

# BEHAVIORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPRAVITY

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## Introduction

God created us to have fellowship with him, so he made us in his image by giving us the interpersonal capacity. But in practice there has always been a breakdown in the realization of that potential in every individual, a breakdown we may call depravity.<sup>1</sup> Like Satan and the fallen angels earlier, every one of us has failed to express our capacity adequately or correctly. In different ways and to varying extents we fail to function interpersonally, in conformity to our own created nature, and in accordance with divine purpose. With the exception of Jesus Christ, each of us has misused the specific abilities that comprise interpersonal capacity and its derivatives, and thereby has affected all aspects of ourselves, our relations, and our destiny; so we say that everyone has total depravity. It turns out that in varying degrees, depravity has been universal since the beginning and all-pervasive in every person that ever lived. Depravity means that although everyone has the real creatable image, no one fully has the ideal ethical image.

For purposes of thought and discussion, within the ethical image we distinguish between behavioral and psychological depravity even though in the real situation these two aspects are inseparable and feed on each other. Behavioral depravity simply means sinning; it is action that misuses or fails to use the abilities intended for positive personal relationship and purpose. Behavioral depravity functions in ways contrary to nature, relationship, and purpose. Our acts, however, do not simply occur; they affect the doers as well as leave in them a propensity to recur and a practical inability not to recur. Good acts occur, recur, and strengthen; sinful ones occur, recur, and ruin. Consequently, psychological depravity results from personal behavior reciprocated into the self. Psychological depravity is ingrained anti-interpersonalism; it is caused by ignorance plus evil influence brought to bear on psycho-physical drives—matters we will elaborate presently. From the practice of sin comes not only the presence and penalty of sin, but the power of sin to enslave and destroy.

There is a correlation then between the two aspects of human depravity and two of the three biblical usages of words for “sin.” Sin is action contrary to a shared standard, a social state of separation that results from such action, a personal condition that comes from acting contrary to (inter)personal nature assumed in the shared standard, and a purposeless existence as measured by divine commission. Sin takes our morally neutral abilities and uses them in negative ways instead of positive ones. “Depravity” addresses the first and third aspects of sin;

“lostness” addresses the second and fourth aspects of sin. A depraved person is one who has sinned and thereby perverted himself, broken relationships, and become objectively meaningless.

### Describing Depravity

First, depravity means unwholesome behavior. It is a breakdown in expressing the creatable image. Depravity means not exercising the personal-interpersonal capacity appropriately. Consequently, it is individualism, egocentrism, anti-interpersonalism, non-self-transcendence. Since the image is a capacity, depravity is not a loss of the created image or part(s) of it or even some degree of it;<sup>2</sup> it is a failure to use and express it appropriately. Second, depravity is bondage. Bad behavior not only tends to enslave the self, but to separate us from others and cut ourselves off from purposeful existence (life) in a way we cannot do anything about on our own. Depravity is not necessarily the loss of the potential even though from a functional standpoint misuse does tend to ruin, but misuse does not irreversibly ruin in most cases. Needless to say, since depravity represents our own failure to actualize—or actualize perfectly—our interpersonal potential, the responsibility and guilt for depravity lies with us, not God<sup>3</sup> or someone else.

Four factors describe depravity. As already noted, most generally (1) depravity involves a breakdown between potential and actual. The potential-actual differential provides the reason depravity can happen. That difference establishes the possibility of the breakdown. The image as interpersonal capacity represents a capability rather than a fulfillment. God’s creating the image into us does not create an interpersonal reality, but an interpersonal potential.

More specifically the format of the potential-actual breakdown in depravity consists of using neutral abilities in negative ways rather than positive ones. The possibility of not perfectly realizing the interpersonal potential is due to the undetermined nature of specific abilities that comprise interpersonal capacity. The potential-actual differential means that abilities are not deterministic. A given ability does not have just one but several possible applications, some of which vitiate interpersonal existence. Individual abilities are either necessary for interpersonalism or appropriate to it. Inasmuch as God created these abilities into all of us, each of us has the interpersonal capacity these abilities comprise, that is, the image. In not fully realizing the capacity, people do not lose it or irreversibly scar it up; they simply do not actualize it as consistently as they should. Each specific ability or combination of abilities can operate in ways that either do or do not fit with personal and interpersonal function and purposeful living: will, reason, creativity, conscience, feelings, physical desires, self-awareness and self-transcendence; psychological inclinations like the desire at least to be loved, the drive for meaningfulness, the yearning for security, the impulse for innocence, the capacity for habit

formation, the social inclination. They are formal, not contentful; they are occasional, not material, causes of sin. Using these capacities dysfunctionally constitutes behavioral depravity.

Since the image is interpersonal capacity, depravity is described in terms of the interpersonal framework. Consequently, (2) depravity collapses the interpersonal into the individual. That is the overall pattern of the breakdown. Depravity is the individual person's failure to become, and be, fully interpersonal. It is our failure to be "more than" individual. Bipolar interpersonalism collapses into unipolar individualism. Instead of the balance implied by inter-personalism, there is a withdrawing into the individual.

(3) Depravity reduces the personal into the impersonal. For all practical purposes, it reduces the personal toward the "animal." It tends toward making us into a stimulus-response beings; it reduces us from living by our higher nature to living by a lower nature, and operates by drives rather than decisions relative to values. Depravity "sows to the flesh" (Galatians 6:8). Depravity makes us "psychical," or "physical" (2 Corinthians 3:3), rather than spiritual. Feelings go unchecked by will and reason, so there is a lack of natural affection, concern, and love. We not only live individually, but immanently. Collapsing the interpersonal into the individual and reducing the personal into the animal are two major aspects of behavioral depravity.

Living in a depraved way not only fails to be self-transcendent, but time-transcendent as well. It refuses "authentic existence" by not getting above our own point of view in time as well as space. (4) Depravity tends to collapse the future into the present. It is existential to the exclusion of the eschatological. Living only in the present and living by drives are alike in not overriding the viewpoint of consciousness. We disregard consequences and operate without purpose as part of our motivation for acting. We tend toward immediate gratification at times when we should practice delayed gratification. Since the rational capacity in the image includes the ability to imagine, we can project our viewpoint over behind the eyes of another person and live interpersonally as noted in the previous entry. Similarly, by imagination we can project forward into the future and consider the results of present behavior. So to speak, reciprocation should take place between the present and the future. The present leads to consequences in the future; and inasmuch as we can know that by warning or past experience, the future shapes present action. Depraved behavior, however, tends not to concern itself with the future either in respect to negative consequences or positive purposefulness.

In the discussion above we have used depravity broadly enough to cover sin as action contrary to a standard for action and sin as alienation that results from sin. In common usage, the term depravity most specifically connotes intensity and highlights the personal perversion that results from sin and enslaves the sinner—what may be called "psychological depravity." In this sense, (5) depravity is the power of past failure over present resolve. Not only can neutral abilities be used in either negative or positive fashion; but when they are used either way, a

psychological imprint is left on the doer. Depravity in this distinctive sense deals with the power of sin, a matter addressed more fully below.

Depravity correlates with sin and therefore with ethical theory and moral principles. Sin, ethics, and morality address the interpersonal situation. As the collapse of the interpersonal into the individual, depravity correlates with sin as self-centeredness and pride. It breaches the principle of prioritizing the common good over personal preference or individual welfare. Reducing the personal to the impersonal violates the principle of prioritizing the spiritual over the material. Living by the “lower nature” corresponds with sin as behavior based on drives rather than values. Depravity includes sin as action contrary to nature, that is, contrary to the interpersonal situation and contrary to our own psychological and physical well-being. Depravity includes sin as action contrary to purpose—especially divine purpose. Sin is action contrary to purpose, contrary to nature that accomplishes purpose, and contrary to relationship as an aspect of divine purpose; hence, sin is action contrary to a shared standard for nature, fellowship, and mission; the practice of sin brings depravity.

### Explaining Depravity

The preceding section described what depravity is and how it can happen. Now we need to discuss why it does happen and why it happens universally and all-pervasively. The possibility of breakdown between potential and actual interpersonalism leads to considering the reasons for actual breakdown. Reasons for depravity include originating and perpetuating causes at the personal and interpersonal levels. These reasons fall into three general categories: ignorance, influence, and desire. The success of these causes plays on the fact that sin is easier and more intensely pleasurable at the moment. Habit formation, or addiction, comes into the picture to make harder the change back toward good.

The originating causes of sin. There are different forms of ignorance: viewpoint of consciousness especially in the social setting, being unaware of what should be done or what is expected. The originating causes of sin include sin without a tempter.

Besides the structural nature of the interpersonal situation and the ignorance possibility, there is temptation aimed at bodily and psychological desires. Our own depravity combines with other peoples’ contribution to it. It is easier to be imminent than transcendent, individual rather than interpersonal, and existential rather than eschatological. Transcendence includes rising above our viewpoint. It is easier not to rise above the physical viewpoint to the transcendent one, the individual viewpoint to the interpersonal one, or the present viewpoint to the future one (projection of consciousness).

We live in several kinds of tension. It is easier to be individual than interpersonal; individual is less complex. It is easier to see our viewpoint than someone else's; ours is more real. It is easier to respond to the present environment than think about the future hope. The present is more vivid than the future even though we can project into the future to anticipate consequences even as we can project to another person's viewpoint to observe impact. The tendency to respond in kind applies both to love for love and rejection for rejection. Our experience of depravity in the world is a desire for self-actualization in tension with a desire for social. These aspects of our situation are a fertile setting for depravity to play itself out.

We can transcend the physical, the individual, and the present viewpoint. The physical, the present, and the individual are more vivid and apparently "real" than the transcendent, interpersonal, and the eschatological. They are not immediately available to us; we have to "look past" these first awarenesses in order to see the second ones—the needs of the psychological self, the needs others, and the effects in the future. Our bent toward personal relationships sets us up for becoming depraved by evil social influence. We do not enter a holy world or even a morally neutral one. We enter one tainted by sin, and it is easier just to go with the flow.

Combined with bodily drives and a morally tainted environment is ignorance in several forms. When we do not know something, we do not realize its effects. The most subtle form of ignorance is our individual viewpoint of consciousness in place and time. It could be called the "curse of particularity."

Development from birth to adulthood takes us through a more complicated experience than Adam and Eve's.

God's invisibility; the "silence of God" is a mystery to us. We are tempted to think that "*hiding his face from us*" only makes sin and disbelief a bigger problem. Paul's programmatic statement in Acts 17:27 says that God appointed the human situation to be such that people should seek God if perchance they might find him by groping for him.

Answers to this problem include the idea that (1) God cannot stand being in the presence of sin, which the incarnation denies. Others have thought that (2) God does not care (deism). More likely is the observation that (3) we would not handle it well if God were continually showing himself to us. Adam and Eve, prophets like Isaiah, and others were afraid even when angels appeared to them. (4) Visible presence would make us feel that God was "standing over us," and we would serve him out of fear more than freedom; we would obey out of a sense of coercion more than willingly. Because of the sin and guilt factor, direct manifestation would not fit with the interpersonal character he has chosen for the nature of the human circumstance. God was striving for a higher kind of righteousness—one practiced in the perceived absence of him as well as when he is "*walking with us in the Garden*." Even in the Garden, God came and went. It was during one of his absences that Adam and Eve succumbed to the tempter. So even in the

ideal situation God appeared and disappeared instead of remaining constantly visible. (5) God is more interested in our response to the real opportunities he gives than our response to reality itself.

It does not create a problem for eternity because (a) God has made himself known in special revelation. (b) Those without special revelation he can judge by general revelation, especially by conscience. (c) Hone way or the other he has given everyone adequate evidence for himself relative to his judgment of them. (d) The problem is that we have characteristically turned aside from him, not in a state of ignorance but of knowledge (Romans 1:21). We need sufficient evidence, not overwhelming evidence. (e) God gives us more dignity by not smothering with his presence, not flooding us with attention, or “hot housing” us to be perfect. Giving us greater freedom implies affording us greater respect. (f) Strength of evidence does not correlate with the likelihood of response. If we do not believe the written record of God’s manifestation, we may not believe even direct divine manifestation itself (note the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:29-31). The reason is probably that disbelief is more a function of attitude than of evidence. Finally, (g) in many ways God is the more glorified by the less he does for us.

In all the explanations for why we sin, the common element is that sin is easier. It is easier to yield to bodily drives; it is easier to be non-interpersonal and non-eschatological. That may be why God has given us a chance at reconciliation but has evidently not done so for disobedient angels and especially for Satan who sinned without a tempter (“*father of lies*”; John 8:44). The psalmist says that God has compassion on us because “*he knows our frame*” (103:13-16; 78:39).

### The Perversion of What Has Been Developed

The perpetuating causes of sin have both social and individual components. In its social dimension, personal influence is the mechanism. As influence brought sin into the human race, so also it moves it from person to person and generation to generation. In doing so, influence is not a separate factor because it appeals to various factors in the individual: the bodily drives, ignorance, *etc.*, noted above.

At the individual level, habit formation adds a mechanism for perpetuating sin. “Self-depravitizing” is more than personally becoming a sinner; it includes receiving in ourselves the perverting consequences of sinning (Romans 1:27). These consequences include the physical consequences of profligate living as well as more subtle, psychological effects. Deterioration because of sin comes as a reciprocal, transactional, residual deposit in the one that sins. The perpetuating causes of sin include the originating causes, because the features of human existence that brought sin into the experience of Adam and Eve can bring sin anew into the

experience of everybody throughout history. Beyond the continued operation of originating causes, we add social reinforcement and personal habit, habit being the distinctive item for the perpetuating sin in the individual.

Depravitizing depends on the transacting and reciprocating mechanisms in habit formation (James 1:14-15). They in turn are a function of our integrated nature. It is self-depravitization even when the originating causes lie outside us in the negative influences of society. It is our response not the temptation that leaves its residual effect in our psyche. “Distinctively” is the point because our desire to be meaningful, accepted (loved), innocent, and secure are givens that do not belong under habit formation and retention; it is our response in them that leaves its mark. There are psychological habits like feeling angry, feeling depressed, wanting to criticize, sensing a need to withdraw in situations that threaten security and raise fear.

The desire for acceptance (love) can be misused by social *temptation*. Within the individual a conflict arises between his interpersonal bent and self-awareness, between social identity and self-identity. Depravity creates inner conflict between individual viewpoint and social bent, between self-consciousness and interpersonal impulse (cp. Romans 7:12ff.).

That conflict showed itself in the sin of our first parents. Eating the forbidden fruit pitted their desire for personal welfare against interpersonal relationship with God and his purpose for them. Personal self-awareness led to interpersonal self-consciousness. They sensed nakedness and fear before the Person they presumably loved. Even though it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18), his sin created a distance between himself and Eve as he implied by his accusation, “*The woman you gave to be with me gave me some of the fruit*” (Genesis 3:12).

The desire for self-preservation and identity can respond to social *rejection* by competitive, defensive behavior as well as it might for attention-getting behavior. The difference between defensive behavior and attention-getting behavior lies respectively in the positive or negative perception of others. Rejection by others leads to withdrawal or competition.

Habit is behavior ingrained by repetition as scripture says: *hardened by the deceitfulness of (previous) sin* (Hebrews 3:13; Acts 19:9—hardened and disobedient). Hardening involves willful action inasmuch as God commands people not to harden their hearts (Hebrews 3:13 < Psalm 95:8; Deuteronomy 15:7). For the most part, hardening is indirect willful action since we usually do not will to harden ourselves; we just do things that harden us. Scripture says that God hardens the heart. Previous sin hardens us (our “hearts”); we know from experience that repeated actions dull the sensitivity of the body and it becomes subject to the law of diminishing returns. That process occurs at the psychological level as well. Dead in trespasses and sins, not only means separate from God, but insensitive to the consequences of sin as well as to the very fact that we are sinning (Ephesians 2:1ff).

When we sin and life then brings us empty results, we get cynical about life, about people, about God rather than admit that the problem stems from our own sin. Temptation to sin puts a low profile on the false side of half-truths so that sin hardens us when we find out the “rest of the story.” Hardening depends on a self-preservation mechanism that reduces stress, tension, and inner conflict. Instead of using repentance-forgiveness to resolve and absolve sin, we steel ourselves against feeling any psychological pain or guilt.

In life we do not get our hands slapped every time we do things we should not do (Skinner’s intermittent reinforcement), so we use those times as rationalizations for continuing what we want to do: “it doesn’t hurt anything.” In fact, in some situations like social rejection and outright persecution, abated zeal may seem to work better than total devotion, especially in the short term.

Hardening brings cynicism, boredom, and aimlessness, effects that we receive in ourselves (Romans 1:24-32). Scripture warns that what we sow we reap; in this case corruption (Galatians 6:7-8a). Experience shows us the same thing. Consequences come from misdeeds that we learn too late lead nowhere and fail to satisfy. It hurts to care and then be rejected, so we quit caring. That can happen with the conscience, the will, the attitudes, the intellect, the feelings, even the physical senses. Hardening can happen toward other people, the future, invisible and spiritual things, which are easier to shut out than tangible things. This all can come both false teaching (1 Timothy 4:1-2ff) and deliberate ignorance (Ephesians 4:18; Romans 1:18-19).

Scripture uses several figures for psychological insensitivity: “hardened,” “dead,” “seared with a hot iron” (scarred and callous), “hard of hearing” (“dull of hearing”), “blind,” “stiff-necked”/“hardened the neck [Nehemiah 9:16, 29]”; not turning our heads to see what God is showing us or facing him when he calls us, “hardening the face (Proverbs 21:29; Ecclesiastes 8:1; cp. Deuteronomy 28:50—“fierce countenance”),” “*shutting up bowels of compassion*” (1 John 3:17). Impenitence (Romans 2:5) is another kind of insensitivity. Psychological de-sensitizing takes place on the analogy of physical de-sensitizing; callousness is comparable to calluses.

De-sensitizing is a self-protection mechanism God gave us so life’s evils do not destroy us, and so we can help in situations where otherwise we could not if, say, we overly identified with our patient in a surgery.

What causes sin causes hardening. To sin, we override our sensitivity to its impact. Shutting it out of our minds is a defense mechanism to keep ourselves from feeling the effects of what we propose to do.

The power of depravity come from the capacity for habit formation and addiction. Despite not knowing the mechanics of it, we do know from experience that it happens. We may not notice the power of habit till we try to change it, because habits can form unconsciously.



Habit formation is a neutral mechanism built into our nature for good or ill. The ability compensates for the limit we have on how many things we can consciously handle at the same time. Being able to put some behaviors on automatic pilot, we do not have to concentrate on everything we are doing or make a conscious choice about everything every day.

Sin is perpetuated more easily when (a) habits remove our actions from conscious reflection and bind us to certain behavior patterns, and when (b) hardening reduces the impact good stimuli would otherwise have.

Depravity of the individual is part of what goes under the biblical terms “corruption,” “perversion,” “death.” The power of depravity goes under the expressions “bondage,” “bondage of the will,” “captivity,” “war in the members” (inner conflict). Peter had that in mind when he said, “*A man is brought into bondage by whatever overcomes him*” (2 Peter 2:19). Included here can be the more extreme forms of habit that we call addiction, or “getting hooked,” which can be a combination of chemical and psychological dependency. With a more psychological turn are such things as impulsive, obsessive, and compulsive behavior. Depravity is the result and cause of these results.

### Reversing Depravity

Influence is the mechanism for reversing depravity. As negative influence on neutral abilities leads to bad behavioral and psychological depravity, so positive influence on dysfunctional behaviors can change them to functional ones. What influence establishes it can change; what it can do it can undo and redo—though there is a difference in the degree of difficulty. Sin as habit is not what might look like one-way chemical reaction—concrete formation, for example. Even seemingly “one-way chemical actions” can actually be reversed by other chemical reactions—even if it takes a while, otherwise, the whole universe would eventually become concrete, so to speak.

If we take our cue from the nature of habit, changing depravity comes primarily by substitution. Reversing behavioral depravity calls for revelation to replace ignorance, good influence to replace bad influence, and proper fulfillment of desires to replace their sinful fulfillment. Reversing psychological depravity by proper behavior is the normal technique for “breaking a habit.” As bad habits are not changed by going from doing something bad to doing nothing, so also psychological depravity is not changed by heeding prohibitions. We need to practice alternative mandates. Most sins are dysfunctional so escaping the pull of past sin takes place by fulfilling those desires in good, functional ways, not by stifling them or trying to ignore them. The greater and more long-lasting satisfaction that comes from righteous living erodes the pull to fulfill desires in former sinful ways. Since feelings and desires are established by action, doing different actions changes old bents to new ones. If bents come from experience rather than

heredity, then new bents come from new experience. Bents and feelings lead to actions, and actions reinforce bents and feelings. It is easier to will an action than to will a feeling or a bent. To change the affections, then, we best go at it indirectly by willing to change action.

Because of what the image is, we can at least be loved even if in extreme cases we have virtually lost the ability to love. The values of spiritual exercises are then self-evident. Bible reading, meditation, communion, prayer, fellowship, fasting, and service are at the same time means of change and means of growth we can take the initiative in doing. Other Christians, in fulfilling their mission mandate, can also take the initiative to persuade and motivate in conversion and sanctification. The mechanics of both processes are the same: interpersonal influence in its several forms. Sanctification is behavioral and psychological change. The whole pattern of conversion and sanctification forms a continuum of interacting aspects. The pattern begins with (a) influence from other people in revelation, positive example, persuasion, encouragement, motivation, and reinforcement. Both God and other people take the initiative in shedding influence. The pattern continues with (b) the willing of alternative actions that tend to (c) change feelings and bents so that (d) continuing those alternative behavior patterns is easier and more consistent. That process takes advantage of reciprocity between persons between the inner and outer aspects of each person.

Besides interpersonal influence that leads to conversion and sanctification, Christianity offers faith-grace as an interpersonal formula to compensate for the difference between aspiration and accomplishment, between performance and perfection, in the individual's ongoing Christian experience.

Influence contrasts with miracle as habit contrasts with defect. Influence includes factors by which one person affects the actions of another without circumventing his will. Forms of influence include example/modeling, expressions of caring, giving reasons, supplying motivation, offering hope, forgiving guilt, communicating the person's worth, offering relationship, providing purpose, being trustworthy, establishing security, and meeting needs in general. Influence does not appeal to authority, force, manipulation, or miracle. Influence works through the will of the other rather than contrary to it or aside from it. It occurs in the shared realm of interpersonal capacity; it is not supernatural like miracle is. Natural and supernatural are not entirely parallel categories since we share something with God called the image. Since the nature of a cause must fit the nature of the effect, a natural defect would require impersonal miraculous operation; but psychological habit can be reversed by interpersonal influence that raises motivation.

A miracle is more than something astounding or statistically improbable. It does not come from the complex interaction of natural processes; it is supernatural. A miracle that would

correct inborn defect is not interpersonal. It would be one person's act on the ontic nature of the other; it would be a person-to-thing operation.

When we come to the end of the depravity story, we move from anthropology (man) to soteriology (salvation) understood in a way that conforms with what we understand about our human nature. For a treatment of that aspect of the total picture, consult *What the Bible Says About Salvation*.

### Summary

Depravity is a breakdown between the interpersonal potential and its actuality. Behaviorally, depravity collapses the interpersonal into the individual, reduces the personal into the impersonal, and loses the eschatological. Psychologically, our behavior gets ingrained into ourselves by way of the capacity for habit formation and then creates a bondage.

Neutral abilities/characteristics meet temptation and for habits that harden and make insensitive to positive influence.

The originating and perpetuating reasons for universal and all-pervasive sin are threefold: ignorance in the form of "innocence," our viewpoint of consciousness, God's invisibility, and misunderstood good example; society in the form of evil example, social pressure, forced behavior especially in the unconscious years, and social reinforcement; and physical nature in the form of pervertible bodily drives. These originating and perpetuating causes create hardening and habit, which in turn binds us and perpetuates our behavior (addiction). These factors combine with the fact that sin is easier and more intensely pleasurable and the fact that overcoming insensitivity and breaking addiction is harder and more painful.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>In conventional usage, depravity implies significant sinfulness—at least characteristic sinfulness. That implication probably comes from the tendency to associate the word with the second aspect of depravity that we are designating psychological depravity.

<sup>2</sup>We could speak about a loss of the "image" in Paul's extended sense of the term—the ethical sense, or the "ethos," but that would address a different issue. In the history of theological reflection, it has been common to equate the two referents of the one term image or at least to make a one-for-one connection between them. In such thinking, the image Paul says is being restored in Christ (Romans 8:29) is identified with, or deterministically correlated with, the image that God created into mankind (Genesis 1:26-27). On the assumption that image has one referent—or two referents welded together, restoring the image implies that it has been lost, partially lost, or weakened. The problem with that reconstruction is twofold: first, it confuses words and realities, and second, it deterministically connects created being and express behavior. That root notion about natural depravity vs. behavioral-psychological depravity spreads systematically throughout the considerable number of areas connected with our ontic nature.

In these comments we are assuming a viewpoint on the rationalism-empiricism issue. Rationality is inborn and gives the “forms” of knowledge while empiricism supplies the content. Developmental psychology teaches us that some abilities come to realization during the developmental experience. Language acquisition, for example, needs to occur when that skill is “programmed” to happen. If it is not—as with feral children, it may not be possible later to develop it very well.

<sup>3</sup>Abilities within the image are “neutral.” The ability to form habits is neither good nor bad; misusing it is sinful. That explains why God is not guilty for human and angelic depravity. Though he is not guilty, he is responsible for dealing with sin because he created that possibility and can stop its realization. He does something about it by limiting it through revelation, redemption, intervention, and consummation. Revelation tells people how they ought to act for people’s greatest fulfillment and for the purposes God has for us. Redemption offers to bring back from depravity those caught up in expressing it. Intervention limits the degree of expressing depravity, and consummation puts an end to it after sufficient opportunity for revelation and redemption to accomplish their purposes (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9, 15).

The idea that abilities are “neutral” does not deny the fact that using them in “good” ways brings greater fulfillment by contributing to positive interpersonal experience. Greater fulfillment in living comes from using abilities in ways that foster positive feedback from other people. “Neutral” also does not deny that using abilities in “good” ways produces more long-lasting positive results. The ability to form habits, choose, *etc.*, are “undetermined” abilities in that we can use them in more than one way. They are “neutral” in that it is only the way we use them that raises the moral issue.