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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

DISCIPLINARY RESPONSES TO CREATED ORDER PREVIEW BY NIGEL BIGGAR

FINE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Daniel Chua

Mr & Mrs Hung Hing-ying Professor in the Arts, Professor and Chair of Music, University of Hong Kong

President, International Musicological Society

Music is a kind of cosmic natural law – at least in the ancient world. Both the Confucian and Pythagorean traditions posited music as a harmonious mathematical order that was simultaneously scientific, aesthetic and moral; and Pythagorean music theory was then adapted and incorporated in the Christian tradition by scholars such as Clement, Augustine and Boethius, and was the dominant view in Western thought for 1500 years. It was truly *great* music and not centred on humanity. In my recent book, *Alien Listening: Voyager's Golden Record and Music From Earth* (Zone Books, 2021), I revisit the possibility of music as 'created order', arguing that to send music into space via the Voyager mission presupposes an ontology of peace (as NASA and Buzz Lightyear insist on saying: "We come in peace"). The question is how to retrofit ancient music theory in the modern world. To answer this question would require a book.

Stewart Gill

Master, [Queens College](#), University of Melbourne

I respond to two valuable insights in Professor Biggar's Preview on Created Order.

On faith and international relations

While many critics have argued that the world is becoming increasingly secular yet, in many of the major conflict zones in the world, religion is at the centre. As the West supposedly becomes more secular it is increasingly difficult for us to

understand this. Whereas, in the past, radical elements would have turned to Marxism, in some countries today it is easier to build upon religion as a protest e.g. radical Islam.

Better understanding of international affairs and foreign policy making will help a person of faith comprehend and activate an important public dimension of their personal understanding. Education of government officials engaged in foreign affairs, international commerce and defence in the dual areas of *religion* and *diplomacy* would assist in having a better understanding of conflict resolution, cross-cultural issues and peacemaking.

We ignore at our peril that in the modern “secular” world religion is no longer relevant, or is seen to be relevant. In fact, in the world of politics, economics and social organisations religion is on the rise and greater understanding is necessary.

On Biggar’s statement that there is no place “for the proud and intimidating place of the ego amongst Christian academics.”

I take the liberty of excerpting my conclusion from a paper I presented some years ago on: “*Rabies Theologorum* and the Lessons of Church History.” It asserts for the wider church what might also be applied with value to Christian academics in our dialogues and conversations.

“A few words about the value of discussion. There is no substitute for it in a healthy church. Where there is life there is thinking, a weighing of opinions, talk, and debate. Where these are absent there is cause for concern. They stimulate thinking. The rubbing of minds against each other sharpens as iron sharpens iron. There is wholesome, fraternal discussion which clarifies, instructs, edifies, and gladdens the spirit. This kind of discussion, however, becomes impossible when one or both parties take themselves too seriously, convinced that truth will live or die with them alone; or when there is an inability or unwillingness to admit that one might be wrong. That deplorable condition may be avoided when a few simple rules are put into practice.

1. The first is a need for a broad charitable spirit. Narrow, unloving contentiousness is an objective and a tool of the devil. Nothing serves the “kingdom of darkness” better than a cantankerous churchman or theologian with a passion for debate. I believe that it was CS Lewis who suggested that hell, where noise and discord are perfect, is where such persons will feel most at home. Rather than helping the cause of truth and light, they impede its progress and so poison the atmosphere that fruitful discussion becomes impossible. It was the lack of magnanimity in leaders on both sides in the Arminian controversy that made it a bitter experience in both church and state.
2. A second requirement for fruitful debate, likewise a scriptural virtue, is humility. This means recognition of one’s frailty and the possibility that the other person might have a point of view worth considering, indeed, that they might even be right. Knowledge is limited; no finite presence has all truth. Augustine was thinking of that when he said that the first, second, and third rules of the Christian religion were one: humility. Quoting that quip with appreciation, Calvin extolled humility as the only approach to God, rid ourselves of “the disease of self-love and ambition”, and get on with life. [1]

3. A third necessity for profitable discussion is honesty. There is no substitute for honesty in debate, particularly theological debate.
4. It is also necessary to try to understand others' points of view. What is it that moves them to take their positions? Calvin strove for such understanding in the eucharistic controversies of his time. There are reasons behind the positions taken, and their discovery may alter opinions. This is why it is difficult to condemn John Wesley's statements on sin and grace; in the light of the antinomianism of his day they make sense.
5. A sense of proportion is invaluable in theological discussion. Trivial matters often become major concerns in the minds of some; slight deviation from a desirable norm is often seen as justification for splitting the church. Calvin had such "capricious separation" in mind when he wrote on the church. [2] It is well to keep in mind the slogan of medieval Schoolmen, *Qui bene distinguit, bene docet* (S/he who distinguishes well, teaches well).
6. A final rule for the theological debate is that the parties stay within the bounds of Scripture in positions taken. Where there is speculation in discussion, as there is bound to be, that fact should be acknowledged. No speculative opinion, however, no "human invention" is permitted "to bind or compel the conscience" in the Church reformed according to the Word of God. Calvin's warning in his discussion of the Trinity is apropos elsewhere as well: "Let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God extends". [3] Predilection or logic may tempt one to go beyond these safe boundaries; where they were exceeded in the past, correction and retraction were necessary. As the pillar and ground of truth, the church should not wander in the wilderness of human opinion but abide by the sure words of the prophets and apostles. Its theologians should do likewise."

Casey Strine

Senior Lecturer in Ancient Near Eastern History and Literature at the University of Sheffield

I offer two brief responses in the form of questions on Prof Biggar's engaging piece.

First, I note the way that Prof Biggar discusses how the created order leads on to some propositions about the moral order as thought provoking and helpful. It is, however, androcentric. The focus is entirely on human beings, and in its current form does not attend to the wide realm of the created order that is not human. Yet, in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament the non-human created order is its own living and active 'being' (I put that in scare quotes as I'm not certain it is the proper term). The mountains and the hills cry out, both in worship (e.g., Ps 19; Ps 96; Isa 55:12), but also in longing for their salvation (e.g., Romans 8). Creation—perhaps it would be more appropriate to refer to both non-human animals and the ecosystem—is often the means by which YHWH acts to bring about the divine will. So, in summary, I wonder how Prof Biggar would respond to those reflections, and what might need to be said about the role of the non-human (majority) of the created order, including animals and the ecosystem, in a theology of the created order?

Second, I am very attracted to Prof Biggar's idea of intellectual humility (perhaps he would not use that qualifier). I would be fascinated to hear more on this topic, and in particular how Prof Biggar would help us to understand what are the limits of our human knowledge, and how those are compatible with or in conflict with our intellectual progress.

Eleonore Stump

Robert J. Henle, S.J., Professor of Philosophy, Saint Louis University, USA

In the history of the Christian intellectual tradition, the account by Thomas Aquinas of the moral life, the virtues, and other such things, is very different from the account sketched in the Preview. Aquinas's approach to the moral life emphasizes love, second-personal relations with the deity, and an account of justice that offers no maximum account of what in justice is owed to the poor. My article on Aquinas's ethics--[Aquinas on the Passions](#)--is a kind of response to Professor Biggar's approach to the moral life.

Nicholas Wolterstorff

Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University

Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia

Honorary Professor of Australian Catholic University

Nigel Biggar's theology-brief preview, "Created Order," is an excellent brief statement of the Christian understanding of the created order, along with some helpful suggestions concerning the implications of that understanding for the work of scholars. I affirm everything he says.

In particular, I affirm his emphasis on the presence of embodied goodness in the created order and on the fundamental importance, for how we live our lives, of acknowledging that goodness. In a recent publication of mine, [United in Love: Essays on Justice, Art, and Liturgy](#), I argue that Christian worship, absorbed attention to a work of the arts, acting justly, and love as attraction, are each, at bottom, a mode of acknowledging goodness.

In the last paragraph of his preview, Biggar, after describing Christian academics as "at once aware of their creaturely responsibility under God's created moral order and of their sinful failure to meet it," mentions the virtues that should characterize their work: humility, docility, patience, justice, and charity. I suggest that, given the awareness Biggar mentions of both goodness and sin, there should be, in addition to these virtues, two sorts of experiences that characterize Christian scholars in their work: the experience of *awe*, before the intricacy and immensity of the cosmos and the ability of human beings to understand something of that awesome intricacy and immensity, and the experience of *horror*, when considering what human beings have done to themselves and to the natural world – and to God. There is

something seriously deficient in scholars who never experience awe or horror in the course of their work.

DIVINITY / THEOLOGY

Christopher Hays

Professor of New Testament at the Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia in Medellín, Colombia

Since my own work focuses on New Testament ethics, in both descriptive and prescriptive senses (i.e., what are the ethical convictions of New Testament authors and how should they shape Christian ethics today), this brief—sketching out some of the lines that run between the created order and the moral order—grabbed my attention. The basic progression proposed (from monotheism to the goodness of creation to the grounding of the moral order in the aforementioned goodness of the creation) strikes me as sound. The question that discomfits me somewhat is how to develop thoughts on the moral order via recourse to the created order, precisely because, when New Testament authors do this, they often do so in ways that are problematic, at least from a 21st-century perspective.

On a couple of occasions (1 Cor 11:4-16; Rom 1:20-27; arguably 1 Tim 2:11-14), Paul elaborates moral teachings in part by appealing to the natural law in ways that are influenced by Stoic argumentation. Stoics believed that the rational divine principle, the *Logos*, generated and sustained the created order. They argued that one could derive moral principles from the examination of the created order, insofar as the created order reflects the divine will more accurately than human behavior tends to do (because humans are corrupted by their passions and thus behave in ways contrary to their own divinity-reflecting-rationality). Paul relies upon this sort of argumentation, but (true to his Jewish theological paradigm) connects it with his reading of the Old Testament, for example with the primeval history of Genesis (1 Cor 11:8-9; cf. 1 Tim 2:13-15), insofar as he surmised that the supposed historical veracity of the Genesis creation narratives would align with the created world as he observed it in his own era. He therefore weaves together natural law observations with invocations of the Genesis narrative, to ground his moral-theological injunctions.

The problem, however, is that Paul's observation of the supposed natural order is culturally embedded in sometimes suspect fashions (as when he claims that nature demonstrates that it is degrading for a man to have long hair, whereas it is proper for a woman to have long hair; 1 Cor 11:14-15). Additionally, contrary to Paul's assumption, there are good reasons to dispute the historicity of the Genesis narratives, which creates problems for the ethical teachings Paul develops on the basis of his reading of those narratives (i.e., his contention that women should wear veils while praying or prophesying, or that women should not teach men).

To take another example, Jesus himself makes moral arguments drawing on the created order in Luke 12:22-30. Pointing out that birds and plants do not prepare for the future, Jesus enjoins his disciples not to worry about securing their future

sustenance, arguing that the same God that provides for the birds and the grass will provide for humans. The difficulty with this sort of argument is that humans do in point of fact starve to death (as do animals, come to that), and in that knowledge, modern Christians by and large do not feel compunctions about saving for retirement, for example.

Consequently, I have questions about how to develop Christian moral teaching in ways that draw upon observation of the created order. The clearest New Testament examples of attempting this sort of argumentation do not fare especially well and have not always been taken seriously by the Church (often with good reason). By this, I mean to point out that the New Testament does not readily commend itself as an exemplary model for how to develop moral theology with recourse to the created order. I would, therefore, be keen to read Prof. Biggar's thoughts on an appropriate methodology for moving from the created order to the moral order in relationship to specific contemporary moral questions.

Oliver O'Donovan

Professor Emeritus, Christian Ethics and Practical Theology, University of Edinburgh

Honorary Professor, School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews

I am delighted to see Nigel exploring these themes, which run parallel to much of my own work in the last two decades. With his general approach I am in the strongest sympathy, and in raising three questions I hope simply to tease out some of the underlying logic that a two-page summary inevitably glosses over.

"Goods" and objective moral order are prior to "principles" and the moral law, Nigel tells us, which I am sure is right. Could he tease out more what makes the difference between them? Would he agree that where goods evoke *worship*, principles evoke *action*? And if there is a genuine "first" and "second" in the order of our moral thinking, *from* goods to principles, would he agree that the decision whether to refer to the ensemble of assumed moral convictions as "natural law" or as "created order" cannot be *merely* a matter of a name, but must orient moral thought in one of two ways: as law, towards practice, or as order towards description.

In the political paragraph the mention of a "possibility of a morally justified rebellion" under the aegis of natural law seems to me to wrap up rather too much in one phrase. The tradition always believed, of course, that political regimes could sin (and could be known to do so) and then removed by God as a punishment. But it didn't always agree that action could or should be taken by citizens, or on the circumstances in which it might be. Thomas believed that we might judge our ruler to be a "tyrant" – therefore not a *legitimate* ruler – and so find ourselves to be (unnaturally) without lawful government at all, needing to take steps to clear the obstacles to a return to the governed state. The popes in the later middle ages claimed a (unique) competence to authorise the removal of a *formally legitimate* ruler for offences against natural law, a competence unhappily appealed to in support of the Spanish conquests in America. Some Calvinists went further still and defended resistance and deposition of a legitimate ruler on the basis not of natural law but of a breach of the historical covenant between God, the ruler and the people, which very often in fact turned on matters of revealed religion.

The last paragraph raises the largest question: is concern with the *truth*, which is rightly said to be common to science and ethics, open to include a truth *about history*? Natural science, it would seem, concerns itself only with a truth of

natural regularities. Humanistic disciplines often have to think about *unique* events (e.g. in history), *unique* objects (works of art in music, literature, architecture etc.), *unique* situations (in politics), in ways that bring out the “truth” of their significance, even though they are not mere instances of any larger class. What obligation does Nigel think ethics has to the historical truths Christians hold about redemption and eschatology? Does the fact of the cross and resurrection “change” or “develop” natural law/created order in some way? Is there “a purpose of God in history” that can be known and followed, though history is a once-and-unrepeatable process? Is there such a thing as a unique vocation that an individual may have – perhaps to suffer or labour in a certain way that other people need not? And would such a vocation constitute a *moral* duty alongside the *generic* obligations to which we are all subject as being members of a recognised class (“Husbands, love your wives...”) or in a typical situation (“Repay no one evil for evil...”)

Murray Rae

Professor of Theology at the University of Otago, New Zealand

How are we to conceive and articulate the relation between the attributes of God and the attributes of creation? Biggar observes that biblical tradition affirms the oneness of God which is to say first, that ‘there is one good God unrivalled by any evil opponent’, and second, that ‘God is internally coherent or rational’. He continues: ‘That is to say, the created order reflects the coherence, the rationality, the beauty, the order of the Creator (Gen 1:3 7).’ The locution, ‘That is to say...’ implies that the two claims are equivalent but that is not obvious to me. The suggestion that ‘the created order reflects the coherence, the rationality, the beauty, the order of the Creator’ may be true, but it asserts something additional to the claim that God is both good and internally coherent or rational. It is important to note this in order to maintain the otherness of creation. Any attributes of God that are communicated to the creation are communicated by grace rather than necessity. Biggar’s further affirmation that ‘the world is basically and constantly ordered and so, in principle, intelligible by human minds or “rational”’ is, of course, vitally important and its implications are far-reaching.

The claim that ‘[Moral] order need not be at odds with freedom’ needs to be stressed, especially within the individualistically inclined culture of Western modernity (and postmodernity). Order of the kind established by God in creation, i.e., that order which serves the well-being of the creature, is in fact a condition of freedom, whereas the absence of such order is a threat to freedom.

Biggar’s observations about the academic vocation, Christianly conceived, are very welcome indeed.

K. K. Yeo

Harry R. Kendall Professor of New Testament at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary

Affiliate Professor, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

I find Prof. Biggar's "Created Order" enlightening and evocative in relation to my field of New Testament study in the following three areas.

1) Monotheism and Trinitarian theology on the created order of God:

Does the difference between Old Testament monotheism and New Testament trinitarianism affect how we think about created order? More particularly, does it affect our understanding of what kind of community is best aligned with the created order? I'm asking neither about the relationship between OT and NT, nor the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, but the implication that monotheism and trinitarian theology might have for my cross-cultural discernment of the salience and priority of community versus individual relationships with God in a created order.

2) Chaos and the good before and after creation:

Are the good (Genesis 1 "It is good") and the beautiful creative responses to chaos, so much so that chaos is inherent in the created order? If "no", then how does God's freedom resolve the chaos? If "yes", then how does human moral will respond to chaos and evil? The implication of this question can help me in dialogue with a Confucian worldview that does not include a "fall" (Genesis 3). Can chaos work for good, i.e., there are times when chaos and disorder are morally justifiable in a theology of the created order?

3) I find the last paragraph on "academic vocation" helpful. It stimulates me to think of our creaturely responsibility as academics: in the academic life can a liturgy of confession (e.g., seeing weaknesses in our scholarship and vocation), reception (e.g., Christian faith or theology that informs and clarifies our non-theological fields' enquiries), practicing the virtues or fruits of the Spirit (e.g., in cross-disciplinary complementarity as we receive gifts and graces from other fields), acting in obedience (i.e., discerning and obeying the rules of the created order, including justice and charity), and communal edification of pursuing truth all be reflections of the created order? I will want to expand this section in my longer response later.

I appreciate the opportunity for dialogue and clarification, as I spell out the potential implications in my field on this topic.

ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Barbara Drossel

Professor of Theoretical Physics, Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany

I like the text, and I have a comment concerning the remark on the laws of physics and quantum chance: pure chance that depends on nothing would not help with "freedom" in the sense we humans understand it. What is essential is that chance is contextual, and that there are top-down influences. We must get rid of a reductionist understanding of chance (and more generally of physics). I have mentioned some of this here:

<https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2021/07/how-the-laws-of-nature-leave-room-for-gods-action/>

My piece deals with God's freedom to act in the world, but the reasoning applies as well to the freedom of nature to evolve and be creative and to the freedom of humans to be causal agents in this world. See, for instance, my closing paragraphs:

"The influence of the wider context on an object is called "top-down Causation". Its omnipresence at all levels of complexity and in all fields of science disproves reductionism and physicalism. To me, top-down causation is also the best approach to explaining God's action in the world. I have argued above that top-down influences may be immaterial, like our intentions or the laws of logic. How this immaterial realm interacts with the material world is not understood, but its influence is well substantiated. Some thinkers, among them John Polkinghorne, have suggested that this interaction might happen via the input of information.

Now, is it true that God never violates a law of nature when he acts in the world? As far as his everyday action is concerned, I am convinced of this. But what about special miracles, such as the resurrection of Jesus? Sometimes I ask myself what a team of physicists would have measured if they had been able to measure everything measurable during the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps they would not have found any violation of the laws of physics. But since the resurrection of Jesus and also his other miracles foreshadow God's new creation, it seems more plausible to me that these events transcend the laws of the present creation. Here we have reached the limits of what we can know . . . ?

Daniel Hastings

Cecil and Ida Green Education Professor and Head, Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

I am deeply and fundamentally in agreement with the argument. I would like to know as an engineer who does research how it guides me with respect to the choices of research, in particular, research on weapons and what classes of weapons. Is all weapons research acceptable if it helps sustain the created order within the context of natural law or, better, just war? The argument does not go far enough to enable one to make correct choices unless you say that all choices are acceptable

Ian Hutchinson

Professor of Nuclear Science and Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Thank you for a hint of fascinating and insightful ideas relating justice and the created order of the natural world. I respond with outlines of some personal affirmations and contrasts, keyed to subsections.

The Good is what is in harmony with God's eternal character. Christian theology answers the Euthyphro dilemma, [4] routinely promulgated by secularists to problematize transcendent ethics, by saying that The Good is neither God's arbitrary command, nor an independent prior quality, but God's eternal nature. This is reflected in the natural world that science investigates; and even secular scientists often sense the goodness.

The Moral is when we humans, by conscious choice, act in ways that reflect in even greater fulness The Good.

Freedom at some level is fundamental to choice. Modern physics does not support the rigid deterministic view of the universe that once seemed to be implied by the success of classical dynamic theory. (Despite naive atheistic arguments about deterministic equations.)

Political Order based on social contracts can also justify rebellion. While a higher (e.g. God's) authority certainly can justify it, those who follow Hobbes would surely argue that rebellion might be justified when contracts were never agreed to, or are repudiated by either side. Christians must, I think, acknowledge that there are political risks believing in higher moral authority. It can be corrupted to a hegemony that is human (or evil) not divine. So the challenge is to reconcile different opinions about what is The Good.

International Relations: this paragraph addresses the challenge, but it is not just international; it is local and national too.

Academic Vocation these days is rarely articulated as being "the discovery of the truth of reality", let alone "as given by God". Christians might therefore be regarded as quaintly old fashioned to say so. In the natural sciences self-interest and pride are plentifully present, but so also, up till recently at least, have been epistemological principles that effectively detect untruth. That is one reason why Marxism and Postmodernism have barely penetrated the natural sciences.

LAW, MEDICINE, PUBLIC HEALTH

[Karen Kong \(江嘉恩\)](#)

Principal Lecturer in Law, University of Hong Kong

- The natural moral law is often viewed as the foundation or building block of the common law legal tradition which originated from England. Values like fairness, justice, equality, the rule of law, and respect for individual rights and liberties permeate the rules of common law and equity. These values can also be referred to as the spirit of the common law. “Justice delayed is justice denied”, and “equal justice under law”, for example, are entrenched common law maxims that were in existence for centuries. As Hong Kong incorporated the English common law legal system in the colonial times, the same norms and principles formed the backbone of our legal system; they are the core values that Hong Kong people had been proud of. These values, however, had been seriously challenged in recent years. There is a strong need to defend and preserve the core values and the spirit of the common law legal system in Hong Kong.
- In international law, there is a source of law called “jus cogens”, or “peremptory norms of general international law”. These are norms so fundamental that they bind all states with or without consistent state practice or consent, and cannot be opt out by a treaty to the contrary. Examples of peremptory norms include the rights against torture and slavery.
- As a Christian legal scholar, I feel a sense of mission to defend and protect the legal norms that reflect Christian moral values, and to strengthen and promote a legal order that enshrines these norms and values. Proposals to legal reform are based on principles of enhanced equality and fairness. I can feel that God’s justice is at work through earthly law and the legal system.

John R. Peteet

Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

What I find most intriguing in Created Order is the idea that goods (e.g., “friendship with God, personal integrity, just relationships, the experience of beauty, and creativity”) precede moral laws, which serve them. This has at least two liberating implications for me as a psychiatrist. One is that more patients could access spiritual resources helpful in their healing if they appreciated this ordering, rather than feeling that moral rules have arbitrarily deprived them of a good life, or engendered toxic shame. A second implication is that moral laws can provide valuable guidance in realizing the good. For example, I have recently been part of a project (<https://www.livingaccountably.com/>) to show how the virtue of accountability, which includes embracing corrective input, contributes to mental health and human flourishing.

Tyler VanderWeele

John L. Loeb and Frances Lehman Loeb Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard University School of Public Health

Co-Director of the [Initiative on Health, Religion and Spirituality](#) and Director of the [Human Flourishing Program](#), Harvard University

I respond to the Preview with three questions.

1. To what extent, and in what ways, can one argue for the basic human goods and the propositions of natural law that follow from a Christian understanding of the created order to effectively persuade those who are not themselves Christian?
2. To what extent can consensus be achieved not only with regard to those willing to engage in philosophical argument, but also with the general public?
3. With regard to arguments for establishing basic human goods, to what extent do the properties of (i) being an end and not only a means, and (ii) of empirically being (nearly) universally desired, play a role, and what other properties or principles are useful in trying to achieve broad consensus around basic goods?

VanderWeele, T.J. (2017). [On the promotion of human flourishing](#). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 31:8148-8156.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Allan Bell

Emeritus Professor of Language & Communication, Auckland University of Technology

Senior Research Fellow at Laidlaw College, Auckland

Honorary Research Professor in the School of English, University of Hong Kong

Nigel Biggar's is a fine statement of the actuality and character of created order, and its relation to moral order. His stress on the pervasiveness of morality through creation, and of the way of life which this implies for politics, international relations, and the academy, is winning and timely.

However, I want to suggest that we would gain a fuller understanding of creation from complementing the principle of 'order' with an awareness of the *profusion* of creation. It is possible, it seems to me, to overstate the orderliness of creation. From Genesis onwards, creation is about profusion, untidiness, jumble as well as about orderliness – and not just because of human sin and failing. So many Old Testament texts, particularly in the Psalms, testify to the overwhelming, untamed profusion of God's creation. While order may be one basic dimension of creation, abundance - even to excess, even to the extent of *disorder* - is another.

As both academics and Christians, we are committed to seeking the orderliness, but of course, ultimate answers to that evade us. There is much in creation which is not orderly in any clear sense, and was never intended to be so. It is overflowing, abundant, abandoned in ways which especially the Old Testament scriptures convey. The a-rationality of David's dance before the Lord, and of the lovers of the Song of Songs, overwhelms notions of orderliness. A too-great emphasis on the orderliness of creation both underestimates God, and risks affirming a modernist, empiricist approach to our understanding of the world. I therefore find 'rational' too potentially reductionist a term to want to apply it to creation. Orderliness can too easily be equated with tidiness. As Biggar observes, creation includes quantum randomness and artistic improvisation.

As a recent affiliate to a theological college, I have realized that theologians are primarily interested in order, in making order out of the revelation of God. By contrast their colleagues in biblical studies, especially of the Old Testament, are much more comfortable with the variegated, untrammelled uncertainty of humanity and creation – and God. The texts of the Old Testament, in all their ambiguity, rainbow diversity, paradox and sheer bitsiness, convey an important truth about the God whose creation is beyond ordering. God threw some things out there to be wildly manifold and productive like the rainforest or an estuary or a galaxy.

We can see this profusion-beyond-order in the field which I work in, that is, language. Much – indeed, most - of language is orderly, and can be described and catalogued in its patterns, although our models remain partial and provisional. But all of language is rife with exceptions and one-off 'nonce' forms which will never be knocked into orderly, rational shape by our descriptions. Language is a site of continuous flux, it just never stops changing amidst the swirl of linguistic production and creation. It is always spinning new words, structures, dialects, styles, genres, accents – and that volatility represents much of the delight of language. If this is so for a human (sub-)creation, it holds even more for God's creation as a whole, and the Good which God delights in includes the flux as well as the order of it.

Judy Dean

Professor of International Economics in the Brandeis International Business School

I found this Preview wonderful in its concise reminder that God's creation is value-laden, and thus moral law follows from this created order.

Regarding international relations, Biggar notes that "even where there are no contracts between different peoples—where there is no international law—moral law still obtains." There is an interesting example of this in economic development, particularly among those passionate about solving global poverty. For example, many who have no particular faith are strong advocates that more wealthy individuals and countries have an obligation to help the less fortunate, and that policy choices in rich countries that harm poor countries are not right. That is, they assume that values such as the dignity of human life, and the importance of "loving your neighbor" are globally true and need no justification. I see this as a recognition of those values imbued by God in His created order. They are indeed "visible," even to those who do not believe in God.

When I was on the faculty at another university, several student groups jointly invited Gary Haugen (president of International Justice Mission) to give a lunchtime talk. It was a very diverse group, and I was sitting next to a professor of international law. I knew that he had rejected his Catholic upbringing long ago. Gary challenged us when he said that to do IJM's work, you need to think about the basis upon which you form your values. E.g., on what grounds can you say that you should intervene in another country to help rescue girls from brothels? Who says your values are the same as theirs? He explained that his own basis was his Christian faith. Interestingly, the international law prof leaned over to me and said he'd been trying to get them to think about this same issue--the basis upon which one can even construct international law--and he had found it very challenging.

Joerg Friedrichs

Associate Professor of Politics, Department of International Development, University of Oxford

Official Fellow of St Cross College, Oxford

This is excellent, and highly readable. My only comment is that, in the section on moral law and international relations, a recognition might be in order that some respected and respectable thinkers in the tradition of political realism (including Reinhold Niebuhr, a protestant theologian) have a tragic view whereby what is in line with God's order might be clear to a Christian leader's conscience yet their responsibility towards constituents in a fallen world may make acting in line with that insight not only impractical but also unconscionable towards those very constituents whom no leader is allowed to betray.

Thus, a Christian leader may be caught in a double bind: on the one hand, they believe and clearly understand God's ethical imperatives, but, on the other hand, they must understand that following these precepts may clash with the best interest of their constituents, voters and/or citizens.

There are at least two reasons for this. First, in a fallen world, third parties may exploit acting according to God's will. Converting swords into ploughshares, short of the second coming, may lead to military disaster. Second, at the domestic level, voters and/or citizens may not always appreciate their leaders acting according to God's will. Giving away one's possessions to feed the poor may be pleasing to God and a Christian leader is free to do so, but a Christian leader giving away a conspicuous share of the national income for development aid may not meet public approval; indeed, how can we be sure that God approves it when leaders spend their constituents' income without their consent? In a democracy, doing so may even be politically self-defeating.

Such considerations are already implicit and partly even explicit in the text but could perhaps be made even more transparent.

Terence C. Halliday

Research Professor, American Bar Foundation

Honorary Professor, School of Regulation and Global Governance, Australian National University

Adjunct Professor, Sociology, Northwestern University, USA

I am most grateful to Prof Biggar for this lucid and compact Preview on God's created physical and moral orders, especially insofar as it touches on law, politics and society—the nexus of my own research and writing. I have four questions.

1. A question arises from my research on the rise and fall of transnational legal orders, those norms and standards and laws that seek to order economic and social and political relations within states and across national borders worldwide. It is a wonderful assurance to have full confidence in an objective, pre-existing, created moral order that is inherently good. Could Prof Biggar elaborate how one bridges the gap between the ideals of the “created, given, natural and objective moral order” (indeed, how one discovers these) and the moral and theological judgments I can make about the rules for the world contained in international economic law or international humanitarian or criminal law?
2. For those of us who study and participate in global settings where delegates from different world religions or diverse ideological beliefs come into the same chamber to draft laws for the world, is a benefit of reasoning from created order a way of getting to consensus that would otherwise be rejected if Christian lawmakers reasoned explicitly from biblical revelation?
3. Is order inherently a good? Are there not occasions when an element of disorder, for example in domestic politics or in business failure, might provide an opening for a renewal of social order? Disorder thereby becomes a periodic moment in societies where a prevailing order (e.g., a corrupt Babylonian or Roman Empire, or a totalitarian state, or an exploitative economy) can and should be dismantled and reconstructed?
4. To take the question above one step further, when Prof Biggar speaks of “morally justified rebellion” would he broaden this notion of revolt from political orders to also embrace economic, or social, or legal orders? For instance, might rebellion against an unjust command or capitalist economy be morally justified by a theology of the created order?

Donald Hay

Emeritus Fellow, Jesus College, University of Oxford

1. The exposition concentrates on just *one* implication of created order - that is, moral order with implications for

ethics generally and more specifically political order. For that I found it excellent, and the applications in the last three sections more than compensated for the fairly abstract reasoning of the first three sections. It argues very clearly and succinctly the link between created order and moral order, in a way that I found compelling. [Perhaps the title should be 'Created Order and Moral Order?']

2. Nigel Biggar acknowledges the effects of sin by identifying the issue of moral failing - 'fallen human conscience' and people 'cannot be always relied upon to do what moral law obliges'. This could arise from human wilfulness (according to St Paul), from weakness of the will (*akrasia*), or from ignorance. The last of these does not feature in his exposition, and yet is evidently an important issue. What is missing is what Emil Brunner termed 'the noetic effects of sin' [5] - that is, our inability to understand human passions and behaviour on a purely naturalistic basis. According to Brunner (and Abram Kuyper and the Reformed tradition) without appealing to revelation we may not arrive at the truth where *human nature is central to the phenomena we are seeking to understand*, and that is particularly true of human ethics and responsibility. More generally the argument that Biggar advances is convincing on the existence of a moral order in our universe, but is not so convincing on how we come to comprehend it.
3. Is there a disconnect between the kind of moral thinking that Biggar has in mind, and the Biblical (OT) emphasis on God's law revealed at Sinai? The Psalms focus on the latter, as for example in Psalm 119, and look to created order as evidence of God's power rather than as a source of moral instruction. As he notes, one NT passage that seems to appeal to natural law comes in the first two chapters of Romans [6]. More generally, the preview is silent on *Biblical* ethics, and what we are to make of the biblical material in relation to moral order. See for example in my own area the excellent exposition by Barrera (Albino Barrera (2013), *Biblical Economic Ethics*, Lexington Books). Are Biblical ethics not relevant to Nigel's exposition? If so, it would be helpful to understand the case for discounting them.
4. There is a further concern about the 'applications' of moral law in a fallen world. The classic statement comes in Jesus' teaching about divorce, where he notes that the moral law requires marriage to be indissoluble, but Moses permitted divorce because of 'hardness of heart'. This may be straying too far outside Nigel's focus in the Preview, but it is for example exactly the kind of moral wrestling that generated the traditions of casuistry.
5. The final section on 'the academic vocation' is very helpful in laying out the pitfalls of sinful human motivations in the academic task, and the virtues that are required to counter them. But it does not address the question of *how* we go about 'the discovery of the truth of reality as given by God'. If the 'noetic effects of sin' as described by Brunner are present, then in the human sciences at least questions of methodology are going to be critically important. Evidently one would not expect Biggar to include a detailed exposition of methodological issues across the disciplines, but it would be good to highlight the problems we face in arriving at the 'truth of reality'.

End Notes

[1] *Institutes* II,ii,1

[2] *Institutes* IV,i,12

[3] *Institutes* I,xiii,5

[4] From Plato's Socratic dialog asking "Is something good (holy) because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is good."

[5] For a very brief introduction to 'the noetic effects of sin', see S K Moroney, 'How sin affects scholarship: a new model', *Christian Scholars Review*, 28, Spring 1999.

[6] But he does not mention that in 1: 26, 27 the passage (rather uncomfortably to contemporary readers) focuses on homosexual relations

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