

Faith & Reason Group Discussion Questions – March 14, 2025

ORIGINS OF WESTERN VALUES

Did Christianity Give Us Secular Morality?

Discussion prompt #1 (link from **0:04** through **24:48**, 2 minutes per person)

What has been your personal experience in this debate? What resonated most (or least) in what the speakers shared? In our secular society, do you find that most people attribute their secular values to at least historically Christian roots (regardless of truth value) or that they disavow such connections (perhaps even insisting on universal humanistic origins to values like human rights, tolerance, and dignity)? Have you encountered someone who surprised you along these lines?

Discussion prompt #2 (link from **35:11** through **51:12**, 2 minutes per person)

Where do you personally find the deepest roots historically and culturally for the values you hold most dearly? Take some of the more radical values Holland claims are uniquely Christian (and moreover anti-classical), e.g., exaltation of the weak and the outsider over the strong and native-born ... loving one's enemies (vs. simply one's neighbors) ... sacrificial love (vs. cooperativism, karma). Would you challenge Holland with pagan, pre-Christian (or even pre-ancient-Jewish) equivalents of these, or equivalents from non-Western traditions?

Discussion prompt #3 (link from **55:58** through **121:50**, 2 minutes per person)

Holland and Grayling agree on little about the history or source of their liberal values, yet they both uncannily share these values and agree that Christianity is metaphysically untrue (Holland elsewhere posited, "If I can believe in human rights, why can't I believe in angels?"). **What say you? Are modern human rights just useful, feel-good myths? Is secular humanism just another Christian sect? Or – if not Christian inheritances – what are they?**

GLOSSARY (this list brought to you by CallieAI)

- Aeschylus** – An ancient Greek playwright, known as the father of tragedy, whose works explored fate and divine justice.
- Alcuin** – An influential scholar, poet, and teacher in Charlemagne's court, key to the Carolingian Renaissance.
- Aristotle** – A Greek philosopher and polymath who profoundly shaped Western thought in logic, ethics, politics, and science.
- Aquinas** – A medieval philosopher and theologian who integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine in Scholasticism.
- Augustine** – A Church Father whose writings (*Confessions*, *City of God*) influenced Christian theology and Western philosophy.
- Augustus** – Adopted son of Caesar and the first Roman emperor who established the principate and ushered in the Pax Romana.
- Axial [age]** – A period (c. 800–200 BCE) when major philosophical and religious traditions emerged across civilizations.
- Caesar** – Julius Caesar, Roman general and statesman, whose assassination marked the end of the Roman Republic.
- Cicero** – A Roman statesman and philosopher, known for his speeches and writings on rhetoric, politics, and Stoicism.
- Confucius** – A Chinese philosopher whose teachings on morality, family, and government formed the basis of Confucianism.
- Constantine** – The first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, instrumental in its rise as a dominant religion.
- Cynicism** – An ancient Greek philosophy advocating for a simple, virtuous life free from societal conventions.
- Dionysus** – The Greek god of wine, festivity, and ecstatic revelry, associated with theater and liberation.
- Divi filius** – A Latin term meaning "son of a god," used by Roman emperors, notably Augustus, to assert divine status.
- Dualism (Persian)** – A religious concept, especially in Zoroastrianism, of two opposing cosmic forces of good and evil.
- Dualism (Platonic)** – A philosophical idea in Plato's works that separates reality into the material and the transcendent world of forms.
- Epicureanism** – A Greek philosophy that the greatest good is pleasure, attained through simple living and intellectual contemplation.
- Euripides** – A Greek tragedian known for plays that challenged traditional values and depicted complex human emotions.
- Evangelicals (historical)** – Originally referring to Protestant reformers emphasizing the authority of Scripture and personal faith.
- Gautama** – Siddhartha Gautama, better known as the Buddha, founder of Buddhism and the path to enlightenment.
- Gibbon** – Edward Gibbon, an 18th-century historian best known for *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.
- Gregory VII** – A reformist pope who strengthened papal authority and fought against lay investiture.
- Homer** – The legendary Greek poet credited with composing *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.
- Hume** – David Hume, an 18th-century Scottish philosopher who championed empiricism and skepticism.
- Jainism** – An ancient Indian religion emphasizing nonviolence, asceticism, and the pursuit of spiritual liberation.
- Leoniceno** – A Renaissance scholar and physician known for challenging medical inaccuracies inherited from antiquity.
- Keynes** – John Maynard Keynes, a 20th-century economist whose theories on government intervention reshaped macroeconomics.
- Mozi** – An ancient Chinese philosopher who founded Mohism, advocating for universal love and meritocracy.
- Neoplatonism** – A third-century philosophical system influenced by Plato, emphasizing a single source of reality and spiritual ascent.
- Nicene Creed** – A foundational Christian statement of faith, established at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.
- Origen** – An early Christian theologian and scholar, known for his allegorical interpretations of Scripture.
- Pico della Mirandola** – A Renaissance philosopher famous for *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, celebrating human potential.
- Plato** – A Greek philosopher and student of Socrates, whose works laid the foundation for Western philosophy.
- Petrarch** – An Italian poet and scholar, known as the "father of humanism" and an early figure of the Renaissance.
- Pliny** – A Roman writer, with Pliny the Elder known for *Natural History* and Pliny the Younger for letters documenting Roman life.
- Prometheus** – A Titan in Greek mythology who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity.
- Quakers** – A Christian movement emphasizing inner divine guidance, pacifism, and social justice.
- Socrates** – A Greek philosopher who developed the Socratic method and emphasized questioning as a path to wisdom.
- St. Paul** – An apostle who spread Christianity across the Roman world and wrote influential New Testament letters.
- Stoicism** – A philosophy promoting rationality, virtue, and resilience in the face of adversity.
- Theodosius I** – The Roman emperor who made Christianity the empire's official religion and banned pagan practices.