

## "Human Nature"

Dallas Willard, Veritas at OSU 11/14/02 (2of2)

*Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the audio in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The [brackets], **bold**, and underline disclose the scribe's commentary and cross-references other Dallas Willard teachings.*



### Session – "Human Nature"

[49:42]

\*Socrates - It is so interesting to see how influential Socrates is and how he taught so many people without professing to know anything. He knew that people had to come to truth they could live by of their own initiative. He called himself a "midwife" - he was bringing truth out of people and assuring them that they had it in them. His confidence in the capacity of human beings to achieve truth and find their way through all the institutions and the power plays that what were around them and discover as an individual that there is a God. Socrates believed in God. One reason why he had confidence he could work with truth as he did because he believed there was a God who spoke to him and guided him. He was sure of this when they came to the point of putting him to death, he had no qualms about it. - *I'm going to a better place. All I need to do is take care of my soul and everything else will be taken care of.*

### ~ Is there Human Nature?

[2:00]

*"Any system of education that ignores the moral conduct and the religious nature of the student is fundamentally defective."*

University President, 1882 [Also quoted in "[The Genius of Jesus](#)"]

This was the vision and the hope of all the universities...and it still is. In spite of all the smoke that is blown on this topic, people come to Universities because they want to find TRUTH. No matter what we may say in defensiveness, the need is still there. The deepest need is for the understanding of the human self.

Socrates - *"The unexamined life is not worth living."*

He meant coming to understand the self. This is the most important thing we have to do. Until we examine the self, we are not prepared to talk about education and curriculum. We're not ready to understand the wisdom from the ex-President of this University. We have to think about the make-up of the person. [[Ohio State](#)]

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### ~ **The Purpose of Human Life**

[3:50]

To **LOVE** and **SERVE** others and to be loved and served by them.

\* Watch a Mother & Child relate to one another

Human beings live in what we can call "**Circles of Sufficiency**"\*\* - In those "Circles of Sufficiency" human life is completed. When something goes wrong we may say to a little child or to someone we love, "*Everything is okay now.*" \*\*[Renovation of the Heart, p. 179-180](#)

Really? Is everything okay?

That is an ideal "Circle of Sufficiency" of knowledge & love.

We know a Mother & Child are not sufficient to themselves. They require others around them. Those "Circles of Sufficiency" reach out to our neighbors that go through life with us.

One thing that is constant - the calling and **the need to know and to love**, and to be known and to be loved. And we go through life with that as our calling. It isn't a deep mystery. It can be observed in life.

The Problem - all human "Circles of Sufficiency" are incomplete and broken. Even those that are most intimate. In our world that begins with Men & Women and the problem of how men and women can be together. If you don't have a framework within which you can make that a "Circle of Sufficiency" to live it out, it turns in to a living hell. The basic "Circle of Sufficiency" is meant to be completed under God.

\* Fulton Sheen - *Three to Get Married*

The reason **marriage** is a sacrament is not because of some religious idea but because in its very nature is at the heart of the value and goodness of life.

Relationship between parent & child, employer & employee...

All these relationships finally conclude themselves in the Trinity -

*"God in Himself is a sweet society."*

His creative and redemptive effort is to reach out and bring those in who are broken. The nature of the human being is a nature that makes loving & knowing central to human life.

\* Near Death Experiences - People come back wanting to know **love & knowledge**. It lies at the heart of the human being. We have to understand that or we can't have a basis to make statements about what education should be like. Love and knowledge go together and they lead to being a creative will for good.

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### **~ There is a Human Nature**

[8:00]

We are in a context where **Desire & Will & Freedom** want to be unlimited. In order to achieve that end, even as an ideal goal, many people have misunderstood the role of nature. Many people say, *"In order for that to be a goal, it must be that we have no nature."*

\* Feminist Controversies - *"Biology is not destiny."*

\* John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922

- He denied there was any human nature. He was after the idea we can be endlessly progressive.

You want to understand that a nature is something everything has.

1.) Nature (def.) - *"A group of basic properties which determines what is possible for the thing in question."*

Not all the properties are a part of its nature.

\* Pen: Blue or Green is not part of its nature. Rigidity is part of its nature.

\* Library - Size & Color - *I'd like a blue book 8" tall, 1 1/2" thick*

Author...topic...date is important. Color is not.

See the difference between properties that are part of nature and properties that are not.

2.) Nature determines the excellence and well being of things of that nature.

\* Pencil that is not very rigid. Would you call that a good pencil? Probably not. It's parts & properties do not fit together to form a whole of that kind.

\* Squirrel - If you know what a squirrel is, you know what a healthy or sick squirrel is. If you didn't know what a squirrel is, you wouldn't know a sick or healthy squirrel.

I hope you'll say with me - Everything has a nature. That's a piece of classical philosophy lasting well into the 20th Century.

You have a nature. A human being is not a squirrel or Brussel sprout. Against that we are judged in terms of excellence or not. Sometimes we make fun of it.

\* Randy Newman - "Short People" song is ridiculous. Why? Because being short has nothing to do with being human.

We commonly accept that and work with it and we need to keep that in mind if we are going to many sense of a discussion about human nature.

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### **~ What is it to Have a Human Nature?**

[13:34]

*"A Human Nature has parts with specific properties that constitute the whole person in such a way that its peculiar wholeness provides a standard for what a human being is and provides norms for how a person is to be treated and what they are to do."*

\* Turnip, horse and human being are different.

How the parts fit into the whole to make relationships.

\* Turnips eaten in "The Depression". Their nature is to grow fast.

\* Plato's *Republic* - Three human parts: Reason, Emotion & Appetite

[see "[Spiritual Formation in Academy](#)" (UofW #1) 31:20]

Each has certain properties and they relate to one another in a certain way. You want to be sure reason is guiding appetite by enlisting emotion on its side otherwise you'll be in total chaos.

These parts for a person who relates in a social context. The other side of Plato's *Republic* showed how this fits together in society. To be good and to live well - Emotion guided by Reason must direct the Appetites to their proper exercise in the individual and society. Plato was one of the most acute critics of democracy because he thought democracy lied right next to tyranny. Democracy was the system that killed his master Socrates. It was next to tyranny because democracy in his mind meant all desires are equal. If all desires are equal, the individual goes mad. Imagine a master desire emerging which is able to subordinate all other desires. Democracy, in his view, would naturally lead to tyranny.

Tyranny is often seen in our country - Addiction is the case of the tyranny of desire. Emotions can not redirect the appetites because the appetites have become so obsessive and so masterful over the whole being that nothing can correct them.

### **~ What are Our Parts & Properties?**

**How do they Relate to Create a Whole?**

[17:10]

The person who says "No Nature" is about the possibility of endless change. To say "No Human Nature" is to hold the human beings that there is nothing they can not do and there is nothing that is not appropriate to do to them. Endless change is possible. No limits.

Our culture is very much tied to this. We have to understand a lot of the rationalization is that there is no human nature is based on the will to be

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able to change things without limit - to make desire and human will ultimate. When we do that, we run into the problem that human desire is not self-limiting. It can't control itself.

**Human DESIRE has to be restrained by the capacity to apprehend reality. Experience and reason have to be able to set the limits to DESIRE.**

\* Automobile Commercials - "No Limits" as a model or ideal for life.

It is amazing in our culture to the extent in which automobile fantasies are cultivated. You get a good picture of how desire works if you watch how automobiles are advertised and what they will do for you. It means the supremacy of "feeling". "No nature" really is way of saying  
*"Feelings - If it feels good, do it!"*

\* *"If it feels good, do it"* worn on the seat of a girl's pants.

What if I kicked her because I felt like it. She would not have worn that pair of pants if she believed in it. She was being a hypocrite. It was only in a world where people did not do things they felt wanted to do that it would be was safe to wear pants like that.

\* Supremacy of the Body - Focus on the Body - "Abs & Buns" or Food  
[\["Genius of Jesus" @ 13:15\]](#)

Try to get feeling of that that will fill our lives full.

\* "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" song [20:45]  
[\["Spiritual Formation Defined" 23:20\]](#)

\* Marlow's "Dr. Faustus" - A wonderful illustration that you can not buy desire find fulfillment. It will always lead you wrong.

\* *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Pico della Mirandola, 1496

[Pico's *Oration* attempted to remap the human landscape to center all attention on human capacity and human perspective. Arriving in a place near Florence, he taught the amazing capacity of human achievement. In 1479 [age 16] requested from the [Marquess of Mantua](#) a free passage to [Ferrara](#), where he would devote himself to the study of philosophy and theology. In the *Oration* he writes that *"human vocation is a mystical vocation that has to be realized following a three stage way, which comprehends necessarily moral transformation, intellectual research and final perfection in the identity with the absolute reality. This paradigm is universal, because it can be retraced in every tradition."* [Wikipedia]

He believed man has no nature because God created him that way so that he would have an infinite capacity to rise towards God. Man has no nature - He can fall infinitely and rise infinitely without limitation.

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{Willard} Actually, he can't do either one but he does have a nature in which great possibilities are present if he understands that nature. When you understand it, you realize there is an issue about infinity because of that relationship with God.

Nature has been falsely used. Human nature has been used oppressively. What was not nature - short people, black people, whatever classification, nature arguments have been invoked to justify oppression in terms of what is just a historical accident. One can correct these appeals only by getting the nature question right. That is in fact, constantly done today by those who often say there is no nature but they are appealing to nature in the process of doing it.

### **~ Moral Knowledge Disappeared from Our Present World [22:45]**

It has disappeared but it has not ceased to exist. It has disappeared precisely because the idea of a nature for a human being has been set aside. Read contemporary moral theory and you will see.

\* Bernard Williams - *"If we can establish an end for human beings, then we might have moral theory, we might have moral knowledge."*

All the writers echo that same point.

Six Rumors of Moral Knowledge led to disappearing from the Western world

1.) "Morality is relative."

- Moral Judgment has not apprehended a reality that is there regardless of what we think. If there is no human nature, there is no reality for it to apprehend. Relativity in terms of feelings takes over.

2.) "Only sense perceptible is knowable."

- The will and human character is not sense perceptible. If only the sense perceptible is knowable, then there is no moral knowledge.

3.) "Only the measure of all is known."

- Science steps forward and says there is not scientific measure of love, knowledge, intentions, character are not measurable.

- These are rumors about knowledge that sets aside any possibility of moral knowledge.

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4.) "Moral Truth suppresses freedom and diversity."

- If there are moral truths, people won't not be free to do what they want. Yes they would be free to do what they want. They wouldn't be free to do what they want, and it'd be ok. They'd still be free but they would have to deal with the fact that they are injuring their nature and the nature of everyone around them.

5.) "Everyone should be able to do what they want as long as nobody gets hurt."

\* LA Emergency Care demise primarily because people do what they want as long as it does hurt anybody rather than what they ought to do.

6.) "Profound changes in the University"

\* Julie Reuben - *The Making of the Modern University*

An excellent study of what happened in University system over the last century so that there is no longer a body of knowledge to be taught about morality in the Universities. These profound changes are all tied to the denial of human nature.

~ **The Outcome**

[26:00]

**Political Correctness** is the only thing left once you have set aside moral truth. You will do that if you think human beings don't have a nature. Political Correctness is not a conspiracy. There is not any other kind of correctness left. With human nature gone, all that is left is power, will, desire. Politics & Law rule. And politics rules law. Instead of law being based upon a foundation of moral truth about human life, it has to be based on what people desire. Judges and legislators wind up trying to reflect what they think is the sentiment of the people.

**Desire** degrades the person to the body and there is no foundation of dignity left for the human being. Human beings become a consumer striving to satisfy their desires.

\* **Romans 1** - People turned away from the knowledge of God and they were abandoned to their own desires and how that developed through utilizing the body.

If you turn away from a value structure that there is in reality - away from God - the only thing you going to have left to work on is your body. You will pump that body for everything you can get out of it. Pleasure will be king. That is what has happened in our culture. You don't retain God. You

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don't have a foundation for understanding human nature. When you lose that, you go to what you can wring out of your body or the bodies of others.

### **~ Christian Reading of Human Nature**

[28:00]

*"Love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength & neighbor as yourself."*

The call of the human being is to love and serve others and to be loved and be served by them. The whole structure of human life is set up around that. The structure of community, parent caring for a child.

What has often been said - the mark of a decent society is how the young and old are treated. In order to make that right, you have to understand that people are not just for use because babies and old people are useless. If that's the way you think about them, if that's all you have to say about them, their treatment will be like it often is in our culture.

If you understand the worth and dignity of the human being in relationship to God and the whole human community, you have a different place to stand both individually and in society about how they are treated.

### **~ The Teaching of Jesus on Human Nature**

[29:30]

[see ["Emotional & Spiritual Maturity" #2 - "Dimensions..."](#)]

[see ["Spiritual Formation in the Academy" IV @ UofW 1 - 37:10](#)]

—> **Heart/Will/Spirit** - The center of the human being - the capacity to make decisions. Human beings are creative beings. We want to create good.

\* A Child - *"Let me do it."* A natural expression of creative will.

Everyone who comes through this life wants to leave the world a better place. They want to be creative will, creative good.

*In order to have a will, you have to have a mind.*

—> **Mind** - Thoughts & Feelings. You can't make a choice unless you have feelings about that choice and thoughts about how it is to be done. The mind contains thoughts & feelings. It's a false abstraction to separate thoughts and feelings. You can't. They always come together. Both of those are required in order to be able to "will". Mind & will are essential to human beings.



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—> **Body** - It's a good thing to have a body. That's essential for human beings. Your body is your little power pack for life. It puts the capacity to act in your world. At this stage in your existence, this is your source of power. Now, it's not your only one. God has given it to you. You can even stand against God in the strength of your body. It's not a bad thing, it's a good thing. Because you have it, you insert yourself into the world and you are inserted into the world. Your identity comes through your body. In eternity you will still be the son or daughter of certain people. That's a part of your identity. Who we are is not something separate from the time, place and people that we are born in. History is of fundamental importance to human beings because it defines who they are and it gives substance of their whole being.

—> **Social** - No one stands alone. We live in relationship to others. That's part of our nature.

—> **Soul** - The part of a person that puts all the other parts together, if it's not a broken soul. It makes one life. There are many broken souls because not many people in our current condition manages to have a unified life.

Ideally if we live in "Circles of Sufficiency" that were unbroken, raised up in a harmonious way to know love and to be able to love, to gain knowledge, experience, grow, we would have souls that were unbroken.

But our souls are broken because we live in a world where the "Circles of Sufficiency" have been violated. We find ourselves crying out. We've lost loved ones, terrible things have been done to us, and so that's the nature of the world we live in.

Then God comes to us through our mind and we respond to Him with our spirit and He begins to pull us back towards wholeness. The common human situation - Paul expresses (Romans 7) "*Things I would like to do, I don't do. The things I would like not to do, I do.*" We are drawn out of that because our whole being is brought together in relationship to God and we are able to be a whole person.

### ~ **The Order Proper to the Human Being**

[34:55]

Remember what I said\*\*:

*"A Nature is parts with properties that relate to one another in terms of those properties and produce a whole which is capable of relationships beyond the self."*

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[\*\* "A Human Nature has parts with specific properties that constitute the whole person in such a way that its peculiar wholeness provides a standard for what a human being is and provides norms for how a person is to be treated and what they are to do." @ 13:34]

The order proper to a human being is this:

Will subordinated to God. I'm not running my world. God is running my world. He is running the world anyways and I accept that. The larger framework of things in which He has placed goodness, I serve gladly. I don't try to be god. "Will" subordinated to God, my kingdom under God's, therefore, at least in the process, that's where all of us remain for a long time, in the process of harmonization of my neighbor's kingdoms and my own kingdom.

Then the mind subordinate to spirit [will] under God. Instead of running wild with imagination of all kinds of things, order comes into my mind. I see things rightly and I act in terms of them because my feelings are coherent with my thinking.

I realize sketching this out in an ideal way may be hard to take in. Think of it an idea, this is a process.

Feelings are becoming more and more harmonious. I'm free of contempt. I'm not full of anger. I'm not cultivating my lusting for my own entertainment. I'm not spending time envying people and dreaming about I wish I had what they had.

Why not? Because I've become alive under God and I don't have to think those thoughts anymore. I'm now alive in God's kingdom and I know I am taking care of. I can rejoice with those who rejoice, instead of thinking I wish I had what they had. I can think, "*I'm glad they have it.*"

I can weep with those who weep because my compassion is not not just for me but for them also.

[37:15] The restoration now begins to move through the BODY and through the SOCIAL relationships.

MIND subordinate to SPIRIT under God.

SOUL to MIND under God.

BODY to SOUL under God.

And SOCIAL relationships then harmonized with the BODY under God.

This is a picture of human nature functioning well!

Out of this comes the norms which can guide us practically. Think of all the things we have a list of things to do and not to do morally, think of what they are about. They are about knowing and loving. If you murder, steal, lie...that's not knowing and loving, that's living in a world where feel like you have to lie.

\* Girl in Sunday School - "*What is a Lie?*"

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*"It is an abomination to God and a very present help in a time of trouble."*

If you're running your world, you're going to need all the help you can get. That's why very few of us have come to the point where we say, *"I am done with lies. I will not mislead anyone."* Think if that actually happened in human life the difference that it would make. Think of all the money and time we invest protecting our goods. Think of a world where you didn't need locks.

### **Kingdom Living**

[39:25]

We're living a spiritual life from God. The influx of God comes into our lives. We have given to us a life that is beyond ourselves. That link to the Kingdom of God is crucial to understanding human nature. You'll never understand human nature unless you understand that it is meant to live in worship and devotion to God.

If you're looking for a way to distinguish human beings different from other animals, always remember Worship - Devotion - Dedication - Love to God. That life flows into us and it produces activity we are not capable of on our own.

The great commandment is then fulfilled in real life. We can become whole persons. The parts in proper order and function by living a life of worship and service to God to others in a power beyond ourselves.

**—> The Great Commandment is basic knowledge of how to live well and be a good person.**

[40:25]

Once you understand the nature of a human being, you can see why that is true. There are no realistic alternatives to that. We have set this aside as knowledge but we have not replaced it with a better view or even a significant alternative to this view of what it is like to be a whole person. When we begin to experience it, we begin to see the beauty and strength of it as it begins to enter our personal relationships and restore them and transform our whole world.

### **Spiritual Disciplines**

[41:05]

This is not by will alone, not something that can be done just by human strength. It has to be touched by the grace of God as the life of God moves inward and gives us inward transformation. This is the place of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are not designed to remedy behavior, they are designed to transform the inner person.

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- Solitude, silence, fasting, scripture memorization, service to others. There is no complete list. A spiritual discipline is something you do to enable you to do what you can't do by direct effort.

The Secret of spiritual discipline: *Indirection* - It doesn't try to correct behavior, it changes the inner person not the behavior.

We don't want to become people who do the right thing. That's a trap. That'll kill you. We want to become the kind of person who does the right thing routinely and easily. That's what it means to have the life of God coming into the person through the Mind and the Spirit and then transformation takes place. The aim is to become in all dimensions of the self the kind of person who naturally and easily does what is good and what is right.

*"The quality of mercy is not strained."* Shakespeare

That's true of all virtues. It is the person who does easily the thing that is right who has had the inward transformation that makes life whole.

[42:42] Moral life must be based on knowledge. We can not hang it in the void. We can not base it on good feeling or political action of various kinds. The human self is meant to act in terms of what it believes. That's why it's important for us to talk about human nature and to understand what it is. Because only if we have beliefs about it that lead us to understand what it is good for, can we use it rightly.

My opening remarks: Understanding human nature is what enables us to know when it is excellent in its character, what is good for it, to establish norms for its guidance, it must be based on knowledge. We will have beliefs about what is real and the task is to assure that they are true beliefs.

You can be sure that if you believe human nature does not exist you will have no norms to guide your life. The secular mind drove the spirit out of any reality it could accept and because of that it is incapable of establishing moral norms. Since the moral life is a matter of the spirit, the will, the character, it is inevitable that moral knowledge would disappear in our culture.

**Nietzsche** understood if you take Christian foundations out from a culture, it will collapse. That's what he was so excited about. He was incapable of giving an alternative.

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I'm saying there are no alternatives. It's in the nature of human nature that there should not be any alternatives. [Nietzsche] saw what was happening and he realized that it was a complete disaster.

### **Revelation is the Source for Knowledge - The Bible** [44:30]

The Bible - the best information on the most important topics that human beings have. Most important topics, among other things, would be Human Nature.

The Bible is a tradition. It contains deep teachings. It is set up in such a way that if you're looking for what is wrong, you'll find it.

\* Medieval thinkers use to say, *"If a jackass looks into a mirror, he does not see an apostle looking out."*

If you look in the Bible, really what you're going to see is you looking out. Used in the Bible - "looking as into a mirror". We want to be able to see ourselves for who we are and that will always bring us to God and it will always show us the right way to go, if that's what we are looking for. If you look for puzzles, you'll find plenty of them.

\* If you want to sit up nights and worry about where Cain got his wife, be my guest.

We want to remember this is the most vital knowledge on the most important topics. Compare it to any writer. This is the source. It happens to be that's the way it is and I believe God has planned it that way. If we look to the scriptures in that way, we will find the guidance we need.

The need is for those who believe this to present the way of Christ as knowledge and reality and as a picture of human nature.

We need to put this in clear juxtaposition to all the other teachings that are around us. In order to do that we don't have to be arrogant and closed minded any more than one who knows how to fix plumbing. They can be open, they can listen. We want to be in the same spirit. That is the spirit of the university as it has been traditionally conceived.

We want to live in that spirit and when we do we'll find we have a treasure of moral knowledge. The way of Christ contains the body of moral knowledge for which the world is dying. Keep in mind from last night\*\* what knowledge is.

\*\* - [The Genius of Jesus - 4:00]

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**Knowledge** (def.) - *We have knowledge when we have the ability to represent things as they are on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.]*

We need to practice that knowledge openly and honestly test it and present it and in this way, make the assemblies of Christians the guiding light of humanity on the University campus and everywhere in life including education and all of culture.

Human nature as it should be is not the responsibility or possibility of the University at present. They do not deal with it because they can not.

We are the ones who have to stand up in such a way and lead our lives so that people will realize there is something better in life than they had every dreamed.

George Palmer, Harvard Professor, 1899

*"Ethics is certainly the study of how life may be full and rich, not as often imagined how it may be restrained and meager. Those words of Jesus announcing the He had come in order that men might have life and have it abundantly are the clearest statement of the purposes of both morality and religion, of righteousness on Earth and in Heaven."*

**~ ~ ~ End of Session [49:42] ~ ~ ~**

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