

God Help the Outcast

Exploring a Biblical View on Social Justice in Disney Features

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Introduction

In contemporary American culture, there are many questions related to the topic of Social Justice. (1) Should a wall be built between the US and Mexico? (2) What should be done about people who are in the US without having followed the established procedures? (3) What should be done with the children of these people? (4) How involved should the government be in healthcare? (5) Should there be a universal basic income? (6) Should the minimum wage be raised? (7) What impact will automation and artificial intelligence have upon jobs? (8) Is gender biological? (9) What does tolerance of differing sexual ethics look like? (10) Should physician assisted suicide be legal? (11) Should the unborn be a protected class? All of these, and many more, expose the many facets in which our country is attempting to explore the question of what it means for a society to live justly.

But before any one of these questions can be discussed, there are some foundational questions that must be addressed. You see, ideas have consequences. These emotionally charged and hotly debated questions did not arise in a vacuum, nor will their resolutions be enacted in a vacuum. Therefore, we must have some context about reality before we can hope to provide a solution from which we can hope to make any real change, assuming that one is interested in seeing real change, as opposed to merely critiquing reality.

The first question we have to ask ourselves is, how are we, individually, going to look at the people involved in the debate at hand? Are we going to come to the table as enemies geared up for war or as equals attempting to understand? In the opening scene of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the Minister of Justice, Frollo, and some guards, come upon a group of Gypsies and seek to arrest them. In his zeal for purity and righteousness, Frollo assumes the woman's bundle is stolen goods and chases her through the streets of Paris, before running her down upon the

stairs of the church. He snatches the bundle from the dead woman's arms only to realize it is a handicapped child. Horrified, he finds a well in which he plans to drown the child, before he is interrupted. Frollo, the man whose role it is to bring about justice, is so corrupted by his own ideas, that he is unable to see the injustice of his actions. In his single-minded pursuit of righteousness, he commits far worse crimes of manslaughter and attempted murder than the crimes for which he was arresting the Gypsies.

However, this is not the only example of single-minded factional loyalty leading to disaster. Fast forward to the scene when Quasimodo and Captain Phoebus are caught sneaking into the Court of Miracles. In their zeal to punish the intruders, the Jester and Gypsies forsake guarding the entrance to the Court of Miracles and single-mindedly focus on executing the intruders. Esmerelda stops the execution and as they warn the Gypsies that Frollo is coming, Frollo and his army burst in and arrest everyone. The scene cuts to the public courtyard in front of Notre Dame which is littered with cages full of Gypsies. As the scene unfolds, a bound Esmerelda is led to a stake, at which she is to be burned alive.

In both of these scenes we see people on both sides of the issue make abstract judgments and snap decisions that are not only detrimental to the opposing side, but actually turn out to be equally, if not more, devastating to themselves. Frollo betrays the core of who he is, a minister of justice, and the Jester betrays his whole community. They each destroy not only themselves, but also others, in their single-minded pursuit of *justice*. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Proverbs 12:15 ESV).

So how can we seek to avoid being fools? What can we learn by listening to the opposing side? The first thing we can learn is that there are two things at the heart of all of these issues: (1) People are suffering and (2) People want that suffering to end. It is a noble desire and a noble

pursuit, regardless the topic and regardless the camp. No matter which side of the table one find's one's self, this is the rationale.

The proponents of abortion see women suffering and want to alleviate it. The opponents of abortion see children suffering and want to alleviate it. In any camp there are extremists who like to champion their cause dogmatically, but the people on the street, voting for the politicians who make policy, are typically making their decisions from a place of empathy, not apathy. The person chanting "my body my choice" may sound dogmatic from a picket line, but if you sat across from her and listened to her story, you are much more likely to hear one of pain, abandonment, fear, misuse, or isolation.

It is heartbreaking stories that lead to dogma. It is an empathy with a particular *kind* of suffering and a desire to alleviate *that kind* of suffering, that creates a single-minded pursuit of a resolution to *that kind* of suffering, without awareness of the *other kinds* of suffering it may cause in the process. Right or wrong is not the *first* question. We need first understand the motives, before we will be able to enact effective solutions, and in order to understand motives, we must first *listen* with the *desire* to understand. We need to listen to the pain, the heartbreak, and the longing of real people, and allow ourselves to empathize with individuals from every camp, rather than demonize them, if we hope to be able to find a way forward. People do not care *what* you know, until they know *that* you care.

Critical Theory

The second question we have to ask ourselves is: what is the kind of world in which we live? This is a much more philosophical question. It will require us to answer some difficult questions about the nature of reality, because the very nature of reality ultimately determines

how much, and what kind of influence, we can have upon it. A very popular view of reality, currently, is that

society is *stratified* (i.e., divided and unequal) in significant and far-reaching ways along social group lines that include race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society (i.e., structural), and actively seeks to change this.¹

This theory is grounded in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and is dependent upon the works of Karl Marx.²

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, a theory is critical only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation.³

However, “a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human ‘emancipation from slavery,’ acts as a ‘liberating ... influence,’ and works ‘to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers’ of human beings.”⁴ Therefore there is an inherent self-destructiveness to Critical Theory proper, as well as any individual critical theory, that prevents it from being able to be the foundation of anything. For if a theory is critical only insofar as it is able to liberate and emancipate, then regardless of how liberated a society or people group may be, new means of liberation and emancipation must be sought in order for a culture that is based upon Critical Theory to continue to be based upon Critical Theory. Thus, an infinite regression of criticism which leads to further liberation and emancipation must take place until there is ultimately no psychological or social authority over any individual. Yet such a circumstance is impossible. In order for there to be no social authority, there must be no social influence, however people do not spontaneously generate *ex nihilo*, nor would they be able to sustain themselves to adulthood were they able to do so. Thus, the complete social “liberation” or “emancipation” of a human is impossible.

The idea of complete psychological emancipation is equally absurd given what we now know about the psychological effects of isolation. In order to be completely psychologically liberated a person would have to have never had any influence by another person, yet from what we know about the human psyche, solitary confinement is an extreme form of punishment that has detrimental effects on those isolated from human interaction for great lengths of time.⁵ Studies of children that have been left to primarily raise themselves results in the use of terms like isolation, neglect, and abuse.⁶ These children are left with hugely destructive emotional scars. Yet, if Critical Theory is the ultimate solution to the world's problems, then the opposite should be true. Isolation should yield the finest fruits imaginable, due to it being the ultimate liberation and emancipation.

Materialism

Not only are the goals for Critical Theory problematic, it is also based upon a specific foundation. A significant number of the founders of Critical Theory were influenced by Karl Marx and his materialism. Every system has logical conclusions from which it cannot escape. Materialism is no different, thus it is essential that we look at the logical implications of materialism in order to see how it impacts one's ability to establish a just society. Additionally, contemporary American culture tends to be materialistic, not in the sense of consumerism, although that is a fall out of philosophical materialism. Rather, it tends to be materialistic in the sense of believing that all that exists is matter in motion; that there is no immaterial aspect to reality. This view of reality is unwittingly championed even by those who disagree with it.

One way we can see what a culture has accepted philosophically, even if unconsciously, is by observing the television shows to which people are attracted. In 2009 a Sci-Fi thriller called *Dollhouse* was created, which portrayed a group of men and women whose minds could be

wiped and uploaded with a new consciousness on demand; human dolls who could literally be turned into whatever personality one desired.

By 2020 the same underlying idea has gained in attractiveness, which can be seen by the popularity of the new Sci-Fi comedy, *Upload*, which portrays a world in which human memories are stored as computer files and then uploaded into a virtual reality before death. People's interest in shows such as these point to the reality that as a culture, regardless of one's religious affiliation, we believe that reality is really just matter in motion. We are looking for material explanations of aspects of humanity that have traditionally been considered immaterial (i.e., human consciousness, memory, and personality). Therefore, whether one intellectually assents to philosophical materialism, its pervasiveness in contemporary culture means that unless we intentionally analyze our beliefs and their source, then we cannot be certain that we are not merely believing what culture has impressed upon us. Nor can we be certain that what we believe does not conflict with some of our more fundamental beliefs.

If materialism is true, then all that exists is matter in motion. If all that exists is matter, then everything has the same essence, matter. In such a worldview, there is no explanation for why matter sticks together in different ways, resulting in humans and ducks, for even DNA is just matter in motion, without a cause for why it originally sequenced in various ways. The contemporary attempt to explain the cause of the different sequences is mutation, but that merely pushes the question back a layer and does not explain *what* causes mutation to occur. In materialism, nothing causes mutation; it is accidental. In such a worldview, there is no intellect, for humans merely dance to the rhythm of their DNA and the electrical firings of their brain matter, which are both random accidents.

The primary implication of this worldview is that there is no inherent value in anything. The only value that can exist in such a world is subjective, relative, and fluid, based upon the whim of the bestower. The human, the animal, the plant, and the rock are all the same stuff; therefore, they are all equally valuable or invaluable. If everything is of the same value, then nothing is valuable. This is the concept behind things we treasure. A piece of jewelry is valuable either because of sentiment—it has meaning that other pieces do not—or materially—it has pieces that other things do not. Intrinsic to value is the concept of hierarchy and difference. If all things are equal, then there is no value.

There is also no culpability in such a world, because if we are merely dancing to the rhythm of our DNA and our actions are the result of random electric firings in our brain matter, then there is no personal responsibility. One can no more hold the person who fires the gun responsible for the results of the action, than the gun itself. Put another way, if an electrical fire breaks out in a building, one does not hold electricity or the electrical wires morally accountable for the results of that fire. If materialism is true, then it makes no more sense to hold the human responsible for the electrical firings of his brain matter, than it does to hold the wires responsible for the electrical fire.

If materialism results in no value and no moral responsibility, then those rooted in this view of reality, who seek justice for the marginalized, must find alternative grounds for their arguments. Some accept no intrinsic value and no ultimate moral responsibility to be true and argue that objective morality is not necessary for moral responsibility, because morality is relative to culture. Based upon this view, a person is morally obligated based upon the morality of a particular culture. However, this misses the initial point. Lack of moral responsibility in materialism is not the result of the lack of objective morals; it is the result of the determinism of

materialism. Determinism negates the possibility of free will. If all that exists is matter, then human behavior is no different from animal behavior. To hold a human morally accountable for his actions makes no more sense, then holding a wolf morally accountable for eating a rabbit or for killing a competitor for leadership of the pack.

Materialism has no moral power. Those, who seek justice for the marginalized, who are rooted in this view of reality, must become effective rhetoricians or sophists, because logic undermines their very cause.

A Contemporary Example

Some may respond to this critique of Critical Theory by claiming that the examples addressed are outdated and are not the contemporary form of Critical Theory. Thus, it will be helpful to look at a contemporary example. In *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, Sensoy and DiAngelo claim that the method by which they seek to change society is:

- (1) Recognize that relations of unequal social power are constantly being enacted at both the micro (individual) and macro (structural) levels.
- (2) Understand our own positions within these relations of unequal power.
- (3) Think critically about knowledge; what we know and how we know it.
- (4) Act on all of the above in service of a moral socially just society.⁷

Common ground can be found on many of the parts of this method; however, point number three claim that knowledge is culturally produced. They base this upon the variety of beliefs that are unique to any given culture. The example they provide is the varying beliefs about a tree based upon whether one is a logger, environmentalist, or farmer.⁸ There is a sense in which critical theorists are correct, people do hold a multitude of beliefs as a result of their culture. However, where they are incorrect, is in claiming that means that knowledge is relative to culture and also in claiming that those beliefs are knowledge. If it is true that knowledge is not objective, then the critical theorist's claim that knowledge is not objective is also not objective. In other words, the

claim that knowledge is not objective is self-defeating. In order to know that knowledge is not objective then one must objectively know what knowledge is to make claims about what it is or is not.

In reality, critical theorists do think there is objective knowledge. Sensoy and DiAngelo juxtapose critical thinking (or knowledge) with opinion. They claim that “critical thinking results in an informed perspective after engaging with new evidence and account for multiple layers of complexity.”⁹ They go on to say that the critical thinking

process is called *peer review*, and it is the cornerstone of how academic knowledge is evaluated. Claims about social injustice made within the academic community have undergone peer review. Although there are debates within this community, peer scholars have found the arguments to be relevant and worthy of engagement.¹⁰

Sensoy and DiAngelo’s claims here undermine their argument. Their argument up to this point has been that (1) “knowledge is produced,” (2) “knowledge is socially constructed,” (3) “knowledge is reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it,” and (4) knowledge is not “removed from any political agenda.”¹¹ However, with this single statement they do the same thing they criticize others for doing. They are validating their view of reality by limiting what is considered acceptable criterium for truth. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo, the only valid information for assessing injustice in society is by looking at “the arguments [found] to be relevant and worthy of engagement” by a certain, limited group of people. In other words, the knowledge that they find acceptable is (1) “produced” by a certain community, (2) is “socially constructed” by a certain subset of society, (3) is “reflective of the values and interests of” a certain subset of society, and (4) is not “removed from any political agenda.” Their comments about knowledge are self-refuting.

They regularly claim that there is no such thing as objective value neutral knowledge. One example they provide is the claim that “Columbus discovered America.”¹² They discuss

how this presents a certain perspective that is not representative of everyone. In this case, the Native Americans were already aware of America and so the term “discovered” presents a European, white bias against Native Americans. However, what they fail to realize is that there is an objective truth to the claim that “Columbus discovered America,” namely that the person in the proposition (i.e., Christopher Columbus) was not aware of the existence of the Americas and then became aware of them (i.e., discovered them). It is not a “myth” that Columbus discovered the Americas, because he was not aware of their existence, thus it was a discovery for him.¹³ He did not produce the American continents. He happened upon information he had not previously had.

Columbus’s landing in the Caribbean was not a discovery of the land for the Native Americans, but their perspective is not the perspective from which the European history books were written.¹⁴ Native American history books, looking at the same event, may well have claimed that day as the day a particular group of Native Americans discovered non-Native Americans (i.e., Europeans). This seems to be the thing that Sensoy and DiAngelo are getting at, perspective equals knowledge. However, this too is a misunderstanding of knowledge. Regardless of the perspective from which an historical event has been recorded, an objective historical event occurred. Christopher Columbus sailed a ship to the shores of the Caribbean on a particular day. The implications and significance of that event were different for different groups, but implications and significance are not knowledge. There were not different meanings between Columbus and the Native Americas, there was one event—a man who had never been there before showed up in a specific place at a specific time. Both groups would agree on this. The significance of that event was different for the different groups. The implications of that event were different for the different groups.

This leads to an important question about the nature of reality. Is reality knowable? If Sensoy and DiAngelo are correct and knowledge is perspectival then the answer is no. But this is not tenable. No one can *live* as though the world is unknowable. Even the person who makes the claim that we cannot know the world takes for granted that there is a world in which he is making that claim and that there are minds which can take in that claim.

If Sensoy and DiAngelo are correct and knowledge is culturally dependent then there is another implication of this, namely, that knowledge is cultural consensus and therefore anything anyone says that is opposite to the consensus is not knowledge (i.e., opinion or non-sense). Sensoy and DiAngelo's system is predicated on being counter-cultural, thus by their own definition of knowledge they are either speaking opinion or non-sense. Thus, their arguments about knowledge are self-refuting and since the main tenant of their theory is their view of knowledge, then their self-refutation undermines their entire system.

Seeking an Alternative

Hylomorphism

As discussed earlier, Critical Theory is known for its ability to critique, but not for its ability to provide tangible measurable solutions. Thus, in order to be useful, we must see if there is a solution that is grounded in reality and provides a way forward. What do we know about reality? We know that it makes sense to hold human beings morally accountable for their actions. We know that there is a difference in kind between the electric wiring, the wolf's actions, and the human's actions. We know that there is something different between kinds of things (i.e., rocks, plants, dogs, cats, and people). We know that there is something intrinsic to a thing that makes it *what* it is, that makes it be of a certain kind and not of another kind. There is much that we know about reality. It is from this place of knowledge, this place of recognizing that there are in fact

things *that* we know, whether or not we know *how* we know them, that we must begin our philosophical pursuit, if we ever hope to know anything. Our philosophy must correspond with the ordinary experience of reality. Let us explore whether there is a philosophy that explains reality better than materialism and whether it has any power to enable a just society.

One of the foundational principles of a just society is that all humans are equally valuable regardless of size, age, or race. *101 Dalmatians* paints a good picture of this for us. Thirteen! Fourteen! Fifteen puppies! No, fourteen...a downcast Nanny hands a puppy wrapped in a towel to Roger. A confused Pongo looks between the towel and Roger. Roger wonders aloud whether anything can be done and begins rubbing the puppy in the towel. A moment later there is movement and a small whine. Fifteen puppies! He is alive! Moments later Cruella bursts into the room. When she sees they have no spots she is horrified. "Mongrels!," she screams. Roger and Anita comment that the spots will come later. Reassured, Cruella offers to purchase the puppies. Appalled, Roger declares, "you're not getting one, not one and that's final!"¹⁵

To Cruella, the puppies are only as valuable as their appearance. When she thinks they are spotless, she no longer wants them. When she discovers the spots will come, she is willing to pay any price for them. She wants them in order to turn them into coats in order to sell them for material gain. She has no interest in them for themselves and only wants them for the utility they provide.

The Radcliffes love the puppies for themselves. They are valuable by virtue of what they are, not by virtue of what they can do or provide. In reality, they will cost the Radcliffes, rather than provide any material gain. Nevertheless, to the Radcliffes, every single one of them are valuable. Not one should die, if it can be helped, and not one should be viewed in terms of utility (i.e., sold to Cruella). Every single one has value because of *what* it is.

In *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a disillusioned Esmerelda seeks sanctuary inside the church. As she wanders the halls she sings “God help the outcast, the poor and down trod. Please help my people...I thought we all were children of God.”¹⁶ She sings this song as she reflects on the suffering of her people. Unbeknownst to her she is making a very powerful and specific argument for the intrinsic value of humanity. She looks at her people, the Gypsies, and claims that they are of the same form or kind as those that persecute them and that the form that they all share is one that bestows upon them intrinsic value. This is something that can only be known if humans are a combination of form and matter. The reason being, if humans do not all share the same form, then she cannot claim that “we all were children of God,” because of the problem of induction. In order for the form to be what makes a thing *what* it is, the form must have power. A form that is external to the being has no power to *cause* the thing to be *what* it is. A form that is merely a mental universal or representation, but that is not actually in the thing, has the same lack of potency as a really existent external form. Put another way, intrinsic forms are prescriptive—they *make* the thing be what it is—any concept of forms that locate the form exclusively outside of the thing are descriptive—they *describe* what is already the case. Thus, Esmerelda’s heartfelt cry is made from a specific metaphysical position.

She is also making an argument for a hierarchy of forms. If everything is matter in motion then kinds of things are not really different in essence, they are merely different in accidents. This is like the difference between two rocks. Materially similar but shaped differently due to circumstance. If there are no forms intrinsic to being then everything that exists is like those two rocks—different accidentally, but not essentially (they have the same essence). If everything is essentially the same, then everything is of equal value. If everything is of equal value, then *nothing* is valuable; everything just *is*. Thus, in order for there to be value there must

be a hierarchy of being. The only way for there to be an actual, rather than an arbitrary hierarchy is if there is an immaterial aspect to being that *makes* it what it is—that is prescriptive, rather than descriptive. Then the hierarchy is based upon the capacities of the various forms, rather than an arbitrary assignment by an intellect. In other words, the hierarchy of value, in such a system, is based upon the increasing capacities of being. The value comparison is not arbitrary, it is based upon the reality that each tier contains the capacities of the previous tier, but adds additional capacities (i.e., the plant can feed itself and move to obtain nourishment within a limited range, but the animal can do all that and more as a result of its mobility and instinct. The human can do all that the plant and animal can do plus more because of his intellect.). The value is objectively based upon the hierarchy of formal capacities.

This might lead some to ask whether individuals within a kind would be valued based upon their capacities. However, this is a misunderstanding of the argument. If value is due to an intrinsic form, then it is not the kind of thing that can be taken away based upon any deficiencies in the instantiation of that form. In other words, if the value comes from the form, not the matter, if the value comes from the *what* of the thing, then nothing about the matter of the thing can change its value (i.e., the color of the matter, the age of the matter, the gender of the matter, the socio-economic status of the matter, the instantiation of the form in the matter (i.e., physical or mental handicaps), the location of the matter (i.e., pre or post birth), the lifecycle stage of the matter (i.e., fertilization to old age), or the usefulness of the matter). If the value is in the form, then nothing about the matter of the composite can affect its value.

Some might object that there does not need to be an immaterial aspect to things because DNA makes a thing what it is. However, DNA tells us that in each kind of being (i.e., dogs, cats, fish), there is a different set of information that makes that kind of thing *what* it is. This set of

information orders the material makeup of the matter of which the thing is composed and delimits the actions and abilities of the thing. However, the information in DNA cannot be merely material, even though it can be represented materially, because if it was merely material then it would lack potency or the ability to direct or order. Put another way, like a text which is both material (words, syntax, and grammar) and immaterial (meaning), DNA must be both material (i.e., the combinations of proteins, etc.) and immaterial (the information or meaning). Thus, there must be some immaterial aspect to things that causes them to be the certain kinds of things that they are, that cause their DNA to be the kind of DNA it is. There must be something intrinsic to the rabbit that causes the matter (including the matter of the DNA) to take on the form of rabbit DNA, rather than duck DNA. The DNA is part of the matter, thus it cannot be the cause, because there is still then no explanation for what caused the DNA to be such instead of another kind of DNA. Thus, there must be more to reality than the material; there must be something immaterial in order for there to be non-arbitrary categories and kinds.

What is more, if there is no actual immaterial aspect to things, then we are stuck with the problem of induction. The problem of induction is that if there are no real forms to things then we cannot make generalizations. For example, I cannot conclude that uninjured dogs have four legs because I have not seen every dog in the world, past, present, and future. Thus, I could say that the dogs I have seen have four legs, but I cannot claim to have knowledge about dogs in general. However, if it is true that in order to know anything, I must know everything, then I cannot know anything. But we know that there are things that we know.

Additionally, the claim that we cannot know anything is self-refuting, because in order to know that we do not know anything, we would have to have knowledge of the fact that we could not know anything. As I have heard my professor Thomas Howe say, “‘Nothing-but’ assertions

always require ‘more-than’ knowledge.” How does one know where the property line ends? By being able to observe past the property line to see that beyond the line is something different. In order to claim a boundary on the human intellect, one must be able to see beyond that boundary; one must have knowledge. Thus, if there really are kinds which are intrinsic to things, then there is an objective way to classify and evaluate things, other than on an individual basis.

Christianity

This is the message of Christianity. God created things “according to their own kinds (Gen. 1:11-12, 21, 24-25, Gen 7:14, 21, ESV).” He did not create discrete particulars that were merely similar to each other. He created forms that are inherent to things and cause the matter to be *what* it is. Thus, when Adam names the things, he can actually, not arbitrarily, name all individuals by virtue of naming the form; he is providing a label to a real aspect of reality—the form (Gen 2:19-20 ESV). He is not creating a mental category and labeling that collection of attributes, he is attaching a label to a real thing, similar to the way that parents name children. When a parent names a child, they are not creating the child, they are labeling that which exists. In a similar way, Adam labels that which exists (i.e., the form of giraffe or elephant). He does not create a conceptual universal and name that. He names what *is*.

Christianity also claims that there is hierarchy to being. In Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV), God created humanity “in his own image,” thus in Christianity, like in hylomorphic metaphysics, humans are the highest composite form. God did not make the individuals, Adam and Eve, in his image. He created the entire kind—the form of human—in his image. Thus, the value of individual humans is by virtue of them being a composite with a certain kind of form (i.e., the form of human). All humans have the same value, which is higher than any other kind of form by

virtue of its capacities. Christianity's affirmation that humans are of the highest value by virtue of being made in the image of God fits nicely with the hylomorphic view of value.

Humans, by virtue of being made in the image of God, are to be treated more valuably than all other kinds of being. Which means that we should not use them for utility. We should not cage them (i.e., concentration and internment camps). We should not have breeding programs (i.e., eugenics, abortion, infanticide). Their continued existence should not be dependent upon how useful someone finds them (i.e., infanticide, abortion, euthanasia, genocide). We should take care of the individual, rather than focus on the interests of the collective (i.e., adoption, homeless, ill, handicapped, ethnic minorities). We should treat everyone regardless of race, gender, ability, age, or any other means of by which people can be grouped, as of the same value.

Where Do We Go From Here?

If this is an accurate representation of reality both philosophically and theologically, then why are people suffering at the hands of other people? Why are people marginalized? In one of the opening scenes of *The Lion King*, Mufasa takes young Simba to the top of pride rock. As the sun rises, they look over the land and Mufasa tells Simba that everything the light touches is their kingdom. An overconfident Simba chirps with excitement that all of this will “belong to him” one day.¹⁷ Mufasa replies that it does not belong to anyone; that the land will be Simba's to *protect* and “while others search for what they can *take*, a true king searches for what he can *give*.”¹⁸

This is one of the primary reasons that despite the reality that all humans are inherently valuable, moral evil exists. People seek to take rather than give. Regardless of socio-economic position or geographic location, people tend towards selfishness rather than selflessness. This is

not unique to western culture, nor is it unique to the wealthier individuals of a society. It can be seen just as clearly in the destruction and theft of the riots of the marginalized as it can be in the extravagance of the one percent. The Bible refers to this as a sin nature, a propensity towards sin, from which no individual is immune.

But if no one is immune then what hope can there be for the marginalized and oppressed? Three quarters of the way through *The Lion King*, the pride lands have been destroyed by the selfishness of Scar and the hyenas. A desperate Nala goes in search of help and finds Simba. Her hopes soar at the implications before being dashed by his refusal to return and take his place as king of the pride lands.

Simba is paralyzed in the life chosen for him by others. He is paralyzed in the lies of his uncle until he realizes who he is. He is powerless until he realizes his own value. When we allow others to define our value, to tell us who we are, rather than realizing our own intrinsic value, then we are prisoners to what others think of us. It did not matter what Nala said or what Rafiki said. Until Simba was willing to recognize who he is, and who's he is, he was of no use to himself or anyone else.

The same is true of individual humans. We are each paralyzed in the lives chosen for us until we, as individuals, realize who we are. Until I realize that I am made in the image of God and that God loves me enough that He took on human form and died for my sin, I am paralyzed in the lies that the world has told me. Until we each realize the truth of who we are and who's we are, we are not able to truly be of any use to anyone. We may be able to do good things, but our actions will be limited in terms of their effectiveness, for at best they will only impact the temporal existence without affecting the eternity of the person.

Simba is who he is by virtue of what he is. He is responsible for the care of others by virtue of who he is, not because of any action of his own, not because of anything he had done. His absence and ignorance did not negate his responsibility. When he remembered who he was, he was able to do what he was called to do. Abdication of responsibility does not make one any less responsible.

The same is true of all people. By virtue of being made in the image of God, we have a responsibility. We are responsible for the world and those in it (Gen 1:26, 28 ESV). We must love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as our self (Mark 12:30-31 ESV). We have this responsibility by virtue of being human. Ignorance of and abdication of this responsibility does not make one any less responsible.

The man who gave this command lived it out. He loved not just his neighbors, but his enemies, more than his own life. Jesus left his throne in heaven to become a lowly human, but did not stop there. He then took our sins upon himself and died a horrifically, gruesome, excruciating, and torturous death in our place, so that we could have a restored relationship with God, should we accept his sacrifice. He loved his enemies as himself and that was more than adequate in terms of eternal significance.

Sensoy and DiAngelo's claim that this solution—loving others as our self—is “woefully inadequate” is correct give a worldview that does not allow for the supernatural.¹⁹ Given the human propensity for selfishness, this is an impossible goal on our own. Jesus realizes that the command to love our neighbor is impossible in our own strength. It is only by virtue of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, it is only by virtue of surrendering all of our self to God, that we are able to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to be truly selfless in the service of others. It is only through

the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us that we are able to see real social change.

The movie ends with Simba and Nala presenting their child to a green and lush pride land full of all kinds of animals. Simba had returned to a desolate destroyed land, but because he was willing to stand up for what was right, everyone flourished. Scar was only concerned with himself and it killed everyone and everything. Simba's abdication allowed Scar's evil to flourish. While Simba did nothing, he was no different from Scar, concerned only with himself. When Simba was willing to recognize who he was and thus his responsibility for not just himself, but others, everyone flourished and thrived. The same is true for seeking to create a just society. We must each recognize who we are in Christ and our responsibility for each other, in order to see everyone flourish and thrive.

¹ Ozlem Sensory and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), xx.

² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. Critical Theory, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/> (accessed March 15, 2020).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ K. Weir, "Alone, in 'the hole,'" *Monitor on Psychology* 43 no. 5 (May 2012) <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/05/solitary> (accessed June 12, 2020).

⁶ Children's Bureau, "Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect," Factsheet 2019, https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/long_term_consequences.pdf (accessed June 12, 2020).

⁷ Sensory, *Is Everyone*, xx-xxi.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25, 29.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. Christopher Columbus, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christopher-Columbus/The-first-voyage> (accessed June 13, 2020).

¹⁵ Disney, *101 Dalmatians* (1961).

¹⁶ Disney, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996).

¹⁷ Disney, *The Lion King* (2019).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Sensory, *Is Everyone*, xx.