

# Evolution, Evil, and the Theology of the Cross

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How do we identify God's action in the long history of biological evolution? The Creationists answer that no such thing as evolution has occurred; and God's action consists of creating the world in the beginning and establishing each of the species in its «kind». The Intelligent Design school answers that a transcendent designer is responsible for leaps in complexity within the evolutionary process, that what we see in nature reflects the intelligence of that divine designer. The scientific problem with these two schools of thought is that they fail to deal adequately with evidence for speciation through natural selection. The theological problem is that neither can handle adequately the theodicy problem. Once a theologian embraces the two key principles of the Darwinian model of evolution — random variation in inheritance and natural selection — the theodicy problem raises its ugly head.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to ask: where do we find divine action in an evolutionary world? Do we find God blessing the victors in the relentless struggle for survival-of-the-fittest? Does God crown the lion with a mane after downing the gazelle? Does God crown the species which adapted with a period of dominance, until it is trodden into extinction by its replacement species? Or, does

God identify with the weak, the losers, the unfit? Does God share in the fear of the gazelle during the death chase? Does God mourn the loss of species after species as they fossilize under the mud of geological history?

It is the question of purpose in nature that keeps the theologian up late at night. It is the bushel of questions surrounding loss, violence, disease, suffering, death, and extinction that put the bite on doctrines such as creation and providence. It is the theodicy question once again, the question of finding a gracious God within a violent and suffering creation.

<sup>1</sup> Francisco J. Ayala argues that theological acceptance of the Darwinian model actually resolves the theodicy problem, because it takes responsibility for the world's suffering away from God and places it on natural selection. «Predators and parasites, dysfunctions and diseases were a consequence of evolution ... not a result of deficient or malevolent design: the features of organisms were not designed by the Creator.» *Darwin's Gift to Science and Religion* (Washington DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2007) 5. Perhaps Ayala is right in asserting that the principle of natural selection rescues a creator God from guilt, but in this presentation I would like to explore the role of God as redeemer as well as creator.

In what follows I do not want to address the issues raised by creationists or intelligent design advocates. Rather, I would like to address a different kind of question, namely, given the long history of life's development according to the Darwinian conceptual model, how can we hold together our faith in a God of grace with what we know about predation, parasitism, violence, suffering, death, and extinction? Just how can we reconcile this picture of nature with our picture of God as almighty creator and loving provider? This is the theodicy question as we ask it within the framework of evolving evil.

On the one hand, we must accept Theodosius Dobzhansky's aphorism, «In biology nothing makes sense except in the light of evolution».<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, nothing in Christian theology makes sense except in the light of the cross and resurrection. How might these be brought together?

## The Darwinian Theodicy Problem

The key principle in today's Darwinian theory of evolution is the mechanism of natural selection, according to which a new species will evolve out of a previous one. Slight random differences in biological heredity will dispose some individuals more than others to withstand the threats and challenges of the environment. Those who survive to the age of reproduction will pass on their heritable characteristics. The genomes of those who die before they can make babies will disappear into the oblivion of nature's history. The genes that survive we call «adapted.» They are the fit. They have been selected by nature to advance forward.

Some inherited variations — what today we call genes — get selected for preservation. Others go extinct. Sociobiologists would like us to believe that it is the gene that drives evolutionary history. The gene — or, better, the DNA sequence — is selfish, so to speak. The gene's strong desire to replicate itself in organism after organism in perpetuity is what provides us with

our inheritance. What Darwin noticed was randomness in this inheritance. Environmental forces would then select from among the inherited characteristics, from among the genetic variations. In *Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin put it this way: «If variations useful to any organic being ever do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterized will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and from the strong principle of inheritance, these will tend to produce offspring similarly characterized. This principle of preservation, or the survival of the fittest, I have called Natural Selection.»<sup>3</sup>

Darwin's theory of natural selection seems to shine a revelatory light on the long trail life has traversed over deep time. He could wax eloquently about the complex beauty of nature as well as the advance of higher intelligence. «Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life ... from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.»<sup>4</sup>

Yet, a shadow follows this trail of light. New life depends on the death of the old. New species require the extinction of their predecessors and even their progenitors. The grandeur of evolved life seems to require the wanton sacrifice of discarded living creatures. One thing Charles Darwin himself noticed is that nature produces far more offspring than can survive to reproductive age. Nature is profligate, almost planning for widespread death to serve the larger purpose of selection. Because more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. This means that early death is scheduled for large numbers of

<sup>2</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Genetics of the Evolutionary Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London, John Murray, 6th ed., 1872) IV.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, XV.

those creatures who get born. Nature has no intention to draw each individual life toward fulfillment, toward actualizing its inborn potential. If suffering befalls the less than fully fit, nature sheds no tears. Nature is pitiless.

«Modern biology describes suffering as a necessary tool for living creatures to orient themselves in reality, or as by-products of this capacity,» writes Ulf Görman; «and death is necessary for evolution through variation and selective retention.»<sup>5</sup> Yet, we might ask: must it be so filled with terror, violence, misery, and waste? «The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation,» writes philosopher of science Michael Ruse. «During the minute it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive; others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear; others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites; thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst, and disease. It must be so.»<sup>6</sup>

The demand of the predator to kill and devour its prey is a ubiquitous part of this universal struggle. Reproducing requires living. Living requires eating. Eating requires killing. And the form that killing takes seems cruel and harsh and unnecessary. This observation haunts the theologian with the theodicy question: why would a God of grace build a machine that unceremoniously chews up and spits out sentient children? Francisco J. Ayala answers: no. «The human jaw is poorly designed, lions devour their prey, malaria parasites kill millions of humans every year and make 500 million sick. I do not attribute all this misery, cruelty, and destruction to the specific design of the Creator ... I rather see it as a consequence of the clumsy ways of the evolutionary process.»<sup>7</sup> One way to win in

the wrestling match with evil and suffering is to attribute it to the clumsy evolutionary process rather than to God the creator. Ayala suggests that this is Darwin's gift to theology.

Darwin himself wrestled with this very same theodicy problem: how does one perceive divine grace in a creation where so much unnecessary suffering is the order of the day, every day? In a letter, Darwin writes, «I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae [insects whose larvae are usually internal parasites of other insect larvae] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. Not believing this, I see no necessity in the belief that the eye was expressly designed.»<sup>8</sup> The violence of predation combined with massive extinctions led Darwin to use the term «waste» to describe nature's debris. Could waste on such a scale be reconciled with the love of God? Not according to Darwin. Better to attribute it to natural processes than to divine intention.

When Richard Dawkins confronts this issue, he gives no thought to reconciling nature's cruelty or waste with divine grace. He offers little sympathy to Darwin in his struggle. Why? Because we should not ask nature to be more than what it is, namely, pitiless. Darwin's «reference to the Ichneumonidae was aphoristic. The macabre habits to which he referred and are shared by their cousins the digger wasps. ... A

<sup>5</sup> Ulf Görman, «Introduction» to *Design and Disorder: Perspectives from Science and Theology*, edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen and Ulf Görman (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002) 5.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Ruse, «Darwinism: Foe or Friend?» in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen*, edited by F. LeFron Shults (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006) 231.

<sup>7</sup> Ayala, *Darwin's Gift*, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, edited by his son, Francis Darwin, 3 Volumes (London: John Murray, 1888) 2:311. Darwin's disciple, Thomas Huxley, also wrestled with the theodicy problem, solving it by eliminating God while decrying evil and suffering in nature. «Evil stares us in the face on all sides; that if anything is real, pain and sorrow and wrong are realities.» *Evolution and Ethics* (Amherst NY: Prometheus, 1896, 2004) 71. Neither Darwin nor Huxley sought to solve the theodicy problem by dubbing nature morally neutral.

female digger wasp not only lays her egg in a caterpillar (or grasshopper or bee) so that her larva can feed on it but ... she carefully guides her sting into each ganglion of the prey's central nervous system, so as to paralyze it *but not kill it*. This way, the meat keeps fresh. ... This sounds savagely cruel but ... nature is not cruel, only pitilessly indifferent. This is one of the hardest lessons for humans to learn.»<sup>9</sup>

Yes, indeed, Dr. Dawkins, this is one of the hardest lessons for humans to learn! It amounts to one of the most forceful challenges to belief in a loving and gracious God. What the person of faith confronts here is a form of the truth question. These days we do not search for apodictic truth; but we can ask for a better rather than a worse explanation. Let us ask, then: which explanation is the better one: the atheistic or the theological? The atheistic explanation would simply accept that nature is pitiless and without meaning. The theological explanation would accept that nature is pitiless but demand that it have meaning. Both need to deal honestly with the fact that new species emerge from the extinction of the old and that all creatures, including ourselves, can live only through killing. Just where does a God of grace or love or care fit into this picture of the world?

### Just what is the problem with suffering and evil?

As we drill beneath the layers of our understanding of suffering to ask whether or not it is evil, we need to acknowledge the complex and indispensable role death plays. Some living thing needs to die for others to live. Some living thing needs to be sacrificed if we are going to eat. The only non-living thing we human beings eat is salt, which comes from rocks. Everything else is a plant or an animal. Life feeds off life. This is the natural world we have inherited.

Many Christian families say table grace. These table prayers thank God for «daily bread.»

Come Lord Jesus  
Be our guest.  
Let these gifts  
To us be blest.  
Amen

America's annual Thanksgiving Day is a day of national gratitude for the bounty the farm land, the pastures, and the forests have provided for our sustenance. We hardly ever remind ourselves that our life is provided for by the death of so many living plants and animals. Christians right along with other religiously sensitive people express gratitude for those beings who died so that we might be nourished. One can imagine gratitude for daily bread from another point of view within the natural realm.

There once was a lady from Hyde,  
Who was carried away by the tide.  
A man-eating shark  
Was heard to remark,  
«I knew the Lord would provide.»

In addition to the death of one so that another might live, evolutionary history is replete with the extinction of one species to make room for a new one to take its place. If one believes in progress, extinction is a form of sacrifice that makes possible nature's advance. Without prior extinctions of many potential predators and predecessors, *homo sapiens* might not have evolved.

So, just what is the focus of this version of the theodicy problem? Christopher Southgate asks: is it pain? No, he answers. The sensitivity to pain we and other higher animals have is necessary for a richer experience. Is it death? No, he answers. Death is a thermodynamic necessity. Further, we cannot say death is evil if it follows a fulfilled life. Rather, says Southgate, the heart of the problem is that so many creatures are cut down mercilessly before they can experience the richness of a fulfilled life. Think of the newly born impala torn apart and devoured by the hyena. We cannot count the sufferers of predation and parasitism, including organisms for which life seems to contain no fullness, no expression of what it is to reach the potential inherent in being a creature. Indeed,

<sup>9</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Harper, Basic, 1995) 95–96.

nature's profligacy in producing far more babies than we could expect to survive means that snuffing out individuals long before fulfillment is the mass victimage perpetrated by evolution.<sup>10</sup>

## The Human Contribution to Evil and Suffering

Are our human propensities to sin by inflicting suffering on other creatures and on other human persons part of our genetic inheritance? Did the first Adam and Eve inherit an already established biological propensity to fight for survival, to kill competitors, real and imagined? If we *homo sapiens* share a common ancestor six million years ago with higher primates — such as chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, and orangutans — and if these species are capable of deceit, rape, murder, and even genocide, should we be surprised if our own species is similarly capable? What we find in these groups of primates, most intensely among chimpanzees, is organized gangs of males who protect territory and expand territory; and they are willing to kill all rivals, sometimes with savage disregard for the feelings of their victims. «Human savagery is not unique. It is shared by other party-gang species ... Our ape ancestors have passed to us a legacy, defined

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Southgate, «Creation as *Very Good* and *Groaning in Travail*: An Exploration in Evolutionary Theodicy,» *The Evolution of Evil*, edited by Gaymon Bennett, Martinez Hewlett, Ted Peters, and Robert John Russell (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming). A related problem to the one I am addressing here is whether pre-human evolutionary history provides precursors to human sinning. If this is the case, then animal behavior we witness today should demonstrate at least proto-sin. Denis Edwards is a theologian who would deny that such phenomena as animal territorialism or aggression (disordered behavior) is sin. *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) 65. Mark Worthing replies rhetorically, «But if this is not sin, then what, according to the theological tradition is sin?» «The Emergence of Guilt and «Sin» in Human Evolution: A Theological Reflection,» in *Sin and Salvation: Task of Theology Today III*, ed. by Duncan Reid and Mark Worthing (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2003) 116.

by the power of natural selection and written in the molecular chemistry of DNA.»<sup>11</sup>

If the human inclination toward violent behavior comes to us through our genes, might we identify our inheritance as a sort of original sin? At least, inherited sin? «The roots of all evil can be seen in natural selection, and are expressed (along with much that is good) in human nature,» writes sociobiologist Robert Wright. «The enemy of justice and decency does indeed lie in our genes.»<sup>12</sup>

If the selfish gene theory holds, might we have here an explanation for genocide? Might it be the case that members of families and clans and races identify with one another because of genetic proximity? Because they share a larger proportion of their DNA with this in-group? Might we unconsciously decide that other groups who are more genetically distant are competing with us for survival? Might we then devise a self-justification to go to war and wipe them out? Would we be able to say following a successful genocide: my genes made me do it?

<sup>11</sup> Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson: *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, Mariner Books, 1996) 198. The difference between human DNA and Chimp DNA is only 1.23%. See: Michael D. Lemonick and Andrea Dorfman, «What Makes Us Different? *Time* 168:15 (October 9, 2006) 44–53.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994) 151. Paleontologist Daryl P. Domning and Monika K. Hellwig find they can thank evolutionary theory for enhancing the concept of original sin. «Far from undermining the concept of original sin ... the evolutionary perspective underlies both its truth value and its practical relevance as never before.» *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in Light of Evolution* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006) 5. The stress here is on the continuity of the human race with its pre-human predecessors. This is at variance with the approach taken by Gustaf Wingren who operates with near neutrality regarding nature, placing the burden of evil solely on human shoulders. «Man is more depraved than the rest of Creation,» he writes. «But the things of creation are always purer than man is. Sin does not lie in the things that are created, but in man's use of them ... The problem is solely man.» *Creation and Law*, tr. by Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961) 41,44.

Theologian Patricia Williams leaps to the logical conclusion. «Under both group selection and kin selection, racism and genocide are natural. Only within groups is charity likely to flourish.»<sup>13</sup> So persuaded is Williams that she can say, «because sin remains central, science and Christianity can be united.»<sup>14</sup>

Williams relies on sociobiology, which many doubt to be a credible science. Still, the issue deserves attention, with or without sociobiology and its concept of the selfish gene. «While the roots of genocide and mass killing cannot be attributed solely to the deep traces of design left in the mind by natural selection,» comments James Waller, «people can no longer dismiss as an unsupportable theological or philosophical assumption that human nature has a dark side. Evil deeds are at least partially grounded in human nature. An impulse to do evil is not *the* defining characteristic of human nature, but the impulse is certainly within human capacity.»<sup>15</sup> Is it reasonable to say that the impulse we human beings have to perform evil acts and inflict suffering on others derives, at least in part, from our evolutionary inheritance?

<sup>13</sup> Patricia A. Williams, *Doing without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 134.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xv. Williams does away with the historical Adam and Eve when incorporating evolutionary genetics into her concept of original sin. Can one keep both while denying evolution? Theologian Charles E. Warren, repudiates evolutionary theory while still affirming a genetic influence (not genetic determinism) on human sin. Affirming a historical Adam and Eve, he holds that in our fallen state our genes have been altered by God so as to lead us toward death. This is consistent with St. Augustine's doctrine of original sin, says Warren. «Augustine clearly asserts that the biological impulses or desires of the body are at times vicious, inciting one to vice, and are but manifestations of the corruption of the flesh resulting from Adam's first sin ... Genetic science clearly serves as the handmaiden of theology and not as its adversary.» *Original Sin Explained? Revelations from Human Genetic Science* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002) 132–133.

<sup>15</sup> James E. Waller, «The Ghost in the Machine,» *Science and Theology News*, (July/August 2006) 28.

Waller would certainly say, yes, with regard to our strong inclination to divide the human race into in-groups and out-groups, into friends and enemies. «We have an evolved capacity to see our group as superior to all others and even to be reluctant to recognize members of other groups as deserving of equal respect. Some even suggest that our tendency to divide the world into «us» and «them» is one of the few true human universals.»<sup>16</sup> It is this habit of dividing others into friends and enemies that leads us to justify going to war, and even on rare occasions, genocide.

Sin is a human act that produces evil. Evil is an event that produces suffering. The problem with sin and evil is that someone eventually suffers. Has our evolved inheritance led us to the point where we are genetically disposed to inflict suffering? Is suffering so built into our evolutionary biology that no alternative form of living is conceivable? Should we offer thanksgiving to natural selection for making us this way?

## Theistic Evolution and the Root of Evil

Might a theologian want to absorb into his or her religious vision this evolutionary picture of the human race? Could the theory of evolution influence Christian anthropology? Theistic evolutionists would answer, yes. «Theologians should acknowledge that it is this kind of genetically based creature God has actually created as a human being through the evolutionary process,» declares Arthur Peacocke.<sup>17</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg almost celebrates evolution: «the stages of the evolution of life may be seen as the stages of its increasing complexity and intensity and

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Peacocke, «The Challenge and Stimulus of the Epic of Evolution to Theology,» in *Many Worlds: The New Universe, Extraterrestrial Life, and the Theological Implications*, edited by Steven Dick (Philadelphia and London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000) 99.

therefore of a growing participation of the creatures in God.»<sup>18</sup>

The term *theistic evolution* does not refer to a tightly organized school of thought parallel to either Scientific Creationism or Intelligent Design.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it refers to a loose federation of theological thinkers who take as their task searching for ways to treat both the science of evolution and the commitments of the Christian faith with integrity. Modes of integrating science with faith differ, even if the overall goal is shared. Gordon Kaufman seems to share in this self-appointed task. «I propose what I call a bio-historical understanding of the human, one that takes account of, and holds together both the biological grounding of human existence in the web of life on planet Earth and the many different sorts of historical development of humankind in and through the growth, over thousands of generations, of the varied sociocultural patterns of life around the planet.»<sup>20</sup>

Among the theistic evolutionists who confront squarely our genetic inheritance of a predisposition toward evil and suffering, we find Robert John Russell, founder and director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, California. According to Russell's version of «theistic evolution ... God creates the world *ex nihilo* with certain fundamental laws and natural constants, and God acts everywhere in time and space as continuous creator (*creatio continua*) in, with, and through the processes of nature. God's action is trustworthy and we describe the results through these laws of nature. The result is the evolution of life. In essence, evolution is how God is creating life.»<sup>21</sup>

One of the unique contributions to discussions within theistic evolution is Russell's sug-

gestion that the roots of evil can be found in the physical processes that underlie our inherited biological processes. Original sin originated in our physical substrate, so to speak. «We evolved out of nature with capacities that are both emergent and genuinely new, and yet in some ways based are on and continuous with precursor capacities in the animal world that preceded us — like elementary forms of reason and altruistic-like behavior. Perhaps we can look even farther back in the history of life on earth, and even farther down into the physics underlying that history, to find additional precursors (precursors of precursors) that lay the grounds for the eventual possibility of moral behavior in humankind. I call this approach «the fall without the fall», for it tries to account for the rise of moral behavior, and its brokenness in sin, as genuinely novel in the human species, and yet as arising without a total break in the evolution of humankind from previous forms of life.»<sup>22</sup> Our disposition toward sin is rooted in natural evil; and natural evil is rooted in the biology we have inherited from our evolutionary history; and, in addition, this evolutionary history is rooted in a more fundamental and physical set of processes.

Of these physical processes, Russell singles out one, namely, entropy. In thermodynamic systems, of which evolutionary biology is one, the dissipation of energy is inescapable. Entropy is a property of things as they decay, dissolve, and die. «Perhaps, then, we have indeed found a precursor in physics to natural evil: entropy.»<sup>23</sup> What we have inherited in our genes was previously inherited from the long history of evolution; and evolution inherited the thermodynamics of death from its physical predecessor, thermodynamics of which one key feature is entropy. What Russell has done is push back the source of what we might think of evil and suf-

<sup>18</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, tr. by Geoffrey W. Bromily, 3 Volumes (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991–1998) 2:133.

<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the various religious interpretations of evolution including theistic evolution, see Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Louisville KY: Abingdon Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman, *God, Mystery, Diversity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 74.

<sup>21</sup> Robert John Russell, *Cosmology, Evolution, and Resurrection Hope: Theology and Science in Creative Mutual Interaction*, edited by Carl S. Helrich on behalf of the Fifth Annual Goshen Conference on Religion and Science (Kirchener, Ontario: Pandora Press and Adelaide, South Australia: ATF Press, 2006) 28.

<sup>22</sup> Russell, *Cosmology*, 30–31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

fering to a pre-evolutionary stage in cosmic history, to the physics that constrained while making possible the course of biological development. Whether from evolution or from entropy, our propensity for violence and, hence, for inflicting suffering, is something we have inherited.

Russell goes on to say thermodynamics plays a positive role, too, since it underlies the good things in life. It makes evolution possible. Hence thermodynamics is an ambiguous or ambivalent feature of nature, underlying both good and evil in human behavior. No doubt what we experience as evil and suffering derive from an ambiguity built into the substrate of our physical nature.

## Alternative Answers to the Question of Evolving Evil

How should we answer the theologian's question: where does a God of grace or love or care fit into an evolutionary world? To this one question I can easily suggest three possible answers: (1) atheism and altruism; (2) divine kenosis combined with positing freedom as a higher value than suffering; (3) the Theology of the Cross combined with the theology of new creation. Let us look at them in turn.

### The First Answer: Atheism and Altruism

As we have seen, Richard Dawkins provides the atheistic answer. Nature is without purpose, without meaning, and without care. It is pitiless. Darwin's theory of natural selection demonstrates this point. No divine designer or director or provider is on the scene to add something nature herself does not provide. All that we have is what nature gives us. To ask for anything more would be unreasonable. We should grow up, become reasonable, and simply accept this fact. This need not be reconciled with a God of grace, because no such God exists.

Now, we might ask: what kind of ethic would be based upon such a godless view of evolution? One would expect an ethic of *laissez*

*faire capitalism*, a social ethic that applauds the fittest who defeat their competitors to survive. We would expect racism and genocide. If no God exists and if nature is our only source for moral guidance, then we should expect a Nietzschean ethic that dispenses with the weak and celebrates the «will to power.» Yet, this is not the route Dawkins takes us. Rather, Dawkins embraces all the values of the modern Enlightenment: human equality, the pursuit of justice, and even care for the victims of discrimination. Dawkins says that our evolutionary history programmed us not just for survival but also for «the urge to kindness — to altruism, to generosity, to empathy, to pity.»<sup>24</sup> And if that is not enough, Dawkins further says that we can overcome our genetic determinism and achieve an ethical standard that transcends our biological inheritance. Now, we might ask, how did we get to this kind of ethic from this kind of natural inheritance?

Dawkins distinguishes between the selfish gene and the less-than-selfish organism. Just because genes are selfish, organisms need not be. Selfishness in the Darwinian and Dawkinsian sense is understood simply as the desire to replicate. «A gene is a replicator with high copying-fidelity.»<sup>25</sup> Gene replication is the driving force of natural selection. Those genes which get copied and passed on win in the game of survival-of-the-fittest. The genes that survive are those that get copied and repeated.

Now, the organism which the genes have created to carry them from one generation to another need not be selfish in the same way. «We have the power to defy the selfish genes,» says Dawkins. We can behave in altruistic ways. We can deliberately cultivate «pure, disinterested altruism — something that has no place in nature.»<sup>26</sup>

Dawkins strains to separate the gene from the organism, so that the selfishness of the gene does not automatically transfer to the selfishness

<sup>24</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006) 221.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, 1989) 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.



of the individual organism. «The whole idea of the selfish gene ... is that the unit of natural selection (i.e., the unit of self-interest) is not the selfish organism, nor the selfish group or selfish species or selfish ecosystem, but the selfish *gene*.»<sup>27</sup> Then he proceeds to list four ways in which organisms may function altruistically. Even though driven by selfish genes, the social habits of individuals or groups may not in themselves be selfish: (1) *kin altruism* is a form of self-sacrifice on the part of some individuals for other individuals who carry the same DNA, with the result that the shared DNA sequences get passed on; (2) *reciprocal altruism* applies to one group of organisms that cooperate for the benefit of another group which does not share the same DNA, with the result that both groups survive; (3) enhancing social power through conspicuous generosity, resulting in a reputation for dominance or superiority, thereby attracting mates and passing on genes; and (4) employing this reputation for buying advertising within the group, and increasing the opportunity for mating and gene continuance.<sup>28</sup> These final two look a lot alike; both operate at the level of the organism in its respective society, where the chances of its genes' survival are enhanced through the attractiveness of generosity to potential mates.

What Dawkins has established here, in his own mind, is a list of precedents within nature that could lead to a leap in altruism beyond what nature bequeaths to us. We human beings can get beyond the limitations of simply serving the selfish need of the gene. We can cultivate the «urge to kindness — to altruism, to generosity, to empathy, to pity. In ancestral times, we had the opportunity to be altruistic only towards close kin and potential reciprocators. Nowadays, that restriction is no longer there.» From a strict Darwinian point of view, was altruism a necessary step in evolutionary development? No. It

<sup>27</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 215.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 219–220. For more on the relation of kin altruism to reciprocal altruism, see: Robin Dunbar, «Social Behaviour and Evolutionary Theory,» *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution*, edited by Steve Jones, Robert Martin, and David Pilbeam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 145–147.

was a misfire or a mistake, something like an unnecessary mutation. Yet, we can be thankful for such leaps beyond genetic selfishness. Disinterested care for others belongs in the category of «misfirings, Darwinian mistakes: blessed, precious mistakes».<sup>29</sup>

## Jesus and Altruism

Dawkins admits that an ethic of self-sacrificial love is non-Darwinian. Can self-sacrificial altruism be reconciled with survival-of-the-fittest?<sup>30</sup> John Teehan tries. He extends the Dawkins logic by applying it to Jesus' apparent denial of reciprocal altruism in favor of loving the other as other. Teehan strives to lodge all morality and all religion in evolutionary biology. Like Dawkins, he wants to deny any transcendent grounding to either morality of religion. Our biological nature is the sole source of our moral values, and religion functions to provide an unnecessary though handy supernatural reinforcement of moral maxims. These moral values and maxims serve reproductive fitness, indirectly guided by kin selection and reciprocal altruism within a cohesive social group. «Religious ethics are grounded in a moral logic that is itself grounded in nature. ... From an evolutionary perspective religious morality provides a vehicle for extending the evolutionary mechanisms for morality — kin selection and reciprocal altruism.»<sup>31</sup>

How might Jesus fit into a biologically grounded system of religious ethics? Jesus appears to defy our genetically determined pre-

<sup>29</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 221.

<sup>30</sup> Can psychological altruism, understood as concern for the welfare of others regardless of its role in one's own reproductive fitness, be seen as an outgrowth of evolutionary mechanisms? Yes, say Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson. «An ultimate concern for the welfare of others is among the psychological mechanisms that evolved to motivate adaptive behavior.» *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998) 7.

<sup>31</sup> John Teehan, «The Evolutionary Basis of Religious Morality,» *Zygon* 41:3 (September 2006) 748, 758.

ference for our own kin and our own in-group. Jesus enjoins us to love God and love others, even if such love is costly to ourselves. Does Jesus advocate a non-reciprocal altruism that contradicts evolutionary morality? Teehan answers no and yes. First, the no. When it comes to Jesus' Golden Rule — to do unto others as you would have them do unto you — Teehan can easily interpret this as tit-for-tat. It is consistent with reciprocal altruism. It serves reproductive fitness. The Golden Rule seems easy to absorb into evolutionary morality.

What about Jesus' teaching that we should love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)? This is more difficult. To love one's enemy means that one risks sacrificing the reproductive fitness of the in-group. When Jesus says, «if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also» (Matthew 5:39), Teehan can only conclude that such «advice is certainly at variance with the principles of reciprocal altruism.»<sup>32</sup> So, how can Teehan lasso Jesus and bring him into the evolutionary corral? By distinguishing between what Jesus taught, on the one hand, and how his disciples have behaved, on the other. Christians simply do not turn the other cheek. Rather, Christians, just like every other religious in-group, defend themselves at the expense of their enemies. «I would claim that the history of Christianity is filled with examples (such as the crusades, the inquisition, and the persecution of heretics and Jews) that speak to the power of the underlying evolutionary logic to overwhelm attempts to develop moral attitudes contrary to it (for example, «turn the other cheek»). The response of Christians in history to enemies and to attacks has often been much more in line with the psychology of evolutionary morality than with these particular teachings of Jesus. This is not so much a condemnation of Christianity as it is a lesson on the difficulty of moving beyond these evolutionarily ingrained moral predispositions.»<sup>33</sup>

What Teehan is saying, in effect, is that the moral values we would expect to rise up from our evolutionary nature would lead to crusades,

inquisitions, and persecutions of heretics and Jews. That Jesus taught us to do otherwise places Jesus outside the pale of evolutionary ethics. A non-transcendent ethic rooted in evolution can only expect to further the interests of one's own reproductive fitness by pitting one's in-group against genetic competitors. Both Dawkins and Teehan are naturalists, yet the latter is more willing to remain within a survival-of-the-fittest ethic than the former.

Naturalist philosopher Holmes Rolston III would agree that the roots of our modern ethics lie in our genetic inheritance; but, unlike Dawkins or Teehan, we cannot reduce our complex human culture to its genetic history. «There are precursor animal roots [to ethics], but few will claim that morality is «nothing but» genetically determined animal behavior.»<sup>34</sup> Cultural epigenesis rides on top of biological genesis.

Rolston cautions us to avoid accepting a second best grade of altruism. If one wants to embrace Christian *agape* love in its fullest sense, then no evolutionary precedent can account for it. «A genuinely altruistic sense ... a person acts, on the moral account, intending to benefit others at cost to himself or herself, and on the genetic account, increasing the likelihood of the aided person's having offspring over one's having them.»<sup>35</sup> Kin altruism or reciprocal altruism are poor substitutes for genuine altruism — *agape* love — because they are secretly forms of the selfish gene in action. «All that natural selection permits is forms of quasi altruism that are actually self-interest.»<sup>36</sup> Sociobiologists such as Dawkins and E.O. Wilson have «the problem of generating generosity. Selfish genes are never generous beyond expedience; that is the core of sociobiological theory.»<sup>37</sup>

What Rolston like Dawkins wants to do is root or ground our highest ethical aspirations in our evolutionary history. Both are naturalists,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 763.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 763.

<sup>34</sup> Holmes Rolston III, *Genes, Genesis, and God: Values and their Origins in Natural and Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 228.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 267.

although Dawkins is the only atheist. Yet, their positions are similar. For Rolston, to move from the drive to survive to self-sacrificial dimensions of a moral ideal is the move from what «is» to what «ought» to be. More than genesis, we need epigenesis. «We inherit these selfish genes, but from somewhere too we inherit genes that prompt us to sympathy, to mutual care, and to cooperation, and from somewhere we ... get enough mental power to reflect over our evolutionary genes and to generate an ethic about what *ought* to be in the light of this *is*.»<sup>38</sup>

Even though Rolston along with Dawkins and Teehan are naturalists, Rolston is a committed Christian who emphasizes slightly more the extra-genetic advance into cultural determinants for explaining human behavior. When it comes to our propensity for violence, evil, and suffering, Rolston grants that much of this is genetically inherited. Yet, at the cultural level, we humans have turned ordinary killing into the sin of murder combined with the giant proscription: we «ought» to do otherwise. «Human cultural inheritance requires experiences super-to-the-genetic, super-to-the natural, that is, beyond the previous attainment and power of biology. ... Killing is not new in the world; primates have killed each other for millennia in the defense of their genetic lines. But murder is new in the world; the human has risen to an option to do otherwise and therefore ought to do otherwise.»<sup>39</sup> Theologian Mark Worthing would agree with Rolston. Altruism along with «the sense of sin and the feeling of guilt serve in the first instance to promote and secure the survival of civilization and only secondarily of the species.»<sup>40</sup>

If we would wish to construct a theological anthropology with a corresponding ethic on the foundation laid by evolution as the sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists see it, what would it look like? Charlene P.E. Burns provides an image of expanding circles of altruistic expression. With each ring in the expansion, we

get further away from the hegemony of the selfish gene and closer to serving the other as other. «If we read science through the lens of Christian theology ... we see an ever-widening altruistic impulse first expressed genetically in the drive toward optimizing survival. The impulse ripples outward in rudimentary forms to find expression as biological altruism, and then gains momentum as it reaches expression in human experience, where the altruistic impulse is now propelled forward through cultural evolution.»<sup>41</sup> Such an incorporation of the sociobiological interpretation of altruism assigns to Jesus an evolutionary role. Jesus marks an advance forward in moral progress. «In Jesus, «the first fruits» of a possible future humanity are revealed. Only now do we perhaps see hints of the next stage of development. As the altruistic drive slowly breaks down the barriers of in-group selection it also has begun to extend its reach beyond the human, to encompass care for other species and for the earth itself.»<sup>42</sup>

In summary, what we find in this first alternative is a two step argument. First, nature does not have any values built in from its point of origin. Nature is amoral. It may appear cruel to us, but that is because we look at nature through moral lenses. Second, the history of nature has led to the development of a moral consciousness and conscience. We are it. We are the result of an evolutionary process which brought moral judgment to natural history. Through evolution we have risen above our beginnings. Holmes Rolston says, «Morality is not intrinsic to natural systems. In fact, there are no moral agents in wild nature. Nature is amoral, but that is not to disparage it. ... Amoral nature is fundamentally and radically the ground, the root out of which arise all the particular values manifest in organisms. This includes all human values, even though, when they come, human values rise higher than their precedents in spontaneous nature.»<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>40</sup> Worthing, «The Emergence of Guilt and Sin in Human, 122.

<sup>41</sup> Charlene P.E. Burns, «Self-Sacrificial Love: Evolutionary Deception of Theological Reality?» *Cross Currents*, 57:1 (Spring 2007) 112.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 114.

When theologians try to integrate New Testament commitments with such examples of evolutionary naturalism, Jesus ends up playing the role of the one who introduces an evolutionary advance in altruism. Jesus' ethic of love for the other without expectation of reciprocity is judged to be an advance, yet still on the single evolutionary path.

## The Second Answer: Evil as a Means to a Further Good

We turn now to the second in our series of three contemporary answers to the evolutionary theodicy question. We turn to a school within the loose federation of theologians here called «theistic evolution,» namely, to the kenotic theologians. I try to sum up this position as an appeal to *divine kenosis combined with valuing freedom higher than suffering*. In contrast to atheism combined with altruism, this answer is theistic. It affirms God as creator. It affirms that God, not nature, is the source and ground of the good.

In its contemporary form, we know this school of thought as kenotic theology. But, somewhat hidden in its own evolutionary development is its ancient predecessor, namely, the Christian concept of evil as the *privatio boni* — that is, the privation of the good. In this theological tradition, what is good is identified with being. The highest good is the fullest being. Subordinate goods can be pressed into the service of higher goods. Let me explain.

It was Augustine who most fully articulated the principle of evil as the privation of the good, *privatio boni*. «For what is that which we call evil but the absence of the good?»<sup>44</sup> One can have something that is purely good; but never something that is purely evil. Evil is always a parasite off what is good, always a distortion or corruption or even destruction of what is good.

According to this North African bishop, to be is to be good. Being is by definition good. To

lose being is to lose goodness. To drop from being into nonbeing is to die, to depart from the realm of the good. What we experience in the struggle for survival on an every day basis is the tension between being and nonbeing, between the good that is and its dissolution or disappearance. «Every being, therefore, is a good; a great good, if it cannot be corrupted; a little good, if it can: but in any case, only the foolish or ignorant will deny that it is a good. And if it be wholly consumed by corruption, then the corruption itself must cease to exist, as there is no being left in which it can dwell.»<sup>45</sup> This applies to the relationship between health and disease in the animal world. «In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present — namely, the diseases and wounds — go away from the body and dwell elsewhere; they altogether cease to exist; the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance — the flesh itself being a substance and therefore something good, of which those evils — that is, privations of the good which we call healthy — are accidents.»<sup>46</sup>

When we turn to the sufferings of the created world, slung in the metaxic tension between being and nonbeing, Augustine affirms what ought always to be thought of as good. Even if we suffer, we are good by virtue of our existence. This applies to all living things. Even in the face of corruption or suffering or dissolution, what we deem evil is redeemed, so to speak, when taken up into the comprehensive ensemble which constitutes the universe in its entirety. Individual suffering is a part of a much larger whole, which is good. «Taken as a whole, however, they are very good, because their *ensemble* constitutes the universe in all its wonderful order and beauty.»<sup>47</sup> The beauty of the whole redeems the corruption of the part. The good of the whole of creation redeems the suffering of its individual constituents.

<sup>43</sup> Rolston, *Genes, Genesis, and God*, 286–287.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1961) XI, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, p.11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, X, p.11.

Thomas Aquinas takes this a step further, arguing that what we experience as evil could positively contribute to a richer and fuller good. Evil is a means to an enhanced good end. «If all evil were prevented much good would be absent from the universe. A lion would cease to live if there were no slaying of animals, and there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution.»<sup>48</sup>

Augustine and Thomas appear to be somewhat sanguine, almost rejoicing at the dialectic between being and nonbeing, between good and evil. Yet, for those of us in a post-Darwinian era, where we are acutely conscious of the overwhelming role played by suffering, death, and extinction, we wrestle. Theologians wrestle with the difficulty of reconciling death with life, destruction with existence, disappearance with redemption. Langdon Gilkey formulates the difficulty in existential terms. «The most baffling and most pressing problem for reflection is the opposition and yet the unity of life and death, of value and the threats to value, of the positive and its negation, of being and of nonbeing. No one escapes this painful and disturbing problem.»<sup>49</sup> Can the *privatio boni* come to the rescue?

The flip side of the *privatio boni* is the affirmation that, if it has being, it's good. To exist and to suffer is better than not existing at all. This is a fundamental premise, obviated only by those whose suffering is so grave that they elect suicide to escape it. Might we say that to live even for a short while and suffer is better than to

have never lived at all? Will that take care of the theodicy problem?

## Kenosis and the Free Will Defense

The *privatio boni* is the background. Now, let's move to the foreground. As contemporary theologians wrestle with the theodicy question in light of evolutionary theory, many put forth the kenosis hypothesis. Our word *kenosis* comes from <sup>NRS</sup> Philippians 2:5 «Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.» To empty oneself or to deny to oneself divinity is that to which the word *kenosis* refers.

Note that the kenotic figure here is the second person of the Trinity, the Son, who empties himself of the Father's divinity in order to become incarnate, to suffer, and to die. Jesus Christ de-divinizes himself, so to speak, in order to become Emmanuel, God with us.

Now, does this process of de-divinization apply to the Father? No, not in this text. Might a theologian apply it to the first person of the Trinity? Today's neo-kenotic theologians say, yes. This is the move made by Nancey Murphy and George Ellis. «While the origin of the term was in Christology — it was used to explain how the divine nature could be reconciled with Jesus' humanness — it is now used to refer to God's self-limitation and self-sacrifice and to God's involvement in the suffering of creation.»<sup>50</sup> This move leads to two applications of theology to an evolutionary interpretation of creation. By self-limiting, God withdraws both omnipotence and omniscience from the world of creatures, thereby empowering creatures to evolve by natural means. Creatures can create their own world, so to speak; the world engages in self-organization

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Q.22: A.2. Gustaf Aulén fears that evil cannot yield to a rational explanation, even if we affirm that evil can become a means to a higher good. «All attempts to explain evil rationally are therefore foreign to faith ... [Faith] is not interested in <theodices> ... Faith has, however, no deeper insight into God's relation to evil than the conviction that he is able to make evil serve the purposes of his love.» *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960) 177.

<sup>49</sup> Langdon Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 189.

<sup>50</sup> Nancey Murphy and George F.R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 175.

or autopoiesis. Biological evolution is the form of self-organization this world has taken. Second, as we can see in this quotation, kenosis makes God vulnerable to suffering with the suffering of earth's creatures.

By withdrawing divine power, God opens up space for creatures to exert power. By withdrawing divine power, God opens up space for creaturely freedom. The absence of God is what makes our free activities possible. Jürgen Moltmann puts it this way: «In order to create a world <outside> himself, the infinite God must have made room beforehand for a finitude in himself. It is only a withdrawal by God into himself that can free the space into which God can act creatively.»<sup>51</sup> This creative self-restriction by God makes our contribution to continuing creation possible.

God has created the world with a dynamic interchange of law with chance; and this means God has not pre-programmed every event. Contingency is built right into the dynamics of our world; and contingency is the prerequisite for freedom. What accounts for the specific path that evolution has taken is the contingency and freedom God has provided to the created order. Suffering along the way is a means to a higher good, namely, a community of free individuals. «God purposes to bring about a greater good thereby namely, the kingdom of free-willing, loving persons in communion with God and with each other,» is the way Arthur Peacocke puts it.<sup>52</sup> He adds, «This self-limitation is the precondition for the coming into existence of free self-conscious human beings ... The cost to God, if we may dare so to speak, was in that act of self-limitation, of *kenosis*, which constitutes God's creative action — a self-inflicted vulnerability to the very processes God had himself

created in order to achieve an overriding purpose, the emergence of free persons.»<sup>53</sup>

The kenotic God is noncoercive. God allows for the world to exist with freedom. «God's nature is essentially kenotic, as is demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus and in particular by his death on the cross.»<sup>54</sup> «Just as sin is a necessary byproduct of the creation of free and intelligent beings, suffering and disorder are necessary byproducts of a noncoercive creative process that aims at the development of free and intelligent beings.»<sup>55</sup>

This brand of kenotic theology thus handles the theodicy problem by placing suffering and evil on the list of byproducts brought about by the world's own evolutionary self-organization. God did not create suffering and evil. God could not create suffering and evil, because these are the forces of nonbeing. God is responsible for what is, not what is not. With one exception. God's self-withdrawal opens up a cavity of nonbeing into which creaturely contingency and freedom can enter. God made suffering and evil possible, but God did not directly will them as such.

The good toward which all things strive is the creation of intelligent and free human beings. Suffering and evil are the price God was willing to pay for us to evolve, for us to arrive at the point in biohistory where we could respond freely to God in love. God could not program free creatures; because to do so would eliminate the very freedom he desired. All God could do was make freedom possible. We had to do the rest.

Well, not quite. God remains a partner in continuing creation, *creatio continua*. S. Mark Heim lifts our sights to a destiny yet to come.

<sup>51</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985) 86. Pannenberg is critical. «The different interpretation of <nothing> by J. Moltmann, which rests on Jewish speculation and which identifies it as the space that God gives creatures as he himself withdraws....must also be rejected as a materially unfounded mystification of the subject.» *Systematic Theology*, 2: 14–15.

<sup>52</sup> Peacocke, «Challenge,» 108.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 123–124. At points Pannenberg takes up the free will defense. «The Creator accepts the risk of sin and evil as a condition of realizing the goal of a free fellowship of the creatures with himself. God did not will wickedness and evil as such. He could not take pleasure in them. They are not an object of his will.» *Systematic Theology*, 2: 167.

<sup>54</sup> Murphy and Ellis, 94.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

«God determines the world to be undetermined. It is out of God's hands, in the sense that God has freely forsaken the role of being the only decider. But the destiny of creation as a whole is not out of God's hands, for the universal salvific will remains a co-determiner of the ends of *all* creatures.»<sup>56</sup> It is not clear here whether God's self-abandonment will continue to enhance our freedom, or whether God will curtail our freedom just to insure that this destiny is attained.

## The Kenotic Ethics of the Free Will Defense

Before moving on to a critique of the neo-kenotic position, let us ask: what kind of ethic correlates with this theological anthropology? An ethic of genuine altruism or, better, *agape* love? If we ground our ethics in the evolution of freedom, might this justify love toward the other for the sake of the other, not expecting any reciprocity?

At Columbia University's Center for the Study of Science and Religion, molecular biologist Robert Pollack provides a minimalist ethic derived from the observation that evolution has led to freedom and that all life forms are interdependent. Our freedom is a gift of biological evolution; and an ethic that extends «the minimum amount of respect and love that is the only fully human relationship» would carry us beyond the «meaninglessness» of evolution's «mechanisms.»<sup>57</sup> Now, can we go further? For a maximalist ethic, Murphy and Ellis add divine kenosis to the natural explanation for the rise of freedom. This carries us dramatically further. The kenotic understanding of God's relation to the natural world leads to a human commitment to pacifism. Freely chosen kenotic love entails self-giving; and this takes the form of refusal to engage in violent behavior, even self-defense.

<sup>56</sup> S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001) 77.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Pollack, «Intelligent Design, Natural Design, and the Problem of Meaning in the Natural World,» *Cross Currents*, 57:1 (Spring 2007) 134–135.

Now, we might ask: would an ethic of self-giving love or even pacifism cohere at all with our inherited propensity for violence? «Given our close connections to animal kin, I do not believe that we could explain how morality ever got off the ground in humans without any precursors in animals,» writes Nancey Murphy. However, Murphy does not draw a straight line from our natural precursors to our modern ideal of disinterested love toward our neighbor. A «moral ambiguity of biology» remains inescapable.<sup>58</sup> If we are to know that altruism is actually a good — a good worth sacrificing for — it must be grounded in something more than merely a misfire of Darwinian evolution. It must be grounded in the God who transcends nature. The God Murphy knows is loving in character. She even goes so far as to describe God as kenotically loving, i.e., as self-emptying. «God's nature is essentially kenotic, as is demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus and in particular by his death on the cross. The implication is that there should be a kenotic response by men and women who are made in the image of God, mirroring this kenotic nature and reflecting it in their relations to each other and to God.»<sup>59</sup>

## A Critique of Neo-Kenotic Theology<sup>60</sup>

I would like to mention three criticisms I have of the neo-kenotic approach. First, the new kenotic theologians have yet to articulate a way to make their emphasis on freedom compatible with the idea that we have inherited in our genes the propensity for violence, evil, and suffering. This evolutionary inheritance appears to be a form of genetic determinism, not freedom. If freedom is the alleged divine goal of God's kenotic activity and of nature's self-organizing capacity, then

<sup>58</sup> Murphy, «Is Altruism Good?»

<sup>59</sup> Nancey Murphy and George F.R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 194.

<sup>60</sup> I refer to this contemporary school as «neo-kenotic» because in late nineteenth century Germany a school of «kenotic theology» appeared briefly.

why are we in moral bondage to our genetic past?

Second, I believe the scriptural basis for applying kenosis to the first person of the Trinity and to the doctrine of creation is insufficient. The very passage on which the concept is derived, Philippians 2:5–8, describes the second person divesting himself of the divinity belonging to the first person. No mention of the first person engaging in self-limitation or de-divinizing appears. So, no scriptural warrant exists to apply kenosis to God the Father.

Might one apply kenosis to «God,» if by «God» we meant the Godhead, or the Trinity? Well, yes, to be sure. The actions of the Son apply to the actions of God in Godself. If this is what is being said by the kenotic theologians, then they might get by with it.

Even so, we confront a third problem, this time a problem with systematic theology. It has to do with power. It appears that the kenotic theologians make a false assumption about the nature of God's power. They assume that for creatures to have power and hence freedom that God needs to withdraw. If God is omnipotent and possessing all power, then, they assume, we creatures have none. God's omnipotence is a form of tyranny. So, if God withdraws through self-limitation, then we can take advantage of the power vacuum. Only if God lacks power in the world can we have the power to exercise our freedom. For us to be free, God must be absent.<sup>61</sup>

The neo-kenotic theologians seem to presume that there exists a fixed amount of power in the universe, like there is a fixed number of gallons of gasoline. If God gets more, we get less. If we get more, God gets less. Only if we have enough of what God does not have can we drive our Toyota wherever we choose to go. Perhaps this applies to human drivers, where one person has the power to go further than another. But, I do not believe it applies to God.

When I read scripture, it appears to me that it is the very exertion of God's power that leads to human freedom. God's power empowers us. In the case of the Exodus, for example, God heard the cries of the oppressed slaves in Egypt. God then exerted divine power in order to liberate them from the chains of their taskmasters.

<sup>NRS</sup> Deuteronomy 5:15 «Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.» Had God decided to be kenotic and withdraw, the Hebrews would have remained helpless in their slavery. Only by exerting power with «a mighty hand and an outstretched arm» could liberation be achieved.

To cite a second example, the Pentecostal experience, even for Christians today, is one of divine empowerment. <sup>NRS</sup> Acts 1:8 «But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.» It appears to me that a Christian theologian should perceive the difference between God's empowerment of us and other more human forms of competitive power. Therefore, it is a mistake, in my judgment, to rewrite the doctrine of creation in such a way that God's absence replaces God's presence in the creative process.

Christopher Southgate offers a criticism similar to mine. If the neo-kenotic theologians presume all power is of a single type and that God and creatures compete for it, then this makes them incompatibilists — that is, they cannot accept the idea that God's actions could be co-present to our creaturely free actions. «It is now

<sup>61</sup> One might interpret Pannenberg as opposing the assumptions at work in this kenotic interpretation of divine omnipotence. «It is easy ... to be misled by the abstract idea of unlimited power into a confusion of God's lordship with the excessive omnipotence of tyranny. This misunderstanding arises when we set God's power as omnipotence in antithesis to others who have power ... But the power of God has no precondition outside itself. One of its features is that it brings forth that over which it has power. Only as the Creator can God be almighty ... as the acts of the Creator they are still oriented beyond destruction to the life of his creatures.» *Systematic Theology*, 1:416. Yet, elsewhere, Pannenberg interprets the kenosis of the Son within the Trinitarian life as the initiation of a creation distinct from the Father. «This self-emptying of the Son (Phil. 2:6–7) is also to be understood as the self-actualizing of the deity of the trinitarian God in its relation to the world that comes into being thereby.» *Ibid.*, 421. The Father surrenders his lordship to permit distinction and freedom for the creation.



my contention that the language of kenosis in creation tends to arise out of commitment to a questionable spatial metaphor for the God-world relation — the alleged need for God to «make space» within Godself for the created world and/or an also questionable commitment to incompatibilism — the notion that the free actions of creatures are incompatible with the involvement of God in every event.»<sup>62</sup>

As Southgate develops his own position within theistic evolution, he applies kenosis within the Trinity to the self-opening of the Father to permit the dynamics of the Son and the creation through the Logos. The intra-trinitarian perichoresis is the foundation for treasuring the particularity of each biological organism, each biological self within creation. He coins the term «selving» to describe this divinely encouraged process. «Selving, then, takes place within what I have called «deep intratrinitarian kenosis». It is from the love of the Father for the world, and for the glory of the Son, that other selves gain their existence, beauty and meaning, that which prevents them from collapsing into nothingness. It is from the self-sacrificial love of the Son for the Father and all his works that each created entity gains the distinctive pattern of its existence, that which prevents the creation from collapsing back into an undifferentiated unity. It is from the power of the Spirit, predictable only in its continual creativity and love, which is the same self-transcending and self-renewing love as is between the Father and the Son, that each creature receives its particularity.»<sup>63</sup> That which puts the tragedy into an evolutionary theodicy is the observation that many individual creatures never fully selve.

What Southgate has done is pinpoint where he believes evil lodges in the evolutionary process, namely, in the cutting down of individual sentient creatures before they can actualize their potential as selves. That's the evil, the nonbeing. What God does by exerting power in creation, is seek to enhance self-fulfillment. Southgate describes it in Trinitarian terms. «Theologically, we might say that this fulfillment in the creature

is the gift of existence from the Father, form and pattern from the Son, particularity from the Holy spirit, and that the creature's praise, in being itself, is offered by the Son to the Father, in the delight of the Spirit.»<sup>64</sup>

## Is Nature Friend or Foe?

Before proceeding to the third in our list of answers to the evolutionary theodicy question, I would like to pause and ask a different question: how should we understand God as creator and redeemer in light of the nihilism and unfeeling brutality of evolutionary history? On the basis of our observations, does this look like God's world? I ask this because we have inserted into our inquiry the observation that the genes we have inherited from the long history of natural selection dispose us at minimum to competition if not violence, evil, and suffering. Is this the best we can say? On balance, is this a world unrecognizable from a theological point of view?

Let us ask the question this way: is the natural world our friend or foe? Friend, is the answer given by both an atheist and a theologian. Atheist Richard Dawkins answers: «We live only on a friendly planet but also in a friendly universe.»<sup>65</sup> Theologian Philip Hefner gives us the same answer, even if he adds a bit of drama: «The creation-doctrine is an item of faith, because in the absence of any final demonstration or disproof, faith affirms that the created world, including ourselves, is God's creation — that it is finally friend, not foe; cosmos, not chaos; consummation, not dissolution.»<sup>66</sup> Curiously, Dawkins bases his conclusion on scientific evidence gathered into the Anthropic Principle. Hefner bases his judgment on faith, even if on occasion the evidence might appear to be contrary. Different methods. Same conclusion.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006) 141.

<sup>66</sup> Philip J. Hefner, «Creation,» in *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl E. Braaaten and Robert W. Jensen (2 Volumes: Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984) 1:356.

<sup>62</sup> Southgate, «Creation.»

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

William Stoeger belongs in the nature-as-friend camp. What we experience as evil finds its place in a larger scheme that works for the good. «In a dynamic evolving universe, which is also limited in resources, relatively integral and autonomous in its functioning, relational and interconnected, and open at every stage to further higher-level organisation, the fragility, transience and dissolution of individual objects and systems are essential ... Thus, transience, fragility, dissolution and death, while certainly «natural evils» form the limited point of view of those organisms and objects which vanish, are obvious «goods» in the long term for nature itself.»<sup>67</sup> And, yes, our evolutionary heritage orients human beings toward «selfishness,» toward sin.<sup>68</sup> Still, Stoeger places evolution within the framework of «God's universal creative action in nature, and God's special action in history.»<sup>69</sup> What we experience as natural evil is taken up into God's more comprehensive and gracious action in the created world.

What we have done here in this brief interlude is place the human propensity for sin within a more inclusive context, namely, the created world of nature as friend, not foe. Creation, after all, is a gift of God's grace.

### The Third Answer: The Theology of the Cross and Resurrection

Now, to the third answer to our evolutionary theodicy question: where does a God of grace or love or care fit into an evolutionary world? In this section I would like to nourish a seed that was sown by Arthur Peacocke and Nancey Murphy in the kenotic theology section, namely, that God is vulnerable to suffering with the creation. To this I would like to add the New Testament emphasis on promise. What is promised is a new creation. How, I ask, might the promise of

a new creation affect our image of the present one?<sup>70</sup>

First, the matter of divine suffering. Does it make sense, as Whitehead once said, to think: «God is the great companion, the fellow sufferer who understands?»<sup>71</sup> Yes, it does. It certainly makes sense when we turn to the *Theology of the Cross*. In what follows, I will attempt to interpret the natural world in light of the Theology of the Cross.

In the Reformation theology of Martin Luther and its subsequent development in Jürgen Moltmann, the theology of the cross stresses two messages. First, it is a theory of revelation, revelation hidden behind masks. It insists that God's presence and action in the world are not immediately visible. To the contrary, what God actually does might differ from what we expect. God is hidden. God's majesty and power are hidden behind the masks of humility and weakness. God's eternal life is hidden behind the mask of death, healing behind a mask of suffering. «The manifest and visible things of God are placed in

<sup>70</sup> As we move from creation to new creation, we must ask if within our evolutionary history we can find a precursor or a prolepsis of the transformation yet to come. Christians locate the anticipatory sign of the new creation in Jesus' Easter resurrection, which functions for us as a promise. Can fragmentary but authentic gestures of transformatory love in the animal world and in human caring also provide a precursor for God's future? «Within our natural this-worldly limitations there is possible a foreshadowing of that in which we believe, redemption.» Hans Schwarz, «Salvation in the Otherworldly,» *Sin and Salvation*, 236.

<sup>71</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Macmillan, Free Press, 1929, 1978) 351. What Whitehead shares in common with the Theology of the Cross is the acknowledgment that God is capable of suffering with creatures. However, redemption for Whitehead dissolves the subjectivity of the creatures into the objective immortality of God's life. What is implied in the Theology of the Cross when combined with the theology of new creation is that the subjectivity of the creatures, even when suffering, is precious to God; and creaturely subjectivity is not only healed but becomes everlasting in the new creation.

<sup>67</sup> William R. Stoeger, S.J., «Evolution, God and Natural Evil,» *Can Nature Be Evil or Evil Natural?* edited by Cornel W. Du Toit (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2006) 25.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness ... in the humility and shame of the cross.»<sup>72</sup> To understand God, says Luther, we must look at the cross and recognize that we do not understand God.

The message coming through the cross is the one relevant to our discussion here, namely, God's life shares in the suffering of the world. In the person of Jesus, the triune God suffers. «When the crucified Jesus is called the <image of the invisible God>», writes Jürgen Moltmann, «the meaning is that *this* is God, and God is like *this* ... The Christ event on the cross is a God event.»<sup>73</sup> Can we say that all the suffering of this world is taken up in this representative person, Jesus Christ? Yes. As the universal logos, the principle by which all things hold together, the actual history of the creation complete with all of its suffering is taken up into the life of the second person of the Trinity, the Son. Jesus Christ is both the embodiment of the physical world and the image of God. God experiences what we experience, both suffering and estrangement.

What the theologian needs to do here is make a move from history to nature, actually to the history of nature. When we speak of the crucifixion of Jesus, we ordinarily think of it as a historical event. It is a human event, a political event. But, in dealing with evolutionary theodicy, we might ask, could the cross be a natural event as well? Could we apply what we learn

about God from the cross to how we understand the natural world, and even how we understand human nature?

Jürgen Moltmann would provide a «yes» answer. «If Christ is the first-born of he dead, then he cannot be merely <the new Adam> of a new humanity. He must also be understood as the firstborn of the whole creation. He is present not only in the human victims of world history, but in victimized nature too.»<sup>74</sup> The cross applies to the natural domain just as it does to the human or historical domain.

Another kindred theologian, George L. Murphy, also answers «yes.» Murphy sees the cross as a pattern with which to interpret creation. «The crosslike pattern of creation means that Christ crucified has cosmic significance.»<sup>75</sup> Murphy goes on: «God suffers *with* the world from whatever evil takes place ... We begin with the fact that God suffered on the cross, but we do not have to stop with that. God's voluntary self-limitation that enables the world to have its own existence and integrity keeps God from simply preventing all evil in miraculous ways. Evil is then the <dark side> of an aspect of the goodness of creation, its functional integrity.»<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) 278–279. Protestants are not the only ones who appeal to the cross when interpreting divine atonement for the natural domain. So also do Roman Catholic theologians such as Denis Edwards. See his *God of Evolution*, 36–42; and «Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ Event,» *Ecotheology* 111 (March 2006) 103–123.

<sup>75</sup> George L. Murphy, *The Cosmos in Light of the Cross* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 2003) 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Celia Deane-Drummond cautions against viewing nature with a built in cruciform structure. She fears that if we view the historic cross of Jesus as one instance of a prior natural structure, the result will be a fatalistic acceptance of natural suffering. Deane-Drummond wants the cross to provide a challenge to, not an endorsement of, suffering. «The Evolution of Sin and the Redemption of Nature,» an unpublished paper delivered as part of the J. K. Russell Fellowship at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, March 31, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> *Luther's Works*, 31: 53. Like me, Charlene P. E. Burns appropriates Luther's Theology of the Cross to deal with the theodicy problem in nature; yet, her emphasis is different. Rather than emphasize God's suffering with the victims of survival-of-the-fittest, Burns uses Luther to emphasize that the hidden God is responsible for the suffering and evil in creation. We must accept this, rather than try to wish it away. «The problem for a theologian is how to take up the call for honesty about God and the indifference of the universe to suffering while remaining faithful to Christian claims that God is Creator, Sustainer and Self-Giving Love.» «Honesty about God: Theological Reflections on Violence in an Evolutionary Universe,» *Theology and Science* 4:3 (November 2006) 280.

<sup>73</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1974) 205.

Now, as you can see, George Murphy like Nancey Murphy [there is no family connection] falls into the kenotic trap. What I would like to borrow from both Murphys is the cosmic application of the Theology of the Cross, minus the «self-limitation» on God's part. As I see it, the entering of God into the world the share in its suffering is an expression of God's power as well as God's love; it is not the result of a divine self-withdrawal.

I believe we can benefit from the realism that results from the Theology of the Cross. It helps us to face our own human nature without recourse to denial or moral self-justification. What we learn about God from the cross teaches us about facing the truth about ourselves. God does not require triumph and victory along with the genocide of enemies to accomplish the divine will. The cross does not bless survival-of-the-fittest as a moral category. Yet, we live in part with the gifts bequeathed to us by those who survived and made our life possible. We are the fruit growing in the garden of natural selection. This theological realism permits us to face the reality about ourselves as human beings. We must face the fact that, as the German text of the Augsburg Confession says, «all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God.»<sup>77</sup>

Invoking the Theology of the Cross only gets us half way home. What it does is make clear that if we begin with what we know about God based upon revelation in the cross of Jesus Christ, God is likely to identify as much with the victims of predation and natural selection as with the victors. If this provides a clue to the meaning of creation, we cannot allow inclusive fitness or triumphal progress to define in any exclusive fashion God's providence in the evolution of life. Yet, there must be more. There must be a vision of what the «good» in creation is (Genesis 1:1–2:4a), which we may apply. This

vision is found in the symbol of the new creation.

## Resurrection and New Creation

*The new creation* is a natural symbol, because we associate creation with nature. More frequently the Bible uses historical or political symbols such as the «kingdom of God» or «the new Jerusalem» when identifying God's redemptive plan. Yet, the natural and political symbols are interchangeable. Both point to God's eschatological promise of a new order, a renewed creation which will also be salvation.<sup>78</sup>

Isaiah's prophecy of what we have nicknamed the «Peaceable Kingdom» stands right up and demands notice. <sup>NRS</sup> Isaiah 11:6 «The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child

<sup>78</sup> Note that I am not appealing to emergence to deal with the theodicy problem. In current discussion, we understand «emergence» to refer to «the theory that cosmic evolution repeatedly includes unpredictable, irreducible, and novel appearances.» Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 39. Emergence may provide a naturalistic explanation for novelty, but not redemption. It could inadvertently justify survival-of-the-emergent-fittest, but not empathize with the Psalmist, «Out of the depths I cry to you ...» (Psalm 130:1). At this point, Antje Jackelén sees a disconnect between emergence and theology. «Emergence Everywhere! Reflections on Philip Clayton's *Mind and Emergence*,» *Zygon* 41:3 (September 2006) 630. In my judgment, eschatology requires more than emergence can deliver. «There cannot be any scientific justification for theological eschatology precisely because it would be a contradiction in itself to treat aspects of eschatology, such as the resurrection of the dead and the New Creation, which by definition are rooted in divine initiative, as if they were a preprogrammed aspect of evolution.» Antje Jackel\_n, *Time and Eternity* (Philadelphia and London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005) 208.

<sup>77</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article II, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 36–38.

shall put its hand on the adder's den.» When the Messiah comes to establish God's kingdom, all of nature will participate in a cosmic healing. There will be peace among the animals. No longer will they devour one another to assuage their hunger. No longer will their species compete with one another for survival. No longer will we in the human race find ourselves at enmity with the nature that surrounds us. Might the theologian say: this is the creation God intended to call «good» back in Genesis 1:1–2:4a?

This eschatological image of peace in the animal kingdom raises the question of the scope of new creation. Is it distinctively human? Or, does it encompass all of creation?<sup>79</sup> Redemption in Christian theology does not target *homo sapiens* alone. It targets all of creation, including the animals whom we eat and cuddle in our homes. Russian Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky, places us within the full context. «On his way to union with God, man in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together in his love the whole cosmos disordered by sin, that it may at last be transfigured by grace.»<sup>80</sup>

Like Lossky, Southgate welcomes animals into the new creation. «On the one hand, I cannot imagine that there will be no animals in the new creation. That would be an impoverished world. On the other hand, I think it highly unlikely that they will all be there. There is a human intuition, shared by many but not by all, that animals are indeed to be valued, but more in the type than in the token ... An intriguing special case is presented by animals who are greatly loved pets. Have they acquired sufficient idiosyncratic significance to require this to be continued beyond death? I don't know. There comes a time when it is best to call a halt to eschatological speculation and to heed the

<sup>79</sup> «So the consummation will not come by any automatic process of development ... but the consummation will come through [God's] own mighty action; and it will concern not only individuals, but it will have cosmic meaning and cosmic dimensions.» Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949) 332.

<sup>80</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1957) 111.

advice, «wait and see».<sup>81</sup> Southgate is unhappy with Polkinghorne's substitution of the «type» for the individual animal. He «rejects Polkinghorne's conclusion that animals are only representatives of their types, and considers instead their individual suffering.»<sup>82</sup> Redemption, for Southgate, involves the subjectivity and fulfillment of the animal self, as an individual.

Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom is complemented by New Testament prophecy. The final book in the Christian Bible, the Apocalypse, provides a parallel prophecy in the form of a vision of the New Jerusalem. Although the *polis* of God is drawn from a pool of political metaphors, it includes the natural order. Healing takes place. Disease will disappear. So will other forms of suffering.<sup>NRS</sup> Revelation 21:1 «Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, «See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.» When confronting the theodicy question, I find these two prophetic passages to provide the key to the answer, because they indicate how wholeness and healing belong to the heart of the divine plan.

May we apply these eschatological symbols to the doctrine of creation? May we think of the present creation as on the way, so to speak, to a new creation that will deserve the unambiguous title, «very good»?

As important as the Theology of the Cross is here, it would dissolve into pathos without being coupled to resurrection and new creation. «The cross and the resurrection are...inseparably connected,» contends Gustaf Aulén; «in the light of the resurrection [the cross] is the sign of vic-

<sup>81</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 152.

<sup>82</sup> Southgate, «Creation».

tory.»<sup>83</sup> And with some force, Jürgen Moltmann argues that evolution needs redemption. «A *Christus volutor* without *Christus redemptor* is nothing other than a cruel, unfeeling *Christus selector*, a historical world-judge without compassion for the weak ... There is therefore no meaningful hope for the future of creation unless «the tears are wiped from every eye». But they can only be wiped out when the dead are raised, and when the victims of evolution experience justice through the resurrections of nature. Evolution in its ambiguity has no such redemptive efficacy and therefore no salvific significance either. If Christ is to be thought of in conjunction with evolution, he must become evolution's redeemer.»<sup>84</sup> William Stoeger would concur. «The resolution of the problem of evil demands the perspective of the eschatological completion of creation in the ultimate domination of good over evil and life over death and diminishment.»<sup>85</sup>

## Where in the World is God?

When we are confronted by a difficult problem that resists a satisfying solution, we might ask ourselves: are we formulating the question appropriately? Is it appropriate to ask: can we

reconcile the dynamics of the long history of the evolutionary process with a theology based upon the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ? The answer to this inquiry has not come easily. Yet, I am not confident there is a way to alter the question to insure a more simple answer. So, I have pressed forward with this form of the question.

By relying on the third of the three alternative answers to the theodicy question raised by evolutionary theory, my suggested logic has been this: when a disciple with faith looks upon the cross of Jesus Christ, something about God is revealed. One quality revealed is that God in Godself is present to us under the conditions of rejection, suffering, and death. If we insist on believing that a God of power sides only with victory, then God's presence under the conditions of the cross will elude us. Yet, if we can confess that in the man from Nazareth we perceive the universal *logos* incarnate, and if we perceive that he sums up in himself all the sufferings of the created order, then the sufferings of this world become internal to the divine life.

By joining with others willing to admit they adhere to *theistic evolution*, I have turned to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather than keep all speculative theology within the doctrine of creation, I have asked whether the doctrine of redemption could be equally illuminating on the difficult question of evil and suffering. I have answered in the affirmative.

Beginning with the cross one might ask: can what we have learned about God's love and grace through divine revelation in the cross apply to our expanding knowledge of nature's evolutionary history? Because the story of Jesus is the story of God's incarnation entailing the taking up of the human experience of injustice and suffering into the divine life, would it follow that in nature God identifies with the victims of unfitness? Would it follow from Jesus' Easter resurrection that we have reason to believe the future will be different from the past, that eschatologically the lion will lie down with the lamb? Yes.

<sup>83</sup> Aulén, *Faith of the Christian Church*, 217.

<sup>84</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) 296–297. Charlene Burns might be critical of the position I am developing here. Whereas I emphasize the promise of divine transformation in the future, she emphasizes a human commitment to altruism and co-redemption of nature in the present. «A focus on the future ... tends to reinscribe the perennial problem that all faiths that posit reward in the after-life face: how do we avoid discounting the importance of working to alleviate suffering here-and-now if it is not really real? Theologies of evolution must not lose sight of the reality of either past or future.» «Honesty about God,» 286.

<sup>85</sup> Stoeger, «Evolution, God, and Natural Evil,» 33. In this same volume Ernst M. Conradie provides support for the eschatological vision by affirming that «creation and redemption belong together.» «On Responding to Human Suffering: A Critical Survey of Theological Contributions in Conversation with the Sciences,» *Ibid.*, 183.

*Summary*

The theodicy question within the dialogue between the Darwinian model of evolution and Christian theology is the focus of this essay: where do we find divine action in an evolutionary world? The central principle of socio-biology and evolutionary psychology — the selfish gene drives evolution through DNA replication — challenges theistic evolutionists: did God create the selfish gene? Is God responsible for the struggle in the animal world that leads to evil in the human world: violence, war, and genocide? Three alternative answers to the question of evolving evil are examined: (1) atheism and altruism; (2) the free will defense of God combined with divine kenosis; and (3) the Theology of the Cross combined with the promise of eschatological new creation. Rather than blessing the victors in the survival of the fittest, a *Theology of the Cross* places God present to the suffering of the unfit, the victims of predation and of species having gone extinct. Rather than bless nature blood «red in tooth and claw» (Tennyson), a theology of new creation hopes for a divine transformation of not only the human reality but of nature as well.

