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A Consequential Evaluation of a Christian Approach to International Human Rights

BENEDICT SHING BUN CHAN

Abstract

In Christian ethics, the concept of *imago Dei* provides a moral foundation for dignity and human rights. Nevertheless, there are still gaps to fill in explaining the connections between Christianity and human rights. Based on the consequential evaluation of international human rights, this paper shows that Christian ideas, such as *imago Dei* and ideas from the Reformed tradition, can help us develop a more complete normative account of international human rights, of which two prominent examples, political rights and human rights to health, are discussed in detail.

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Keywords: *imago Dei*, Christianity, Reformation, consequential evaluation, international human rights

I. INTRODUCTION

There are various normative accounts of human rights. One prominent example is how Christianity can provide a moral foundation for developing an account of human rights. A general idea from Christianity is that human rights are based on human dignity, and the concept *imago Dei* (the image of God) provides a moral foundation for dignity and human rights. Some scholars argue for this Christian approach to human rights by analyzing the concept of *imago Dei* in philosophy and history, particularly in the Reformed tradition. Nevertheless, this Christian approach to human rights is quite controversial and open to debate. To say the least, there are still many gaps to be filled when it comes to tracing the connections between the Christian tradition and the practice of human rights.

To address these gaps, we should not only discuss Christian or Reformed theological human rights approaches and ideas, but also some detailed features of human rights. One of these features is the importance of human rights in international legal documents (in short, "international human rights"). Some scholars, such as Allen Buchanan,[1] argue that international human rights are morally significant in their practice and are not necessarily *solely* justified by deontology or a rights-based approach; indeed, some international human rights are not traditional absolute rights. One of the possible ways to develop a normative account of international human rights is consequential evaluation. There are now more and more discussions on how consequential evaluation is relevant to human rights.[2] Consequential evaluation de-

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[1] Allen Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[2] Amartya Sen, "Utilitarianism and Welfarism," *Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 9 (1979): 463–89; Amartya Sen, "Rights and Agency," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11, no. 1 (1982): 3–39; Amartya Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," *Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 9 (2000): 477–502; Amartya Sen, "Elements of a Theory of Human Rights," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2004): 315–56; Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Capabilities," *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 2 (2005): 151–66; William Talbott, *Human Rights and*

serves more attention than it receives in current human rights literature. I have argued elsewhere about how to use consequential evaluation regarding other topics in human rights debates.[3] This paper can be considered another contribution to my overall project, focusing on a consequential evaluation of a Christian approach to international human rights.

Based on the consequential evaluation of international human rights, this paper shows that Christian ideas, especially those from the Reformed tradition, can help us develop a more complete and normative account of international human rights.[4] I argue that some scholars have confused traditional absolute rights and international human rights in their writings, but their works can still be used in the consequential evaluation of Christian ethics and international human rights. I conclude that even though the relationship between Christianity and international human rights is complicated, by properly interpreting the view of international human rights, Christianity and international human rights can be compatible, or even mutually supportive. To illustrate my point, I will discuss political rights and human rights to health as two prominent examples of civil and political rights and of economic, social, and cultural rights respectively.

Following this introduction, I will discuss a Christian approach to human rights, which is based on the concept of *imago Dei* and the historical movement during the Reformation. I will also address some challenges to such a Christian approach to human rights and the research gaps in meeting these challenges. In Section III, I will present some important features of consequential evaluation and the importance of international human rights in practice. Section IV advances

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Human Well-Being (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); William Talbott, "Consequentialism and Human Rights," *Philosophy Compass* 8, no. 11 (2013): 1030–40.

[3] Benedict S. B. Chan, "Enhanced Interrogation, Consequential Evaluation, and Human Rights to Health," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (2019): 455–61; Benedict S. B. Chan, "A Preliminary Consequential Evaluation of the Roles of Cultures in Human Rights Debates," *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 8, no. 1 (2019): 163–82.

[4] Jeremy Waldron, "The Image of God: Rights, Reason, and Order," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 216–35; John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Witte, Jr., "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism: The Example of Calvinism," in Witte and Alexander, *Christianity and Human Rights*, 135–54; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Modern Protestant Development in Human Rights," in ibid., 155–72.

the main argument of this paper, namely, how the challenges to the Christian approach to human rights can be met by the consequential evaluation of international human rights.

II. IN DEFENCE OF A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS

In a very general claim, dignity is a moral foundation of human rights. The word "dignity" appears frequently in international human rights documents. In these documents, human rights are based on dignity or derived from dignity. For example, the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, which was adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on June 25, 1993, recognizes and affirms that "all human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person." Another example is the preamble and Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which says:

> Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world…. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

A similar idea is also written in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and other international human rights documents.

Based on these international documents on human rights and dignity, some philosophers of human rights develop their arguments in order to explain how human rights are derived from human dignity.[5] In addi-

[5] Yechiel Michael Barilan, *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility: The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Li Xiaorong, *Ethics, Human Rights and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); James Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

tion, some scholars discuss the concept of dignity in depth,[6] and some doubt that dignity is a moral foundation of human rights.[7]

One of these discussions focuses on a Christian approach. In particular, the notion of *imago Dei* is used in this approach to explain dignity and its importance. Theologians usually rely upon the concept of *imago Dei,* which appears mainly in Genesis chapters one to eleven. For example, *imago Dei* is noted in Genesis 1:27 (KJV): "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Roughly, the idea is that human beings are directly created by God and bear the image of God, which means human beings are below God but above the rest of God's creation, and that is why human beings are worthy of honor and respect, that is, dignity. An example in applying *imago Dei* is that we should not murder another person because lifeblood belongs to God alone. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."[8] In general, the biblical affirmation of the concept of *imago Dei* is the basis for the widely accepted principle of human dignity in the Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, many interpretations and applications of *imago Dei* are quite controversial even within the Christian tradition and are open to debate. As Vorster says, "Christian theological traditions almost without exception take the concept of the *imago Dei* as point of departure for its doctrine on the human being. However, there is little agreement amongst theologians on the precise content and meaning of the *imago Dei*."[9] Since there are so many different arguments and interpretations of this concept—a debate which exceeds the scope of this paper—let us merely focus on the part relevant to human rights. In general, even for non-Christians, such a Christian approach is recognized as one of the Western foundations of human rights.[10] The discussion of the concept of *imago Dei* can be found in different eras in the history of Christianity—for example, Augustine discussed *imago*

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[6] Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[7] Andrea Sangiovanni, *Humanity without Dignity: Moral Equality, Respect, and Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[8] Genesis 9:6, King James Version.

[9] Nicolaas Vorster, *Created in the Image of God: Understanding God's Relationship with Humanity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 3.

[10] Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 124–26.

Dei and the fall of man in the conceptions of "two cities."[11] Let us now narrow down our discussion and focus on the Reformed tradition.

The Reformed tradition emphasizes the importance of *imago Dei*, liberties, and rights. As Witte points out, "four main branches of the Formation—Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist, and Anabaptist—offered distinct teachings on rights in the sixteenth century."[12] Witte argues that within the Calvinist tradition, many theologians have contributed to the development of human rights in different ways. In *Institutes of the Christian Tradition,* John Calvin discussed several factors that are important to human rights debates.[13] His discussion of rights is mostly based on the liberties of his time. In book 3, chapter 19, Christian freedom is discussed in detail. His discussions on freedom from the law or freedom of conscience represent pioneering ideas on human rights.[14] Second, Calvin discusses the development of liberties and rights by referring to the separation of church and state.[15] Third, human dignity is assigned an important role in these discussions.[16]

Another example is John Milton.[17] The traditional Calvinist ideas on religious freedom are developed by Milton to reach a new level. He also adopts the concept of *imago Dei* from Calvin and early Calvinists to defend religious liberties. According to Witte, Milton defends religious freedoms such as freedom of conscience, freedom of religious exercise, and the separation of church and state.[18] Milton also argues that his idea on religious liberties is based on many New Testament verses.[19] Furthermore, he argues that the Reformed tradition must move on and Calvin should not be idolized. In this sense, he corrects the Calvinists of his time on some ideas of liberties and rights, espe-

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[11] Ibid., 125. Another example is from the Catholic tradition. For the Catholic interpretation and a critique of it, see Sangiovanni, *Humanity without Dignity*, 27–36.

[12] Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 135. See also ibid., 138–41.

[13] Ibid., 138–41.

[14] Jean Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, re-issued ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2006), 833–47.

[15] Ibid., 847–49, 1215–29, 485–90.

[16] See book 4, for example, ibid., 1206–07.

[17] John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953–1982).

[18] Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 151.

[19] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 230. According to Witte, these verses are: John 8:32, 36; Rom. 6:18, 22, 8:2, 14:4, 5, 10; 1 Cor. 7:32, 8:13; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 3:10, 4:7, 5:1, 13; Heb. 2:15; James 1:25, 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:16.

cially those regarding the roles of church and state.[20] He also defends civil liberties such as freedom of speech and the press and rights to democratic elections. Witte argues that Milton's ideas influenced Calvinists on both sides of the Atlantic.[21] His ideas spread to Puritan Massachusetts and other New England colonies after their first settlement in 1620.[22]

There are other historical influences as well. For example, the *Virginal Declaration of Rights*, which was written in 1776, is influenced by the ideas of Milton and the Calvinists. Witte examines the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and democratic rights in Article 1, 15, and 16.[23] He also discusses how John Adams included traditional morality of social covenant in the Massachusetts Constitution, which was written in 1780.[24] All of these show how Calvinist ideas affected Puritans and Americans in the development of the United States.[25] Wolterstorff also discusses how an understanding of the connection between *imago Dei* and dignity in Calvinism influenced the Christian approach to human rights in the twentieth century.[26]

This is just a summary of some historical concepts and applications of *imago Dei* and dignity in this Christian approach to human rights. Given that this paper focuses on philosophical rather than historical ideas, the above information, though brief, is sufficient for our purpose. Now it is time to discuss some challenges to this approach. Let us consider some questions on *imago Dei* and human rights. Waldron raises several objections to the claim that *imago Dei* can serve as a moral foundation of human rights. These objections can be divided into three categories.[27] The first category is a general challenge. Some secular or

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[20] Ibid., 220–71, especially 35–48. See also Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 150–53.

[21] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 235–48. Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 151–52.

[22] Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 152.

[23] Ibid., 152–53.

[24] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 301–18. Witte, "Rights and Liberties in Early Modern Protestantism," 153.

[25] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 318.

[26] Wolterstorff, "Modern Protestant Development in Human Rights," 155–72.

[27] Waldron also discusses the fourth category, which says that "*imago Dei* may play a role in Christian social thought which is not necessarily associated with human rights." See Waldron, "The Image of God," 221. Since this category is not directly related to our current discussion, we will skip this category of objections. For other discussions on modern Protestant development in human rights, see Wolterstorff, "Modern Protestant Development in Human Rights."

non-Christian scholars may have doubts regarding this Christian approach to human rights because they may not want to use any religious idea to support human rights. As Waldron rightly points out, the drafters of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* deliberately avoided adopting any single cultural or religious thought tradition to delineate human rights in drafting this international document.[28] Any defender of the Christian approach to human rights needs to explain and justify *why* people should use Christian values to support human rights.

While the first objection comes from non-Christian voices, the second and third categories are challenges from within Christian discourses. The second challenge involves different interpretations of *imago Dei.* For example, the Jewish tradition and the Reformed tradition have different interpretations of "the meaning of *imago Dei* in light of the Incarnation."[29] In the Reformed tradition, there is also disagreement on *imago Dei* and the fall of man. Waldron points out that Calvin and Martin Luther have different interpretations concerning this issue.[30] The third category is that there are other concepts in Judeo-Christian thought that may be used as a moral foundation of human rights. For example, John Locke prefers the idea of God's workmanship to *imago Dei* as the foundation of natural rights.[31]

The second and third categories of challenges are echoed in some historical arguments as well. There has been disagreement among scholars on theologians' concepts of liberties and rights in history. Calvin often violated liberties and rights, and many Calvinists (including Calvin himself) are considered to be totalitarian and to have practiced many "shameful forms of pathos and injustice."[32] It is also argued that Milton rejects the idea of natural law and natural rights and only accepts very limited civil liberties. In other words, Milton's work is far from supporting *imago Dei* as the moral foundation of human rights.[33]

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[28] This is also a reason why *UDHR* uses the term "human rights" rather than "natural rights." See Waldron, "The Image of God," 217–18.

[29] Ibid., 219.

[30] Ibid.

[31] John Locke, *The Two Treatise of Government*, book 1, section 30 and book 2, section 6, accessed July 26, 2018, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Two_Treatises_of_Government1689. Waldron, "The Image of God," 220.

[32] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 1. See also 39–42 for the historical perspectives on how Calvinism violates liberties and rights, and 75–76 for Calvin's idea on the limitation of individual liberties.

[33] William Walker, "Human Rights, Modernity, and Milton's Areopagitica," *The European Legacy* 23, no. 4 (2018): 365–81.

Notice that Waldron does not completely reject using *imago Dei* in the human rights debates. He simply raises those objections to remind people that we cannot use *imago Dei* as the sole moral foundation of human rights.[34] In his perspective, there are many gaps to fill between *imago Dei* and human rights. He suggests that *imago Dei* relates to human rights "at a foundational rather than at a derivate level" and it is "the basis of our dignity, in the sense that 'dignity' means the rank that we hold in creation."[35] He then discusses the implications of *imago Dei* for several kinds of human rights in detail, particularly political rights.[36] He claims that *imago Dei* provides a unique perspective and moral foundation for human reasoning, religious freedom, and different kinds of rights.[37] Waldron argues that modern Protestants have associated *imago Dei* with participation in politics, and used that to support political rights such as "human rights of conscience and association," and rights "associated with democratic participation and enfranchisement."[38]

In focusing on political rights, Waldron only briefly mentions other human rights such as the rights to life, security, and welfare.[39] Nevertheless, this does not mean that *imago Dei* is only good for political rights. Other scholars have explained how *imago Dei* is used to support economic, social, and cultural rights. For example, Robert A. Seiple offers "a partial sketch of a Christian foundation for human rights, based on the character of God and his Son."[40] Seiple's argument is not the same as Waldron's, but their reasonings are quite similar. Seiple mainly uses different ideas in the Bible to explain concepts of human value, human choice, and human hope, and then uses these concepts to support those economic, social, and cultural rights such as "the basic rights to food and drink, shelter and protection, health care and education, and other rights that are essential to preserving and enjoying the

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[34] For example, Waldron writes: "It is not my intention to refuse the interest of *imago Dei* for human rights theory. But I want to insist on due caution and counsel against just grabbing at the doctrine because it seems like an impressive bauble to produce as a distinctive religious foundation." See Waldron, "The Image of God," 222.

[35] Ibid., 225.

[36] Ibid., 230–33.

[37] Ibid., 227–30.

[38] Ibid., 231.

[39] Ibid., 226–27.

[40] Robert A. Seiple, "Christianity, Human Rights, and a Theology That Touches the Ground," in Witte and Alexander, *Christianity and Human Rights*, 321.

most basic right to human life and human dignity."[41] For example, he discusses Jesus's famous teaching about the "Day of Judgement" in Matthew 25:31–46 to explain our obligation to help the poor and how this is related to basic economic rights.

Although Waldron, Seiple, and many other scholars believe that *imago Dei* can be the moral foundation of human rights, there are still many research gaps to be filled. Even if we accept Waldron's approach, it is still unclear how secular political liberals or non-Christians can accept such a Christian approach to human rights. Waldron thinks that *imago Dei* is the foundation but not derivative of human rights. However, it is unclear how to distinguish between foundational and derivate. As there are conflicting interpretations of *imago Dei,* theologians disagree on the role of *imago Dei* in human rights debates. Some even think that we should use other Christian concepts to support human rights. With all these conflicting ideas, what should we do? If we assume that human rights are absolute moral rights and their justification must be derived from some kinds of rights-based approach, then it will be hard to see how *imago Dei* can be such a foundation, or what good it would do to make it such a foundation. With so many gaps in research, it is obvious that we need further explanation and justification, or such a Christian approach is simply an incomplete or even a wrong account of human rights. In the following sections of this paper, I will propose to fill in these gaps by using consequential evaluation of international human rights.

III. CONSEQUENTIAL EVALUATION AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Consequential evaluation is a useful form of practical reasoning and can be applied to different ethical topics. As previously mentioned, I have used consequential evaluation in another paper to discuss the roles of Ubuntu and Confucianism in international human rights.[42] Elsewhere, I have also argued for human rights against torture and human

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Chan, "A Preliminary Consequential Evaluation of the Roles of Cultures in Human Rights Debates," 163–82.

rights to health by means of consequential evaluation.[43] Given that I have already argued for consequential evaluation of international human rights in other papers, I will summarize some important points here before I present some new points to develop my argument in this paper.

The consequential evaluation I use here is a kind of practical reasoning suggested by Amartya Sen. He considers consequential evaluation as "the discipline of responsible choice based on the chooser's evaluation of states of affairs, including consideration of all the relevant consequences viewed in the light of the exact circumstances of that choice."[44] There are several important points to note about consequential evaluation. First, it is easy to mix up the term "consequential evaluation" with "consequentialism." Indeed, they are usually considered to have the same meaning, and are sometimes used interchangeably. Nevertheless, the term "consequentialism" was introduced as a negative label by G. E. M. Anscombe.[45] As Sen explains, in the past even some consequentialists did not like to use this term. Therefore, Sen believes that whether consequential evaluation "should be called by the name 'consequentialism' or not is a subsidiary and rather uninteresting issue."[46] Fortunately, nowadays more philosophers are willing to use this term positively and call themselves consequentialists.[47] In this paper, I do not use the term "consequentialism" or "consequential evaluation" as negative labels.

Furthermore, consequential evaluation is not a comprehensive moral theory. Some people think that consequentialism is a moral theory and the rightness of an action is merely determined by its consequences. For example, Martha Nussbaum generally agrees with Sen on the capability approach or even consequential evaluation, but she does not agree with consequentialism because she views "consequentialism as a comprehensive ethical theory and thus not (I hold) an acceptable source

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[43] Chan, "Enhanced Interrogation, Consequential Evaluation, and Human Rights to Health," 455–61.

[44] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 477.

[45] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 12.

[46] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 477–78.

[47] For example, see Philip Pettit, ed. *Consequentialism* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1993). See also Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Parfit argues for a convergence among plausible forms of Kantianism, contractualism, and consequentialism. In this sense, while he aims at more than just defending consequentialism, he can be considered a sort of consequentialist.

of political principles in a pluralistic society."[48] Sen's consequential evaluation is at most only a weak version of consequentialism, if one insists on using the label. That is, consequential evaluation is only a moral reasoning against (1) making consequence-independent judgements, and (2) moral constraints that deny trade-offs in every situation. This implies that consequential evaluation is even compatible with some versions of deontology, provided that no consequence-independent or trade-off-barred factors are involved.[49] One implication of Sen's idea is that consequential evaluation is unavoidable in many debates on normative ethics, including the ethics of human rights.

One may also wonder about the relationship between consequential evaluation and utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the most famous version of consequentialism. Moreover, one of the basic components of utilitarianism is consequential evaluation. According to Sen, utilitarianism has three components: consequential evaluation, welfarism, and sum-ranking.[50] Sen argues that most of the objections to utilitarianism target welfarism and sum-ranking only. Thus, he concludes that consequential evaluation is not affected by those objections.[51] For the purpose of this paper, there are two important reminders about this relationship between consequential evaluation and utilitarianism. First, we need to realize that consequential evaluation is not utilitarianism, which means that I am not trying to develop a utilitarian argument for Christianity and human rights here. Second, although consequential evaluation is not utilitarianism, they are still closely related in many debates. I will borrow some discussions on utilitarianism and Christianity to develop my argument. However, I will also point out clearly how consequential evaluation is different from utilitarianism in those discussions.

Although defenders of consequential evaluation do not need to face those traditional challenges to utilitarianism, they do need to reply to other objections. The most important objection to consequential evaluation is that it is unclear what values should be held in evaluating the consequences. In the presence of pluralistic values, this problem becomes more serious. Utilitarians do not have this problem because they

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[48] Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities, Entitlements, Rights: Supplementation and Critique," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 12, no. 1 (2011): 34.

[49] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 479–80.

[50] Sen, "Utilitarianism and Welfarism," 464–68.

[51] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 502.

consider welfare (happiness) to be the only intrinsic good. Yet if we believe in pluralistic values, we must ask what they are and how to rank them when there are conflicts.

Some philosophers such as Judith Jarvis Thomson think that it is impossible to have a complete list of good consequences and that the commensurable problem is unsolvable.[52] Although Nussbaum is generally more optimistic and generous towards consequential evaluation than Thomson, she shares a similar concern regarding this particular problem.[53] Sen's response is to defend the possibility of incomplete ranking in consequential evaluation. That is, he argues that it is possible to compare and rank two consequences even if we do not have a complete list of good consequences.[54] Another way to reply to Thomson's challenge is to consider what pluralistic values we can have that hold the potential of good consequences. Although Derek Parfit develops his own argument independent of Sen's idea, he also suggests an objective list theory which contains a list of good things.[55] Indeed, Parfit has even successfully convinced Peter Singer, one of today's most famous utilitarians, to change his position. Singer now believes that classical hedonistic utilitarianism may be better than preference utilitarianism. However, his position is not conclusive, and so far he has not totally rejected the possibility that pluralist consequentialism is a better option.[56] In general, we may accept that consequential evaluation allows good consequences in a pluralistic context.

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[52] Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 152–59.

[53] Nussbaum, "Capabilities, Entitlements, Rights," 34–35.

[54] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 486–87.

[55] Parfit writes, "The good things might include moral goodness, rational activity, the development of one's abilities, having children and being a good parent, knowledge, and the awareness of true beauty." Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 499. For further discussion, see Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 493–502, and Parfit, *On What Matters*, 371–403.

[56] Singer writes, "At the time of writing, I am still reconsidering whether preference utilitarianism is more defensible than, for example, classical hedonistic utilitarianism, or some other form of consequentialism that has more than one intrinsic value." Peter Singer, "Engaging with Christianity," in *God, the Good, and Utilitarianism: Perspectives on Peter Singer*, ed. John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 67. In other works, he seems to posit that classical hedonist utilitarianism is more defensible than preference utilitarianism, or even pluralist consequentialism. His position seems inconclusive. See Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 200–84; Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 42–56.

The debate on consequential evaluation is still ongoing. For this paper, I will limit the discussion to the consequential evaluation of human rights only. People usually think that human rights are "the rights that one has simply because one is a human being"[57] or to "claim that there are human rights is to claim that all human beings, simply because they are human, have rights in this sense."[58] One may wonder how human rights can be compatible with consequential evaluation. On the side of consequential evaluation, it will not be a problem. The moral theory that is incompatible with absolute rights is utilitarianism. For example, Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, is strongly against natural rights, as he writes, "Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense—nonsense upon stilts."[59] John Stuart Mill also claims that the moral foundation of rights is utility. He writes, "To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask, why it ought? I can give him no other reason than general utility."[60] However, as I have discussed above, consequential evaluation is different from utilitarianism. For Sen, consequential evaluation is sensitive to the importance of rights or human rights, not only because human rights can be incorporated into the reasoning of consequential evaluation and produce good consequences, but also because human rights are good consequences in themselves.[61]

Let us now turn to human rights. Nowadays, there are two main views on human rights. One common view put forward by philosophers is that human rights are absolute moral rights. An example in

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[57] Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 10. The italics are original.

[58] Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights and Asian Values: A Defense of 'Western' Universalism," in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, ed. Joanne Bauer and Daniel Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 61.

[59] Jeremy Bentham, *Anarchical Fallacies; Being an Examination of the Declaration of Rights Issued During the French Revolution*, ed. John Bowring, vol. 2 of *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1838–1843), Article II.3, accessed June 22, 2019, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/bentham-the-works-of-jeremy-bentham-vol-2#Bentham_0872-02_6149, 1792/1843.

[60] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, (1863), chapter 5, accessed July 26, 2018, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Utilitarianism.

[61] Amartya Sen, "Rights and Capabilities," in *Resources, Values, and Development* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 307–24; Sen, "Elements of a Theory of Human Rights"; Sen, "Human Rights and Capabilities." For further interpretation, especially on capability and human rights, see also Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities and Human Rights," *Fordham Law Review* 66, no. 2 (1997): 273–300; Nussbaum, "Capabilities, Entitlements, Rights," 23–37.

history is the position of natural rights in the natural law tradition since Middle Ages. There are also contemporary philosophers who argue for absolute rights in different ways.[62] Another view considers human rights as the rights in international legal documents and the most famous of these is the list of rights in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (*UDHR*).[63] These international human rights are morally significant in their practice, and they are not necessarily justified by absolute moral rights. Buchanan argues for such a view. He writes:

> International legal human rights are not the legal embodiments of a subset of moral human rights. Rather, *they are what they are: legal rights; and legal rights need not be embodiments of corresponding moral rights. Nor need legal rights be justified by appealing to moral rights*. Legal rights, as instrumental human creations, can serve a number of different purposes and can be justified by appeal to a number of different kinds of moral considerations, of which moral rights are only one.[64]

Now we have at least two views on human rights: one asserts absolute moral rights, and the other asserts international human rights. These two views are not mutually exclusive, but there are some differences between the two. The first view is that these two kinds of rights are not always equivalent. Some international human rights are not considered to be absolute moral rights. For example, if one only believes in Locke's natural rights (that is, life, liberty, and private property), one probably argues for a list of human rights that is much shorter and more abstract than the list of rights in *UDHR*.[65] For another example, Griffin argues that human rights protect normative agency[66] and evaluates the list of human rights on this basis. However, his list of human rights is also shorter than that of *UDHR*. In fact, he explicitly

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[62] For example, John Tasioulas, "The Morality Reality of Human Rights," in *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* ed. Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75–102; John Tasioulas, "Taking Rights out of Human Rights," *Ethics* 120, no. 4 (2010): 647–78; John Tasioulas, "On the Nature of Human Rights," in *The Philosophy of Human Rights: Contemporary Controversies*, ed. Gerhard Ernst and Jan-Christoph Heilinger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 17–60.

[63] United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," accessed July 26, 2018, https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.

[64] Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights*, 11. The italics are original.

[65] Locke, *The Two Treatise of Government.*

[66] James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

rejects some rights in *UDHR* as human rights because they are irrelevant to normative agency. To illustrate, he has reservations on the rights outlined in Article 24 of *UDHR*, which specifies the "right to rest and leisure, [as] including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." Griffin finds that this right is not necessary for normative agency.[67] Indeed, it is hard to consider the rights in Article 24 as absolute moral rights in any sense.

The second difference is that international human rights may not be justified by appealing to absolute moral rights only. Buchanan argues that many moral and political philosophers (including Griffin and himself before 2013) have wrongly assumed that justification of international human rights simply "mirrors" or resembles absolute moral rights.[68] Buchanan calls this the "mirroring view" and argues against it. He thinks that we should focus on the importance of international legal human rights in practice. In order to justify such an idea, justification of international human rights is usually pluralistic.[69] Notice that Buchanan does not deny the possibility that some normative theories such as consequentialism could be the fundamental moral theories for plural justifications of international human rights. He simply argues that we should emphasize the moral significance of international human rights in practice.[70] Yet it does not mean that international human rights can be justified by any reason or moral theory. Which reasons and theories are good enough to serve the purpose of plural justifications is the most important question for us to answer. For now, at least we can see that this reasoning is compatible with consequential evaluation and pluralistic good consequences discussed above. Let me illustrate this idea by using an argument I have developed elsewhere. This

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[67] Ibid., 186.

[68] Buchanan also argues that some scholars, such as Beitz, Nickel, and Wellman, are on the right track as they realize the importance of international legal human rights, but they are still mistaken in assuming that international legal human rights are moral rights. Although Buchanan does not directly mention other scholars such as Donnelly, Nussbaum, and Sen, I think it is safe to assume that Buchanan would also think that these scholars face the same problem as Beitz, Nickel, and Wellman. See also Charles Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights*; Carl Wellman, *The Moral Dimensions of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[69] Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights*, 50–106.

[70] Allen Buchanan, "Reply to Talbott, Ackerly, Kelly, and Risse," *Law and Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2017): 196–97; William Talbott, "A Social Practice Prioritarian Response to Allen Buchanan's 'The Heart of Human Rights,'" *Law and Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2017): 121–33.

argument relates to the debate on political human rights and East Asian cultures, especially Confucianism.

Among all the debates on political rights, those related to East Asian cultures are prominent. These include the Asian values debate of the 1990s and the continuous human rights disputes between the Chinese and American governments. Although these debates are slightly different in contexts, they share a common concern about the conflict between human rights and East Asian cultures. Although East Asian cultures mean more than just the Confucian tradition, people in these debates usually narrow down East Asian cultures to Confucianism.[71] The debates have two sides. On one side, some believe that political rights, such as political freedom and democracy, are still important in East Asia.[72] On the other hand, some argue that political rights violate the values of East Asian cultures. Given that East Asian cultures should have priority in East Asia, political rights are not as important by comparison in East Asia.[73]

Here I focus only on an argument I put forward in my PhD dissertation, "An East and West Debate on Human Rights."[74] This argument was originally developed as a response to Bell's challenge to political rights.[75] My argument starts from the idea that not all human rights are denied in East Asia. Even Bell, who denies political rights in East Asia, thinks that some rights, such as those against torture or against slavery

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[71] Joanne Bauer and Daniel Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[72] Donnelly, "Human Rights and Asian Values," 60–87.

[73] Daniel Bell, "The East Asian Challenge to Human Rights: Reflections on an East West Dialogue," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1996): 641–67; Daniel Bell, *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Daniel Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[74] Benedict S. B. Chan, "An East and West Debate on Human Rights" (Phd dissertation, University of Maryland, 2011), 22–56; Benedict S. B. Chan, "A Human Rights Debate on Physical Security, Political Liberty, and the Confucian Tradition," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 4 (2014): 567–88; Benedict S. B. Chan, "Do Economic Rights Conflict with Political Rights? An East and West Cultural Debate," in *Conflict and Harmony in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. Aaron B. Creller (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 139–47.

[75] Daniel Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

(that is, physical security rights), are universal.[76] He borrows Walzer's idea of minimal values (or in Walzer's term, "minimal and universal codes") to support his view.[77] What are these minimal values? I argue that a common, international standard that protects a dignified life fits easily into the idea of minimal threshold of human life. This idea is supported by a number of empirical findings as well.[78] I call them "essential necessities of dignity," and these necessities can be related to central capabilities in development ethics and the capability approach.[79]

When I first developed this argument in previous works, I did not use consequential evaluation and did not focus exclusively on international human rights. Similar to Buchanan before 2013, I assumed that the debate was about traditional moral rights, but more recent debates on the issue have shown that minimal values and dignity are better defended by a consequential evaluation of international human rights. It is hard to defend political rights simply as traditional moral rights. If we assume that they are only traditional moral rights, then we should find an absolute moral foundation for these rights. However, neither the concepts of dignity nor minimal values could serve that purpose. Indeed, recently more and more scholars have doubts about dignity as the only ground or justification for absolute moral rights. For example, Sangiovanni argues that "the idea of dignity cannot sustain our commitment and its corresponding rights."[80] It would be hard also for

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[76] Ibid., 79. Notice that these rights are exactly the same, correspondent, or similar to rights in Articles 3 and 4 in *UDHR* and Article 7 and 8 in *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (*ICCPR*).

[77] Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1985* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 21–24; Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 6.

[78] Chan, "An East and West Debate on Human Rights," 116–25; Chan, "A Human Rights Debate on Physical Security, Political Liberty, and the Confucian Tradition," 582–84.

[79] Benedict S. B. Chan, "East Asia: Challenges to Political Rights," in *Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics*, ed. Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher (New York: Routledge, 2019), 382–86; Benedict S. B. Chan, "Are International Human Rights Universal?—East-West Philosophical Debates on Human Rights to Liberty and Health," in *Metaphysics of Human Rights 1948–2018: On the Occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the UDHR*, ed. Luca Di Donato and Elisa Grimi (Malaga, Spain: Vernon Press, 2019).

[80] Sangiovanni, *Humanity without Dignity*, 2–3.

Confucianism to hold such an absolute view on dignity.[81] Scholars can thus easily characterize such a view as Western-centric.

Instead of the traditional view of moral rights, we can realize first the moral significance of international political rights in their practice, and then plural justifications for these rights. Roughly, political rights are those in Articles 18–21 in *UDHR*, and Articles 18, 19, 21, 22, and 25 in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (*ICCPR*).[82] The Confucian notion of dignity and the minimal threshold of a dignified life are all included as part of consequential evaluation of plural justifications of international human rights. In this way, my argument will be more complete based on consequential evaluation. Dignity does not need to be a well-defined philosophical concept, but simply an ordinary term. The special status of dignity in human rights debates comes from international legal documents, as it is widely accepted in international documents, different cultural and religious traditions, including the Confucian tradition.[83] The argument goes on to claim that items in physical security rights and political rights are essential necessities of a dignified life in a consequential sense. One example is that protections against torture are an essential necessity of dignity because a person's dignity is violated by torture. In addition, if a person does not have freedom, it is also hard to claim that this person

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[81] Peimin Ni, "Seek and You Will Find It; Let Go and You Will Lose It: Exploring a Confucian Approach to Human Dignity," *Dao* 13, no. 2 (2014): 173–98.

[82] United Nations, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," accessed July 26, 2018, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx. Articles 6–11 in *UDHR* and Articles 14–17 and 26 in *ICCPR* are rights of fundamental legality, and Articles 12–17 in *UDHR* and Articles 12, 13, 20 and 27 in *ICCPR* are rights of the individual towards the community. Sometimes they are only considered as civil rights. Sometimes, broadly speaking, they can also be regarded as political rights. The boundary between civil rights and political rights is never well-defined. For simplicity's sake, I will not discuss the debates on these rights in detail, even though the argument defended in this paper can be applied to these rights as well.

[83] In my previous works, I use Bloom's analysis of dignity and Confucianism to support my view. Bloom argues that the notion of "nobility of heaven" in Mencius's philosophy is close enough to an ancient Chinese version of dignity. As a general and ordinary term, it is generally acceptable to claim that dignity is not merely a Western concept. And Bloom provides a Confucian perspective to explain why human beings are worthy of honor or respect. See Irene Bloom, "Mencius and Human Rights," in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 94–116. Chan, "A Human Rights Debate on Physical Security, Political Liberty, and the Confucian Tradition," 580–81.

has a dignified life. Therefore, both are important for dignity.[84] Such an argument suggests a way to select one conflicting Confucian context over another in the framework of consequential evaluation.[85] It also allows alternative reasons that justify human rights, as it is only a sufficient but not necessary condition for the justification of human rights. In other words, it is within the framework of plural justifications of international human rights.[86] All these points have been developed in previous works, but they are better justified in consequential evaluation. In this way, the discussion shows that whether it is about Confucianism or other cultural traditions such as Ubuntu in Africa, consequential evaluation rather than cultural evaluation offers a more sound justification of international human rights.[87]

IV. APPLICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH

Although the argument discussed in the preceding section was originally developed as a response to East Asian challenges to human rights, the reasoning can be extended to other human rights debates as well. The Christian and Confucian traditions have some similarities in their application to human rights debates. Both involve the concept of dignity, and both have some conflicting contexts regarding dignity and human rights within their own traditions. Nevertheless, there is also a major difference between the two. In the human rights debates on Confucianism, the controversy chiefly revolves around whether East Asian cultures endorse or deny political rights. However, in the Christian approach to human rights, people usually agree that political rights are important; they simply disagree on the interpretations of *imago Dei* and how these can be related to dignity and human rights. They also disagree on whether the Christian approach can be applied to every human right. In the following I will argue that consequential evaluation of international human rights can solve these disputes.

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[84] Chan, "A Human Rights Debate on Physical Security, Political Liberty, and the Confucian Tradition," 567–88.

[85] Ibid., 577–78, 582.

[86] Ibid., 582.

[87] Chan, "A Preliminary Consequential Evaluation of the Roles of Cultures in Human Rights Debates," 163–82.

Does it make sense to assume the Christian approach as one of the justifications of international human rights? As I argued in previous sections, some scholars find this problematic. Should we include some Christian values? Or are Christian value categories simply too broad, allowing for anything as justification for international human rights? To answer these questions, we need to realize that the argument basing on consequential evaluation of international human rights works back and forth between the importance of international human rights in practice and the moral foundation behind it. That is, we start by the empirical judgements that international human rights are important in global politics in practice, and then we ask further questions about the moral justifications for them. Concepts such as *imago Dei* and dignity as minimal values are part of the plural justifications for international human rights, and international human rights are applications of these values in practice.

In addition to the above practical reasoning, we also need to realize the important difference between international human rights and absolute moral rights. As Buchanan says, it is not easy to distinguish between them.[88] People often unintentionally assume that these rights are the same, and it is true that sometimes these rights overlap with each other; nevertheless, sometimes they are different, and it is better not to assume that international human rights must be justified by absolute rights or absolute moral theories. In a word, we cannot assume that they are the same, and we need to explain and justify them case by case. In the case of Waldron, Witte, and other scholars in the debates on Christianity and human rights, even if we assume that these scholars are correct in their interpretations of the Reformed tradition or other Christian thoughts, they have not clearly distinguished international human rights from traditional absolute moral rights. Most of their works assume that human rights are absolute rights, but sometimes they also mention human rights in the *UDHR* or other international documents.[89] In this case it is crucial not to confuse them but distinguish between them. It will then become clear how concepts in the Christian tradition (especially the Reformed tradition) contribute to human rights debates.

Let me apply the above ideas and further discuss Waldron's three categories of objections, as these objections are typical problems in the

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[88] Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights*, 14–23.

[89] For example, Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 32–38.

debates on Christianity and human rights. These objections to *imago Dei* and human rights are legitimate challenges if we assume that human rights are merely traditional absolute moral rights, and *imago Dei* is the only moral foundation of such human rights. However, these assumptions are problematic. If we do not hold these assumptions, we can still use consequential evaluation of international human rights to fill in the gaps and respond to Waldron's three objections successfully. The first objection comes from some secular political liberals who disagree that human rights should be based on any single cultural or religious tradition. This objection assumes that there is only one way to justify international human rights. In consequential reasoning, plural justifications are needed for international human rights. Thus, it is better to consolidate the support of different religions and cultures. Whether one should subscribe to Christianity (or any other particular religion or culture) is beyond the scope of this account. All we need is to admit that there are plural justifications, and one of them is a Christian account.

The second and third objections focus on different interpretations of *imago Dei*, dignity, and other concepts in the Christian tradition. Since these are challenges within the Christian circle, let me respond to them together. First, we need to note that these objections are also challenging the belief that dignity is the only or major moral foundation of human rights. As mentioned before, Sangiovanni argues against dignity as the moral foundation. He has discussed dignity in the Christian tradition in detail to argue that such a concept is not sufficient to serve as the only ground or justification of human rights.[90] Though Waldron's objections are different from Sangiovanni's in content and he does not totally deny the importance of *imago Dei* in human rights debates, his objections are parallel to Sangiovanni's in doubting the interpretations of dignity and its position as the moral foundation of human rights. If we do not assume that international human rights are equivalent to absolute moral rights or that they can only be justified by some absolute moral theories, it will be easier to explain the importance of dignity in human rights debates. We thus begin by emphasizing the importance of international human rights (such as political rights) in their practice, and then we find plural justifications for these international human rights. To achieve this, we also need to use consequential evaluation. It is within the framework of consequential evaluation that dignity is an

[90] Sangiovanni, *Humanity without Dignity*, 27–36.

important consequence that is worth our moral consideration. Dignity is important because it is a minimal moral standard and threshold that no one should sink below, and each tradition (for example, Confucianism, Reformation) has its own explanation and interpretation of dignity.[91] In other words, this fulfils the practical view to emphasize religious and cultural traditions in plural justifications of international human rights.

Having the above reasoning in mind, we can then tackle the problem of different interpretations of *imago Dei* by different Christians (such as Calvin and Milton) in history. From the view of international human rights, it is acceptable to have conflicting concepts of *imago Dei* and dignity within the Reformed tradition as Waldron, Walker, or Witte has suggested. The situation is just like the human rights debates in East Asia, in which there are conflicting contexts. The key point is to realize the importance of leading a life of dignity as a good consequence, which includes maintaining a minimal moral standard that no one should sink below. Following this we can easily fill in the works of scholars such as Waldron and Witte to explain how political freedom and democracy are prerequisites for dignity and argue that these rights are morally significant in practice. This reasoning allows some exceptions in history since *imago Dei* or dignity is not assumed to be the only and absolute moral foundation of human rights. In other words, even though we find that Calvin or other Calvinists violated liberties and rights, and Milton did not totally agree with natural rights, these exceptions do not affect the consequential reasoning of *imago Dei*, dignity, and human rights. As this reasoning allows pluralistic justifications, the Christian approach to human rights can be accepted as one of them. This is based on the idea that we need to gain convergent support of human rights from different religious and cultural traditions, including the concept of *imago Dei* as an important source of dignity, and in turn a moral foundation of human rights in a consequential sense. In a word, this argument fills in the gap and links *imago Dei* and dignity in the Reformed tradition with international human rights by consequential evaluation.

Now let me respond to two more possible objections to the above argument. In the preceding section I have already discussed how consequential evaluation is compatible with human rights. We now

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[91] For the argument on the relationship between dignity and minimal value, see Chan, "A Human Rights Debate on Physical Security, Political Liberty, and the Confucian Tradition," 578–82.

turn our focus to the compatibility between consequential evaluation and Christian ethics. Is Christian ethics compatible with consequential evaluation? A common view is that Christian ethics is usually on the side of absolutism and therefore, even though human rights are not absolute rights, it is still problematic to use consequential evaluation to discuss the Christian approach to human rights. However, this is a misunderstanding of both Christian ethics and consequential evaluation. It is open for debate whether Christian ethics is simply a kind of absolutism. As Christianity has such a long tradition, some scholars believe that Christian ethics contain elements of three major moral theories—consequentialism, absolutism, and virtue ethics. For example, Robin discusses the concepts of goals, duties, and virtues in Christian ethics, which can be related to these three moral theories.[92] One should provide further evidence to demonstrate how Christian ethics is incompatible with moral theories other than absolutism.

Here let us ignore virtue ethics (as it is not relevant to this paper) and focus on consequentialism in general and consequential evaluation in particular. Christian ethics is usually considered to be incompatible with some versions of consequentialism, especially utilitarianism. Yet such incompatibility is mainly due to some specific components of utilitarianism. Let me illustrate by discussing a debate between Peter Singer on the utilitarian side, and Charles Camosy, John Hare, and John Perry on the Christian side.[93] These theologians have pointed out that utilitarianism may be more compatible with Christian ethics than Singer, a longstanding opponent of Christianity, admits. This point has gained credence since Singer has been convinced by Parfit and changed his view from non-cognitivism to non-naturalist objectivism:

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[92] Robin W. Lovin, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

[93] Charles C. Camosy, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics: Beyond Polarization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Charles C. Camosy, "Engaging with Peter Singer," in *God, the Good, and Utilitarianism: Perspectives on Peter Singer*, ed. John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 68–90; John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); John Hare, "Morality, Happiness, and Peter Singer," in *God, the Good, and Utilitarianism: Perspectives on Peter Singer*, ed. John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 93–103; John Perry, "Where Did Utilitarianism Come From?" in *God, the Good, and Utilitarianism: Perspectives on Peter Singer*, ed. John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15–52; Singer, "Engaging with Christianity," 53–67.

> [S]ince most Christian ethicists believe that ethical judgements can be true or false, my shift to ethical objectivism does reduce the gulf between us. A Christian could be a non-naturalist objectivist for exactly the reasons that have led me to this position.[94]

Although Singer does not agree with any religious position, his utilitarianism moves one step closer toward Christian ethics. More importantly, once objectivism is no longer a point of disagreement, it is easier to see how consequential reasoning in utilitarianism is essentially compatible with or even necessary for Christian ethics. Both Camosy and Hare have argued for the importance of consequential reasoning in Christian ethics. Particularly, John Hare has argued further how Christian ethics and consequential reasoning can solve the problem of preference utilitarianism, as pioneered by R. M. Hare—father of John Hare and dissertation supervisor of Singer.[95] Although Singer disagrees on many points with Christian ethical approaches, he does not explicitly deny the compatibility of consequential reasoning with Christian ethics. From this literature, we can see that even though some components of utilitarianism are incompatible with Christian ethics, consequential evaluation is not one of them. In other words, Christian ethics does not deny consequential evaluation.

In addition, this is consistent with Sen's idea on consequential evaluation and pluralism as well. Although Sen does not directly address Christian ethics, he has pointed out that consequential evaluation is only a practical reasoning but not a comprehensive moral theory. Consequential evaluation is compatible with most moral theories, including even some versions of deontology.[96] Given that it allows plural values to be good consequences, there is no reason to believe that consequential evaluation denies Christian ethics. In a word, there is no objection from consequential evaluation to Christian ethics, or from Christian ethics to consequential evaluation. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that there is no conflict between consequential evaluation and Christian ethics whatsoever.

Now let us turn to the second objection. Is this Christian approach to human rights simply appropriate for the justification of some international human rights, such as political rights, but not all international

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[94] Singer, "Engaging with Christianity," 66.

[95] Camosy, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics*, 178–214; Hare, *God and Morality*, 243–48, 73–89.

[96] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," 479–80.

human rights? In other words, is this approach just an *ad hoc* argument? It is true that what I have done so far mainly focuses on political rights. Nevertheless, consequential evaluation of the Christian approach to human rights can explain and justify other human rights as well. In the following let me discuss human rights to health as an example of economic, social, and cultural rights.

Human rights to health are affirmed in many international documents, such as Article 25 of the *UDHR* and Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (*ICESCR*), and so these rights are also international human rights. People recognize the importance of these rights and adopt plural justifications to explain and justify them. I have discussed some possible justifications elsewhere, but here let us focus on the Christian approach.[97] Although scholars such as Witte and Waldron do not talk about human rights to health, or do so only in brief, other scholars such as Seiple argue for the Christian justification of human rights to health. For example, as mentioned in Section II, the obligation to help the poor is based on one of the core values in the Christian tradition, *imago Dei*. Since everyone has the image of God, everyone is worthy and should be honored and respected.[98] Even Singer realizes that "when it comes to our obligations to help the poor, my views are substantially in harmony with mainstream Christian teachings."[99] It is also important to note that reducing poverty is not only an economic issue but also a health issue. Human health is usually considered one of the key elements to measure a society's level of development, especially when underdevelopment is defined as deprivation associated with poor/inadequate physical and mental health. For example, Sen and other scholars adopting a capability approach have argued for health as an important dimension of capability, using health to measure the level of poverty and human development in any given society.[100] Based on the idea that health is an

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[97] Chan, "Are International Human Rights Universal?"; Chan, "Enhanced Interrogation, Consequential Evaluation, and Human Rights to Health"; Chan, "A Preliminary Consequential Evaluation of the Roles of Cultures in Human Rights Debates."

[98] Robert A. Seiple, "Christianity, Human Rights, and a Theology That Touches the Ground," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 320–34. See also Waldron, "The Image of God," 226–27.

[99] Singer, "Engaging with Christianity," 62.

[100] Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Jennifer Prah Ruger, *Health and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University

important factor in reducing poverty, and one of the major obligations in Christian ethics is to help the poor, it is easy to connect these ideas to justify international human rights to health. In a word, this justification is about how the obligation to help the poor is based on *imago Dei* and other Christian values: we can then use that as a moral foundation of human rights to health, and hence conclude that there is a Christian approach to international human rights to health. Again, this is based on consequential evaluation of plural justifications for international human rights.

In this paper, I have argued that by adopting consequential evaluation of international human rights, it is possible to find that Christian ideas, especially the concept of *imago Dei* and dignity in the Reformed tradition, play important roles in plural justifications of international human rights, such as political rights and human rights to health. While reconciling the divergent views on human rights will require substantial commitment in the years to come, one should not ignore Christian approaches altogether. This reasoning is comparable with other approaches to human rights, such as those in the human rights debates in East Asia. It appears that both the Confucian tradition and the Christian tradition can join forces in consequential evaluation and develop a more complete view of international human rights. Nevertheless, arguing for such a complete theory is beyond the scope of this paper. I look forward to doing further work on this topic in the future.

Press, 2010); Sridhar Venkatapuram, *Health Justice: An Argument from the Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

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