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Love Conquers All in *The Children of Men*

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According to scholars Craig Mattson and Virginia LaGrand, PD James's *The Children of Men* is about "mankind's illusion of control over life," (Mattson and LaGrand 283). Humanity's lack of control is evident in both the death and rebirth of humanity. Mankind had no way of anticipating either the sudden universal infertility that would gradually end the human race or the inexplicable conception of a child after a quarter of a century of human infertility. While humans could not control the seemingly cosmic events that determined the fate of their race, humanity did dictate how it reacted to those events. Its response was divided between those who gave up and submitted to the whims of mad science, and those who were guided and inspired by love. For those whose submitted, mad science ruled in three forms: relativism, or Nihilism; the elevation of science to a religion or religious "priesthood"; and anti-humanism. These three fates, however, could never truly prevail. That is because mad science can never truly overcome what it cannot understand—the mysterious divine science of love.

When examining the three definitions of mad science that are most present in *The Children of Men*, each has flaws that leave it incapable of understanding, and therefore overcoming, love. Relativism, which refers to the belief that there is no objective distinction between right and wrong or good and bad, is refuted by love's relationship to approval. Josef Pieper, a German Catholic philosopher, spent years studying love in its many different forms and facets, and came to this conclusion:

"In every conceivable case love signifies much the same as approval. This is first of all to be taken in the literal sense of the word's root: loving someone or something means finding him or it *probus*, the Latin word for "good". It is a way of turning to him or it and saying, "It's good that you exist; it's good that you are in this world!" (Pieper, *On Love II*)

From this connection between love and approval, it can be concluded that if love exists, and since love is a declaration of the goodness of a person or object's existence, then there must be some basis for what is good. This basis can be considered objective because, although certain loves, like that of food or drink, can be chosen, the love one individual has for another cannot always be controlled. When an individual cannot control whom they love, it means that the lover was not able to choose their beloved based on their own personal definition of what is good. Instead, some outside definition of goodness must have existed that was used to influence the lover that the existence of their beloved was good. This outside objective definition of goodness that is proven by the existence of love cannot be understood by or reconciled with the beliefs of relativism or Nihilism. Therefore, only one of the two can exist. To prove the existence of love, one must return to the writings of Josef Pieper. He discovered that, since the nature of love's approval can be translated not only as "[i]t's good that you exist" but also as "I want you (or it) to exist," then "[l]oving is therefore a mode of willing" (*On Love* II). He then went on to state that, since wanting something to exist is at the very heart of will, "love also inspires...as the immanent source, all specific decisions and keeps them in motion" (*On Love* II). The existence of decisions and actions therefore prove the existence of will, which in turn proves the existence of love. Since love and relativism are incompatible, the proven existence of love ensures that the mad science of relativism is incapable of overcoming love.

The "technocratic priesthood" of mad science that evolves from a blind faith in scientific experts cannot comprehend love. This is because it cannot be known in the typical scientific sense, but it can be known in that it can be understood by those who have experienced it; any explanation that attempts to sum up the entirety of love fails, except to those who have already experienced it. This type of knowledge—knowledge that comes from experience, rather than

observation and calculation—is still a form of science since, in its most basic definition, science (of the Latin *Scientia*) means knowledge. The science that encompasses the knowledge of love can be referred to as supernatural or “divine” because of the god-like qualities of love. The questions of why we love the people we love, why people will behave completely irrationally in the name of love, and why love exists are quandaries that we do not have the capacity to answer, and so love requires faith. In fact, in many instances love is the absolute foundation for faith. Since belief is a decision that is based almost solely on will rather than fact, “[w]e believe because we love” (Pieper, *On Faith* III). This link between faith and love is reflected in the Christian phrase, “God is love”. The mad science of a religious faith in scientific experts cannot explain away the rationale behind the existence of love or the irrational pairing of lovers, and so it cannot include love in its scientific preaching. Since love is the cornerstone of faith, the worshippers of a technocratic priesthood without love cannot fully have faith in their religion. The worshippers would eventually be faced with a choice: either they believe that everything can be logically explained by scientific experts and dismiss the notion of love, or they admit that love exists and it is irrational and beyond explanation. Love will conquer this mad science because love transcends reason. Love is unpredictable and impossible to control, and because of this, even scientific “experts” may be subject to the irrationality of falling in love. Also, those who already love often behave irrationally in favor of their beloved. Scientific experts would say that people who are “deformed” are not as valuable human beings as healthy humans, and yet people whose loved ones have deformities would argue that their loved ones are more valuable than healthy people they don’t love. Because of the weakness of a faith without love and the prioritizing of love before reason, a mad science religion could not overcome love.

Anti-humanism, or the use of science to deny human dignity, value, and agency, directly opposes love and therefore cannot understand it. Since love's existence has already been proven through the existence of (not necessarily *free*) will, love proves that there is an objective basis for what is good. Love opposes anti-humanism because an individual who loves another person, sometimes without any choice in the matter, affirms that their beloved's existence is "good" and therefore has value. By telling another person that their existence is wanted in the world, the lover bestows the beloved with value that cannot be taken away until the love ends. Additionally, the lover is also bestowed with some form of value because now they have been given the purpose of validating the value of their beloved. This bestowing of value that falls under the divine science of love defies absolute control. There are ways to decrease or increase the likelihood of two individuals falling in love by controlling the conditions through which they meet, or choosing people who have a lot or very little in common, but love cannot be predicted with complete accuracy. Even two people who meet in the worst conditions can still fall in love, like Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers, and a situation that was an undeniable catalyst for romance could fail to inspire true love in individuals. While it is possible to increase the likelihood that someone will stop loving their beloved, there is no guaranteed method for making a person fall out of love. The lover can be put through unimaginable pain or strife, and there is still no guarantee that they will stop loving. The beloved may betray the lover, and yet the lover may continue to love. Since a person's love cannot be controlled, that person still has some form of agency that cannot be taken away. As long as a person can love, they are capable of will and faith. The combination of value and agency allows people to believe in human dignity. As long as people are given value and the freedom to believe that that value is something to be proud of,

human dignity exists. Anti-humanism can neither comprehend nor overcome love, because love guarantees the existence of the three ideals whose existence it denies.

In *The Children of Men*, love's victories over the mad science of relativism and anti-humanism are illustrated by Theo's changes in response to his love of Julian. Before he loves her, Theo is complacent and was not at all bothered with the idea that Xan "could probably even kill [a man] without scruple," (James 14). This evident disregard for right and wrong, as well as for the value of human life, is also seen when Theo is discussing ongoing injustices and says, "[i]t was reasonable to struggle, to suffer, perhaps even to die, for a more just, more compassionate society, but not in a world with no future" (112). This shows how Theo understands morality and used to believe in the value of it, but now he believes that it is all relative, and that nothing matters because the world is going to end anyways. This Nihilistic attitude changes, though, as Theo falls more and more in love with Julian. Love "disrupt[s] the complacencies of Theo by involving [him] in larger societal conversations." (Mattsson & Lagrand 277) When Theo loves Julian, he is affirming that her existence is good, and therefore he is acknowledging the existence and value of goodness. Once he has an objective basis for goodness, Theo is a more compassionate person and a more motivated leader. His new respect for right and wrong, as well as for human value and dignity, is clearly seen when Theo takes charge to go steal a car. His taking control shows just how far he has come because it demonstrates that now Theo realizes that his decisions and actions matter because they affect Julian and her child, as well as the Five Fishes that he was learning to love. His new moral code and value of human dignity is especially apparent when the old woman he is tying up needs to use the restroom, and he realizes that leaving her in her own puddle "was one indignity he couldn't inflict on her" (James 206). From this point on, he no longer believes the philosophies

of relativism and anti-humanism. Through his love of Julian, Theo now cares about his fellow man, and he believes that moments have meaning despite their end. The final triumph of love over Nihilism is when Theo recognizes the importance of right and wrong, finding peace in having done the right thing for Julian and her child:

“He thought: I have done what I set out to do. The child is born as she wanted. This is our place, our moment of time, and whatever they do to us, it can never be taken away.”

(236)

The ultimate victory of love over anti-humanism comes when Theo is confronted by Xan in the woods. Theo offers his life to protect the dignity of Julian and her child, telling Xan that if Xan wants access to Julian and her child he would have to kill Theo. Theo’s sacrifice for his new family is a conquest over mad science because Theo is behaving absolutely irrationally. Xan would not actually harm Julian or the baby, he would just hurt their pride by forcing Julian into marriage and subjecting Luke Theo to constant testing and breeding, treating him as an object. Theo is offering to give his life for their dignity, which demonstrates that he understands the true meaning of human value, dignity, and agency.

Love’s conquest of the religion of mad science is more accurately shown through Julian and Luke. Theo says that “Western science has been our God” (5). This religion of Western science failed, and it was assumed that humanity failed with it. The Council never bothered to test people with deformities or disabilities because they implied that the weak would not be the ones to save the race. Much of humanity believed that, because the scientists said they could not fix the problem, the problem could not be fixed. Julian had a deformed hand and Luke had epilepsy as a child, so they were told they would not fix the problem, and yet because Luke loved Julian, he saw value in her despite her deformity. Because of this, they were the only ones in 25

years to conceive a child. The scientific priests were wrong, and Luke's love for Julian did what the best scientific minds in the world could not accomplish. Also, while it was never explicitly explained in the book, the main thing Julian and Luke have in common that is different from the rest of the characters is that they are devoutly religious. Luke is a priest and Julian is the only one to attend his service, but it is a daily routine that the two of them are committed to, unfailingly. The religious undertones of the Nativity-like scene of the savior baby being born in a humble shed, under threat from a cruel empire, promotes the idea that God is the one who granted Luke and Julian fertility. This divine intervention goes against the religion of science, and shows that the love of God overthrows the logic of science.

Love is at the heart of will, faith, value, agency, dignity, and goodness. Because of this, love is also at the heart of freedom and truth. Freedom is the ability to pursue truth and meaning, and love is necessary for this pursuit. The divine science of love proves that there must be universal truths because of its guarantee of an objective definition of goodness. Love also proves the existence of meaning by proving the existence of value and ensuring that people have the faith and will to believe that value has meaning. Love is necessary for this pursuit because it ensures the existence of agency, so no man can have complete control to stop another's pursuit. It is necessary also because of its connections to will and faith, which make it possible for a person to decide and implement a course of action, and to believe in the truth and meaning they are searching for. Love is at the heart of truths not only because it proves that there are universal truths, but also because it establishes the faith needed to believe that something is true. Through its many roles in human ideals and capabilities, in addition to its divine control over mankind, love is fundamental to what it means to be human. In *The Children of Men*, the rebirth of the population served as a reminder to have faith in humanity and that love will overcome madness.

Works Cited

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