

# OpenTheo

## Natural Law and Natural Theology with Andrew Walker

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Andrew Walker, a professor of ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the managing editor for World Opinions, comes on to talk with Kevin about the importance of natural law and natural theology. Although some Protestants reject natural law, and others are nervous about it because of caricatures they may have, the broad sweep of Protestant theology has affirmed the legitimacy and importance of making natural law arguments. Kevin and Andrew talk about where the idea of natural law comes from in the Bible and in church tradition. They also apply natural law thinking to several current controversies in our day. They close with a number of book recommendations for those who want to go deeper.

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## Transcript

Greetings and salutations, welcome to Life and Books and Everything as we begin a new

season here in the first month of 2022. I'm your host, Kevin DeYoung, good to be with you, and at the outset let me do a few, a couple of housekeeping announcements. More than housekeeping, some important tweaks to the podcast for this new episode, not this episode, but this season.

This podcast began during the pandemic as Justin Taylor, Colin Hanson and myself were talking and then I had the idea, well, we're talking all the time, maybe it would be fun for us and possibly beneficial for others if we talked and let other people listen in. And as the podcast developed and I think it's grown, I hope, and have listeners and we've had interviews, it's taken a little different shape with a lot of interviews, which I like to do. And one of the things, however, that's difficult with interviews is lining up all of the moving parts.

And so you may have even noticed from last season that Colin and Justin were in and out as it worked in their schedule. So it's not a major change from last season, but just to say at the outset of this season that what you're going to find is a little bit more of Life and Books and Everything hosted by Kevin DeYoung with occasional special guests, Colin and Justin. You can send all of your angry letters for that.

There's no blood feud between us. Among us, it was very difficult to coordinate our three schedules anyways and then to line up interviews. So we have booked several times throughout this season to have Colin and Justin on.

So you will still hear the three of us bantering and talking about Midwestern cuisine and Big Ten sports. But most of the other episodes will be me interviewing various guests. So whether that's good news or bad news, that is the news and that's how we're progressing with this season.

And I'm really excited for the guests that we have lined up over the next 10 or 12 episodes and roughly the cadence will be about every other week. Hey, you have lots of other things in your life. You are not in desperate need to hear another podcast or hear from me every week or every day.

So about every other week we are. I am very glad to say that the podcast is still sponsored by Crossway. Really grateful to work with them on a number of projects and to have them sponsoring this particular episode.

I want to mention Sam Storm's new book, *A Dose of Things God Did with Your Sin and Three Things He'll Never Do*. This came out just a week ago. So Sam talks about what God will never do such as counting our sins against us and then walks through the Bible's teaching and how we as believers can experience freedom and joy and peace and knowing what God has done.

So you can pick up a copy that wherever books are sold or visit [crossway.org](http://crossway.org). And if you

go to [crossway.org/plus](https://www.crossway.org/plus) you can find out how you can get 30% off with a crossway plus account. So thank you, Crossway for sponsoring life and books and everything. My guest for today is someone that I've gotten to know well-ish over the past few months as we've communicated a lot online and by text and I'm sure we've met before I think but we haven't properly, you know, got to, I won't say have a beer because I actually don't drink beer in Andrews of Baptist so he may not either.

But whatever we would do to have a proper chinwag in person. Anyways, my guest. This episode is Andrew Walker Andrew welcome to the program.

Hey Kevin it's great to be with you and I actually as I'm sitting here thinking about it we were on a panel together with CBMW at the Gospel Coalition in 2016 perhaps. That was a different world. Yeah, different world.

We have hung out before but I guess I guess we're becoming friend-ish. Yeah, yes, no it's very good. It's been great.

So Andrew has wears many hats upon his domed head. And which I can see but you can't see. And so he works now, his newest gig is managing editor of World Opinions and to check that out and I'm one of the columnists for that.

Andrew's doing a great job there and he works a full-time job at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Andrew tell us a little bit about yourself. Give us some of your background, your education, your family and how many jobs you have now.

Yeah sure thanks Kevin. So I grew up a Midwestern kid in Central Illinois and felt a call to ministry when I was 18. Was converted when I was 15.

And when you're 18 and you feel a call to ministry you think that automatically means the pastorate. And so I was kind of wrestling and undergrad when I went to Southwest Baptist University and did a degree in religion and biblical studies. And was still wrestling with the pastorate and what that meant for me and really loved the academic side of things and had some, I guess, mild or moderate success in it.

And thought, I mean this could be fun to study theology and the Bible professionally. And so then went off to Southern Seminary for my MDiv. And then again was still wrestling with academia, the pastorate.

And also at the same time I've always loved public policy, culture, ethics, religion, kind of the confluence of how all of these things interact in the public square. And a job kind of fell into my lap out of seminary to go work for our organization here in Kentucky. That was kind of a Christian public policy type organization.

And so got involved doing that, loved it. And then from there went to the Heritage Foundation and worked on marriage, life, religious, liberty issues. Then from there went

to the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for six years, worked on my PhD while I was there and had an opportunity to come to Southern and took that opportunity, moved up here six weeks before COVID hit.

So I had this mid career change. I'm learning what it means to balance a classroom, to teach a class, to manage a syllabus, and then COVID hits and we go online. So it was a strange, strange moment.

But yeah, love what I do here at Southern. I teach ethics and we don't have a formal public theology program, but we have some public theology oriented classes that I also teach as well. And so I just love it.

I get to talk about the interaction of Christian faith with the world around us and to be paid to do that and to teach is just a blessing that I can't take for granted. I've been married for 15 years and my wife Christian, and we have three daughters and my wife's a kindergarten teacher here in Louisville at our classical Christian school where our kids go. And I'm a member of Hyde, you Baptist Church, where I teach kind of a young adult class.

So that's kind of one part of my life. I'm also, as you mentioned, the managing editor for Royal Opinions, which is a brand new project, and which is a substantive project, which I'm enjoying doing because it's giving me the opportunity to both kind of do my academic gig and then also kind of keep one hand in the political news fray on a day to day basis. And then also I'm a fellow at the ethics and public policy center under Ryan Anderson.

He's been a longtime friend of mine. And when he became president there, he asked me to kind of be one of his token evangelicals, predominantly Catholic. He's friendly to evangelicals.

Yeah, so I cost him trouble with him and kind of the evangelicals and Catholics together for causing trouble in the public square type movement. Yeah, well that's good. And what was your PhD on? So I did my dissertation on the topic of religious liberty.

And so I had a book come out May of 2021 called Liberty for All, which is a much more reader friendly version of my dissertation. And what I was kind of exploring, it kind of came about accidentally. Obviously I was working at the ethics and religious liberty at the time.

And so did a paper on religious liberty and was really exploring how 20th century Protestants had conceived of religious liberty and really noticed kind of a lacuna in the literature that there were. Really no evangelical arguments to ground religious liberty and kind of distinctly systematic biblical categories. And so I kind of set forth from that to kind of put up in skeletal frame work form.

How should we think of religious liberty as evangelicals? And is there anything intrinsic to the DNA of Christianity itself that births something like religious liberty? And when you go and study the historical record, religious liberty comes about from Christian thought, tortoellian, lactantious, early church. There are formulations or permutations of religious liberty, not like how we might conceive of it today. But the idea that individuals should be free at the level of their conscience and therefore uncovered.

That really does come about from Christianity. And so I think that there's, that the religious liberty is not merely a social construct. It's something that does flow out of our Christian faith, but it's also something that we've refined as we've, as Christianity has interacted in the world around it.

Do you find that we're going to get to just sort of listeners know the main thing that Andrew and I are going to talk about in a bit is natural law, natural theology, the interests of both of ours and just doing some, some work on that and has written some things on it. And it's an important topic and it continues to be relevant for contemporary discussions and there's a lot being written about it. So we're going to get there in just a moment.

But I want to follow up on something you just said about religious liberty flowing out of Christian convictions. Do you, do you sense that among, let's just call them conservative Christians that religious liberty itself is being questioned. We think of the people that don't want to give evangelical Christians liberty of conscience when it comes to issues of sex or gender or marriage.

But are you finding also from within our own tribe some people are suspicious of Christian liberty like we should just go all the way and be. Constantinian again. Yeah, I think actually, you know, I wouldn't have said this three or four years ago, but I think that there definitely is a growing and typically to religious liberty and conservative Protestant circles.

And let me say a lot of the concerns that kind of the Christian reconstructionist, the, theonomist kind of Protestant integralist crowd has as far as their critiques concerning Western culture. I share a ton of those critiques. I don't think the solution then is to completely jettison or bypass the basic liberty structure that we've established in kind of American context.

But I mean, to the overarching sentiment. Yes, there is, I think a misunderstanding on the one hand that religious liberty is a form of kind of bland religious relativism, which is an inaccurate construal of religious liberty. But then I think at the pragmatic level, there's an attitude that says, in an ideal society religious liberty would be good, but we're no longer in that ideal society and religious liberty is now inviting in all of these cultural pathologies under the rubric of liberty.

And so there's in conservative Protestant circles right now, there is a big debate about what is liberty. And I share the concerns of those individuals and wanting to recapture a more classical definition of liberty, which is the freedom to do what we ought, not simply what we want. And so that means that that's going to bring us into the questions of the natural law, big time because it assumes teleology.

It assumes moral order for you to have the basic foundations of a working social order. And again, I share those critiques where society, jettisons, those overarching, necessary shared teloses or teleologies. We are going to fragment into a thousand different voices, where you really cease to have a nation.

What you really have are 360 million autonomous wills, shooting off in whatever direction that they define as the good. And so this is the famous Anthony Kennedy, the missed at the heart of mystery is the heart of liberty is the freedom to define your own existence. He's kind of the high priest of expressive individualism.

So I think the response to these challenges is in my book I talk about. This is a section called make liberal democracy Christian again. So I don't think we need to jettison liberal democracy because if we jettison that what we're doing is just trading various forms of liberalism's back on top of each other.

And that's where you create systems where there's resentment, violence, and just social conflict. And a lot of this too is we need to readjust some of our expectations about what we hope to achieve in a fallen social order like our own. And I think when you understand that contestability is just a reality of the world that we live in, you want to then build difference into the structure of the political system so that people who don't think like you aren't necessarily then driven to the margins, or penalized, or, you know, God forbid acted with violence against.

Right, right. Yeah, I think one of the most important, maybe it is the most foundational truth for political philosophy moral philosophy is what, whether you have an Augustinian view of the human person. And certainly there's lots of things that are really important but that's where you see things deviating very quickly you see this, of course, with Rousseau famously see civilization as the corrupting force on mankind versus, you know, it would be too far to say that, you know, lock was reformed.

And he wasn't and he had some heterodox views, but there was certainly more of a pessimism about human nature and you find that in Madison, Madison studied with my guy, John Witherspoon so I am convinced that some of that reformed anthropology did seep down into the founding fathers and that it finds its way into the formation of the Constitution. Famous Federalist paper 51 is Madison arguing that ambition must be made to counteract ambition, that government must be somewhat frustrated by itself, because the underlying assumption is that they're bound to do bad things. So there, there, I teach an elect, of course, on the Enlightenment and one of the things I just try to

have people think about.

And I'm not trying to say what their, you know, political ends should be. But there's, there's two fundamentally different sort of questions we can ask with politics. One question is, what great things could we accomplish if all of us got together.

And this thing called government or politics, we accomplish some great end. Well, that seems like well surely don't we want to do that. But the American founders really had a different set of a different kind of question and it was, what are all of the bad things that people could do.

And what sort of system and government would do best to try to frustrate those evil plans and the corrupting influence that power and ambition has upon us in our system. So I think understanding who we are as people, and the worst atrocities of the 20th century where people who at least ostensibly believe that utopia could be created on earth, where the societies that have actually flourished and had great growth and prosperity have been those, you know, generalizing by and large that have understood what Thomas so calls a constrained vision of the human person and what we can accomplish. So let's use this to segue into natural law, natural theology, and we can circle back to some of those other issues in a moment, because this is not just a, it's a theological question to be sure.

And I'm going to ask in a little bit to trace out what are some of the objections and why has this tradition very, very steep, not just in Aquinas or medieval scholasticism, but in Protestant scholasticism, and in the Protestant tradition. From the very beginning, from the very beginning in the 16th century and what happened that it has become suspect but let's start with some definitions. Natural law, natural theology overlapping but not identical terms so what do we mean, what's a generic definition of natural law.

So I mean I think that there are effectively, you know, perhaps four components to a natural law definition one would be the question of origins so is there a natural law where does it come from. So then then you have this question of substance, what is it what comprises the natural law, then you have an issue of epistemology and no ability so then how do we grasp it. And then on the 4th, there's this apologetical question of why deploy natural law and I actually think later on I'd love to hit on the question of the why of natural law because I think, I think reform Protestants have a misunderstanding at the level of apologetic which then shapes how we respond to the idea of the natural law.

But if you're thinking through the natural law, if I lay out those broad contours, we would say natural law is rooted in the eternal law of God the eternal reason of God. And so the way we understand moral good is through reason grasping the fact that there are non-instrumental reasons for acting. And so we think that life is a basic good that you woke up today Kevin you had breakfast you might exercise at some point today.

We've established that life is a good so if we establish that life is a good by use of our practical reason from that we then develop norms and principles to order our life to facilitate and achieve those particular goods and there's a lot of theory about what are all of those various goods. So then there's a question of how do we know the natural law. So again that's that's reason, that's conscience, the famous language, the locus classicus is the Romans to 14 and 15 the law written on the heart that God implants on it kind of the Thomistic tradition, the law written on the heart is believed to be what they call the first principle of practical reason, which is we are to pursue good and avoid evil.

That's that's what we call an indemonstrable or self evident truth that we then build all other moral truths off of. And then utility, why do we deploy it. I think to me, we deploy it not primarily as an apologetical enterprise to persuade non believers.

That's if if we start there from the presupposition of why we deploy it, we then can rightfully fall victim to or we can we can devalue the impact of sin on reason. And so I'm a reformed Calvinist, who is also a natural lawyer and so I have to simultaneously say the natural law exists, but also sin has impacted reason. But I think the way that some Calvinists talk about reason and the natural law is we don't talk about it in very clear categories.

And so you see this in in Carl if a Henry's writings the natural law and I love Henry he's one of my heroes, but I think he completely misunderstands the natural law. And one of the reasons he misunderstands it is he substitutes the term natural law for another term called creation ethic, because even he understands. If non believers have even basic moral minimal moral knowledge, they're operating on the grounds of the natural law.

And 99.99% of Americans are going to go to bed tonight without having murdered each other. So the fact that there is an intuitive grasp on the principle of life as a good. And people are then acting to preserve life.

Well, from the ultimate perspective of the eternal law, you have rational creatures participating in the eternal law. And that's that's the that's the definition Aquinas proffers. It's the rational agents or the creaturely agents participation in the eternal law.

That's natural law. That's good. No, it's really good.

And I like those just to highlight you said origin, substance epistemology, and then utility or how we use it. Those are four good categories. My simple definition, which coheres with that natural law refers to the rule of right and wrong implanted by God in the minds of all people.

So Romans to 14 and 15. Sometimes just if you're reading the literature, especially older literature, sometimes called law of nature, law of nations, the divine law, the eternal law. It is important to remember.



We're talking about God's law. So, natural law doesn't mean it's the law of nature apart from God. Sometimes that, you know, we can use nature, but it's divine.

It's God's law and the conscience bears witness to it. So, the 10 commandments traditionally are seen as a divinely revealed summary of the law of nature. So, the law of nature or natural law refers to this idea that there's something implanted within us.

And you talk about epistemology. So that's another question in a moment. How we can know it.

But there is something that can be known about how God wishes his creatures to conduct themselves that does not require special revelation, or special revelation is clearer special revelation is necessary in order to be saved. Special revelation will help us see more clearly what is there in natural law. But even apart from special revelation, there are things that can be known.

And here in Reformed theology, they make distinctions sometimes between, you know, Turretin says this, picked up, say what is innate and acquired. So there are certain things that can be known that are innate that sense of divinity that seed of the divine that Calvin calls it the conscience. So there are things innate, and then there are things acquired by observing the rational universe by observing God's acts of providence.

They believe that there are things that you can know and that's getting here into what natural theology. So why don't you say a little bit Andrew, because obviously they're related. Yeah, but how is natural theology different and what is your definition there.

So, I mean, there's a lot of confusion about the term natural theology and reform circles. And so let me let me kind of remove the problematic way of thinking about natural theology. The caricature of natural theology is kind of a hyper reform critique of Aquinas that says Aquinas believes that someone can reason themselves with tremendous certainty to a full knowledge of God.

What Aquinas is saying is that, no, it's not a full knowledge of God, because full knowledge of God is revelatory and Aquinas actually talks about the need for revelation, divine revelation, to clarify the full nature of God. Aquinas says that there is this innate knowledge that individuals understand God as creator. They don't necessarily understand God as redeemer.

The question then becomes, how has God instilled or instantiated knowledge of himself in the world around him. And here, you know, I would say you would point to Romans chapter one, there's a there's an innate knowledge of our design, bodily design, creational design. We might point to the law of consequences, the law of conscience, that there is some voice that is telling us that we're wrong when we overstep a moral boundary.

And there's this sense that we feel like we have violated some rule. Well, what is that rule? Well, it's a moral law, but again, that moral law is rooted in God. But then I would say more than that, I mean, Psalm 19, for natural theology is the locus classicus.

And actually just over the weekend was doing some research on this and had my mind quite frankly, blown. When you go to the first parts of Psalm 19, God is mentioned as L, which is the the the creational concept of God. And then in the latter part of Psalm 19, it's the covenantal name of God, Yahweh.

And so when when the Psalmist David is talking about creation, he's saying that creation pours forth divine speech. It pours forth design. There's intelligibility that individuals by looking to creation, orderliness, design, they grasp the idea that there must be a way to be.

And again, that's that's not the covenantal God. That's this understanding of God, the Creator. You go down sequentially in Psalm 19, it then begins to get more particularized and narrow that the Psalmist understands that this Creator God is the God who gave the law, the divine revelation that particularizes and offers granular detail on the on the on the on the fullness of that law to Israel.

Israel is then that divine carrier of God's divine law. And then in the last part of Psalm 19, David is referring to the laws impact on itself. So I feel like there's this this very nice device where we're improving the law go from from general to specific.

Yeah, and theologians will sometimes, and you mentioned it, there are the two things that in natural by natural theology, one can know that there is a creator. Romans one, and you can know the eternal power and divine attributes. And depending on which reform theologian you read, some of them, like Benedict picked up, he gives quite a lengthy paragraph of all the things he thinks we can know.

Others have a shorter list. But really, this is this is consistent throughout the reform tradition and through old Princeton. I don't know if people would have access to it, but I did an article came out a few months ago in the Westminster Theological Journal about this and going back and forth in a charitable way I hope with another author and just talking about natural theology and whether we can acquire true theology apart from special revelation, not saving.

I mean, every reform are always clear. It's not saving. It's not sufficient for that.

It's not sufficient to know Christ as redeemer, but to know true things about God. And your point about Aquinas is really important because that's often the well, you're a closet Roman Catholic, because you said something nice about Aquinas. No, actually, if you go back and read, you know, the famous five proofs or five ways.

That's what Aquinas is often known for in our circles, the proofs for God's existence. He

calls them five ways and he actually starts with Exodus 3 14. I am the God I am that I am.

So Aquinas doesn't argue that, all right, I'm sort of René Descartes style, who forces later. I'm just going to think myself empty. And now I'm going to build my way up to believe and know that there's a God and I can convince you a God and that there's a God and that there's the Christian God.

And we says, God is self-existent. God is that he is, but here are five ways. You could argue philosophically, are those still convincing ways or not? I think there's some are better than others.

But Turretin, for example, really the high points of reformed post-reformation reform dogmatics. He has his own four proofs for the existence of God, which are quite similar to Aquinas's. William Shedd, into the 19th century, has five principal arguments for God's existence.

So none of these theologians were thinking, we have emptied ourselves and now we start by reason alone and we work up to the Christian faith. Well, and go ahead. I'd like to speak to that because, I mean, the question we ought to ask as reformed Protestants is not did Aquinas say it, therefore it's suspect.

The question is, did the scripture reveal this? And yes, I mean, to your point, and what I try to tell my classes until I'm blue in the face is reformed rejection of natural law is a 20th century phenomenon. But prior to that, it's everywhere in the reformed tradition. Speaking to this reality that man has some type of innate knowledge, Calvin refers to it as the *census divinitus*.

But then you go look in scripture and I'm telling you, when you go looking for the natural law in scripture, it then begins to show up everywhere. So in Deuteronomy chapter four, there's language about God gave Israel the statutes of the law that is good. But then it says in verse six or seven of chapter four that the nations will see that the Lord is good and that his law is good.

Well, that presupposes that the surrounding nations have legitimate moral knowledge to know that the law is actually good. And then what Israel testifies to is actually good. You go to a bimalak in Genesis chapter 20.

He says to Abraham, why have you done things that ought not be done. How does a pagan king understand that some type of principle of justice has been violated. And that's that's what we're getting to with natural theology.

Yeah, Archibald Alexander, the Genesis there of old Princeton first professor says natural theology quote consists in the knowledge of those truths concerning to being an attributes of God, the principles of human duty, and the expectation of a future state

derived from reason alone. And many of these theologians you're actually right, most important is not a coin is not even our own reform tradition, or the Westminster confession, which distinguishes between the knowledge that comes from the word and the knowledge that comes from the light of nature all these are important we belong to a tradition but ultimately it's what does scripture teach and a couple of the passages that are theological forefathers would go to all the time you mentioned, we talk about Romans one Romans to Psalm 19, but also ax 14 and X 17 when when Paul, we can see when he's preaching to Jews and they have a certain shared a epistemological foundation, he's going to talk about their shared history as God's people and as Hebrews and Israelites but with others he's going to reference one of their poets he's going to talk about creation. He's finding something that is a kind of commonplace now he's he's not saying that from that you can reason your way and let's not have scripture play any role but all through the reform tradition and you sit it very well.

Until relatively recently 20th century, there is an understanding that there is revealed religion and there is reasoned religion or there is natural theology and supernatural theology and of course supernatural theology is far far superior and we needed in order to be saved and I teach systematic theology and it's a course on that revealed religion what what God has revealed to us in the scriptures but there's another kind of revelation, general revelation, what we see in creation what can be known by the the works of providence through observation and through this means there are things that can be known and so you know sometimes they get dinged on just thinking of you know we always the danger with doing a PhD you always want to talk about it and no one wants to listen to it but if I can just mention John Witherspoon and so much of the secondary literature and even from really esteemed you know historians Noel and Marson and others will ding him and say well look here in his lectures on moral philosophy he's really imbibed this completely enlightenment idea he's too indebted to Francis and he has this he's now become just an enlightenment philosopher because he's talking in these reasons sort of terms but if you read carefully what he's saying he's doing nothing different than his reform forefathers did for the two centuries prior and that is to say in this category of moral philosophy we're dealing with what can be known by reason and we may argue that he thought you could know too much or there were mistakes but just the category itself was so widely shared and assumed that it didn't even need to be argued for so something that was pointed out to me and I honestly I forget where I read it now at this point because it all bleeds together but something I read one point one time pointed out that when Paul is indicting the audience in Romans chapter one he's not indicting them for how little they know he's indicting them for how much they know so there is that in a knowledge but then obviously there's this they suppress the truth and unrighteousness I find when talking about the natural law and reform circles it requires as much removal of caricature as it does proper theological and biblical formulation of the category itself because as I mentioned like with Henry substitutes natural law for creation ethic than other traditions might refer to it as an

order of creation in the Lutheran worldview you might have common grace in some sense kind of the neo Calvinist tradition it's in the general revelation as well so I mean there's a whole swirling subset of terms that are all dancing around this notion that innate moral knowledge exists and a lot of the reason that people don't like the natural law is because they just associated with Roman Catholicism and in fact I almost did my dissertation on Carl Henry the natural law and then kind of as I was considering it didn't think that there was enough there to do a full dissertation on but in the process I had a conversation with Dr. Richard Land who is a close friend of Dr. Henry and I said to Dr. Land at a meeting one time I said Dr. Land I've been reading Henry on the natural law and Dr. Land by the way is is pro natural law and I said it's as I'm seeing Henry Henry is making arguments for the natural law without using the terminology of natural law and Dr. Land bellowed in his like classical big laughter and he said well of course that's the case Carl Henry was a post Vatican II anti-Catholic he wouldn't let our language play on their terms and so of course he's going to find different language to use. Alright let's transition our discussion just a little bit and we've already hinted at some of the objections that people may have to using natural law or arguing according to natural theology so Andrew talk about what what is the correct way or what are some of the good ways we should use and think like natural lawyers and what are some dangers we should avoid? Well I think one of the things we want to do is to first and foremost move away from thinking about natural law as primarily an apologetical tool. It's never less than an apologetical tool but it's something more than that and I think when we talk about this how we conceive of it and frame it up is is really really important because I find in my circles that I move in when you hear natural law you often think about well this is how we convince non-believers to become persuaded by our public ethics.

I think that's possible but I don't think that that's necessarily likely all the time. In my view we ought to be discussing natural law in the context of its explanatory power in terms of it giving rational explanation or rational articulation of those norms that we think God has and planted within the created order. So for that it means again explanation of those norms I think it means exposing the errors of secular morality and I think quite frankly in our culture if we can't persuade someone something that we can do is at least have people maybe be a little less strident in the confidence that they have in their convictions and realize oh hey these Christian natural law convictions they're not they're not simply sectarian or thetaistic.

And then I you know honestly it's an issue of discipleship. If we're thinking about in this context that we're in right now in this culture around issues of gender and sexuality. I don't know how our people in the pews can have conversations with people in their workspace without having to employ categories adjacent to the natural law which means before they are engaging in those conversations outside there has to be catechism within.

So that means them understanding that there's a relationship between general

revelation and special revelation and that when the Bible is giving a portrait of what it means to be male and female we go to Genesis chapter one and we see that God made male and female in his image. And so tied to that image then is the ability for them to reproduce so male and female he made them in his image. Get married multiply exercise dominion.

Okay so that's actually a natural law argument tied to our definition of male and female. It are their capacities for reproduction. And what we know is if you begin to construct definitions of male and female off of those biological immutable categories you jettison sound rational or even coherent understandings of male and female.

Yeah that's right I mean one was it's increasingly hard in our day for people to simply explain what is a man or a woman and you see this all the time. And there's more to say but there's not less to say than to start with a man is someone who again if all the plumbing is working correctly is able to say your children and a woman is someone again who if all is working correctly is able to incubate human life a womb man and you see this in Genesis it's wonderful how it works with the Hebrew that she shall be called a Shah for she was taken out of each she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man it's nice that there's something of an English parallel there with the words and of course we see more clearly from scripture but to your point I agree entirely these natural law arguments help to sustain and inform our faith that the caricatures are that we just strip ourselves empty of any other ideas and just argue from the ground up and there we've convinced somebody of it. Yeah that won't often work now it's true in the public square we should use the Bible and at other times we should use these sort of natural law arguments which may have a little more immediate power for people I think of the expression I've heard Greg coco use putting a pebble in someone's shoe that's often what you're doing with evangelism or putting in a good word for Christ or giving the sort of rational explanations you're not expecting that someone says wow I've never thought of that I think abortion is wrong I'm going to change my mind on gay marriage I believe Jesus rose again from the dead but they may walk away and though in that moment they don't give any credence to what you're saying they think about it they ruminate on it and it's like that pedal in the shoe eventually you stop and you bend over and you say okay enough is enough what is here in my shoe and they maybe need to think about it a little bit more and say a little bit more Andrew let's talk about some specifics and in our culture that means a lot of discussion about sex gender marriage we've already hit on that a little bit how do you think some of these natural law arguments and the reasoning can help bolster our faith because one of the things you and I have talked about before is and you just mentioned discipleship catechesis I said before that I think we do a fairly good job in the church of giving people the correct conclusions on these universal matters we don't often give the superstructure that helps them reach these conclusions so they know oh I'm not just believing this because as an act of the will I ought to believe this but because they're really good metaphysical morally philosophical reasons to

support what we see in scripture how do we think like that with some of these hot button issues? Well I mean I think like you said we want to go to the superstructure and so the superstructure says a Christian view of reality doesn't divide reality up into a Christian interpretation of reality and then reality over here there is one reality it is God's world we are living in it and so that has a massive implication for secular ethics it means that secular ethics insofar as they jettison special revelation and they jettison general revelation they're jettisoning sound coherent rational principles just in themselves but when you get to the issue of something like marriage we know from scripture that marriage is given as a creational ordinance in Genesis chapter one we understand the redemptive significance of marriage and the Christchurch union and that imaging that reality but tie to marriage in Genesis chapter one is not just the capacity for the creation there's something prior to that which is the whole notion of complementarity that complementarity makes procreation possible and so if we're taking marriage all the way back to the beginning and complementarity is tied into the definition of it if you remove the definition of marriage that would keep marriage to be principally limited to only two persons and something that's assumed to be a permanent exclusive monogamous union and we're seeing that right now play out a lot of secular secularism progressives were saying oh you social conservatives and you Christians you're just fear mongering over this over this game or issue no one's actually arguing for plural marriage that's not the case we actually know that's happening right now in several jurisdictions that took like a minute before that happened right and so I mean they were saying well you're engaging in a slippery slope argument and we're saying well actually the slopes turn out to be really really slippery because the slopes are dependent upon logic and if you remove complementarity from the foundational super structure of marriage you're playing fast and loose with the intelligibility over the overall institution and now you have jurisdictions in Massachusetts that are actually arguing for reciprocal marital like legal exchanges for polyamorous couples and the social conservatives and the Christians are sitting back and basically saying we told you so so again if you remove complementarity you remove the superstructure of it all together and then if you go to something like this sanctity of human life this is actually one of the more simpler arguments I think is every single human being began as an embryo began as an unborn child so the question then becomes why do we bestow rights and personhood only when a child passes through the birthing canal well that's what secularists do that's not what Christians do and so when you then measure human dignity and the inscription of human rights to the size the development the environment that the unborn child is in you then begin to put human rights and human dignity on a sliding scale so for us as Christians we want to say no the principle of dignity means that dignity begins the minute contraception conception begins yes big difference right there big difference yes so from the moment of conception we would say as Christians human dignity and the image of God in hears within that intrinsically and so from there that's where we begin to ascribe this notion of rights secularists don't do that that's why again you have this sliding scale understanding of where to assign those realities yeah and that's so right because we are

biologically organically the same being that we were from that moment when the sperm penetrates the egg and personhood adheres there that's makes the most sense with biology now that's a religious claim you could say on one level but it's also a biological philosophical claim and you talk about marriage too and when you say complementarity we would both be complementarian in the theological sense of men's women's roles but you're meaning something even a little less than that you're simply meaning right men and women were created man and woman male and female created as a complementary pair so that we know from Genesis the side of the man the rib forms women so that when Adam and Eve come together it's not just a union but in a profound way a reunion of the man and the woman each fit for each other the reason that she was a help mate now look around Adam why couldn't have Adam why couldn't God have created a bunch of buddies for Adam a lot of guys with that love just a man cave with a bunch of buddies why couldn't he have had companionship with a golden retriever man's best friend no it was because it wasn't chiefly companionship but that's special that's you know wonderful but the woman was a help mate for the husband because only the man with the woman could fulfill that creation mandate you talked about that is to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth you think about a conjugal view of marriage marriage is that arrangement by which human life is formed what does it mean to have a one flesh union why is it that when you hold hands with someone that doesn't constitute marriage or you give somebody a wet willy or you stick their finger up their nose you don't think that's a one flesh union why because a one flesh union is emotionally biologically one with a telos meaning it comes together for a singular for a biological function that's not all marriages but you don't have marriage without that without the two sorts of persons who again if all of the plumbing were working form that sort of one flesh union that's what it is yeah I affirm absolutely all of that so we go from gender sexuality the issue of human dignity and I've mentioned human rights already but you can't get at a coherent understanding of human rights which everyone wants to believe in and subscribe to in our society you can't get to a clear principled and viable doctrine of human rights apart from the natural law again we would say that's a natural law rooted in the eternal law there's there's a famous quote from one of the drafting members who wrote the Universal Declaration on Human Rights from the UN in 1948 and one of the drafting committee members said to a journalist that's a unanimous about these rights on the condition that no one asks why and I think that's honestly one of the most telling quotes that society can admit about itself again that speaks to the universality of the natural law that's a longing for wholeness there's a longing for justice there's a longing for truth we would say that that is a facet of natural theology but Christianity goes one step further and says in much the same way that Paul does in Acts 17 this longing for rights to the unknown deistic social justice God of human rights Christians say that God has become flesh his name is Jesus Christ and so that's why we always want to go back to this reality that special revelation and general revelation are not at odds and special revelation particularizes and makes more granular the universal longing for rights and justice and think about 1 Corinthians 11 and admittedly there's



some cultural element to it that's what makes these discussions difficult at times but when Paul says does not nature itself teach you that it is shameful for a woman to pray with her head uncovered we talk about what exactly was the covering and it was some sort of symbolic representation in that culture of masculinity and femininity and of proper sexual discretion but Paul uses an argument to say nature teaches us something there there are a lot of people talk ill about the you know the so called gag reflex or the yuck reflex and that's true that can be overdone and it's not foolproof but there is something that Paul is saying that the confusion of male for female that's the underlying argument that that itself is shameful now yes it's true culture is at times going to give us what some of those cues look like but we're kidding ourselves even with the explosion of the people identifying as trans we're kidding ourselves if we don't think there's still a sense we have of men are not women and women are not men because when Bruce Jenner wants to become Caitlin Jenner doesn't just walk out looking like Bruce Jenner is not looking this very feminine form because there's something that a woman is even if we've so confused it that we now think by an internal sense of our own identity we're male or female yet we realize that as that comes on the other side that's the tragedy of puberty blockers for young kids and surgeries because people understand that there actually is an is-ness to being a male or female let me so gracious to give us this time let's end here talk about some resources by all means mention anything you've written or you're working on articles books authors just as we close give our listeners if they want to read more where should they go sure so I write quite a bit about natural law and its connection to religious liberty in my book Liberty for all there's there's quite a bit in there and then I've done quite a few essays on this subject at public discourse first things I'm actually working right now on it's an evangelical natural law ethics primer that will be coming out there being a B&H academic I'm still writing it so it's still a ways out until it's going to see books bookshelves but other books I'd recommend David Van Druneen's work just generally speaking politics after Christendom is a book the biblical case for natural law his volume divine covenants and moral order I think might be the most modern day magisterial treatment of natural law from a reform perspective Andrew Haynes and David Fulford's volume from the Davenant Institute on natural law is very helpful any work by Jay Budicevsky I would also encourage you to pick up and then the works of Robert George whether that's generic articles you can find of his online or his more popular volumes volumes like Clash of Orthodoxy's or his more technical volumes like Individence of the natural law they take some time to get through because they're academic but they are accessible and then I would say going backwards well go to there's a recent volume 2006 not that recent from Stephen Grebel rediscovering the natural law and reforms theological ethics which is now being looked to in the field and scholarship of natural law theory as a real major hinge upon which the retrieval of natural law is happening in reform circles you know Grebel's book goes back and looks at Peter martyr vermigli John Calvin Martin Luther Francis Turretin we have other reformers like Althusius, Niels Hemmingson, Jerome Zanchi again if you go looking through the reform tradition natural law is everywhere so just any of these resources would be good

places to start that's great and in particular the Grebel book published by Erdmans it looks very daunting but there are over 100 pages of in notes and index so it's less than 200 pages of text I think it was his dissertation but it's very good the new book did you mention natural theology a biblical and historical introduction and defense by David Haynes also Devanant guides David teaches philosophy and theology at Bethlehem college and seminary so this is one of my top 10 books of last year very readable and good survey of the biblical defense and historical introduction and then also you mentioned earlier just in passing Niels Hemmingson on the law of nature a demonstrative method so this is an older 16th century Lutheran work so it's not easy reading but whenever we can to go back to these earlier sources were well served and thanks to E.J. Hudsonson, Cory Moss both professors at Hillsdale who put this out translated as it introduced and they're doing good work and you can get this relatively inexpensively on Amazon or elsewhere moral philosophy in 18th century Britain, Godself and other by Colin Hight, that's a new book that talks a lot about the natural law tradition and someone we haven't mentioned yet Samuel Puffendorf one of the great names of moral philosophy everyone was working from Puffendorfian assumptions after Puffendorf whether to tweak it or to continue it but there's very much this natural law assumption both Protestant and Catholic and it comes down in really important ways to the American founding and there's lots of good stuff out there and encourage people to look for your stuff to read your articles to Google Andrew Walker and Natural Law and Robbie George of course is usually very good and readable as well Andrew thank you so much for being here and looking forward to continuing the conversation in person and maybe having you back so until next time all of our loyal listeners or if I got enjoyed forever and read a good book you

(dramatic music) [ Silence ]