More Than Dust
“More Than Dust” is a visual and musical exhibition which is keenly interested in exploring human worth through discussing naturalism and genocide. Perhaps the question I have most consistently asked myself in the pursuit of creating has been ‘what defines the worth of an individual and how should we treat them in light of that value?’ I believe this subject is inestimably worthy of evaluation; it governs how we think of, behave toward and interact with other humans. It is governed itself by our beliefs of origins, and therefore the works presented engage also with thoughts of beginnings, thoughts of ultimate origin.

Influential in the process are the varied literary, visual and musical works of C.S. Lewis, Rembrandt, W. H. Auden, The Civil Wars, Alister McGrath, the book of Genesis, as well as many others, too numerous and working too subconsciously to name.

-Nathan Krishnan
If the philosophical extensions are made from my naturalistic assumptions, the possibility of the future is nothing short of unbridled violence.

-Charles Darwin

The Introduction

I began my studies at Weber State University, an eager, nervous, self-conscious thing, in the fall of 2007. My life up until this point had been as chaotic and beautiful and messy as anyone could ask for. In the trials of the teenage years, I had found myself unable to express the conflicts with which my angst-ridden soul wrestled. Little did I know that this was an experience common to all walking that awkward, gangly stage of life. And, ever so awkward and gangly was I. Although it is true that a desire to express is usual, there were a few extraordinary events in my life which left me with an unusual need to process and express.

At twelve, I started playing music. Music gave me the ability to write my thoughts on a page, sing (or screech) them out and in the process sort out what I was going through, and it was not uncommon to stay up long into the night, huddled in the closet with my guitar. A couple of years later, at the age of fourteen, I began to draw. Art and music were always integral to me. I couldn't draw to silence. I couldn't play music without seeing images and stories in my mind.
These two hobbies became a vital form of processing for me and would develop into perhaps the two most vibrant threads running through my life, after my faith. I graduated high school early and attended a technology college to study graphic design and 3D animation. A year later found me awkward, again, and fumbling for a tune in a college voice classroom. I had never sung a solo in my life (outside of my closet or shower) and the thought of singing in front of talented vocalists was petrifying, to put it mildly. Now here I was, previously the shadow in the corner, suddenly a vocal major at a university.

Fast-forward a couple of years, imagine untold amounts of awkwardness and glean here that shadows make poor performers, though I am still a fond lover of music. At this point, I decided that I would like to try my hand at pursuing art more seriously. I had still been creating art and taking classes where I could, so the change of studies was simply a change of focus. It turned out to be a healthy one. It afforded me the ability to express without having to personally take the brunt of the attention. I preferred the anonymity of the artist to the bravado of the stage performer. In art, I was able to create work, place it in a gallery and walk away. As an artist my job is to create an expressive, understandable collection of work; the viewer analyzes and enjoys the work, not me.

In addition to artistic and musical endeavors, I had also been involved in the Honors Program which developed in me an already keen appetite for conceptual thinking. Concepts, I became fascinated with the things. The world of ideas was infinitely delicious: testing them against reality, building a worldview, analyzing and being challenged. I felt that in these three areas of study, I could pursue both the expressive and the conceptual, so I became a Bachelor of Integrated Studies major. I wanted to find how I could bind these threads into a single cord:
music, art and the critical thinking of the honors program. My aim, which developed over time, was to create original music to coincide with a gallery of art. In it, each piece of music would function as a piece of art itself, in that the lyrics would be analyzable and would convey a message using audial and lyrical metaphor in the same way as the art used visual metaphor.

**The Reason**

After deciding on the Bachelor of Integrated Studies, I continued in the coursework outlined for my degree. Almost regardless of the subject, I enjoyed my classes. I loved exploring new avenues of understanding, and over time, I became more articulate and better able to rationally grapple with abstract thought. Often in the course of my education, however, I came into friction between my worldview and that which was being taught by most of my professors. This was to be expected in many ways, but not in others. Let me explain. I expected to have my worldview challenged; that is a necessary part of education. I did not expect one particular worldview to be taught so exclusively: Naturalism. Most likely this was because educators felt that since it is derived from scientific findings, it is objective; whereas theistic worldviews are not based solely on scientific findings and therefore were subjective. Of course this is not the case. But the reason why here is a very complex subject, for now let me focus on that “what.”

In many of my classes, I was told that the universe exploded into existence, uncaused, from nothing. I was preached Abiogenesis, the belief that biological life began as an incidental byproduct of Nature operating according to her own laws, e.g. a surge of lightning against Earth’s surface. I was taught that humans were ultimately born from individuals and groups of life forms striving for self-promotion, self-preservation, and procreation. I was taught that
morality was an adaptation to allow for the community of humans to survive most efficiently. I was taught that empirical evidence explained all of existence: that there is no post-mortem existence, that body and mind are all that exist and that there is no human soul. (In one class, I was called a “Good Post-Modernist” by the professor for stating that empiricism was not the only way to know truth about the universe.) I was taught that religion as a social study was a fine pastime, but theology was a passé or frivolous endeavor, unfit for the university as “science” had proven that God is a creation of man, not the other way around. All of these concepts caused immense friction in my mind and very much challenged my beliefs. Out of the conflict of this friction was birthed a flame to create, to express. This was the subject I chose for my capstone project.

I have mentioned that what was really going on here was a clashing of two worldviews, the one I was taught growing up and had personally developed and the one being taught to me in the classroom. This, consequently, caused desires to clash inside of me. I wanted to affirm my professors and to glean from them everything I could, but at the same time, I disagreed with their worldview assertions drastically. At the time, I had difficulty distinguishing between the two. The more I thought about the presented worldview, the less sense it made of the world I knew and experienced daily.

Let me pause for a moment to expound on this term worldview. A worldview is a conceptual framework of what existence, of what everything must be like. Ravi Zacharias, a contemporary Christian thinker, describes a worldview as an ideology which attempts to answer four key questions about humanity and the universe: origin, meaning, morality and destiny (Zacharias). Origin: how did the universe and humanity begin? Meaning: what is the purpose of
existence? Morality: how should humans behave toward other humans, animals or objects? Destiny: what happens after we die? Zacharias then asserts that the answers of these four questions must stand to the tests of logical consistency, empirical adequacy and experiential relevance. They must not logically contradict each other or make each other rationally impossible. They must be in accordance with what is observable, and they must make sense of personal experience.

Through evaluating the worldview that was being taught to me, I found it unable to satisfactorily answer these questions in a way which was consistent with my experience, my observations and my reason. I wanted to focus my project on the understanding of origin and morality. Particularly, I wanted to focus on where these two meet: human worth. Human worth is defined by beliefs of origin, how everything came to be and where humans fit in relation to other objects and beings. This is the case because the term worth is a comparative term, it describes a position in relation to something else: other objects and beings. In turn, beliefs of human worth define morality. Beliefs of how we relate to other objects and beings dictate how we ought to act toward them. Morality applies to four groups of objects or beings: other humans, animals, plant life and non-living matter. How we answer these questions, as individuals as well as societies, has immense impact on our treatment of each other and the world around us. Therefore, these subjects of origin, worth and morality deserve constant conversation and re-evaluation. This is good grounds for art.

In addition to discussing these aspects of thought, I also wanted to challenge myself in the various forms of expression which I had studied. I wanted to apply my art and music to my fullest capacity. As I have mentioned before, I have always believed these two to be inextricably
linked and I wanted to bring them into cohesion for those who would experience the final work. This would present many difficulties, attempting to mesh musical and artistic aesthetics, moods and metaphor, as well as many others, but I felt that the investment would be worthwhile and that the growth that would come from the difficulties would be worth the effort.

One of the unforeseen difficulties presented maintaining a balance between the equality of persons and the hierarchy of ideas. In creating work I was passionate about, it was easy to be caught up in being right instead of caring for those I was actually trying to converse with through my art. I respected and still respect many people who hold to this worldview and have no intention of attacking them personally. I also understand that ideas govern our actions and therefore it is vital that they be discussed, confronted and re-evaluated constantly. These two forces caused a constant tension through the process of creating, always tempting to fall to one extreme or the other. In light of this, I resolved to find a middleground: to respect persons, who ought always to be treated with dignity, and to not compromise in regards to ideas which can have drastic or beautiful consequences. This was, though I never could have guessed it, perhaps the most trying portion of the project.

The Inspiration

Inspiration for this project began in the Spring of 2015, in a 3D design course. Each of the students was assigned to bring a material to class, the weight of which had to be equal to our own bodyweight. It was up to the student to choose the material. It seemed a strange assignment, but then again, I had undergone stranger. The purpose of the assignment was to get us to think of the metaphorical implications of material: what it is used for, what connotations does it bring with it, etc. Ideologically, I had been piecing through understandings of the
body/soul dichotomy of man. I had been reading of Erasmus Darwin's theories of biological origins. His theories posited that no deity was necessary for biological life, that Nature herself could give birth to life simply by material acting according to her own laws (Darwin, 309-312). This was an interesting perspective, though I felt that it was incomplete in describing material origins, but more importantly, the implications of this theory in regards to human worth. I had at the time also been studying the book of Genesis where the writer records, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (*New American Standard Bible*, Gen. 2:7). As a Christian, I believed that this passage was accurate in describing my own experience of humans: physical, but imbued with a soul. Imbued with the “Imago Dei” and therefore possess inherent worth apart from any other qualifier. Of course, this question cannot be answered empirically. Empiricism simply does not comment on it, so we must turn to rationality and experience.

In light of this, I felt that bringing my body weight in dirt was metaphorically charged in that the dirt was representative of the body, excluding any representation of the soul. On arriving to class, the professor altered the assignment to now transform the material in the eyes of the viewer. That is to say, we were asked to change the way a viewer might think of the object by giving it a context to be interpreted in. The fact that the dirt was my exact bodyweight held significance. It meant that this project was a self-portrait in a sense, which was the intention of the professor. As I have mentioned, this implied that the dirt was only displaying a portion of myself in view of Genesis 2:7, though all of myself (minus biological functions) in the Naturalistic worldview.
I had heard at this time of a high school woodshop teacher who had committed suicide. For his burial, he had prepared a magnificently intricate casket. (He saw his own life to be worthless, but placed worth in what his hands could make: a wooden casket which would spend its existence under the earth. This was thought-provoking.) When it entered the sanctuary in which the service was being conducted, there was an audible suspension of sorrow as the attendees gasped in admiration. But hours later, it was beneath the earth. The hearts of his friends and family were not turned toward the magnificent casket. They were thinking of him. Empathy, judgement, perhaps relief, all smothered under a massive weight of sorrow, of loss.

This story gave rise to a host of questions concerning the physical/non-physical dichotomy of man. For instance, if we are only physical material with an evolutionarily-developed consciousness, as the Naturalistic worldview asserts, then what is it that brings us to funerals, is all we are mourning in death the loss of brain activity and biological functions? Is there something more that is missing from this once-friend? Relative? Acquaintance? Lover? As their body turns into dust, where is the person we knew? Where is the person? I had watched my grandmother pass away the year before, held her hand when she was nothing more than a breathing corpse. The questions were pertinent. My mind kept rolling with questions, and it was to this backdrop that I nailed together a haphazard coffin and placed my bodyweight-of-dirt inside it. Insodoing, I was taking my own future, deceased body and calling it self. I was representing myself without my spirit, without my self. My intention in doing so was to get to the tipping point, the place where the question of a soul matters. I wanted to ask viewers to engage with this concept of a soul, to question whether dirt (material) is all we are. When I am laying in the ground, will I be ground as well? This piece was very personal. It was not a piece
of answers, it was a piece of questions. It was a mirror, and what I--I, a person, not only a homo sapiens--saw in it was not me. There was something visceral and intuitive that sprang up in me which would not let me think of myself as such. This visceral response urged me to develop intellectually what was going on. So this project became the impetus with which I would enter the intellectual endeavor of puzzling out human worth.

The Process

In the fall of 2015, I began work on my project, my aim still to discuss human worth in regards to the two opposing worldviews. I went first to the most extreme cases of devaluation of human life: genocide and slavery. I felt again that by taking the question to its most drastic consequential grounds the question would be best illustrated and most poignant. The burial process was interesting, mass graves were horrifying -perhaps the closest thing to damnation a living human can witness, photograph or otherwise. I began by researching the most notable and generally-well-known acts of dehumanization of the 19th and 20th centuries: the Holocaust, genocides under the Russian and Chinese Communist governments, American slavery and the Rwanda Genocide. The brutality which I wandered through in this research, both in personal stories as well as arching narrative, made the process difficult and slow. It was haunting. It is a process that, to undergo, is to necessarily be changed. Viscerally, I needed to understand how persons could do this to one another, slaughter and rape them en masse; intellectually, I needed grounds for why this was wrong.

Over the course of a few months, I created a three-drawing series titled *In Derision of the Image of God*. These three drawings corresponded each to a historical event of dehumanization: the Holocaust, the Rwanda Genocide and American slavery. In these drawings, I pictured
mangled or dead forms of the victims, half-buried in mud or dirt or represented as inanimate objects such as cotton. In each of the pieces were depicted shovels with broken handles, often sunk into piles of bodies or dirt. With these shovels I wanted to represent dehumanization, treating humans as objects devoid of will or personhood, treating persons the same way one would dirt. Alongside the visual pieces, I also arranged two historical songs written or adopted by the victimized people groups. In both of these songs, the lyrics looked forward to a hope which transcended their singers' treatment. “Hatikva” was sung by surviving Jews upon release from the Bergen-Belsen death camp, 1945. “Wayfaring Stranger” was adopted by the American slaves and by the mid-1800s became known as a standard Negro Spiritual. I wanted to present these songs in juxtaposition to the drawings to provoke thought of historical persons' concepts of post-mortem existence with the dehumanization they were undergoing. They used these songs to express themselves; I felt this to be extremely powerful in light of the horrors they were submitted to.

I know dark clouds will gather o'er me
I know my pathway's rough and steep
But golden fields lie out before me
Where weary eyes no more will weep (Wayfaring Stranger)

The gallery included two more songs which I had written. In these songs, I wanted to condense what I had found in the writings of genocide victims. I wanted to try to understand their expression in regards to what they believed of human worth compared with how they were treated. The first song, Dust in the Spirit's Wake I had written some time prior, but the lyrics
were adapted to the subject, inspired by reading stories of genocide survivors. It follows the thoughts of a fictitious survivor who is grappling with the horror of having buried friends and family. What I really wanted to drive at was the psychological and emotional toll which genocide victims express. The second piece “We Were Not Who They Will Say We Were” was in spoken-word form, set to music. The piece discussed the lack of grounds for the current moral conscience which we experience in the explanation provided by a Naturalistic worldview. It is posed from the voice of genocide victims. The piece was inspired by W.H. Auden's "Ode to Terminus.” In Auden's poem, he rebels against the Naturalistic worldview proclamations which were being made. Namely, that man's existence has no meaning, that he originated from a natural accident. He is forthright in this poem which I appreciated and I sought to emulate his tone in the creation of my work. Alongside this work I created a large charcoal drawing titled “Is It Not the Priviledge of the Fittest to Use What They Will.” This piece again used shovels as a depiction of dehumanization, lodged into large piles of bodies which filled a majority of the work. In the distance, an oversized figure dressed in a lab coat is examining individual bodies with surgical tools. In the foreground, the bodies piled show signs of impalement, presumably from these tools. The sky of the piece represents the cosmos being born, bringing in comments on worldview assertions of origins. There is also a large, freestanding door in the middle of the piles of bodies. I meant this to represent meaninglessness or purposelessness. A door leading nowhere. In this piece, I was commenting on what I believe to be the consequence of a 'survival of the fittest' world. This was coupled with the spoken word piece which discusses the diametric opposition of morality and a survival of the fittest mode of operation.
The final piece was a series of charcoal drawings titled *The Wrappings of Flesh*. The message of this series was somewhat more straightforward than the other pieces. I simply wanted to present the concept that the body is a wrapping for the soul in the same way material or cloth is a wrapping for the body. The drawings depict figures or portions of the body loosely wrapped in fabric. The series came originally from a contemplation of pain but was altered to discuss the soul/body dichotomy.

All of these pieces together comprised the work of the gallery which was titled *More Than Dust*. The nature and purpose of the gallery was to provide a full-bodied discussion of human worth as it pertains to a Naturalistic worldview.
Literature Review: *Mere Christianity*

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis provides an introductory overview of the core tenets of the Christian Faith. He does this from a personal perspective, approaching the subject from his own background of philosophy and literature as opposed to a purely theological approach. In this work Lewis provides an explanation of core Christianity, not of a particular denomination; it displays essential tenets held by all orthodox Christians. The volume is split into four books, each dealing with a facet of Christian belief. For my project, I relied most on the first book, titled “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.” This portion is written to discuss the Christian perspective of morality. More specifically, it is an argument that the Christian view of morality aligns most closely with what is observable, experienceable and rationally deducible about the world.

In the first chapter of the book, Lewis argues that humans are subject to what he calls “The Law of Human Nature” (Lewis 16). This law is what we commonly refer to as morality. He illustrates its existence by pointing out that in quarrels, people appeal to this standard of behavior. He writes:

“They say things like this: ‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?’ . . . ‘Why should you shove in first? . . . Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about” (Lewis 15).

Lewis posits that the Law of Human Nature or the Law of Morality is mutually understood and agreed upon. Rarely, if ever, do individuals claim that the *standard* is wrong, but rather they
attempt to show that they are in the right or that there is an exception in their case. He writes,
“The other man very seldom replies: ‘To hell with your standard.’ Nearly always he tries to
make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does
there is some special excuse” (Lewis 15). Lewis illustrates that the law is the fixed point in
argument and that the arguers appeal to it to prove that they are wrong or right. Lewis then goes
on to point out that if morality were dictated by opinion, there would be no grounds for judging
moral arguments between either societies or individuals. He writes in regards to World War II,
“What was the sense in saying the enemy were in the wrong unless Right is a real thing which
the Nazis at bottom knew as well as we did and ought to have practised? If they had had no
notion of what we mean by right, then, though we might still have had to fight them, we could no
more have blamed them for that than for the colour of their hair” (Lewis 16). Thus, Lewis
reiterates that if morality is a subjective standard for determining behavior then there is no
arguable ground for justice. The Moral Law must be a fixed standard in order for us to appeal to
it.

Lewis then moves to the concept of morality differing between civilizations and cultures;
he explains that though there are small changes between them, the core of what is held as right
and what is wrong is consistent throughout all humanity and all history. “If anyone will take the
trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus,
Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each
other and to our own” (Lewis 17). He states that all cultures have and currently do practice
essentially the same morality, though with minor variations. Lewis then compares morality to
mathematics, inferring again that both are objective systems which are not susceptible to change
because of individual or cultural thought. He writes, “Think of a country where people were
admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people
who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and
two made five” (Lewis 17). The implications of Lewis’ comparison of the Moral Law to the
multiplication table is this. In order for two and two to equal five, the laws of mathematics itself
would have to change. In order for rape, genocide or theft to be good, morality itself would have
to be done away with and a new system brought in to determine the goodness of human
behavior. If the laws of mathematics were subject to change based on opinion or convenience,
mathematics would lose its viability in explaining the world. There would no longer be a
standard to state that two and two make four. Likewise, if the standard of morality were
malleable, there would no longer be any grounds to say that the Holocaust was wrong.

Lewis draws his thoughts thus far to a definitive conclusion: “It seems then, we are
forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. People may be sometimes mistaken about them,
just as people sometimes get their sums wrong; but they are not a matter of mere taste and
opinion any more than the multiplication table” (Lewis 17). This is the sum of the initial
argument of the first chapter of the book.

After these observations and arguments, Lewis ends the chapter with his second point,
which is that humans do not in fact keep the Law of Morality. We know what is right, but we do
not choose it. And when we do not choose it, Lewis argues that we typically compensate for our
inadequacy to live up to this morality by shifting the blame onto circumstances or others. He
deducts that this compensation is actually an affirmation of our belief in objective morality,
writing:
“This year, or this month, or, more likely, this very day, we have failed to practise ourselves the kind of behaviour we expect from other people. There may be all sorts of excuses for us. That time you were so unfair to the children was when you were very tired . . . The question at the moment is not whether they are good excuses. The point is that they are one more proof of how deeply, whether we like it or not, we believe in the Law of Nature. If we do not believe in decent behaviour, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently” (Lewis 18).

This is the sum argument of the first book of *Mere Christianity*: that there is a fixed moral standard and that we do not live up to it, and when we fall short of it, we excuse our own behavior.

In the second chapter, Lewis confronts the conception that morality is a socially-developed mechanism to aid humanity in the cosmic struggle. This chapter was highly pertinent to my project as socially-developed morality is the pervading explanation for morality from the Naturalistic worldview. He presents three arguments as to why morality must be different from the adapted pro-social behavioral mechanism, which he calls the “herd instinct.” He affirms that a herd instinct exists, but posits that the moral conscience must be a separate entity from it. He gives an illustration of coming across a man who is perceived to be in need of help. The first impulse tells one to just keep moving on. Then the second impulse tells him to help the man. At this point there is a friction of desires. Then the third voice interjects, telling him to suppress the first impulse and to act on the second. He then concludes, “Now this thing that judges between two instincts, that decides which should be encouraged, cannot itself be
either of them” (Lewis 19). He reinforces that morality cannot itself be the either impulse because it is another entity and is able to comment in on the decision-making process.

Lewis’ second argument is essentially an expansion of the first, so I will pass over it. His third argument states that if the Moral Law were a developed impulse, we would always be able to point to it as the *correct* impulse to choose in every situation. But in reality, the Moral Law is the *guide* which tells us which behavior is right in a given situation. He posits that, “There is none of our impulses which the Moral Law may not sometimes tell us to suppress, and none it may not sometimes tell us to encourage” (Lewis 20). He states that in some situations a specific desire or impulse is to be discouraged while in other situations it should be encouraged, for instance the sexual desire. In one situation the sexual desire, if acted on, would result in rape; in another, a healthy act of relationship and procreation. Without the moral conscience dictating when to act on the impulse, there would be no distinguishing between healthy sexuality and rape.

These arguments are the grounds Lewis provides for objective morality over the evolutionary model of morality as instinct. Lewis then speaks to morality as an intellectually-formed social convention, passed on by education and through parental influence. Lewis again appeals to the objectivity of the Moral Law to combat this view. He again likens morality to the multiplication table. One’s parents or teachers may teach them correctly or incorrectly about the multiplication table, but how it is taught does not affect the truth of the table itself (Lewis 21). He acknowledges that morals *are* taught by cultures and that they can be aligned or misaligned with the Moral Law. The fact that they are taught does not make them correct. Just as teaching your child a wrong system of mathematics would result in objectively wrong equations when tested against the fixed standard of mathematics.
He then states that in order to be able to discuss moral concepts as better than one another, you must measure them against a standard. It is implied that if that standard is personal opinion, there could be no conclusion about what is actually moral. Instead, he reasons that that standard must be beyond personal opinion. He expounds on this writing, “If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something--some Real Morality--for them to be true about. The reason why your idea of New York can be truer or less true than mine is that New York is a real place, existing quite apart from what either of us thinks” (Lewis 22). Lewis appeals to perhaps the most abhorrent and aberrational illustration in near history to give a clear picture of what happens if we make morality a socially malleable construct. “In the same way, if the Rule of Decent Behaviour meant simply ‘whatever each nation happens to approve.’ there would be no sense in saying that any one nation had ever been more correct in its approval than any other; no sense in saying that the world could ever grow any morally better or morally worse” (Lewis 22).

To reiterate, Lewis’ arguments in the first section of Mere Christianity are as follows. First, that unless an objective Moral Law, something outside of humanity’s creations, likes or dislikes, there is no grounds for good or evil. Second, that we affirm our actual belief in a fixed Moral Law when we make excuses for not following it. He writes in summary:

“These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in” (Lewis 18).
How Lewis Affected My Project

My project was heavily influenced by Lewis’ thinking in *Mere Christianity*. His reasoning made sense of what I had been taught versus what I had experienced in regards to morality. There are a few arguments which he does not address directly in this book which are common in a Naturalistic worldview, but which are addressed indirectly. Let me expound on them. The first is the concept of empathy as morality. This argument typically holds that as humans evolved they gained capacity for empathy. Empathy is the ability to intuitively understand another’s feelings or thoughts by imaginatively putting yourself ‘in their shoes’ as it were. This ability to imagine another’s pain then guides our behavior to not inflict unnecessary pain on others. The problem with this argument is this. Empathy is a bridge to another human; it does not define what we ought to do when we get there. Many can attest to the fact that the most empathetic people can also be the most hurtful people because they simply know where to strike- where to plunge the dagger and how far. Empaths can use their understanding of others’ pain against them. In addition, this argument would necessarily state that, as some people are naturally more empathetic than others, some have a greater capacity for morality than their less-empathetic counterparts. This is the spawning point for a host of uncomfortable questions.

The second position commonly held among those with a Naturalistic worldview is that morality is simply another word for ‘what is best for human flourishing.’ I agree. And I disagree. Morality does lead to what is best for human flourishing. However, “human flourishing” needs to be defined by something. We still need a standard which lets us know what flourishing means. By what standard do we pronounce that survival is better than non-survival? Ultimately, *flourishing* is a subjective term which needs to be grounded in an objective standard.
In regards to these two arguments as well, I still resonate with Lewis’ statement that an unchanging, fixed Moral Law is starting point for all clear thought on the subject of morality. It is clear to see that we humans do not even live up to our own interpretations of morality, let alone the standard itself. From this point, I believe we can begin to have meaningful conversations about right and wrong, about whether the rape and slaughter of the Nanking Massacres were actually wrong or if they just didn’t suit our fancy. We can have meaningful conversations about women’s rights in the Middle East, about gender equality in the Americas, about homosexuality, about so many other issues which a subjective morality cannot comment on.
Literature Review: Less Than Human

In *Less Than Human*, David Livingstone Smith explores the process of dehumanization. In it, he posits that it is dehumanization which permits persons to commit such atrocities as genocide, rape and slavery. He states that we are unable to do these things to other humans unless we first psychologically degrade them to something sub-human. The full title of the book is *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave and Exterminate Others*. As well as exploring the psychological process of dehumanization, the book looks at complex ideologies and worldviews which can permit one to treat other humans as objects.

The book opens by discussing the Declaration of Independence. Specifically, Smith hones in on Thomas Jefferson’s assertions of the inherent rights with which humans are “endowed” by their Creator, God. From this statement, he moves into discussing the reality of slavery in America at that time and the justifications used to dehumanize slaves. Smith then explores the psychological process of dehumanization. He summarizes his grounding argument by stating, “The important thing to keep in mind is that dehumanization is something psychological. It occurs in people’s heads. It’s an attitude--a way of thinking about people” (Smith, 27). Smith builds his understanding of this process by observations and deductions from notable cases of dehumanization and by quoting numerous psychologists and philosophers.

In order to discuss de-humanization, one must first understand what it means to be human. Thus Smith moves into a discussion of various ideologies regarding what qualifies one as human. He approaches this subject by making a distinction between appearances and essential being, arguing that it is the inner being which defines a human, not superficial appearances. He then writes:
“Thanks to our essentialistic proclivities, the idea that every human being is endowed with a human essence, an inner core (a soul, spirit, or distinctive genetic signature) is intuitively compelling. If you share this intuition, as most people seem to, then you will be open to the idea that someone can be human even though they don’t look human” (Smith, 33).

Thus, Smith provides grounds on which all humans share a particular essence which defines them as human: an “inner core.”

Smith then moves into the discussion of worldviews which may best explain the reason for respecting human life. He begins by discussing the Christian concept of being/object hierarchy. This hierarchy has been historically comprehended in the “Great Chain of Being” philosophy (See appendix). At its essence, this ideology understands object/being worth as tiered into six categories: God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Minerals. And, as Smith puts it, “The position of anything on the hierarchy was an index of its intrinsic worth” (Smith, 39). This scale ranges from spiritual life being most valuable, to biological life, ending with non-life as being least valuable. God is entirely comprised of what is written in the original Greek as Zoe, or spiritual life (John 4:24. John 14:6). Plant life is entirely Bios, or biological life. Minerals have no life. Humans, of course, have biological life, though an opportunity for Zoe. God offers them Zoe (spiritual life) if they believe in His sacrifice as payment for their sins. After explaining the great chain of being, Smith then gives examples of some persons further separating humans out into subcategories based on race and intelligence.

He compares the Christian hierarchical model with that of the Naturalistic worldview, which states that there is no valid ground for an object/being hierarchy because we are all made
of the same material and there is no ultimate goal of living by which we must gauge ourselves. He writes in regards to these human subcategories:

“Unsurprisingly, considering their origin, most of these schemes modestly placed Caucasians at the pinnacle of humanity . . . How different this is from the Darwinian picture of constant flux, in which machinery of nature eternally generates ‘forms most beautiful and most wondrous’ and consigns others to oblivion . . . Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Darwin’s work lay in his replacing the ancient vertical model of biodiversity with a more egalitarian, horizontal one” (Smith, 39).

Smith posits that a Naturalistic worldview in regards to origin leads to an egalitarian view of object/being worth, in turn providing a better system of morality than the Christian hierarchical model. He asserts that it is the Christian ideology which leads to dehumanization and that it is the presence of the great chain of being thought system in current culture which leads to acts of genocide, rape and slavery. He writes, “The great chain of being continues to cast a long shadow over our contemporary worldview. It’s also a prerequisite for the notion of dehumanization, for the very notion of subhumanity--of being less than human--depends on it” (Smith, 41). Smith here states that it is a concept of hierarchy which allows for dehumanization and that if we were to abandon these more ancient ideas in favor of Darwinian concepts of complete object/being equality, acts of dehumanization would not only decrease drastically but cease entirely.

In the rest of his book, Smith covers diverse aspects of the psychological process of dehumanization as well as other implications of worldviews. I felt that it was these aforementioned arguments which were most pertinent to me in creating my project; therefore, I
will address how they interacted with my project which was essentially the counter-argument to his propositions.

**Counterarguments to *Less Than Human***

First, Smith is unfortunately guilty of the Strawman argument in regards to the Christian ideology of object/being hierarchy. The idea of human subcategories is not part of orthodox Christian belief. In fact, not only is it in direct opposition to orthodox Christian belief but in opposition to the historical words and life of Christ Himself who extended His aid to those discriminated against in regards to race or gender, such as the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) or Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18). Women were horrifyingly devalued in this society, and Samaritans were considered by the Jews to be racially inferior. In the same chapter as Smith discusses the great chain of being, he also quotes Saint Augustine, a revered theologian, saying:

> “Whomever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast. We can distinguish the common human nature from that which is peculiar, and therefore wonderful” (qtd. in Smith, 35).

Smith passes by the accepted orthodox teaching of Christianity that “All humans are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” regardless of race, age, gender, talent or disability, and paints the aberration as normative. Smith also fails to
discuss the fact that concepts of the proprietor of human subcategories and Augustine are in contradiction.

Second, at one point we find Smith saying that modern science has allowed us to separate fact from value (Smith, 39). The contextual inference which Smith makes is that facts tell us that all things are equal. We are all “starstuff” as Carl Sagan put it. The second inference is that all things are equally valuable, or valueless. This builds the case for my next point.

Third, Smith proposes that there be no object/being hierarchy. Let us pause for a moment to consider how this would play out in society. The implications of his statements of Darwin “Replacing the ancient, vertical model of biodiversity with a more egalitarian, horizontal one” (Smith, 39) are as follows. With no hierarchy of object/being worth, we have instead a complete equality of all beings and objects. In this case, the words of animal rights activist Ingrid Newkirk, “A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy” (Newkirk) describe the world as it is. Moreover, unless Smith would like to argue that biological life or the development of a nervous system is what measures object/being worth, one could as easily say, “a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy is a tree is a stone” and believe it to be a valid explanation of the universe. But this is not what we find.

Think of it this way. Imagine that you are on a dusty street, crossing with your seven-year-old son who is trailing lackadaisically behind you, wind tossing at his all-too-blond and overgrown hair. You reach the other side and turn to find him lolling in the street after some dragonfly or dandelion billow. A moment of panic surges inside of you as you hear a bus fast approaching. But a dilemma rises. A second vehicle is approaching from the opposite direction. In its path is a beautifully scaled and equally oblivious iguana. You have the time to save one.
On the aforementioned assertions, you have no legitimate grounds on which to save your son over the animal. Replay the scenario without the Iguana. Would you give yourself up for your son? A sense of duty, a sense of love maybe compels self-sacrifice. How could you live with yourself if you didn’t. Now, replay the iguana scenario, but insert instead of the iguana another child. Choose between children. The worth of objects and beings is not the same. Not at all. We must have a hierarchy that is built from inherent worth such as is implied from the Genesis account of creation in order to make these kinds of decisions. Simple biological life is not the standard of worth. A central nervous system is not the standard of worth. Personal attachment, if we took the illustration further we would find out, though it compels, is not even the standard of worth. This sense of hierarchy gives the word ‘worth’ a meaning. Contrary to Smith’s representation, object/being hierarchy is necessary in order to have any kind of meaningful conversation about human worth or morality. Without it, we are flotsam on the sea of a biodiverse egalitarianism. With it, we begin to see a duty to care for the lesser. With it, we see the dischordant beauty of a beneficent God sacrificing His own Son, for us, iguanas at best, by comparison. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
Analysis and Personal Reflection

In this section I will expound on what I felt to be the successes and shortcomings of my project, but before I do, let me explain a portion of my philosophy of art to help organize my methods. I believe that art speaks on three levels. First, it speaks on level of aesthetics and emotions, that is to say beauty and invocation of feeling. This is the first level in which we experience art. Even those who are without the language to describe it can articulate that a piece makes them happy or sad, or that the mood of the song is lachrymose or ecstatic. Intuitively we express that we find certain pieces beautiful and others plain and we naturally gravitate toward the beautiful and away from the plain. In moving into a more intricate level of understanding of this concept, the artist or musician begins to use language such as line weight, value, balance, contrast, impact, dynamic, fortissimo, etc. But this only allows them to better understand what is going on so that they can create more effective artwork. Regardless of language, this initial layer of art is accessible to every viewer.

The second level of art is the message. There are a few forms used here, but most common are metaphor and juxtaposition. Metaphor is the use of symbols or objects which represent larger concepts or realities to tell a story. Juxtaposition is the placement of objects alongside each other for contrast or context. With this layer, the artist begins to have a conversation with the viewer regarding reality. That is to say, he asks questions or makes truth statements about reality. Maybe think of the song “Love is All You Need” by the Beatles and you’ll get what I mean. The artist is challenged with presenting an interpretable message which
is also rich and meaningful. When taken as a whole, the message of the piece ought to be coherent and accessible to the analytical viewer.

The third level on which art speaks is that of reference. Referencing is simply using terms, objects or forms which are reminiscent of other work. Using references, the artist is able to call in statements or questions posed by other works of art. For instance, Shakespeare's references to Greek mythology. With a single reference, Shakespeare can give immense backstory for context or information about a character or situation. References serve to enrich and broaden the art experience for the informed viewer.

In trying to break down the successes and limitations of my project, this system of understanding has helped categorize areas I which felt worked well as well as areas which were not as successful.

**The Art**

When I began work on my project, initially I did not have a clear vision of the aesthetic. I was thinking of some abstract paintings and some realistic drawings, some in color, some colorless. I began work on my project by sketching out the visual pieces first and took them to my advisor who was able to help me focus my concepts aesthetically. He introduced me to a number of Rembrandt’s etchings which I liked. They lent themselves to my subject matter with their heavy contrast, articulation balanced by abstraction, romantically surreal nature settings, etc. My particular affinity lies in linework and the leading of the viewer’s eye through a piece. I felt like Rembrandt accomplished this extraordinarly and I sought to let his work influence me in the creation process. I chose to work in charcoal and pen which worked beautifully with the subject. In general, as an artist, I have also been influenced quite strongly by many of the
surrealists, particularly Salvador Dali and Jerry Uelsmann. Since I was first introduced to their work, I have been drawn to the beauty of the ‘out-of-placeness’ which characterizes their work. It necessitates understanding; my mind simply must get to the bottom of its unusuality and I am discontent to otherwise let it alone. I wanted to emulate some aspects of their art as well by including seemingly out-of-place items in my own compositions to inspire curiosity.

It was these out-of-place objects which I wanted to imbue with metaphor to communicate the message of my work. For instance, in the four pieces dealing with genocide and slavery, there are oversized shovels with broken handles placed throughout. Often they were shoved into piles of bodies the way one would see them shoved into a pile of dirt. I wanted to use them to comment on the fact that we cannot treat humans in the same way as we treat non-living objects. The shovel is also instrumental in the burial process, thus being oversized hinted toward the concept of mass graves which are common in genocide.

As I have stated, these works reference the stylistic choices and methods of Rembrandt as well as various surrealist artists. I also wanted to reference historical photographs by toning the paper slightly and by including piles of bodies seen in genocide photographs.

In all, I was proud of the final product. I am grateful for all of the guiding advice along the way from my advisor who helped guide me aesthetically, metaphorically and referentially. If I were to recreate the gallery knowing then what I know now, there are a few things I would change. I would include a work which attempted to ground the metaphorical tie between dust and the human body, such as the coffin piece I have described. Beside that, I am very happy with the final product.
The Music

In regards to the music, aesthetically I wanted the music to be genuine. I wanted to be sure that the music did not sound processed, like a pop record. I chose to collect a number of other musicians and we played and rehearsed the music live in an old church. This gave a beautiful, natural resonance to the sound and inspired in the musicians a certain feeling which a recording studio could not. For instrumentation, I put together an intimate setup, mostly vocally driven as I wanted the concentration to be on the lyrics.

In regards to metaphor, I feel that Music is typically only engaged in the first level in which it speaks, aesthetics and emotive quality, though the writer often intends for it to be engaged on all three levels. In order to challenge this, I printed the lyrics of each piece and placed them on the wall with the same emphasis as each art piece. Part of the particular difficulty of music is that it is made to be experienced in time. It is linear and is experienced as a stream over a particular period of time. This makes it difficult for the viewer to pause to analyze metaphor or reference. I felt that by placing the lyrics on the wall in the same context as the pieces, it would allow the viewer to analyze the lyrics over an indefinite period of time. This would allow them more time to attempt to devote to understanding the metaphor and references used, instead of being limited to the linear audio experience typically offered. In the typical visual art gallery, length of viewing is not dictated for the viewer. That is to say, the viewer can stand in front of the piece for however long he or she wants to invest in understanding it. If they feel that they have analyzed the metaphor and reference and has understood to piece in a matter
of two minutes, and has come to its conclusion, often time he will move to the next. This process may easily take 20 minutes, or three days, or years in some cases. I enjoy this about art, and wanted to bring an element of it into my presentation of music. In most of my experience with music, I have had a deepest connection and appreciation with that music which I have taken time to understand the metaphor and reference of the lyrics or instruments of the music itself. I want to give my viewers the same opportunity.

In regards to references, I wanted to incorporate the intimacy and genuinity found in folk music, yet to bring into the music somewhat modern preferences as well. I listened to folk and gospel music and some Yiddish music to gain inspiration for the pieces. The spoken word piece drew much inspiration from W.H. Auden’s work “Ode to Terminus.”

Taken as a whole, I felt the music turned out beautifully and added an incredibly immersive aspect to the artwork. The authenticity I was looking for bled through into the final project and it worked well in keeping with the subject matter of the gallery. One aspect I did not anticipate was that when the viewer had headphones, it became incredibly difficult to analyze the artwork in regards to metaphor and reference. It was the same predicament as most people have when they attempt to listen to music while doing math. The deconstructive, analytical portion of the mind keeps getting broadsided by the emotive wave of the music. If I continue to create work like this, I will place a sign at the entrance of the gallery encouraging viewers to pause the music to contemplate the artwork from time to time. Besides this, there were only a few moments of pitchiness or musical arrhythmia which I would alter. In all I am very happy with the music and am incredibly thankful to all who collaborated with me to create it.
The Impact

I had the opportunity to spend a couple of evenings at the gallery and invited friends and family to come see it and to converse about it. Their perspective was insightful and it was enlightening talking to them once they were able to experience it. There were some who came out of the gallery in tears and some with perplexed looks and furrowed brows and I was able to engage them in deep and meaningful conversation. I was able to listen to viewers talk about their experience with the art and music and even sit and talk with a few individuals about their worldview assertions as to what defines human worth. It was rewarding to be able to see and experience the impact the gallery had and I was reminded that, when it comes down to it, artists don’t create art for themselves. It is an extraordinary egotism which creates art as a means for self-attention. Art is a powerful platform from which to discuss the beautiful, difficult and complex matters of what it means to be human in this universe, and that platform should always be used for the sake of others, not for the sake of self-promotion. But then, that’s a matter of morality.
Works Cited


<http://rzim.org/just-thinking/think-again-deep-questions>
Artist Statement - Nathan Krishnan

This body of work is keenly interested in exploring human worth through discussing materialism and genocide. Perhaps the questions I have most consistently asked myself in the pursuit of creating have been 'what defines the worth of an individual and how should we treat them in light of that value?'. I believe this subject is inestimably worthy of evaluation, it governs how we think of, behave toward and interact with other humans. It is governed itself by our beliefs of origins, and therefore some of the works presented engage also with thoughts of beginnings, thoughts of ultimate origin.

Influential in the process are the varied literary, visual and musical works of C. S. Lewis, Rembrandt, W. H. Auden, The Civil Wars, Alister McGrath, the book of Genesis, as well as many others, too numerous and working too subconsciously to name.
As the sun falls into the sea
A young man leans on a spade
Shivering in short sleeves
How vacant he dreams
His heart creased in at the seams
From the dull weight of all that he’s seen
And the emptiness that evening brings
The shallow graves sing

Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’
Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’

A frail man sits in a chair
Empty and lost in a stare
Twitching and fidgeting
With weakened resolve
The blood fires inside of his veins
For the sweet burn to wash what remains
Of everything he can’t help but see
And the bottle it sings

Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’
Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’

Memories still cling in cold-sweat dreams. Some days
I swear it feels more like I buried them beneath my floor. I feel them prying at the boards there.
They are gone but they don’t leave.

Dust. If I dug them up I’d never find them, only the withering decay of what they used to be. I still miss them, but how could I love that, that something that would look so much now like dust.
But they are something else...

The dust now sings

Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’
Calling ‘lover, darling,
Come soon to me’
We were not who they'll say we were
In dim-lit classrooms.
We were not mere
Dust at a lightning's flailing-
Happenstance of an atmosphereless belch
Spawning it's way to existence
Feeding itself to form and from there to
Consciousness and from consciousness to greediness,
dominance- randomly, insatiably, and
This to the end of some
Self-imposed infringement on "Natural" processes- an
Imposition on the rules by which we made ourselves.

No. No, morality is so much more than a
Counteract to the force of violent Self-promotion for
the sake of societal possibility, more than a
Weight to slow "progress."

It is more because
We were more than the
Dust from which we were comprised
We were and are still luminous things
Vivacious and flickering Images
Of Something unimaginably dignified
(Sola Dei Gloria)

We had a worth unearned except by breath,
It is a thing too deep for scalpel or tool,
Shovel will not find its residue
Earth's bosom where our mortal frames were unmade
Does not now hold it

We were. Not who they will say we were
I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling in this world of woe
Yet there's no sickness, toil nor danger
In that bright land to where I go
I'm goin' there to see my Father
I'm goin' there no more to roam
I'm just a-goin' over Jordan
I'm just a-goin' over home

I'll soon be free from every trial
This form will rest beneath the dust
I'll drop this cross of self-denial
And enter in the home of God
I'm going there to see my Savior
To sing His praise forevermore
I'm just a-goin' over Jordan
I'm just a-goin' over home
Transliteration:
Kol od ba’lev v’p’rim
Neftsh yehudi ho’imiyah
U’lefa-atei mitzrah kadrimah
Ayin le’Tziyon tora’yah.

Odl lo zada tikva-teim
Hatikvah hay sh’nit al-payim
Lib-yot am chodi bi’ar-zeina
Erez Tziyon v’Yerushlayim.

Translation:
As long as within our hearts
The Jewish soul sings,
As long as forward to the East
To Zion, looks the eye.

Our hope is not yet lost,
It is two thousand years old,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.