is relatively good. His explanation of the data for secular humanism is not so good — it fails, but he tries. He fails to underwrite most of it because he fails to give credit where credit is due.

After having made the case for progress, Pinker returns to the themes that provided its foundation, which he identifies as key themes of the Enlightenment, and calls for these ideas to be fortified against counter-Enlightenment movements in the culture like religion.

Reason, he points out, is fundamental, and anyone who opposes it is unreasonable. But from whence comes reason and the halls of reason, the universities? While some may claim that religion is an impediment to reason and science, history says otherwise. Indeed, it is more than a fact of history that the universities were birthed in Christian Medieval Europe. This fact is best explained by the Christian worldview making it more than a mere fact of history.

Some argue that universities were around long before the Christian era. But entities like Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum to which they point were nothing like the modern university. It was not the Greeks or the Romans that invented universities. They established no scholarly guilds and no permanent institutions.⁴² The major universities did not emerge in the east, in atheism, or in Islam, but in the west, in the Judeo-Christian context. Jesus, a Jew, said that our purpose in life is to know God (John 17:3). This is fitting with Aristotle’s observation. Man desires to know ultimate reality. Knowledge is not peripheral to the biblical mindset about the good life.

The knowledge of God is central to some of the greatest thinkers in the west for over 2,500 years.⁴³ The Medieval project was *fides quarens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”). The Medieval philosopher-theologian, Thomas Aquinas, and others used to

42 Charles Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (NY: Henry Holt, 1923).

43 Corey Miller, *In Search of the Good Life: Through the Eyes of Aristotle, Maimonides, and Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2019).

say that theology is the queen of the *scientia* and philosophy is its handmaiden. That is, like the spokes connected to the hub of a wheel, the diversity of academic disciplines is connected in unity to the hub of theology with philosophy as the glue that holds the spokes into the hub. We have the unity in diversity constituting the university.

While we derive our notion “science” from the Latin term, *scientia*, it wasn’t construed as reductionistic as it is today. Now, one thinks of science as whatever can be described in third person perspective in terms of physics and chemistry. *Scientia* was the Latin equivalent of the Greek *episteme*, the second major branch of philosophy, dealing with knowledge more broadly understood. This explains why it is that anyone possessing a PhD has a Doctor of Philosophy (the “Ph” and the “D”) even if they’ve never taken a philosophy class.

The rise of the universities in Europe like Bologna, Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford, weren’t mere accidents of history, but were intentionally formed with Christ at the center. This spread to America and around the world. The interesting Indian thinker, Vishal Mangalwadi, reminds us that it is neither colonialism nor commerce that spread modern education around the world. Soldiers and merchants do not educate. Education from the lowest levels to the highest was a Christian missionary enterprise.⁴⁴ The monasteries kept education alive and Christian thinkers birthed the major universities.

Missionary Protestantism desiring people to read the Bible in their own language was the major impetus for teaching people to read and developed much higher levels of global literacy. Sociologist Robert Woodberry demonstrates through careful research that mass education and mass printing followed wherever protestant missionaries went. This biblical literacy encouraged religious freedom which became the staple First Amendment in the US, whose freedom is now coveted throughout the world. Woodberry challenges anyone to look at any map to see for himself. Countries with more protestants are more democratic and have more stable democratic transitions. Wherever they have been, there we find evidence of more printed books and more schools per capita.⁴⁵

The American model emerged from Europe’s Christocentric universities, later spreading to southeast Asia. Most of the modern universities were for centuries largely established in the context of, and motivated by, the Christian faith. Ironically, Pinker reveals tremendous ignorance as he saws off the branch on which he sits. The very university from which he luxuriously pontificates was founded by the Puritans, devout apprentices of Jesus. I’ve been on the campus and have seen the words etched on buildings exhibiting its motto for nearly 300 years, *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae* (“Truth for Christ and the Church”).⁴⁶

44 Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that Changed Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 194.

45 Robert Woodberry, “The missionary roots of liberal democracy,” *American Political Science Review* 106 (2012): 244-74.

46 Harvard’s original motto, *Veritas*, although it has retained only that term, cannot escape its theistic roots in that it emerged from the idea that all truth is God’s truth and that at best we can and ought to seek to think God’s thoughts after him.

Yale, sensing Harvard (1636) drifting left, began anew affirming *Veritas* but adding a notion that represented salvation in the Hebrew scriptures: *Lux* (light). The motto of Yale (1701) is *lux et veritas* (“Light and Truth”) in reference to Psalm 27 where light represents salvation of the Lord. Yale’s great child prodigy, Jonathan Edwards, then went and became the president of Princeton. The motto of Princeton (1746) is “Under God’s power she flourishes.” The motto of Columbia (1754) is “In thy light we shall see light” quoting Psalm 36:9. These are only the first four universities in America all preceding the actual beginning of the country in 1776. I’ve visited most of the early colonial schools and the same can be said for them.

Christian intellectuals have since the rise of educational institutes seen themselves contemplating what the father of modern science, Francis Bacon, called the two books of God. That is, God’s Word and God’s world, Scripture and nature, yet without conflict. If there is conflict, it rests not at the level of the facts themselves (nature or Scripture), but at the level of the interpretation of the facts (science or theology). While Harvard’s current head chaplain is an atheist, the student body are largely non-believers, and the motto has reverted back to “truth” with a small “t,” the root cause is present. The centuries old motto “Truth for Christ and the Church” that is extant on numerous buildings is emblazoned on the Harvard shield whose source of inspiration stands. Remarkably, the top two books on the shield are face up while the bottom book is face down. This symbolizes the limits of reason, and the need for God’s revelation. With the secularization of the school, the current shield now contains only the word *Veritas* with three open books. This influence spread as far east as South Korea and India with their initial major universities as Christian just like America and Europe.

As for the nature of many of these seminal universities, their central purpose was training missionaries and pastors. At Harvard, established within a decade of their arrival in Massachusetts, chapel attendance and freshmen Hebrew were mandatory. Harvard’s original mission statement concerned knowing God in Christ. Over half of the graduates in the seventeenth century became clergy.⁴⁷ Up until 1840 all university and college presidents in the USA were members of the clergy and almost all were Protestant. As late as 1890, chapel and church attendance were required in every college in America. Clearly, the universities, the cultural center of ideas and influence, were Christ-centered until just over a century ago. That seminal historical influence is not to be credited to secular humanism but to Christian humanism.

There is a long history revealing how the universities moved from a Christocentric, sacred worldview to godless, secular worldview.⁴⁸ The universities and education are good for the world, and Christianity deserves all the credit for these goods. Connected

47 George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 43.

48 Corey Miller, “How we Lost the Universities and How to Reclaim the Voice of Christ,” *Christian Research Journal* online exclusive feature article (Aug 22, 2019). <https://www.equip.org/article/how-we-lost-the-universities-how-to-reclaim-the-voice-of-christ/>. Last accessed January 21, 2020.

to the rise of the universities is modern science, and ironically, Pinker says that science is the proudest accomplishment of our species. And of course, by “science,” Pinker means material explanations derived from material causes to the exclusion of a rational mind (God) as the ultimate cause or conserving cause for the objects of scientific inquiry.

Ironically, reason and science come not from matter, but from mind, that which is fitting for a Christian theistic worldview more than an atheistic one. At one point in the Enlightenment, it was thought that everything was reducible to matter. Later, we discovered that underlying matter is information. Below that we came to see intelligence. While pantheism in the east struggles to explain matter, atheism in the west struggles to explain mind. Theism accounts for both with the primacy of mind over matter.

Darwin revealed his own doubt about considerations of knowledge, which would include moral knowledge assuming the veracity of both evolution and naturalism together. “With me,” says Darwin, “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?”⁴⁹

Modern science, leading to technology, owes its existence to the Christian worldview. Virtually every major subdiscipline was founded by a committed apprentice of Jesus. Gregor Mendel, the father of genetics, developed genotype and phenotype traits while playing with pea pods in his monastery. Carl Linnaeus was the father of taxonomy. Louis Pasteur gave us bacteriology. Rene Descartes the father of modern Geometry. Leibniz, the father of Calculus. Robert Boyle, the father of chemistry. Johannes Kepler is noted for astronomy. Isaac Newton began with the assumption of a moral law and predicted laws of physics according to which he began to test. His faith both informed and inspired what eventuated in Newtonian physics.

Not only does history reveal that Christianity and science were not at odds, but it also reveals that Christianity spawned modern science. More than a fact of history, this history is best explained by a worldview that begins with Mind, not matter, and that includes beings created in God's image capable of mapping onto the external world, abstracting information, drawing inferences, and developing technology. Christians believed that God was the ground of rationality and had given human beings minds to discover his glory in the created order.

Ratio is the Latin term for “reason.” It is derived from the Greek, *logos*, from which we get our word “logic.” John's Gospel begins, “In the beginning was the Word [*logos*], and the *logos* was with God and the *logos* was God... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus is not only the central figure in human history underwriting love, but logic as well. The case for reason, science, and human value seems more at home in Christianity than in secular humanism.

49 Letter to William Graham, July 3rd, 1881. In *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin (D. Appleton and Company, 1887), vol. 1, p. 255.

CONCLUSION

We have seen clear evidence that Christianity is good for the world in numerous ways from rationality to hospitality. It provides robust motivation for health care (hospitals), public and private charity, reasons for the rise of the most elemental to the highest level of education such as universities (and hence science), inspired economic prosperity and, also, serves as a robust foundation for morality. This is especially salient when comparing it to other competing worldviews on something like the Golden Rule. But more than mere evidence, the inference to the best explanation for such breadth of evidence is the existence of God in Christ seeking to reach and reconcile the fallen world to Himself.

Astonishingly, the atheist historian, Tom Holland, makes clear his thinking about the value-impact of Christianity, “That every human being possessed an equal dignity was not remotely self-evident a truth. The Romans would have laughed at it.... The origins of this principle — as Nietzsche had so contemptuously pointed out — lay not in the French Revolution, nor in the Declaration of Independence, nor in the Enlightenment, but in the Bible.”⁵⁰

In a most amazing statement, Holland profoundly rebuffs Christianity’s critics like Pinker, saying, “the founding conviction of the Enlightenment — that it owed nothing to the faith into which its greatest figures had been born increasingly came to seem to me unsustainable.... Even as belief in God fades across the west, the countries that were once collectively known as Christendom continue to bear the stamp of the two-millennia-old revolution that Christianity represents.... It is why we generally assume that every human life is of equal value. In my morals and ethics, I have learned to accept that I am not Greek or Roman at all, but thoroughly and proudly Christian.”⁵¹

Two billion people today profess allegiance to the revolutionary who has transformed individuals, societal structures, and the world more potently for good than any single person. They believe he paid the debt he did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.

50 Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 494.

51 Tom Holland, “Why I was wrong about Christianity,” *The New Statesman* (September 14, 2016): <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2016/09/tom-holland-why-i-was-wrong-about-christianity>.

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