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Editor's Introduction
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Computers hold enviable traits, and a few characteristics stand out. The devices learn and preserve data quickly. And what's more, to pass on knowledge to a new computer, a simple command contacts the vast tower of memory storage, and in seconds, knowledge is uploaded and retained. An entire library of information can be uploaded and then processed into a synthesized document in the time it takes to make a cup of coffee.

 The comparison of computers to humans is stark. Shakespeare's seven stages of man in *As You Like It* paints the ritualistic nature of human existence. The *infant* has no ability to care for himself until he learns rudimentary skills, such as feeding himself. Once accomplished, he is then shuffled off as a *schoolboy* to begin uploading data into his mind, a torturous adventure of a decade, perhaps several decades. His mind turns to romance as he becomes a *lover*, a game with rules learned through experience and the training becomes a difficult taskmaster on his emotions. His strength soon becomes apparent to the State, and his life as a *soldier* begins where his education is continued on the battlefield. The stakes are high, higher than ever before and life is felt at its top.

 Life continues. His mind turns to *justice*, where his acts are used to weigh those things not readily apparent, such as which course a man must take based on personal fulfillment and personal creed. What decisions are just? Which course causes malice and pain to others? Here, his education and experience serve him well and the labor he has undertaken over the course of decades protects his waning strength. Finally, he returns to the last vestiges of life, a *second childhood* of sorts, where he can no longer care for himself, and the end approaches.[1]

 Computers, in this fledgling Technology Age, learn all a human can learn and more in a fraction of a second. Why then, pursue knowledge? Why do we need to learn, or even have memories, when we enjoy all the information at the tips of our fingers? Why must we read an entire book when all we must do is ask a question into a device that instantly provides an answer? Why learn when

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[1] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2009), act II, scene 7.

our computers have all the right answers, when the books we read may be dated or simply wrong? And most importantly for our purposes here, why publish another academic journal?

Individual imagination, when engaged, leads to the deepest sense of connection to the cosmos of God's creation and to God Himself. As you are about to see in the articles we offer, the relationship with God stands as preeminent. We are created to create and to enjoy the creation of Him and our fellow humans.

For example, the emotional connection between two people on a date can bring joy when the evening's planner follows the script of his heart rather than the algorithm best designed to get what he wants.

And yet, technology has its place. He may use technology to find the perfect recipes to make her favorite meal, but the work to understand the recipe, mix the ingredients, and aesthetically plate the meal is an art of his own creation and skill. Her use of technology gives directions first to his house, then how to soothe his burnt hand from touching a hot skillet, and finally, directions to the closest sushi restaurant. Thankfully, through the clever use of combined tactics, the evening is not ruined.

Academic journals also have a place in our age. They allow the author to use experience gained through hard work and research in a format best designed to pass on knowledge. The work uploads data to the reader's mind. The journal allows for the reader's imagination to spark, where connections are created in the mind by living off the experiences and feelings and understanding of another, an understanding an algorithm simply can't produce. The reader quickly jots down ideas in a journal and responds to the article's author, and soon, a conversation ensues. In this process of learning, a key piece of humanity is experienced which a tower of memory cannot convey— relationship. Because human connection, based on understanding, respect, and compassion through the dialectic, is a connection offering a joy we cannot truly grasp. This very act is what Shakespeare was doing when he broke down life in to seven stages.

The flagship issue of *The Classical Connection* offers two intriguing articles that invoke the imagination. The first, by Joshua Snell, challenges the reader to understand better the nature of our actions and what our true purpose is by comparing Christian and Buddhist views of evil. The second article, by Michael Barros, brilliantly explores the roots of Halloween and a Christian's thoughtful response.

As you set the journal before you, and as the coffee is brewing, take a moment to anticipate the knowledge you are about to upload into your brain. Notice the human connection that comes with the imagination and creation of human authors and how it associates with the stage of life you are currently

enjoying. True, the thirty minutes it takes to read the articles is far less than it takes to upload them onto the computer. I trust, however, that you will step back with not simply more information in your head, but that you'll enjoy the process of putting it there. I know I did.

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The Problem of Evil and Its Fruit
Joshua Snell

Abstract: The enduring philosophical and theological question of evil, deeply embedded in the human experience, has historically been navigated by diverse religious traditions, each elucidating a unique perspective. This essay delves into the Christian and Buddhist approaches to defining the problem of evil and its solutions, emphasizing the shifts in understanding from theological exploration of the nature of suffering and evil for the sake of orthodoxy and orthopraxy into apologetic responses in contemporary contexts. By examining the profound insights of Christian figures such as Augustine and Jonathan Edwards, juxtaposed with the foundational teachings of Buddhism, we see that prior to the modern era humans sought to understand the essence of human existence and the transformative potential of grappling with the existential quandaries of suffering and evil. We show that the conversation extends beyond East/West divides and bears the most fruit when the *telos* of inquiry is not winning a debate but becoming a better human being.

Changing The Context and Changing the *Telos*

The problem of evil is one of the quintessential questions about the human condition. The problem of evil as a question and as a field of exploration did not arise in the halls of academia, the dark, smoky rooms of a cold post-enlightenment society, it is not a question that came from the atheist. The problem of evil is an inherently Theocentric question, and as a result, we see that religions of all kinds have wrestled with the problem of evil. Christianity is no exception to this. Christians should never be afraid of the problem of evil because Moses did not fear it, the prophets did not fear it, Jesus (God Himself) did not fear it, nor did the apostles, nor have the great theologians and people of the church throughout history. In recent generations, within Western culture, Christians have seemed to become afraid of the problem of evil. This begs the question, "Why?"

If it is the same problem of evil that has been asked millions of times in history, then why now does it offer this unique anxiety? As stated, the problem of evil is a question of theology, and in the past, the question of evil arose in a theological context, whether it was a Priestly Class presiding over sacred rites, a mentor to his disciples, or a broken person looking up to heaven and crying out. But since the Enlightenment – especially Voltaire and the earthquake in Portugal,

this question has started coming from a new direction, the atheist's challenge. This changes the nature of how we have perceived the question. Rather than being a question for exploration that deepens the relationship of the person asking with the object of worship or changing their relationship with creation, the question has become one of apologetics and polemics. As a result, the desired outcome in answering this question is one of a release of tension, getting God off the hook, or providing cognitive dissonance so we can continue with our lives and not have to think about the question again. This is fundamentally different from the way the problem of evil has been explored throughout the rest of human history.

First off, we need to change our posture when it comes to the problem of evil. There is so much that we can get out of this question, but often the insights go unnoticed because we're focused on the wrong outcomes. The problem of evil, logically speaking, has been definitively addressed countless times.[2] It is the existential problem of evil that we as humans still wrestle with, and it is there that much good fruit has been lost, but it can be regained.

Many apologetics engagements from the atheist's perspective tend to deal with making statements about what is morally possible for an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God or stating that suffering is pointless—even when the charge is unprovable. Such as the following cardinal point by J. L. Mackie, "If a good and powerful God exists, he would not allow pointless evil, but because there is much unjustifiable, pointless evil in the world, the traditional good and powerful God could not exist."[3] On an existential level, these debates are a formal exercise in a "Yes He can…no He can't…yes He can…no He can't" sort of argument.

Apologetics serves a purpose, and this essay is not to disparage apologetic work, but the reality is that exploring these questions in their theological contexts with the *telos* being focused on orthodoxy and orthopraxy is the better way of processing these questions and continuing the great conversation. So, let us examine an example of this approach.

Engaging The Problem of Evil within Christianity and Other World Religions

What is at stake in practice and the problem of evil? How does our understanding of the problem of evil affect our beliefs and actions? Everything. The problem of evil helps us grow in our understanding of orthodoxy and in how we live out orthopraxy.

An example of this is in the story of the Buddha. As orthodox stories go, the Buddha came out of a Hindu context, and the great spiritual journey and foundation of Buddhism was Buddha's answer to the problem of evil. The way

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[2] Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, et al.

[3] J. L. Mackie, "IV.—EVIL AND OMNIPOTENCE," *Mind* LXIV, no. 254 (January 1, 1955): 200–212, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/lxiv.254.200.

the Buddha answered the question affected the entire universe from his perspective. Much is at stake in the problem of evil, but it is not the apologetic question of "how do we get God off the hook?" What is at stake is the essence and the *telos* of human existence. For the Christian and the Buddhist alike, the way we answer this question influences the rest of life. God will be there, regardless of how well we answer the atheist; the question we need to ask is, "How should we live?"

Buddhist Perspective on the Problem of Evil:

In a way, the entire edifice of Buddhist teachings can be seen as a response to the problem of suffering. To understand how Buddhism approaches this issue, one need only look at the life of Siddhartha Gautama, who would later become the Buddha. Encountering the undeniable realities of old age, sickness, and death – the omnipresent suffering inherent in life – he embarked on a spiritual quest to comprehend and transcend this suffering. His Enlightenment was the realization of the Four Noble Truths which pivot around the acknowledgment of suffering (*dukkha*) and its cessation.

1. *The Truth of Suffering*

   "Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering."

2. *The Truth of the Origin of Suffering*

   "It is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination."

3. *The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering*

   "It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it."

4. *The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering*

"It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path[4]; that is, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."[5]

From a Buddhist perspective, suffering is not viewed as a consequence of original sin or the actions of malevolent beings, but rather as an intrinsic aspect of existence in *samsara*—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It arises due to attachment, desire, and ignorance. The intention, or will, in Buddhism isn't an independent entity but is interwoven with these afflictions. When purified of these afflictions, the will or intention becomes a tool for enlightenment, working towards the cessation of suffering.

Karma, which means action, is a connection of behavior in the past with suffering in the present. While there may not necessarily be a one-to-one relationship between a specific action and a specific present suffering, the past evil karma will set up for the next rebirth in *samsara* and can set one up for a future life of misery. For example, it may not be the case that because I kicked an old chicken as a child that I am, in another life, suffering in the cold right now but it may be the case that because of that because of that former action I was reborn in a destitute condition and so secondarily, with regards to causation, I am now suffering in the cold. There is a great incentive in this system to right action because wrong action will bear consequences even if it takes another lifetime to experience.

We can see from the breakdown above that the Buddhist tradition answers four important questions in their worldview about suffering: What is the case, how did it come to be, what needs to change, and how can that change take place? By virtue of providing answers alone, the Buddhist tradition alone offers a more robust worldview than the modern atheist views of suffering and release from suffering. What is seen in the systematic approach to addressing the problem of evil is a concern for the primary principle of human flourishing – a recognition of a wrongness in the universe and a pathway to address that wrongness. This answer arose from the situation in which Gautama found the world and his attempts to lead people to liberation. The answers to the problem of suffering were not framed as a response to a polemic argument, they were a response to an inescapable fact of life.

There are many surface similarities between the Buddhist and Christian worldviews regarding the problem of evil; however, further investigation reveals important differences regarding all four answers of nature, origin, change, and

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[4] The Noble Eightfold Path is a comprehensive guide for ethical and spiritual development, leading to enlightenment and the cessation of suffering. It is the Buddhist approach to living a balanced and purposeful life, covering the topics of wisdom, right action, and right purpose.

[5] "SuttaCentral," SuttaCentral, n.d., https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false.

means of change. We will look at the Christian view of the problem of evil through the lens of St. Augustine and Jonathan Edwards.

Comparison with Christian Views of Augustine and Jonathan Edwards:

In many ways the Buddhist answer to the problem of evil is similar to what Christians call "The Free Will Defense" in Christian apologetics which answers the following questions. What is the origin of suffering in the world? The effects of sin; the waxing entropy of age, sickness, human evil, death. What is the origin of evil that causes suffering? The misuse of the free will with which God created humans, we desire and even crave things which are not good. What is the way to end suffering? To walk in accord with the desires and nature of God and relinquish the desires that are evil. What is the path to walking in accord with the desires and nature of God? Think, desire, speak, and act in the right manner. The Buddhist and Christian views are most different, however, when questions of foundations are asked—what is the nature of evil and the nature of the will? This is where the Christian and Buddhist traditions part ways and yet both retain their depth and inner consistency.

What is the nature of evil, according to the Christian worldview?

Two influential theologians who have influenced the way many Christians view engage with suffering both intellectually and in daily life are St. Augustine and Jonathan Edwards.

St. Augustine who wrote in the fourth and fifth centuries was a Christian theologian and philosopher whose prolific writings, notably 'Confessions' and 'City of God,' influenced Western Christianity and philosophy and continue to do so until this day. Jonathan Edwards who wrote in the eighteenth century was a prominent American preacher, theologian, and philosopher who played a central role in the First Great Awakening and is best known for his fire-and-brimstone sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' however his contributions to Christian philosophy on free will and divine sovereignty have made significant contributions to those areas of theology and philosophy. Both these theologians demonstrate how within the Christian worldview the conversation about how to act and worship in a world marred by evil and suffering has been going on for thousands of years. Both theologians appreciated versions of what is commonly called the Free Will Defense within apologetics.

The Free Will Defense, as the argument that the misuse of free will is the cause of evil, is important but requires more depth to be satisfactory–an explanation of what evil is. If the misuse of free will is the reason, then why was it misused in the first place? This is what is explored by both Augustine and Edwards.

It is worth noting that there are two ways in which the question of why can be asked in this context. The first way is asking, "Why, in the biblical story, did *Eve* and *Adam* take the fruit if they were in such a great place?" In this sense, the

question is getting at the inner workings of Eve and Adam, asking rather incredulously, "What was their thought process? What was their inner struggle? What were they thinking?" This sense of the question cannot be answered because the Bible never explains the inner workings of their minds in a play-by-play narrative. So, this sense of the question is interesting, but a satisfactory answer is not possible due to the personal and internal nature of the answer and the lack of access to those inner and personal thought processes. The second way in which the question can be asked is the philosophically invigorating one, "What is it about *the nature* of free will that makes evil intentions even possible if free will was imbued by an all-good Creator?" That is what we will investigate below. What we are about to find is that the foundational content of the answer is not found in responding to an atheist's objections. Rather it is born from the pursuit of truth and understanding.

St. Augustine argued that evil is not a substance but rather a 'privation' of good. Augustine grappled deeply with the nature of evil. Augustine gets to the heart of the question and asks, "what is evil in the first place?" He says:

> In the bodies of animals, disease, and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present — namely, the diseases and wounds — go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance, — the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils— that is, privations of the good which we call health — are accidents. Just in the same way, what are called vices in the soul are nothing but privations of natural good. And when they are cured, they are not transferred elsewhere: when they cease to exist in the healthy soul, they cannot exist anywhere else.[6]

This is somewhat parallel to the Buddhist idea that suffering arises from ignorance and attachment, though the theological foundations differ. Augustine believes that there is a real substance, and that substance is understood in the creative act of God to make substance from that which was not substance. One removes the "holes in the cloth" by drawing closer to God—the source of all substance. This is a fundamental distinction between Augustine and Buddhist thought – Augustine believes in orthodoxy in its most literal definition, "right glory" as the answer to evil. For Augustine, there is an eternal and unchanging God, and it is rightly glorifying Him that removes evil, which is the impetus of suffering.

According to Augustine, nature is not a power struggle but a privation. This is important because since Christians believe that humans are made in the

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[6]"CHURCH FATHERS: Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love (ST. Augustine)," n.d., https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm.

Image of God, any privation is to be met with becoming more like God. In other words, the Christian view holds that there is a permanent self that is designed to exist in goodness. In contrast with the Buddhist view of liberation and realizing there is no permanent self, the Christian view holds that the answer to liberation from evil is to become more permanent, turning more into God both ontologically and functionally.

To the Christian worldview, humans like Adam and Eve, and indeed all creatures, have an ontological privation–they are contingent beings. As Graham Cole summarized, in the Bible, "The fundamental metaphysical distinction is not that between being and becoming, or the infinite and the finite, but between the Creator and the creature. Creatures are internally related to the Creator. That is to say that, without the will of the Creator, they are not."[7] Due to the contingent nature of humans and the privational nature of evil we begin to see possibilities. If things act according to their nature and humans are contingent in nature, then it follows that humans are metaphysically able to deviate and make contingent choices which are privations from the good. God, the necessary being, necessarily does what is good. Humans, the contingent beings, *may* do what is good but are metaphysically contingent.

This is where Edwards brings a fine point on the connection between the metaphysical contingency of human nature and the moral contingency within "the will" which causes evil actions. He puts a fine point on Augustine's idea by exploring the nature of *the will* and why humans choose what they choose:

> We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing, when we can't do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature does not allow of it, or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the Will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects. Moral Inability consists not in any of these things; but either in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite an act of the Will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary.[8]

While individuals have the natural ability (physical and mental capacity) to make different choices, their moral ability (what they are inclined or disposed to do) determines their actions. Adam and Eve provide an example of this in that while they had the natural ability to obey God in the Garden, their moral inclination at the time of temptation was an impelling force to sin. There are both internal and external forces that shape the will and the inclination of the will may change with new understandings (internal processing) and/or with new circumstances (external environments).

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[7] Graham Arthur Cole, *Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology, 2019).

[8] Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 1979.

So, in the biblical narrative of the fall we see that the serpent had an active role in providing Eve with incentives to disobey God. The words and persuasion of the serpent had an effect on the moral inclination of Eve's will. The serpent did not change the natural ability of Eve to desire or not desire the temptation. The natural ability was the same natural ability before the serpent appeared. Eve was always naturally capable of not acting on temptation. What the serpent did was introduce a new potential desire for Eve. It was Eve, with her natural ability, that not only desired the temptation but found the contrary inclination, acting out on temptation, more inducing than the inclination to obey God.

Naturally, the ability to commit an evil intention had always been present in Eve because of the nature of humanity. Even the command to not eat of the tree was not new in the serpent's address to Eve. Prior to the serpent the state of nature had continued without a temptation to sin: Adam and Eve in the garden, the tree present, the command not to eat of the tree. The only thing that changed was the introduction of contrary motives.

For both Augustine and Edwards, the orientation of the mind toward the things of God is fundamental to the undoing of evil and the elimination of suffering. Ontologically, the more we rely on necessary being and commune with that necessary being the less metaphysically contingent we become. Morally, the more we align ourselves with the rightness of the necessary goodness of God, the less we will be inclined to contrary inclinations. The will of a contingent being will act according to the nature of contingent beings.

Implications for Orthopraxy

Buddhism's answer to the problem of evil isn't just theoretical but affects every aspect of life. The Noble Eightfold Path offers concrete steps to cultivate right understanding, right intention, and right conduct to alleviate suffering. The orthopraxy here is geared towards understanding the nature of suffering and working towards its cessation.

In Christianity, particularly through the lenses of Augustine and Edwards, orthopraxy in the face of evil is rooted in faith, trust in God's plan, and the moral responsibility of humans to choose good over evil. The problem of evil is, thus, also a call to moral action and deepening one's relationship with God. The Christian praxis to the problem of evil turns out to be the biblical view of "repentance," turning toward God and turning away from that which is not of God. It is, metaphysically, a turning toward the source of substance and turning away from the absence of substance—a continuous moral act of ever inclining the heart more toward the Creator rather than inclining the heart toward chaos. In conclusion, both Buddhism and Christianity (as represented by theologians like Augustine and Edwards) recognize the profound challenge posed by the problem of evil or suffering, they approach it with different theological and philosophical underpinnings. Buddhism emphasizes an incentive to right action due to the cause and effect of karma, escapable only by reaching enlightenment. Christianity emphasizes the inclination of the will and the importance of this

inclination being toward the nature of God. Both, however, emphasize the transformative potential of understanding and confronting suffering, leading to deeper spiritual insight, ethical commitment, and, in the case of Christianity right worship of God.

Benefits of Approach

Approaching the problem of evil as an inherently human problem that transcends religious worldviews has a series of advantages over a polemic-centered approach. These advantages can be attained in other topics by refocusing the *telos* anywhere polemics were previously the center. This is a plea to return to a great conversational approach to exploring problems of theology and life.

The first benefit is the humanization of "the other" in the exploration of the problem of evil. In our polemic age, this is timely and important. When the topic of discussion, such as the problem of evil, is seen in the context of the human condition then the humanity of "the other" is not possible to ignore. The topic is subordinated to the great conversation and not the other way around. Polemics takes the great conversation and the reality of human experience and history and subordinates it to the *telos* of winning an argument or advancing a view. Recontextualizing the topic outside of polemics releases anxiety and leads to greater respect among parties.

A second benefit is that it rightfully recognizes a *telos* that is appropriate to the subject matter. When polemics are used the strongest inclination and motivation is winning the argument and advancing the view. But this is actually taking part of a conversation of thought that has been weaved through countless cultures and thousands of years and using part of that conversation to win an argument. Literacy allowed humans to communicate outside of the immediate and imminent context—allowing their contributions to the great conversation to be recorded and engaged with throughout the future and beyond their personal presence. What we see in the history of human thought and literacy is that this conversation was already happening prior to the written word since rich reflection and dialogue appear in the foundations of literacy. As a result, it can be said that these conversations have been happening so far back in history that we cannot know when they truly began. From our perspective the conversation of the problem of evil is timeless because it predates our records of thought captured in time. To take such a topic and merely try to win an argument is inappropriately trite. The *telos* of exploring the problem of evil is deeply ingrained in the human experience and the nature of God and God's relationship to creation. The appropriate telos of such an exploration would be something like a better understanding of the person and work of God and the right action that out to be taken by humans.

There are more benefits that can be added by the discerning mind. But my call to action, in conclusion, is for individual humans like the reader to recontextualize polemic arguments in the context of the great conversation.

Through this change of action, we will see a more amicable marketplace of ideas in our culture and beyond.

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Spooky Spiritual Spaces Subverting Secularity

Michael Barros

Abstract: In the current climate, where society straddles the line between secular beliefs and a pull towards post-secular desires, Halloween stands out as a topic of deep reflection among Christians. For some, it's a time tinged with dark associations, while others see it as mere commercial entertainment. This essay suggests that Christians shouldn't overlook Halloween's spiritual dimension or treat it with indifference. By understanding its Christian roots, intertwined with pagan traditions and its place in today's world, we can see Halloween as more than just a secular event. Instead, it can be a way to reintroduce deeper spiritual connections in an age thirsting for meaning. This paper seeks to shift the mindset of Christians so that they can engage with Halloween with fresh eyes.

Introduction

In today's secular age, where reason and empiricism reign supreme, many Christians find themselves at a crossroads when it comes to Halloween. A palpable fear lingers for some, stemming from the age-old association of the festival with the demonic. These believers tread cautiously, wary of the spiritual pitfalls they associate with October's end. Meanwhile, a larger portion seems unfazed, perhaps even dismissive, attributing their indifference to the secular conditioning of the modern world. For them, Halloween is but a harmless blend of candy, costumes, and commercialism.

However, this very dichotomy reveals a hidden danger. The overtly demonic, with its grotesque imagery and blatant malevolence, might have retreated into the shadows, but it hasn't disappeared. Instead, it's taken on a more insidious form, blending seamlessly into the secular celebrations that dominate contemporary Halloween. By relegating the festival to mere commercial frivolity, we might be missing the subtle spiritual undercurrents at play.

Yet, there's a bold proposition to be made: instead of sanitizing Halloween of its spiritual essence or relegating it to secular indifference, why not confront the spiritual head-on? By doing so, Christians can reclaim the narrative, viewing Halloween not as a battleground where demonic forces run rampant but as a

testament to the enduring power and triumph of Christ. In this light, Halloween transforms from a night of fear to a celebration of Christ the Conqueror, who has overcome the world, including all its hidden spiritual adversaries.

The Evolution of Halloween from Sacred to Secular

The Christian Origins: All Saints' Day and All Hallows' Eve

Established in the 7th century by Pope Boniface IV, All Saints' Day originally fell on May 13th, marking the dedication of the Pantheon in Rome to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs.[9] By the 9th century, under the guidance of Pope Gregory III, the observance was moved to November 1st, with the intention to honor not only recognized saints and martyrs but also all the departed faithful. This shift placed the celebration in close proximity to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, leading to a synthesis of traditions over time. The eve of this solemn feast, known as All Hallows' Eve on October 31st, evolved into a time of reflection and remembrance. As the centuries passed, while the religious undertones of All Hallows' Eve persisted, the night became imbued with various cultural practices. Prayers, vigils, and contemplations of the ethereal characterized the evening, setting the stage for the ensuing holy feast and, inadvertently, laying the groundwork for the Halloween we recognize today.

Pagan Precursors: Samhain and Celtic Traditions

Yet, before the Christian reinterpretation of this period, the ancient Celts had their own significant celebration, Samhain.[10] Marking the transition from the abundant harvest season to the cold embrace of winter, Samhain was seen as a time when the boundaries between the mortal and the supernatural worlds thinned. Spirits, both benevolent and malicious, were believed to roam more freely. To counter any potential spiritual malevolence, the Celts lit grand bonfires and donned disguises. These practices were rooted in the belief that by blending in with the spirits or by offering light to guide the good ones and repel the bad, they could avoid harm and ensure a prosperous new year.

The Synthesis of Christian and Pagan Ideas

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[9] "Halloween: Origins, Meaning & Traditions," History.com, accessed October 5, 2023, https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween.
[10] Ibid.

Christianity, as it spread its influence across Europe, displayed a nuanced approach to pagan traditions. Rather than outright rejection, there was often a synthesis, a "baptizing" of pagan places, rituals, and objects. The positioning of All Saints' Day close to Samhain can be viewed as a strategic overlap, harmonizing two worlds. However, this was not Christianity bending to the culture but a deliberate effort to redirect, rather than replace. Christian cultural synthesis is an extrapolation of the implications of basic *Christus Victor* theology – Christ has conquered, and he's got the authority to use the resources of his opponents. Likely, the most pronounced example of this perspective is the reconsecration of previously pagan temples, like the Parthenon. St. Gregory the Great said it best in his letter to Mellitus:

I have long been considering in my own mind concerning the matter of the English people; to wit, that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let water be consecrated and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed there. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more freely resort to the places to which they have been accustomed.[11]

This is not a practice of submitting to the culture but walking among it with the boldness and confidence of a faith that actually believes that Christ has "been given all authority in heaven and on earth."

The American Influence and Ethnocultural Evolution

When European settlers, including descendants of the Celts, brought Halloween to American shores, the festival underwent a transformation.[12] The United States, a melting pot of cultures, infused Halloween with diverse layers of spookiness. For instance, Scottish and Irish immigrants carried forward the Celtic traditions of Samhain, integrating them with the American milieu. They carved turnips and later pumpkins, a New World fruit, into jack-o'-lanterns, a practice reminiscent of the ancient custom to ward off malevolent spirits. Similarly, the tradition of "souling" – where the poor would visit homes, offering prayers for the departed in exchange for "soul cakes" – found its echo in the American custom of trick-or-treating.   Initially rooted in spiritual and communal gatherings, the American

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[11] "Pope Gregory's Letter," Oxford Reference, accessed October 5, 2023, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100337215.

[12] Nicholas Rogers, *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

version of Halloween gradually leaned towards revelry and mischief. As communities grew and diversified, so did the celebrations. The melding of various immigrant traditions, from English to German to Latino, enriched the festival's presentation.

With the dawn of the 20th century, the winds of commercialism began to blow strongly. Halloween, with its vivid imagery and communal spirit, was prime for commercial adaptation. Costumes grew intricate, driven by popular culture and cinema. Candy companies recognized the goldmine that was trick-or-treating, leading to a surge in candy sales, turning Halloween into a child's dream and a dentist's nightmare.

Modern Interpretations: A Celebration of Spookiness

Today, Halloween is an eclectic blend of old-world rituals, Christian observances, and modern consumerism. Jack-o'-lanterns, symbols rooted in ancient rites, now illuminate suburban porches. Haunted houses tap into our timeless fear of the unknown, and candy sales soar.

The narrative of Halloween, as it is celebrated today, offers a lens through which we can explore the broader theme of secularity. Sociologist Max Weber's concept of "disenchantment"[13] speaks to a world stripped of its magical essence,[14] a landscape where rationality and predictability reign supreme. This evolution has led to a collective disengagement from the spiritual dimensions that once deeply permeated daily life. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*,[15] sheds light on this transformation, illustrating how society has transitioned from an era where divine belief was the default to a time where faith becomes one among many available worldviews. Secularity is not, then, simply a disbelief in the religious, but rather a complex shift in the conditions of belief, where the sense of the transcendent is no longer axiomatic, and multiple understandings of existence, including the non-religious, coexist and contend within the social imaginary.
In the secular age, symbols, and rituals associated with Halloween find themselves borrowed, repurposed, and commodified. While these symbols — such as the jack-o'-lantern or the notion of spirits wandering the Earth — had profound meanings in their original contexts, they have, over time, been

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[13] Enchantment philosophy has developed a great deal since Weber's time, but for an introduction, please see Mario Marotta, "A Disenchanted World: Max Weber on Magic and Modernity," *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795x231160716.

[14] For other definitions of disenchantment, see: John Cottingham and Herbert De Vriese, "Religion Without Magic: Responding to the Natural World," essay, in *The Philosophy of Reenchantment*, ed. Michiel Meijer (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 38–53.

[15] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

disentangled from their foundational narratives. In the modern Halloween celebration, they are appreciated more for their aesthetic or entertainment value rather than any deep spiritual significance.

Yet, this isn't necessarily a diminishment. The very fact that Halloween can seamlessly blend ancient traditions with modern festivities speaks to its adaptability and enduring appeal. Even in its secularized form, Halloween offers a momentary break from the everyday, a chance to engage with an aesthetic that, while perhaps no longer transcendent in the traditional sense, still captivates the imagination.

Metamodern Halloween

In an age where disenchantment runs rampant, Halloween emerges as an exception, cutting through the thick layers separating the sacred and the profane. This isn't just any festivity; it's a window into the metamodern psyche.[16] Consider the metamodern individual, a creature shaped by postmodernism's shadows but continually grasping for something transcendent. The pull is so strong, they've bypassed the rigid, calculated rationality of the Enlightenment and are now drawn to beliefs framed in aesthetics. As Halloween nears, everything shifts: the changing leaves, the crisp air, and, of course, the inevitable invasion of Pumpkin Spice.

Reflecting on Halloween's trajectory from All Hallow's Eve to today, it's clear this wasn't always just about candy and costumes. It began as a genuine intersection of realms, but over time, it evolved into mere spectacle. The metamodern moment demands a pivot. Not a naïve attempt to revert to days of old, but a nuanced fusion of past and present. With the West's embedded imagery of Halloween, turning away from its gothic allure isn't an option. Instead, the macabre must be recognized and engaged as a spiritual dimension.

For Christians, especially, this metamodern Halloween presents an opportunity not just to glance back nostalgically but to breathe new life into old traditions. To merge the sacred with the secular, recognizing the risks but accepting them in pursuit of a higher truth. It's an urgent call to action, a reminder of the spiritual warfare beyond the material. Halloween, in this context, isn't just about ghosts and goblins. It's a powerful tool, both for outreach and for shattering secular paradigms. This year, the challenge is to move beyond candy

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[16] Metamodernism is a movement with the cultural epoch of Metamodernity. This is characterized by multiple things, but fundamentally by the oscillation between Modern and Postmodern sensibilities. For an introduction, see: Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5677, https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677.

and costumes and plunge headfirst into the mysterious, sacred depths Halloween can reveal.

A Second Naivete

The term "Second Naivete" was coined by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur.[17] It describes a developmental process of understanding, where one moves from an initial naive acceptance of religious narratives through a period of critical skepticism and finally to a post-critical re-embrace of those narratives, but with a more profound appreciation. Think here of how both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien held an affinity for children's literature despite the fact that they were both legitimate scholars of literature. They enjoyed the children's literature naively, then went through the sort of academic rigor that would lead many to mock that naivety, but they emerged, in the end, able to enjoy the literature once again but with renewed vision.

To extrapolate this idea from the personal to the cultural, one can view the Metamodern epoch as the collective "Second Naivete" of society. Modernity, with its emphasis on reason, empiricism, and secularism, sought to flatten reality, removing the spiritual and mysterious elements that didn't fit neatly into its framework. This resulted in a disenchanted world where the supernatural was pushed to the margins or denied outright.

But this disenchantment seems to have reached its *telos* with postmodernism. While many consider postmodernism a separate epoch, it might be more apt to view it as a culmination of the Modern age. It took the critical skepticism of Modernity and amplified it, questioning not just religious narratives but all grand narratives and foundational truths. If Modernity was about flattening reality, postmodernism was about fracturing it. One of the, perhaps unintentional, consequences of this disenchanting was the so-called "meaning crisis" that we face today. The world has been stripped of inherent meaning, and folks have been left to make it for themselves.

Enter Metamodernity, which can be seen as society's "Second Naivete." It doesn't reject the insights of Modernity or the critiques of postmodernism. Instead, it seeks to move beyond them, to re-embrace a sense of depth, meaning, and even, at times, spirituality, but in a way that's informed by the journey through skepticism. It's not, in itself, a return to pre-modern naivety but rather a post-critical embrace of depth and transcendence.

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[17] Áron Buzási, "Paul Ricœur and the Idea of Second Naivety: Origins, Analogues, Applications," *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* 13, no. 2 (2022): 39–58, https://doi.org/10.5195/errs.2022.606.

By viewing the historical-cultural progression in terms of secularity, Metamodernity appears to be a time when this second naivete is emerging in the culture. Where and theorists of metamodernism and Metamodernity tend to view it only as a return to Modern naivety, this lens would categorize modernism as a movement away from premodern naivety, which culminated in postmodernism. Thus, the Metamodern is an era where the culture is navigating its way back to a reenchanted world.[18]

The Insufficiency of Prevailing Christian Approaches to Halloween

When it comes to engaging with Halloween, the Christian community seems split into two main camps: those who engage non-cautiously and those who attempt to strip Halloween of its inherent spirituality, opting for more palatable alternatives.[19] Both approaches, in their own ways, might be inadvertently affirming the secular overtones of modern society.

Non-Cautious Engagement: Presuming the Secular

This group looks at Halloween and thinks, "What's the big deal? It's just fun and games." They dive right in, immersing themselves in the holiday without much thought about its deeper spiritual implications. This approach, in essence, presumes the secular a priori. It's as if there's an underlying belief that the spiritual realm either doesn't exist or, if it does, it poses no threat to the devout Christian.

But history tells a different story. Time and time again, Christians have been cautioned about the potential dangers of the demonic. Think of Athanasius' *The Life of St. Anthony*,[20] which describes his numerous battles with demonic forces. To brush this aside, to see Halloween as just masks, candy, and symbols is a mistake. By doing so, Christians inadvertently align with a culture that might be fundamentally at odds with their faith. They end up playing into the hands of secularism without even realizing it. It's like walking into a dark room without checking if there's a pitfall waiting.

Stripping of Meaning: Affirming the Secular

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[18] It's unbelievably tempting to reference Hegel here, but I didn't want to overcomplicate things.

[19] This dichotomy ought to be viewed as poles, where Christian participants tend toward one side or the other, but possibly, or probably not entirely so. Additionally, this dichotomy excludes Christians who opt out of the season entirely, as this section is about engagement with Halloween.

[20] Athanasius and Budge E A Wallis, *The Life of St. Anthony* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints, 2007).

On the flip side, there's a segment of the Christian community that's deeply wary of Halloween's spiritual undercurrents. Their solution? Strip it of its depth, extract the potentially harmful elements, and promote sanitized versions like 'harvest festivals' or 'trunk or treat' events. At a glance, this might seem like a commendable attempt at safeguarding spiritual integrity.

However, this hollowing out of Halloween's essence has its pitfalls. By retaining the candy, costumes, and pumpkins, while discarding the profound spiritual symbolism, this approach essentially affirms the secular. It doesn't challenge the secular narrative; it negotiates with it. The result isn't a re-consecration or a baptism of Halloween's profound essence; it's an endorsement of a commercial, secular version.

In their bid to protect their faith, these Christians might be missing a golden opportunity. Halloween, with its liminal space between life and death, its flirtation with the mysterious, and its inherent focus on community, could be a platform to delve into profound spiritual discussions and reflections. Instead, by sidelining its depth, we're left with a surface-level celebration that does little to challenge or enrich the Christian narrative.

Aesthetically Mediated Belief and Halloween

Aesthetically Mediated Belief

A notion that has become increasingly prevalent in the Metamodern era[21], "aesthetically mediated belief" refers to the idea that our understanding and experience of beliefs are significantly influenced by aesthetics – the sensory and emotive aspects of religious or cultural phenomena. Rather than mere intellectual or doctrinal affirmations, beliefs are often "felt" and "experienced" viscerally through the lens of art, rituals, symbols, and other aesthetic manifestations.[22] Here, it's helpful to think of the "suspension of disbelief" that we all use when reading a novel or watching a movie – we would simply enjoy the narrative less if we held it to high standards of skeptical criticism.

The Liminal Halloween

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[21] Here, I draw primarily from the post-postmodern movement of performatism, as described by Eshelman: Raoul Eshelman, *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2009). However, this movement has been integrated into metamodern thought by Vermeulen and van den Akker in *Notes on Metamodernism*.

[22] This concept is also noted by James K.A. Smith, see: Smith James K A., *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011).

At the heart of Halloween lies an aesthetic that is both enchanting and eerie. This festival swathes itself in a rich array of colors – the inky black of the night, the fiery orange of pumpkins, and the deep reds reminiscent of fall. Sounds, too, play their part – the distant echo of a haunting melody or the gleeful laughter of children trick-or-treating. Combined, these elements create a unique sensorial experience that's distinctly Halloween.

Culturally, Halloween has cemented its place in the global psyche. From iconic movies to spooky-themed merchandise, its imagery has become ubiquitous. One might argue that this commercial prevalence dilutes its original significance. However, there's an underlying cultural thirst that Halloween quenches. It serves as a conduit, a liminal space, allowing participants to traverse between the ordinary and the extraordinary. This liminality is vital, for it permits a temporary escape from the mundane, offering a portal to the mystical, even if just for a night.

At its core, every ritual, including the festivities of Halloween, is a symbolic act. The act of donning a costume, for instance, isn't merely about changing one's appearance. It's a potentially transformative experience,[23] allowing individuals to momentarily shed their everyday identities and embrace "the other" – in a broad sense, where "otherness" is the non-mundane. This can be a character from folklore, a contemporary icon, or even an abstract concept. Such acts of transformation resonate deeply with the metamodern yearning for both playfulness (irony) and authenticity (sincerity).

Symbols serve as the anchors of our cultural traditions, especially in events like Halloween, where the interplay of aesthetics and belief shines most vividly. Consider the ubiquitous skull or skeleton, which appears in many forms during the Halloween season. At its core, the skeleton symbolizes mortality, a universal human truth. Every person, regardless of background, understands the inevitability of death. The skeleton, as a symbol, is a direct confrontation with this truth.

During Halloween, skeletons are not just displayed as reminders of death but are often adorned, animated, or even celebrated. The act of dancing with a "skeleton" at a party, or playfully posing a set of bones in one's yard, takes the somber reality of mortality and, for a night, transforms it into something lighter, more approachable. It's an aesthetic mediation between the living and the concept of death. This ritualistic play with skeletons allows participants to

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[23] For more on transformation in the context of transcendence, see: Michael Barros and Lola Schultz, "The Transformative Potential of Religious, Spiritual, and Mystical Experiences," *Social Science and Humanities Journal* 7, no. 2 (February 2023): 3035–43, https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22225213.v2.

engage with the deep-seated, often uncomfortable awareness of mortality, but in a manner that's communal, playful, and less daunting. Through the lens of Halloween, the skeleton loses some of its sting, and participants find a way to aesthetically navigate one of the most profound truths of human existence.

The rituals and symbols associated with Halloween offer more than just surface-level engagement. They invite participants into a deeper dialogue with the mysteries of existence, allowing for reflection, celebration, and even catharsis. In a world often dominated by reason and disenchantment, these symbolic acts and aesthetic experiences rekindle a sense of wonder, reminding participants of the intricate dance between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown.

To understand Halloween fully, one must look beyond the superficial. It's not merely about costumes, candies, or scares. At its heart, Halloween is a rich aesthetic and cultural experience, offering a liminal space where the boundaries blur. In this transient space, the metamodern individual finds a playground – an arena where irony and sincerity, skepticism and belief, coalesce. As the world continues to oscillate between extremes, festivals like Halloween, with their deep-rooted symbols and rituals, offer a beacon – a reminder that amidst the chaos, there's magic waiting to be rediscovered.

Christian Engagement with Halloween

The fusion of ancient and modern, secular and sacred, challenges us to understand Halloween in a light that might be unexpected to many: a stage for meaningful Christian engagement. Halloween can be seen as a touchpoint for Christians to navigate their faith in a disenchanted world. By synthesizing our previous discussions, we can chart a path towards a genuine Christian interaction with this festival without compromising core tenets of faith.

Genuinely Engaging with Halloween

Christianity, in its essence, doesn't shy away from engaging with the world. From Paul's sermon at the Areopagus, addressing the philosophers of his time[24], to the Christocentric interpretation of pagan celebrations in the early church, the historical trajectory of the faith suggests an eagerness to converse with prevailing cultural narratives. Halloween, with its medley of pre-Christian and contemporary secular motifs, offers a similar platform today.

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[24] Acts 17: 16-34

However, to genuinely engage means neither engagement without discernment nor stripping Halloween down to its secular bones. It demands an authentic encounter where Christians can appreciate the liminal beauty of Halloween—the eerie allure of a world where the supernatural briefly feels tangible—and simultaneously reorient it towards a Christian understanding of the supernatural, of death, and of hope.

Reconquering Halloween for Christ

The prevailing Christian approaches to Halloween, I've argued, either assume the secular or affirm its value. The alternative I present is a mindset where Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.[25] To understand Christ as King is to reject the authority of other spiritual powers.[26] This isn't to assume that the wolves have no teeth or claws but to trust that when Jesus sends us out as sheep among them, he'll keep us safe.

Again, think of the admirable St. Anthony, who suffered various attacks from demons, sustaining physical injuries. However, he went ahead and faced them anyway. Eusebius noted in the 4th century that miracles still occurred among Christians, but that they were fewer than in the early days of the apostles. Today, they are fewer than at any point in history, and the buffering from the spiritual realm that Taylor identified in *A Secular Age* is no help. This inculcation of the secular at once buffers us from the demonic and the divine. To adopt this conquering mindset is to face spiritual realities as they are, without hiding behind the secular.

Reenchanting with Halloween

In a world dominated by disenchantment, the veil between the spiritual and the material seems thicker than ever. Here, Halloween is a compelling exception, a liminal space where the secular and the sacred meet. The metamodern individual is one who's been conditioned by postmodernism; they're living in the meaning crisis, and they're yearning for the transcendent. So drawn are they toward it that they've shed their ironclad Enlightenment-era rationality and moved toward aesthetically mediated beliefs. Halloween has the benefit of building anticipation for the holiday itself by building up to it for a month or more. The decorations go up, the leaves begin to change, the weather changes, Pumpkin Spice finds its

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[25] Matthew 28:18

[26] The obvious direction here is to discuss *Christus Victor* theology. I only avoid this to circumvent atonement debates.

way into all our favorite food and drinks, and Halloween movies begin popping up on our favorite streaming services.

Halloween, from its All Hallow's Eve origins until now has always presented itself as a day of convergence between realms – only this went from authentic to performative over time. Now is the time to embrace this love of form that mediates our beliefs, seize on the strong pull toward transcendence that characterizes the victims of the meaning crisis, and plunder Halloween for its enchanting potential before the moment passes. A return to the All Hallow's Eve and All Saint's Day origins is admirable but unlikely. The cultural imagery, consumerism, and general aesthetic of Halloween have been cemented into the Western psyche. Thus, rather than shying away from the macabre, we embrace it as a spiritual reality.

Christians ought to be viewing Halloween in the Metamodern era as an unprecedented opportunity not to return to the past but to revitalize the past by bringing the sacred into the secular. This shouldn't be a careless engagement that acknowledges no danger of demonic influence but one that accepts the dangers as worth facing in pursuit of the goal. We've been given a time, a place, and an audience for the following message: "Yes, there is evil in this world that lies beyond the material, and I've got a solution." Taken in this way, Halloween is at once an evangelical tool, a tool for tearing down our own secular biases, and a cautionary tale to keep us sharp. This Halloween, let's not be tricked by secularity but treat ourselves to the fruits of the transcendent.

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