God In Creation:
The Challenge and Possibility
of Discerning Human Purpose
from an
Evolving Nature

by

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Abstract
If the Christian God is creator of all things but is also revealed in Christ to be costly love, then how can divine agency in creation be understood in light of scientific discoveries revealing that biological warfare undergirds the creative process of natural selection? The implications are significant for understanding Christian vocation if indeed the human is made in God’s image with the capacity for creative or destructive “dominion” over earthly life (Gen. 1:26). To approach this challenge, I begin with an exploration of Philip Hefner’s theory of the human as created co-creator, and conclude that his teleonomic axiom focusing on the survival of creation, although necessary and fruitful, is contradicted by his use of the male-gendered logos with the teleological metaphor of sacrifice and John Hick’s Irenaean Theodicy to understand divine agency in creation. I then turn to the work of Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson, who consider the female figure of divine Wisdom, or sophia, incarnate in Christ, as a more liberative representation of God, inclusive of women and the diversity of creaturely life. However, their use of John Polkinghorne’s “free process defence” neglects the depths of natural evil suffered at the level of the individual and runs the risk of justifying suffering and death as the inevitable cost of the realization of a greater good. A consideration of William Paley and his work in Natural
Theology highlights the risky dynamic set up by teleological representations of God, which can serve the interests of a powerful elite. With reference to the historical context of Paley’s work, I consider the role of theory as a larger framework of meaning, contextualizing observations to serve as evidence. Finally, I look to Charles Darwin and his impact on the thinking of Asa Gray and Aubrey Moore to argue that divine agency in creation can only be discerned from a faith perspective. That said, although divine providence is not empirically demonstrable, Christian theology can offer a larger framework of meaning to interpret the facts of nature as revelatory of God when considered in light of the suffering Christ and an existentially fallen creation.
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Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Methodology .......................................................................................................................................... 6

A “Natural Theology” or a “Theology of Nature”? .................................................................................. 8

Procedure ............................................................................................................................................. 12

Chapter One: Philip Hefner’s Risky Teleology ....................................................................................... 21

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 21

Theology as “Scientific” .............................................................................................................................. 25

Freedom and Determinism of the Created Co-Creator ............................................................................ 29

Teleonomy vs. Teleology ............................................................................................................................ 34

Myth as “detector of reality” ..................................................................................................................... 44

Sacrificial Love and Natural Selection ....................................................................................................... 59

Feminist Criticism of Sacrificial Motif ....................................................................................................... 68

Irenaean Type of Theodicy: John H. Hick .................................................................................................... 78

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 92

Chapter Two: Denis Edwards, Elizabeth Johnson, and a Liberative Sophia ........................................... 95

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 95

Sophia as Emancipatory God-Language for Women and Nature ................................................................. 97

Wisdom Christology as Ecological Theology .............................................................................................. 112

Deification of the Flesh .............................................................................................................................. 116

Divine Immanence Revealed in Trinitarian Love of Mutual Relations ....................................................... 117

Creaturely Participation in Sophia’s Goodness, Being, and Agency ............................................................. 121

Evolution as the Autonomous “Self-Transcendence” of Creation ............................................................. 126
Limitations of “Free Process Defence” and Need to Recognize Existential Fall ........134

“New Earth” as Realization or Interruption of Natural Law.................................. 147

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 157

Chapter Three: William Paley and Douglas John Hall
The Watchmaker God and the Crucified Christ............................................. 159

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 159

An Ethics of the Cross and a Suffering Creation ............................................... 163

Paley’s Natural Theology as Theologia Glorae...................................................... 169

The Argument Cumulative .................................................................................... 172

Evidence and the Emerging Awareness of Inference and Interpretation ........... 182

Paley’s Natural Theology as Theologia Crucis ...................................................... 188

The “Newtonian Synthesis” as Anglican Apologetic .......................................... 191

Reason and Revelation in Creation ..................................................................... 197

Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 199

Chapter Four: Charles Darwin, Asa Gray, and Aubrey Moore
A Natural History of the Golden Rule............................................................... 201

Introduction ............................................................................................................ 201

Darwin and the Natural History of the Moral Sense or Conscience .................. 205

Darwin’s Theory as a Call for Social Justice ......................................................... 218

Natural Selection, Human Freedom, and the Question of “Progress” ................. 221

A Wider Teleology and the Emergence of the Human as “word of the Word”........ 225

Asa Gray on Natural Selection and Divine Design ............................................. 226

Aubrey Moore on the Facts of Nature as the Acts of God ................................. 231

Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 240
Conclusion: Discerning Christ in Creation, and Future Directions ........................................ 243

Human Language as “word of the Word” ........................................................................... 247

“Falling Up” and the Natural History of Outgroup Altruism ........................................ 248

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 254

Primary Sources .................................................................................................................. 254

Secondary Sources .............................................................................................................. 261
‘But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, “It is not in me,” and the sea says, “It is not with me....”

‘Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and death say, “We have heard a rumour of it with our ears.”

‘God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt; then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to humankind, “Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”’

Job 28:12-14, 20-28 (NRSV)
Introduction

If the human being is a product of natural processes, and if the Christian God is the creator of all things, then to understand what it means to be human and thus made in the image of God, Christian theology must consider the processes through which the human being came to be. Our sources of theological understanding should then be brought into dialogue with those of the natural, social, and anthropological sciences if we are to develop a credible articulation of the *imago Dei*. Such an approach looks to cultural evolution and technology as extensions of natural processes, emergent from and reciprocally active upon genetic evolution. One challenge, of course, is how to understand the character and direction of human freedom in light of our conditioned nature. In particular, how do we understand the Christian ethic of costly love in light of our evolutionary history? Looking to Wisdom categories found in scripture, we see that *sophia* (Greek for divine Wisdom) is incarnate in Christ but is also immanent in creation, which thus shares with humans in the image of God.\(^1\) Moreover, if with Darwin, we recognize that all living things are kin, and share a common origin, then the uniqueness of human beings as moral creatures (Gen. 3:22) can be better understood in light of nonhuman creation. Thus, in our discernment of Christian vocation and purpose, in understanding the altruistic imperative to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44), we can gain insight by considering the natural processes through which the human being has been created. In this manner we can approach human freedom informed by an understanding of divine presence and purpose as active in an evolving creation.

\(^1\) Compare, for example, Colossians 1:15-20 with Proverbs 8:22-36, or the Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-8:1 and Sirach 24:3-7 with Hebrews 1:2-4. *For sophia’s* immanence in creation see Wisdom of Solomon 7:24.
As a vehicle for engaging my discussion of what it means to be made in the image of God yet emergent from natural processes, I will examine the fruitfulness of Philip Hefner’s metaphor for the human as created co-creator in his influential text *The Human Factor* (1993), which explores traditional theological themes of freedom and determinism in light of Darwinian evolutionary biology. Hefner’s argument provokes a re-examination of Victorian preoccupations with classical teleology in order to illuminate more recent theological consideration of these themes in light of evolutionary theory. Using Hefner’s argument as an entry point for my discussion, I will build upon the Darwinian theory of common origin, in conversation with a range of sources both historical and contemporary, from William Paley’s *Natural Theology* (1802) to the twenty-first century articulations of Wisdom Christology by Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson, to argue that, from the perspective of Christian faith, an emergent *imago Christi* can be discerned in our evolutionary past as a representation of the immanent agency of a divine Sophia. If God in Christ is Sophia incarnate, emergent in history as costly love, and if Christ represents the goal and model for what human beings as made in the image of God are capable, then Sophia’s providence can be seen in the processes of group and social selection acting upon altruistic behaviours to shape our physiological development as ethical creatures of conscience. I will argue, then, that ideals which have made humans successful as relational beings living in community reflect those governing the way of life manifested in the specific historical incarnation of Christ, and that a Christian “ought” can therefore be informed by an evolutionary “is.” In this sense, God’s purposes are discernable in creation as guides for human action.

At the same time, to develop this theology of a cosmic Christ active in an evolving creation, I will argue that the crucifixion of God in the historical person of Christ by God’s
“good” creation in the form of human beings, whom Darwin reveals can no longer be understood apart from nature, points to the continuing significance of the theological metaphor of “the fall.” This is not to say that there ever was a lost paradise or a historical Adam and Eve but only to argue that, after Darwin, the metaphor of the fall can function theologically as a reminder of the irremediable harm, suffering, and wasted life that are intrinsic to biological processes. In this sense, at least from the limited perspective of the human being, there appears to be a gap between the world as presently experienced and the world intended by God.²

From a theological as distinct from a scientific perspective, then, the commitment to the Abrahamic God is a commitment to a personal Creator and justifies personal adjectives applied to creaturely processes if indeed those processes are the tools of creation and relate to the intentions of a moral author, or more specifically challenge the moral character of the Christian God as Creator. The “arms race” of biological creation may therefore appear “cruel” and “wasteful,” if not “evil,” particularly when approached from the perspective of its victims, who suffer harm as the cost of any perceived benefits to a larger natural order, however conceived. My use of the term “natural evil” is grounded in the Victorian context of Darwin’s work and can be understood in light of the concrete and specific realities of individual creatures, for whom the existence of suffering and aborted potential at the hands of a larger ecosystem is experienced as excessive, unwanted, and harm-full; such subjective experiences ground my understanding of creation as existentially fallen. In this way, I do not mean to argue that the apparent waste and suffering in evolution should not be part of the universe story, nor do I assume that they are some sort of failing requiring remedy; however, I am asserting the need to sufficiently acknowledge their existence, that they are meaningful, and that their depth and breadth demand consideration

in any discussions of the Christian God’s relationship to creation, particularly as *experienced* at the level of the individual. Moreover, although I use the terms “natural evil” and “existential fall” to indicate an *apparent* gap between divine intention as humanly conceived and the reality of the natural order as presently experienced *subjectively* by its victims, I do not mean to say that the natural order or its processes are *not* intended by the Abrahamic God, only that the magnitude and severity of suffering, at face value, point to an insoluble mystery in light of the God incarnate in Christ and the limitations of human understanding.

Grounded in Darwinian evolutionary biology, I will therefore engage a metaphorical understanding of the fall as something other than just the fault of human action since suffering and premature death have existed long before the first human being stepped out onto the planet. At the same time, with particular emphasis on the work of Charles Darwin and Philip Hefner, I will flesh out the notion of Christian vocation as a discernment of and cooperation with Christ-Sophia active in, and shaped by, developing natural processes. The notion of progress will be considered in light of the emergence of both conscience and culture and the consequent role and responsibility of the human being as a player in that “progress.” Relevant to this discussion will be the concept of multilevel selection, or rather natural selection at both the individual and group levels, with respect to the challenge of the altruism paradox: “Why do human degrees of generosity seem to defy the patently ‘selfish’ principles of natural selection theory?”

Darwin’s work in the *Descent of Man* focusing on the evolution of human conscience is seminal to the argument that altruism, or costly love, of the Christic kind has been an essential ingredient in the evolution of the human animal in a groaning creation (Rom. 8:18-25).

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Of key importance, I will examine Denis Edwards’ call for human beings “to be God’s partners in the ongoing history of creation” in light of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s claim that “the entire process of evolution [is] ultimately and strictly loving and lovable,” such that “evolution is giving new value, as material for our action.” These theologies raise the following questions, which I will address in my thesis: How is it possible for Christians to cooperate with evolutionary processes to realize and fulfill Christian hope and purpose? What are the risks of discerning the ought from what is? How are “evolutionary processes” to be defined and understood? How is it possible to discern the character of God from natural history? Is outgroup altruism supernaturally imposed from without, or can we find its roots in an evolving creation? How are we to understand, for example, the complex interplay of cultural and genetic evolution (e.g. sexual selection, language and big brains, ingroup vs. outgroup altruism) in the development of a Christian ethic? How do we situate Christian vocation, as the need to cooperate with or counter evolutionary processes, or both?

Informing this discussion is the challenge of Aubrey Moore’s claim that the evolving world’s continuous creativity demands an all-encompassing divine providence. Indeed, he argues, Darwinian evolutionary science enables the claim that “the facts of nature are the acts of God,” such that the natural and physical sciences can illuminate and confirm forgotten Christian claims about the immanence of the Word, or “creation’s secret force.” If evolution is creation then there can be no division between God’s agency and that of nature, he asserts: “There are

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5 Teilhard, 164.


not, and cannot be, any Divine interpositions in nature, for God cannot interfere with Himself.”

In this sense, deity is not relegated to the margins or the gaps but is front and centre in the bleeding and breathing creaturely world. Thus, argues Moore, the unity of God in nature is intelligible to human comprehension and discernible to reason. Nevertheless, he also recognizes that his approach is grounded in a faith-infused impression and that, although there can be no explicit proof for “the immanent Reason of the universe,” human reason can verify a posteriori “a truth already held.”

**Methodology**

For the purpose of perceiving an immanent Christ-Sophia in a suffering nature, I will turn to Douglas John Hall’s articulation of a theologia crucis and consider James Gustafson’s argument for accommodation as I critically engage Philip Hefner’s concept of the created co-creator in *The Human Factor* as a foundation for a Christian ethic in light of an evolving creation. In the text *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt*, Gustafson recognizes that Christian theology cannot afford to reject the sciences and other secular knowledge, which are so culturally pervasive and persuasive. In essence, although the idea of God is only accessible to religious belief, theological knowledge must stand in a “critically self-conscious” and deliberate relationship to scientific and secular sources if it is to assert a divine “Maker of heaven and earth.”

This careful engagement with the sciences is particularly necessary when it comes to discussions of the *imago Dei*, as every ethical theory depends on a description and explanation of

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10 Moore, *Mundi*, 76.


12 Ibid., 34, 94, 44.
human nature and action in the context of a bleeding and breathing creation.\textsuperscript{13} And since the intersections of interdisciplinary traffic are “in us”—that is, shaped by our anxieties and commitments—the need to be self-aware in these discussions is of the utmost importance.\textsuperscript{14} I will therefore draw upon the work of David Hume, William Paley, William Whewell, and Charles S. Peirce, in critical dialogue with Darwinian evolutionary biology, to examine the theoretical embeddedness of concrete experience, or the data observed in nature, in the formulation of theological worldviews. In so doing, I will investigate the application and interaction of deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning in the discernment of God in creation and the role of faith in informing theological conclusions.

Ultimately, the methodology of Douglas John Hall undergirds my approach, for he emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, self-assessment, and self-criticism in the unearthing and revision of taken-for-granted assumptions and foundational beliefs.\textsuperscript{15} Drawing on Martin Luther, Hall argues that the \textit{theologia crucis} places at its centre the crucified Christ, representing God’s movement toward the world in the incarnation of a historically situated human being, and demanding the context\textit{ualization} of faith, in which doctrine is submitted to the test of life.\textsuperscript{16} Method must then flow from content as speculative abstraction is qualified by the historically concrete, for God the Supreme Being, “omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, infinite, absolute, ultimate, prime mover, first cause, etc.” is re-understood in light of the vulnerability and limitations of creaturely flesh.\textsuperscript{17} In this way, Christian theology

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 68-9.
\textsuperscript{15} Douglas John Hall, \textit{The Cross in Our Context} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 3-4, 28, 201.
\textsuperscript{17} Hall, \textit{Thinking}, 325; Hall, \textit{Cross}, 112, 120.
encounters the world with all of its contradictions, plurality, flux, pain, and unpredictability, in imitation of the Christic incarnation.\textsuperscript{18} The consequent awareness of \textit{relativity} should foster dialogue with both religious and secular sources to reveal arbitrary truth claims and taken-for-granted biases. Pointing rather than grasping, the Christian community may then acknowledge that, although it can make \textit{estimations} of the truth, it can never fully monopolize it.\textsuperscript{19} New perspectives and changing contextual knowledge will mean that agreements reached in the past will have to be re-visited in the future: “Indeed...the ontic presupposition being the presence in all life of the divine \textit{Logos}, I should be obliged to think that the other \textit{might have positive or corrective insight to bring to me}.”\textsuperscript{20} Such an approach opens the door for scientific discovery as material for theological construction and reconstruction.

\textbf{A “Natural Theology” or a “Theology of Nature”?}

Of particular significance for my thesis, then, will be its status as either a “natural theology” or a “theology of nature.” Although William Paley, writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, used the terms interchangeably, they have since acquired distinct definitions. John Hedley Brooke notes in a 1974 publication that the expression “natural theology” has “several shades of meaning” but that in Britain during the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries, its significance came to be understood in opposition to \textit{revealed} theology. That is, explains Brooke, whereas \textit{revealed} theology involved knowledge of God “deduced from God’s revelation to mankind: in the person of Christ, in the pages of Scripture, and in the corporate life of the Church,” \textit{natural} theology denoted knowledge of God “acquired and demonstrated by the use of

\textsuperscript{18} Hall, Cross, 41.


\textsuperscript{20} Hall, \textit{Cross}, 194.
innate or natural reason.” In this sense, natural theology primarily seeks “to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity,” and only secondarily does it relate to nature. Thus, argues Brooke, to define natural theology as “nothing more than arguments for God’s intelligence or beneficence drawn from a study of nature” is too narrow, for certain articulations of natural theology make no reference to natural phenomena or have “exceeded the mere parade of divine attributes”; Brooke notes, for example, that it was common in the period to focus on demonstrations of divine providence from an examination of fulfilled prophecies. Nevertheless, he continues, arguments for God from the appearance of design in nature were of special significance for Christian apologists in England as “part of an elaborate apparatus designed to establish the rationality of faith and the folly of disbelief.” The phrase “a theology of nature,” he explains, is a more recent construction referring to any interpretation relating the significance and status of natural phenomena to God. More importantly, a theology of nature, unlike a natural theology, makes “no attempt to demonstrate anything, and the belief is almost certainly an article of faith.” Brooke therefore notes a distinction in the terms, although he also asserts that an attempt to prove God’s existence from nature, as a form of natural theology, “could be derived from a particular theology of nature,” which would thus “countenance a particular form of natural theology.” In this sense, the distinction, though real, becomes blurred.

Writing in 2011, Alistair McGrath goes so far as to argue that the term “natural theology” has been interpreted in such a variety of ways that “it cannot be defined.” Nevertheless, he points to “a significant degree of ‘family resemblance’” amongst the forms, more specifically “their engagement with the natural world with the expectation that it may, in some manner and to some

22 Ibid., 9.
extent, disclose something of the divine nature.”

Thus, he argues, “Natural theology is about maximizing the intellectual traction between the Christian vision of reality and observation of the natural world” in order “to designate the idea that there exists some link between the world we observe and another transcendent realm.”

Proving God’s existence from nature is only one way of conceptualizing the enterprise. McGrath notes that the manifestation of any particular natural theology, and the degree to which it engages nature, is determined by the sociocultural matrix within which it is embedded and the consequent philosophical and theological presumptions which lend the form its plausibility.

He therefore recognizes with Brooke that there is no master narrative but a shifting spectrum of approaches within the Christian tradition. He asserts that from the late Renaissance through to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, the understanding of natural theology underwent a shift in meaning from affirmations of “the consonance of reason and the experience of the natural world with the Christian tradition” to “the attempt to demonstrate the existence of God by an appeal to reason or to the domain of nature.” In light of the shortcomings of this later approach, which articulates a watchmaker God or “divine mechanic” inconsistent with the God revealed in Christ, McGrath proposes a re-affirmation of natural theology as “the consonance or resonance of reason and the

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24 Ibid., 2-3, 12.

25 Ibid., 2, 12.

26 Ibid., 16.


28 McGrath, 17.
experience of the natural world with the Christian tradition.” Thus, he recognizes “a theology of nature” as a specific approach to natural theology, which focuses on “an interpretation of nature that is conducive to, or consistent with, religious belief” (italics mine). In this sense, proof is not sought for God from nature, but the theological sources of Christian faith are applied to nature as a framework for understanding.

In his book *Darwin and Design* (2003), Michael Ruse draws on Wolfhart Pannenberg to argue for a clear distinction between “natural theology” and “a theology of nature,” asserting that we can no longer affirm “a traditional natural theology” but instead must develop “a theology of nature,” reflecting the shift from William Paley to William Whewell, where “one abandons the hope of strict and conclusive proof and aims for illustration of and support for something that one has accepted already on other grounds.”

Pannenberg writes:

> If the God of the Bible is the creator of the universe, then it is not possible to understand fully or even appropriately the processes of nature without any reference to that God. If, on the contrary, nature can be appropriately understood without reference to the God of the Bible, then that God cannot be the creator of the universe, and consequently he cannot be truly God and be trusted as a source of moral teaching either.

As further clarification, Ian Barbour, like Ruse, also draws a clear distinction between natural theology and a theology of nature as two different versions of his Integration model for relating science and religion. In his books *Religion and Science* (1997) and *When Science Meets Religion* (2000), Barbour notes that a natural theology begins with scientific data, to find evidence for God’s existence and benevolent design in nature, based upon reason and

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29 Ibid., 17-18.
30 Ibid., 16.
observation, while a theology of nature is faith-based and seeks to reformulate doctrine in light of science, recognizing that doctrine must be consistent with scientific evidence (if not proven by it) since scientific knowledge inevitably informs models of God’s relation to nature. In this sense, and to avoid confusion, my thesis will assume the succinct distinction acknowledged by Ruse and Barbour but work within the parameters of “a theology of nature” as identified by all four authors.

Procedure

Although drawing upon a range of contemporary and historical sources, my thesis does not approach the respective authors in chronological sequence. Rather, because of my interest in the possibility of discerning human purpose from an evolving nature in light of the creator God of Christian faith and a commitment to the human as made in God’s image, my thesis begins by taking up the challenge posed by Philip Hefner’s theological theory of the human as created co-creator, introduced in his book The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion. In this text, Hefner articulates his core proposal as follows:

Human beings are God’s created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us—the nature that is not only our own genetic heritage, but also the entire human community and the evolutionary and ecological reality in which and to which we belong. Exercising this agency is said to be God’s will for humans.

Undergirding this proposal is another, which, Hefner argues, should be taken up by the sciences as an issue for serious research, that “beneficence is a fundamental characteristic of reality and therefore a ground for our own beneficent behaviour and self-understanding.”

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36 Ibid., 196.
specifically, Hefner argues that as Christ is a symbol of one who has emerged from natural and historical processes as a fulfillment of divine purpose in creation, so, too, have we as human beings emerged from an “ambience” that has equipped us with the capacity to fulfill divine intent. Thus, if creation is grounded in divine intention such that God and nature can be conflated under the phrase “that which really is,” then human freedom emergent from nature, can be understood as the “instrumentality of God” through which the creation fulfills divine ends. The challenge for the human, argues Hefner, is to correctly discern God’s purposes in the natural world in order to understand what it means to be made in God’s image and to act accordingly as free agents, in cooperation with the evolutionary impetus undergirding creation. In this manner, the scientific study of nature becomes a theological enterprise in which the imperative ought is gleaned from the indicative is. For Hefner, the import of human freedom and “co-creatorhood” is better understood when one considers that the natural course of evolution has shaped human beings as a globally dominant species, whose technological powers hold the fate of creation in the balance. The challenge for Christian vocation is therefore located in the formation of culture and the quality of cultural systems.

Hefner’s theory can be criticized, however, for oversimplifying evolution and insufficiently engaging the concrete and specific realities of its victims. James Gustafson argues that Hefner’s approach to the interrelationship of the sciences, religion, and ethics “issues in midrange generalizations…. He does not test his account, in this book, in specific and dense

37 Ibid., 245, 247.
38 Ibid., 33, 114-115, 272, 43, 265.
40 Ibid., 30, 47, 226.
41 Ibid., 226.
Hefner’s theology is thus informed by a bird’s-eye view of evolution, which enables him to overlook the *tremendum* of suffering, destruction, and loss intrinsic to natural processes. A challenge of an interdisciplinary approach is therefore introduced to theology: Do the great depths of creation’s “falleness” preclude the possibility of human evolutionary history as a source for understanding what it means to be made in the image of God? Does the magnitude of suffering, predation, parasitism, and wasted life necessitate rose-coloured lenses of abstraction or can evolutionary science offer useful insights and resources for an understanding of Christian vocation? Hefner uses the male-gendered *logos* with the teleological metaphors of sacrifice and freedom to approach the character of divine agency in a groaning creation, but do these symbols set up a liberative or exploitive model for human vocation and are they attuned to the experiences of the oppressed and marginalized, to the victims of natural and cultural forces?

Turning from the male-gendered *logos* as a means for approaching Christ’s divinity and immanence in the world through the Spirit, both Elizabeth Johnson and Denis Edwards retrieve the scriptural figure of *sophia* to better represent the character and quality of God in creation as inclusive of both women and the broader ecological community. Greek for “wisdom,” *sophia* is grammatically gendered feminine, is often depicted in the figure of a woman, and is also with God “at the beginning” as a “master worker” through whom all things were created (Prov. 8:22-31; 3:19). As such, she embodies divine power and omniscience, is identified with the Torah, and orders creation as both life-giver and sustainer. Incarnate in the historical person of Jesus, she upsets male dominance of God’s gender and sex to empower the female as capable of

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44 Ibid., 89, 93.
imaging the divine.\textsuperscript{45} Christ as \textit{sophia} thereby signifies both male and female in the figure of one person to reconcile opposites in a unified diversity and to signify the diversity of God’s presence in the Church and the wider work of creation.\textsuperscript{46} Christ as \textit{sophia} on the cross comes to signify God’s love for and solidarity with a “groaning” creation in its evolutionary emergence, while the resurrection offers redemptive promise for all creatures in their death and pain (Rom. 8: 18-25).\textsuperscript{47} Johnson and Edwards also articulate John Polkinghorne’s “free process defence” to reconcile the suffering and loss intrinsic to biological evolution with a commitment to \textit{sophia’s} immanence and agency in a creaturely universe beloved by God as “very good” (Gen. 1:31).\textsuperscript{48} The approach assumes a sufficient similarity between human experience and the physical universe to extend the free will defence to creation.\textsuperscript{49} However, “the world” is not a person that can experience suffering or make decisions about its future or enjoy benefits accrued from natural selection.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, pain, death, freedom, and pleasure can only be experienced at the level of the individual. Thus, Polkinghorne’s defence is challenged for privileging an abstract and over-generalized personification of creation to the well being of its victims. This thesis will therefore argue that when one engages the concrete and specific experiences of suffering and death inherent to the generativity of natural processes, one encounters the irremediable mystery of the Christian God and the character of creation as existentially fallen.

Chapter three acknowledges that a teleological interpretation of divine agency in creation runs the risk of legitimating suffering and wasted life as the inevitable price of the realization of

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 94-95, 55, 148.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 165, 169, 162.
\textsuperscript{49} The free will defence asserts that freedom is intrinsically good even if it can be used for harm.
\textsuperscript{50} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 191
a greater good and can offer a dangerous model for human vocation as made in the image of God. Without recognition of an existential fall, a teleological theology may defend divine omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence by overlooking the specific and concrete realities experienced by the individual, to dwell instead on a vague abstraction of a larger personified order despite any expressed emphases on experience or empirical observation. As a classic articulation of the teleological argument, William Paley’s *Natural Theology* demonstrates an interpretation of divine agency in creation that legitimates the status quo and entrenches the power hierarchy of existing social systems.

Douglas John Hall’s delineation of a *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory) and a *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) provides insightful tools for approaching teleological arguments such as Paley’s, by looking to Christ as a measure for discerning divine agency in an evolving natural order. In particular, Hall asserts the methodological importance of the cross as a filter for a liberative theology that attends to a suffering creation. As an example of a *theologia gloriae*, Paley’s *Natural Theology* articulates a powerful patriarchal watchmaker God, who sits apart from the universe he has designed, much like a contemporary British industrialist over the products and machinery of his industry. Arguing analogically in the rhetorical style of Cicero and Aristotle, Paley can therefore argue from the reader’s experience of machinery to the complexity of organic bodies found in nature, by focusing on the relation, aptitude, and correspondence of many and diverse parts, working together in an arrangement to realize a function or final cause, as evidence of God’s existence, wisdom, and benevolence. In this way, everything has significance in its contribution to the functioning of a greater system or “congregation of systems.”

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for an Anglican elite whose wealth and power depended upon the survival of existing social,
political, and economic systems.

Following in the footsteps of John Locke and Francis Bacon, Paley builds his method
with a focus on empirical observation and personal experience, in the faith that divine agency
and therefore human purpose could be discerned in a designed nature. Drawing upon inductive
probability and an emergent utilitarian ethic, and filtered through the lens of his own personal
prosperity and well being, Paley’s “Argument Cumulative” asserts divine intention to be evident
in the “preponderancy” of pleasure and happiness in the world. Thus, human beings as made in
the image of God should behave in a manner that contributes to the “general happiness,” if
indeed God’s intention is the happiness of all creatures. Predatory and venomous animals may
only appear inconsistent with the intentions of a loving, all-knowing and all-powerful divine
Designer because of the limitations of human comprehension. Paley’s “Argument Cumulative”
therefore illustrates Hall’s articulation of a theologia gloriae, by dismissing and ignoring the true
magnitude of creaturely suffering imposed on individual victims of creaturely and “man”-made
systems.

Note, however, that although inductive reasoning and abductive “inferences to the best
explanation” can only offer probabilistic conclusions, Paley’s conclusions are asserted with a
deductive certainty characteristic of the work of authors of English “physico-theology,”
published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who assumed the significance of

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52 Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight, introduction and notes to Natural Theology, by William Paley, ed.
Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight (1802; reprint, New York, NY: Oxford, 2008), 295 n. 17, xix-xx; Paley,
Natural Theology, 17, 271.

53 Eddy and Knight, xiv, xxviii, xxii; Paley, Natural Theology, 242, 244.

(1785; reprint, London: Longman and Co., 1838), 27, 32, 34.

55 Paley, Natural Theology, 244.
observation to be self-evident. In the law courts of the time, “the facts spoke for themselves” and had merely to be gathered to corroborate and prove one’s allegations.\(^{56}\) At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the significance of “evidence” was increasingly understood to be a matter of interpretation and inference from observations embedded within a larger framework of meaning or theory.\(^{57}\) Paley’s sensitivity to this developing awareness is reflected in an apparent contradiction in his writing; for although he asserts that divine design is incontrovertibly evident in nature, he admits, at one point, to the need for an “anterior belief of a Deity” to shape one’s perceptions.\(^{58}\) Moreover, he articulates values congruent with Hall’s *theologia crucis*, admonishing humility and rational engagement with the world, to challenge dogma with experience, and to be sensitive to, and willing to learn from, alternate points-of-view.\(^{59}\) Thus, although Paley’s natural theology represents a distant and powerful watchmaker God, whose power and industry in creation reflect and reinforce the socioeconomic conditions of industrial England, elements of his method better reflect Hall’s articulation of a *theologia crucis*, which set up a capacity for self-awareness and self-criticism, informed by an encounter with the crucified Christ and, thus, a groaning creation. Indeed, this thesis will argue that, for Christians, the unfathomable *magnitude* of suffering and death experienced by the individual victims of natural processes cannot be rationalized or explained away as the instrumental outcome of divine intent but demands a recognition of the existential falleness of creation in light of the limitations of human understanding.

\(^{56}\) McGrath, 115-116.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 75-76, 102, 115-119.

\(^{58}\) Paley, *Natural Theology*, 43, 278, 280.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 277-280.
In order to avoid an overgeneralized picture of evolutionary processes and to indicate how Christian theology might understand those processes as suggesting an immanent Christ-Sophia, chapter four rigorously engages a primary text of evolutionary theory, specifically Darwin’s explanation for the origin of human beings in the *Descent of Man*. Although his work challenged the capacity of Victorian theology to accommodate observed data, Darwin’s argument for the common origin of all life offered material for a “wider Teleology,” supporting the immanent agency of God and more significantly an immanent Christ emergent in history as the model and goal of human freedom.  

Darwin argues, for example, that human beings bear a significant responsibility for the formation of culture in order to advance evolutionary progress. Although he argues that the improvement of civilized societies depends less on natural selection and more on cultural advancement and the persistence of Lamarckian mechanisms of evolution (“love, sympathy and self-command become strengthened by habit” and “perhaps fixed by inheritance”), he continues to emphasize the importance of struggle and human effort in the advancement of “virtuous habit” and the general advancement of the human species. For Darwin, it is this “moral sense” more than anything else, which sets human beings apart from nonhuman creation. And it is in his understanding of the role of sympathy and altruism in the process of group selection and creaturely flourishing that Darwin plants the evolutionary explanation of the Golden Rule and prepares the understanding of Christian vocation as a cooperation with evolutionary processes: “I have so lately endeavoured to shew that the social instincts—the prime principle of man’s moral constitution—with the aid of active intellectual

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62 Ibid., 133, 150.
powers and the effects of habit [i.e. inheritance of acquired traits], naturally lead to the golden rule. In so doing, Darwin opened the door for the works of Asa Gray, Aubrey Moore, Lyman Abbott, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Elizabeth Johnson, Denis Edwards, and Philip Hefner. By identifying a continuous creativity undergirding the natural world, from which the evolution of humans is not excluded, Darwin’s theory enabled the re-discovery of a divine immanent logos or sophia and informed the argument for human freedom as an extension of divine creativity.

At the same time, Darwin’s theory of evolution points to and highlights the need to acknowledge the fallen aspect of creation, in the sense that the intrinsic and inescapable tremendum of suffering, imperfection, and wasted life, which complements and drives the process of natural selection, challenges a faith in teleology. The question arises: To what extent does the existential “falleness” of creation undermine our ability to gain insight about God or to discern divine intention in nature? I will argue that, from the perspective of faith, the very way of Christ as costly love takes its power and shape from the fallen world it encounters. Thus, although divine presence and agency cannot be empirically demonstrated, the interplay of competition and cooperation in the natural selection of both the individual and the group enable the discernment of an immanent sophia in the evolution of the human capacity for loving regard of the stranger, manifest in the actions of healing, inclusivity, and liberation. The historical Jesus represents the incarnate sophia and thus the model and goal of what the human can become emergent in history as the image of God. From a faith perspective, then, the Christian can discern an ethical “ought” from a natural “is” assuming an existential fall formative of a suffering Christ.

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63 Ibid., 151.
Chapter One

Philip Hefner’s Risky Teleology

Introduction

Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner has argued that if the Abrahamic God of Christian faith is the creator of all things, then creation, itself, must be approached as a resource for understanding the character, presence, and agency of the Christian God. ¹ In this sense, the physical sciences, as our most effective, reliable, and rewarding source of knowledge about the natural world, should play a part in the theological enterprise, if only to argue for a world that is existentially fallen or “empty” (kenosis) of God. The challenge for Christians is how to understand divine providence in light of the suffering and destruction intrinsic to the creative and evolving processes of natural selection revealed by scientific methodologies. Hefner presents a rich and thought-provoking engagement with the issue of God and creation in his book The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion. His work is fruitful for stimulating an inquiry into the relationship between divine providence and human freedom in the face of scientific discoveries surrounding the role of genes and culture in human evolution. For example, if indeed human beings are both products and agents of evolving processes, which have shaped and are shaping our very constitution as physical, emotional, and spiritual creatures, then how are Christians to understand human vocation as made in the image of God, to be “created co-creators,” if natural processes represent God’s mode of creation? That is, if God as creator is responsible for the creation of all

things as we perceive them through the lenses of scientific methodologies, then how as human beings are we to shape our creative powers in light of the creative processes that have produced us and of which we are extensions and agents? As something new and very powerful on the scene of creation, can we as human beings engage the natural world as a source of ethical knowledge in light of a commitment to a God who is the ultimate ground of all things?

Hefner responds in the affirmative, proposing what he labels a bottom-up approach to the challenge of culture formation, by beginning with traditional myth and ritual, which are brought to bear on contemporary developments in science and renovated as necessary, rather than proceeding first through the sciences and “into new channels.” Thus, from the perspective of faith, Hefner argues that the issue of survival must govern Christian discernment of divine agency in creation as a model for human vocation and ethical norms, for if God is creator, then God must intend the survival of creation. That is, “if… the survival thrust is… a motif that gives shape and dynamic to the created order, even where that order includes human beings, the theologian must make the effort to discern how that motif is related to God.” Hefner therefore proposes his “teleonomic axiom,” which states, “if we have been created in the form of certain structures and processes, then God must will those structures and processes to be, in some sense at least, fulfilled.” Accordingly, human behaviour as modeled on the discernment of divine purpose in nature must be measured by a criterion of “wholesomeness” and the degree to which natural processes are either enhanced or destroyed: “A decidedly noninstrumental valuation of

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3 Ibid., 227.
nature is called for.” In this way, Hefner argues, human freedom seeks to be in harmony with the deterministic course of its evolutionary context. Divine purpose becomes nature’s purpose such that providence is conflated with natural process using variations of the phrase, “that which really is.” This knowledge is not self-evident, Hefner admits, but only available in myth; but because myth has survived to the present day and has contributed to human survival, it is consonant with God’s will and a “detector of reality,” he concludes.

Hefner’s teleonomic axiom and criterion of wholesomeness calling for a “noninstrumental valuation of nature” are contradicted, however, by his teleological representation of divine agency in nature, which justifies the maladaptation, suffering, and wasted life intrinsic to creaturely processes as the necessary cost of the realization of a greater good. That is, Hefner’s focus on the metaphor of sacrifice for discerning the Christic logos in nature’s “transformations,” and his use of John Hick’s Irenaean theodicy to explain “natural evil” as the necessary outcome of freedom and personhood within an evolving creation, serve to reinforce patriarchal models of God that condone the instrumental use of both nature and human beings.

Judith Plaskow, in her book, Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, argues that a focus on the metaphor of sacrifice reinforces the continuing subjugation of women trapped in traditional roles of self-denying service and sacrifice. Undergirding Hefner’s teleological metaphors for divine agency in creation then is the challenge posed to his teleonomic axiom by the reality of natural processes,

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6 Ibid., 41-42, 73.
7 Ibid., 117.
8 Ibid., 33, 100-101, 103, 147, 193, 241, 272.
9 Ibid., 241, 221, 187.
10 Ibid., 73, 249, 271.
11 Ibid., 269, 271, 275.
in which the fulfillment of the function of one creature (or several creatures in cooperation) is always at the cost of the function of another. Indeed the creativity of natural processes is dependent upon mass extinctions, genocide, and a predator-prey “arms race” of tooth, claw, hoof, and wing.\textsuperscript{12} The claim, then, that the creator God of Christian faith intends the survival of his creation is challenged by the holocaust of destruction experienced by its constituent members. Or rather, a focus on sacrifice and Hick’s Irenaeian type of theodicy may support a God who intends the survival of ecosystems but does not support a God who cares for and intends the survival of the individual.

Congruently, the argument that myth is “not a false explanation” but is consonant with God’s will and a “detector of reality” because of its survival to the present day and its contribution to human survival oversimplifies the concrete and specific diversity of myth and overlooks the role that myth has played in bigotry, genocide, sexism, racism, and ecocide, often with divine sanction.\textsuperscript{13} To argue, then, that it is “a virtue” that myth be undetermined by empirical data and in the form of unconditional imperatives to counter and transmute primordial drives of inherited genetic programming and to contribute to our survival in the present day not only sets up a false duality between culture and genes but also overlooks the dangerous “functionality” of ignorance in contributing to group survival at the expense of outsiders, both human and nonhuman.\textsuperscript{14} In summation, Hefner’s theory of the created co-creator, as introduced in his book \textit{The Human Factor}, offers a rich and fruitful approach to the vocation of the human being as \textit{imago Dei} in light of environmental crisis. However, his focus on the issue of survival


\textsuperscript{14} Hefner, \textit{Human}, 202-204.
as a criterion for discerning divine agency in creation does not sufficiently engage the intrinsic, complementary, and inescapable cost of that survival, whether biological or mythic. More specifically, Hefner’s teleological representation of God’s grace in creation, as mythic story, justifies the suffering, oppression, and death of individuals as necessary for the realization of divine intent or the future fulfillment of a greater good, to contradict his teleonomic axiom and set up a “risky” model for human beings as made in the image of God.15

**Theology as “Scientific”**

Hefner notes that the very nature of theology requires that it be grounded in the physical sciences.16 That is, if the primary task of theology is to understand who we are as human beings and what our relationship is and should be to our physical environment in light of our religious traditions, then science, as our most reliable and fruitful source of knowledge about the physical world, must be a source in the theological endeavor; for the human cannot be understood apart from the natural environment in which it has evolved and upon which it is dependent.17 In other words, if who we are as human beings, existing in communities, has emerged from an evolutionary process, inclusive of genetic and cultural factors, then theological research can benefit from engaging contemporary theories of natural selection to articulate concepts of human identity: “Although we may not derive our oughts from our experience of the is, the ought would have no real substance if it were not rooted in the is.”18 Thus, because we are inextricably embedded in a natural context, all of our concepts and images are inevitably informed and

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16 Hefner, Human, 218-219.

17 Ibid., 4, 8, 9, 12-16, 17, 58.

18 Ibid., 103, 62, 151, 188.
shaped by that context.\textsuperscript{19} How one conceives of the origin of human beings, for example, whether by special creation or by Darwinian evolution, will shape understandings of divine agency and human vocation.\textsuperscript{20} In this way, conceptions of the world impact conceptions of faith, such that the results of scientific discovery offer valuable material for reflections on the import of Christian belief: “This may simply be another way of stating the ancient maxim, so essential to faith, that unless everything (in this case, all of nature) has meaning, nothing (in this case human being) can claim meaning.”\textsuperscript{21}

To justify nature as a theological source, and to argue that “grace functions through nature,” Hefner engages Darwinian evolutionary science with Christian scripture and tradition.\textsuperscript{22} He argues, for example, that scientific revelation of humanity’s origin from an evolutionary crucible is lent particular significance in light of Paul’s statement to the Athenians (Acts 17:28), that in God “we live and move and have our being,” and by the myths of \textit{creatio ex nihilo} (creation out of nothing) and \textit{creatio continua} (continuing creation), which together demonstrate our dependence upon God’s creative agency.\textsuperscript{23} The natural realm as “a realm of grace” and “a realm of value” is supported by \textit{creatio ex nihilo} in that, leaving aside the “dissonance and deviation” of a subsequent fall, the goodness of God is intimately caught up with creation’s very beginnings: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 14, 82-83, 229.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 14-15.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 15, 247.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 43, 230-231.
The doctrine of *creatio continua* extends the potency and presence of divine grace to include “God’s ongoing sustaining of the world.”\(^{25}\) In an essay published in 1984, Hefner argues,

> This assertion of continuing creation, when coupled with the creation out of nothing, makes a powerful statement about the nonhuman creation as a trustworthy environment for the human. It asserts that the world about us is not antithetical to our human destiny and God’s will but is a fundamentally friendly home for us. It cannot be otherwise if it has proceeded originally from God’s creative intention and continues to be sustained by the will of God who has expressed a fulfilling redemptive will toward us. This statement about the reliability and benevolence of the ecosystem under God is one of the most striking faith-statements in the Christian system of belief.\(^{26}\)

Hefner further draws upon the doctrine of the two natures of Christ as professed at the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.), which drew on the contents of the Tome of Leo (449 C.E.), to argue that the incarnation of God in Christ represents the physical nature of creation as a suitable vessel for divine agency and grace: “Martin Luther insisted that ‘the finite is capable of the infinite’—a maxim that undergirded his sacramental theology and derived from reflection on Christ.”\(^{27}\)

> The doctrine of the Trinity fleshes out and elaborates this character of divine immanence in its articulation of the *perichoretic* relationship of the three divine persons. God as First Person, as creator upon whom all is dependent, is seen in the Third Person, or Spirit, to be undergirding creation. Christ as the Second Person reveals the character of this omnipresent divine agency and provokes human persons to behave in a manner that is in keeping with “what really is.”\(^{28}\) He is the Word, or *logos* in Greek, which we encounter as “the rationale of all reality” and in whom “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).\(^{29}\) The “prime datum of Christian theology,” Christ is the vision or paradigm of human purpose, the “determinative instantiation of


\(^{26}\) Ibid.


\(^{28}\) Ibid., 71-72, 234-235.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 193-194.
what really is,” and exemplifies the behaviour necessary for life to be in harmony with the universe.³⁰ That is, Christ as the second Adam sets the bar for what it means to be human and what it means to realize human potential, by linking in his very being the attributes of altruism, love, and service with the state of being made in the image of God.³¹ In this manner, argues Hefner, Christ reveals that love of neighbor is an intrinsic quality of ultimacy: “What I mean is that to adopt such behaviour is itself to participate in ultimacy, to be in accord with the way things really are, and thus to be in touch with what is fully human.”³² Christ reveals, then, in conjunction with the indwelling Third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit, and also as the incarnation of the immanent logos, the personal quality of the ultimate ground of creation.³³ Thus, Hefner argues, Christ reveals in a definitive and ostensible way what is also discernible in our concrete experience and our perceptions of the natural world, a reality that is gracious and beneficent: “The ultimate is not abstract, but rather is accessible only in the concreteness of life.”³⁴ Indeed, “beneficence is a fundamental characteristic of reality and therefore a ground for our own beneficent behaviour and self-understanding.”³⁵

As a result, nature, too, in some manner, reflects and reveals the image of God, concludes Hefner. Scientifically, we find support for this conclusion, he continues, for if the human has emerged from evolutionary processes, then what we can claim about the human must be referred back to nonhuman nature, at least to some degree, or at least potentially: “Because the human is made up of the basic stuff of the planet, the image of God in that human being indicates that the

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³¹ Hefner, Human, 238, 243, 34.
³² Ibid., 34.
³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Ibid., 33, 80, 81, 190, 194, 247.
³⁵ Ibid., 196.
world itself is capable of that special relationship to which the image of God points.”36 But whether it be true that shared origins logically entail shared capacities, Hefner raises the significant observation that Christian thinkers have failed to connect in an adequate measure the relevance of the common origin of all life to the immanent logos or Word of God, “a prophetic contribution to the soul and mind of our culture that is painfully needed.”37 To illustrate, he refers to Christ’s sacrifice as a way into understanding the image of God in creation:

Sacrifice (interpreted as self-giving for others in behalf of larger purpose) is quite likely an observable phenomenon in prehuman life that goes back millions of years in God’s activity of creation. For Christian theology, the symbol of Jesus’ death as sacrifice affirms that sacrifice is a leading thread that runs through the total tapestry of God’s creation, and that symbol speaks directly to the question of what this thread means for that zone of the Creation that is inhabited by human beings and shaped by their culture.38

Drawing on the centuries-old image of the Two Books, the one of Scripture, the other of nature, Hefner concludes, then, that scientific discovery informs humanity’s most basic values and speaks to issues of ultimacy.39 He therefore demonstrates that the meaning and purpose of human beings can be discerned in conversation with our embeddedness in natural systems, which have value as the source and sustainer of the human made in God’s image.40

**Freedom and Determinism of the Created Co-Creator**

In particular, Hefner notes, the human being is caught at the crossroads of two “symbiotic” forces, its culture and its genes.41 Hefner draws on Ralph Wendell Burhoe to describe the dynamic in terms of two “organisms” co-adapted within the human individual to such a degree that they live in symbiosis and co-evolve. The inescapable vocation of the human being is to

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40 Ibid., 41; Hefner, “Sociobiology,” 192.
manage this relationship within whatever context it is set. Thus, writes Hefner, Christian theology must take seriously the biocultural model of human origins and development if indeed theology deals with the nature of the human being and the providence of creation. He articulates this approach by quoting Solomon Katz, who states,

Biocultural evolution consists of a series of interactions among: the biological information resident within individuals and populations in the form of the genetic constitution (i.e. the DNA); the cultural information which is the sum of the knowledge and experience which a particular society has accumulated and is available for exchange among its members; and thirdly, a human central nervous system (CNS), which is of course a biologically based system, whose principal evolved function with respect to this model is to facilitate the communication or storage of individually and socially developed knowledge and awareness.

Hefner acknowledges that genes and culture encounter each other in the CNS and are indeed one entity rather than two. Thus, he admits, to speak of them separately is to speak of them metaphorically for heuristic purposes, for conceptualizing an artificial duality between “nature” and “nurture” can lead to error.

Articulating the dynamic of culture and genes in terms of freedom and conditionedness, Hefner acknowledges their co-dependence by defining freedom as an intrinsic condition of our natural character, whereby we are compelled to interpret the natural order from which we have emerged, to inform decisions leading to intentional actions. Although there can be tension

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between genes and culture, the two have arisen conjointly within the one evolutionary process and any “dualism is more apparent than real.” Indeed, discussions of freedom and determinism are human constructions, which have no reality outside of their origin and elaboration within human communities. They are scaffolding, in a sense, which enable us to structure our experience as a perceivable reality. Hefner therefore stresses a contextual approach, to bring the discussion of freedom and determinism down from the heights of abstraction: “determinism is often defined as the attribute appropriate to actions that are fully caused by antecedent factors, whereas freedom is defined as an attribute of actions that are not caused by antecedents, but rather by autonomous choice.” These definitions, hypostasizing the two elements, are unhelpful, he explains, because they isolate the concepts from their context and each other. Freedom and determinism only have significance for human beings because of their relevance to the ought of our becoming within the communities in which we are embedded, he argues. It is this social environment, which informs our determined capacity for freedom that defines who we are as human beings.

Hefner draws on Theodosius Dobzhansky to recognize freedom as a “genetically controlled adaptive plasticity,” which is expressed in human behaviour and supports human survival in a wide variety of environments. That is, what makes human beings unique is our brain and its capacity for learning through language and symbol systems. Prior to the emergence

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46 Ibid.,103; Hefner, “Fall,” 86.
47 Hefner, Human, 112.
48 Ibid.,114.
49 Ibid., 112.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 97, 102, 112-113.
of the human, any experiential knowledge acquired by individuals would be lost at their death. With the human, however, accumulated learning could be inherited inter-generationally through culture: “Learned patterns of behavior extend and fine-tune the genetic programming of the phenotype and thereby allow the creature to handle a much more complex set of inputs in a wider range of environments.”

Thus, one of the main factors enabling the survival and advance of the human species has been its increased ability to observe, retain, interpret, and communicate information, empowered by its sophisticated brain. Moreover, humans are defined by compulsions to explore their environment, to reflect self-consciously on actions best suited for a situation, and to finally decide on the best course to follow. Grounded in the consequences of these decisions, and in a sense of responsibility for having pursued them, a complex reception and evaluation of “feedbacks” comes into play, leading to a correction and modification of behaviour. Such freedom is set within and conditioned by a social matrix that allows exploration and free choice in balance with the needs and welfare of other individuals and the community, itself.

As a consequence, our values, morality, and ethics are biologically rooted in the co-emergence of our conditionedness and freedom within creaturely and human societies. The evolution of human beings is thus a “value-driven process,” with human morality being a matter of survival and a key factor in human development. In contrast to authors like John Hick, who opposes our “self-regarding animality” to our “self-giving…ethical values,” Hefner claims that

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53 Hefner, Human, 109.
54 Ibid., 99, 110.
57 Hefner, Human, 30.
58 Ibid., 30-31, 111.
59 Ibid., 31.
the quality of “oughtness” is intrinsic to the evolutionary process and does not need to be
imported from the outside: “What I have just described is the ambience of values—the
emergence of values as a requirement for life and its evolution, the clarification of values, the
achieving of consensus about specific values, and the taking of responsibility for actualizing the
values.” Thus, if determinism consists of the present and historical context in which creation
has come about and in which we are “becoming”; if it is historically our cosmic, genetic, and
ethological heritage; and if it is contemporaneously our natural, social, cultural, and interpersonal
environment; then determinism, as our causal past, shapes our freedom, which in turn
participates in our very conditionedness. Human freedom is driven by the becoming of what we
believe we “ought” to be, based upon the momentum of our evolutionary life-course, argues
Hefner. In the exploration of our environment and as the foundation of our decision-making,
we are therefore always attempting to discern the “ought” of our evolutionary existence and the
basic meaning of creation in order to fulfill its trajectory, he concludes.

The relationship is dialectical rather than polar, such that freedom is not intrinsically
good or determinism intrinsically bad. Instead, our deterministic context is constituted by the
very explorations and actions of our free choices, such that “the heart of evolution’s determinism
is the generation of freedom that enables the causal context to persist in new and different
ways.” In other words, the deterministic “is” informs the human “ought,” which, in turn, shapes
the very structures informing our freedom: “the entirety of the ecosystem and of biological

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61 Hefner, Human, 114-115.
63 Ibid., 113.
evolution is participant directly or indirectly in the freedom of human culture.”

Thus, Hefner argues, creation, itself, is eschatological and value-laden, or moral, such that “the coevolution of genetic and cultural information, mediated by the brain and selected by the system of forces that selects all things, can be said to be the means that God has chosen to unfold the divine intention and to bring nature/matter to a new stage of fulfillment.”

Hefner can therefore conclude: “The appearance of Homo sapiens as created co-creator signifies that nature’s course is to participate in transcendence and freedom, and thereby nature enters into the condition in which it interprets its own essential nature and takes responsibility for acting in accord with that nature.”

In this sense, human freedom represents an extension or sublimation of the evolutionary process, as a tool or “instrument” of the Abrahamic God, or “the ultimate system of reality,” for the exploration and discovery of behaviour requisite for life.

**Teleonomy vs. Teleology**

To qualify this discussion of the purposes underlying human and nonhuman creation, Hefner identifies a *teleonomy* over against a *teleology*. Referring to the writing of Alasdair MacIntyre, Hefner notes that teleological assertions are a matter of faith: “To the extent that the term *teleology* refers to preprogrammed goals that can be extrapolated from the original programming, we cannot think of the creation as teleological.”

Without further clarification of what he means by “teleology,” Hefner cites Alasdair MacIntyre’s “sad” reflections on its decline in the face of modernism’s ascent, and the deleterious impact on efforts to understand the meaning of life or to construct a significant ethical framework. According to Hefner, MacIntyre argues that we are left

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65 Hefner, Human, 47.
69 Hefner, Human, 39, 47.
with the chaos of relativism, or an Aristotelian ethic of virtues grounded in desires for excellence and eudaemonia. As an alternative, Hefner identifies his theory of the created co-creator as a *teleonomy*, according to which, he claims, observations of natural structures and processes reveal a milieu of meaning and purpose for human beings. That is, “The biocultural sciences, *qua* science, do not tell us to what goals the structures and processes should be directed, nor the limits or value of human intervention into the structures and processes. But these sciences do tell us that whatever meaning and purpose human being possesses take the shape of the nature that evolutionary processes have bestowed upon us.”

Hefner’s “teleonomy” therefore asserts that the empirically understood world presents organized bodies sustained by specific operations, which require certain actions to remain functional “and if their very existence is to make sense.” Specific values are entailed in these required actions, which are understood to be in accord with an objectively defined nature. Such values and responses are *teleonomic*, argues Hefner, for “although they cannot be said to constitute the preordained teleology of human beings and the rest of nature, they can be said to represent a credible correlate to structures and processes that are innate in the human being.” In this sense, the methodologies and discoveries of the empirical sciences provide a trustworthy and accessible resource for shaping ethical values necessary for human living in the context of an evolving creation. In the essay, “Is/Ought: A Risky Relationship Between Theology and Science,” published in 1981, Hefner draws on the work of Richard M. Hare to argue: “The

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72 Ibid., 20.

73 Ibid., 39.

74 Ibid., 39-40.

75 Hefner, “Risky,” 67-68.
ecosystem (world, human species) has needs (goal-directed behaviour); to fulfill these needs is a prescription; to prevent such fulfillment is harmful and wrong; therefore, we ought to fulfill these needs.”76 Ultimately, Hefner’s teleonomic axiom comes to expression in his book *The Human Factor*, where he states that the meaning and purpose of a thing can be hypothesized from its structure, its requirements for functioning, the processes by which it functions, and its placement within, and impact upon, its environment. That is, theologically, if God has designed us with certain bodies and functions, then God must also intend those bodies and functions to be fulfilled.77

From the perspective of faith, then, Hefner argues that if creation is an evolutionary system in movement, it must have purposes intended and instilled by God since meaning and purpose as applied to nature, and spoken of “teleonomically,” make no sense unless understood in relation to God; indeed, the intrinsic goodness of creation can only be affirmed from a grounding in God, “or in the equivalent of God.”78 The crucible of evolution is therefore the work of God enabling the fulfillment of divine intention through natural processes as the medium of divine grace.79 More specifically: “Most of what we commonly conceive of as grace, whether in religious terms or not, pertains in some way to the correction, regeneration, redirection, or fulfillment of the self and its communities,” which are natural phenomena emergent from evolving processes grounded in relationship.80 Thus, “knowledge and grace are in no way an escape from nature, but rather are in themselves natural happenings and critical elements of what

76 Ibid., 72.
77 Hefner, Human, 40.
78 Ibid., 45-46, 241, 59.
79 “The encounter with God takes place within the processes of nature” (Hefner, Human, 45).
80 Ibid., 62.
nature is and can become.”\textsuperscript{81} The human, as created co-creator, is an extension of these natural processes, and, as such, is bound by service to, and is responsible for, preparing the best possible future for creation: “The will of God is that the creation should fulfill its God-grounded purposes out of its own intentionality.”\textsuperscript{82} In this fashion, concludes Hefner, a “noninstrumental valuation of nature is called for,” in that the object of our motivations and actions should be “the enhancement of nature’s processes.”\textsuperscript{83} That is, “freedom exists with purposes that pertain to the conditioning evolutionary processes that have preceded its appearance in \textit{Homo sapiens}. Therefore, freedom is to be interpreted as part of nature’s way of being nature.”\textsuperscript{84} This knowledge, notes Hefner, is not self-evident but only available in myth.\textsuperscript{85}

Hefner goes so far as to argue that human freedom, in the abstract, seeks to discern and pursue the deterministic course of the causal past from which it has emerged: “the true \textit{oughts} of this determinism are what freedom seeks to actualize in more adequate ways,” and “Freedom calls forth determinism as the structure of the trajectory that freedom seeks to fulfill….assimilating itself to that determinism, freedom becomes what it must be.”\textsuperscript{86} Conflating the divine with nature in his use of “the way things really are,” Hefner writes:

Humans search the \textit{is} of the determined context, in order to discover its \textit{ought}; just as they probe the \textit{ought} in order to discover its \textit{is}. In other words, freedom seeks the end or purpose or fundamental nature of the life process in which it finds itself, in order to be obedient to what fundamental nature can become. This is another facet of the innate human drive to discover the way things really are and to shape human behaviour commensurately.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 39, 241, 73, 46.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 114-115.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 115.
Thus, argues Hefner, if nature has purposes and those purposes are divine, then human freedom seeks to be in harmony with the deterministic course of its evolutionary context: “We do not prize freedom except as it is consonant with the course of evolutionary becoming and supportive of it. We do not prize freedom that breaks out in self-destructive behaviours. Determinism is a concern because at points it seems to go counter to our freedom, and it raises the fear that our freedom is in dissonance with our evolutionary course.” As humans, then, not only are we “determined to be free,” but we are also “free to be determined,” such that “our freedom must be finally consonant with the objective course of our evolution,” for “[t]he conditions that support our fulfillment within our evolutionary course are those in which both the determined elements of our context and the freedom we exercise within that context are consonant with each other and also harmonious with what it is that we are to become.”

The discernment of divine purpose in nature as a means for judging human intention and shaping human freedom must be judged ultimately by a criterion of “wholesomeness,” concludes Hefner, by the degree to which human action contributes to the life of creation. The criterion is pragmatic in that what is beneficial to nature will have to be empirically measured: “Criteria that are clearly indifferent to benefitting nature or actually harmful are thereby falsified.” Hefner admits, though, that his rubric of wholesomeness is a general one, and that he does not explore it in any elaborate fashion. Moreover, he notes that the meaning of this criterion is not self-evident and must be available for critique and revision since teleonomic proposals are human constructions grounded in interpretation: “How this functioning and fulfillment are carried

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88 Ibid., 117.
89 Ibid.,121.
90 Ibid., 41-42.
91 Ibid., 61.
92 Ibid., 60-61.
out…is subject to human freedom, which includes the human search for what fulfillment means in each instance.” Nevertheless, in keeping with his drive for a public theology, he claims to offer a discussion of meaning and purpose that transcends subjective relativism and grounds a discernment of human purpose in empirical descriptions of nature that are open to public scrutiny and agreement.

But a reader may be left scratching his or her head about the “teleonomic” status of Hefner’s proposal in light of his claim that to speak “teleonomically” about meaning and purpose attaching to natural processes demands a grounding in ultimacy or God. Indeed, this assertion confuses Hefner’s delineation of teleonomy from teleology and runs counter to definitions proposed by those who initially applied the term to biology. Consider that Colin S. Pittendrigh introduced “teleonomic” in 1958 as a descriptive rather than prescriptive name to recognize the presence of organized end-directed adaptation in natural systems without needing recourse to God or Aristotelian final cause. He argues,

Biologists for a while were prepared to say a turtle came ashore and laid its eggs, but they refused to say it came ashore to lay its eggs. These verbal scruples were intended as a rejection of teleology but were based on the mistaken view that the efficiency of final causes is necessarily implied by the simple description of an end-directed mechanism….The biologist’s long-standing confusion would be more fully removed if all end-directed systems were described by some other term, like “teleonomic,” in order to emphasize that the recognition and description of end-directedness does not carry a commitment to Aristotelian teleology as an efficient causal principle.

93 Ibid., 40, 42.
94 Ibid., 40.
95 Ibid., 59.
Pittendrigh argues that the organization of living things, unlike appearances of simple order, cannot exist without being relative to an end or function. In this sense, to speak of organization in creation is to speak of adaptation. And because organization contains and represents nonrandom information, “an improbable state in a contingent universe,” the existence of organization demands explanation beyond mere acceptance. Indeed, “The study of adaptation is not an optional preoccupation with fascinating fragments of natural history; it is the core of biological study.”

Thus, the aforementioned causal or physiological explanation of the turtle, without mention of purpose, overlooks two significant questions worthy of study: “(1) What is the goal of turtle organization (including the subsidiary goals of constituent features)? (2) What is the origin of that information which underlies and causes the organization?” In addition to the causal or physiological explanation, these questions provide two additional lines of investigation, focusing on creaturely function and evolutionary history, respectively. All three, concludes Pittendrigh, explain features of life that have developed by a fully physiological process “free from teleology.” In other words, Darwin’s articulation of natural selection is significant, not mainly for being the impetus behind natural history, but for offering an explanatory approach to adaptation that coincides with the dominant scientific conceptual scheme of physics rather than depending upon teleological formulations of final cause, explains Pittendrigh.

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98 “The importance of this point for the student of living systems is that he cannot lightly assert they are organized without being prepared to face the question: ‘with respect to what are they organized?’” (Pittendrigh, 394).

99 Ibid., 395.

100 Ibid., 396.

101 Ibid., 393.

102 Ibid., 393.
Grace A. de Laguna, takes up Pittendrigh’s discussion to argue that what has been rejected in the term “teleology” is the belief that the outcomes of evolution, “the production of the living cell, and later of intelligent man,” are goals intended by an immanent and/or transcendent guiding agency, working through natural processes according to a preordained plan.103 “What is more important for our argument,” argues Laguna, “is the existence in nature of ends which are independent of man and apparently of any conscious purpose. This is the recognized fact of the ‘end-directedness’ of all organisms.”104 Referring to Pittendrigh’s use of the descriptive term “teleonomy,” she notes that confusion arises from a failure to distinguish the goals of organic organization from their origins. As an example, Laguna mentions William Paley, who proposes that the end-directedness of nature demonstrates an intentional end-directedness in the forces that produce it, or a final cause. The rejection of such teleology, she argues, often leads to the denial of the teleonomy of living things, or rather to treat such end-directedness as not scientifically important, when indeed teleonomic conceptions are essential for the advancement of modern evolutionary theory: “only when we think in teleonomic terms, and regard the structure as end-directed, does it make sense to speak of ‘selection’ at all.”105 Laguna therefore concludes with Pittendrigh that teleonomic structure is evident in nature with mechanical structure.106

Turning to human beings, she associates the emergence of mind with “a new type of teleonomic structure,” grounded in human culture as an emergent platform for evolutionary

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 119-121. “Natural selection is not to be conceived as itself a physico-chemical process, and while it is equally not to be conceived as itself teleological, it operates on end-directed organism to produce populations of more efficient and more complex end-directedness—and it is only on them as teleonomic systems that it can operate” (Laguna 121).
106 Ibid., 126.
processes to take effect.\textsuperscript{107} In contrast to “the teleonomy of primitive organization,” which focuses on the “supreme end of reproduction,” human culture is driven by goals “superorganic, impersonal and ideal,” which extend beyond the mere physical preservation of self and offspring, the perpetuation of the species, and “differential reproductive success.”\textsuperscript{108} Argues Laguna, “This is not due to any transcendental endowment of conscious purpose, but to the emergence in [man] of a new form of teleonomic organization, a personality structure centred upon a self.”\textsuperscript{109}

Although human beings are congenitally predisposed to culture, the specific teleonomic structure shaping the content of that culture must be learned, and in the process of this enculturation, argues Laguna, the individual is transformed into a \textit{person}, or “self oriented to the realization of values and the maintenance of moral standards.”\textsuperscript{110} In this way, although humans like animals will fight to defend their homes, families, and livelihoods, what makes the \textit{human} individual \textit{human} is the capacity to imagine and form a conception of \textit{self} within an ideal world of culture, for which members of that culture are willing to die: “the only world in which [man] can live as a human being, he not only maintains through his daily activities, but in its defense he is ready to sacrifice his life.”\textsuperscript{111} Therefore, explains Laguna, “It is a familiar saying that one must lose one’s life in order to save it. But the life which is to be saved is not that of the immortal soul after death but that of the self in its integrity as an ideal.”\textsuperscript{112} In this sense, she continues, human action and human freedom are oriented towards the formulation and preservation of the self as an ideal, which in turn is necessary for the maintenance and development of the ideal world of culture in

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{107}] Ibid., 126-128.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] Ibid., 129-130; Pittendrigh, “Adaptation,” 398.
\item[\textsuperscript{109}] Laguna, “Teleonomy,” 130.
\item[\textsuperscript{110}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{111}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{112}] Ibid., 131.
\end{itemize}
which the self is situated: “Since man creates—or generates—himself as a person in generating his human world, this world is not only the end for which the preservation of the self is a necessary means, but the world is the necessary condition for the preservation of the self.”

Thus, in Laguna’s articulation of teleonomy, grounded in Pittendrigh’s work, we can see the reflections of Hefner’s theory of the created co-creator. But Hefner’s proposal differs in a crucial point from the definition of “teleonomy” offered by Laguna and Pittendrigh, for Hefner’s discussion of freedom and determinism is grounded in the discernment of divine purpose in nature, such that the ends found in nature become the intentions of God, referred to interchangeably as “that which really is.” Hefner argues that “we” only prize freedom that is consonant with and supportive of our “evolutionary becoming” or “the objective course of our evolution,” and “do not prize freedom that breaks out in self-destructive behaviours.” For Hefner, “we” therefore “fear” that our freedom may be “dissonant with” or “counter to” the determinism of “our evolutionary course.” Leaving aside the universal applicability of this assertion in light of the concrete and specific realities of human individuals the world over (many of whom do not believe in the evolutionary origins of human beings), Hefner argues that teleonomic proposals are “a work of human construction” and “are subject to interpretation,” yet states elsewhere in the text that “to adopt a point of view that speaks of theology and religion as interpretation, hermeneutics, and nothing more is not adequate”; and with reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg, Hefner concludes, “theology cannot finally avoid the task of arguing cogently its

113 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 117, 121.
116 Ibid., 117.
117 According to Gallup's “Values and Beliefs” survey conducted May 8 to 11 in 2014, 42% of Americans believe in the Creationist view of human origins, that “God created humans in their present form 10,000 years ago, a view that has changed little over the past three decades.” (http://www.gallup.com/poll/170822/believe-creationist-view-human-origins.aspx)
claim to be a representation of the way things really are.”

To further elaborate, Hefner turns to Gerd Theissen, who argues that evolving natural processes suggest an unknown “inner goal,” which is the basic reality to which all “matter, life, and culture” struggle to adapt as the end or fulfillment of creation. For humans, this process is experienced as a “destiny” or task “programmed into the structures of our existence” by an ultimate reality known by Christians as God. In this sense, Hefner’s proposal is teleological for proposing the reality of a pre-existing intelligence, whose intention is the final cause undergirding and envisioning evolving natural processes as the means to realize ends in creation; human freedom, as an extension of these natural processes, is a vehicle for the discernment of divine intention and its realization in the achievement of final cause. Consequently, Hefner appears to want his cake and to eat it, too, because of his paradoxical assertion that teleonomic proposals are grounded in “interpretation” but also pertain to “that which really is.”

Myth as “detector of reality”

For Hefner, then, the physical sciences set out the empirical descriptions, which are taken up by myth and ritual to give “teleonomic” meaning, purpose, and direction to our actions. Human beings, as creatures of culture, he argues, are free in the sense that we have no choice but to make decisions and to pursue certain behaviours, which we contextualize, interpret, and justify through the creation of goals, norms, rules and larger frameworks of meaning, or stories, as we

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120 Ibid., 172-73, quoted in Hefner, Human, 190-91.

121 Hefner, Human, 40, 42, 45, 46, 59, 241, 219.

122 Ibid., 20-21, 213.
live our respective lives. Myth offers such a framework of meaning, as a story of “ultimate concern.” Hefner follows Paul Ricoeur, who writes:

Myth will here be taken to mean what the history of religions now finds in it: not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but (1) a traditional narration which (2) relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of (3) providing grounds for the ritual actions of persons of today and, in a general manner, (4) establishing all the forms of action and thought by which we understand ourselves in our world.

More specifically, myth for Hefner is a “detector of reality” representing “the way things really are” since “God refers to what really is.” In this fashion, myth and ritual shape imperatives for moral action, which are held to be in harmony “with the fundamental character of reality” though the proposed world-picture may be “underdetermined by the data.” Tested in the living out of our lives, myth and ritual are ultimately grounded in the faith commitment that what they present is true. Otherwise we would not be compelled to act according to the ethic they demand and require. Hefner writes,

When we are hanging in faith over the 70,000 fathoms of water that [Kierkegaard] spoke of, we are willing to take the leap, willing to be suspended over nothing more solid than the water, because the object of our dialectical faith has to do with the way things really are. Otherwise we would not be able to summon the energy, courage, and strength to live by faith in images of and in the ever-present reality of that which is always undetermined by the facts of our total experience.

In particular, the Christian call to love beyond the kinship group can be costly and involve suffering; so to justify and compel such behaviour requires the conviction that altruism and

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123 Ibid., 38, 97-98, 99, 121.
124 Ibid., 21.
125 Ricoeur, 5, quoted in Hefner, Human, 21.
127 Ibid., 162-163.
128 Ibid., 187.
sacrifice are congruent with the demands of an essential reality undergirding creation.\textsuperscript{129} The consonance of myth and ritual with “the way things really are” is finally judged, Hefner argues, by their persistence and viability in light of the selective pressures of biological and cultural evolution.\textsuperscript{130}

Indeed, he continues, the information of myth and ritual has been essential and necessary for human survival because myth and ritual provide an operative understanding of one’s environment despite a dearth of empirical data.\textsuperscript{131} From the very beginning, humans have required cultural motivators to match and counter the force of inherited genetic programming. Instincts to fight or flight, or to lust and greed, had to be controlled by cultural supplements of greater power and directness if humans were to survive and thrive in community. Much of this learned knowledge could not be gained by the slow methods of empirical trial and error but had to be accepted immediately, and as operationally absolute, in order for humans to cope with the exigencies of a harsh and hostile environment.\textsuperscript{132} Thus, argues Hefner, it is a “virtue” that myth be underdetermined by empirical data and in the form of unconditional imperatives to counter and “transmute” the baser drives of our inherited genetic programming and contribute to our survival in the present day.\textsuperscript{133} In this sense, Hefner concludes, myth and ritual are consonant with God’s will because they contribute to the survival of concrete human communities, creaturely life, and planetary ecosystems; for survival is written into “the way things are” since God is concerned with the well being of the life God has created, “its dynamic, its creativity, its

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{132} “There are too many facets to the picture that cannot be readily experienced, and some behaviours cannot wait upon the results of long-term, or even short-term, trial and error…. Moses did not bring down with him from Sinai a list of Ten Suggestions or Ten Hypotheses to Be Tested, but rather Ten Commandments” (Hefner, Human, 162-163).
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 202-204.
direction, and its quality.”\textsuperscript{134} We therefore pursue the teleonomy for which we were made in the image of God, as self-aware mythmakers and “free creator[s] of meaning,” when we take responsibility for our mythmaking and the flourishing of our planetary ecosystem in light of our technological power.\textsuperscript{135}

But Hefner’s treatment of “myth” appears, at first glance, too monolithic and abstract, underrepresenting the role that mythic imperatives have played in bigotry, racism, sexism, genocide, persecution, and eco-cide, particularly when “underdetermined by data” or grounded in ignorance. Hefner writes, “the critique of myth on the grounds that it is underdetermined by data may rest in a deep failure to appreciate the true function of myth in human evolutionary history.”\textsuperscript{136} Indeed, myth has contributed to the survival of human beings but often at the expense of other human beings or nonhuman creation. To argue, then, that “myth” is a “detector of reality” or is consonant with an objective reality (“the way things really are”) because of its persistence into the present day and its role in human survival is to overlook the concrete and conflicting diversity of myth and its destructive cost when driven by political agendas seeking power and privilege in divine sanction. For illustration, one has only to look at the role of “myth” in the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages, the influence of Martin Luther’s anti-Semitism on Nazi ideology, the present chaos in Iraq and Syria, or the conflict in and around Israel. More commonly than not, myth serves the interests of the community or ingroup from which it originates, at the expense of those outside the community. As a result, any worldview that claims to be “the way things really are” can be offputting to the uninitiated, and can echo

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 195, 227.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 239. “To probe theologically what survival means is to recognize that we encounter the holy in every aspect of our lives, including those that are life-threatening. Survival will be brought into our myths and rituals, because...the meaning of survival is not self-evident, and it will remain so until it is properly rendered mythically and ritually” (Hefner, Human, 226-227).

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 204, 185.
ideological assertions to believe in something “because I said so,” particularly if those assertions are not inter-subjectively demonstrable in any empirical way, though they may be outcomes of communal deliberation and decision.

Moreover, in the context of Christian myth, Christ’s revelation of God in vulnerability, selfless service, compassion, forgiveness, poverty, hospitality, inclusivity, and attending to the “lost” and marginalized, led to his death and the martyrdom of those who followed his way. Indeed, in a fallen world marked by militarism and consumerism, the way of Christ as revealed in the gospels is counter-cultural and, although focused on the survival of others, can doom its adherents to persecution and suffering, not survival (Phil. 1:19-21; 3:7-11; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Gal. 6:14-17). Thus, without sufficient recognition of that to which the incorrigible falleness of creation points, the abstract and unqualified criterion of survival remains problematic and vague as a warrant for behaviour modeled on the discernment of divine intent in creation. In the natural world, the survival of any lifeform or lifeforms is always at the cost of another. In his essay “Survival as a Human Value,” published in 1980, Hefner acknowledges such conflict when he writes,

> survival is not necessarily a pretty thing. Our common language tends to obscure this fact. . . .Survival, for one thing, is accompanied by a high rate of failure. Most species that have ever existed have not survived but rather have become extinct….Survival interests and strategies in one species or individual may well conflict with those of others. My survival may well depend on some other species’ or individual’s death. This is what “red in tooth and claw” refers to. If human beings are considering survival for themselves, are they at the same time willing that others not survive?\(^{137}\)

Homo sapiens would not have evolved had there not been five previous mass extinctions; and the present flourishing of humanity has been the catalyst for a sixth major extinction driven by modern myths commodifying nature for national and individual self-interests. Thus, although

Hefner acknowledges “ambiguity” and raises “the question as to just what survival is and what it means,” his focus on the fulfillment of organic function as the measure of divine will does not sufficiently account for the fact that many of the “functions” of earth’s creatures, including that of the human as mythmaker, have evolved from out of competition and from what Richard Dawkins refers to as an evolutionary “arms race.”

Of the cheetah and antelope, Dawkins writes,

The teeth, claws, eyes, nose, leg muscles, backbone and brain of a cheetah are all precisely what we should expect if God’s purpose in designing cheetahs was to maximize deaths among antelopes. Conversely, if we reverse-engineer an antelope we find equally impressive evidence of design for precisely the opposite end: the survival of antelopes and starvation among cheetahs. It is as though cheetahs had been designed by one deity and antelopes by a rival deity. Alternatively, if there is only one Creator who made the tiger and the lamb, the cheetah and the gazelle, what is He playing at? Is He a sadist who enjoys spectator blood sports? Is He trying to avoid overpopulation in the mammals of Africa? Is He maneuvering to maximize David Attenborough’s television ratings?

In other words, the fulfillment of the function of one creature is often at the expense, defeat, destruction, or repression of the function of another, whether a cheetah eating a gazelle, or a gazelle escaping a cheetah.

Therefore, although Hefner’s “teleonomy” may be valuable and, in some sense, “wholesome” for its abstract focus on the survival of individuals and environmental ecosystems, it fails to reconcile the tension between the survival of ecosystems and the survival of individuals; one does not directly translate to the other. Hefner, himself, admits: “The ambiguity concerning the unit of survival poses, prima facie at least, a reductionism that does not allow God to be involved in the survival process.” That is, ecosystems by their very nature flourish at the expense of individuals, whatever their function or requirements for being, since

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140 Hefner, “Survival,” 212.
ecosystems are maintained and driven by mechanisms of predation, parasitism, exploitation, extinction, genocide, and wasted life. Hefner acknowledges,

> It does make a difference to human beings and to their value system how we judge what it is that survives. Actions and attitudes will be different if it is individual human survival that is of dominant importance from what would be the case if it is genes or culture....At the present time it is not clear just what unit of reality we are speaking of when we discuss survival.\(^{141}\)

Survival, then, whether of the individual or the ecosystem is a necessary abstract goal for determining ethical behaviour in harmony with God’s will, but when applied to the concrete and specific realities of “natural evil” consequent upon the “geometrical ratio of increase” of all living things, the challenge to assertions of divine grace in creation remains unanswered, particularly “within our publically discussable understandings of human nature.”\(^{142}\) How can God desire the fulfillment of the function of each creature when those functions are in explicit conflict? If God values survival then why, as Abrahamic creator, would God create a world so deadly and pain-full?

Moreover, in contradiction to Hefner’s teleonomic axiom, Darwin recognized that the adaptive impetus underlying physiological development or “transformation” is defined by an organ or trait taking on a different function from that which it was originally developed to fulfill, in order to cope with changing circumstances or competitive pressures.\(^{143}\) The process of natural selection driving the creative process of evolution depends upon this adaptation or change in function for the development of new forms of life and the emergence of novelty; for those organisms unable to develop new behaviours or traits in light of environmental challenges suffer extinction. One need only look at the development of the human tongue for speech, the bacterial

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 205.


flagellum for motion, or the evolution of the jawbone from a fish gill. Hefner’s teleonomic proposal is therefore informed by a bird’s-eye view of evolution, which overlooks the concrete mechanisms and processes that shape ecosystems and cause the suffering, destruction, and death experienced by its constituent members as the cost of the survival of the few. James Gustafson notes that Hefner’s treatment of the relationship among the sciences, religion, and ethics is couched in generalization: “He does not test his account, in this book, in specific and dense scientific accounts.”

As a consequence, Hefner’s treatment of a monolithic “nature” lacks definition and enables the conflation of God and “natural process” under the moniker of “that which really is.” At one point, Hefner admits that despite our limited experience, “We seek knowledge that we can rely on to guide us when we next experience an apple or a person, or a flow of interconnected things and events. I refer to this as the attempt to know what really is or how things really are.” In this way, we embed our immediate perceptions in an understanding of experience, where we “strive to base our thinking and our actions on that which lies deeper within our experience, the ‘way things really are’—whether it pertains to growing apples, relating to persons, or determining the vocations of our lives and societies.” The Abrahamic religions and, more recently, science have taken on significance as attempts to determine “the way things really are,” he explains. Though in other ages, we believed ourselves to be passive recipients of the “truth about the nature of things,” to which we only had to conform, there is now a greater recognition of our freedom and participation in the construction of “truth,” considering that the “indicative or is forms the norm for the imperatives or oughts of human

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146 Ibid., 100.
Rhetorically, then, Hefner equates science with theology using the phrase “that which really is” to lend myth and ritual the weight and credibility of the “science-based story,” which, he affirms, “our schooling and our culture often tell us…is the most important story of all, the most universally accepted, the ‘truest.’” “These sciences have, after all, fashioned what is surely the most significant means that our epoch has discovered for gaining knowledge. For many, if not most, persons alive today, to ‘know’ something means to comprehend it scientifically.” At the same time, Hefner argues, “the commitment of the scientist to understand human being as fully as possible, as well as the commitment of all persons to advance the survival of the human species and the planet, make no sense except as an effort to take seriously that which really is; what really is, is finally grounded in the ultimate, else neither commitment is fully worthwhile.” In so doing, Hefner conflates divine providence with physical processes to support his argument for a “public” or “scientific theology” that is “credible to scientists,” in which discussions of human vocation and ethics can transcend subjective relativism because of their basis in empirical descriptions of nature, subject to public examination and agreement.

Hefner is thus able to propose a “pragmatic criterion” of “wholesomeness” as the measure for discerning the human ought from the physical is, by that which leads to “the enhancement of natural processes” or benefits nature, though he admits that the criterion is “uncertain and ambiguous.” Indeed, without qualification, it appears to privilege the ecosystem over the individual and is vulnerable to dangerous interpretations of the manifest and multiple realities of “natural processes.” Depending upon the changing “conditions of existence”

\[147\] Ibid., 101.
\[148\] Ibid., 115, 167, 272, 12, 16.
\[149\] Ibid., 272.
\[150\] Ibid., 40, 218.
\[151\] Ibid., 39-42, 60-61, 73.
(Darwin’s terminology), certain actions, whether competitive, cooperative, parasitical, or altruistic, have contributed “to the life of those natural processes.”\footnote{Ibid., 41.} Thus, to justify an ethic as harmonious with “the way things really are” because it benefits nature can warrant any number of behaviours grounded in processes leading to survival in contrasting times and places.

Consider, for example, that the most successful survivors on planet earth are not humans but insects, viruses, and bacteria, which have pre-existed humans by millions, if not billions of years, and will doubtless survive, if not flourish, long past our extinction and into the future because of traits and behaviours not conceivable within the human frame of reference. Hefner, himself, acknowledges the problem when he writes,

\begin{quote}
In my estimation the conversation about human survival tends to minimize the harsh reality of what the survival game is really like in the nature around us and within us….When survival is the value, everything is judged by whether it is functional in such a way as to serve the struggle for survival. This functionalist consideration introduces the reductionism which is so repugnant to theologians….It threatens to judge the human enterprise by criteria which may leave out of consideration the values which the theologian considers essential.\footnote{Hefner, “Survival,” 206-207.}
\end{quote}

In other words, the scientist and the theologian will often conflict in their definitions of survival, which is why it is so necessary to recognize the distinction, explains Hefner.\footnote{Hefner, “Is/Ought,” 76.} For example, the scientist can reduce survival to the unit of the gene, such that Richard Dawkins can describe human beings as “survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.”\footnote{Ibid.; Hefner, “Survival,” 205; Richard Dawkins, “Preface to First Edition,” in The Selfish Gene, 30th Anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xxi.} Hefner stresses the need to augment or “valorize” the meaning of survival from a theological worldview in order to prioritize an organism’s life over that of a
gene. In this way, from a Christian perspective, he argues, “a kind of reduction of all life strategies to survival strategies is not amiss” for “life does serve the function of promoting that survival,” which must be God’s concern as the primal and omnipresent creator.

In order to clarify the theological meaning of “survival,” then, as a criterion for human freedom and the making of myth and culture, Hefner proposes “the love principle,” revealed in Christ to be God’s will (Matt. 5:43-48; 22:37-40; John 13:34): “If you wish to be in harmony with the way things really are, you will love your neighbor and your enemy.” This Great Commandment, Hefner explains, is developed from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, in which God’s very being is the source and foundation for love. According to Christian mythic material, all ethics and morality presupposes and reflects God’s prior love for us. As a result, biocultural explanations of altruistic love, organized around epigenetic rules or strategies of self-interest, are theologically insufficient and must be completed by an understanding of altruism as an intrinsic value fundamental to reality, “as expression of basic cosmological and ontological principles.”

From out of his faith in Christ and his trust in the physical sciences, then, Hefner concludes that the purposes of God revealed in Christ are the purposes of the created world. He argues, therefore, that if myth speaks of “the way things really are,” and the love command is foundational to the myth, then Christian myth should predict scientific conclusions: “if the myth refers the empirical realm to an unconditioned universe, then it would be rendered useless if

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158 Hefner, Human, 189, 205-206, 216, 249-250.
159 Ibid., 206.
160 Ibid., 194.
161 Ibid., 208-209, 197.
162 Ibid., 41, 241.
scientific studies did not converge, at least to the extent that the myth could account for them.”

Indeed, he continues, the persistent and powerful religious sense of “the way things really are….that beneficence is a fundamental characteristic of reality and therefore a ground for our own beneficent behaviour and self-understanding” should compel “the sciences to take these views seriously as issues for research.”

In other words, Hefner argues, although genetic programs may seem inadequate to explain trans-kin altruism in human beings, trans-kin altruism as revealed in myth has nonetheless contributed to the formation and success of human beings, and is deemed by many to be a defining feature of human uniqueness.

Myth, ritual, and religion are therefore essential for the human being, Hefner concludes, because the proposal of trans-kin altruism as behaviour attuned to “the way things really are” is not self-evident, nor accountable by genetic evolution alone, yet is required for human survival; thus, “[t]he prediction is implied that as the human sciences progress and become more adequate, they will recognize this essentiality.”

For our existence in socially complex communities has demanded selfless behaviours in tension with, if not contradicting, genetic programs of selfish behaviour, which have served creaturely development in our ancestral past, Hefner explains.

In response, Langdon Gilkey notes that Hefner’s book The Human Factor covertly expresses a nineteenth century dualism grounded in the metaphysical faith in progress, despite Hefner’s recognition of the inseparability of genes and culture, the fallibility of myth, and the

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163 Ibid., 193-194.
164 Ibid., 196.
165 Ibid., 206, 194. Hefner claims, “myth and ritual that carry the cultural programs for trans-kin altruism have proven themselves to possess reliable information for understanding reality and for the guidance of human behavior. Even when, as with some of the cosmological myths, they appear to stand falsified when compared to the findings of contemporary science, they have served the survival and flourishing of concrete human communities” (Hefner, Human, 195).
166 Ibid., 175, 199, 271.
167 Ibid., 192, 195, 199, 200.
inability of human beings to live up to its standards. Gilkey summarizes Hefner’s argument as follows:

we [are] made up of contraries in tension; genetic influences that lead us to competitiveness, to brutality, to violence, to selfishness, and to hedonism; cultural influences (largely myth and ritual) that direct us to cooperation, to the welfare of others, to self-discipline. Following Donald Campbell, Hefner argues that ‘individuals are selfish genetically; society needs altruism; genetic competitors must become social cooperators’ (pp.133-34). Our inherent sense of sin and guilt arises from this experienced discrepancy within us (pp.132-33). This is not, as it might seem, dualistic; the two, says Hefner, work together to form a whole (p. 131—but so also did the Greek body and soul!).

That is, Hefner’s use of the biological metaphor of supraorganism, or superorganism, to explain culture as symbiotic with genes, much like two creatures co-adapting, coevolving, and cooperating, is misleading because the “heuristic” of tension and dissonance implies, exaggerates, and over-simplifies a dualistic separation between “the two streams of information.” Indeed, our genetic baggage has burdened us with selfish drives and instincts, which are destructive in contemporary contexts and inform an understanding of sin; but a long history of social living has also shaped our genes with hardwired capacities for empathy, shame, and language, all of which contribute to the human conscience, the internalization of social norms, and the self-regulation of behaviour for functional group living. Hefner, himself, recognizes that “We should guard against a false dualism between genetic and nongenetic evolutionary causes of behaviour….At the same time, it is equally inadequate to hold that behaviours as deeply rooted in human life as belief in myths and rituals and respect for moral commands, as well as respect for the specific behaviour of self-giving love, would exist today if they were not reinforced by the human genotypes.” Elsewhere, he admits, “the dimensions of

170 Ibid., 199.
‘oughtness’ and value are built into the evolutionary process and need not be imported from the outside. . . It is a value-driven process.”171 Nonetheless, Hefner locates trans-kin altruism ultimately in the influence of culture and religion, and locates selfishness in our biology, conflating Richard Dawkins’s concept of the selfish gene with selfish behaviour: “Precisely because human behavior toward non-kin conspecifics must be and has been distinctive, and because this distinctiveness is not generated by genetic programs, the cultural programs need to be forceful.”172

Hefner’s treatment of myth in the monolithic sense, then, refers to those myths that compel trans-kin altruism and reflect Christ’s love command at the core of Christian myth for life in harmony with “what really is.” Hefner admits that “myth and ritual can be wrong; they can speak less than the full truth about life, or they can speak truth that was once viable but today is virtual truth.”173 He admits that religion has caused war and conflict as much as it has contributed to peace. Referring to events in Northern Ireland, India, Lebanon, and Palestine, Hefner identifies the dangers of altruism focused on one’s own group: “The great advance in human history came when religion enabled altruism to be extended beyond family, tribe, and nation.”174 The problem is that “neither Christianity nor any other religion has been faithful enough to its mythic emphasis on the love command.”175 But looking to science, religious communities can be reminded that “the love command is of special significance for human living.”176 Although this imperative is not self-evident in nature, he argues, when one approaches

171 Ibid., 31.
172 Ibid., 181-83, 192, 199-200, 201.
173 Ibid., 9, 174, 196, 240.
174 Ibid., 192.
175 Ibid., 192-193.
176 Ibid., 193.
scientific revelation from a faith-based Christian perspective, one can discern the viability of Christ’s Golden Rule as a functional and successful way to survive and thrive. In this sense, Hefner argues,

we will meet the challenge to our culture-formation from the bottom up, rather than the top down. By that I mean we are more likely to move through and with our existing myth-ritual traditions into new and more adequate myth-ritual formations than to proceed from science-based concepts into new channels. I term the latter a top-down approach, since it tends to abandon the traditions of the last 40,000 years.177

Thus, although Hefner’s theory of the created co-creator is informed by the scientific revelation of nature, ultimately the final arbiter of his ethical stance is his Christian faith, which determines how that scientific knowledge is used to discern meaning, value, and purpose. Indeed the organic world has functions, but how those functions are determined and fulfilled, whether human, nonhuman, or divine, is a matter of interpretation from the perception of “what is real.”178 More specifically, Hefner argues, the is and the ought are unified in “the religious symbol,” which “projects…meaning into the objective realm” from a representation of “the true or ultimate character…of ‘the way things really are,’” to provide “an image of activity which, if carried through, brings the agent into harmony with that objective order of meaning,” now conforming with God.179 Only with this qualification, then, that his approach begins bottom up with his Christian faith, is Hefner able to argue that “the conventional interpretation of the so-called naturalistic fallacy…understood in any simple way is no longer tenable.”180

Hefner’s bottom-up approach informs an answer to Gilkey’s question, “if Hefner’s argument be valid that myths and rituals need an apodictic form to function properly, then how

177 Ibid., 214.
178 Ibid., 6-8, 20-21, 41, 45, 56-60, 114, 213, 268-69.
179 Hefner, “Is/Ought,” 58, 60, 66.
180 Hefner, Human, 58.
can a ‘liberal,’ ‘science-shaped’ form of theology be useful?” Hefner states explicitly that the “larger frameworks of meaning” offered by religious myth and story to inform our ethical worldview “do not lend themselves to verification by sure knowledge.” At the same time, he asserts that the “more specific, falsifiable knowledge” provided by scientific methodology “may be certain, but [that same knowledge] is often unsatisfying because it provides so little larger meaning.”

That is, scientific methodology offers us the best and most successful means of information about the physical world, but it is limited, grounded in the limitations of being human. Thus, although science should be a source within faith, scientific knowledge will only go so far if indeed God is the name for that which is nameless, whose being cannot be encompassed by the human mind. The apodictic form of myth will, therefore, always be necessary if we are to function as social creatures with limited knowledge of the world yet the need to survive in it. At the same time, how we interpret, revise, and apply these ethical principles must change with new knowledge and experience in light of our fallibility.

**Sacrificial Love and Natural Selection**

Hefner recognizes that the processes of natural selection, revealed by science, offer the greatest challenge to the theology of a Christian God in creation, particularly to his theory of the human as created co-creator and the claim that the natural order is ultimately “reliable and friendly.”

The processes of natural selection are challenging because, studied empirically, they appear meaningless and without purpose. Moreover, from the perspective of the human being, and particularly the Christian, the creaturely world and the mechanisms intrinsic to its development seem replete with suffering, injustice, cruelty, callousness and “evil.”

181 Ibid., 6-7.
182 Ibid., 43.
183 Ibid., 42.
the theory of the created co-creator has been criticized for omitting the neo-orthodox emphasis on evil and the need for transformation through grace. But, he replies, “These criticisms are misguided.” Theology must not shrink from the blood be-spattered book revealed by the sciences if it is to speak to the actions of a Creator God, he argues. To prove his point, Hefner notes that his theory of the created co-creator acknowledges nature to be in a continuous state of transformation due to an undergirding grace, as seen in its evolutionary history. Such divine self-giving evident in creation is the very same grace, he argues, demonstrated in Christ: “the religious symbols of Christ’s sacrifice are correlated to phenomena that are already present in nature, or, under the creative presence of grace, nature shares in the transformation that the Christ symbol announces.” Through this image of Christ’s sacrifice echoed in nature, Hefner takes an eschatological perspective, stressing not simply the present condition of creaturely existence but also what it will become according to divine intention.

In his essay “The Cultural Significance of Jesus’ Death as Sacrifice,” published in 1980, Hefner draws on passages from the Old Testament (Gen. 15 and 22; Exod. 12 and 13; Isa. 53; Psalms [e.g. 40, 50, 51, and 69]) and the New (Rom. 3:21-6 and 12:1; John 1:29; Phil. 2:15-17 and 4:18; Hebrews) to defend the notion of sacrifice as “theology’s chief category of critique.” For Christians, Hefner claims, the image is difficult to avoid because of its pervasive and prominent role in the formative years of the church. Although the actual cult of sacrifice did not exist for the early Christians, he argues, they were motivated by contextual influences,

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184 Ibid., 275.
185 Ibid., 43.
186 Ibid., 275.
187 Ibid., 43.
189 Ibid., 412.
grounded in the Old Testament, pagan rituals, and interactions with Jews of the Diaspora, to spiritualize and ethicize the cultic sacrifice, transferring its transformative power to the life of an individual or group.\(^{190}\) Hefner draws on Paul to assert that the early Christians understood Jesus’ death to be the sacrifice that fulfilled and completed all prior sacrifice, while offering the model and paradigm for a way of being, empowered by the grace of the Spirit, which actualized Christ’s self-giving in the life of the believer (2 Cor. 4:10-12).\(^{191}\) Life for the early Christian, then, was understood in the language and theology of sacrifice, within a framework of interpretation derived from scripture.\(^{192}\) As a result, concludes Hefner, arguments for the indispensable role of the sacrificial motif in understanding Jesus Christ can be supported by its formative location within the heritage of the early Christian church.\(^{193}\)

In his 1980 essay, Hefner grounds this articulation of sacrifice in the action of “negation.”\(^{194}\) In addition to the negation of evil and self-interest, Hefner stresses “self-negation” for the sake of the other and the group, while simultaneously asserting that as “an intentional service,” the biblical paradigm of sacrifice entails “an assertion and fulfillment of the self, not a destruction.”\(^{195}\) Sacrifice is, therefore, “a negation with a positive content,” and results in “the birth of redemptive newness.”\(^{196}\) At the same time, he focuses explicitly on the need for

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 417, 418.
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 418, 422.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 417, 418.
\(^{193}\) Ibid., 413.
\(^{194}\) Consider, for example: “Sacrifice criticizes all self-interests in that it calls for their negation and asserts that fulfillment comes only through the refining fires that negate the evil or inadequate and bring it into accord with God’s will. Sacrifice relativizes self-interests because it reminds us that our self-interest is part of something larger that is working itself out in our midst. Sacrifice broadens self-interest as it challenges us to redefine our self-interest in such a manner that we understand that serving the other and the whole is in our interest” (Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 429).

\(^{195}\) Ibid., 419, 429, 430, 431, 433, 437, 438, 420.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., 421, 428.
obedience, with sacrifice as a necessary strategy for engaging the evil which Christianity identifies as intrinsic to creaturely processes—to be confronted in the hope and belief that God’s sovereign grace is redemptive. The Christian must, therefore, be “obedient unto death,” for “God works through his servants,” with Christ as the normative revelation of God’s sacrificial ways in creation. Hefner refers to Markus Barth, who argues that sacrifice is “the criterion for that obedience of faith” to which Christians must be held to account. It is a “category of critique,” which penetrates false appearances set up by ideological interests, to reveal barriers against “the real” to better direct actions in conformity with “the real.” Moreover, as a category grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, sacrifice offers a measure of critique that is commensurate with Christian faith and, thus, argues Hefner, “is no demonic negativity.” In sacrifice, he explains, one participates in the “way things are,” and fulfills the will of God since God has established the sacrificial way as a means of grace. The sacrificial motif therefore provides an interpretive lens on life, the world, and ultimate reality. As a symbol, Hefner argues, it provides shape and meaning to our experience and has profound cultural significance in proclaiming the quality of action necessary for fellowship with God and

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197 Ibid., 419, 420. Writes Hefner, “Jesus’ willingness and that of his true disciples to take the risk of suffering in order to elicit the best from their situations is a constant reminder that, apart from such willingness to suffer and to risk death, can neither the good be evoked nor the evil be healed and brought into a belonging covenant with self and others. If there were another way, or if this world were perfect as God intends in his eschatological fullness, Jesus and his sacrifice would not have been necessary” (Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 429).

198 Ibid., 420.


201 Ibid., 427.

202 Ibid., 430.

203 Ibid., 412.
participation in God’s grace. In this sense, he continues, sacrifice is not “a call to weakness” but a demonstration of strength in service, even to the point of death.

Hefner explains that his understanding of sacrifice as a participation in God’s grace responds to those who criticize the co-creator theory for supporting a justification by works, or “a form of Pelagianism that obscures the grace of God.” He acknowledges that for many Christians an emphasis on human function or purpose appears to violate the heart of the gospel, which is that God takes the initiative by accepting us “as we are” rather than for what we do. But, Hefner argues, a biblically informed notion of sacrifice places primary importance on God as the initiator of reconciliation who “graciously provides the circumstances in which humans may share in that grace.” He cites Gen. 15 and 22, as well as Exod. 12 and 13, to argue that God’s prevenient grace is intrinsic to the sacrificial imperative. The self-giving act maintains or restores God’s “covenant of mercy and faithfulness” and is the means by which grace is simultaneously given and received as a demonstration of God’s loving will to effect reconciliation. Sacrifice does not cause the “transmutation” of evil “into the possibilities of grace and healing,” argues Hefner, but enables prevenient grace through the faith that “God is sovereign” and will redeem evil in the act of self-giving as an occasion for peace.

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204 Ibid., 414, 420.
205 Ibid., 420, 421.
206 Ibid., 420.
207 Hefner, Human, 241.
208 Hefner, “Sacrifice, 420.
209 Ibid., 411, 414. Thus, “Sacrifice, in its cultic and ethical dimensions, unifies divine prevenience and human participation in such a way that the giving of one’s life becomes a locus for sharing in the grace and purpose of God. Receiving and giving, acting and being acted upon, are unified in sacrifice, so that a psychologically, as well as a religiously, sound basis for life in the world is provided” (Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 419).
210 Ibid., 419-420.
In *The Human Factor*, Hefner responds to accusations of works righteousness by defining this quality of grace as “forensic.”

He turns to Gerd Theissen, who writes:

The New Testament begins from this insight: in their lives all human beings have the “pre-programmed” task of living in harmony with God, i.e., adapting themselves to the central reality, but none of them achieves this aim. Harmony with God is achieved in quite another way: God takes the questionable attempts of human beings to adapt as being successful. He affirms them independently of their success or failure. The justification of the godless offers everyone that harmony with the ultimate reality which is the inner goal of evolution—regardless of how near to this goal they may be—or how far from it.

Theissen argues that the processes of an evolving creation suggest an unknown “inner goal” that is not “pre-given,” nor even guaranteed, but is the basic reality to which all “matter, life, and culture” struggle to adapt as the fulfillment or end of creation. Humans, who are uniquely self-conscious, experience the process as a “destiny” and task “programmed into the structures of our existence” by the central reality or *eschaton* that, for Christians, accords with God. At the same time, there is an awareness of distance or alienation from that goal: “They experience separation from that central reality to which all their thought, action and being is consciously or unconsciously related, as grievous omission and failure. They call this separation sin: insufficient capacity to realize adequate structures of adaptation to the ultimate reality.”

Faith, however, enables a justification by grace, despite failures and imperfections, to experience “now, already—within a transitory and often unsuccessful life—the intrinsic goal of the whole of evolution: harmony with God.” In this way, argues Theissen, a cultural evolution is enabled

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213 Theissen, 171.
214 Ibid., 172.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid., 174.
because the believer may self-identify as the successful image of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and supported unconditionally by “something of eternity.”

Referring to Matt. 22:37-40, Hefner argues that this faith and trust in God, and in God’s prior love for us, compels moral action driven by a love for God and neighbour as the means for life in harmony with “the central reality” or “the way things really are.” He encapsulates his understanding of justification by grace through faith with mention of the Augsburg Confession:

For this is Christian perfection: honestly to fear God and at the same time to have great faith and to trust that for Christ’s sake we have a gracious God; to ask of God, and assuredly to expect from him, help in all things which are to be borne in connection with our callings; meanwhile to be diligent in the performance of good works for others and to attend to our calling.

This citation of Article 27 identifies moral action as the vehicle for grace and the means by which its benefits are realized, argues Hefner. Love for God therefore renders us accountable and committed to a central reality undergirding creation, to which we must struggle to adapt out of respect and awe: “It is the call to believe that our life in the nature that surrounds us is an awesome transaction caught up in the fabric of mystery that is grounded finally in a coherent reality.” To adapt successfully to this reality is to attend carefully to its processes and “ways.” Love for neighbour consequently is lived out in self-giving community with all creaturely life and especially human beings; for “the neighbor is explicitly defined in terms that are not limited by genetic similarities, or racial, national, or cultural ties.” In this sense,

\footnote{Ibid., 173-174.}
\footnote{Hefner, Human, 190-191.}
\footnote{Hefner, Human, 242.}
\footnote{Ibid., 190.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
Hefner explains, Christ, as true image of God and revelation in word and deed of God’s grace, is exemplar of God’s unqualified love for creation; for just as Christ spent his energies on creation, so, too, should the created co-creator spend his or her energies on the flourishing of earthly processes. Moral action, continues Hefner, grounded in the faith of divine acceptance and love, is shaped by an appreciation that the natural world from which we have evolved is the environment to which we belong and which has enabled us to fulfill our God-given functions as culture creators; such is the outcome of the conviction that the central reality grounding our concrete experience is available to us as beneficent and gracious support.

Hefner, thus, rejects any dualism between being and doing because, he argues, “Function is adverbial, it is what constitutes being. If we are made with purposes and functions, then to be caught up in those functions is to be what we were created to be.” God accepts us for who we are and “forensic justification is the message that our functions are acceptable.” Grace and righteousness are therefore inseparable from the vocation to which we were created, which is to serve others in a self-giving way, explains Hefner. Grace generates trust in God and in God’s support to confront the fulfillment of our God-given function: “To ‘have great faith and to trust’ in a gracious God in the context of our function or calling is nothing else but to be wholly dedicated to what really is, and to permit no distraction from that dedication.” Sacrifice in self-giving love is therefore an act of grace in the faith that our lives, mortal and fallible though they be, are capable of harmony with God, asserts Hefner. In this sense, the crucifixion

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224 Ibid., 189, 246.
225 Ibid., 190, 196.
226 Ibid., 242.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid., 246.
represents an inevitable outcome of a way of being, which seeks fulfillment in self-giving love for the creation, according to God’s purposes, rather than in the Anselmic payment of some perceived debt.  

Thus, continues Hefner, just as Christ is a symbol of one who has emerged from natural and historical processes as a fulfillment of divine purpose in creation, so, too, has the human emerged from an “ambience” which has equipped it with the capacity to fulfill divine intent. The human is justified forensically by grace through faith and deemed righteous by God because of this evolved potential, or vocation, explains Hefner, despite the life course taken by any specific human being: “Surely, this is the most daring proclamation of the gospel imaginable in our world today—that life is worth living, no matter who or what we are, because the way things really are is an ambience of grace and meaningfulness.” Such forensic justification, however, does not negate the importance of, nor need for, the co-creator’s work, Hefner argues. Instead, the quality of redemption in a world undergoing the crucible of evolution and governed by a loving and faithful God is such that the deeds of the co-creator, no matter how flawed and fallible, are acceptable and indeed accepted. That is, all things have their place and part to play in a continuously evolving creation: “The mutation and adaptation that appear to be failures are essential for the process that creates those few that appear to be highly successful.” The sacrifices of creaturely life and well-being to evolutionary processes become “acceptable to the Lord” and, according to Hefner, are “united mystically with the sacrifice of Christ.”

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230 Ibid., 253.
231 Ibid., 245, 247.
232 Ibid., 247.
233 Ibid., 249.
234 Theissen, 172-73, quoted in Hefner, Human, 249.
235 Hefner, Human, 249.
same manner as the Eucharist, Christ reveals not only that God is in creation but also that creation is within God, that our actions and lives, no matter how apparently wayward or tragic, are taken up within God’s grace in the fulfillment of divine intention.  

**Feminist Criticism of Sacrificial Motif**

Hefner’s persistent focus on the sacrificial motif as a lens for understanding divine agency in light of the waste and suffering intrinsic to natural processes remains vulnerable to Judith Plaskow’s criticisms of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose “norm of freedom,” she writes, is “sacrificial love.” In her 1980 book, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*, Plaskow summarizes Niebuhr as follows:

> The coming of Christ discloses both the sovereignty of God over history and the final norm of human nature within history, and that norm is sacrificial love. This means, however, that so far from excluding self-sacrifice, Christian freedom is ultimately defined by it. The redeemed self, according to Niebuhr, strives to approximate in all its relations the “impossible possibility,” which is sacrificial love. Insofar as the self must be a self in order to sacrifice itself, its selfhood, too, he insists, is a byproduct of self-sacrifice.

Similar to Hefner, who argues that sacrifice is “theology’s chief category of critique,” Niebuhr identifies Christ’s life and death as the criterion of the life of grace, and specifically his crucifixion as “the perfection of sacrificial love.” For Niebuhr, then, as for Hefner in his 1980 essay, *obedience* is the most important aspect of one’s orientation to God: “It is this obedience to the divine will which establishes the right relation between the human will in its

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236 Ibid, 249.


finiteness and the whole world as ruled by God.” But this dynamic, with God as sovereign male demanding sacrificial love on the part of human beings, reinforces culturally sanctioned notions of male superiority and dominance over women, to the point of excluding women from leadership positions in the church. Hefner’s sensitivity to these concerns is demonstrated in *The Human Factor* by the attenuation of his earlier emphasis on “obedience unto death” and a reduction of “negation” language—particularly the mysterious paradox of self-negation as self-assertion. Hefner shifts his attention instead to “self-giving love and altruism” as constitutive of “the biblical image of sacrifice.”

But Plaskow argues that retaining the sacrificial motif does not sufficiently address, recognize, or ameliorate the cultural pressures on women to be self-abnegating or self-forgetful; nor does it adequately explain how grace contributes to the re-constitution of the self-denying person. Indeed, an emphasis on sacrifice as a virtue overlooks those human and nonhuman creatures for whom sacrificial suffering and/or death is already a reality, involuntarily imposed and inescapable. Dorothee Sölle, in her 1975 book *Suffering*, notes that “almost all Christian interpretations, however, ignore the distinction between suffering that we can and cannot end. And by referring to the universality of sin, they deny the distinction, in a marriage involving guilt, for instance, between the guilty and the innocent party.” In this way, Christian articulations of suffering can celebrate and condone masochism as a means for breaking down

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242 Plaskow, 165.


244 Plaskow, 29, 14, 149, 151.

pride and demonstrating powerlessness and dependency: “Affliction has the intention of bringing us back to a God who only becomes great when he makes us small.”²⁴⁶

Drawing on a growing body of feminist criticism written since the 1960s, Plaskow notes that “women’s sin” is more than just pride or self-centeredness but is inclusive of traits commonly linked with Christian virtue:

Self-sacrifice, obedience, etc., while perhaps necessary counterweights to the behavioral excesses of a stereotypically male culture, have been preached to and taken to heart by women, for whom they are already a way of life. Practiced in excess, they undermine the self’s relationship to itself and ultimately to God.²⁴⁷

Niebuhr’s doctrine of grace addresses the self-absorbed person who needs to be “broken open” in service to others according to “the law of its being,” which is love.²⁴⁸ Grace is, therefore, constituted by the “the shattering of the individual self” in the struggle to achieve right relationship with God in sacrificial love.²⁴⁹ But, writes Plaskow, this understanding of grace overlooks the self which has exhausted its energies on other people and cannot engage them as subjects because it has not developed into a subject itself: “It is meaningless to say that this self can become a self only through being shattered and turned to others, for its sin is precisely that it has no self to shatter.”²⁵⁰

In her 1995 book, Creative Disobedience, Sölle notes that an understanding of obedience to the point of selfless suffering has dangerous implications for those in positions of powerlessness, who are made objects of “demanded duty” by a society which does not allow

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²⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.
²⁴⁷ Plaskow, 2.
²⁴⁸ Ibid., 156.
²⁴⁹ Ibid., 166-169.
²⁵⁰ Ibid., 156, 166.
them full powers of self-determination. Sölle identifies the state of these people as being “self-less.” Elizabeth Johnson argues that women’s predisposition to give themselves to others, culturally engrained if not genetic, threatens the development of a subjective centre from which to give. That is, women tend to be so focused on the needs of others that their own personal centre is unfocused. Thus, emphasis on self-giving love without sufficient attention to self-affirmation and mutuality can only contribute to the subordination of the powerless, she argues. Plaskow notes that, in light of the particularities of women’s experience, the sin of self-abnegation and the failure to fulfill one’s potential in freedom must be recognized “as equally firmly rooted in human nature” as the male sin of pride. Such an understanding entails the reconfiguration of grace to be active in moments of self-affirmation and self-creation, looking forward to a reality in which all persons are realized and respected in full integrity and coherence. In this way, reunion with God in grace enables the potential for “self-love and self-relatedness,” empowering creative action in and for the world.

Hefner recognizes that feminist authors have criticized the emphasis on sacrifice for reinforcing the subjugation of women, trapped in traditional roles of servile self-effacement and powerlessness. In response, he argues that these critiques are based on concepts of sacrifice which are inadequate and unbiblical. Detached from its scriptural roots, he argues, the

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251 Dorothee Sölle, *Creative Disobedience* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 34.
252 Ibid., 31.
254 Ibid., 218.
255 Ibid., 265
256 Plaskow, 175.
257 Ibid., 34.
258 Ibid., 156.
259 *Hefner, Human*, 246.
contemporary definition of sacrifice is linked with “a relinquishing, an abandonment, usually under duress and oppression,” and, as such, “may be unusable today.” Nevertheless, Hefner explains that a scriptural retrieval reveals that the sacrificial “model of the godly life” is an act of grace in which an individual is empowered to live in an active rather than a passive manner, in harmony with what really is: “The sacrifice is a covenant act, and the consequence promised for the act is shalom, the wholesome belonging of self with God, with the people, with the land, and with oneself. The actor and the act are declared suitable. That is grace.”

The biblical understanding of sacrifice, revealed in Christ’s self-giving love for the benefit of others “and for the whole situation in which self and other exist,” is, thus, an ontological statement about the character of ultimate reality, he argues. To model one’s actions after Christ’s sacrificial life is to affirm an identity with, or a belonging to, something that is greater than oneself; it demonstrates an intention to reconcile evil; and it affirms a confidence in the possibility of this redemptive outcome. Sacrifice is a hermeneutical category used by New Testament writers, then, to describe a way of life modeled on Christ’s teaching, ministry and death; and Christ’s example “is far from passive or self-abnegating,” asserts Hefner, as it illustrates “an act of living” for values worth dying for.

To clarify, Hefner refers to Gandhi’s philosophy of satyagraha, commonly translated as “militant nonviolence,” though previously defined as “passive resistance” or “truth force,” which is “in touch with what really is.” Hefner quotes Erik Erikson, who writes:

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260 Ibid., 244.
261 Ibid., 246.
262 Ibid., 245; Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 422, 430.
263 Hefner, Human, 244-246; Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 422, 411.
264 Hefner, Human, 250.
The acceptance of suffering, and, in fact, of death, which is so basic to his [Gandhi’s] “truth force,” constitutes an active choice without submission to anyone… an expression of a faith in the opponent’s inability to persist in harming others beyond a certain point…. Gandhi’s way, as we have seen, is that of a double conversion: the hateful person, by containing his egoistic hate and by learning to love the opponent as human, will confront the opponent with an enveloping technique that will force, or rather permit, him to regain his latent capacity to trust and love…. At the end only a development which transforms both partners in such an encounter is truth in action; and such transformation is possible only where man learns to be nonviolent toward himself as well as toward others.  

The emphasis on the interpersonal, as seen in the reciprocal transformation identified by Erikson, focuses attention on the group rather than the individual. In the crucifixion of Jesus, argues Hefner, and in his willingness to die for the sake of others, God reveals the purpose of sacrifice as being reconciliation, not only between God and God’s people but also amongst the people themselves. It is an occasion, explains Hefner, for participating in God’s grace, with the hope of establishing a state of belonging for self, other, and the land, “the condition of the broken being made whole again.”

Hefner, therefore, argues that sacrifice, as an act of grace, leads to shalom for the actor only when “contextual and relational” for both human and nonhuman creation. In this manner, he claims to meet concerns raised by authors like Judith Plaskow, who argues: “The need for and possibility of personal and social transformation is discerned in the context of community, and the continuing process of questioning, growth, and change remains collective and is aimed at the collective.” Indeed, she argues that the joyful experience of grace is one of “co” participation, which is not due to God’s agency alone but is “the experience of the

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266 Hefner, Human, 251.
267 Hefner, “Sacrifice,” 419.
268 Hefner, Human, 246.
269 Ibid., 246; Plaskow, 172.
emergence of the ‘I’ as co-creator—albeit through participation in the creativity of God. God comes to be known through community as the one who sustains the self in community. Relatedness to God is expressed through the never-ending journey toward self-creation within community.”270 But this articulation, writes Plaskow, undermines emphases on self-denial and self-negation, which feed into “women’s sin.”271

Thus, the demand for sacrificial love, even when understood as active, intentional or voluntary, remains problematic, she argues, because it can extend feminine passivity masochistically. That is, women are often rendered passive to male agency, not because of inability or exclusion, but because of voluntary and active submission to, or cooperation with, male intentions: “Woman is active precisely in losing herself….She ought to be self-denying for the good of the created order.”272 Subject to this cultural and social dynamic, women learn to accept their designation, and respond to conditions rather than initiating or establishing them.273 Plaskow notes that much psychological theory looks to women’s so-called sexual passivity to argue for women’s “active (psychological) passivity” in her submissiveness, self-abnegation, and what Freud and his followers identified as her masochism.274 In this sense, concludes Plaskow, the woman abdicates her “responsibility before God” to become a self, for her sin is the failure to remember and develop the self.275 Male culture has, therefore, shaped doctrines of grace and sin based upon the assumption that male experience can be universalized as human experience:

270 Plaskow, 172.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid., 14, 23.
273 Ibid., 29.
274 Ibid., 14.
275 Ibid., 151.
“Man is the absolute subject, the paradigmatic human. Woman is the ‘Other.’” Experiences that are “developed, judged, and transformed” represent those of the male, whereas those of the female have been reinforced or treated as secondary. Male generalizations become a part of women’s experience, shaping their development, and restricting the fulfillment in freedom of their human potential.

Plaskow asks, “How is it that male human beings come to define and represent the human norm?” Her answer provides a warning to those attempting a functionalist approach like Hefner’s, which conflates being with doing, such that human vocation or purpose may be discerned from biological structures or empirical descriptions of nature. Plaskow draws on anthropologist Sherry Ortner’s article “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” to claim that every culture assumes superiority to and dominance over nature, and that every culture views women as “more rooted in, or having more direct connection with, nature.” In particular, Ortner points to biology and the fact that “proportionately more of a women’s body space, for a greater percentage of her lifetime…is taken up with the natural processes surrounding…reproduction.” In this manner, biological functions are used by patriarchal culture-creators

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277 Plaskow, 3. And immersed within patriarchal definitions of the Eternal Feminine, women have had no critical vantage point from which to evaluate their designated role: “This is the way you are, a firmly entrenched social mythology tells women, and this is the way you ought to be” (Plaskow, 11, 29, 32, 49, 48).

278 Ibid., 10, 31, 32.

279 “Function is adverbial, it is what constitutes being,” writes Hefner. “If we are made with purposes and functions, then to be caught up in those functions is to be what we were created to be” (Hefner, Human, 242).


281 Ortner, 75, quoted in Plaskow, 13.
to determine female vocation and purpose, restricting women to social tasks that can be considered of temporary or lesser value in the formation of culture.\textsuperscript{282}

Both Plaskow and Ortner stress that this connection of women with nature, despite appearances, is not innate, nor self-evident, but is a cultural construction. Biological data is \textit{interpreted} by society to justify certain ways of living based on value judgments and choices. Argues Plaskow, “It is hardly \textit{necessary}, for instance, that the care and socialization of children be viewed as natural functions; they could be seen as cultural processes of the highest order.”\textsuperscript{283}

In Western cultures, women have been relegated to the domestic private sphere, in which their labour appears passive because it is hidden from public view; in this way, women’s work has been valued for its capacity to free men to participate in the wider world; and women’s self-worth and self-definition have been determined by their success at attending to other people’s needs. These social aspects of feminine passivity have been justified as \textit{continuous} with female biological passivity in intercourse, pregnancy, and childbearing: “The character traits she exhibits and the social tasks she is asked to perform are products not of the interaction of nature and culture, but of her ‘being’ in all times and places.”\textsuperscript{284}

Plaskow is, thus, critical of Tillich’s articulation of the Protestant doctrine of justification, which Hefner echoes in his doctrine of grace. Hefner states that “the reality of redemption is the fact that the artifacts of our co-creating are acceptable and are in fact accepted,” no matter how flawed, and that “our sacrifices are acceptable to the Lord,” including those “sacrifices” or failures in nonhuman adaptation and mutation, which result in suffering; for they are “united

\textsuperscript{282} Plaskow, 13.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 14, 28.
mystically with Christ” and are part of, and contribute to, the process that creates those creatures that are successful. As if in reply, Plaskow writes:

In accepting acceptance, the self surrenders all of its goodness to the sole activity of God in bringing about reunion. Not only can no moral, intellectual, or other work secure the self’s acceptance—this is of course the meaning of justification—but no work need follow from it. The self must simply accept the fact that it is accepted. The question arises: is this an appropriate response to the self whose sin is the failure to act, the failure to become a self?

Plaskow claims that the Protestant doctrine of justification may be a more suitable response to the male sin of pride and less germane to the female experience of self-abnegation. Instead, she argues for a more nuanced understanding of justification, responding to the sin of self-effacement and galvanizing a movement towards self-actualization: “Perhaps…one must be a bit Pelagian to be faithful to women’s experience.” To an extent, Hefner accommodates Plaskow’s concern by proposing sacrificial love as an active vehicle for prevenient grace and the means by which its benefits are realized; faith in divine acceptance compels moral action out of respect and awe for this central reality, and in this sense sacrifice is actively chosen. Nevertheless, Hefner does not address sufficiently the destructive effects of an enculturated masochism of freely chosen active sacrifice on the part of women. Moreover, his articulation of justification by grace falls victim to both Plaskow and Sölle’s criticisms in his conflation of the voluntary sacrifice of Christ with the involuntary sacrifices of human and nonhuman creatures, suffering and dying under the crucible of cultural and physical processes.

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285 Hefner, Human, 249.
286 Plaskow, 157.
287 She asks rhetorically: “does the message that the self is forgiven despite persistence in sin foster a passivity which is women’s real problem?” (Plaskow, 157).
289 Hefner, Human, 190.
Irenaean Type of Theodicy: John H. Hick

To complement his use of the sacrificial motif in *The Human Factor*, Hefner adopts John Hick’s theodicy as “an auxiliary hypothesis” for approaching divine providence and human freedom in light of natural selection. He refers specifically to Hick’s chapter, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” from the 1981 book *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, in which Hick attempts to demonstrate the rationality of Christian belief despite the apparent reality of evil. Without being more specific in his definitions, Hick states that, “traditionally,” Christian theology has understood the universe, its pain, suffering, “wickedness and folly,” to have been created by a God “limitlessly powerful and limitlessly good and loving.” According to this view, notes Hefner, the world has been created according to divine intention, which is the context and basis for a language of function applied to creation. In light of the challenge offered by the rigours of natural selection, Hefner appropriates Hick’s proposal explaining evil as the inevitable outcome of the production of freedom and personhood within an evolving creation.

Understood in this way, Hefner argues, God’s intention is for the creation to be free, both to

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290 Ibid., 269, 271.
291 Hick, 39.
292 Ibid., 39-40. Frederick Sontag highlights Hick’s assumptions in his critique: “Hick asks if a world which contains sadistic cruelty can be regarded as the expression of ‘infinite creative goodness’? But the prior, and the more urgent questions are: (1) What does ‘goodness’ mean in God’s case, and might it encompass cruelty?; and (2) Should we agree to regard the world as an expression of goodness in the first place? Hick acknowledges that there are different concepts of God, but he states that he will discuss a ‘specifically Christian’ theodicy, as if somehow that solved the question of how to define God’s nature. To work within a Christian framework certainly narrows the range, but our central and primary concern is still how to conceive of God. For instance, Hick states that Christian theology has centered on the concept of God as ‘limitlessly good and loving.’ That simplifies the argument if it is true, but what is the evidence that Christianity has accepted any such crucial assumption? Or more accurately, what is the evidence that we all agree on what ‘limitlessly good and loving’ means and that our problems do not stem from our differences here?” (critique of “An Irenaean Theodicy,” by John H. Hick, in *Encountering Evil: Live options in theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis [Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981], 55-58).
294 Ibid., 271.
acknowledge its creator and to fulfill the creator’s will as exemplified in Christ’s sacrificial love.\footnote{Ibid., 43-44, 46, 86-87, 244-248.}

Hefner further uses the phrase “sin of origin” rather than “original sin” to reject the etiological “first sin” account of Adam and Eve and to draw attention to our evolutionarily acquired genetic baggage as the source of human fallibility and vulnerability; at the same time, he asserts the intrinsic goodness of human beings, “rooted in what really is (God),” and argues that “defect of origin and goodness are not contradictory but, rather, constitutive of human being in its primordial nature.”\footnote{Ibid., 240; Hefner, “Fall,” 83, 89, 94.} He therefore agrees with Hick, who rejects “the traditional Augustinian type of theodicy” in which free finite creatures, from angels to human beings, experience a historical fall from grace to a physical world gone wrong.\footnote{Hefner, Human, 125-128, 240; Hefner, “Fall,” 93; Hick, 40.} Following in the footsteps of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Aubrey Moore, Asa Gray, and Charles Darwin, Hick claims that “most educated inhabitants of the modern world” approach the story of Adam and Eve as myth rather than historical fact and believe that human beings evolved from “lower forms of life” rather than fell from a state of finite perfection and harmony with self, nature, and God. According to this worldview, the “traditional Augustinian type of theodicy” is “pre-scientific” and, although “logically possible,” is “radically implausible” and inadequate as a solution to the problem of evil.\footnote{Hick, 40-41.} Hick turns instead to the work of an early Hellenistic Father of the Church, Irenaeus (120-202 C.E.), who did not, Hick claims, develop a theodicy but a system of thought from which a theodicy could be developed. According to Hick, humans appeared gradually as immature creatures both morally and spiritually and made in the image of God with the potential
to know and engage the divine but imperfectly. Only through a long difficult process of growth and development do human beings become “intelligent ethical and religious animals” with a unique moral and spiritual freedom, enabling sophisticated social systems and imbuing likeness to the divine.299 “Perfection,” according to this way of thinking, is therefore realized in the future rather than the past:

If we want to continue to use the term fall, because of its hallowed place in the Christian tradition, we must use it to refer to the immense gap between what we actually are and what in the divine intention is eventually to be. But we must not blur our awareness that the ideal state is not something already enjoyed and lost, but is a future and as yet unrealized goal. The reality is not a perfect creation which has gone tragically wrong, but a still continuing creative process whose completion lies in the eschaton.300

Hick’s theodicy is a contemporary version of this approach, grounded in the premise that the human is an imperfect creature, whose struggle to survive and thrive in the face of adversity and suffering enables a maturation, or person-making, leading to a final perfection (Rom. 5:3-5).301

But in order for this person-making process to take place, continues Hick, the creature must be created at an epistemic distance from God. For humans, this distance corresponds to the world as presently experienced—a world that appears to be an “autonomous system” operating according to its own laws that can be investigated without resorting to explanations of divine intervention, “as if there were no God.”302 Nevertheless, the very same world may be experienced as God’s creation and as revelatory of God’s presence. In this fashion, human freedom is empowered either to recognize and worship God or to doubt God’s existence: “In such a world one can exist as a person over against the Creator. One has space to exist as a finite being, a space created by the epistemic distance from God and protected by one’s basic cognitive

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299 Ibid., 40-42.
300 Ibid., 42.
301 Ibid., 42-45.
302 Ibid., 43.
freedom, one’s freedom to open or close oneself to the dawning awareness of God which is experienced naturally by the religious animal.”

According to Hick, this freedom is necessary, because God wants human beings to come to know and love “him” freely.

Hick further proposes that virtues developed through ethical struggle in the face of adversity and temptation are more valuable than if they were pre-programmed and ready-made and intrinsic to a person’s original nature without the painful learning accumulated from the mistakes and successes of one’s own free endeavours: “This principle expresses a basic value judgment, which cannot be established by argument but which one can only present, in the hope that it will be as morally plausible, and indeed compelling, to others as to oneself.” For Hick, then, a greater moral nature is developed in an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings, who acquire ethical knowledge from insights gleaned from the consequences of their own free choices. Without the struggle to avoid danger and accumulate reward, there would be no growth in imagination or intellect, and no development in human culture or civilization, in the sciences or the arts. And without the potential to experience pain and suffering, our actions would have no moral significance, argues Hick; for if a morally right act prevents or ameliorates harm and contributes to human well-being, and if a morally wrong act harms some aspect of human community, then a world without pain and suffering would be one offering no moral choices and no opportunity for moral development. Thus, the real environment is one in which the struggle to survive and thrive in community enables human beings to transcend “self-

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303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid., 44.
306 Ibid., 46.
307 Ibid., 47.
regarding animality” and to achieve the virtues of love, mutuality, “self-sacrifice for others,” and a “commitment to a common good.”

Hefner interprets Hick to claim that the creation must be able to choose its own freedom if it is divinely intended to be free. For freedom to be somehow programmed externally is a contradiction, Hefner argues: “By using the term choosing to be free, we point not to a Promethean wrenching of freedom from God by human choices, but rather to the actuality of the process of becoming free as it transpires within the medium of human volition and hence participates in that volition.” To be created free by divine fiat cannot be in accord with the divine intention because the creation would then have played no part in its own liberation—God desires that the creation desires its own freedom, argues Hefner. The evolutionary processes of natural selection are the very processes one would expect in a world intended to generate its own potential for freedom and personhood, he continues. In their brutality these processes offer an epistemic distance between present conditions and a hoped-for future—a future attainable through the organism’s own initiative and effort. Such a dynamic meets the conditions necessary for generating freedom. Thus, Hefner concludes, Hick presents an eschatological vision focused on ratifying the present in light of what it will become.

But it is not entirely clear what Hefner means when he states: “If indeed it is God’s will that there be a free creation, it is necessary not simply that the world be created in a condition of freedom, which God presumably could bring into being by fiat, but that the creation be created so that it can become free by its own choosing (Hick 1981).” Or, in other words, “God desires

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308 Ibid., 48.
309 Hefner, Human, 43-44, 46.
310 Ibid., 43-44, 46, 271.
311 Ibid., 44.
not only that the world be free, but that it freely desire that condition.\textsuperscript{312} Why or how creation must choose its own freedom if it is to be free is not apparent. Moreover, the perspective is too broad, too distant, and overlooks the concrete experiences of specific individuals in deference to an unfocused and abstract conceptualization of a personified creaturely order. Indeed, “the world” or “creation” is not some monolithic sentient entity, which can make decisions about its future. It is, rather, a vast collection of individual organisms, whose lifespans are short at best, and who are objects of circumstance with little to no power, choice, or control over their creation, location, vocation, or destiny. That is, earth’s creatures are products of an evolving natural history, of which the vast majority are ignorant, though each plays a part with little to no knowledge of the outcomes or impact of their actions on the larger order. Humans are unique in developing cultural supplements to adapt their genetic and cultural legacy for new and changing conditions, but most humans, argues Hefner, are unaware “of these challenges as such” and are simply responding to new conditions based on genetic and cultural stimuli in light of increasing rational capacities.\textsuperscript{313} The claim that creation must choose to be free according to its own desires is contradicted further by Hefner’s own recognition that the human has “no choice” in the configuration of the distinctive characteristics which constitute its freedom, having been determined by an evolutionary past.\textsuperscript{314} Freedom, he explains, is an intrinsic condition of our natural character, whereby we are compelled to interpret the natural order from which we have emerged, to inform decisions leading to intentional actions.\textsuperscript{315}

\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 100, 102, 113, 118.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 45, 270.
Hick, himself, argues that humans have a “limited freedom” because of the “survival instinct” inherited from our nonhuman ancestors, which makes us selfish and “morally imperfect.” For this claim, Hick assumes Kant’s definition of moral evil to be true, according to which others are treated as a means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. Our “animal self-regardingness,” Hick explains, compels us to sacrifice others for our own interests. There is, therefore, a tension between our inherited animality and the ethical values of love and self-giving, which accompany an empathic conscience attuned to the experiences and needs of others, argues Hick. He opposes, then, an intrinsic animality over against our potential to be “children of God” within a civilization fostering moral growth and the development of “higher ideals.” Relevant to a discussion of freedom, he notes that “the human animal is not responsible for having come into existence as an animal. The ultimate responsibility for humankind’s existence, as a morally imperfect creature, can only rest with the Creator. The human does not, in one’s own degree of freedom and responsibility, choose one’s origin, but rather one’s destiny.” But even here, in the control over one’s future, Hick argues, we as humans are endowed with a “Godward bias,” prompting Augustine to write, “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” Hick proposes, then, a universal salvation, through which all people, in their own fashion and course of time, find their way to God “freely…not as a logical necessity but as the contingent but predictable outcome of the process of the universe, interpreted theistically.”

Created to be in relationship with God, humans are endowed with freedom in a genuine but

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316 Hick, 45, 52.
317 Ibid., 45.
319 Hick, 52.
limited way, to find fulfillment in the divine.\textsuperscript{320} Paradoxically, then, the human is free, according to Hick, because determined to be with God. One cannot blame a reader for believing in light of this discussion, that Hick, also, is wanting his cake and to eat it, too.

Moreover, the focus on freedom as a strategy for discerning divine purpose in the face of natural and moral evil can be criticized for legitimizing and condoning the suffering experienced by its victims, much like the motif of sacrifice is vulnerable to feminist criticisms. Inspired by Hick, Hefner claims that evil must unavoidably accompany the development of freedom and personhood in an evolving natural system if God’s intention is for the creation to be free, both to acknowledge its creator and to fulfill the creator’s will.\textsuperscript{321} Hick notes that if we value moral freedom and responsibility as “indivisible” from, and necessary for, “the eventual creation of perfected children of God” and “a consummation of limitless value,” then we must not reject that freedom when its misuse becomes torturous or intolerable.\textsuperscript{322} In a similar sense, Hefner argues that all things in the crucible of evolution, including maladaptations and bloody “carnage,” have a part to play in closing the epistemic distance from present to future: “The mutation and adaptation that appear to be failures are essential for the process that creates those few that appear to be highly successful.”\textsuperscript{323} As a result, “the sacrifices” in nature become “acceptable to the Lord” and are “united mystically with the sacrifice of Christ,” such that our lives, no matter how lost or tragic, are included within God’s grace to fulfill divine intention.\textsuperscript{324} Thus the multitudinous suffering which comprises the natural order is justified as the necessary cost, if not

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{321} Hefner, Human, 271, 43-44, 46.
\textsuperscript{322} Hick, 49.
\textsuperscript{323} Theissen, 172-73, quoted in Hefner, Human, 249.
\textsuperscript{324} Hefner, Human, 249.
means, for the realization of the divine intention. Hick identifies the challenge to this Irenaean type of theodicy when he cites Dostoevsky’s oft-quoted question:

Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?\(^{325}\)

In light of the sheer magnitude and depths of creaturely suffering, Hick admits his theistic answer may be intellectually “true,” but its view so broad as to be emotionally unsatisfying.\(^ {326}\) But even “intellectually,” the behaviour of God according to both Hick and Hefner’s theodicy coincides with Hick’s definition of Kantian moral evil, in which the interests and well-being of others are sacrificed for the interests and well-being of oneself, or rather, Godself; in which people, and in this case all living things, are treated as a means to an end rather than as ends in themselves.\(^ {327}\)

Thus, Hefner’s metaphor of sacrifice used with Hick’s Irenaean type of theodicy to understand divine action in creation highlights the intrinsic challenge offered by natural selection to Hefner’s teleonomic axiom, which states, “if we have been created in the form of certain structures and processes, then God must will those structures and processes to be, in some sense at least, fulfilled.”\(^ {328}\) That is, overlooked in this articulation is the fact that the fulfillment of natural “processes” necessarily demands the destruction of natural “structures.” Here we are faced with the conflict between the survival of individuals and the survival of ecosystems. At one point, Hefner claims that “the enhancement of nature’s processes” is “an adequate object of

\(^{325}\) Hick, 49.
\(^{326}\) Ibid.
\(^{327}\) Ibid., 45.
\(^{328}\) Hefner, Human, 40.
our motivations and actions,” which translates to a “decidedly noninstrumental valuation of nature”; yet, his use of the metaphor of sacrifice with Hick’s Irenaean type of theodicy sets up a divine model for human agency that condones the instrumental use of creatures as “beneficial to nature” because harmonious with providence, or “that which really is,” to achieve freedom in nature through sacrificial means manifested in “the objective course of our evolution.”  

In essence, then, Hefner violates his own pragmatic criterion of “wholesomeness” as defined by “the love principle” revealed in Christ to be the measure for discerning divine intention in nature; for Hefner’s metaphors of sacrifice and freedom justify the suffering and destruction of creatures as the means of realizing divine intention.

Consider that Hick defends God as limitlessly good by arguing that all apparent evils contribute to the realization of the greatest possible good: “evils are never tolerable—except for the sake of greater goods which may come out of them.”  

David R. Griffin asks, but “why did God give us real freedom in the first place?” Hick assumes freedom to be necessary for the emergence of that which is most valuable, specifically “moral and religious virtue.” If virtue is to be authentic, it must come about through the “genuine” freedom to be non-virtuous. But, asks Griffin, for whom does it matter that these virtues be authentic or the most valuable in this way? According to Hick, explains Griffin, it is not ultimately for humans but for God’s sake that “freedom” is as we know it:

God makes humans genuinely free so that God can have the knowledge that the creatures have come to love God freely….Is a creator who has the power to create a completely different type of world and yet who deliberately builds earthquakes, tornadoes, and

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329 Ibid., 73, 41, 61, 114-15, 121, 272.
330 Ibid., 42, 249-250.
331 Hick, 50, 53.
cancer into the structure of the world, who created us so that moral evil is necessary—
moral evil that can produce Hiroshimas and Auschwitzes—is a deity who would do all
this, solely for the sake of knowing that some of its creatures came to love their creator
freely, “limitlessly good?” Again, Hick has not made this possible. 333

To compound matters, if the natural environment as presently experienced is necessary to
establish the “epistemic distance” required for human freedom and virtue, then one has to
question the cost to the innumerable suffering, dead, and dying nonhuman creatures, who pay the
price for human moral development, whether in the present or the past, during the hundreds of
millions of years leading up to the first human being. 334 In other words, asserts Frederick Sontag,
the epistemic distance required by Hick is too great. 335 Freedom may be necessary for human
development, but why does the cost have to be so high? Too many are destroyed and too few
educated. Could freedom not be envisioned another way, within more desirable circumstances,
such that every horror and depravity is not justified nor found necessary for the greater good? 336
Complains Griffin, “Surely an all-wise, omnipotent being could have found some happier middle
ground between our present, all-too-destructive world, and the ‘hedonistic paradise’ Hick fears
would make us morally and spiritually flabby.” 337

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333 Ibid., 54-55.

334 Griffin argues, “Hick provides no reason why God should have wasted over four billion years setting the
stage for the only thing thought to be intrinsically valuable, the moral and spiritual development of human beings”
(53).

335 Sontag argues, “Only a few beautiful bodies survive out of billions, and spirits are broken every day. If
God designed this training program, we need a new coach. We could not be able to develop without danger, it is
true, but my problem is why the dangers were designed so that they actually break and destroy so many?” (56).

336 Ibid., 57.

337 Griffin, 54. Stephen T. Davis adds, “Surely [God] could have made us grow and learn in a much less
painful, harsh, and destructive world” (critique of “An Irenaean Theodicy,” by John H. Hick, in
“Some hardship and pain may make persons stronger and better, but Hick, I think, sees the world too much as a
schoolroom when it is actually more like a dangerous alley” (critique of “An Irenaean Theodicy,” by John H. Hick,
Indeed, as Hick himself admits, one can defend God’s “limitless” goodness and power when one approaches human freedom in “broadly the kind of world of which we find ourselves to be a part” (italics mine). In this way, the Irenaean type of theology can offer a solution that is grounded in a general but not a detailed understanding of our relationship to God. But when faced with the true height and breadth of moral and natural evil, Hick and Hefner’s abstract justification of freedom suffers under the weight of the concrete experiences of finite individuals. Roth recognizes that human morality depends on a certain degree of intervention, or a restriction of freedom, in light of our communal existence, which requires the balancing of our needs and interests against the needs, interests, and well being of others. But, he argues, the indivisibility of Hick’s freedom enables, legitimates, and defends “all hell [to] break loose,” and such limitless freedom undermines the plausibility of a limitlessly good and powerful God. A consummation of “limitless value” goes a certain way to ameliorating the suffering and pain of indivisible reality in a “broad” sense, but also overextends its reach in defending and legitimating “the waste of permissiveness” and “all manner of evil.”

In response, Hick falls back on an ultimate acknowledgement of mystery as the grounding principle of Irenaean theodicy, and justifies the contingent and indiscriminate nature of life’s “blessings and calamities” as a requirement for the moral life of human beings: “For if bad things happened always and only to evil people, and good things only to good people, we should inevitably be seeking rewards and avoiding penalties rather than making genuine moral

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338 Hick, 48.
339 Ibid., 64, 68.
340 Ibid., 48, 54, 56-57.
341 Roth., 62-63.
choices."  Leaving aside the assumption that such a world would really be worse than that of the present, Hick resorts ultimately to the “already operating faith” or “trust in God” from which he began his theodicy, to support his conviction that the world as we know it is only a passing stage in the operations of divine intention towards a “limitless good.” Such an approach depends on there being another sphere of existence after corporeal death, for the person-making process demanded by Hick’s theodicy remains unfinished for the majority of men and women during a single lifetime on this earth:

the perfect all-embracing human community, in which self-regarding concern has been transcended in mutual love, not only has not been realized in this world, but never can be, since hundreds of generations of human beings have already lived and died and accordingly could not be a part of any ideal community established at some future moment of earthly history.

Thus, according to Hick’s Irenaean type of theodicy, the fulfillment of divine purpose in the unity of human community, presumes the survival of every individual person in some form of an afterlife, which enables further moral growth and final consummation. Without this eschatological reality, Hick admits that his theodicy would crumble.

In contrast, Hefner argues that an emphasis on a supernatural afterlife devalues the creaturely realm in which evolution occurs. Such an approach, he claims, locates human destiny outside the order of creation in a manner which conflicts with the essential foundation of the Christian and Jewish faiths, found in Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” The affirmations of creatio ex nihilo (creation out of nothing)

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342 Hick, 64-65.
343 Ibid., 39, 49, 65, 68.
344 Ibid., 51.
345 Ibid.
346 Hefner explains, “for example, the view that life on earth may be marked by the cruel deaths of natural selection, but in life hereafter, the pain and unfairness of selection will be matched with the divine compensation of eternal blessedness” (Hefner, Human, 43).
and *creatio continua* (“continuing creation”) inform a worldview that considers the creaturely order “to be reliable and friendly,” concludes Hefner, “in the sense that its processes make for the fulfillment of the human being and the rest of nature, rather than their betrayal and degradation. Of all the affirmations of the Christian Scriptures, none ranks above the confession that God is faithful to the creation that has come into being by God’s own free intention.”

Thus, explains Hefner: “The theological import of the term *eschatological* affirms that God is able to provide new possibilities and new futures without destroying the life-giving continuities with our origins.” In this way, Hefner anchors his eschatology, not so much in an *escape* from creation, nor in a past paradise or a present state of being, but rather in the development and realization of what the world can become in light of God’s intentions.  

Human culture and the brains that produce it play a vital role as an extension of natural processes to realize human destiny in the most desirable conditions for the whole.

At the same time, Hefner’s “theological valorization” of survival supports a definition extending beyond the material limits of physico-chemical and biological realities identified by the empirical sciences to include the “consummation and perfection” of creation according to a destiny intended by God, which allows for the “termination” of earthly species, individuals, and ecosystems “as they now are” but not the “nonsurvival” or “obliteration” of their value before God and the rest of creation.

More specifically, Hefner argues in *The Human Factor* that Christian belief in an afterlife or eschatological redemption must refer to the selves and communities which constitute our creaturely existence, since “that upon which God bestows

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348 Hefner, *Human*, 47.
349 Ibid., 43, 44, 46.
350 Ibid., 47, 118.
grace and that which God redeems for eternal life is that which God has created through natural processes.”  

He reveals his teleological bent in an earlier essay, published in 1980, when he explains that “the survival process is a means to an end,” for the concept of the Abrahamic God “demands that the process of survival and its specific mechanisms be valorized as instrumentalities within God’s consummating activity in the created order” (italics mine). However, despite this assertion that “the survival process is created by God and that it fits his purposes,” Hefner admits that the theologian cannot explain nor understand “the pain and ugliness” intrinsic to “the mechanisms of survival by natural selection” if indeed these are the means “of the creation’s consummation and perfection.” Nonetheless, he argues, we must accept that “the struggle to survive and the mechanisms of survival…have been implanted within us” and “are part of the rhythm of our pilgrimage toward consummation” although we cannot develop much “material content” relating survival to divine processes of redemption and salvation because of “the ambiguity” of “the survival process.”

Conclusion

Hefner’s theological theory of the created co-creator as introduced in The Human Factor therefore provides a valuable resource for Christian ethical practice because of its focus on salvation in this world as a fulfillment of divine intent rather than salvation from this world in a supernatural paradise divorced from corporeal existence. In this sense, Hefner articulates his teleonomic axiom as the measure by which human freedom is judged to be in harmony with divine providence intent on the survival of creation. However, Hefner’s use of the metaphor of

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352 Hefner, Human, 62.
354 Ibid., 210-211.
355 Ibid., 211-212.
sacrifice and Hick’s Irenaean type of theodicy to understand divine beneficence in creation can serve to justify the suffering and death intrinsic to creaturely process as the “acceptable” cost of the realization of a greater good intended by God.356 As a result, the individual victims of “the survival thrust” driving natural process are overlooked in favour of “benefits” to a vaguely defined and personified “nature,” culminating ultimately in the emergence of the human as “a most luminous example of what the process of the evolution of nature/matter is and…the surest clue to what the evolution of nature is up to.”357 This teleological understanding of divine action in creation not only contradicts Hefner’s teleonomic axiom but also realizes the definition of Kantian evil by representing living creatures as a means to an end and thereby establishing a dangerous model for the human being made in God’s image as created co-creator. Hefner’s theology therefore argues for the “benevolence of the ecosystem under God” and of the world as “a fundamentally friendly home for us” by working with an abstract and unfocused rendition of “nature.” Overlooked are the concrete and specific examples of the true breadth and depth of “natural evil” experienced as the cost of survival by individual creatures, suffering, bleeding, and dying in the crucible of a creative system predicated on competition, death, destruction, and cruel indifference.358 Such realities cannot be explained or rationalized away in any simple manner as reconcilable with the actions of a loving, all powerful, and all knowing God. Rather, there has to be greater acknowledgement of the inexplicable in light of the limitations of our human comprehension; and that indeed, the Christian God revealed in Christ suffered and died as a vulnerable human being at the hands of the very world God created. Indeed, creaturely suffering at the hands of an evolving nature offers a stumbling block to Christian theology in the same

356 Hefner, Human, 242, 249.
sense that “Christ crucified” offers “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). Thus, the significance of a suffering Christ for a suffering creation, in conjunction with the recognition of an incorrigible if existential fall, can lend a revealing lens on discussions of divine grace in creation.
Chapter Two

Denis Edwards, Elizabeth Johnson, and a Liberative Sophia

Introduction

Rather than focusing on the figure of the male gendered *logos* as a vehicle for understanding Christ’s divinity and immanence in creation through the Spirit, both Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson turn to the Biblical figure of Wisdom, or *sophia* in Greek, *hokmah* in Hebrew, and *sapienta* in Latin, to flesh out and broaden the presence and agency of God in Christ as Spirit, to powerfully liberate and empower women as made in the image of God, and to set the foundation for a more comprehensive ecological theology. Feminine in grammatical gender and often represented in the person of a woman, Sophia is with God “in the beginning” during the creation of all things, and orders human and nonhuman affairs as life-giver and sustainer.¹ She thus embodies divine power and omniscience and is identified with the Torah.² Incarnate in Christ as Spirit phenomenon, she restores dignity to the female as *imago Dei* capable of representing the divine and undermines male monopolization of God’s gender and sex.³ Moreover, signifying both male and female in the figure of one person, Christ as Sophia reconciles opposites in a unified diversity.⁴ In so doing, the very being of incarnate Wisdom as pneumatological reality points past Jesus’s sex and humanity to the diversity of God represented

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² Ibid., 89.
³ Ibid., 94-95, 55, 148.
⁴ Ibid., 165, 169.
in the Church and God’s work of creation.\textsuperscript{5} For through the figure of Wisdom, God’s general presence and self-communication in the world are specially revealed to humans in Christ’s humanity. Thus, the divine love expressed on the cross demonstrates God’s love for and identification with creation in its evolutionary emergence while representing God’s redemptive presence and promise to every suffering creature.\textsuperscript{6} At the same time, God “gifts” the universe with the independent and intrinsic power to evolve, to complexify, and to innovate, to thereby contribute to its own development.\textsuperscript{7} God lets the world be what it will be, while participating in its becoming out of love and respect for the freedom of both creature and creation.\textsuperscript{8}

However, although Sophia is a liberative vehicle for discerning divine immanence and agency in creation as “the love of mutual relations” modeled in Christ, Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson can be challenged for not sufficiently engaging the concrete and specific magnitude of suffering and wasted life intrinsic to creaturely process in their articulation of John Polkinghorne’s “free process defence.”\textsuperscript{9} The approach assumes that there is a sufficient similarity between human free will and the development of the physical universe to extend the “free will defence”\textsuperscript{10} to a personified and monolithic abstraction of “creation.”\textsuperscript{11} But because suffering and death are only experienced at the level of the individual, an approach to divine love in creation must engage the concrete and specific particulars of creaturely experience to develop a credible theology of creation. Both Edwards and Johnson prioritize experience as a source for

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 91, 156, 162, 166, 168.
\item The free will defence asserts that human freedom is an intrinsic good, preferable to a life without freedom, even if that freedom can be misused or result in destructive choices.
\item Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 172.
\end{enumerate}
understanding divine agency through the Spirit in the world, but this stated approach is not reflected in their articulation of the “free process defence.” Thus, Johnson can argue for the “reciprocal operation” of natural law and chance as the location of “boundless love at work in the universe,” representing “the creative activity of the Spirit and the natural world’s freedom in its own making.” And Edwards can assert that “the Spirit as the life-giving Energy of Love…is to be seen as immanently present to all the entities of our universe, enabling creatures to exist, to interact, and emerge into the new by means of the laws of nature and the processes discussed in the natural sciences.” Edwards goes so far as to argue that the final consummation of all things will be achieved by the powers of divine agency working through the laws of nature and secondary cause. However, when one considers the concrete specifics of creaturely struggle and death intrinsic to the emergence of novelty under the crucible of natural selection, and that Christ’s life, words, and deeds represent the parousia or inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in creation, then one finds reason to re-assert the mystery of divine agency in creation and redemption, and the need to approach nature as existentially fallen, in light of the limitations of human understanding.

**Sophia as Emancipatory God-Language for Women and Nature**

Elizabeth Johnson argues that as the church acculturated to Greco-Roman society and as Christianity became the religion of Empire, it began to emulate the structure of the patriarchal household around which Rome was organized, with the Emperor as ultimate patron or father (pater in Latin). The image of Christ consequently took the form of the patriarchal head of

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12 Ibid., 143, 169-173.
household or imperial lord and ruler of the cosmic order, “the ruling king of glory, the Pantocrator par excellence, whose heavenly reign sets up and sustains the earthly rule of the head of the family, empire, and church.”16 To obey these earthly powers, then, was to follow Christ, and to disobey was to defy God. In this fashion, the maleness of Jesus was used to justify the maleness of God, which was then appropriated for sacred justification of male dominion over the female: “If Jesus is a man, so uncritical reasoning goes, and as such the revelation of God, then this must point to maleness as an essential characteristic of divine being itself.”17

In support of this patriarchal bias, the logos has traditionally been used to identify God’s immanence in creation, and more specifically, “God’s creative patterning of the world from the beginning and, in Christ, [as] God’s self-expression in the world (Arthur Peacocke),” because of its long-standing association in Greek philosophy with the male principle.18 Johnson looks to Rosemary Radford Ruether, who notes that once the logos is allied with the man Jesus, “the unwarranted idea develops that there is a necessary ontological connection between the maleness of Jesus’ historical person and the maleness of Logos as male offspring and disclosure of a male God.”19 This androcentric anthropology attributes a certain honour, dignity, and normativity to the male sex as the chosen vehicle for the incarnation of Christ: “men alone among human beings are able to represent Christ fully. Women’s physical embodiment becomes a prison that shuts them off from God, except as mediated through the Christic male.”20 Women’s salvation is, therefore, compromised when historical maleness is deemed essential for the enfleshment and

16 Johnson, She, 151.
17 Ibid., 151-152. For Christic justification of woman’s subjection to man, see Ephesians 5:21-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-15; 14:34. For Christic justification of obedience to human institutions, see 1 Peter 2:13, 18-24.
18 Johnson, Beasts, 161-162; Johnson, She, 152.
20 Johnson, She, 153.
redeeming function of Christ; for if according to the early Christian aphorism, “What is not assumed is not redeemed, but what is assumed is saved by union with God,” then female humanity cannot be saved outside of its relation to the male. In this way, argues Johnson, the Christ becomes a tool for the repression, exclusion, and control of women. Indeed, she notes, the linking of the human Christ’s maleness with the essence of Christ’s divinity overlooks the doctrine of Chalcedon, which asserts the clear distinction between the human and divine essences of Christ.  

Rather than focusing on the figure of logos as a vehicle for understanding Christ’s divinity and the Spirit’s immanence and agency in creation, Johnson turns to the biblical figure of Wisdom, or sophia in Greek, hokmah in Hebrew, and sapienta in Latin, to develop emancipatory language about God and to subvert gender stereotypes. She argues that Sophia “is the most developed personification of God’s presence and activity in the Hebrew Scriptures.”

In addition to being grammatically feminine in gender, which Johnson admits, in itself, does not prove anything, the biblical representations of Wisdom are consistently feminine, “as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and a myriad of other female roles.” Sophia is a woman who “strides into the Book of Proverbs” as preacher and prophet, proclaiming with authority “reproach, punishment and promise” to “scoffers,” “fools” and “simple ones,” deaf to her counsel (Prov 1:20-33). As hostess, Wisdom takes the initiative, building a house, laying out food and wine, and preparing a table, before sending out maidens to invite those that are “simple” and “without sense” to dine and drink with

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21 Ibid., 151-153.
22 Ibid., 86-87.
23 Ibid., 87.
24 Ibid., 87.
her, to “lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (Prov. 9:1-6).\textsuperscript{25} In the
Wisdom of Solomon, Solomon approaches her as a wooer, admitting, “I loved her, and sought
her out from my youth, I desired to take her for my bride, and became enamoured of her beauty”
(Wis. 8:2). Elsewhere, he admonishes the reader, “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister’” (Prov.
7:4), and, himself, characterizes Wisdom as “mother” of “all good things” (Wis. 7:11-12; Prov.
8:32).\textsuperscript{26} Congruent with this maternal role, and as transcendent power immanent in the world,
she delights in and orders both human and nonhuman spheres, to guide creation and its creatures
along paths of life and renewal (Wis. 8:1; 7:27).\textsuperscript{27} In this way, Johnson notes, Sophia is a giver
and sustainer of life, and, as such, “she is your life” (Prov. 4:13); Wisdom, herself, proclaims,
“whoever finds me finds life” (Prov. 8:35).\textsuperscript{28}

As a result, concludes Johnson, Sophia can be understood as the female personification of
God, whose creative and saving deeds in creation are equivalent to those of Israel’s God
YHWH.\textsuperscript{29} In Proverbs, she is there in the act of creation: “The Lord by wisdom founded the
earth,” and later she is with God as he established all things, “then I was beside him, like a
master worker” (Prov. 3:19; 8:22-31).\textsuperscript{30} In the Wisdom of Solomon, she is attributed with divine
omnipotence for “although she is but one, she can do all things” (Wis. 7:27); and, “she reaches
mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well” (Wis. 8:1).\textsuperscript{31}
Thus, Sophia demonstrates an omniscience in this omnipotence from which one has much to
learn. In Sirach, Wisdom is identified as Torah, “the book of the covenant of the Most High

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{25}{Ibid., 88.}
\footnotetext{26}{Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 141.}
\footnotetext{27}{Johnson, \textit{She}, 87, 126; Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 165.}
\footnotetext{28}{Johnson, \textit{She}, 87.}
\footnotetext{29}{Ibid., 91, 92.}
\footnotetext{30}{Ibid., 88.}
\footnotetext{31}{Ibid., 89; Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 141-142.}
\end{footnotes}
God,” and, in Baruch, as “the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures for ever” (Sir. 24:23; Bar. 4:1).\(^{32}\) Writes Solomon, “I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things taught me” (Wis. 7:17-22). In Proverbs, those who ignore her admonitions and ways will be, in turn, ignored to suffer “calamity,” “distress,” and “anguish” as a result of their heedlessness (Prov. 1:24-32). In contrast, those who “listen to” and follow her ways will live secure, “at ease, without dread of disaster” (Prov. 1:33). In Sirach, there is a persistent call to attend to and follow \(hokmah\), to “Put your neck under her yoke,” to “receive” her instruction, and to benefit from the “reward” (Sir. 51:25-30).\(^ {33}\)

This retrieval of Wisdom draws particular attention to the Spirit, whom Johnson identifies as Spirit-Sophia.\(^ {34}\) She admits that the pre-trinitarian wisdom literature does not draw an exact correspondence between Wisdom and the Creator Spirit, but the similarities in function and divine relationship compel the application of Wisdom categories to interpretations of the Spirit.\(^ {35}\) Consider, for example, the Wisdom of Solomon in which “wisdom is a kindly spirit” (1:6), and several chapters on, she possesses spirit,

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\text{intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. (7:22-24)}\]

In a similar sense, the “immortal spirit” of the Lord “is in all things” such that it “has filled the world” and “holds all things together” (Wis. 12:1; 1:7; Ps. 139:7-10): “In him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:28). Moreover, like the figure of Wisdom, the Spirit represents

\(^{32}\) Johnson, _She_, 89, 90.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{35}\) Johnson, _Beasts_, 143.

\(^{36}\) Johnson, _She_, 94; Johnson, _Beasts_, 142.
the divine creative power to give and sustain life and to renew the damaged and the broken (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). Solomon exclaims to personified Wisdom, “How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living” (Wis. 11:25-26). Such functions of Spirit-Sophia, argues Johnson, reflect specifically the realities of women’s experience: “[Spirit] is depicted as a woman knitting together the new life in a mother’s womb (Ps. 139:13), as a midwife, working deftly with those in pain to bring about the new creation (Ps. 22:9-10), as a washerwoman scrubbing away at bloody stains till the people be like new (Is. 4:4; Ps. 51:7).” In this way, Johnson identifies Sophia with Spirit to retrieve God-language that better reflects the fullness of divine power in non-male entities.

Some authors, like Philip Hefner, refer to God in neuter language, simply reiterating “God,” for example, when speaking of the divine. Thus, theology is relieved of a certain degree of androcentrism, but the neutering of God language, in itself, is an insufficient corrective to sexist constructions because of theology’s historical patriarchal bias, as well as the need for personal language to address the Abrahamic God of Christian faith. Johnson acknowledges that the incomprehensibility of God can lead to “nonpersonal or suprapersonal” terms like Paul Tillich’s “the ground of being,” Rosemary Radford Ruether’s “matrix surrounding and sustaining all life,” Wolfhart Pannenberg’s “power of the future,” and Karl Rahner’s “holy mystery”—all of which point to a being whose reality transcends representation. Johnson notes, however, that the personality of the Christian God demands a treatment of sex and gender because all

37 Johnson, She, 130; Johnson, Beasts, 128-129.
38 Johnson, She, 83.
39 Ibid., 44.
40 Ibid., 45.
personalities known to human beings are approached using male and female categories; and although the mystery of God ultimately transcends sex and gender, both male and female are made in God’s image, which entails that both be allowable as pointers to the divine.\textsuperscript{41}

Indeed, argues Johnson, human language can never definitively circumscribe or possess the divine once and for all, particularly with symbols overlooking female and cosmic realities and delimited by images of ruling males and “the patriarchal relation of father.”\textsuperscript{42} Instead, pluriform speech is demanded by the “illimitable mystery” and intrinsic ineffability of God, in recognition of what Aquinas identifies as the “poverty of our vocabulary” and “the necessity of giving to God many names” in order to open theology to constant renewal.\textsuperscript{43} But compiling names in the hope for some future definitive concept of God is also an illusion. Those who attempt to do so are better compared to swimmers who can only keep afloat by moving, by cleaving a new wave at each stroke. They are forever brushing aside the representations that are continually reforming, knowing full well that these support them, but that if they were to rest for a single moment they would sink.\textsuperscript{44} If you have understood then what you have understood is not God.\textsuperscript{45}

The proliferation of names, images and concepts derived from personal relationships, political life, human crafts and professions, the animal kingdom, and from cosmic reality offer different and sometimes contradictory perspectives on divine being, but in their contrasting diversity, each provides corrective to the other to undermine that which assumes sufficiency or completeness, pointing instead to God’s ultimate unknowability: “The tradition of the many names of God

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 55, 148.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 104-105, 120; Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 134.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Henri de Lubac, \textit{The Discovery of God}, trans. Alexander Dru, Mark Sebanc and Cassian Fulsom (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 120-121.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Johnson, \textit{She}, 120.
\end{itemize}
results from the genuine experience of divine mystery, and acts as a safeguard for it." For each form of discourse illuminates different aspects of creaturely relationship to divine being, female and male, human and non-human. In their convergence and contradiction they point to God, who ultimately remains elusive.

This need for pluriform language to point to the transcendent person of Spirit-Sophia immanent in creation also draws attention to the need for an engagement with pluriform experience. Specifically prioritizing interpreted experiences of the Spirit (ruah), Johnson argues against abstract theological constructions of a monolithic divine nature and its metaphysical properties, or of the inner life of a triune God proceeding from the first to third person, from the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit. Rather, Johnson’s “inductive approach” builds upon the identification of Spirit-Sophia “as God present and active in the world, as God who actually arrives and is effective wherever fragments of freedom and healing gain a foothold in the struggling world,” thereby facilitating language about the divine grounded in the experiences of those on the margins, who are otherwise rendered voiceless by “deductive approach[es]” predicated on an otherworldly and abstract “Father.” In particular, the diverse concrete experiences of women and nonhuman creation are placed front and centre due to Johnson’s focus on Spirit-Sophia. In contrast, abstract discussions of Spirit-Sophia as a “mutual love proceeding” from the Father and the Son imply the subordination of Spirit-Sophia to the Father and the Son based on a priority of origin: “If the Spirit is then envisioned in female metaphors

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46 Ibid., 118.
48 Johnson, She, 121-122; Johnson, Beasts, 128.
49 Johnson, She, 122-123.
and associated with women, the subordination of women is powerfully reinforced.” Therefore, Johnson begins with personal experience of Spirit-Sophia to counter the subliminal impression of a processional hierarchy and to retain the classical understanding of Trinity, which, she claims, has consistently asserted the coeternal and coequal status of the three hypostases in mutual love.

Thus, if we begin with interpreted experience of Spirit-Sophia and think through to the “living triune God,” we discern at the root of all doctrine and religious imagery an experience of God’s mystery that is simultaneously immanent as it is transcendent. Johnson draws on Aquinas, who argues that while “God is in all things,” it is also true that “all things are in God,” such that they are “contained” by God’s infinite presence. The contemporary label is panentheism, which is taken from the Greek, meaning pan (all), en (in), and theos (God), or all-in-God: “a kind of asymmetrical mutual indwelling, not of two equal partners, but of the infinite God who dwells within all things sparking them into being and finite creatures who dwell within the embrace of the divine love.” Human engagement with this mystery occurs in the living out of historical experience, with all of its vicissitudes, struggle, and diversity, since Spirit-Sophia is the creator and sustainer of all life: “If we ask more precisely which moments or events mediate God’s Spirit, the answer can only be potentially all experience, the whole world.” This sacramental understanding of historical creation includes experience of the natural world, of the personal and interpersonal, and of the macro-political—anywhere “the living presence of

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50 Ibid., 142-144.
51 Ibid., 143-144.
52 Ibid., 91, 122, 124, 147; Johnson, Beasts, 129.
53 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I.8.1 ad 2, quoted in Johnson, Beasts, 147.
54 Johnson, Beasts, 147.
55 Johnson, She, 124.
powerful, blessing mystery amid the brokenness of the world is mediated.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, explains Johnson, using the language of the Spirit-Sophia to articulate divine mystery signifies the active presence of God in the suffering world, passing by and drawing near with creative sustaining and renewing power, since God is not one distinct finite being amongst many but mystery which pervades all things.\textsuperscript{57}

The Spirit, as life-giver and sustainer of the world in its evolutionary “being and becoming,” represents the \textit{creatio continuo}, or continuous creation, of “a generous and compassionate Giver,” which, in light of Jesus-Sophia, and despite the “poverty of our vocabulary,” points to gracious love as an appropriate word or analogy describing the essence of divine mystery in creation (Wis. 11:24-12:1).\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, argues Johnson, God in Spirit is love, “proceeding in person,” immanent in creation and incarnate in Christ.\textsuperscript{59} She writes,

> Christian faith is grounded on the experience that God who is Spirit, at work in the tragic and beautiful world to vivify and renew all creatures through the gracious power of her indwelling, liberating love, is present yet again through the very particular history of one human being, Jesus of Nazareth. The one who is divine love, gift, and friend becomes manifest in time in a concrete gestalt, the loving, gifting, and befriending first-century Jewish carpenter turned prophet.\textsuperscript{60}

God’s friendship, manifest in the life-giving grace of the Spirit against destructive agencies, is revealed in Jesus-Sophia, whose solidarity with the oppressed, poor and marginalized expresses the essence of “Sophia-God” and her way in creation—as “a passion for human and cosmic flourishing.”\textsuperscript{61} Christ is Spirit-phenomenon, for he is Messiah or the one anointed, inspired and resurrected by the Spirit to be Emmanuel or God with us, as the “the tent of meeting” was set up

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 126.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 127, 124; Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 146, 144, 160, 163, 166, 168, 176-177.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Johnson, \textit{She}, 142, 168; Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 124, 128-130, 133.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 133, 138.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Johnson, \textit{She}, 150.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 168.
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in the wilderness by Moses to be the dwelling place of God, “where the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exod. 33:7-11). In other words, “through [Christ’s] human history the Spirit who pervades the universe becomes concretely present in a small bit of it; Sophia pitches her tent in the midst of the world.” Indeed, in the Book of Sirach, the Creator instructs her to pitch her tent in Israel and find her “resting place…in Jerusalem” (24:7-12). In the Book of Baruch, Wisdom arrives on earth to live amongst human beings (3:37), but in the Book of Enoch, she does so only to be rejected, like Christ, and forced to return to her heavenly place amongst the angels (42:1-2).

Particularized in the form of Torah, and localized in Jerusalem, sophia was co-opted by first century Christians to express the saving significance of Christ. As living Torah, he impresses his listeners by speaking and acting “with authority,” admonishing, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 1:22; Matt. 5:17-19). Consequently, Christ’s words, actions, and traits echo those of Sophia. In the Wisdom of Solomon, Sophia is “a breath of the power of God,” “a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty,” “a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (7:25-27); and, in Proverbs 8:22-31, God creates Sophia at the beginning of his work, “the first of his acts of long ago,” to be at his side in the creation of the world. Christ, on the other hand, is described as “the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15); the radiant light of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3); the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15); the

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62 Johnson, Beasts, 194-195.
63 Johnson, She, 150.
64 Ibid., 88.
65 Ibid., 90.
66 Ibid., 94, 95, 97.
67 Ibid., 89, 88.
one through whom all things were made (1 Cor. 8:6)."\textsuperscript{68} And like Sophia, Christ calls the heavy burdened to come to him, take his yoke, and find rest (Matt. 11:28-30; Sir. 24:19; 51:26); he makes people friends of God (John 15:15; Wis. 7:27); and he gifts those who love him with life (John 17:2; Wis. 11:25-26).\textsuperscript{69} In this fashion, Johnson develops in great detail the scriptural connections between Christ and Wisdom, concluding that “Jesus was so closely associated with Sophia that by the end of the first century he is presented not only as a wisdom teacher, not only as a child and envoy of Sophia, but ultimately even as an embodiment of Sophia herself.”\textsuperscript{70}

Wisdom, then, as Torah, comes to be understood as embodied in Christ himself.

Johnson attends specifically to the gospel of John, which draws heavily on Wisdom categories and themes to link the story of Christ with the story of creation (e.g. “In the beginning” [Gen. 1.1; Jn. 1:1]) but attributes the prehistory of Christ to the Word, or logos, rather than to Wisdom, or Sophia: “present ‘in the beginning,’ an active agent in creation, descending from heaven to pitch a tent among the people, rejected by some, giving life to those who seek, a radiant light that darkness cannot overcome (Jn. 1:1-18).”\textsuperscript{71} Johnson asks, why has the Word or logos been substituted for Wisdom/Sophia in the Prologue? In answer, she refers to Philo, who she identifies as a major influence in late first century theological thought. In keeping with Platonic dualism, Philo linked the female with all that was considered irrational, passive, or evil and limited to the world of the senses, while the male included all that was good, active, and rational and pertained to the world of the spirit. Writes Philo,

\begin{quote}
For pre-eminence always pertains to the masculine, and the feminine always comes short of it and is lesser than it. Let us, then, pay no heed to the discrepancy in the gender of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 89, 95.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 95-97.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 96-97.
words, and say that the daughter of God, even Sophia, is not only masculine but father, sowing and begetting in souls aptness to learn, discipline, knowledge, sound sense, and laudable actions.\textsuperscript{72}

The replacement of the female symbol $\textit{sophia}$ with the male symbol $\textit{logos}$ can therefore be understood as an outcome of a growing sexism in the early Christian church and a general shift towards centralized male power, removing women from leading ministries: “The point is, however, that Christian reflection before John had not found it difficult to associate Jesus Christ with Sophia” and that a restoration of the relationship is in order.\textsuperscript{73}

Thus, even in his creaturely maleness, the retrieval of Jesus as incarnate Sophia can represent the image of God as female to undermine the male monopolization of God’s gender and sex. In this way, Jesus-Sophia subverts masculine and feminine stereotypes by signifying both male and female in the figure of one person, reconciling opposites in a unified diversity: “Long-standing dichotomies are herein brought into mutual coinherence: creator and creature, transcendence and immanence, spirit and body, all splits which have fed into patriarchal obsession with power-over.”\textsuperscript{74} Christ as pneumatological reality is, therefore, a creation of the Spirit whose very being as incarnate Wisdom points to the diversity of God incarnate in the Church, a pneumatological body transcending any one feature of Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, “for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). That is, the biblical symbol of $\textit{sophia}$ in Christ includes more than the historical person, for it subsumes all those who participate in the disciple community: “biblical metaphors such as the Pauline body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27) and the Johannine branches abiding in the vine (Jn. 15:1-11) expand the reality of

\textsuperscript{72} De Fuga et Inventione, 51-52, quoted in Johnson, \textit{She}, 98.

\textsuperscript{73} Johnson, \textit{She}, 98.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 165, 169.
Christ to include potentially all of redeemed humanity, sisters and brothers, still on the way.”

Thus, the body of the risen Christ becomes the body of the Church: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20). Through Sophia, then, as Torah, we can see that solidarity with Christ resides not in his maleness but in an ethical knowing necessary for life in community, namely the way of liberating and compassionate service, particularly for the suffering, poor, and marginalized: “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). In Luke, he states, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (8:21). And on the road to Damascus, Christ challenges Saul, who is “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,” by asking, “Why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:1, 4).

Indeed, the maleness of Christ is only one facet of his historical being, along with his age, linguistic heritage, nationality, and socio-economic location, and any other historical constants that make up his creaturely identity. To focus on his sex, explains Johnson, as somehow more fundamental to his essence than any of his other historical traits overlooks the nature of the risen Christ active through Spirit-Sophia in Christian community: “Feminist theological language about Christ bears the insight that the inevitable limitations of Jesus’ humanity are completed in the wholeness of the human race anointed with the Spirit, women and the elderly included. Maleness is not constitutive of the essence of Christ but, in the Spirit, redeemed and redeeming humanity is.” The specificity of Jesus’s historical identity therefore represents our shared humanity only as an instantiation of the diversity that constitutes the human species. Individual

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75 Ibid., 162.
76 Ibid., 162, 167.
77 Ibid., 164.
78 Ibid., 163.
persons are comprised of innumerable traits, which are interdependent and mutually conditioned and, in their combination, offer unique gestalts, irreducible to an “equality of sameness” or a binary of sexual difference, and establish a more wholistic context in which to understand the human person: “Focusing on sexuality to the exclusion of other equally constitutive elements is the equivalent of using a microscope on this one key factor of human life when what is needed is a telescope to take in the galaxies of rich human difference.” Human nature is realized in its diversity and not in systems of one-term uniformity or two-term opposition. Difference is therefore something to be celebrated as a resource for creativity and strength in community rather than as a “regrettable obstacle.”

The figure of Wisdom further draws attention to the cosmic dimension of the risen Christ (Col. 1:15-20). As “masterworker,” who was with God in the beginning and is immanent in creation, Sophia points past Jesus’s sex and humanity to the wider realm of nonhuman creation and its flourishing: “The power of Christ’s Spirit is seen wherever human beings share in this love for the earth, tending its fruitfulness, attending to its limits, and guarding it from destruction.” In this fashion, an immanent Christ-Sophia gives shape to human vocation as imago Dei and created co-creator, as friend, mother, sister, and lover of the world, who becomes historically present in relationships of solidarity between human and nonhuman life: “we are loved in order to love; gifted in order to gift; and befriended in order to turn to the world as sisters and brothers in redeeming, liberating friendship.” Human freedom, therefore, plays an essential part in the here and now redemption of a groaning creation and is challenged to renew

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79 Ibid., 155-156.
80 Ibid., 156.
81 Ibid., 165-166.
82 Ibid., 146.
social and political structures to form communities of life (Rom. 8:19-23). In this way, the agency of Spirit-Sophia is discernible anywhere there is justice and peace, connectedness and relatedness, wisdom and courage, renewed life and energy, emancipatory resistance, hope against hopelessness, and all that is subsumed with love, concludes Johnson.

**Wisdom Christology as Ecological Theology**

Johnson’s retrieval and elaboration of the Wisdom figure, fleshing out and broadening the presence and agency of God as Spirit and Christ, immanent in all things, powerfully liberates and empowers women as made in the image of God, and sets the foundation for a more comprehensive ecological theology developed by Edwards and later herself in *Ask the Beasts*.

Edwards notes that the identification of Jesus with Wisdom enables the connection between Christ and God’s work of creation, for “just as Wisdom was beside God in creation and was daily God’s delight (Prv. 8:30) and ‘reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other’ and ‘orders all things well’ (Wis. 8:1), so, too, are all things in heaven and earth created ‘in,’ ‘through,’ and ‘for’ [Christ] (Col. 1:16), and ‘in him all things hold together’” to share in his transformation (Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2-4; Jn. 1:3; Eph. 1:8-10). Enabled by the Spirit, explains Edwards, Christ-Sophia is immanent and operative in the world through a continuous creation, offering an approach to Christian praxis grounded in the human experience of nature and daily living: “a relational knowing, involving, above all, relationship with God.”

Edwards quotes Karl Rahner, who writes, “we can understand creation and incarnation as two

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83 Ibid., 135-137.
84 Ibid., 122, 128.
85 Ibid., 161-167. Please note that this thesis refers to Johnson’s second edition of *She Who Is*, which was published in 2002, shortly after Edwards published *Jesus the Wisdom of God* in 1995. However, the first edition of Johnson’s text was published in 1992.
moments and two phases of the one process of God’s self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process.”

Through the figure of Wisdom, we see God’s presence and self-communication in creation made human in Christ. Thus, if the incarnation represents God’s love for creation (Jn. 3:16), then, the love demonstrated in the cross reveals the love at the heart of the cosmos (1 Jn. 4:7-16). Indeed, concludes Edwards, the common theme of Wisdom Christology asserts that Jesus Christ makes manifest what is already revealed in creation—Wisdom’s pre-existent agency in the unfolding of the cosmos: “The divine Wisdom, at work creatively and continuously in the expanding universe and in our evolutionary history, stands revealed in the extreme vulnerability of divine foolishness of the cross.”

In her book Ask the Beasts, Johnson turns to Hebrew scripture to note the early recognition that nature can teach us about God if only we would pay attention (Ps. 19:1-4). According to the book of Wisdom, she argues, sophia as Torah is available in creation, but the “foolish and ignorant” are unable to see past “the good things” which exist to their maker (Wis. 13:1). Only the wise are able to discern in “the greatness and beauty of creatures” the greater depths of the power responsible for their existence (Wis. 13:1-9). Johnson notes the conclusion of Augustine that Moses “had no books of Moses to read” but only the book of nature for encounter with God. Edwards looks to Paul to identify the significance of Christ as explicit revelation of that which was already available in creation, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our

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89 Edwards, Wisdom, 52, 54, 71-72, 113; Edwards, Evolution, 117-118.
90 Edwards, Wisdom, 52; Edwards, Acts, 72-73.
91 Johnson, Beasts, 151.
proclamation, to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). That is, explains Edwards, God has chosen to reveal God’s self more explicitly in the foolishness of Christ and the cross because human beings did not already recognize Wisdom in the works of creation (Rom. 1:18-22; 1 Cor. 1:26-27; 2:1-16; Eph. 2:1-3:13).93 And thus Wisdom Christology is important for signifying God’s orientation to creation in passion and love: “Paul’s theology of Wisdom confronts us with the fact that this Wisdom at work in the universe is now revealed in the vulnerable love expressed in the crucified One.”94 Edwards chooses to focus on Christ’s weakness on the cross as a way of understanding God’s action in the world through Wisdom as a freely chosen vulnerability: “The Wisdom that shapes a word of more than a hundred billion galaxies reaches out to embrace struggling and suffering and sinful creatures in love which finds its final expression in death for us.”95 Indeed, the cross highlights what is not explicitly obvious from reflection on a suffering creation, that God, in the Spirit, is present to and feels the pain of the world, both human and nonhuman (Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:6).96 Moreover, Edwards explains, the cross of Jesus reveals not only the foolishness of God’s love but also the nature of God’s power in the resurrection at work in the cosmos through liberation, healing, and renewed life, in the hope of justice and the transformation of a suffering creation: “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor. 1:25).97


94 Edwards, Wisdom, 75-76.
95 Ibid., 76.
96 Edwards, Heart, 42-43.
97 Edwards, Wisdom, 77; Edwards, Heart, 42.
In this sense, argues Edwards, immanent Sophia incarnate in Christ reveals the inseparability of creation from redemption. Colossians and Ephesians develop this understanding of Wisdom Christology to offer insights about the relationship of Christ’s resurrection to the material universe, identifying Christ as the revelation of God’s saving purpose (1 Cor. 2:7; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; Eph. 2:1-3:13). The texts reveal that God’s plan includes all peoples, Jew and Gentile; all things in heaven and on earth; and the gathering up of all things in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:10). In Col. 1:15-20, the creation of all things is linked with their reconciliation in Christ-Sophia, “God’s agent in creation from the beginning of time.” Thus, concludes Edwards, “The rest of creation cannot be seen merely as the stage on which the drama of human redemption is played out. The Colossians hymn insists that the whole universe is caught up in the Christ event.”

Christ is the “firstborn from the dead” and the catalyst for the resurrection of “all things,” while at the same time, their goal and fulfillment. The work of Wisdom in the universe therefore finds expression in the vulnerability of the cross:

Jesus Christ, in the power of the resurrection, has become in his humanity what the Wisdom of God always was, engaged with the whole universe as a power at work shaping and transforming all things. This means that the humanity of Jesus is eternally significant not only for our salvation, but for the whole created universe….Jesus of Nazareth, risen from the dead is (in the hypostatic union) one with the dynamic power which is at the heart of the cosmic process of galaxy formation and of evolutionary history on Earth.

Thus, argues Edwards, the cross works in human and nonhuman affairs towards a transfiguration in Christ, such that the incarnation of God in a human being represents the incarnation of God in the material universe, extending the promise of the resurrection to the whole of creation: “the

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100 Ibid., 80.
101 Ibid., 82.
102 Ibid., 86.
resurrection is not an event that comes from outside, but the expression in history of God’s will to save, which has been operative in creation from the beginning and will find its fulfillment in the transformation of the whole creation.”

**Deification of the Flesh**

Drawing on Karl Rahner, both Edwards and Johnson claim, then, that the bodiliness of human beings cannot be separated from the bodiliness of the material universe. Rahner argues for the human being as an open system. He states, “Of course we must not get the impression in this connection that our body stops where our skin stops, as if we were a sack containing a number of different things, which clearly ceases to be what it is where its ‘skin,’ the sacking, stops.” As creatures we are dependent upon and interrelated with elements of a common sphere and space—a common body—without which we could not exist as we presently are. Explains Edwards,

> At the very centre of our beings we always have something to do with other human creatures, with the food we eat, the air we breathe, the flowers we smell, the wind which brings rain. And we necessarily have something to do with Jesus, whose death two thousand years ago took place in a bodily sphere which is still ours today.

Edwards and Johnson therefore draw on Danish theologian Niels Gregersen’s notion of deep incarnation, which states that in Christ’s flesh (Greek *sarx*) God enters biological life to achieve solidarity with *all* flesh, “in all its complexity, struggle, and pain.” Indeed, asserts Johnson, “the prologue [to the gospel of John] does not say that the Word who existed before creation became a human being (Greek *anthropos*), or a man (Gr. *aner*), but flesh (Gr. *sarx*), a broader

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reality.”  

In this way, Edwards and Johnson place particular emphasis on the origin of all Earth’s creatures from stardust to argue that the incarnation of God in the flesh of Jesus is the special incarnation of God in the flesh of the material universe, such that the whole sphere of bodiliness, the cosmos, itself, with its “struggle and creativity,” will be taken up and blessed by God in Christ. Explains Gregersen, “the death of Christ becomes an icon of God’s redemptive co-suffering with all sentient life as well as with the victims of social competition. God bears the cost of evolution, the price involved in the hardship of natural selection.”  

At the same time, Christ’s resurrection constitutes God’s promise of healing and fulfillment for all creatures in a new creation emerging from the realities of death, predation, and extinction. The cross, then, signifies God’s identification with creation in its evolutionary emergence while representing in microcosm God’s redemptive presence and promise to every suffering creature. Drawing on Athanasius, Edwards refers to this ontological transformation achieved through the incarnation of God in Christ as the deification of creaturely flesh.

**Divine Immanence Revealed in Trinitarian Love of Mutual Relations**

To better understand the nature of this divine immanence, Edwards argues that an ecological theology must focus on the trinitarian God revealed in Christ to enable the representation of divine self-expression in creation as one of Persons-In-Mutual-Relationship: “What is needed is to hold together radical mutuality, equality and perichoresis with a dynamic understanding of the

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distinct roles of the trinitarian Persons in creation and redemption.”¹¹⁵ That is, in contrast to theologians like Philip Hefner, who turn to Christ and claim that “altruistic love holds the status of a cosmological and ontological principle,” Edwards turns to the Trinity to argue that “the love of mutual relations” holds that status.¹¹⁶ In making this argument, Edwards does not undermine the significance of Christ’s altruistic love culminating in his crucifixion but is sensitive to the feminist critique of “indiscriminate, undifferentiated, and uncritical calls to self-sacrifice and altruism,” which maintain oppression.¹¹⁷ Revealed in the Trinity, he argues, is a model of unity in diversity, or rather, a mutual relation respecting the distinctness of the persons involved. That is, both mutuality and personal distinction are inseparable and require each other for the Trinity to exist and function.¹¹⁸ Applied to creation, explains Edwards, trinitarian relationships of love create and sustain all creatures, such that the primary ontological categories in Christian faith should include not only being and substance but also person and relationship; for all things come to be and continue to exist from out of their inextricable embeddedness in communion: “When life unfolds through the process of evolution, it emerges in patterns of interconnectedness and interdependence that ‘fits’ with the way God is.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, argues Edwards, the analogy of friendship may be used to articulate the essence of divine love as the fundamental principle enabling all creatures to be and become.¹²⁰ The self-expression of God in the universe, then, is rightly conceived as trinitarian since all things exist from within personhood and relation:

“Creation itself is simply the relationship between God and the universe and each creature in it.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, Wisdom, 135, 112.
¹¹⁷ Edwards, Evolution, 16.
The existence of a rain forest is dependent at every moment on the Trinity’s relationship with the forest.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, he argues, the fecundity of creation reflects the fecundity of trinitarian love, which is the source of existence for all creatures.\textsuperscript{122}

Turning to Athanasius, Edwards notes that the love and delight of the Father and Word in the Spirit is intrinsic to divine being and is extended to creation through the incarnation and immanent agency of Christ-Sophia in such a way that “participation in this communion of the Trinity will be the healing, liberation, and final fulfillment of the whole creation.”\textsuperscript{123} The indwelling love expressed in trinitarian community is the indwelling love expressed on the cross in the incarnation of God in Christ, which invites us as humans to participate in trinitarian friendship (Jn. 14:16-17; 15:15; 17:20-26) and reveals the divine love for, and pleasure in, creation (Gen. 1:31; 9:8-17; Is. 11:1-9; Ps. 104; Prv. 8:29-31; Matt. 6:26-30; Rom. 8:18-23; Col. 1:15-20; Rv. 5:11-14).\textsuperscript{124} Edwards quotes Tony Kelly, who writes, “The universe emerging in the long ages of time is ever coming into being out of such Love,” and also Khaled Anatolios, who argues: “Such a trinitarian account of creation speaks to our contemporary ecological crisis, leading us to see that a destructive posture towards creation is blasphemous in its dishonouring of the Father-Son delight and the Spirit’s gift-giving of that delight.”\textsuperscript{125}

As a result, the model of the trinitarian God immanent in creation has ethical ramifications for human beings, whose very biological nature as relational creatures coincides with the relational being of the divinity in whose image we are made. That is, the human is not

\textsuperscript{121} Edwards, \textit{Wisdom}, 118, 115.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 159; Edwards, \textit{Partaking}, 26-30, 93.
\textsuperscript{123} Edwards, \textit{Partaking}, 32, 93.
\textsuperscript{124} Edwards, \textit{Wisdom}, 113.
primarily an individual consciousness detached from its environment but is instead a creature constituted and defined by its communal and inter-subjective relationships, both human and nonhuman. Reflection on experience and the insights of the sciences supports the communal nature of the human being, for evolutionary history is a history of communities involving group processes by which we emerge as social beings with distinct identities. The biblical view, argues Edwards, recognizes and supports this communal constitution of human beings while respecting the value and dignity of the individual before God: “In the Christian scriptures…we find Jesus calling people into a new familial relationship with God and into a community of equals, a ‘new family’ of brothers and sisters” (Matt. 12:46-50; Luke 8:21). At the same time, theology supports the scientific theory of our kinship with all creatures in the recognition of our common origin within God’s creative action; for “we share a common journey in the ongoing story of creation, as God is present to every part of the universe dynamically sustaining and empowering it; and we share a common destiny in the New Creation.” In this sense, explains Edwards, God’s creative agency involves one act of self-giving love, “from the Father, through the Word, and in the Spirit,” actualized in and sensitive to the particularities and outcomes of a multifarious creation. The unity of God in three persons is therefore reflected in the unity of creation in diversity, he concludes. The human person, soul, mind, and body, is not exempt from inclusion in this unity, “which embraces both original creation and the continuous creation of all things.” Thus, argues Edwards, when taken together, human experiences of ecological

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128 Edwards, Wisdom, 135.
129 Ibid., 143.
131 Edwards, Partaking, 126.

**Creaturely Participation in Sophia’s Goodness, Being, and Agency**

More specifically, continues Edwards, we can perceive in nature the relational mandate of the feminine figure of Wisdom revealed to us in Christ. Connected to all aspects of existence, she is intimate with God (Matt. 11:25-7; Jb. 28:1-27; Sir. 1:6, 8; Bar. 3:15-32; Prv. 8:12; Wis. 7:25-6; 8:3-8; 9:4, 9, 11), immanent in creation, and rejoices in human beings and the inhabited world (Prv. 8:22-31). She is thus mediator between the divine and the material and is discovered in the living out of personal experience in relationship with Jesus to offer guidance in the ways of justice, equity, and mercy (Prv. 2:6-8). As a result, she demands discipleship grounded in the discernment of right relation in daily life, namely in service towards “sinners,” the poor, the outcast, and the ill. For Christ-Sophia, then, knowledge of God and God’s will entails an ethical knowing evinced in the liberating practice of loving-kindness and mercy towards the disparate other (Lk. 6:36; Matt. 5:43-44). The extension of this imperative to include *ecological care* derives, firstly, from the irreplaceable value of all evolved life as the self-communication and “art” of Wisdom, “[built] slowly over millions of years,” and, secondly, from the dignity and

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responsibility of the human as *imago Dei*, uniquely self-aware of its relational position and power over creation.¹³⁵

To illustrate, Edwards and Johnson turn to Aquinas, who argues that God’s goodness is expressed in the excellence of creation’s diversity: “he [God] produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another….Hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.”¹³⁶ Indeed, argues Aquinas, the goodness of creation must be grounded in God’s generous, generative, and self-giving goodness, for God alone is good, and “every created good is good by participation in the One who is good by nature.”¹³⁷ To carelessly destroy life and its diversity is therefore a “deadly sin” and tantamount to the destruction of God’s body and self-expression.¹³⁸ Thus, ecological care should extend to both ecosystem and individual, for “Every creature, in its form, its function and its beauty, reflects the divine Wisdom,” explains Edwards; “Divine Wisdom is the Exemplar.”¹³⁹ He points to the historical specificity of God’s incarnation in Christ to illustrate the sacramental presence of divinity in the multifarious particularity of creation:

that *particularity* is revealed as infinitely precious. This can mean that the God of the universe is revealed not only in the particularity of Jesus but also in this laughing kookaburra, this beautiful flowering eucalyptus tree, this vulnerable human person before me. God is present in, and revealed in, the finite, the ordinary, as well as in the wonders of our planet and our universe.¹⁴⁰

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Each specific creature is thus a reflection of divine Wisdom, “a word of the Word,” writes Edwards, which makes creaturely destruction tragic because true wisdom can only come through a relationship with God.141

Building on the notion of participation as developed by Aquinas, Johnson argues that the existence of each creature depends upon “a certain relation to the Creator as to the principle of its being.”142 In this way, all life is a gift from God, who “undergirds, enfolds, and bears up all evolutionary process,” such that no creature would exist without divine support: “In ultimate terms [plants and animals] do not bring themselves into being nor does their existence explain itself. Their very being here at all relies on the overflowing generosity of the incomprehensible Creator who freely shares life with the world.”143 Thus, argues Johnson, God “simply is.”144

Turning to the Latin of Aquinas, she compares two words for “being,” ens and esse. The first, ens, is a noun and indicates some thing amongst other things. The second, esse, is a verb, meaning literally “to be,” and is a more appropriate word for God, she argues, because it draws attention to the nature of divinity as verb, as active primary cause undergirding all things, of which it is not a member: “To say that God is being in the sense of esse means that God is not a noun, not a being, not a substance, not a static thing, does not have the property of being, is not in a class described as being at all. Rather, the infinitive form of the verb accentuates the active force of ‘be-ing,’ namely ‘to be,’ which evokes not a substance but infinite divine aliveness. God is to-be. Think fire.”145 Such an understanding of divine being is in keeping with a triune God whose very essence is dynamic and relational, as a communion of three persons united in

144 Ibid., 144.
145 Ibid., 144.
love, reaching out to creation in Christ through the Spirit in life-giving, self-communicating love: “there is no divine essence which is not at the same time communion…. ‘God is love’ (1 Jn. 4:16).”\(^{146}\)

God, who is being, who is esse, who is love, “the active force of ‘be-ing,’” freely shares the “plenitude of sheer aliveness,” which is God’s nature, with the creature, who is and remains other than God.\(^{147}\) In this sense, argues Aquinas, “a thing has being by participation,” for “all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation.”\(^{148}\) That is, Johnson explains, God is being, from which creatures have being: “By virtue of the fact that they exist, creatures participate in ways proper to their own finite nature in the very being of the incomprehensible, self-diffusively good God.”\(^{149}\) Much like a song, which is dependent upon the voice of its singer, the creation is dependent upon the Word of God active in the Spirit.\(^{150}\) There is an ongoing relationship, then, in the creaturely dynamic of continuous creation as a communion of God, freely gifting nature, which is, in turn, dependent on that gift: “the world exists due to a continuous act of love on the part of the Creator Spirit who shares the gift of being in an ongoing way, indwelling creation, sustaining its life, cherishing its every crevasse.”\(^{151}\) At the same time, creatures have their own integrity as agents and causes, though grounded in God’s “plenitude of being.”\(^{152}\)

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 145.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 144, 147-148.


\(^{151}\) Johnson, *Beasts*, 123, 148, 150.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 148.
In keeping with Johnson’s insights about divine causality, that “creation is a *sui generis* relation,” Edwards identifies the world as paradoxically autonomous, yet “God does not operate in competition with creaturely processes, does not overturn the laws of nature, but acts creatively and providentially in and through the whole process.” Edwards draws on Athanasius and Aquinas to argue for the Spirit as “the Energy of Love in evolutionary emergence,” for “‘when you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground’ (Ps. 104:30).” From Athanasius, he draws the argument that all things exist because they are supported by the triune God; that all things are continuously created from nothing by the “Source of All” through the Word in the Spirit; and that the presence of the Word to all creatures enables their participation in divine creativity, “to interact in a community of creatures,” each according to their own particular and “proper” character. The Spirit is the bond of communion between the Word and creation in all of its particularities. Without the Spirit, argues Edwards, there is no creation or evolutionary becoming. From Aquinas, Edwards identifies God’s “primary causality” as omnipresent, “continuous,” and undergirding the existence of all things, the physical processes and creaturely interactions, which are the “secondary causes” of the empirical realm accessible to science. Like Johnson, he therefore proposes that God as Wisdom is not one cause amongst many but the ultimate cause undergirding all others, including natural selection.

154 Edwards, *Partaking*, 73, 76.
155 Ibid., 74.
156 Ibid., 79.
157 Ibid., 74.
Evolution as the Autonomous “Self-Transcendence” of Creation

In light of recent developments in our scientific knowledge of evolution, both Edwards and Johnson note that primary causality must include not only creation from nothing (creatio ex nihilo), the continuous conservation of creaturely being (conservatio), and the enabling of creaturely action (concurus), but also the notion of God as ultimate ground of creation’s “fruitful creativity and capacity for novelty.” Edwards takes his lead from Karl Rahner, who argues that the Creator empowers the active “self-transcendence” of creatures in the context of God’s self-giving continuous creation directed toward the incarnation. In a similar sense, Johnson draws on Augustine to suggest that the innermost presence of the “utterly transcendent” God, through the Spirit “pervading all creatures according to their capacity with its vast generosity and fruitfulness,” acts continuously at the core of the evolving world, “empowering its advance.” Creatures are therefore enabled to become something new through the interactions of chance events butting up against the regularities of natural law, as evinced in evolutionary processes studied by the sciences. In this way, concludes Edwards, God empowers the creation with the capacity to create itself.

Johnson draws on Rahner to argue that God has gifted the universe from the very beginning with creative agency and propensities “to become something more.” In particular, matter is endowed with the capacity for self-transcendence, developing “out of its inner being in

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159 Edwards, Partaking, 74; Edwards, Acts, 93; Johnson, Beasts, 163, 173, 175.
161 Augustine, The Trinity, VI.11, quoted in Johnson, Beasts, 143.
162 Johnson, Beasts, 169-173.
163 Edwards, Partaking, 75-76, 127.
164 Johnson, Beasts, 160, 175.
the direction of spirit.”¹⁶⁵ Compelled by an interior power, argues Johnson, “matter has a
dynamic urge to explore,” to complexify and self-organize, and to become “ever more beautiful
and complex.”¹⁶⁶ Both Edwards and Johnson emphasize with Rahner that this emergence of
novelty comes “from within” and is not added on nor received passively from God: argues
Rahner, “Novelty comes about by the self-organizing dynamism inherent in creatures
themselves.”¹⁶⁷ Such a theology, Johnson and Edwards argue, accommodates the scientific
revelation that first life and then human self-consciousness evolved from matter through
autonomous natural processes.¹⁶⁸ In this way, both Edwards and Johnson argue that God as
primary cause empowers and conserves the creaturely world, endowing the universe with the
innate and autonomous capacity to evolve, to self-organize, and to emerge into the new, to be “a
free partner in its own creation.”¹⁶⁹ Johnson notes that Augustine identified this partnership in
the Genesis account where God says “let the waters bring forth” (1:20) and “let the earth bring
forth” (1:24), and “they do.”¹⁷⁰ In this sense, argues Johnson, the world is not compelled to
develop according to some divine blueprint or prescribed plan from some point in the past but is
“unscripted” and called towards a novel and surprising future horizon: “it is as if at the Big Bang
the Spirit gave the natural world a push saying, ‘Go, have an adventure, see what you can
become. And I will be with you every step of the way.””¹⁷¹  

¹⁶⁶ Johnson, Beasts, 170, 176.
¹⁶⁷ Rahner, “Christology,” 165, quoted in Johnson, 176, 177.
¹⁶⁸ Johnson, Beasts, 177; Edwards, Acts. 94.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 178.
¹⁷¹ Ibid., 173, 156.
This strategy for understanding divine agency in creation reflects a strategy for understanding human autonomy in light of divine grace and love: “Could it not be that since the Spirit’s approach to human beings powerfully invites but never coerces human response, the best way to understand God’s action in the evolution of the natural world is by analogy with how divine initiative relates to human freedom?” Such an insight takes its lead from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, “a flashpoint which illuminates how the God of love acts in other contexts.” In Christ we perceive an individual whose “deep union” with God does not overwhelm and eclipse his human nature but instead constitutes his “genuine” humanity and “the integrity of his own freedom.” In this sense, argues Johnson, human autonomy grows in direct proportion with nearness to God and provides a model for the paradox of creaturely participation in divine being, in which “radical dependence on God and the genuine reality of the creature increase to the same degree.” Human beings “become themselves and can act more freely” when they accept God’s grace rather than when they are distant from it. As explanation, Johnson quotes Bernard of Clairvaux:

What was begun by grace alone, is completed by grace and free choice together, in such a way that they contribute to each new achievement not singly but jointly; not by turns, but simultaneously. It is not as if grace did one half of the work and free choice the other; but each does the whole work, according to its own peculiar contribution. Grace does the whole work, and so does free choice—with this one qualification: that whereas the whole is done in free choice, so is the whole done of grace.

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172 Ibid., 156-158.
173 Ibid., 156.
174 Ibid., 157, 197.
176 Ibid.
Thus, with Christ as “the key” for understanding how divine agency works in the Spirit, we can understand divine love not as “power over” but as “power with,” as a suffering sovereign love which is realized in “compassionate self-giving” for the liberation and empowerment of the different other.\textsuperscript{178} Johnson cites Wolfhart Pannenberg, who writes, “The omnipotence of God can be thought of only as the power of divine love.”\textsuperscript{179} Applied to nonhuman creation, the agency of the Spirit can therefore be understood as love proceeding in person, who “is present to bless and enhance natural powers rather than to compete with them,” such that, “the Spirit graciously continues to invite, prod, push, [and] pull…. But the freedom of the creature remains,” an outcome of God’s “profound respect for creatures” and “respect for the freedom of the natural world to evolve consistently with its internal laws as discovered by contemporary science.”\textsuperscript{180}

In keeping with the relational nature and agency of Wisdom at the heart of nature, Edwards defines “real” freedom as the capacity to enter into relationship, “to risk oneself with another, to enter into love in openness to the other.”\textsuperscript{181} Seen in Christ, this freedom involves a “self-possession and self-giving in vulnerability,” realized through “loving communion,” at the risk of suffering freely chosen as an outcome of care for creaturely life.\textsuperscript{182} Writes Edwards,

Creation is a free act of God’s love, and that through this freely chosen act of love God enters into a real relationship with creation, which means that God freely accepts the limitation and vulnerability of such relationship (Phil. 2:6-11). God’s supreme capacity for love is of such a kind as to be able to make space for others.\textsuperscript{183}


\textsuperscript{180} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 158, 162-163.

\textsuperscript{181} Edwards, \textit{Wisdom}, 123.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 123-124; Johnson, \textit{She}, 265.

\textsuperscript{183} Edwards, \textit{Wisdom}, 125.
In this way, concludes Edwards, creaturely freedom and the freedom of physical processes are enabled by divine freedom or *kenosis*; and the omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God is absolved of blame for suffering and evil; for moral evil can be attributed to the misuse of freedom by human beings, and natural evil can be attributed to God’s respect for the freedom and integrity of physical processes: “God’s freedom and power may well be self-limited in the very fact of creating a universe which unfolds by way of process.”

Johnson notes that in mature loving relationships, human persons promote the growth of personal autonomy in the beloved, enabling the flourishing of talents rather than their suppression: “Parents rejoice when their child walks, talks, shows interest in the world, grows into a functioning, contributing person. Teachers rejoice when their students learn skills, pose questions, and begin to think for themselves.” In this sense, love is life giving, for it enables and empowers the freedom necessary in others to fulfill their potential, “in that independence which is Love’s gift to the one beloved.” Applied to creation, this love is manifested by the Christian God creating a universe “capable of its own evolution.” Thus, argues Johnson, the evolutionary process is empowered by God, who gifts the natural world with its own creative agency, offering an operational autonomy through ontological dependence: “The *kenotic* position perceives that God voluntarily self-limits divine power in order to participate vulnerably in the life of the world.” That is, God lets the world be what it will be, while at the same time

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184 Ibid.
185 Johnson, *Beasts*, 159.
187 Ibid.
188 Johnson, *Beasts*, 162.
participating in its becoming as the natural world freely participates in its own creation.\textsuperscript{189} Creatures are “perfect” only as finite causes capable of acting according to the fullness of their capacities, a “gift the courteous Creator bestows without reserve.”\textsuperscript{190} Thus, in the same sense that creaturely goodness and being depend upon creaturely participation in divine goodness and being, so, too, is creaturely agency in freedom grounded in creaturely participation in the uncreated power of the divine, who is “pure act.”\textsuperscript{191} God’s goodness and wisdom are therefore seen in the innate agency of natural processes, which have their own integrity apart from divine providence: “The Source creates and sustains, while creatures receive their form and power to act with their own efficacy….In this sense the world necessarily hides divine action from us. The living God acts by divine power in and through the acts of finite agents which have genuine causal efficacy in their own right.”\textsuperscript{192}

Both Edwards and Johnson draw their argument from the work of John Polkinghorne, who resorts to the “free-will defence,” asserting that human freedom is an intrinsic good, preferable to a life without freedom, even if that freedom can be misused or result in destructive choices.\textsuperscript{193} Polkinghorne develops a variation of this approach to address the reality of so-called natural evil. Applied to the physical world, he calls this approach, “the free process defence”:

In his great act of creation I believe that God allows the physical world to be itself…in that independence which is Love’s gift of freedom to the one beloved. That world is endowed in its fundamental constitution with an anthropic potentiality which makes it capable of fruitful evolution. The exploration and realization of that potentiality is

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
achieved by the universe through the continual interplay of chance and necessity within its unfolding process. The cosmos is given the opportunity to be itself.\textsuperscript{194}

Having set in place specific processes of creation, God is not then able to override those processes, but, out of respect for their integrity, self-limits divine power and freedom.\textsuperscript{195} Physical evil and suffering can be understood as an outcome of the “precariousness” of such providential activity: “God no more expressly wills the growth of a cancer than he expressly wills the act of a murderer, but he allows both to happen.”\textsuperscript{196} According to Edwards, this line of thinking is the only approach to suffering which makes sense of God’s compassion in the crucified Christ: that is, God’s suffering in the suffering Christ reveals the quality of divine presence in the suffering world, working redemption, healing and liberation, while respecting the integrity of the system set in motion.\textsuperscript{197}

Polkinghorne admits that this way of thinking may appear to render God impotent, “so evacuated of power that he becomes little more than the colluder with cosmic process.”\textsuperscript{198} In response, Polkinghorne falls back on the power of God “perfected in weakness” as co-sufferer with creation in God’s incarnation in Christ: “He is not a spectator but a fellow-sufferer, who has himself absorbed the full force of evil….opening his arms to embrace the bitterness of the strange world he has made.”\textsuperscript{199} God’s caring is revealed in God’s chosen vulnerability to reconcile all things through the cross in the assurance that “all will be well.”\textsuperscript{200}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[194] Polkinghorne, \textit{Providence}, 66.
\item[196] Polkinghorne, \textit{Providence}, 67; Polkinghorne, \textit{Reason}, 84.
\item[197] Edwards, \textit{Wisdom}, 126.
\item[198] Polkinghorne, \textit{Providence}, 68.
\item[199] Ibid., 68.
\item[200] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
know future contingent events. Rather, he argues, we must assume God’s promises to be contingent upon and responsive to the unpredictable outcomes generated by human freedom and natural process: “This theology offers a vision of the trinitarian God engaged in ongoing creation in the way that is consonant with radical love—not out of a static predetermined plan, but responsively, adventurously and inventively.”

In this sense, God can be understood to be responding creatively to the universe or “improvising” through the interaction of chance and law. Edwards refers to Athanasius and his use of music as a metaphor to understand Wisdom’s agency in creation:

Like a musician who has attuned his lyre, and by the artistic blending of low and high and medium tones produces a single melody, so the Wisdom of God, holding the universe as a lyre, adapting things heavenly to things earthly, and earthly things to heavenly, harmonizes them all, and leading them by his will, makes one world and one world-order in beauty and harmony.

Arthur Peacocke takes up this image of musical improvisation using the more modern illustrations of classical composition and jazz. Bach, for example, created music by responding to the limits imposed by a theme, his instrument, and the rules of composition. A group of jazz musicians improvises in response to a theme but also to each other’s interpretation of that theme, creating a gestalt that is greater than the sum of its parts: “So the trinitarian God creates in a way which is responsive to freedom and process,” writes Edwards.

In this way, explains Johnson, divine ineffable mystery continuously creates and accompanies the world, “in, with, and under nature’s own processes,” to achieve divine purpose through the autonomous workings of secondary causes, “letting it be and self-spending in an

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outpouring of love. Drawing on the work of Aquinas and his articulation of Final Cause, Johnson notes that the autonomous working of natural processes may appear as if God’s governance was not necessary, but this very appearance is itself an imprint (impression) from God, for God endows creatures with the natural inclination to pursue a goal through their own actions, which simultaneously fulfills divine purpose: “While endowing creatures with their inbuilt nature and ways of acting, God leaves them free to follow the strivings of their natural inclination which aims them toward a natural good.” And since all good derives its character from participation in the ultimate good, or Final Cause, which is God, all things tend toward God as ultimate goodness. Thus, God is ultimate cause of creation in its entirety and in its “every detail,” for divine intention is achieved in the creaturely pursuit of purposes sought by those grounded in the immanent Ground of all: “the Spirit of God continuously interacts with the world to implement divine purpose by granting creatures and created systems their full measure of efficacy.”

Limitations of “Free Process Defence” and Need to Recognize Existential Fall

The assertion, however, that God’s omnipotence as Spirit-Sophia is love immanent and active in the world through a continuous creation—operative through secondary cause and the interplay of natural law and chance, as life-giver, sustainer, and renewer, compassionately and generously undergirding, enfolding, and supporting creaturely interaction and evolutionary process as a reflection and outcome of trinitarian relationships of loving friendship and mutuality, intending both cosmic and human flourishing against destructive agencies, and empowering nature’s

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205 Johnson, Beasts, 159, 160, 163, 169, 179.
206 Ibid., 165.
207 Aquinas, Summa Theologica I.103.8, quoted in Johnson, Beasts, 165.
208 Johnson, Beasts, 165, 166.
fecundity and self-transcendence—is confronted by the intrinsic, active, and complementary role of destruction in the creaturely process of natural selection, specifically as an outcome of the “particular” and “proper” character of creatures themselves, whose biological drives and environmental pressures inform intentions and purposes predicated on conflict. For example, how can Spirit-Sophia grant “creatures and created systems their full measure of efficacy” when the efficacy of one creature is only realized in the deficiency, if not destruction, of another? That is, if the Spirit is love operative in the evolutionary emergence of novelty then it is hard to understand how that love is manifested in the “arms race” of natural selection, in which the flourishing of the lion is only possible with the destruction of the gazelle, and the flourishing of the gazelle is only possible with the starvation of the lion. Both Johnson and Edwards acknowledge Holmes Rolston’s statement that “The cougar’s fang has carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer, and vice versa.” And Darwin notes,

> the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or from which it has to escape, or on which it preys. This is obvious in the structure of the teeth and talons of the tiger; and in that of the legs and claws of the parasite which clings to the hair on the tiger’s body.

Consequently, the abstract claim that divine love is evident in nature’s creativity and innovation is challenged by the process of biological innovation and the innovations themselves, whether one considers the HIV virus whose virulence is grounded in its mutability, or the boa constrictor who slowly crushes its prey before swallowing it whole.

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210 Johnson, Beasts, 166.
Thus, Richard Dawkins’ argument remains unopposed. That is, “if there is only one Creator who made the tiger and the lamb, the cheetah and the gazelle, what is He playing at? Is He a sadist who enjoys spectator blood sports? Is He trying to avoid overpopulation in the mammals of Africa? Is He maneuvering to maximize David Attenborough’s television ratings?” In other words, the Darwinian theory of evolution offers a significant obstacle to the Thomistic claim identified by Johnson, that “the perfection of creatures to act according to the fullness of their abilities, as finite causes” is a “gift the courteous Creator bestows without reserve” because the biological processes that comprise and drive natural selection entail that Spirit-Sophia must be life taking in order to be life giving, for all life depends upon the destruction of other life. This dynamic is inherent to the creative process as creatio continuo, such that God as immanent Sophia cannot take credit for the giving of life without also assuming responsibility for its destruction.

Darwin argues that his theory “will be dimly seen or quite misunderstood” unless “every fact on distribution, rarity, abundance, extinction, and variation” be approached in light of “competition” and “the truth of the universal struggle for life.” That is, the diversity and “fecundity” of living things, he argues, is owed to the “struggle for existence” that “follows from the high geometrical ratio of increase which is common to all organic beings” and which “must be checked by destruction at some period of life.” More specifically:

any variation, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if it be in any degree profitable to an individual of any species, in its infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to external nature, will tend to the preservation of that individual, and

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215 Ibid., 105.
216 Johnson, Beasts, 164.
217 Darwin, Origin, 62.
218 Ibid., 61, 63, 467, 65.
will generally be inherited by its offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term of Natural Selection.\footnote{Ibid., 61.}

Inspired by Thomas Malthus’s *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which focuses on human populations, Darwin therefore relates nature’s “fecundity” and innovation to the destruction and death of individual creatures and the groups to which they belong:

As each species tends by its geometrical ratio of reproduction to increase inordinately in number; and as the modified descendants of each species will be enabled to increase by so much the more as they become more diversified in habits and structure, so as to be enabled to seize on many and widely different places in the economy of nature, there will be a constant tendency in natural selection to preserve the most divergent offspring of any one species. Hence during a long-continued course of modification, the slight differences characteristic of varieties of the same species, tend to be augmented into the greater differences characteristic of species of the same genus. New and improved varieties will inevitably supplant and exterminate the older, less improved and intermediate varieties; and thus species are rendered to a large extent defined and distinct objects. Dominant species belonging to the larger groups tend to give birth to new and dominant forms; so that each large group tends to become still larger, and at the same time more divergent in character. But as all groups cannot thus succeed in increasing in size, for the world would not hold them, the more dominant groups beat the less dominant. This tendency in the large groups to go on increasing in size and diverging in character, together with the almost inevitable contingency of much extinction, explains the arrangement of all the forms of life, in groups subordinate to groups, all within a few great classes, which we now see everywhere around us, and which has prevailed throughout all time.\footnote{Ibid., 470-471.}

Darwin therefore argues that although “the face of nature” may appear “bright with gladness” when “the forces are so nicely balanced,” the reality of creaturely process is better understood using the metaphor of war: “Battle within battle must ever be recurring with varying success”; “What a struggle between the several kinds of trees must here have gone on during long centuries…what war between insect and insect—between insects, snails, and other animals with birds and beasts of prey—all striving to increase, and all feeding on each other or on the trees”; “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....from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved." In this sense, the emergence of novelty is not determined by some intangible vitalistic “inner tendency,” “urge,” or “power,” but by the “varying conditions of life” acting upon creatures from without to destroy the weak, the vulnerable, and the less fit; indeed, “nature” does not evolve “by adding something on” but by consuming and destroying a far greater number of creatures than are able to survive in the great crucible of life.222

Thus, although the world is constituted by, and derived from, relationships of interdependence and interrelatedness, of creatures sharing a common origin who are thus technically “kin,” the true measure of the depths and quality of creaturely relationship must account for the obvious injustice, cruelty, waste, immoderation and selfish behavior that define and drive natural selection, including the mechanisms of predation, extinction, and parasitism, which enable and empower the diversity and “fecundity” of earth’s ecosystems. Edwards draws on the work of George Tinker to argue that “if we believe that we are all relatives in this world, then we must live together differently from the way we have been doing—‘we will live together out of respect for each other, working toward the good of each other.’”223 Darwin notes, however, that the greatest struggle occurs between individuals who are most closely related, “individuals of the same species,” and “the most closely-allied forms...which, from having nearly the same structure, constitution, and habits, generally come into the severest competition with each other. Consequently, each new variety or species, during the progress of its formation,

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221 Ibid., 62, 73, 74-75, 79.
222 Ibid., 5; Johnson, Beasts, 143, 174-177.
will generally press hardest on its nearest kindred, and tend to exterminate them.” In this sense, the kinship relations modeled in nature can be better understood to reflect the postlapsarian kinship relations of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-16) or Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25-27) rather than the inclusive relations demanded by Christ-Sophia. To argue, then, for “the Spirit as the Energy of Love in evolutionary emergence,” or that nature’s fecundity is “grounded in the dynamic generativity and fruitfulness of God the Trinity….endlessly generating the eternal Wisdom/Word and breathing forth the Spirit of life and love,” does not sufficiently account for the bloody and brutal “struggle for existence” or biological “warfare” consequent upon the “fecundity” or “geometrical ratio of increase” of all living things, particularly amongst those who are most closely “kin.”

Both Johnson and Edwards acknowledge the cost of evolution, that massive death, suffering, and extinction are integral to the “mutual relations” driving evolutionary process, and that new forms only come about with the disappearance of the old. Edwards admits that “98% of species that have ever existed are now extinct,” and that “suffering, death and extinction are…intrinsic to the process of evolutionary emergence. They are not simply unfortunate side-effects….without death, there could be no wings, eyes, or brains.” Nevertheless, argues Johnson, “the absolute statement that ‘the living God and death are irreconciliable antitheses’ is less than helpful. We are precisely trying to think theologically about death as part of the creative process on this planet. The creating Giver of life has to be part of the picture in some

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way, or this is a fruitless endeavour.” But Johnson and Edwards’ interpretation of Polkinghorne’s “free process defence,” which articulates the cost of evolutionary emergence as an outcome of God’s generous and fruitful gift of autonomy to physical processes, offered out of loving respect for the integrity of the universe to become a free partner in its own creation, empowered with the capacity to create itself and to fulfill its potential “in that independence which is Love’s gift to the one beloved,” overlooks the concrete and specific experiences of the individual suffering creature in favour of an abstract and monolithic personified nature.

As if in rebuttal to their use of the free process defence, both Johnson and Edwards argue that human personality and moral behaviour cannot be attributed to physical processes like natural selection. Edwards argues that natural selection must be understood in “a nonmythological and nonanthropomorphic way,” as “simply the differential reproductive success that is built into nature.” To describe it as “cruel” or “selfish” is to speak anthropomorphically of a process of nature, he explains; and, “This is not a scientific or a theological way of talking.” Congruently, Johnson notes that “pain, suffering, and death,” as an outcome of “the natural working out of life’s creative processes,” are “morally neutral.” She quotes John Thiel, who, she states, “rightly observes, ‘nature lacks the personal character required for either guilty or innocent agency.’” As a result,

Orcas chase a sea lion through the waves, flipping it playfully in the air before devouring it; a lioness snags a wildebeest, knocking it down and biting its throat to cause asphyxiation; a hawk plummets to hook a scampering rodent with its sharp talons. The

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228 Johnson, Beasts, 189.
229 Polkinghorne, Providence, 67, quoted in Johnson, Beasts, 191.
231 Ibid., 38.
232 Johnson, Beasts, 185.
prey endures pain and death, but these are the result of interrelated life processes, not of some malign force. Indeed, benefits accrue. In every instance the nutrients in the lifestream of one organism are resources that nourish the life of the other. Over the long haul, the struggle to survive brings about rich, complex changes in structure and behaviour…. Without pain, no further exploration of life’s potential forms; without death, no new life. These afflictions arose as essential elements in a tremendously powerful process that created and continues to create the magnificent community of life on this planet.”

But if, as Edwards writes, physical processes like natural selection, the Big Bang, or stellar nucleosynthesis, are “dimensions of the way God creates through the unfolding of potentialities and laws that are built into the material universe”; and if, as Johnson writes, “God is ultimate cause of the world as a whole and in every detail, endowing all created beings with their own participation in divine being (enabling them to exist), in divine agency (empowering them to act), and in divine goodness (drawing them toward their goal)”; and if, as Author and “Immanent Ground of all, God’s intention comes to fruition by means of purposes acted out in those who are thus grounded”; then Christian theology must be free to use anthropomorphizing language when approaching the natural processes of creation and evolution, for if the Abrahamic God is creator of all things, then natural processes are God’s means of creation and can speak to the personality and intentions of God.

Despite their claims to the contrary, then, Johnson and Edward’s articulation of Polkinghorne’s “free process defence” depends upon a personification of nature to reconcile divine omnipotence as love with the intrinsic reality of suffering and death in creation. Johnson takes the lead from Darwin, who personifies biological process using the term “natural selection” as a rhetorical and pedagogical device to convince readers already familiar with, and committed to, the practice of artificial selection. She even quotes Darwin, who writes,

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234 Johnson, Beasts, 185.
235 Edwards, Evolution, 38; Johnson, Beasts, 165.
I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term of Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man’s power of selection. We have seen that man by selection can certainly produce great results, and can adapt organic beings to his own uses, through the accumulation of slight but useful variations, given to him by the hand of Nature. But Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man’s feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art.\textsuperscript{236}

Darwin therefore illumines his theory of biological creation by extending the actions of the human breeder to a personified representation of natural selection:

It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.\textsuperscript{237}

In parallel fashion, Johnson argues,

There is a deep compatibility between the creative though not conscious ways physical, chemical, and biological systems operate through the interplay of law and chance on the one hand, and persons’ experience of consciousness and freedom within their physical embodiment on the other. These particular human qualities are intensely concentrated states of capacities found throughout the universe in natural forms. At the very least, the freedom of natural systems to explore and discover themselves within a context of lawlike regularity is one of the natural conditions for the possibility of the emergence of free and conscious human beings as part of the evolving universe.\textsuperscript{238}

But Johnson begs the question here, assuming to be true in her premise what she purports to prove in her conclusion, that there is a sufficient similarity between the dynamic of human freedom and the physical processes of material creation to merit an analogical comparison. In so doing, she can argue that “matter has a dynamic urge to explore,” that “natural systems…explore and discover themselves,” “empowered by the Creator who as love freely gifts the natural world with creative agency,” “making it a free partner in its own creation.”\textsuperscript{239} Thus, she continues, “it

\textsuperscript{236} Darwin, \textit{Origin}, 61, quoted in Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 48–49
\textsuperscript{238} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 172.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 176,172, 160, 155.
is as if at the Big Bang the Spirit gave the natural world a push saying, ‘Go, have an adventure, see what you can become.’”\textsuperscript{240} In this sense, “the universe” is compared to an experimental inventor who is “generously” empowered in freedom “to figure out its own way” through the “interaction of chance and law” as “a creative means, over time, for testing out, tweaking, and finally evolving every new structure and organism of which the physical cosmos is capable.”\textsuperscript{241}

However, the analogy of freedom as applied to the universe and its development is too broad and unfocused in its abstract representation of a personified creaturely order, and overlooks the concrete and specific individuals who comprise creation and experience the suffering, extinction, wasted life, and death consequent upon living in an evolving world. Johnson, herself, acknowledges with Holmes Rolston that, “in general, the element of suffering and tragedy is always there, most evidently as seen from the perspective of the local self, but it is muted and transmuted in the systematic whole.”\textsuperscript{242} From a macroscopic perspective, Edwards is able to argue that God empowers creatures to participate in their own creation: “God’s self-giving in continuous creation…enables creatures to become something new, to transcend themselves, through all the processes of evolutionary emergence studied in the sciences.”\textsuperscript{243} But “the world” or “creation” is not a person, which can make decisions about its future, nor experience suffering or pain, nor enjoy the accruement of value that is consequent upon natural selection; Johnson admits that, as metaphor, “natural selection does not operate with conscious, intelligent pre-planning and intent. It is not an active agent.”\textsuperscript{244} Rather, “the world” or “creation” is a great ecological community of creatures, whose life-spans are fleeting, and whose

\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 156, 172.
\textsuperscript{242} Holmes Rolston, \textit{Science and Religion}, 137-140, quoted in Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 186.
\textsuperscript{243} Edwards, \textit{Partaking}, 75-76, 127.
\textsuperscript{244} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 28.
circumstances are not of their own choosing; no creature has control over its genes or the context into which it is born; and very few creatures have any understanding of their location in time or space or their contributions to an evolving natural history. Thus, the claim that God “respects the freedom and integrity of physical processes” does not necessarily agree with the additional claim that “the freedom of the creature remains” because of God’s “most profound respect for creatures.” That is, the health and well-being of the ecosystem does not necessarily translate to the health and well-being of the individual; for the health and well-being of a balanced ecosystem is only possible at the cost of countless individual lives suffering and dying under the crucible of natural selection. Therefore, the divine love for natural systems, however understood, does not necessarily equate to divine love for the individual.

Darwin cites the example of “the sting of the bee causing the bee’s own death,” and the “ichneumonidae [wasp larvae] feeding within the live bodies of caterpillars,” to note, “The wonder indeed is, on the theory of natural selection, that more cases of the want of absolute perfection have not been observed,” since “it adapts the inhabitants of each country only in relation to the degree of perfection of their associates.” That is, since “natural selection acts solely by accumulating slight, successive, favourable variations,” he argues, “We can plainly see why nature is prodigal in variety, though niggard in innovation [sic].” Thus, if the emergence of novelty and the development of life on earth is an “unscripted” experiment, its creator could be better compared with a heartless and cruel inventor, whose careless disregard for the health, safety, and well-being of his subjects enables the sacrifice of countless sentient creatures as a

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248 Ibid., 471.
means to achieve experimental ends. And if the development of the universe since the Big Bang has been an “adventure,” it has been soaked in blood, rife with terror, and driven by murderous death. Johnson argues that “the gracious God, Spirit proceeding as love in person, is present to bless and enhance natural powers,” but it is unclear to what “natural powers” she is referring and what their enhancement might signify, particularly as a manifestation of God’s love.  

Therefore, it is hard to conceive how God’s love is manifested in “the freedom” of a monolithic personified creation, when that “freedom” of the larger insentient whole is at the expense of the sentient individuals of which it is constituted.

The indigestible obstacle, which is at the core of this ambivalence, is the unfathomable potential of the natural system for suffering, waste, and destruction as the necessary cost of innovation and development. It is this *tremendum* of natural evil which renders Polkinghorne’s “free process defence” vulnerable to the “argument from divine neglect,” despite Johnson and Edward’s expressed concern for the individual and their emphasis on divine immanence and agency in “the particular.” Wesley J. Wildman argues that “the argument from divine neglect” hinges on an analogy with human parents, that loving parents balance the need of an offspring’s freedom to learn with the offspring’s need for protection:

Loving parents do not hesitate to intervene in a child’s life when they discern that ignorance or mischievousness or wickedness is about to cause serious trouble, and perhaps irreparable disaster. Parents rescue the child, [or intervene] with education, punishment, or encouragement as needed. As time goes on, children need less guidance but parental interference rightly persists until the child is largely independent. Wise parental interference does not limit a child’s freedom; on the contrary, it enhances it by protecting the child from freedom-destroying injuries and character defects, and by leading the child patiently but surely toward freedom-enhancing independence and moral

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249 Johnson, Beasts, 158.
responsibility. We hold parents negligent, and sometimes criminally negligent, if they fail to intervene when necessary for the sake of their child’s safety and well-being.\footnote{Wesley J. Wildman, “The Argument from Neglect and the Nature of God” (paper presented at the 100th annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Montreal, Quebec, November 9, 2009), 1-2.}

As analogical parent of creation, the personal God of Christian faith, represented by the biblical figure of Wisdom, has similar responsibilities to educate, guide, protect, punish, and re-direct. But the degree of suffering experienced by individual creatures embedded in and emergent from an evolving world, subject to predation, disease, parasitism, and the vagaries of physical process and natural disaster, render the Abrahamic God vulnerable to accusations of negligence, if not malevolence and cruelty. Argues Wildman,

we feel neglected...left to comfort ourselves with illusions of ultimate love and perfect nurture that experience finally does not support. We get our love and protection, our education and wisdom, not from God’s parental activity but from our own good fortune at living in a cosmic era with few meteoric collisions, from our own determination to build stable and rewarding civilizations, and from our own discoveries about the world that we pass along to our children. The idea of God as protective, solicitous parent may make a difference in our lives in the way that a wonderous story can bring comfort and solace, but that is as far as it goes.\footnote{Ibid., 2.}

Thus, when perceived through the lens of the “argument from divine neglect,” the “free process defence” as articulated by Edwards and Johnson can appear to go too far in attempting to explain away that to which the metaphor of an existential fall points. Suffering, waste, and destruction are minimized and obscured behind a haze of abstraction, if not justified as the cost of biological innovation. If indeed the workings of physical processes are an “adventure,” an “exploration,” and a “suffering through toward something higher,” then one has to ask for whom?\footnote{Johnson, Beasts, 156, 185; Polkinghorne, Providence, 66; Holmes Rolston, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science 29, no. 2 (June 1994): 220.} After all, the vast majority of creatures suffer and die before their potential is ever reached, unable to
experience the rewards of nature’s development, and lacking the freedom and power to create themselves in partnership with God.\textsuperscript{254}

\textit{“New Earth” as Realization or Interruption of Natural Law}

Turning once again to Rahner, Johnson notes that the culmination of natural history, the destination of a world in evolution, is revealed at Easter in the bodily resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{255} In the words of Rahner, “His resurrection is like the first eruption of a volcano which shows that in the interior of the world God’s fire is already burning, and this will bring everything to blessed ardor in its light. He has risen to show that this has already begun.”\textsuperscript{256} The crucified and risen Christ is therefore the end made manifest to creation, which is still moving forward in time, “just as the front of a procession which has reached the goal calls back with cries of triumph to those still marching: we are there, we have found the goal, and it is what we hoped it would be.”\textsuperscript{257} That is, argues Johnson, although creation still suffers the pain and loss of Good Friday, the resurrection of Christ in the power of the Spirit signals the first arrival of the glory to which the world in motion is directed: “Put another way, Christ carries the whole creation towards its destiny.”\textsuperscript{258} In this way, Christ’s \textit{bodily} resurrection constitutes God’s promise of healing and fulfillment for all physical beings in a “resurrection of the body, the whole body-person, dust and breath together”; although not an extension of our present biological state of existence, argues

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{254} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 156, 191.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 227.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{258} Johnson, \textit{Beasts}, 227.
\end{itemize}
Johnson, this “deep resurrection” promises a transfiguration of all things toward a new and unimaginable “physicality” (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:44).\textsuperscript{259}

Indeed, the transfiguration of creation is so radical according to Johnson that a link can be drawn between God’s \textit{creatio ex nihilo} “in the beginning” and God’s \textit{creatio nova} at the \textit{eschaton}. These are bookends, she argues, for “the absolute mystery who is Alpha, creative God of the beginning, is also Omega, the same creative God of the end, who will transform the original creation into ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev. 21.1).”\textsuperscript{260} Johnson refers to Paul, who connects divine creative power in the beginning and in the end, describing the God of Abraham as a God “who gives life to the dead and calls into being the things that do not exist” (Rom. 4:17). Through this linkage, she argues, the \textit{creatio originalis} of the world by God from “out of nothing” sets up and reveals the significance and meaning of the \textit{creatio nova} of the \textit{eschaton} in which God offers a new beginning for a transfigured creation, “based not on the potential of the finite world in itself to survive the final death, but on the character of God” and “a promise embedded with the gift of...life.”\textsuperscript{261} Paul echoes Plato, for example, in the letter to the Hebrews when he identifies God’s promise to “shake not only the earth but also the heaven,” to remove “created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain,” namely “a kingdom that cannot be shaken...for indeed our God is a consuming fire” (12:26-29). Congruent with a world in evolution, Paul is acknowledging the transience and changeability of creation, “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (13:14). Johnson therefore

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 207-210.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid., 219.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 216, 219-220, 17.
concludes that scientific predictions of the end of the universe are consistent with theological assertions of the renewal and transfiguration of the cosmos on “the last day.”  

Similar to Johnson, Edwards also argues that the universe’s transformation depends upon an eschatological act of God in Christ-Sophia (1 Cor. 15:24-28; 1 Thes. 5:1-10).  

Turning to Colossians 1:20, which reads, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross,” Edwards notes that immanent Wisdom is active in the world through the risen Christ and is moving towards Christ in a reconciliation underway: “if the risen Christ is already the secret heart and center of the created universe, then, through God’s gracious act, the transformation of matter has begun from within the processes of the universe.”  

As a result, he argues, the way of Wisdom entails a respect and reverence for the integrity of creaturely processes because divine action works creatively through chance and law to not only sustain and empower but also to transform all things in the universe: “God’s purposes are achieved, not in spite of, but in and through the indeterminacy that is built into the process.”  

Thus, in contrast to Johnson, who admits a new beginning in the eschaton grounded in the power of divine action over and above any potential found in the finite world, Edwards explicitly argues that the final consummation of all things will be realized by the powers of divine agency acting through the laws of nature and secondary cause.  

Because God creates a universe capable of being transformed in new creation, there is no need to understand this transformation as an intervention that overturns or bypasses

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262 Ibid., 219-220.
263 Ibid., 220; Edwards, Wisdom, 87.
265 Edwards, Wisdom, 155, 122; Edwards, Partaking, 113-114; Edwards, Evolution, 49, 126, 121.
natural laws. And I do not think it needs to be seen as introducing new laws of nature. Rather, it can be seen as the instantiation of potentialities that God had placed in the natural world from the beginning, potentialities that have always been directed toward resurrection and new creation.267

In this way, the resurrection of the world in Christ provides “the real meaning and goal of God’s work of creation, rather than as the kind of miracle that overturns the natural world and its laws.”268

Assuming a universal and unremitting application of natural law, Edwards therefore argues that the difference between scientific predictions of the universe’s demise—for example, in an “endless cold or intolerable heat”—and the Christian hope of a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) can undermine belief in an afterlife, a future resurrection, and even God.269 “Yet,” he argues, “Christian theology needs to affirm that there is nothing illogical or improbable about divine action that brings the universe to its consummation.”270 Christians should not avoid making claims to the resurrection or a New Creation in order to accommodate contemporary cultural skepticism, but neither should Christians reject scientific theory about the future “in a fundamentalist isolation.… Both these options end in infidelity to the gospel and in intellectual dishonesty.”271 Edwards claims, then, that Christians should rather accept and live with a tension between scientific claims about a future cosmic extinction and theological assertions of a New Creation, in the recognition that although theology and science may not be fully reconcilable at present, they may be in future.272

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268 Ibid., 94, 96, 99.
270 Edwards, Wisdom, 146.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid., 147.
of the death and resurrection of the individual body with a possible death and resurrection of the universe: “a God who would bring humans to new life beyond death can also bring the universe to new life.”

At first glance, Edwards’ argument appears inconsistent, for Polkinghorne’s resurrection of the universe parallels the biblical representation of Christ’s bodily resurrection from death, which contravenes the laws of nature and contradicts Edwards’ claim that the consummation of all things in Christ is the “work of creation,” entailing the reconciliation of scientific predictions with those of the theological. As explanation, Edwards argues that all miracles, including those of Christ and the resurrection, can be viewed in noninterventionist terms as wonderful and magnificent signs of God’s grace, taking place through secondary causes without violating natural laws. That is, “God’s respect for the integrity of secondary causes…may mean that even in miracles, God acts in and through the known and unknown laws of nature,” for otherwise, if miracles are an exception overturning or bypassing laws of nature, then “why would God intervene in the natural order at some times and not at others? Why would God save some from harm and not others?” Edwards is also sensitive to the scientific perspective represented by physicist Paul Davies, who, when asked, “What do you think about Christianity?” replied that Christianity is based on the miracle of the resurrection, and that he, as a scientist, does not believe in exceptions to the laws of nature. With such caveats in mind, Edwards notes that the suffering built into creation demands a theology of divine action offering eschatological hope of

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276 Ibid., 84, 77.
277 Ibid., 106.
an objective transformation realized in the final liberation, healing, and fulfillment of all things in God, while at the same time countering the assumption that God, in miracles, must intervene in such a way as to suspend, bypass, overturn, or change the laws of nature. In this sense, concludes Edwards, divine agency can take effect in creation while fully respecting the integrity of biological and physical processes in tandem with human freedom.

Edwards makes this argument in dialogue with William Stoeger, claiming that laws of nature are highly successful scientific theories, which “offer a detailed model of fundamental patterns of order and causal influence that we observe in the physical and chemical world.” As such, explains Edwards, laws of nature have a “strong basis” in observation and experiment. Nevertheless, “much of the reality of the matter under observation is missed” since science “isolates and simplifies aspects of reality” and is influenced “by the heuristic anticipation of the researcher.” In the words of Stoeger, “the most we can say is that there are regularities and interrelationships in reality as it is in itself—a fundamental order—which are imperfectly reflected in our models and laws”; and therefore, “it is an illusion to believe that these incredibly rich representations of the phenomena are unconstructed isomorphisms we merely discover in the real world. Instead they are constructed—painstakingly so—and there is no evidence that they are isomorphic with structures in the real world as it is in itself.” Thus, explains Edwards, we must be careful to distinguish “laws of nature as human descriptions of observed regularities”

278 Ibid., 77, 92, 99.
279 Ibid., 89.
280 Ibid., 84.
282 Edwards, Acts, 84.
from “the relationships, processes, and causal interconnections of the natural world itself.”

In other words, Edwards asserts, Stoeger denies that the laws of nature have a Platonic pre-existing and independent reality over against their human construction: “[Stoeger] finds no scientific or philosophical reason to see the laws of nature as constituting an underlying plan or pattern of physical reality.”

Congruently, the laws do not prescribe nor cause the regularities observed, for they are only a description of the behaviour of reality, and thus, “the laws of nature, meaning the natural sciences as we know them, do not model or describe central aspects of reality,” including “the metaphysical, but also the mental, the ethical, the interpersonal, the aesthetic, and the religious.”

However, Edwards’s argument appears to confound itself when he goes on to claim that the “laws of nature” can refer to “the relationships and processes that function in reality, which are more than we have fully understood or adequately modeled. And, of course, all of these patterns of relationship and causality that escape our present models are, theologically, secondary causes.”

From this, Edwards asserts that miracles “such as an act of healing” may not be explainable by the laws of nature “as we know, understand and model them,” but they may be explainable by “laws of nature” or rather, “regularities, relationships, processes and structures in nature…as they actually function in reality, which is much, much more than we know, understand or have adequately modeled.”

He then conflates “laws of nature” with the much broader term “secondary causes” to conclude: “This opens up the possibility that miracles may occur through a whole range of secondary causes that our current science cannot yet model or

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286 Ibid., 85, 87.
287 Ibid., 87.
288 Ibid., 87.
cannot yet model well,” and therefore, “God can give marvelous signs of grace to God’s people without violating natural laws.” Such a conclusion, he explains, is in keeping with Aquinas’s view that “God creates in such a way as to enable creatures to be genuine causes,” for “God so loves and respects the dignity of creatures that God wants them to be fully causal. God fully respects their integrity, their dignity, and their proper autonomy.”

But Edwards challenges the credulity of both the scientist and the theologian when he approaches the miracles and resurrection of Jesus with his thesis that “miracles can be seen as wonderful manifestations of the Spirit that occur through secondary causes”; or, more specifically, that “even in miracles, God acts in and through the known and unknown laws of nature.” That is, for the scientist, if indeed the laws of nature are human constructs developed from empirical method and experiment and grounded in observation and corroborated prediction, then the claim that Christ’s miraculous deeds can be congruent with the laws of nature and secondary causes yet to be discovered, may be a possibility but also a definite improbability, considering that Christ’s deeds of healing with a touch, feeding multitudes with scarce loaves and fishes, walking on water, and resurrecting the dead objectively and bodily, are unprecedented, empirically unrepeatable, and defy all physical laws and causes now known. Of the “final re-creation” and consummation of all things, Johnson argues as if in response to Edwards, that “for theology to say something meaningful at all, it must rest its words on a basis other than hunches and flights of fancy,” for “the world’s ultimate origin and final end launch the mind toward the unknowable.” Edwards admits as much, himself, when in answer to his own

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289 Ibid., 87, 89.
290 Ibid., 81-82.
291 Ibid., 84.
292 Johnson, Beasts, 212-213.
question, “Is the resurrection...an instance where God intervenes in such a way as to overturn, bypass, or change the laws of nature?” he responds, “What I will not address directly is the great act by which God raises up and transforms Christ crucified. This is not something to which we have direct access.” Indeed, the same can be said for all of Christ’s miracles, which, if treated literally, are empirically inaccessible and thus a matter of faith not science, exceeding our capacity to ascertain the means of execution, whether by natural law or otherwise, which is reason for reticence in any attempt at explanation.

Moreover, from an explicitly theological perspective, Edwards’ argument for the need of an noninterventionist God in light of creaturely suffering is contradicted by the very act of God’s unique incarnation in Christ, which is, in itself, an intervention of a sort, whether “from within” as an outcome of the laws of nature and secondary cause or not; for Christ’s life, words, and deeds represent the parousia, or presence, arrival, and inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in creation. That is, whether you treat the virginal birth and the otherworldly nature of Christ’s

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293 Edwards, Acts, 100. More specifically, Edwards negates the driving question of the chapter: “Now the question of the resurrection must be addressed. Is the resurrection an exception to this pattern? Is this an instance where God intervenes in such a way as to overturn, bypass, or change the laws of nature?” (Acts, 91).

294 Edwards draws on the work of John P. Meier, who responds to the question, “Did Jesus perform extraordinary deeds that were considered by himself and by others as miracles?” to argue for the historicity of specific miracle stories and belief in those stories rather than for the historicity of the events themselves (Acts, 78-80). In this way, Edwards is able to conclude, for example, of the healing of the blindness of Bartimaeus that “This story has a good claim to historicity” (Acts, 79). Edwards also understands Meier to argue for specific miracle stories in the gospel as exaggerated or figurative. Of the Lazarus story, Edwards notes Meier’s recognition that, “at this distance from the event, it is impossible to know whether Lazarus was clinically dead” (Acts, 80). With regard to Christ’s walking on water, Meier argues that this story “is most likely from start to finish a creation of the early church, a christological confession in narrative form” (A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles [New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994], 921, quoted in Edwards, Acts, 80). In this way, explains Edwards, it is “a narrative comment on the feeding of the five thousand,” or rather in the words of Meier, “to a small church struggling in the night of a hostile world and feeling bereft of Christ’s presence, the walking on the water likewise symbolized the experience of Christ in the eucharist” (Edwards, Acts, 80; Meier, Marginal, 923, quoted in Edwards, Acts, 80). But whether Edwards believes certain miracle stories of Christ to be figurative or exaggerated, he is committed to the “objectivity of the resurrection,” such that “a noninterventionist theology” cannot simply argue for the resurrection of Christ as “the subjective experience of the disciples,” for “such a reductivist theology not only fails to represent the Christian tradition adequately, it also fails to provide a basis for the eschatological transformation of creation. It has little to offer a suffering creation” (Edwards, Acts, 97). As a consequence, Edwards’ noninterventionist theology of miracles is left with the significant challenge of the literal representation of Christ’s bodily resurrection and the final resurrection of all things in “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1).
miracles literally or not, they indicate, if only symbolically, “something completely unpredictable and new,” which “cannot be fitted into any pattern or preexisting category.”295 Christ, himself, famously replies to Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36). As explanation for Christ’s “novelty,” Edwards notes with Rahner that just as the “material universe transcends itself in the emergence of life, and life transcends itself in the human,” so, too, “in this history of self-transcendence, Jesus, a product of evolutionary history, can be understood as the radical self-transcendence of the created universe into God.”296 Thus, whether or not the miracles and resurrection of Christ are eventually demonstrated to be the outcomes of divine agency operative through the laws of nature and secondary cause, in Christ there is a divine intervention in the status quo, suspending, bypassing, overturning, and changing not only the laws of nature as presently known but also the conventional moral laws of human beings.297 Indeed, for the people of Judaea, who would have had little conception of the laws of nature or secondary cause, let alone the physical sciences, God reveals Godself in Christ by way of actions and outcomes impossible for the average human being to achieve and exceeding the known capacities of the creaturely world. In other words, the need to assert God’s actions in Christ as novel outcomes consequent upon emergent natural processes operating at higher “levels of reality” in order to argue against the notion of “miracles interrupting the laws of nature” is immaterial to the Gospel assertion that God reveals in Christ the divine capacity to achieve unprecedented and unrepeatable outcomes in nature, which defy human experience of the

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296 Ibid., 94, 97, 105.
297 Ibid., 77, 92, 99.
capacities and limitations of nature, effectively demonstrating in Christ, God’s ability to intervene in and interrupt natural process as presently known.\(^{298}\)

**Conclusion**

Therefore, although *sophia* provides a liberative means for discerning divine immanence and agency in creation as the love of mutual relations modeled in Christ, Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson can be challenged for overextending their explanation of divine agency in creation through secondary causes and for not sufficiently engaging that to which the metaphor of an existentially fallen creation points in their articulation of John Polkinghorne’s “free process defence.” Edwards, himself, concludes that the tradition asserting divine incomprehensibility is not one among many but, indeed, undergirds all Christian tradition. For illustration, he refers to theologians like Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus, amongst others: “In the West, Augustine taught that God is better known through ignorance than through knowledge.”\(^ {299}\) He also turns to scripture to define God’s immanent cosmic action as mysterious and unpredictable (1 Cor. 2:7; Col. 1:26; 2:2; Eph. 1:9; 3:2-6).\(^ {300}\) That is, in any theological approach to the problem of natural evil, argues Edwards, we must turn to Job (38-42) and humbly acknowledge our limitations of knowledge, understanding, and power before the providence of God in creation.\(^ {301}\) But in arguing that divine love is manifested in the autonomy of creaturely process, both Johnson and Edwards render their theology vulnerable to the “argument from divine neglect.” Regardless of whether the concept of human freedom can even be applied to the physical processes of creation, “the free process defence” minimizes the

\(^{298}\) Ibid., 88, 94.
magnitude of suffering and wasted life intrinsic to creaturely process by ignoring the concrete and specific particulars of creaturely experience.

299 *De Ordine* 1.2.16, quoted in Edwards, *Wisdom*, 58.


Chapter Three
William Paley and Douglas John Hall: The Watchmaker God and the Crucified Christ

Introduction

Without a recognition of the existentially fallen character of creation, a teleological approach to the discernment of God’s creative providence in nature can legitimate and condone suffering and wasted life as the necessary cost of a “greater” good and can have dangerous implications for the determination of human vocation as made in the image of God. That is, in order to defend divine omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, the teleological theodicy must overlook the true magnitude of natural and human-made “evil” by focusing instead on an unfocussed abstraction of a larger, if not personified, natural system, to ignore the concrete and specific realities suffered by the individual, despite any emphases on the use of experience or empirical observation as sources of theological knowledge. William Paley’s *Natural Theology* is a pivotal and well-known expression of the teleological argument and draws attention to the way theological discernments of divine power in creation, without recognition of an existential fall, can justify social systems of power and the continued oppression of its victims.

As tools for dissecting Paley’s argument, Douglas John Hall’s articulation of a *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory) and a *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) draw attention to the significance of the historical and human figure of Christ for understanding divine agency in creation and the method for doing so. In particular, Hall argues that a liberative theology must focus on the cross if it is to understand divine agency in a suffering world. In many ways, Paley’s *Natural Theology* represents a *theologia gloriae* in its articulation of a distant and powerful watchmaker God, who designs the biological and physical universe much like a
machine. Informed by the rhetorical style of Cicero and Aristotle, Paley argues analogically from his experience of the mechanized products of a rapidly industrializing England, to assert that evidence for God’s existence, wisdom, and benevolence can be discerned in observations of organic complexity, of the relation, aptitude, and correspondence of numerous and diverse parts working in an arrangement, as a whole, to achieve a final cause or function. Whether looking at the parts of an eye or the parts of the universe, or the socioeconomic hierarchy of Anglican society, everything is significant in its relation to a larger system, as a member of “a congregation of systems.”¹ Paley’s natural theology, asserting a divinely ordained static universe, therefore offered a reassuring apologetic for a conservative elite invested in the status quo.

Inspired by an eighteenth century revival in Empiricism, and specifically the work of Francis Bacon and John Locke, Paley stressed empirical observation and personal experience as sources of knowledge, believing that humans could understand in designed nature God’s agency and the moral purpose for which they were fitted.² Building on nascent utilitarian thought and inductive probability, Paley’s “Argument Cumulative” was grounded in his rose-coloured perceptions of the natural world, seen through the filter of his own personal well being and prosperous circumstances, and asserting God’s providence to be evident in a “preponderancy” of pleasure and happiness in the world.³ If God’s will is for the creation to be happy, then “man’s” actions as made in the image of God should be judged by their contributions to the “general


³ Eddy and Knight, xiv, xxviii, xxii; Paley, *Natural Theology*, 242, 244.
happiness." Creaturely elements that are imperfect or incongruous with Paley’s design argument, such as predatory and venomous animals, whose design imparts pain and destruction, may only appear incongruous due to the limitations of human knowledge. In keeping with Hall’s articulation of a *theologia gloriae*, then, Paley’s text reinforces the status quo and serves oppressive power by minimizing, if not rationalizing away or ignoring, the magnitude of suffering experienced by the victims of both natural and human-made systems.

He is able to do so by using an inductive approach in combination with deductively asserted conclusions. Inductively, he argues, we can look to human-made machines and note “marks of contrivance,” which point to the existence of a contriver. Deductively and with analogical inference, Paley explains, wherever we see marks of contrivance in natural organs, we must also conclude there to be a designer. This is irrefutable and certain and impossible to explain otherwise, he concludes. Michael Ruse and Alister McGrath note, then, that Paley’s argument is not merely inductive but also abductive in its assertion to be the best explanation possible. However, while inductive and abductive arguments can only lead to probabilistic conclusions, Paley’s understanding of evidence is influenced by earlier authors of English “physico-theology,” writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who believed that the significance of observation as evidence was intrinsic, certain, and directly discernable. The

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5 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 215.

6 Ibid., 53, 89, 100, 122, 204, 131.

thinking in the law courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries assumed that “the facts spoke for themselves” and need only be accumulated to support one’s conclusion.\(^8\)

In Paley’s time, however, there was a growing awareness of the role of theoretical inference and the need for observation to be interpreted and contextualized within an imagined explanation to serve as evidence.\(^9\) Paley was not immune to this change in thinking and his text appears to contradict itself when at one point he asserts divine design to be empirically discernable from nature, while at another, he stresses the need for a scriptural faith to filter one’s perceptions.\(^10\) In keeping with Hall’s articulation of a *theologia crucis*, Paley stresses the need for humility, for rational thought, and worldly engagement, to be open to correction and instruction in light of different points-of-view, and to challenge dogma with experience.\(^11\) Thus, although Paley’s *Natural Theology* coincides with Hall’s articulation of a *theologia gloriae* in its assertion of a designing God whose power and industry in creation reflect and reinforce the socioeconomic conditions of industrial England, the influence of more recent developments in the recognition of theoretical inference and interpretation, pave the way for a Christian theology that is self-aware and critical of its status as theory, of its capacity to accommodate empirical observation, and its need to engage a suffering Christ to engage the magnitude of suffering and wasted life experienced by the individual victims of human and natural agencies. The stage is set, then, for a recognition of the metaphysically fallen nature of creation.

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\(^8\) McGrath, 115-116.

\(^9\) Ibid., 75-76, 102, 115-119.


\(^11\) Ibid., 277-280.
An Ethics of the Cross and a Suffering Creation

Hall recognizes that all theology is anthropology and draws from Paul Tillich to note that religion is an expression of a people’s “ultimate concern.” That is, how we image God and God’s agency in the natural world embodies our own ideals and aspirations. Whether we believe that the divine is a reflection of human values or that human values are a reflection of the divine, the link between human self-understanding and theology is clear: “We emulate—or strive to—what we worship. ‘Be perfect, as your father in heaven is perfect’ (Mt. 5:48).” Thus, as Elizabeth Johnson notes, if “the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth...[and] powerfully molds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis,” then proposals of God’s relationship to creation, both human and nonhuman, will reflect and shape ethical beliefs about the vocation of the human being as *imago Dei*. Whether one subscribes to a God of glory, an architect, who designs the universe like a great system of machines, or whether one believes in a suffering God whose power is immanent in weakness and diversity, will determine and shape concepts of human responsibility and care.

Drawing on Martin Luther, Hall therefore compares and contrasts a *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory) with a *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) to identify the importance of self-awareness, self-assessment, and self-criticism in the unearthing and challenging of taken-for-granted assumptions and foundational beliefs, specifically to change destructive behaviours in light of changed worldviews. He claims that Western Christians are deceived who do not

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13 Ibid.
believe that their religion directly courts violent and aggressive behaviour: “the association of the
Christian religion with white Western/Northern economic, military, and cultural imperialism
constitutes possibly the single most insidious cause of global peril.”\(^\text{16}\) To compound matters,
Hall argues, older forms of classical Protestantism and Catholicism are hesitant to play the critic
because the role is foreign to their Constantinian past, and the very people with the influence,
money, and power to compel change are often those who profit most from the status quo.
Indeed, he continues, to challenge entrenched religious conventions and class associations, to say
that something is intrinsically wrong with “our way of life,” is a prophetic undertaking that
requires unusual courage in the face of predictable resistance; sacrifice and suffering would be
the inevitable result.\(^\text{17}\)

He notes that the closest we may come in modern English to what Luther meant by
*theologia gloriae* is the term *triumphalism*. Under this ideology, whether secular or religious,
falls the tendency to deem one’s system as absolute and all-encompassing. There is little
allowance made for questions, debate, feedback, or alternate ways of thinking. Instead, there is a
false certitude in the comprehensive truth of one’s point of view, and no recognition of doubt,
ignorance, or fallibility. As a consequence, the triumphalist claim, in its monopolistic hold on
what is real, demands blind obedience to authority, enforced by the mechanisms of absolute
power.\(^\text{18}\) Partial truths are rendered universal as the subjective is rendered objective. Yet the
draw of *triumphalist* ideologies is strong, for humans have “a deep psychic need” to find security
and stability in beliefs purged of uncertainty, ambiguity, and relativity.\(^\text{19}\) Indeed, writes Hall,

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., 3-5.
\(^\text{17}\) Hall, *Imaging*, 17.
\(^\text{18}\) Hall, *Cross*, 17.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 18.
there is “an intellectually and psychologically comforting insulation from the frightening and chaotic mishmash of daily existence. For the ideologue, whether religious or political, it is not necessary to expose oneself constantly to the ongoingness of life; one knows in advance what one is going to find in the world.”

Thus, in a theologia gloriae, unsettling truths that do not fit the system are controlled and repressed in the name of “true” belief.

The theologia crucis, on the other hand, recognizes that doctrine always has to be submitted to the test of life, for at its centre is Jesus as the Christ. God’s movement toward the world in the incarnation of a historically situated human being can be seen as the impetus behind what is called the contextualization of faith. In saying “yes” to our creaturely condition, God does not so much demonstrate divine power as divine compassion and love, suffering with creation (Mitleid) in a solidarity of spirit and identity. Turning from the theologia gloriae, then, to the theologia crucis, we shift from speculative abstraction to the historically concrete, as God the Supreme Being, “omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, infinite, absolute, ultimate, prime mover, first cause, etc.,” is replaced by a deity whose mystery and vulnerability is shaped by the limitations of being human.

Informed by Luther, Hall claims that God’s essence is this very vulnerability or with-suffering, which “is a complete reversal of the omnipotent one to whom inductive reason and religious authority testify”; thus, he argues, the God proclaimed in a theologia crucis “must be revealed because neither nature nor rationality nor experience leads the soul to conclude that the Absolute is merciful.” At the same time, he argues, the status of Christ as revelation of God must be communicated “inductively, not

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20 Ibid., 25.
21 Ibid., 28–29.
22 Ibid., 28.
23 Ibid., 112, 120.
24 Ibid., 22–23, 68–69.
deductively,” for “Jesus is ultimately significant not because the church says that he is significant but because, here and there, now and then, faith perceives this significance in and through and behind what it sees and hears of this person.”  

Indeed, Hall explains, one cannot base a triumphalist Christianity on this incarnate God without a Procrustean amputation of the Gospels, particularly the Synoptics, because the God revealed in Christ models a way of selfless love or kenosis in which our own finitude is made clear (e.g., Matt. 18:1-5, 23:11-12).  

That is, the theologia crucis grounds in Christ an ethics of the cross, which presupposes vulnerability and the risk of engagement.  Such a faith undergirds and compels the formation of a community open to life-giving communion with those both similar and different (Gal. 3:28). In this way, argues Hall, the object of God’s power is not its own vindication as such but the justification of creaturely existence realized in its full potential and diversity, “whole, authentic, alive” (1 Cor. 12:1-31). Christian discipleship compels, then, an encounter with the world in all of its contradictions, plurality, flux, pain, and unpredictability, although the journey of the Creator to the creation is only a hope, a not yet, or a becoming, initiated through Christ and sustained by the Spirit in the community of Christ’s discipleship, the church: “God will become our God; therefore, divine power, to achieve its own aim, must accommodate itself to human weakness.”

So much of religion, however, is grounded in an implicit fear of our mortality and creaturehood, explains Hall. For example, the impassible “God” of the theologia gloriae has

25 Ibid., 125.
26 Ibid., 112-113, 198, 70.
27 Ibid., 201.
28 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid., 41, 195-196, 23.
been interpreted as a reverse projection of our own neurotic death anxiety, as a transcendent safety net undergirding our own finitude. Hall notes that “the real challenge…is whether such belief can be held without presupposing or leading to a subtle yet entirely effective disbelief in the ultimate worth and meaning of life, creaturely life.” Thus, although the crucified Christ represents God’s affirmation of human creaturehood and of creaturehood as a whole, the crucifixion, itself, represents humanity’s rejection of its creator and its own limitation. 

Ironically, society’s neurotic stigma and denial of death is evidence of an overwhelming obsession, and inhibits our ability to engage life more fully and with joy: “The great objection of the Bible is in fact not to death in itself and as such; it is to the power of death over life.” Thus, the theology of the cross confronts human beings with our impermanence and creaturehood in order to free us from a selfish preoccupation with our own mortality, from our fear of death and suffering, in order to empower and encourage selfless attention to the life and well-being of the other in imitation of Christ. Through the agency of the Spirit, explains Hall, the crucified God indwells and accompanies Christians in mortality and co-suffering to recognize a new beginning in the church.

Note, therefore, that the recognition of human limitation and fallibility informs a warning, inherent to the theologia crucis, against systematic ideologies which are fixed and simplistic and provide easy religious answers to complex human problems. Argues Hall, “the Spirit that ‘proceedeth from the Father and the Son’ continues to unsettle our answers, and we

31 Ibid., 77.
32 Ibid., 99.
33 Ibid., 77, 149, 147.
34 Ibid., 41, 147-149.
35 Ibid., 149.
36 Ibid., 29, 32.
are brought again and again into the presence of the one who asks us questions—the one who is for us and before us an unanswerable and living question.”

In contrast, the theologia gloriae overlooks kinks in comprehension, rationalizes contradictions, professes false absolutes, and dismisses the paradoxical. In so doing, it enforces blind assent to doctrinal assertions, lies about life, and shuns confrontation with questions that no mere religious answers can stifle. Hall recognizes that an authentic theology must instead be committed to thought—“reasoning in its deepest sense”—and the unceasing struggle for understanding and faith. In Christ we see that all theology is contextually incarnate and must change with the time and place in which it is set. A theology of the cross is therefore modest about its claims, recognizing their basis in faith rather than sight.

Nevertheless, Hall argues against a necessary chaos and license concomitant to theology. Instead, the awareness of relativity must compel dialogue within and without the church to check arbitrary truth claims and unchallenged biases. Although the disciple community can never possess the truth, it can make estimations of it, pointing rather than grasping, and assuming “full responsibility for its relativities.”

Agreements are reached in recognition that they may be changed in future based on new knowledge and the encounter with conflicting points of view: “Indeed, the noetic presupposition being faith and the ontic presupposition being the presence in all life of the divine Logos, I should be obliged to think that the other might have positive or corrective insight to bring to me.”

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37 Ibid., 121.
38 Ibid., 26-29, 117, 193.
40 Hall, Cross, 194.
Paley’s Natural Theology as Theologia Gloriae

Hall’s formulations of the *theologia crucis* and the *theologia gloriae* provide valuable tools when approaching nature from a theological worldview, particularly when making claims about the creative agency of God in light of biological process. Consider William Paley’s methodological approach in his book *Natural Theology*, which attempts to identify and defend evidences for the existence, agency, and attributes of God based on observations from the natural world. At one extreme, Paley’s book is triumphalistic and supports a *theologia gloriae* in its reliance on a power God, or divine “architect,” who presides over a great Cartesian/Newtonian system of machines.\(^{41}\)

Writes Paley:

> I contend, therefore, that there is mechanism in animals; that this mechanism is as properly such, as it is in machines made by art; that this mechanism is intelligible and certain;...that whenever it is intelligible and certain, it demonstrates intention and contrivance, as well in the works of nature as in those of art; and that it is the best demonstration which either can afford.\(^{42}\)

Creation is rendered a great system of mechanized objects overseen by God as craftsman, who envisions specific means to fulfill certain ends, which realize divine intentions to achieve final causes.

Informed by classical rhetoric, by thinkers like Cicero and Aristotle, Paley uses a wide range of analogies from his experiences of manmade machinery, like the telescope, the camera obscura, pipes, pegs, screws, washers, watermills, thresher, the parts of a ship, etc., to understand the physiology of the living creature.\(^{43}\)

We see intelligence constantly contriving, that is, we see intelligence constantly producing effects, marked and distinguished by...a kind and class of properties, such as relation to an end, relation of parts to one another, and to a common purpose....Furnished with this experience, we view the productions of nature. We observe *them* also marked

\(^{41}\) Paley, *Natural Theology*, 224.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 12, 295, 19, 24, 68, 67, 11, 52, 51.
and distinguished in the same manner. We wish to account for their origin. Our experience suggests a cause perfectly adequate to this account. No experience, no single instance or example, can be offered in favor of any other. [W]e conclude that the works of nature proceed from intelligence and design, because, in the properties of relation to a purpose, subserviency to an use, they resemble what intelligence and design are constantly producing, and what nothing except intelligence and design ever produce at all.  

Paley describes the criteria marking contrivance as the “relation, aptitude, and correspondence” of numerous and diverse parts functioning together in an *arrangement*, as a whole, to fulfill a common purpose; he understands these relations, and the forces by which they are governed, to be externally active. Like the “wheels,” “springs,” and “chain” of a watch, working physically against one other to tell the time, the muscles, bones, and vessels of the organic body are understood to be parts of a machine functioning to sustain the life of an organism: “whatever was true of the watch...is true of plants and animals.” Such complexity and utility is mechanical, he argues, and evinces design and fabrication, which entail a designer, who must be a person.

Implicit in the mechanistic understanding of creation is, of course, a Platonic dualism, in the sense that “whatever the Deity be, neither the universe, nor any part of it which we see, can be he. The universe itself is merely a collective name: its parts are all which are real; or which are things.” In contrast to this visible *sensorium*, the “spirituality” of God is evident in “self-sufficiency” and “self-comprehension,” in the “perception, thought, will, power, action,” which are “the origination of motion; the quality, perhaps, in which resides the essential superiority of spirit over matter.” With reference to the analogy of the watch, Paley explains,

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44 Ibid., 215-216.
45 Ibid., 199, 140-146.
46 Ibid., 7, 32.
47 Ibid., 97, 147, 243, 12, 213, 215.
48 Ibid., 214-215.
when we see the watch going, we see proof of another point, viz. that there is a power somewhere and somehow or other, applied to it; a power in action; that there is more in the subject than the mere wheels of the machine; that there is a secret spring or a gravitating plummet; in a word, that there is force and energy, as well as mechanism.\textsuperscript{50}

In this sense, although Paley argues that creation is static, that species are special creations, which are fixed and invulnerable to extinction, he nevertheless points to motion and the world’s activity as demonstrative of God’s power “at the centre; for, wherever the power resides, may be denominated the centre.”\textsuperscript{51} The divine self remains external to “his” instruments and to the cosmos, while the unity and uniformity of plan undergirding creation and natural law (e.g. homologies, gravity) evince God’s “essential ubiquity” and authorship.\textsuperscript{52} God may be operative through natural law, but God is not natural law. God may be omnipresent, but God is not immanent. God may be universally active and perceiving, but God remains impassibly apart from the suffering creation.\textsuperscript{53} Such an understanding was in keeping with the designer God of Plato and Cicero but was also informed by the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century, in which England was leading the way amongst its European economic rivals with new mechanical methods of production in pursuit of Empire and dominion: “machinery was such a familiar element of the cultural landscape,” explains Alister McGrath, “that [Paley’s] core argument from a mechanical analogy carried far more appeal and imaginative power than in earlier ages. The argument that nature was ‘contrived’ resonated strongly with his readership.”\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 217.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 39, 187, 249, 217-218.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 234-235, 232, 279-280.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 232, 231, 213.
\item \textsuperscript{54} McGrath, 91-92.
\end{itemize}
The Argument Cumulative

But Paley’s natural theology is only able to maintain this *theologia gloriae*, asserting the existence, wisdom, power, and beneficence of a designing God, by overlooking, if not dismissing, the great degree of imperfection and suffering intrinsic to creaturely experience—what Hall describes as “the frightening and chaotic mishmash of daily existence.”\(^{55}\) To do so, Paley grounds his arguments in the utilitarian ethics of William Wollaston the Deist and Joseph Priestley the Unitarian, while simultaneously engaging “the rising tide of probabilistic thinking in science and medicine.”\(^{56}\) He argues that although there may be suffering and dysfunction in creation, the significance must be determined in the context of the far greater presence of happiness, beauty, utility, and order.\(^{57}\) More specifically, “irregularities and imperfections” must be considered

in conjunction…with the unexceptional evidences which we possess, of skill, power, and benevolence, displayed in other instances; which evidences may, in strength, number, and variety be such, and may so overpower apparent blemishes, as to induce us, upon the most reasonable ground, to believe, that these last ought to be referred to some cause, though we be ignorant of it, other than defect of knowledge or of benevolence in the author.\(^{58}\)

Of particular significance, Paley notes, one cannot deny that venomous or predatory animals exhibit properties of design, which produce effects demonstrative of intent, yet lead to the suffering and death of other creatures. The question is whether such effects are “ultimately evil.”\(^{59}\) In answer, Paley falls back on inductive probability to conclude from “the benevolence which pervades the general designs of nature,” and in light of “the confessed and felt

\(^{55}\) Hall, *Cross*, 25, 28-29.

\(^{56}\) Eddy and Knight, xxviii, xxii.


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 35-36.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 244.
imperfection of our knowledge,” that the ultimate consequences of the “mixed state of things,”
though presently unknown, “would turn the balance on the favorable side. 60

Paley refers to his approach as “The Argument Cumulative,” building upon John Locke’s articulation of induction, which is stated succinctly in section xiii of The Conduct of the Understanding. Locke writes,

those seem to do best who taking material and useful hints, sometimes from single matters of fact, carry them in their minds to be judged of, by what they shall find in history, to confirm or reverse their imperfect observations: which may be established into rules fit to be relied on, when they are justified by a sufficient and wary induction of particulars. 61

Paley asserts that proof of God’s goodness can be based on observations of the natural world, which demonstrate, first, that the majority of contrivances serve beneficial ends, and, secondly, that the Deity has invested animals with the sensation of pleasure, far beyond what is necessary for any particular purpose, to motivate action which might have been compelled by pain. 62 Paley concludes,

It is a happy world after all. The air, the earth, the water, teem with delighted existence. In a spring noon, or a summer evening, on whichever side I turn my eyes, myriads of happy beings crowd upon my view. ‘The insect youth are on the wing.’ Swarms of newborn flies are trying their pinions in the air. Their sportive motions, their wanton mazes, their gratuitous activity, their continual change of place without use or purpose, testify their joy, and the exultation which they feel in their lately discovered faculties. 63

This discernment of providence and divine intention in the prevailing happiness of all living things shapes Paley’s proposal for human vocation:

We conclude, therefore, that God wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures. And this conclusion being once established, we are at liberty to go on with the rule built upon it, namely, ‘that the method of coming at the will of God, concerning any action, by the

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60 Ibid., 242, 244.
62 Paley, Natural Theology, 237, 241.
63 Ibid., 238.
light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of that action to promote or diminish the general happiness.'

Paley’s argument for a beneficent, all-powerful deity, who has designed creation like a great mechanical clock, is thus grounded in his affective experience of the natural world, perceived through a utilitarian lens and shaped by a classic Aristotelian understanding of inductive probability, drawing universal conclusions from observed particularities.

Matthew M. Eddy and David Knight argue in their introduction to *Natural Theology* that Paley recognized that God could not be proved deductively like a theorem in geometry. For Paley, the proof was not a conclusion dependent upon a chain of reasoning, of which if one link fail, the whole chain would fall apart. Rather, Eddy and Knight refer instead to the analogy of a rope, which is comprised of fibres that are in themselves weak but can together carry a significant weight. If a small number of the fibres were to weaken and break, the rope would still be strong and supported by the “large and decided preponderancy” of fibres remaining. Argues Paley, “it is an argument separately supplied by every separate example. An error in stating an example affects only that example.” Thus, Paley’s arguments are comprised of strings of examples or analogies supporting appeals to probability, which, according to Eddy and Knight, are presented as “proof,” understood “loosely” by Paley “as a synonym for a teleological analogy (or example) or to connote a conclusion made from inductive assent.” Paley can therefore argue,

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64 Paley, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, 34.
65 Eddy and Knight, xx.
67 Eddy and Knight, xxi; Paley, *Natural Theology*, 242.
68 *Natural Theology*, 46.
69 Eddy and Knight, xvii-xviii, xix, 332 n. 213.
If we observe in any argument, that hardly two minds fix upon the same instance, the diversity of choice shews the strength of the argument, because it shews the number and competition of examples.⁷⁰

According to Eddy and Knight, Paley had adopted this probabilistic way of thinking from the law proceedings he had attended out of interest as a young man. Similar to the lawyers, who couched evidence in probabilistic arguments to convince juries beyond a reasonable doubt of the guilt of an accused, Paley sought to prove beyond a reasonable doubt the existence of a divine Designer, “knowing that deductive logical proof was not possible.”⁷¹

But in the manner of classical rhetoricians like Aristotle, Paley’s inductive argument first sets out universal statements or conclusions based upon the accumulation of observed particulars, only to reverse direction and deduce intermediate conclusions from those initial induced generalizations.⁷² The stereotypical structure of the deductive argument presents two or more propositions that move from the general to the specific to set up a conclusion, which cannot be false if the premises be true. For example,

Premise A: All men are mortal
Premise B: Socrates was a man
Conclusion: Socrates was mortal.

This deductive argument asserts its conclusion with an irrefutable certainty not available to an inductive argument, which is determined to be weak or strong based upon the degree of probability of its conclusion, given its premises. Bertrand Russell breaks down the principle of induction into two parts:

(a) The greater the number of cases in which a thing of the sort A has been found associated with a thing of the sort B, the more probable it is (if no cases of failure of association are known) that A is always associated with B.

⁷¹ Eddy and Knight, xxi.
(b) Under the same circumstances, a sufficient number of cases of the association of A with B will make it nearly certain that A is always associated with B, and will make this general law approach certainty without limit.73

Paley argues that wherever we see human-made artifacts we discover evidences of contrivance (sort A) linked with a contriver (sort B), increasing the probability, if we work by analogy, that similar evidences of contrivance found in nature will also demand a contriver—inelligent, intentional, and personal in a comparative sense to human beings, but proportionally greater and more complex as natural artifacts are to human-made artifacts.74 Paley, however, treats his inductive conclusion—that marks of contrivance entail an intelligent designer—as irrefutably certain, grounded in the analogically determined mechanical similarity of the watch to the eye. He can therefore deduce the following,

Were there no example in the world of contrivance except that of the eye, it would be alone sufficient to support the conclusion which we draw from it, as to the necessity of an intelligent Creator.

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The eye proves it without the ear; the ear without the eye. The proof in each example is complete; for when the design of the part, and the conduciveness of its structure to that design, is shewn, the mind may set itself at rest: no future consideration can detract any thing from the force of the example.75

His deductive reasoning is based on his inductive conclusion and can be broken down as follows:

Premise A: marks of contrivance entail an intelligent author
Premise B: an organ or organism in nature demonstrates marks of contrivance
Conclusion: an organ or organism in nature entails an intelligent author.76

In this way, Paley’s “Argument Cumulative” draws on the strengths of both inductive and deductive reasoning to articulate a natural theology despite the “mixed state of things.”77 His

74 *Paley, Natural Theology*, 16.
75 Ibid., 45-46.
76 Ibid., 49, 215-216, 218, 243.
77 Ibid., 242.
method emulates Cicero, who, in his *De Inventione*, identifies deduction and induction as the two forms of rhetorical argument, which Cicero combines, arguing in his *De Natura Deorum*, “if perchance these arguments separately fail to convince you, nevertheless, in combination their collective weight will be bound to do so.”78 Paley’s strategy, then, is twofold: to focus only on those effects that demonstrate proofs of design, and, secondly, to judge those proofs based on a “preponderancy” of evident “benevolence” in “the general designs of nature.”79 A single example of contrivance in nature may be enough to prove “the necessity of an intelligent Creator,” but the number and diversity of examples lend strength to the argument, supporting both the existence and attributes of God.80

Note, however, with Michael Ruse and Alister McGrath, that Paley’s argument is not simply inductive or deductive but offers a variant of an approach, which later came to be known as “abduction” or “inference to the best explanation.” That is, Paley defends the existence of a wise creator as the most probable, plausible, and persuasive explanation for complexity in biological life.81 If he were to offer a simple inductive argument asserting that the world is artifact-like, and therefore most probably has a designer, he would leave himself vulnerable to David Hume’s criticism that the world is not artifact-like at all. Rather, in the words of Michael Ruse, Paley asserts, “the world (the organic world especially) has features that need explanation, and the only viable explanation is that of design. However much you may (truly) say that the


79 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 242, 244.

80 Ibid., 45, 277.

81 McGrath, 95.
world is not artifact-like, if it has the key features that need explanation, then you are home free.”

McGrath cites the work of Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), whose distinctive approach to the interpretation of observation is widely identified with “abduction,” which can be set out as follows,

1 The surprising fact, C, is observed;
2 But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.
3 Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.

For Pierce, the transition from the observation of C to the explanatory hypothesis of A is therefore abducted rather than deduced or induced. Abduction, argues Peirce, is the “only kind of argument which starts a new idea.” It involves an act of the imagination, which exceeds the limits of reason and the observational data, to generate explanatory frameworks that can best make sense of the data. In the process, “one infers, from the premise that a given hypothesis would provide a better explanation for the evidence than would any other hypothesis, to the conclusion that the given hypothesis is true.” McGrath notes that “inference” entails not the direct deduction of a conclusion from observed data or “facts” but the interpretation and correlation of known facts, despite incomplete or missing information, to create evidence for a theory, which “cannot be proven directly.” In this sense, an observation only becomes evidence when set within an explanatory theory, which is itself inferred from an observation or observations. Focusing on probability rather than certainty, the recognition of theoretical

82 Ruse, 43.
83 McGrath, 198.
86 McGrath, 118.
inference responds to the question, “Which story best accommodate[s] the observations available?” instead of simply accumulating observations grounded in the assumption that their meaning is evident to all.\(^87\) Ruse admits that Paley’s abductive position is thus a “stopgap” measure, which can disregard the Humean critique only for as long as a better explanation is unavailable. But once an alternate theory is determined to be of greater probability and plausibility, Hume’s critique can no longer be ignored.\(^88\)

Nonetheless, in keeping with a *theologia gloriae*, and based upon his inductive argument conflating manmade mechanism with organic complexity, Paley attributes a *deductive* certainty to his conclusion of “a designing, disposing intelligence” undergirding the adaptive design of biological organisms.\(^89\) He argues that just as the conclusion of intelligent design is “invincible” when discerning “marks of contrivance” in manmade objects like the watch, so, too, he asserts, “No reason has ever been assigned, no reason can be assigned, why the conclusion is not as certain in the fish, as in the machine; why the argument is not as firm, in one case as the other.”\(^90\) Arguing inductively by analogy, and bypassing Hume abductively, Paley cinches his argument *deductively* by asserting it to be not simply the best explanation available but the *only* explanation possible: “No account can be given of this without resorting to [divine] appointment….no answer can be given to [these questions], but what calls in intelligence and intention”; “Whilst we see therefore the use and necessity of this [anatomical] machinery, we can look to no other account of its origin or formation than the intending mind of a Creator”; “All these [things requisite for lifting one’s hand] share in the result; join in the effect: and how all

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Ruse, 44.

\(^{89}\) Paley, *Natural Theology*, 100.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 15, 215, 131.
these, or any of them, come together without a designing, disposing intelligence, it is impossible to conceive”; “it is impossible to assign any cause, except the final cause”; “The mandate of the Deity will account for this: nothing else will.” For Paley, the evidence of contrivance, observable in natural bodies, definitively “excludes every other hypothesis,” is “inexplicable without design,” and “necessarily carries us to something beyond itself, to some other being, to a designer prior to, and out of, itself.” To argue otherwise, “that no art or skill whatever has been concerned in the business,” is absurd, he argues, and nothing less than atheism.

These assertions of the irrefutable nature of his argument are, at face value, and in the words of Hall, triumphalistic in their certitude, “leaving little if any room for debate or difference of opinion and expecting of their adherents unflinching belief and loyalty”; in this way, Paley’s inference to design defeats “all ignorance, uncertainty, doubt, and incompleteness,” and exalts “over every other point of view.” Hall argues, however, that “there is no system of interpretation…that can account for the whole of reality, or demonstrate its veracity universally. ‘Knowledge is always surrounded by ignorance.’” He concludes that any “genre of human thinking” presupposes a “prominent element of belief…even when the system in question repudiates belief and purports to base itself solely on scientific procedures.” But Paley frequently asserts his conclusions to be self-evident and final, as if directly observable from nature and demonstrable independent of any prior belief. One example is enough, he argues, even in the face of the irreconcilable: “True fortitude of understanding consists in not suffering

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91 Ibid., 53, 89, 100, 122, 204.
92 Ibid., 114, 144, 215.
93 Ibid., 15, 16.
94 Hall, Cross, 17.
95 Wendell Berry, Life is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), 60.
96 Hall, Cross, 17.
what we know to be disturbed by what we do not know. If we perceive an useful end, and means adapted to that end, we perceive enough for our conclusion. If these things be clear, no matter what is obscure. The argument is finished.\footnote{Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 43.}

In this sense, with the belief that the “consciousness of knowing little, need not beget a distrust of that which [the observer] does know,” Paley leaves himself vulnerable to Hume’s admonition that we must not rest easy in our ignorance, for “a man is guilty of unpardonable arrogance who concludes, because an argument has escaped his own investigation, that therefore it does not exist.”\footnote{Ibid., 10; David Hume, \textit{An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding} (1748; reprint, Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988), 39-40.} More importantly, Paley runs afoul of Locke, who holds far less confidence in the surety of inductive or analogical arguments and challenges their status as knowledge:

Possibly inquisitive and observing Men may, by strength of judgement, penetrate farther, and on probabilities taken from wary observation, and hints well laid together, often guess right at what experience has not yet discovered to them. But this is but guessing still; it amounts only to opinion, and has not that certainty which is requisite to knowledge.\footnote{Locke, 158.}

Indeed, as the natural world is encountered in all of its complexity and mystery, Paley’s simple and close-ended \textit{deductive} inference to design appears to contradict his own \textit{abductive} approach, which recommends an “anterior belief of a Deity” to shape its conclusions:

The train of spontaneous thought, and the choice of that train, may be directed to different ends, and may appear to be more or less judiciously fixed, according to the purpose, in respect of which we consider it: but, in a \textit{moral view}, I shall not, I believe, be contradicted when I say, that, if one train of thinking be more desirable than another, it is that which regards the phænomena of nature with a constant reference to a supreme intelligent Author.\footnote{Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 280, 278.}
In this way, Paley argues, the world “becomes a temple, and life itself one continued act of adoration,” such that, “every organized natural body, in the provisions which it contains for its sustentation and propagation, testifies a care on the part of the Creator expressly directed to these purposes.”\footnote{Ibid., 278-279.} Concluding in one sense, then, that observations of creation serve to inform, develop, and support a pre-existing faith achieved non-rationally, while at the same time, concluding in another sense, that the argument from design is definitive proof and irrefutable explanation of God’s existence and benevolent wisdom, even for nonbelievers, Paley appears to want his cake and to eat it, too.

**Evidence and the Emerging Awareness of Inference and Interpretation**

Such ambiguity regarding the significance of observed data and its interpretation reflects a cultural shift in the public perception of evidence around the time *Natural Theology* was written. A critic in *The Edinburgh Review* writes of Paley’s book: “The physiology, in so far as we are able to judge, is extremely correct throughout; and it was not without surprise that we found the reverend author so accurately and familiarly acquainted with the most recent discoveries of science.”\footnote{F. Jeffrey, “Art. III. *Natural Theology; or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, collected from the appearances of Nature*. By William Paley, D. D. Archdeacon of Carlisle, London. 1802,. 8vo. Pp. 586,” *Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh, 1803): 287-305, quoted in Eddy, 11.} Indeed, Paley’s selection of empirical illustrations, examples, or “commonplaces,” draws upon established anatomists of the eighteenth century, and he cites from the most recent articles in the preeminent scientific journal *Philosophical Transactions*.\footnote{Eddy, 11.} However, Eddy and Knight note that Paley’s text is “an old man’s book” published three years before his death in 1805 and influenced by the thinking of an earlier period, by the compositional method and metaphorical approach of classical rhetoric, by thinkers like Cicero and Aristotle, whose work
was formative of scientific discourse from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century and who were studied by Paley during his years at Cambridge. The selection and use of “scientific” examples to prosecute an argument was common practice in classical rhetoric; in *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero cites “the orrery of Posidonius…astronomical details, tides, the ether, volcanoes, climate, human diet, the kinship of plant, animal, and human life.” Thus, although Paley draws on scientific authors published around 1800, when biological and geological knowledge was rapidly advancing, he was not concerned about being at the frontier of scientific knowledge so much as working from firmly established sources, which were well tested and familiar, to find examples that best supported his analogical argument.

This dependence on classical rhetoric reflects the approach of natural theology or “physico-theology” published between 1690 and 1720, specifically that of John Ray, Joseph Addison, and William Derham. Alister McGrath notes that readers of these authors, spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, would have privileged “the evidence of the senses,” having been influenced by the empirical philosophy of Francis Bacon, who proposed the “idea of putting nature on trial” to discover her secrets:

> Nature discloses evidence in her own innate language, unaffected by the inadequacies and peculiarities of human language. This leads to the formulation of preliminary axioms, which in turn lead to the discovery and design of new ‘trials,’ thus generating further new axioms, and leading on to successively higher levels of abstraction.

In a similar sense, the predominant understanding of natural theology in the early eighteenth

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104 Eddy and Knight, xvii-xviii.
105 Harris Rackham, introduction to *De Natura Deorum*, by Cicero (London: William Heinmann, 1932), xvii, quoted in Eddy, 8.
106 Eddy and Knight, xix, xxiii.
107 Eddy and Knight, xviii; Eddy, 6, 11; McGrath, 66, 70, 101.
century focused on the observation of nature to reveal evidence of design. Similar to Ray, Derham, and Nieuwentijdt, explains Matthew Eddy, Paley’s examples from natural history draw from eighteenth century classification systems that presumed God to be the divine orderer: “For instance, Paley explains how a seed ‘knows’ how to grow upward no matter which way it is situated in the earth.”

In this sense, design is understood to be directly discernable, as intrinsic to the complex order, beauty, and organization of the biological and physical world, rather than inferred indirectly. William Derham notes,

[All the animal world] can with Admiration see the Great Creator's wonderful Art and Contrivance in the Parts of Animals, and Vegetables: And, in a Word, behold the Harmony of this lower World, and of the Globes above, and survey God's exquisite Workmanship in every Creature.

The observation of “contrivance” in nature, of something constructed and designed, is therefore proposed as a means of discerning God that is available to all, rather than as a mere “handmaiden” to a pre-existing faith.

McGrath notes that, in England between 1650 and 1850, attention largely focused on the issue of evidence and its interpretation within the law courts. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the guilt or innocence of an accused was believed to be ascertainable by the facts of the case, which could be established with a high level of certainty by eyewitness testimony, which, in turn, could be evaluated for credibility by ordinary persons. The operating assumption was that the “facts spoke for themselves”; in other words, *da mihi facta dabo tibi ius*

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109 Eddy, 15.
110 McGrath, 75.
112 Ruse, 42-43.
113 McGrath, 115-116.
(“give me the facts, and I will give you justice”).\(^\text{114}\) This attitude, explains McGrath, was typified by Sir Matthew Hale (1609-1676), an influential judge, lawyer, and legal scholar, who claims that when multiple observations “concur and concenter in the evidence of the same thing, their very multiplicity and consent makes the evidence the stronger; as the concurrent testimonies of many Witnesses or many Circumstances even by their multiplicity and concurrence make an evidence more concludent.”\(^\text{115}\) Thus, there was a general belief that in order to prove one’s argument, one need only accumulate testimony and observation (understood to be self-evident) rather than explain how that observation or testimony functioned as relevant evidence.\(^\text{116}\)

The English “physico-theology” tradition of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries must be understood with these evidentiary assumptions in mind, for John Ray’s assertion, that the existence and wisdom of a creator God are exhibited for all to see in the beauty and complexity of nature, is only “common sense” because of the shared cultural conventions and convictions of his time and place. Writes McGrath, “Sociologically, belief in God was a settled intellectual conviction of the age; the work of Ray and Derham is best seen as reinforcing an existing belief, while lacking the evidentiary and argumentative resources to establish this \textit{de novo}.”\(^\text{117}\) Although writing a century later, Paley’s natural theology depends upon some of the same evidentiary conventions, assuming that divine design can be “deduced” as a matter of certainty rather than probability from observations of contrivance in nature, from the “relation,


\(^\text{115}\) Sir Matthew Hale, \textit{The Primitive Origination of Mankind, Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature} (London: William Godbid, for William Shrowsbery, 1677) 130, quoted in McGrath, 116.

\(^\text{116}\) McGrath, 95, 115.

\(^\text{117}\) Ibid., 116.
aptitude, and correspondence of parts."\textsuperscript{118} By leaving aside any philosophy or theology of analogy to explain his deductive movement from observations of nature to the plausibility of theistic belief, he is able to assert unequivocally that, “Contrivance proves design.”\textsuperscript{119}

But at the time \textit{Natural Theology} was published, a public debate was brewing around the role of evidence and inference, with the potential to change English legal convention and practice, and leading to the parliamentary debates of 1821 to 1837 over the question: “to what extent did facts of observation require interpretation and collation if they were to serve as evidence?”\textsuperscript{120} At issue was the distinction between observation and theory, and the role that interpretative frameworks play in the translation of observed data into evidence.\textsuperscript{121} Increasingly, Paley’s deductive “proof” of a divine creator came under scrutiny, as it assumed an intellectual milieu and style of interpretation belonging to an earlier age. Argues McGrath, “the weakness of this position could not be overlooked. What if observations were misinterpreted, or misunderstood? To what extent did the observation of nature simply represent the unconscious repetition of socially dominant paradigms of interpretation?”\textsuperscript{122} In other words, Paley’s deductive “proofs” were not established by airtight logic but by conventions of rhetorical persuasion effective in a seventeenth-century court of law; and in the nineteenth-century, authors and lawyers recognized that the translation of observations into evidence required a complex mediated process that complicated any belief in the “facts speaking for themselves,” particularly

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 40, 199.
\item McGrath, 95; Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 243.
\item McGrath, 102.
\item Ibid., 115.
\item Ibid., 76.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
As a consequence, explains McGrath, a growing skepticism of Paley’s evidential assumptions led to a concern about the certainty of his conclusions.

Nonetheless, the countervailing abductive tendencies in Paley’s argument, his stated moral preference for an “anterior belief of a Deity,” and his admission of inference from observation, though understood to be direct and self-evident, reflect a sensitivity to the changing currents in the understanding of evidence at the time *Natural Theology* was written. That is, Paley’s resort to divine design as the best possible explanation of biological complexity reflects a notion of evidence that McGrath describes as *theoretical* rather than *empirical*. Christian assumptions are used to develop a framework and field of inquiry, “a context for asking questions,” within which observations are perceived as evidentially significant. McGrath refers to Cambridge philosopher of science William Whewell (1794-1866), who in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1840) used the analogy of the pearl necklace to illustrate the way a good theory correlates and embeds observations in the larger string of a theory. Whewell writes, “The facts are known but they are insulated and unconnected…The pearls are there but they will not hang together until some one provides the string.” According to McGrath, “Paley identifies pearls and assumes their significance will be evident to all. Whewell, while appreciating the same pearls, is more concerned to find the best string on which to thread them.” But although Paley insists that one “pearl” of biological contrivance is enough to prove

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124 McGrath, 102-103.
126 McGrath, 117.
128 McGrath, 119.
his argument, he also demonstrates an awareness of the larger theoretical necklace upon which
his observations are strung, for his Christian faith and his commitment to Christian scripture
filter his perceptions, shape their significance, and establish their “colligation” or relation to one
another. ¹²⁹ He writes,

It is one of the advantages of the revelations which we acknowledge, that, whilst
they reject idolatry with its many pernicious accompaniments, they introduce the Deity to
human apprehension, under an idea more personal, more determinate, more within its
compass, than the theology of nature can do. And this they do by representing him
exclusively under the relation in which he stands to ourselves; and, for the most part,
under some precise character, resulting from that relation, or from the history of his
providences. Which method suits the span of our intellects much better, than the
universality which enters into the idea of God, as deduced from the views of nature. ¹³⁰

Paley therefore recognized the importance of faith informed by scripture for discernments of
God in nature, noting in The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy that, “Of our own
writers…they divide too much the law of Nature from the precepts of Revelation.”¹³¹

Paley’s Natural Theology as Theologia Crucis

At the same time, and in keeping with Hall’s theologia crucis, Paley recognizes the weak
foundations of a faith grounded in unthinking assent to authority and to the verbal propositions
of others. Instead, he encourages the independent “investigation” of “proofs” to lend “stability
and impression” to widely held doctrinal claims.¹³² He stresses the significance of personal
“impression” or experience in challenging “mere assent to any verbal proposition” and in finding
“support in argument for what we had taken up upon authority.”¹³³ He notes that “The works of
nature want only to be contemplated” and represented in one’s own words to establish a greater
degree of awe and admiration for Deity than in anything that could be represented in the words

¹²⁹ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Paley, Natural Theology, 230.
¹³¹ Paley, Natural Theology, 277-281, 283; Eddy and Knight, 298 n. 36; Paley, Moral and Political
Philosophy, 18.
and ideas of another.\textsuperscript{134} David Hume claims that we can divide all of the mind’s perceptions into two kinds, classified according to their degree of vividness and immediacy:

By the term \textit{impression}, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned.\textsuperscript{135}

That is, the human imagination may seem to have an unbounded power of thought, capable of envisioning any monstrosity as easily as the most mundane object. However, the creative agency of the human mind is limited to the raw materials collected from its own senses and experience. Its imagination can rework and reconstitute these elements to form novel combinations and mixtures, but it cannot develop its ideas from anything that was not already perceived: “When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, \textit{gold}, and \textit{mountain}, with which we are formerly acquainted.”\textsuperscript{136} As a result, when our thoughts are examined, no matter how compounded or profound, we can do nothing but distill them to simple reflections of our subjective experience. To challenge, then, the scope and clarity of our ideas, we have only to ask, “\textit{from what impression is that supposed idea derived?}” and, thus, “By bringing ideas into so clear a light we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.”\textsuperscript{137} In this call to consider subjective \textit{impressions} or experiences underlying abstract \textit{ideas} or thoughts, a person is compelled to think independently.

Although Hall argues that knowledge of God as “living subject...exceeds, surpasses, and challenges experience,” specifically inductive reason, his articulation of a \textit{theologia crucis}

\textsuperscript{132} Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 277-279.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 279, 278.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 279.
\textsuperscript{135} Hume, 21.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 22, 24.
emphasizes that “*doctrine has always to be submitted to the test of life*” because of its commitment to a contextually incarnate God who suffers with creation in compassion and love in a solidarity of spirit and identity.\(^\text{138}\) In this sense, Hall asserts that Christ must be understood “*inductively*” because “Jesus is ultimately significant not because the church says that he is significant but because, here and there, now and then, faith perceives this significance in and through and behind what it sees and hears of this person.”\(^\text{139}\) The concomitant awareness of the relative limitation and fallibility of human worldview therefore demands that a theology of the cross be modest in its claims and committed to *thought*, to “reasoning in its deepest sense,” in the recognition that the truth is not a *possession* but an *unceasing struggle* for understanding and faith, requiring engagement with the world and dialogue within and without the church as a corrective for self-serving biases and random truth claims.\(^\text{140}\) Paley’s stated approach, although highly empirical, nevertheless reflects Hall’s *theologia crucis* with its emphasis on *thought* and worldly *engagement*: “Now it is by frequent or continued meditation upon a subject, by placing a subject in different points of view, by induction of particulars, by variety of examples, by applying principles to the solution of phenomena, by dwelling upon proofs and consequences, that mental exercise is drawn into any particular channel.”\(^\text{141}\) There is a concomitant modesty and open-mindedness in this approach as the natural world is encountered in all of its complexity and mystery. Paley writes:

> The true Theist will be the first to listen to *any* credible communication of divine knowledge. Nothing which he has learnt from Natural Theology, will diminish his desire of further instruction, or his disposition to receive it with humility and thankfulness….to attend with the utmost seriousness, not only to all that can be discovered concerning him.

\(^{138}\) Hall, *Cross*, 28.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 125.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 26-29, 117, 193.

\(^{141}\) Paley, *Natural Theology*, 278.
by researches into nature, but to all that is taught by a revelation, which gives reasonable proof of having proceeded from him.\textsuperscript{142}

In contrast to his deductive inference of design, which rests on an ignorance unchallenged, Paley’s stated inductive/abductive approach emphasizing an antecedent and scriptural faith, open to correction and instruction in light of opposing worldviews, reflects more recent developments in the assessment of evidence, more in keeping with Hall’s \textit{theologia crucis}.

**The “Newtonian Synthesis” as Anglican Apologetic**

Paley’s stress on empirical observation and personal experience as sources of knowledge for understanding divine agency and human vocation can be better understood in light of the growing distrust of the English Church during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when political and religious conflicts in England undermined people’s faith in both the authority of the Bible and the reliability of Christian revelation.\textsuperscript{143} A consequent rise in atheism and materialism was fueled by the desire for certainty in all matters of belief. McGrath summarizes the attitude at the time with the question, “Was not the most effective way of eliminating the tensions and warfare that so easily arose from religious disputes simply to abandon religion altogether?”\textsuperscript{144} Natural theology was therefore developed as an \textit{apologetic} response of the Anglican Church to a culture alienated from the gospel by political instability and religious violence.\textsuperscript{145} In the aftermath of the English Civil War (1642–1651), Walter Charleton (1619–1707) argued in his \textit{Darkness of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature} (1652) that the Christian faith was best re-invigorated by an appeal to human reason and a Newtonian discernment of God in the ordering, beauty, and government of the natural world. He subtitled

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 280.
\item \textsuperscript{143} McGrath, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 50-51.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 52.
\end{itemize}
his work *A Physico-Theological Treatise*, coining the label, which, when translated from the Greek, means a “natural” (Greek: *physikos*) theology.\(^{146}\)

Following the deposition of the Catholic King James II in the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, the period of 1690 to 1745 became known in English culture as the “Augustan age” due to the influence of the Roman poets Virgil and Horace. Core canonical works of the period included John Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1688) and Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711), both of which represented nature as rationally comprehensible and governed by God’s moral, aesthetic, and intellectual design. This conception of a stable and reliable universe extended to human thought and action and informed a family of natural theologies, which McGrath refers to as the “Newtonian synthesis,” for “they established and maintained a close working relationship between the natural sciences and religion” and reassuringly “set out a vision of a stable universe, mirrored in the social and political norms of England.”\(^{147}\) In this way, Anglican theology, self-conscious of the role of religion in social conflict and upheaval, appealed to nature’s regularities as a calming and moderate approach to Christianity, attempting to mitigate the threat of atheism and materialism, while offering divine sanction for a cohesive and peaceful social order.\(^{148}\) Moreover, as opposed to divisive creedal demands, the doctrine of creation had not proved to be contentious during the Reformation, nor the Jacobean and Caroline eras, argues McGrath, and therefore could function as a common denominator for a public theology, unifying an otherwise quarrelsome English Protestantism.\(^{149}\)

\(^{146}\) Ibid.
\(^{147}\) Ibid., 49, 56.
\(^{148}\) Ibid., 51-52, 61.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., 62.
In Paley’s time, the skepticism represented by Hume and the atheism of French intellectuals or *philosophes* were perceived as part and parcel of a developing science. That is, the stress on the universal laws of mechanics threatened a faith in miracles and, in turn, appeared to undermine a traditional Christianity. For science-minded individuals in England, this apparent disconnect between faith and science was a significant concern because institutional education was indissolubly connected with the church. At Oxford and Cambridge, an individual had to be an ordained minister, let alone a member of the church, in order to find employment as a don. Argues Ruse,

Scientists who wanted to support themselves by holding positions at these universities increasingly needed some counter-argument to show that the pursuit of science, far from threatening the true faith, strongly supported it. Natural theology, and design in particular, was the perfect answer. One could do one’s science and at the same time claim that, through one’s findings about the marvelous nature and workings of the empirical world, one was burnishing the most powerful argument there is for God’s existence and perfect, all-powerful nature.  

In this sense, English natural theology not only justified Christianity in an increasingly scientific age but also affirmed the biological and physical sciences in a persistently Christian society.  

At the same time, Paley’s articulation of natural theology appealed to a well-heeled and powerful conservative readership allied with the Anglican Church, who had profited from the industrialization of England, and for whom the image of God as watchmaker reflected and reinforced existing systems of British industrial power. Consider Paley’s discussion of the “doctrine of imperfections,” which he describes as follows:

It is probable that creation may be better replenished, by sensitive beings of different sorts, than by sensitive beings all of one sort. It is likewise probable, that it may be better replenished, by different orders of being rising one above another in gradation, than by beings possessed of equal degrees of perfection. Now, a gradation of such beings implies a gradation of imperfections. No class can justly complain of the imperfections which

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150 Ruse, 41.
151 McGrath, 52.
belong to its place in the scale, unless it were allowable for it to complain, that a scale of being was appointed in nature: for which appointment there appear to be reasons of wisdom and goodness.\footnote{152}{Paley, *Natural Theology*, 256.}

Everything has its place and part to play, with its imperfections and in its own unique and fixed way, in the functioning of the greater whole, whether of the natural order or by extension the order of English society. Moreover, Paley describes a physical, social and biological order, in which everything is interdependent and interrelated:

The relation therefore of sleep to night, is the relation of the inhabitants of the earth to the rotation of their globe; probably it is more: it is a relation to the system, of which that globe is a part; and, still further, to the congregation of systems, of which theirs is only one. If this account be true, it connects the meanest individual with the universe itself; a chicken roosting upon its perch, with the spheres revolving in the firmament.\footnote{153}{Ibid., 158.}

Every individual matters in the larger scheme of things because the function of the body is dependent upon the proper functioning of its diverse and numerous parts. Of nature, Paley writes,

It seems to me, that animal constitutions are provided, not only for each element, but for each state of the elements, i.e. for every climate, and for every temperature; and that part of the mischief complained of, arises from animals (the human animal most especially) occupying situations upon the earth which do not belong to them, nor were ever intended for their habitation….We invade the territories of wild beasts and venomous reptiles, and then complain that we are infested by their bites and stings.\footnote{154}{Ibid., 245.}

Now consider that, across the Channel, the rise of Napoleon at the head of a revolutionary Catholic France offered more than a military threat, for the socio-political upheaval sparked by the ideals of “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” in tandem with the evolutionary ideas of progressive change amongst species, proposed by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin, provided ammunition for proponents of progressive social change in light of agitation amongst Irish Catholics and labour unrest amongst a growing urban population drawn from the countryside.
looking for work. The discomfort caused to those with vested interests in the Anglican order of English society could not be underestimated, for “Christianity as interpreted by Anglican leaders was not just the predominant religion in England; it was the official religion.”

Paley’s *Natural Theology* offered reassurance to this conservative readership, able to afford his book, because its static understanding of divine providence served the interests of those with money and power and justified the economic and social hierarchy of England. Matthew M. Eddy and David Knight note in their introduction to *Natural Theology* that Paley was comfortable and well off and perceived providence in the prosperity and happiness of the creaturely world around him. In contrast to Hall’s *theologia crucis*, which highlights the location of all knowledge in social context and subjective perspective, Paley’s gospel lacks a significant degree of self-awareness, over-generalizing from his own well being and social context to claim objective or universal conclusions. Consequently, his natural theology dismisses those most in need of help, for despite his emphasis on observation and experience, Paley’s utilitarian convictions are grounded in abstraction and ignore the immeasurable realities of creaturely suffering experienced by the different *other*, to focus instead on the imagined happiness of an illusive majority. In this way, and in the words of Hall, Paley’s natural theology fabricates a “lie about life” to satisfy “the fallen human need to control and repress truth, to hold to comforting and comfortable partial truths or even downright falsehoods that can seem to


156 Quammen, 26.

157 Eddy and Knight, xiv.
assuage the soul’s thirst for certainty and ultimacy and so avoid unprotected exposure to the
abyss of meaning over which finite existence is suspended.”\textsuperscript{158}

As a result, Paley can argue that there is little reason to view the disparity of wealth and
station in human society as evil. After all, he argues, nature’s gifts far outweigh the advantages
bestowed by material wealth or “fortune.” Moreover, habit, “the instrument of nature,” breeds a
familiarity that dulls the edge of both pleasures and sufferings, “So that, with respect to the
gratifications of which the senses are capable, the difference is by no means proportionable to the
apparatus.”\textsuperscript{159} The advantages gained through wealth, Paley argues, are, therefore, “not greater
than they ought to be.”\textsuperscript{160} Indeed, he concludes, the poor have it easy and the powerful are
heavily burdened: “Command is anxiety, obedience ease.”\textsuperscript{161}

Underlying this leveling or “equalization” of the states of poverty and wealth is Paley’s
imposition of the design argument onto providence.\textsuperscript{162} Since the course of events and the
contrivances in nature have the same author, he argues, both are products of the creator’s design.
There must then be a purpose for which humans are fitted and to which they are made to serve.
For Paley, the vicissitudes and trials of life enable a state of moral probation in preparation for
the afterlife, “calculated for the production, exercise, and improvement of moral qualities, with a
view to a future state, in which, these qualities…receive their reward, or become their own.”\textsuperscript{163}

Although Paley argues for the creative and continuing care of providence by citing the
benevolent intention and design realized in the creation of sensitive beings, he admits that

\textsuperscript{158} Hall, Cross, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{159} Paley, \textit{Natural Theology}, 262.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 271-272.
providence cannot be understood apart from an afterlife. The “disorders” and imperfections in
the creaturely world only make sense in light of preparation for this future state. Indeed, both
poverty and riches provide the same preparation as trials, such that “the original distribution of
the circumstances under which that character is formed, may be defended upon principles not
only of justice but of equality.” Neither is inherently more demanding, in terms of duties,
temptations, dangers, or labour, though those who have more talents will be more highly
rewarded for their right use than those with fewer. Moreover, argues Paley, a diversity of
external circumstances and a mixture of tastes, faculties, and tempers are needed for the proper
functioning of human affairs. Considering the ineffable power of the God responsible for this
distribution, what better explanation could there be besides chance, he explains, which only
appears so in proportion to our ignorance. Finally, without these trials and tribulations, found
in both poverty and wealth, we would not be inclined to look to the afterlife nor consider the
behaviour necessary to achieve it: “The truth is, we are rather too much delighted with the world,
than too little,” and, thus, “privation, disappointment, and satiety, are not without the most
salutary tendencies.”

**Reason and Revelation in Creation**

In the design of creation to serve the moral probation of human beings, Paley’s theology
demonstrates an anthropocentrism, which is in keeping with the *theologia gloriae*. Consider that
contrivance is by its very nature imperfection as it is shaped and limited by the laws and
circumstances in which it is formed. Paley asks, “Why make the difficulty in order to surmount

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164 Ibid., 272.
165 Ibid., 274.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 267, 269.
168 Ibid., 275.
it?… Why resort to contrivance, where power is omnipotent?… To have recourse to expedients, implies difficulty, impediment, restraint, defect of power.”169 Argues Paley, it is through contrivance that God’s wisdom, beneficence and power are made known to his rational creatures. God could have created the universe without resorting to natural instruments and processes but chose to limit “his” agency within the laws of the system created. As apprehended in nature, these laws are uniform and universal such that God creates not by manipulating laws to serve his purpose but by shaping organisms within the boundaries of the laws and to the needs consequent upon them.170 Paley did not believe in miracles because they would undermine the natural system in place and likely introduce disorder, dependency, and negligence into human affairs.171 Taking his cue from John Locke, he therefore places reason at the centre of Christian ethics, as necessary for discerning God’s intention in creation.172 Locke writes,

**Reason** is natural revelation, whereby the eternal father of light, and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties: revelation is natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proofs it gives, that they come from God. So that he that takes away reason, to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both, and does much what the same, as if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope,…

…Reason must be our last judge and guide in every thing.173

Indeed, Paley argues, human rationality is dependent upon the difficulties, inconveniences, and wants offered by nature for stimulation, challenge, and consequent happiness.174 Nonhuman

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169 Ibid., 26.
170 Ibid., 27.
171 Ibid., 27, 269-270.
172 Eddy and Knight, xiv.
173 Locke, 264-265, 270.
creation is, thus, rendered a means to an end, the end being human well being and human salvation.

**Conclusion**

William Paley’s *Natural Theology* illustrates the intrinsic dangers of a teleological argument for divine agency in creation, in which both natural and human “evil” are the necessary cost of a greater good. Despite emphases on using experience as source, the argument can only work in abstraction by overlooking the individual, where suffering is actually experienced, in favour of benefits accrued to a larger imaginary system, order, or plane of existence. Despite any protestations to the contrary, the teleological outlook is an instrumental process justifying the oppression, exploitation, and suffering of the overlooked victims in deference to a hypothetical greater good. If God is the author of this process, whether as watchmaker or as immanent Wisdom and Word, then a dangerous model is established for the vocation of the human being as made in the image of God. Hall’s articulation of a *theologia gloriae* draws attention to the dangers of any articulation of a Christian God without reference to a scriptural Christ, to a human being who is rejected as special revelation of God, who in his chosen vulnerability is made victim, a suffering servant, whose message and example are highlighted and defined by that rejection. Represented in historical microcosm is the location and agency of God in a fallen world. God may be creator, but the God revealed in Christ is tortured and killed by the very creation God made, in the form of human beings. There is an unfathomable mystery here, grounded in our limitation as human beings, which cannot be rationalized or explained away, but which is the complement to the glimpse of the Christian God we do see in the scriptural figure of Christ, the suffering servant. Thus, as a means to recognize the incomprehensible depths of
suffering experienced by the individual victims of creaturely process, there is value in approaching God in light of Christ in the context of a creation which is existentially fallen.
Chapter Four

Charles Darwin, Asa Gray, and Aubrey Moore: A Natural History of the Golden Rule

Introduction

In the *Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin argues that all life shares a common origin and, more specifically, that all human “races” have descended from a common progenitor “thus characterized would probably deserve to rank as a man.”¹ He therefore argues that the same laws, which have generated variations in “the lower animals,” have also done so in the body and mind of human beings. More specifically, humans have populated all corners of the earth but, like other animals, must have continued to multiply beyond the “means of subsistence” to induce “a struggle for existence.” Exposed to a diversity of conditions, specific variations beneficial to an organism would have been preserved and “injurious ones eliminated,” to fulfill “the rigid law of natural selection.”² In particular, Darwin focuses on the evolution of the moral sense or conscience, which, he argues, “perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals.”³ As a result, he addresses what in modern parlance is called the altruism paradox: “Why do human degrees of generosity seem to defy the patently ‘selfish’ principles of natural selection theory?”⁴ In one sense, Darwin draws on Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s theory of the inheritance of acquired traits to argue that obedience to the social instincts and the capacity to feel sympathy are improved through habit and passed on through the generations. In another

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² Ibid., 67.
³ Ibid., 151.
sense, Darwin introduces the idea of multilevel selection, which proposes that natural selection takes place at the level of the individual and of the group. That is, although altruistic behaviours may immediately cost the individual in favour of the interests of the group, ultimately the individual serves his or her own interests by serving the group, for if the group thrives, the individual survives, and if the individual dies, at least his or her traits survive in relatives benefitting from the group’s success.\textsuperscript{5} Nonetheless, Darwin came to believe that the moral advancement of civilized societies depended less on natural selection and more on culture, particularly the use of language and on “beneficent religions” and a “fear of God.”\textsuperscript{6} Overall, Darwin envisions a progressive development of the human moral sense and conscience, culminating in a “perfect self-command” capable of controlling the selfish drives “without a struggle,” such that “[Man] might then declare—not that any barbarian or uncultivated man could thus think—I am the supreme judge of my own conduct, and in the words of Kant, I will not in my own person violate the dignity of humanity.”\textsuperscript{7} In this way, Darwin envisioned the natural origins of “the prime principle of man’s moral constitution…the golden rule, ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise.’”\textsuperscript{8}

For many Christians, the comprehensive scope of Darwin’s theory was threatening because it appeared atheistic, replacing divine agency with natural process, and rendering God obsolete as an explanation for the creation of all things, including human beings. Darwin appeared to challenge the very dignity of “man” as made in the image of God, as something special, separate, and apart from nonhuman beasts, for if divine law is replaced by natural law,

\textsuperscript{5} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 83, 85, 130, 132-133, 154, 157-8, 166, 168.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 137, 138, 140, 144, 157, 162, 163, 682.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 139, 133.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 151.
and man is just an animal, then what reason is there for man not to behave like an animal? What reason is there for man to follow Christ? If the golden rule is only an outcome of natural processes, then why follow it? To compound matters, Darwin’s argument for speciation and the progressive trajectory of evolution had subversive sociopolitical implications for Anglicans invested in the hierarchical structure of British society as a divinely sanctioned extension of the static “congregation of systems” intended by the Designer God of William Paley. Additionally, Darwin’s assertion of the common origin of all living things and the descent of all human “races” as one species from “a common stock” compelled a re-assessment of the enslavement and exploitation of all life as our co-suffering kin. For many Christians, Darwin’s theory therefore challenged the explanatory capacity of Christian faith to accommodate observations of the world. Darwin was of course sensitive to these concerns and even blamed his “abstract,” On the Origin of Species (1859), for causing “the main part of the ills to which my flesh is heir.”

However, Darwin’s theory was also welcomed by many Christians for offering a wider and more comprehensive teleology that accounted for the imperfections, suffering, and wasted life which so challenged the power and personality of William Paley’s watchmaker God. Asa Gray (1810-1888), a professor of botany at Harvard, and Aubrey Moore (1848-1890), a theological tutor at Oxford, both discerned in the continuous and omnipresent agency of natural selection the continuous and omnipresent creativity of the Christian God. Both argue that divine providence operates from a point of mystery exceeding the reach of the evolved limitations of human comprehension, but both also argue that the unity of God is intelligible to human reason

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10 Darwin, Descent, 678.

through the unity of nature. Gray argues like Paley, that evidence of God is found in the design of living organisms, in their arrangement of parts or “machinery” and the specific functions such arrangements serve. The proof is unassailable, he argues, even in the face of everything that we cannot know as finite beings of the designs of “an infinite mind.” Gray perceives divine beneficence active in the mysterious cause of biological variation upon which the process of natural selection takes effect. Nevertheless, although Gray was inspired by Darwinian theory to profess a God who acts from within, he still believed God to be an architect, an omnipotent and impassible “intelligent first cause,” who was ultimately separate and apart from a suffering creation, reflecting his belief in the separate and special creation of human beings, made in God’s image, whom he excepted from the common origin of all life. Rarely engaging scripture or the suffering God revealed in Christ, Gray dismisses suffering, waste, and “imperfection” in nature as the necessary cost of a larger design, overlooking the significance of the Christic God for a groaning creation.

Moore, on the other hand, although heavily influenced by both Gray and Darwin, draws heavily on scripture and the figure of Christ to inform his articulation of an immanent logos or Word. Conflating the supernatural with the natural, he argues that the facts of nature are the acts of God and believed that the natural world revealed by the sciences offered insight and

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13 Gray, 70, 74, 79.

14 Ibid., 380.

15 Ibid., 75.


17 Ibid., 378.

18 Moore, *Mundi*, 70-76.
confirmation of forgotten Christian claims about the immanence of the Word.\textsuperscript{19} However, unlike Gray, Moore argues that there can be no explicit proof of God in nature but that human reason could verify “a truth already held.”\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, Moore believed with Darwin that human beings shared a common origin with all life, and that our origin from “dirt” did not negate our special status as made in the image of God but indeed compelled a reconsideration of and respect for our relationship with all other creatures as kin.\textsuperscript{21} Finally, from a faith-based perspective, Moore perceived a progressive development in the evolving world driven by divine providence and leading to “the revelation of Himself as Infinite Love in the Incarnation of the Word.”\textsuperscript{22} Darwin’s theory of the evolution of all life from a common origin therefore inspired a wider teleology enabling the discernment of beneficence in nature and the emergence of Christ in natural history. From the perspective of Christian faith, if the image of God in Christ is exemplified by the call to costly love, then divine providence can be seen in the processes of group and social selection acting upon altruistic behaviours to shape our physiological development as ethical creatures of conscience.

**Darwin and the Natural History of the Moral Sense or Conscience**

At both the beginning and end of chapter four in the 1879 edition of the *Descent of Man*, Darwin argues that the moral sense or conscience is the most important difference “between man and the lower animals” [sic].\textsuperscript{23} Although he frequently uses the two terms interchangeably, he provides separate definitions, explaining “the moral sense” as that “which tells us what we ought to do”

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\textsuperscript{19} Moore, *Science*, 223-224, 226; Moore, *Mundi*, 75-76.

\textsuperscript{20} Moore, *Mundi*, 76.

\textsuperscript{21} Moore, *Science*, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{22} Moore, *Mundi*, 76.

\textsuperscript{23} Charles Darwin, *Descent*, 120, 151, 680.
and “the conscience” as that “which reproves us if we disobey it.”\textsuperscript{24} Darwin draws upon the philosopher Immanuel Kant to describe “the moral sense or conscience” as “the deep feeling of right or duty” inscribed as “naked law in the soul,” which can compel an individual to risk, if not sacrifice, his or her life for that of another or for a greater cause.\textsuperscript{25} “Reverence” and “obedience” are demanded but also the question, “whence the original?”\textsuperscript{26} Darwin’s answer is “exclusively from the side of natural history,” an approach never before attempted, he believes, to fathom how far the study of “the lower animals” will illuminate “the highest psychical faculties of man.”\textsuperscript{27}

In particular he focuses upon “the social instincts,” which are “innate in the lower animals,” having been drawn from “the parental and filial affections,” and which, in combination with the well developed “intellectual powers” of human beings, would have “inevitably” led to the acquisition of “a moral sense or conscience.”\textsuperscript{28} Initially, he argues, the “lower animals” would have acquired the social instincts—to find pleasure when together and displeasure when alone, to experience feelings of sympathy, and to provide “services” for their companions—because of survival: “With those animals which were benefited by living in close association, the individuals which took the greatest pleasure in society would best escape various dangers; whilst those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers.”\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, amongst animals and “savages,” Darwin argues, the feelings of sympathy and service generated by the social instincts would apply largely to members of an individual’s immediate circle, towards “those of the same community” and not necessarily to all members of one’s own

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 140.  
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 120.  
\textsuperscript{26} Immanuel Kant, “Metaphysics of Ethics,” trans. J. W. Semple (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1836), 136, quoted in Darwin 120.  
\textsuperscript{27} Darwin, Descent, 120.  
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 121.  
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 121, 129.
Amongst “rude men,” Darwin explains, actions considered “crimes within the limits of the same tribe” would not be considered such against individuals outside the tribe, for actions would be deemed good or bad based upon their effects, primarily, on the welfare of the group: “No tribe could hold together if murder, robbery, treachery, &c., were common.” One can understand, then, concludes Darwin, how the moral sense or conscience could have developed from the social instincts because both relate to community.

“Secondly,” Darwin stresses the importance of an active and vivid memory, which accompanies the development of an advanced intellect and contributes to the functioning of the conscience or moral sense. Consider that animal and human behaviour is influenced by the competing pressures of numerous instincts and habits, which are of varying strength and duration and which can come into conflict:

that is, some either give more pleasure in their performance, and more distress in their prevention, than others; or, which is probably quite as important, they are, through inheritance, more persistently followed, without exciting any special feeling of pleasure or pain. We are ourselves conscious that some habits are much more difficult to cure or change than others. Hence a struggle may often be observed in animals between different instincts, or between an instinct and some habitual disposition.

“Man” will likely act on the stronger inclination, explains Darwin, and though this may prompt acts of self-sacrifice, “man” will more frequently seek to gratify “his” own interests at the expense of others: “it is untenable, that in man the social instincts (including the love of praise and fear of blame) possess greater strength, or have, through long habit, acquired greater strength

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30 Ibid., 121, 132-133, 141, 143, 680.
31 Ibid., 141, 143.
32 Ibid., 143.
33 Ibid., 121, 681.
34 Ibid., 131.
than the instincts of self-preservation, hunger, lust, vengeance, &c.” Many of these instincts that threaten the good of the community are temporary, however, and their “vividness” as feelings are difficult to recall once satisfied. Nevertheless, the developed mental faculties of the human “cannot avoid reflection,” for a steady stream of impressions and images of all past behaviours and motives constantly pass through the human mind. Thus, once the feeling of the anti-social instinct recedes, a person is left with the memory of the event, of the act or motive, itself, and will suffer the “dissatisfaction” or “misery” of an unfulfilled instinct in light of the ever-present influence of the social instinct. An individual will suffer regret, remorse, repentance, and shame for fear of others’ disapproval, disapprobation, and censure: “He will consequently resolve more or less firmly to act differently for the future; and this is conscience; for conscience looks backwards, and serves as a guide for the future.” In this way, argues Darwin, only “man…can with certainty be ranked as a moral being,” for only “[man] is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them.”

“Thirdly,” Darwin proposes that the moral sense or conscience develops from the emotion of sympathy and the consequent capacity to appreciate, and be influenced by, “the approbation and disapprobation” of the members of one’s community. He turns to Alexander Bain for his definition, noting that the basis of sympathy is found in our own past experiences of pain or pleasure. That is, “the sight of another person enduring hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in

36 Ibid., 145, 149, 121-122, 136.
37 Ibid., 121, 136.
38 Ibid., 121, 680.
39 Ibid., 138, 680.
40 Ibid., 135, 680.
41 Ibid., 169, 680.
us some recollection of these states, which are painful even in idea." Our desire, then, to relieve another’s suffering is rooted in a desire to relieve our own; and our desire to share in another’s pleasure is motivated by memories of our own. In this way social animals are compelled to help and support one another, he argues. However, while nonhuman animals are largely, if not “exclusively,” guided by specific and blind instincts tuned to specific and reflexive behaviours, the human has only a “general wish to aid his fellows” with “few or no special instincts.” Thus, the human is dependent upon “his improved intellectual faculties,” in conjunction with the emergent “power of language” and the articulated desires of the community, to create, develop, and internalize a socially constructed ethic of moral behaviour: “the common opinion how each member ought to act for the public good, would naturally become in a paramount degree the guide to action.” But the extent to which the individual appreciates and obeys “the expressed wishes and judgment of his fellow-men” depends upon the “the strength of his innate or acquired feeling of sympathy; and on his own capacity for reasoning out the remote consequences of his acts.” Indeed, sympathy is the “foundation stone” of the social instincts, for both work together as “the primary impulse and guide” influencing the conduct of each group member relative to the standards of behaviour determined necessary for “the general good or welfare of the community.” Without sympathy, concludes Darwin, one cannot fully experience “the love of praise and the strong feeling of glory,” nor suffer the feelings of shame, regret, repentance or remorse consequent upon “the still stronger horror of


43 Darwin, *Descent*, 129.

44 Ibid., 133, 681.


46 Ibid., 133, 138.

scorn and infamy.” ⁴⁸ In other words, without sympathy, the social instincts lose their power to control anti-social behaviour, for the person is left without a conscience, and such a man “is essentially a bad man; and the sole restraining motive left is the fear of punishment, and the conviction that in the long run it would be best for his own selfish interests to regard the good of others rather than his own.” ⁴⁹

“Lastly,” Darwin argues that habit plays a major role in the acquisition of a moral sense or conscience because habit strengthens the social instinct together with sympathy to reinforce “obedience to the wishes and judgment of the community.” ⁵⁰ Although the social instincts themselves, including the instinct of sympathy, were originally acquired through natural selection, Darwin writes, in “civilized nations” with “an advanced standard of morality…natural selection apparently effects but little;” rather, “the moral qualities are advanced, either directly or indirectly, much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instruction, religion, &c.” ⁵¹ That is, without specific instincts tied to specific behaviours, the human inherits a basic predisposition to be social, to be faithful to companions and to obey a leader, but is dependent upon instruction, experience, and imitation to learn the specific dictates and expectations of the community. ⁵² Ironically, self-interest catalyzes “the power of sympathy,” for with the development of the human brain and its capacities for reason and foresight, an individual learns that “acts of sympathetic kindness to others” often lead to kindness in return. ⁵³ Darwin explains, “From this low motive he might acquire the habit of aiding his fellows; and the habit of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 133, 138.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 138, 140.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 122.
⁵¹ Ibid., 153, 155, 156, 169, 682, 163, 688-689.
⁵² Ibid., 130, 132-133, 163.
⁵³ Ibid., 130, 156.
performing benevolent actions certainly strengthens the feeling of sympathy which gives the first impulse to benevolent actions.”\textsuperscript{54} More importantly, Darwin believed with Jean Baptiste Lamarck that habit produced effects in an organism, which would be inherited by its ancestors.\textsuperscript{55} Darwin was, of course, unaware of the workings of genetic inheritance or the existence of DNA and RNA. Rather, he assumed that in response to changing environmental pressures and consequent biological needs, an animal’s organs or capacities would either strengthen and enlarge from significant use or atrophy from disuse; these acquired changes would then be inherited by the creature’s offspring. With regard to humans, he writes,

Even the partial transmission of virtuous tendencies would be an immense assistance to the primary impulse derived directly and indirectly from the social instincts. Admitting for a moment that virtuous tendencies are inherited, it appears probable, at least in such cases as chastity, temperance, humanity to animals, &c., that they become first impressed on the mental organization through habit, instruction and example, continued during several generations in the same family, and in a quite subordinate degree, or not at all, by the individuals possessing such virtues having succeeded best in the struggle for life.\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, Darwin thought that there was no reason to believe that the social instincts would weaken over time but instead, “that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance,” such that in “the struggle between our higher and lower impulses…virtue will be triumphant.”\textsuperscript{57} Ultimately, the social instincts would achieve “perfect self-command” over the emotions and drives, “without a struggle,” because of the workings of “long habit” and the promptings of the conscience, in light of the wishes and strictures of the community.\textsuperscript{58} In this way, Darwin concludes, the “deeply planted social instincts,” in conjunction with the aid of the intellect, reasoning, and the effects of habit, would “naturally lead to the golden rule,…and this

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 122, 677.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 148-149.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 133, 139-140.
lies at the foundation of morality.” Acts of altruism and self-sacrifice would become reflexive, impelled as if by an innate and natural instinct, he argues. Thus, Darwin recognized that the social instincts were insufficient explanation in and of themselves for the Christian mandate to return good for evil and to love your enemy; they required the inherited effects of sympathetic behaviour and instruction, together with “the aid of reason” and “the love and fear of God.” Only then could the “sympathies [become] more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races, to the imbecile, maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals.” Darwin, therefore, believed that an intentional and careful construction of culture would contribute to the progress and development of a standard of morality, which “has risen since an early period in the history of man.”

But Darwin acknowledges that the process of natural selection would seem to undermine the effects of inherited habit, and challenge any advance in the moral standard, because those individuals gifted with the “higher” virtues, like patriotism, courage, sympathy, fidelity, or obedience, would be more likely to sacrifice their personal “fitness” for the welfare of the group and to leave fewer offspring if any. In this sense, the more “sympathetic and benevolent” members would lose out to those of a more “selfish and treacherous” disposition if indeed “survival of the fittest” were the operating principle. Darwin, however, shifts his attention away from the individual to the community, arguing that the powers of sympathy and self-command necessary for acts of altruism can be strengthened through natural selection because of the value

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59 Ibid., 145, 151.
60 Ibid., 134, 145.
61 Ibid., 137.
62 Ibid., 149.
63 Ibid., 149.
64 Ibid., 147, 155-156.
of these virtues to the group.\textsuperscript{65} That is, he argues, although obedience to a high standard of morality may be of little to no advantage to individuals over against other members within the group, those groups with the highest standards of morality and the most sympathetic members, ready to help and protect one another, even to the point of self-sacrifice, would be more likely to succeed against other groups less highly endowed (all other conditions being equal).\textsuperscript{66} “Selfish and contentious people will not cohere,” he observes.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, although an altruistic individual who gives his life for the welfare of others may never leave offspring, his selfless act will “excite the same wish for glory in other men, and would strengthen by exercise the noble feeling of admiration. He might thus do far more good to his tribe than by begetting offspring with a tendency to inherit his own high character.”\textsuperscript{68} In this sense, Darwin recognizes the importance of culture in contributing to the survival of a group and to the individuals within it: “Great lawgivers, the founders of beneficent religions, great philosophers and discoverers in science, aid the progress of mankind in a far higher degree by their works than by leaving a numerous progeny.”\textsuperscript{69} Moreover, Darwin recognizes that even if the sympathetic altruist sacrifices himself for his community and leaves no children, his close “blood-relations” will benefit from the group’s survival to carry forward the altruist’s sympathetic predisposition in their own offspring: “it has been ascertained by agriculturists that by preserving and breeding from the family of an animal, which when slaughtered was found to be valuable, the desired character has been obtained.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 130, 142, 155.  
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 130, 155, 157.  
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 155.  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 157.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 162.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 154.
Of major importance for the cultural development of the moral sense or conscience, and for strengthening the self-command necessary for the realization of the golden rule, Darwin stresses the importance of “beneficent religions.” He notes that although the social instincts may have originated by natural selection, the moral advance of human beings depends more on public opinion guided by “religious feelings, and confirmed by instruction and habit.” He explains,

To do good in return for evil, to love your enemy, is a height of morality to which it may be doubted whether the social instincts would, by themselves, have ever led us. It is necessary that these instincts, together with sympathy, should have been highly cultivated and extended by the aid of reason, instruction, and the love or fear of God, before any such golden rule would ever be thought of and obeyed.

Darwin notes that humans are descended from social animals and that “uncultivated man” has thus “some capacity for self-command,” prompting him to protect and aid members of his immediate community, but only to the degree that his own welfare and desires are not significantly endangered. Moreover, “the primitive conscience” compels vengeance against an enemy rather than suffering remorse for doing so, in keeping with an ingroup bias and an outgroup prejudice. Only with the advent of oral and written language could the human community’s desires and opinions shape the development of the human mind to reinforce, extend, or even oppose the innate compulsions of the social instincts. Inculcated at an early age, these articulated “beliefs” could “acquire almost the nature of an instinct,” Darwin explains, “for they are performed too instantaneously for reflection, or for pleasure or pain to be felt at the

71 Ibid., 138, 144, 157, 162.
72 Ibid., 163, 157.
73 Ibid., 137 n. 27.
74 Ibid., 132-133.
75 Ibid., 137 n. 27, 143.
76 Ibid., 146, 139.
time; though, if prevented by any cause, distress or even misery might be felt.” More specifically, the violation of norms deemed sacred by the community would give rise to deep feelings of remorse for fear of divine reprobation or punishment, even if the rule violated was something “apart from the social instincts.” Thus, although Darwin protests against “absurd religious beliefs” like “the senseless practice of celibacy” or “the horror of a Hindoo for unclean food” or the “incalculable evil” of the Catholic Church during the Spanish Inquisition, he recognizes the importance of communal judgments and norms “held sacred by the tribe” for reinforcing behaviours necessary for the emergence of the golden rule and for moral progress.

Darwin’s claim of an ethical advance marking the evolution of human beings from a “lower” morality focused on the self to a “higher” morality focused on “the welfare of others” finds its trajectory in his theory of natural selection applied to nonhuman creation in his book On the Origin of Species. Reflecting a Victorian faith in progress, he asserts that “as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.” He, therefore, assumed a hierarchy of “high and low forms” within natural history in which the “the more recent forms must...be higher than the more ancient; for each new species is formed by having had some advantage in the struggle for life over other and preceding forms.” This “process of improvement” leads to the production of “more perfect” forms, which would beat out and “exterminate” ancient forms if they were

77 Ibid., 146, 134.
78 Ibid., 138-140, 157.
79 Ibid., 146, 143, 149, 167, 139.
80 Ibid., 147.
81 Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (London: John Murray, 1859), 489.
82 Ibid., 336-337.
forced to compete. Concludes Darwin: “The inhabitants of each successive period in the world’s history have beaten their predecessors in the race for life, and are, in so far, higher in the scale of nature; and this may account for that vague yet ill-defined sentiment, felt by many palaeontologists, that organisation on the whole has progressed.” But Darwin is careful to qualify his argument, noting: “Natural selection will not produce absolute perfection, nor do we always meet, as far as we can judge, with this high standard under nature.” For Darwin, organic beings only become as “perfect” as they need to be in the “struggle for existence” against competitors and conditions of life. In other words, natural selection “adapts the inhabitants of each country only in relation to the degree of perfection of their associates.” As a result, we should not be surprised, he argues, if nature is not “absolutely perfect,” if there be suffering, wasted life, and inefficiencies. Nonetheless, in the face of organs “so perfect as the eye,” we should recognize that “if we know of a long series of gradations in complexity, each good for its possessor, then, under changing conditions of life, there is no logical impossibility in the acquirement of any conceivable degree of perfection through natural selection.”

Darwin believed, however, with Alfred Russel Wallace, that human beings are no longer subject to bodily modification by natural selection “or any other means. For man is enabled through his mental faculties ‘to keep with an unchanged body in harmony with the changing

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83 Ibid., 116, 201, 337.
84 Ibid., 345.
85 Ibid., 202.
86 Ibid., 201.
87 Ibid., 472.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 204.
In other words, man’s intellect enables him to adapt his habits to the changing conditions of existence and to compensate for any limitations in his corporeal endowments: “He invents weapons, tools, and various stratagems to procure food and to defend himself. When he migrates into a colder climate he uses clothes, builds sheds, and makes fires; and by the aid of fire cooks food otherwise indigestible. He aids his fellow-men in many ways, and anticipates future events.” Thus, explains Darwin, although the human “form” may no longer undergo progressive improvement subject to the processes of natural selection, the fact that “the intellectual and moral faculties” are variable and “tend to be inherited” and are significant for human survival ensures their progressive perfection and advancement through natural selection. More specifically, Darwin stresses the importance of the group or community for ensuring both moral and intellectual development and for shaping the “superiority” of the human being as “the most dominant animal that has ever appeared on this earth.” He argues in Descent that a group comprised of a significant population “rich” in sympathetic traits and “obedient” to a high moral standard will defeat competing groups of more selfish individuals until defeated itself by a “tribe still more highly endowed” with “the social and moral qualities.” So it would go, groups “supplanting” groups, driving a gradual advance and diffusion of social and moral standards and an increase in “men endowed with high intellectual and moral faculties.” At the same time, Darwin recognizes that “progress is no invariable rule” and “seems to depend on


[91] Darwin, Descent, 152.

[92] Ibid., 152-153.

[93] Ibid., 67.

[94] Ibid., 155, 133, 158, 166.

[95] Ibid., 158, 155, 166.
many concurrent favourable conditions, far too complex to be followed out.”

Nevertheless, in arguing against a lost paradise and a postlapsarian creation, he concludes “that progress has been much more general than retrogression” and “that man has risen, though by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition to the highest standard as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals and religion.”

Darwin implies, then, that humans are in part responsible for their ascent, if not enjoying the rewards of their “own exertions,” then the benefits of the efforts of those who went before; consequently, we can feel “some pride” as a species for reaching “the very summit of the organic scale.”

Moreover, the progressive momentum of history provides reason to hope that human beings shall achieve “a still higher destiny in the distant future,” having risen to their current position rather than “having been aboriginally placed there.”

In a letter to Charles Lyell, dated April 27 and 28, 1860, Darwin admits, “to me it would be an infinite satisfaction to believe that mankind will progress to such a pitch, that we sh[oul]d be looked back at as mere Barbarians.”

**Darwin’s Theory as a Call for Social Justice**

Darwin’s belief in biological and moral progress is grounded in his political leanings as a reform-minded Whig and abolitionist but contrasts with his thinking as a young man. During his time at Christ’s College, Cambridge (1828-1831), Darwin believed in “the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible”; and professors taught him to see the natural world as designed and subsisting by the agency of divine providence: “This was good Anglican theology and Tory politics, justifying a stable world subject to aristocratic rule,” explains James Moore and Adrian

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96 Ibid., 166, 167, 158.
97 Ibid., 172.
98 Ibid., 689.
99 Ibid., 689.
Desmond in their introduction to the Descent of Man.\(^{100}\) As a student, Darwin read William Paley with “much delight,” and in a letter to John Lubbock dated November 22, 1859, writes, “I do not think I ever admired a book more than Paley’s Natural Theology: I could almost formerly have said it by heart.”\(^{101}\) Prior to his voyage on the Beagle in 1831, Darwin describes himself as “quite orthodox,” having accepted Paley’s premises without question: “taking these on trust I was charmed and convinced by the long line of argumentation.”\(^{102}\) Of particular political significance, Paley proposes a static universe comprised of “a congregation of systems” in which all things have their proper place and part to play in the functioning of the whole.\(^{103}\) This conceit of a fixed and hierarchical creation reinforced the economic and class structures of nineteenth century England as an extension of God’s will for creation and served to reassure a conservative Anglican elite, anxious about the ideals of the French revolution, of “liberté, égalité, fraternité,” igniting both Irish Catholic agitation and the labour unrest in growing urban centres.\(^{104}\) Indeed, Paley’s argument was developed in part to rebut the evolutionary ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Darwin’s grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, whose theories of biological progress, asserting that species could change over time to form new and distinct species, were appropriated by reformers to argue for social change.\(^{105}\)


\(^{103}\) William Paley, Natural Theology, 158.

\(^{104}\) Ruse, 40.

During the 1830s, after his experiences on the *Beagle* and in the context of the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, Darwin took up the ideas of Erasmus and Lamarck in full recognition of their social, moral, and political ramifications, to develop his own argument for the common origin of all living things, driven by a concern for animals and an antipathy for slavery. Indeed, Darwin extends the metaphor of slavery to include nonhuman animals and equates their suffering with our own:

> Animals whom we have made our slaves we do not like to consider our equals. — Do not slave-holders wish to make the black have other mind? — Animals with affection, imitation, fear of death, pain, sorrow for the dead — respect….If we choose to let conjecture run wild, then animals — our fellow brethren in pain, disease, death, suffering and famine, our slaves in the most laborious works, our companions in our amusements, — they may partake from our origin in one common ancestor, we may be all netted together.  

For Darwin, the theory of natural selection emphasizes humanity’s creaturehood while leveling up nonhuman creation. In this way, his theory undermined the conventional Anglican understanding represented by Paley, of a fixed natural hierarchy in which all things are enslaved by the static design of an aristocratic, if not monarchical, God: “Once grant that species’ evolve ‘& [the] whole fabric totters & falls,” writes Darwin. That is, if all creatures harbour the potential to diversify and develop, to improve their station through the independent workings of natural process, then all life signifies the potential for its own liberation. More specifically, Darwin’s extensive treatment of sexual selection to support his argument for monogenism, or the common descent of all human “races,” was a rebuttal of the polygenist’s argument that the different human races represented different species with separate origins, which justified the

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107 Moore and Desmond, xxii.

108 Ibid., xxii.

109 Ibid.
enslavement of one group by another. In this sense, “racial science and racial politics went hand-in-hand—and [Darwin’s] biology underwrote abolitionist values,” argue Moore and Desmond. Indeed, both slave and animal acquire a newfound dignity in their status as kin.

**Natural Selection, Human Freedom, and the Question of “Progress”**

However, in light of his claim that the effects of natural selection are of lessened and subordinate influence in highly civilized nations, “for such nations do not supplant and exterminate one another as do savage tribes,” Darwin is faced with “a most intricate problem” of the ethical norms and values necessary for shaping “the laws, customs, and traditions of the nation” if, indeed, as he believes, the “advancement of the welfare of mankind” must align with the progressive trajectory of evolution by natural selection. Consider, more specifically, in the *Origin of Species*, that Darwin asserts his theory “will be dimly seen or quite misunderstood” unless “every fact on distribution, rarity, abundance, extinction, and variation” is approached in light of “competition” and “the truth of the universal struggle for life.” That is, the diversity and fecundity of living things, he argues, is owed to the “struggle for existence” that “follows from the high geometrical ratio of increase which is common to all organic beings” and which “must be checked by destruction at some period of life.” But in *Descent*, Darwin notes with some concern that unlike “savages,” who suffer a rigorous elimination of the “weak in body or mind,” to leave behind only those of a “vigorous state of health,” civilized societies actively “check the process of elimination” by protecting and supporting their weak members through

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110 Ibid., xiii, xiv, xxvii-xxviii.
111 Ibid., xxvii.
112 Ibid., xxii.
115 Ibid., 61, 63, 467, 65.
medical means, “poor-laws,” and various institutions for “the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick.”

Thus, Darwin complains,

> the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.

In this sense, Darwin continues, “man” spends more care and consideration on the breeding of his animals than he does on the selection of a spouse. He should rather choose a mate with greater concern for her potential to produce children of a certain “bodily constitution and frame” and with specific “intellectual and moral qualities.”

Darwin also declares that those who “are in any marked degree inferior in mind or body” or “who cannot avoid abject poverty for their children” should “refrain from marriage.” As explanation, he argues that man has only achieved “his present high condition” through “a struggle for existence” based upon an exponential rate of increase and a scarcity of resources. Thus, if mankind is to continue his progressive advance, he must extend the processes of natural selection to the design of human communities: “There should be open competition for all men; and the most able should not be prevented by laws or customs from succeeding best and rearing the largest number of offspring.”

Consequently, Darwin asserts, the “natural rate of increase” of human populations should remain unchecked to ensure the “severe struggle” necessary for “the more intelligent” and “more gifted men” to defeat the “less gifted” in the “battle of life” and to “leave a more

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116 Darwin, *Descent*, 159.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 688.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 67, 169, 688.
121 Ibid., 688.
numerous progeny.” As a result, “man” will suffer as the necessary cost of progress the same physical evils experienced by all animals under the crucible of natural process; for, he argues, if life is too easy, a people “is liable to become indolent and to retrograde.”

But Darwin’s prescriptive “ought” derived from his descriptive “is” encounters an apparently irreconcilable tension, for he believed that human civilization would develop from the formation of small groups into larger communities, compelling individual members to extend their social instincts and sympathies to include a greater number of fellows, many of whom would remain unknown to each other:

This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent [an individual’s] sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If, indeed, such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience unfortunately shews us how long it is, before we look at them as our fellow-creatures.

The final moral achievement, and “the most noble attribute of man,” is a “disinterested love for all living creatures,” based upon an extension of sympathy to nonhuman animals. Darwin describes the virtue as the very definition of “humanity,” yet recent in appearance, and dependent upon its dissemination to the young through teaching and example, for, he writes in his autobiography, “I doubt indeed whether humanity is a natural or innate quality.” The implication is that the “hatred of indecency, which appears to us so natural as to be thought innate,” and which “is a modern virtue, appertaining exclusively…to civilized life,” is not a given, but rather something that requires conscious effort, nurture, and struggle. Thus, he

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122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 168-169, 688.
124 Ibid., 147.
125 Ibid., 147, 151.
127 Darwin, Descent, 143.
argues, we must not check our sympathy, for to do so, “to neglect the weak and the helpless,” could only be at the cost of “the noblest part of our nature,” and create a very real evil for an uncertain and hypothetical benefit.\textsuperscript{128}

In essence, then, Darwin argues that evolutionary development by natural selection is driven by a shifting spectrum of competition and cooperation. What is unique to the human is a freedom from blind obedience to specific instincts and a freedom to choose behaviour based upon a complicated interplay of biological predispositions and cultural norms. The consequent struggle between selfish and altruistic drives is represented in Darwin’s own conflicting ethical prescriptions of the behaviour necessary to preserve the progressive trajectory of biological evolution amongst human beings; the implications are significant, explains Darwin, for an organism’s choices actually shape the very biology that makes those choices possible. In other words,

He who admits the principle of sexual selection will be led to the remarkable conclusion that the nervous system not only regulates most of the existing functions of the body, but has indirectly influenced the progressive development of various bodily structures and of certain mental qualities. Courage, pugnacity, perseverance, strength and size of body, weapons of all kinds, musical organs, both vocal and instrumental, bright colours and ornamental appendages, have all been indirectly gained by the one sex or the other, through the exertion of choice, the influence of love and jealousy, and the appreciation of the beautiful in sound, colour or form; and these powers of the mind manifestly depend on the development of the brain.\textsuperscript{129}

The challenge for the human, as a biological product of creaturely decisions, is grounded in the evolved complexity of the human brain and its adaptive dependence upon its own freedom to make decisions in dialogue with the cultural expectations and norms arbitrating its survival.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 687.
A Wider Teleology and the Emergence of the Human as “word of the Word”\textsuperscript{130}

In the context of Victorian Britain, Darwin’s theory therefore had significant implications for understanding the character and agency of God as Creator and the character and agency of the human as made in the image of God. For Christians committed to an Anglican theology grounded in the design argument of William Paley, Darwin’s theory challenged the very status of God as the creator of all things and undermined the dignity of “mankind” as made in God’s image. To many, Darwin’s theory appeared to supplant divine law with natural law, divine love with “survival of the fittest,” and to lower the human to the status of an animal with no reason to behave any differently than an animal. On the other hand, Darwin’s articulation of natural selection as a progressive development of biological life culminating in the appearance and evolution of humans also re-invigorated teleological conceptions of the Christian God as creator of all things and of the human as made in God’s image. Thomas Henry Huxley writes,

\begin{quote}
The Teleology which supposes that the eye…was made with the precise structure which it exhibits, for the purpose of enabling the animal which possesses it to see, has undoubtedly received its death-blow. Nevertheless…there is a wider Teleology, which is not touched by the doctrine of Evolution, but is actually based upon the fundamental proposition of Evolution.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

More specifically, Darwin’s identification of a progressive and continuous creation undergirding the natural world, from which the evolution of humans is not excluded, enabled theologians to re-discover a divine immanent logos (Word) or sophia (Wisdom), and to argue for human freedom as an extension of this divine creativity. Indeed, Darwin identifies language, or rather the human word, as the catalyst for human ethics and thus the foundation of human society, for “after the power of language had been acquired, and the wishes of the community could be

expressed, the common opinion how each member ought to act for the public good, would
naturally become in a paramount degree the guide to action.”\textsuperscript{132} Thus, the human “word,” as
biologically grounded but also culturally formed, shapes the very biology of the human brain
upon which it is dependent, to enable the formation of the human intellect, the moral sense, and
the conscience.\textsuperscript{133} For the Christian, Darwin’s theory of the evolutionary emergence of the
golden rule, consequent upon the emergence of the human intellect, the moral sense, and the
conscience, and catalyzed by the human “word,” enables the perception of an immanent Word
active and emergent in natural process and realized in human freedom. Ultimately, Darwin
argues, the use of language is integral to “man’s” future acquisition of a “perfect self-command”
obedient to the golden rule.\textsuperscript{134}

\textbf{Asa Gray on Natural Selection and Divine Design}

Thus, the location of final cause or \textit{telos} is shifted from its realization in the designed adaptations
of individual creatures to its fulfillment at the end of history. Asa Gray (1810-1888), a professor
of botany at Harvard and a friend of Darwin’s, notes in his article “Evolutionary Teleology”
(1876):

\begin{quote}
Darwinian teleology has the special advantage of accounting for the imperfections and
failures as well as for successes….It explains the seeming waste as being part and parcel
of a great economical process….So the most puzzling things of all to the old-school
teleologists are the \textit{principia} of the Darwinian. In this system the forms and species, in
all their variety, are not mere ends in themselves, but the whole a series of means and
ends, in the contemplation of which we may obtain higher and more comprehensive, and
perhaps worthier, as well as more consistent, views of design in Nature and heretofore.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{132} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 122, 146.  \\
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 679.  \\
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 67, 139, 150-151.  \\
\textsuperscript{135} Gray, 378.
\end{flushright}
Indeed, Darwinian teleology explains the “common objections” that so challenged Paley’s teleology, for without the wasted life, struggle for existence, and competition, there would be “no continuous adaptation to changing surroundings, no diversification and improvement, leading from lower up to higher and nobler forms.” Gray therefore perceived divine power in the omnipresent agency of natural selection upon biological life. He quotes Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a paleontologist and geologist at Harvard, who claims “that ‘the task of science is to investigate what has been done, to inquire if possible how it has been done, rather than to ask what is possible for the Deity, since we can know that only by what actually exists.’” Gray therefore links the comprehensive and systematic quality of Darwinian teleology with providence, noting that our inability to perceive the final telos at the end of time is linked to our limitations as human beings. In contrast to human affairs, where design evinces more focused and short-term goals, the far-reaching and all-encompassing nature of divine design means that much will remain obscure and apparently meaningless, he argues: “But the higher the intelligence, the more fully will the incidents enter into the plan, and the more universal and interconnected may the ends be.”

Nevertheless, Gray asserts like Paley that we should not suffer “what we know to be disturbed by what we do not know,” concluding that “the failure of a finite being to compass the designs of an infinite mind should not invalidate its conclusions respecting proximate ends which he can understand.” That is, for Gray, evidence of design in nature is inferred from the arrangement of organic bodies or parts which appear to be adapted or intended for a specific use

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136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 21.
138 Ibid., 381.
139 Ibid., 380.
140 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 43; Gray, 380.
or result, in the same manner found in human-made mechanisms like the watch.\textsuperscript{141} Falling back on induction, he argues that “the probability of design will increase with the \textit{particularity} of the act, the specialty of the arrangement or machinery,” and the number of examples recorded or experienced.\textsuperscript{142} As an outcome of this approach, conviction of design can reach a “moral certainty,” which “we are as unable to resist as we are to deny the cogency of a mathematical demonstration.”\textsuperscript{143} Contrivance and adaptation therefore provide proof of a primary intelligence whether they are formed directly (e.g. watch) or indirectly (e.g. eye): “the repetition of the result, and from different positions and under varied circumstances, showed that there \textit{must} have been design.”\textsuperscript{144} In this way, Gray perceived the Christian God as active in natural law and the process of natural selection:

Mr. Darwin, in proposing a theory which suggests a \textit{how} that harmonizes these facts into a system, we trust implies that all was done wisely in the largest sense designedly, and by an intelligent first cause. The contemplation of the subject on the intellectual side, the ampest exposition of the unity of plan in creation, considered irrespective of natural agencies, leads to no other conclusion.\textsuperscript{145}

In other words, if nature is a unity, sharing a common origin, then design must be either ubiquitous or entirely absent; but from localized examples of contrivance, we must grant that design is pervasive though it be fully imperceptible to our finite experience.\textsuperscript{146}

At the same time, Gray recognizes with John Tyndall (1820-1893), a physicist at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, that divine potency is ultimately hidden and grounded in

\textsuperscript{141} Gray, 70, 74, 79.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 70, 74.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 72-73.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 379-380.
mystery. He, therefore, locates in the unknown cause or “impulse” of variation the “ordaining will” and argues that “The tendency of science in respect to this [originating power] is not toward the omnipotence of matter, as some suppose, but toward the omnipotence of spirit.”

As a result, Gray admonishes Darwin to assume in his philosophy that “variation has been led along certain beneficial lines.” Unlike Darwin, who believed that “the cause of ordinary variability. . . is due to the reproductive system being eminently sensitive to any change in the conditions of life,” Gray believed that “variation, and therefore the ground of adaptation, is not a product of, but a response to, the action of the environment.” For Gray, the cause of variation is rooted in the constitution of the organism rather than in external circumstances, though these circumstances determine which variations survive. In contrast to Paley’s designer God who, albeit omnipresent, manipulates the universe from without, as a craftsman with a watch, Gray developed from Darwinian evolutionary science, an understanding of divine agency from within. He uses the analogy of a ship and its rudder, noting that the power underlying variation is tantamount to the wind pushing the ship, and that the ship is guided by the rudder in the same sense that natural selection acts upon variations to guide the course of evolution. Just as the ship cannot be steered without the wind, neither can natural selection take place without the production of variations. Recognizing to some extent, the dangers of a God of the Gaps argument, and anticipating the discovery of genes, Gray notes that even if the physical causes underlying variation are discovered, these secondary causes will remain mysterious at base and

147 Ibid., 390.
148 Ibid., 75, 158.
149 Ibid., 148.
150 Darwin, Origin, 273; Gray, 386.
151 Gray, 12, 196, 388.
152 Ibid., 386.
leave untouched the mystery of the originating power, though we will have come one step closer to its meaning.\textsuperscript{153} Gray professes a faith, then, in providence as the \textit{supernatural} “wind” and “rudder” active in variation and natural law, originating improvements and enabling adaptations, but moving from a ground inexplicable.\textsuperscript{154} The investigation of physical causes does not, therefore, stand opposed to the theological view but is essential to it, as necessary for understanding the intellectual conception or primary mind underlying the material world, with which it is in harmony.\textsuperscript{155} In this way, the natural world revealed by the sciences must be a source of knowledge in the theological endeavor to understand human purpose and vocation as made in God’s image and to formulate a Christian ethic.

Although Gray’s teleology draws on Darwinian evolutionary science to better incorporate the imperfections and sufferings in nature and to articulate God’s power as immanent, his understanding of divinity is still that of a power God or architect. He refers, for example, to the evolving category or idea of the \textit{edifice} to understand the evolving variations and grades of organic species: “We might extend the parallel, and get some good illustrations of natural selection from the history of architecture, and the origin of the different styles under different climates and conditions.”\textsuperscript{156} Although Gray re-conceives divine creation in the face of Darwin, his understanding of divine being, itself, is still that of an impassible, omnipotent Deity, who ultimately sits apart from an objectified creation rather than suffering with it, reflecting his belief in the separate and special creation of human beings as made in God’s image.\textsuperscript{157} Thus, God remains an “unseen operator,” an “intelligent, reasoning master,” whose designing agency is

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 76.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 60, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 21-22, 54, 269, 389.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 168.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 92-93.
\end{itemize}
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effective “indirectly” and “mediately” through the processes of Darwinian evolution.\textsuperscript{158} Gray omits any treatment of the suffering Christ or of Christ’s significance as the incarnation of divinity, for Gray rarely engages scripture. Rather, Gray uses Darwinian theory to dismiss the suffering and imperfection in nature as a means to an unseen end, as a necessary part of a larger incomprehensible plan. In this sense, his understanding of God’s agency in creation focuses lopsidedly on the scientific side of the issue and draws insufficiently on theological sources. As a consequence, the theology developed by Gray informs an understanding of Christian vocation, which overlooks the significance of a suffering God for a suffering creation.

\textbf{Aubrey Moore on the Facts of Nature as the Acts of God}

Aubrey Moore (1848-1890), a theological tutor at Oxford, was heavily influenced by Gray, noting that the evolving world’s continuous creativity re-shapes understandings of God’s agency and presence. However, Moore is more explicit both in his treatment of an \textit{immanent logos} or \textit{Word} and his conflation of the supernatural with the natural:

\begin{quote}
The one absolutely impossible conception of God, in the present day, is that which represents Him as an occasional Visitor….\[Darwinism\] has conferred upon philosophy and religion an inestimable benefit, by shewing us that we must choose between two alternatives. Either God is everywhere present in nature, or He is nowhere. He cannot be here and not there. He cannot delegate His power to demigods called ‘second causes.’ In nature everything must be His work or nothing. We must frankly return to the Christian view of direct Divine agency, the immanence of divine power in nature from end to end, the belief in a God in Whom not only we, but all things have their being, or we must banish Him altogether.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

For Moore, “the science of nature” illuminates and confirms forgotten Christian claims about the immanence of the Word, or “‘creation’s secret force.’”\textsuperscript{160} Indeed, he argues, Darwinian evolutionary science enables the claim that “\textit{the facts of nature are the acts of God},” such that

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\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 71, 73, 79, 85, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Moore, \textit{Mundi}, 70-71, 73-74.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 75.
\end{itemize}
the antithesis of the natural and supernatural is a false one. If evolution is creation then there can be no division between God’s agency and that of nature: “There are not, and cannot be, any Divine interpositions in nature, for God cannot interfere with Himself. His creative activity is everywhere….A theory of ‘supernatural interferences’ is as fatal to theology as to science.” In this sense, deity is not relegated to the margins or the gaps but is front and centre in the bleeding and breathing creaturely world. Thus, argues Moore, the unity of God in nature is intelligible to human comprehension, is discernible to reason, and constitutes real knowledge. In this way, the unity of nature, seen in microcosm in the embryonic development of the human being, is significant and revelatory of the unity of God.

At the same time, and in opposition to Gray, Moore recognizes that his approach is grounded in a faith-infused impression and that there can be no explicit proof for “the immanent Reason of the universe,” but human reason can verify a posteriori “a truth already held.” The question, then, for Christians cannot be “Is there a God?” but “what is God?” What is God’s “essence”? According to Moore, humans experience an unreasoned consciousness of a Being or Beings whom we cannot see, but upon whom we are dependent. This “instinctive consciousness” is then reinforced and illustrated by the conscience, which demands that God be moral, and the speculative reason, which discovers the immanent unity that underlies all things. Moore’s distinction between the moral conscience and the speculative reason echoes that between David Hume’s two species of philosophy, the easy and humane (prompting moral

162 Ibid., 225.
163 Ibid., 232-233, 182; Moore, Mundi, 49, 60, 79-81.
164 Moore, Science, 233.
165 Moore, Mundi, 76.
166 Ibid., 76-77.
167 Ibid., 76, 79.
action) versus the accurate and abstract (shaping rational induction). Hume notes the need for balance, that abstract speculation must be grounded in the concrete experience of everyday life.

Speaking in the voice of a personified nature, he admonishes:

Indulge your passion for science, says she, but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society. Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception which your pretended discoveries shall meet with, when communicated. Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.

In other words, Hume is arguing that the two species of philosophy—“the easy and humane” versus “the accurate and abstract”—each serve a purpose but must be practiced in conjunction with the other. The first compels action by drawing on the tastes and sentiments of common life to recommend virtue and stigmatize vice. The second pushes forward to general principles from the accumulation of specific instances, to tackle difficulties, unflinchingly. Without the first, the second “vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade, and comes into open day; nor can its principles easily retain any influence over our conduct or behaviour.”

Detached from the contextual realities of living and breathing people, the abstruse science “cannot enter into business or action” and is “but little acceptable in the world.” But without the abstruse and profound, the “easy and humane” lacks “a sufficient degree of exactness in its sentiments, precepts or reasonings.” It fails to confront, in adequate measure, the sometimes painful and

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169 Hume, 12.
170 Ibid., 13.
171 Ibid., 10.
172 Ibid., 10, 11.
173 Ibid., 13.
challenging difficulties, which inform authentic, relevant conclusions.  

Moore, however, argues that neither the moral conscience nor the speculative reason is sufficient in and of itself or even when taken together. An “untrained and undeveloped conscience” cannot provide sufficient argument for a righteous God, and the argument from nature “has been made to bear more than it can carry.” Both conscience and nature, then, can only be used to argue for a loving God when considered under the influence of Christian faith, though “our belief in Him is attested and confirmed by both.”

Consider that Moore, like Gray, perceived in the evolving world a progressive development dependent on God’s agency in natural law, but “leading the world by a progressive preparation for the revelation of Himself as Infinite Love in the Incarnation of the Word.” Similar to Paley, who understood mortal trials and tribulations as moral preparation for the afterlife, and like Gray, who believed that pain and imperfection were elements of a divine design not yet comprehensible to human beings, Moore believed “that the dramatic tendency in the evolution of the whole world would be irrational if it had not a moral goal.” Darwin, himself, believed that the evolution of conscience and culture would lead to the creation of societies governed by the golden rule and populated by humans with “perfect self-command.” Against those who argued that his theory of evolution is “highly irreligious,” Darwin responds,

The birth both of the species and of the individual are equally parts of that grand sequence of events, which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts at such a conclusion, whether or not we are able to believe that

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174 Ibid.
175 Moore, Mundi, 77-78.
176 Ibid., 78.
177 Ibid., 76.
178 Ibid., 78.
179 Darwin, Descent, 139, 150-151.
every slight variation of structure—the union of each pair in marriage—the dissemination of each seed—and other such events have all been ordained for some special purpose.\footnote{Ibid., 683.}

Moore therefore notes that although the natural sciences cannot lead us to a personal god, they can enrich and deepen religion by following the “the steps by which God worked, to eliminate…all that is arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable, and even where as yet we cannot explain, to go on in faith and hope.”\footnote{Moore, \textit{Science}, 185-186.} There is a belief, then, that despite the great cost to evolutionary progress, sentient life will be “perfected” in its struggle and suffering.\footnote{Ibid., 195.} Darwin writes, “\textit{Believing} as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long-continued slow progress” (italics mine).\footnote{Francis Darwin, ed., \textit{The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, including an autobiographical chapter}, vol.1 (London: John Murray, 1887), 312.} Moore therefore admits that undergirding his teleological argument is a faith in a Deity who is benevolent, whose agency is all encompassing, and whose work is ultimately rational. And although we cannot demonstrate the wisdom and goodness of God from nature alone, “we should still believe in the goodness of God, in spite of all that seems to contradict it, and look forward to the time when our children, or our children’s children, will see clearly what to us is dim and dark.”\footnote{Moore, \textit{Science}, 199-200.} Moore, Paley, and Gray, then, each in his own way, are compelled by a faith in an ultimate purpose, making meaningful what might otherwise be rendered meaningless, and offering grist for what it means to be human and made in the image of God.

However, Moore also argues that the faith-based conceit of an immanent designing God has to be grounded in mystery and shaped by the revelation of the Christic incarnation. He

\footnote{Ibid., 683.}
\footnote{Moore, \textit{Science}, 185-186.}
\footnote{Ibid., 195.}
\footnote{Francis Darwin, ed., \textit{The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, including an autobiographical chapter}, vol.1 (London: John Murray, 1887), 312.}
\footnote{Moore, \textit{Science}, 199-200.}
recognizes that Darwinian evolution is subject to the limitations of the natural sciences, which accept nothing as fact which cannot be tested by the senses, and that those beliefs that Christians hold most dear—the existence of God, the reality of the human soul, and its relation to God—lie outside its aegis. Moore writes, “For [a Christian] visible nature is the segment of the circle, ‘we see in part.’ And the visible is not co-extensive with the known. Rather the ultimate explanation of ‘the things which are seen’ is to be sought in ‘the things which are not seen.’” Congruently, if evolution is to be a rational system it necessitates the presence of a power, which although operative in nature, is also “above” it. For the Christian, argues Moore, this unity of nature perceived in the unity of God and “cradled in mystery,” must be understood in the light of Christ, for “every new truth which flows in from the side of science, or metaphysics, or the experience of social and political life, is designed in God’s providence to make that revelation real, by bringing out its hidden truths.” In this way, although Christian revelation claims finality in Christ, it is also progressive in its openness to new knowledge and different points of view: “‘Truth is an ever-flowing river, into which streams flow in from many sides.’” In this assimilation there is a drive to encounter difficulties with hope and trust and a recognition that mental indolence or blind obedience is not an option. Rather, the Christian is called to intellectual and moral struggle. Unlike Gray and Paley, then, whose claims of design in the face of imperfection and inconsistency are grounded in the acceptance of an ignorance unchallenged, Moore takes the lead from Hume, who argues that we must not rest easy in our

185 Ibid., 226-227.
186 Ibid., 213.
187 Ibid., 223.
188 Ibid., 227; Moore, Mundi, 42.
189 Moore, Mundi, 42.
190 Ibid., 42-43.
ignorance. Significantly, then, in the commitment to thought and the confrontation of difficulties, Moore’s method is conducive to a *theologia crucis*, to the apprehension of a suffering God in a suffering creation, and to the revision of triumphalist notions of the *imago Dei*.

Consider, for instance, “man’s” place in nature as understood by Gray, Moore, and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913). Gray, writing in 1860, immediately after the publication of *Origin*, believed that although natural selection explained nonhuman creation, “man” must have been separately and specially created. In so doing, Gray denies the creaturehood of human beings and maintains “man’s” status as the image of *God the architect*, who sits separate from and dominant over his designed creation. Similarly, Alfred Russel Wallace, who formulated the theory of natural selection independently of Darwin and who initially shared Darwin’s naturalistic views on human origins, developed a belief in the special intervention of a primary Mind for the creation of human beings. This revised understanding coincided with Wallace’s growing spiritualism and the publication of papers between the years 1864 and 1870. Although Wallace did not ascribe to the separate and special creation of the human species, he believed that Darwin’s theory could not explain human intelligence. Natural selection, he argued, would have provided humans with a brain little more advanced than that of an ape.

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191 “True fortitude of understanding consists in not suffering what we know to be disturbed by what we do not know” (Paley, *Natural Theology*, 43); “the failure of a finite being to compass the designs of an infinite mind should not invalidate its conclusions respecting proximate ends which he can understand” (Gray, 380); “I must confess that a man is guilty of unpardonable arrogance who concludes, because an argument has escaped his own investigation, that therefore it does not exist” (Hume, 39-40).

192 Gray, 92-93.

193 Ruse, 105.


Instead, he argues, when we compare “the savage” with civilized “man” and nonhuman creation, “we are alike driven to the conclusion that in his large and well-developed brain he possesses an organ quite disproportionate to his actual requirements—an organ that seems prepared in advance, only to be fully utilized as he progresses in civilization.”¹⁹⁶ Yet the laws of Darwinian evolution, continues Wallace, can only produce an organized complexity proportionate to the fulfillment of an organism’s immediate wants and needs and cannot anticipate the requirements of a future context.¹⁹⁷ Thus, in the “savage” we see evidence of developments, which outstrip the demands of its immediate context and thus necessitate an intervening agency or intelligence other than natural selection for their production.¹⁹⁸

Moore, in rebuttal, argues that from a theological perspective, this understanding of divine supervision in the creation of humans has an “unorthodox look.”¹⁹⁹ He explains,

If, as a Christian believes, the ‘higher intelligence’ Who used these laws for the creation of man was the same God Who worked in and by these same laws in creating the lower forms of life, Mr. Wallace’s distinction, as a distinction of cause, disappears; and if it was not the same God, we contradict the first article of the Creed. Whatever be the line which Christianity draws between man and the rest of the visible creation, it certainly does not claim man as the work of God, and leave the rest to ‘unaided nature.’²⁰⁰

Moore recognized that Darwin’s theory threatened many peoples’ sense of human dignity. The implication that we shared a common origin with nonhuman animals, that difference was a matter of degree rather than type, appeared to undermine our unique relationship with God as made in “His” image. Darwinism was labeled by many, a “gospel of dirt.”²⁰¹ Tackling this

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 343.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁹⁹ Moore, Science, 202-203.
²⁰⁰ Ibid., 203.
²⁰¹ Ibid., 204.
challenge head on, Moore knew that those Christians who decried the Darwinian theory of a shared human ancestry with nonhuman creation were guilty of the “genetic fallacy” of judging a thing by its origin.\textsuperscript{202} He, therefore, turns to scripture, in which “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,” to argue that “God’s method is always to choose ‘the base things of the world and things which are despised’ and use them for his purposes” (Gen. 2:7).\textsuperscript{203}

From scripture, Moore then turns to Darwin, who in dealing with humanity’s “animal and corporeal nature” has revealed our place in creation, Moore argues, as “the last term in the series” and “as the roof and crown of all things visible.”\textsuperscript{204} The circularity of his argument can be seen in the quote Moore selects from \textit{Descent of Man}, which demonstrates the formative influence of a Christian worldview on Darwin’s thought. In language reminiscent of Genesis 1:26-28, Darwin writes, “Man in the rudest state in which he now exists is the most dominant animal that has ever appeared on this earth. He has spread more widely than any other highly organized form: and all others have yielded before him.”\textsuperscript{205} Let alone the truth of this claim in the face of microscopic organisms or even certain insects, Darwin’s theory was shaped by Christian understandings of “man’s” special relationship to God as the \textit{imago Dei}. Argues Ruse, “To the end of his days, Darwin saw evolution as leading to humankind, which, for a good Victorian, is no bad thing.”\textsuperscript{206} Thus, Moore was able to argue that Darwinism does not undermine but rather reinvigorates understandings of divine agency and the \textit{imago Dei}: “man is


\textsuperscript{203} Moore, \textit{Science}, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 205-206.

\textsuperscript{205} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 67, quoted in Moore, \textit{Science}, 207.

\textsuperscript{206} Ruse, 127.
man, whatever he came from.” Maintained is humanity’s relation of likeness to God and our unique relationship as made in “His” image.

At the same time, Darwin’s argument for the relatedness of human beings to other animals is formative for Moore, who notes that we can no longer assume that everything exists for the benefit of humanity—an anthropocentrism that Darwin, himself, thought was arrogant.

According to Moore, we now have to attend to other creatures with their unique needs and relationships. The new teleology, he argues, “seeks to give a reason for the existence of each species, by fitting it into its place in the genealogical tree, and relating all the species to one another in the unity of the whole.” Humanity may be superior in many ways, but in light of a developing ecological literacy, its relation to nonhuman creation needs to be rethought. Moore quotes the Duke of Argyll who writes, “Man is a part of Nature, and no artificial definitions can separate him from it. And yet in another sense it is true that Man is above Nature—outside of it; and in this aspect he is the very type and image of the ‘Supernatural.’” Moore’s theology, grounded as it is in Darwinism, therefore foreshadows contemporary understandings of the Christic God’s immanence in nature and offers a revision of anthropology and Christian vocation in the face of a creation which is kin and upon which we are dependent.

Conclusion

Thus, although the Darwinian theory of the common origin of all life challenged the capacity of Christian theology to accommodate observed data, it also enabled a wider teleology, which

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207 Moore, Science, 211-212.
208 Ibid., 210.
209 Ibid., 196; Ruse, 113.
210 Moore, Science, 196.
assumed that the natural and physical sciences could illuminate and confirm forgotten Christian claims about the immanence of the Word, or “creation’s secret force.” Asa Gray argues that the study of nature is not opposed to theology but is rather necessary to approach the primary mind undergirding the physical universe. In this sense, the natural world must be a source of knowledge in the theological endeavor to understand human purpose and vocation as made in God’s image and to formulate a Christian ethic. At the same time, a rigorous engagement with Darwinian evolutionary science compels the removal of rose-coloured lenses and highlights the suffering and waste intrinsic to the creaturely processes of natural selection. To meet this challenge, Aubrey Moore’s focus on the incarnation of Christ as a key for understanding divine agency in nature sets the stage for a theologia crucis, or the articulation of a suffering God whose vulnerability takes its meaning from engagement with a groaning creation. In particular, the figure of Jesus as manifestation of the Word made flesh comes to represent the unique emergence of the divine in history as the hope and possibility of what humans can become as co-creators made in the image of God to shape culture and thus biology in the act of making decisions. Exemplified by the call to costly love, the emergent Word is literally manifested in the human word, which empowers the processes of group and social selection by favouring altruistic behaviours as a matter of survival, to shape our physiological development as creatures of conscience in a groaning creation. Thus, in the same sense that an existentially fallen creation is concomitant with and constitutive of the life, actions, and teachings of the historical Jesus-Sophia emergent in history as the goal and model of what human beings as made in the image of God are capable, so, too, in light of Darwinian evolutionary theory can we understand an existentially fallen creation to be concomitant with and constitutive of the evolution of human

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212 Moore, Mundi, 75.
213 Gray, 21-22, 54, 269, 389.
beings as ethical creatures of conscience with the capacity for loving regard of the stranger. That is, as Moore argues in response to the design argument of Gray, although God cannot be objectively seen in creation, the Christian religion can offer a larger framework of meaning to contextualize the facts of nature as congruent with the life-giving and sustaining presence of the Spirit in creation. In this sense, the ideals that have made humans so successful as relational beings living in community reflect those governing the way of life manifested in the specific historical incarnation of Christ. Thus, although biological and cultural evolution may be formative of the Christic call, they do not necessarily undermine its imperative, nor a faith in its divine origin. Indeed, knowledge of evolutionary origins may demonstrate the value of the golden rule for creaturely flourishing and provide us with the motivation to meet its imperative; for the historical person of Christ reveals that the ultimate ground is in us as free human beings struggling against selfish drives, to reject or to embrace—to crucify or to follow.
Conclusion

Discerning Christ in Creation, and Future Directions

In his text *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt*, James Gustafson quotes Paul Tillich, who states:

> Of course theology cannot rest on scientific theory. But it must relate its understanding of man to an understanding of universal nature, for man is a part of nature and statements about nature underlie every statement about him…. Even if the questions about the relation of man to nature and to the universe could be avoided by theologians, they would still be asked by people of every place and time—often with existential urgency and out of cognitive honesty. And the lack of an answer can become a stumbling block for a man’s whole religious life.¹

In particular, Darwinian evolutionary theory reveals that we can no longer assert ourselves to be apart from or other than nature.² Everything we know and do is conditioned by our origins and existence within a creaturely context. Thus, argues Gustafson, “it is not possible to avoid intersections between the sciences and other secular knowledge on the one hand, and religious discourse on the other,” especially since the sciences are our most reliable, trustworthy, and respected means of knowledge about our physical environment.³ Moreover, the status of God as “Maker of heaven and earth” entails that “heaven and earth” be carefully approached and understood.⁴ And if the human is made in God’s image, then theological knowledge must establish a “critically self-conscious” and deliberate relationship to the sciences, for any ethical

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³ Gustafson, 85.

⁴ Ibid., 44.
theory assumes an understanding of human nature in relationship to other organic beings and the wider environment.  

The ethical challenge for the Christian, of course, is how to understand what it means to be made in the image of the Abrahamic God, who is creator of all things but also revealed in Christ to be costly love, if the creative processes of natural selection are governed by a competitive arms race of tooth and claw. Looking to the work of Philip Hefner, Denis Edwards, and Elizabeth Johnson, I argue that a teleological representation of the divine in nature can establish a dangerous model for human vocation by justifying the exploitation and suffering of the victims of evolution as the means through which God achieves divine intention. Philip Hefner’s use of the male-gendered logos and the metaphor of sacrifice further ignore the concrete realities of women’s experience, and although Edwards and Johnson’s use of sophia retrieves a more liberative model of God by restoring dignity to the woman as image of the divine, all three authors fail to account for the true depth and breadth of creaturely hardship and distress by applying the analogy of freedom to the creative processes of natural selection. John Hick’s Irenaean type of theodicy, used by Hefner, and John Polkinghorne’s “free process defence,” used by Johnson and Edwards, both privilege benefits accrued to an abstract and personified “nature,” or “world,” over the suffering and loss experienced by its individual victims. Such teleological accounts can overextend an explanation for natural evil, to such a degree that they risk a justification of its existence as the cost of a greater good. An examination of William Paley’s work, *Natural Theology*, highlights the dangers of the teleological approach, whether applied to a static or evolving universe, for it can rationalize, if not legitimate, the suffering and oppression of

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5 Ibid., 94, 34, 11.
the few as the necessary cost of the greater good of a larger system, privileging the needs of those in power, who benefit from the sacrifice of those without.

Indeed, Darwin’s identification of the biological warfare undergirding natural selection points to the incorrigible character of creation as existentially fallen. There is a degree of suffering and waste intrinsic to the process, which when engaged at the level of the individual’s concrete and specific experiences cannot be reconciled with a God who is identified in any simple manner as the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator of all things. John Haught and Douglas John Hall note, however, that the theodicy challenge is often grounded in the premise of a Greco-Roman God (i.e. Zeus), whose power is defined by domination and control, or of a divine architect who has designed everything according to some blueprint from a point in the past. Thomas Reynolds argues that theodicy can “[lead] down a path that trivializes suffering, explaining it away as a problem to be solved rather than empathetically engaged and potentially transformed. The real challenge is not intellectual, but practical.” Like Douglas John Hall, he points to the incarnation of God in the vulnerable flesh of Jesus to understand the character and power of the Christian God:

The redemptive effect of Jesus is the welcoming presence of God in the shape of a human being who makes himself vulnerable in welcoming others. This is the stuff of divine creativity, a creativity that fashions a world to which it is vulnerable and available. Jesus embodies…God’s capacity to be with, to suffer with, the beloved creature for its well-being….His fullness is a welcoming into God’s embrace that is the opposite of triumphal, sovereign power. It is a vulnerable love that comes in humility and weakness.

In this sense, the suffering creation is encountered but not rationalized or explained away; for the character of God’s power in the trinitarian love of mutual relations takes its shape and

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8 Ibid., 200.
significance as *costly love* over against an existentially fallen world, and is revealed through the human figure of Christ in the healing and feeding of bodies, the inclusion of the marginalized, and the liberation of the oppressed. There is a mystery here, for as a consequence of these actions, God the creator of all things is *crucified* by God’s “good” creation in the form of human beings, whom Darwin reveals can no longer be understood apart from the creaturely world from which they have evolved.

The human Christ therefore provides a different filter for discerning the agency of God in creation, defined by the capacity for costly love rather than controlling power. More explicitly, in the same sense that an existentially fallen creation is concomitant with and constitutive of the life, actions, and teachings of the historical Jesus-Sophia emergent in history as the goal and model of what human beings as made in the image of God are capable, so, too, in light of Darwinian evolutionary theory can we understand an existentially fallen creation to be concomitant with and constitutive of the evolution of human beings as ethical creatures of conscience with the capacity for loving regard of the stranger. That is, although God cannot be *objectively* seen in nature, the Christian religion can offer a larger framework of meaning to interpret the facts of nature as compatible with the life-giving and sustaining presence of divine agency in creation; for the providence of God in the world as *logos/sophia* can be represented in the processes of group and social selection acting upon altruistic and cooperative behaviours as a matter of survival to shape our physiological development as self-aware creatures of conscience capable of imaging Christ in a groaning creation. Darwin’s explanation for the natural history of the Golden Rule therefore illustrates how the ideals that have contributed to human flourishing reflect those governing the way of life exemplified in the human incarnation of Christ. As a result, the evolutionary explanation of the Christic call does not necessarily undermine its
imperative nor preclude its divine origin but can instead provide practical incentives for its fulfillment. From the perspective of Christian faith, then, my thesis proposes that an ethical “ought” can be discerned from a natural “is” when considered in light of a crucified Christ and an existentially fallen creation.

**Human Language as “word of the Word”**

Denis Edwards suggests an avenue for future research when he refers to each creature lured into existence by God as “the word of the Word.” With regard to human beings, this phrase highlights the role of language in the formation of human culture and community and consequently human biology. For the emergent capacity of abstract and syntactical *symbolic* communication empowers the human to override social instincts and to create ethical ideals privileging the community’s needs over the individual’s, thereby supporting the call to costly love and the capacity to follow it. The human therefore emerges as created co-creator, made in the image of God, and born into a milieu over which he or she initially has no control but maturing in freedom with the power to shape the course and continuum of creaturely evolution and the direction of human *being*. The *tool* of language can therefore be understood by the Christian as the *vector or fulcrum* of divine action upon the human as a conditioned and contextual creature who is at the same time a free partner and participant in the very act of articulate expression; for the power and function of language is only effective in community, and enfolds the human as a determined and relational being, limited by biology and learning, yet embedded within a social matrix spanning time and space.

Consider Christ’s admonition to his disciples, “For where two or three are gathered *in my name*, I am there among them” (italics mine) (Matt. 18:20). In this sense, language is the

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instrument enabling humans the creative power to image God through their relationship to one another, as exemplified through the formation and practice of “beneficent religions.”¹⁰ The significance of language for the human as created co-creator is revealed in the first creation stories of Genesis when considered alongside the first verses of John: “In the beginning,” God creates all things through the Word; God speaks their name, and they come into existence (Gen. 1; John 1:1-5). The second chapter of Genesis presents a variation of the story, asserting that “the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19). Language, then, as the very tool God used to create the universe, is gifted to humans with the freedom and power to use it, to choose how to interpret the world around them, to embed observations in frameworks of meaning, and to thereby construct truth through representations of reality. Darwin’s theory of evolution can serve to illuminate this understanding of human language and the consequent emergence of “beneficent religion” as instrumental to God’s call in history but filtered through the limited understandings of culturally situated creatures emerging in specific and concrete contextual realities.

“Falling Up” and the Natural History of Outgroup Altruism

Developing the idea of an immanent Christ-Sophia, whose agency and power are shaped by and dependent upon their formation within a fallen creation, I can investigate the possibilities of Gregory Peterson’s re-articulation of “the fall” as a “falling up” in light of the emergent complexity revealed by evolutionary science, and Irenaean explanations linking creaturely suffering to life’s immaturity.¹¹ Holmes Rolston III notes that Christ’s birth, life, death, and

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resurrection represent in microcosm the experience of all organisms undergoing the crucible of evolution, or a “suffering through to something higher.” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin speaks of “a cross which symbolizes much more the ascent of creation through effort than the expiation of an offense”—“a symbol of progress and victory won through mistakes, disappointments and hard work.” However, Peterson’s use of the biblical symbol of “the fall,” in the figurative form of “falling up” and in dialogue with Irenaeus, challenges naïve teleologies, which minimize or ignore the magnitude of suffering to justify its existence as the cost of the realization of a greater good, achievable through creaturely processes inclusive of human culture and informed by a Victorian metaphysics of progress. Hick, for example, argues that “the divine intention in relation to humankind, according to our hypothesis, is to create perfect finite personal beings in filial relationship with their Maker.” Peterson, on the other hand, problematizes any possibility of achieving a future “perfection.” He writes,

In an evolutionary context, immaturity is not simply that of our own species but of all conscious life. As each new species and even individual comes to be, we see the advent of something new, full of potential but also impeded by tragic limitations…. Increased complexity allows for increased freedom, which in turn allows for greater potential for both good and evil. The emergence of our species, Homo sapiens, is testimony to this fact. The great plasticity of our behaviour allows us to act selfishly, to cooperate, and even to cooperate selfishly….Falling is not simply what happens to us, it is what we do. But it is only because of our considerable sophistication that we do it in the first place, and it is because of our psychological sophistication that such falling seems an inevitable consequence of human freedom.

In this sense, Peterson’s articulation of “falling up” enables the recognition that we will always be faced with the incorrigible falleness of creation as a complementary and counter undercurrent

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15 Peterson, 285.
or cost to any progress achieved in any constructive sense; thus, progress is never unqualified, nor guaranteed, but always vulnerable to the workings of a fallen creation.

To complement this idea of the evolutionary “falling up” of creation, I can investigate the relationship between biological and cultural evolution and its role in the origin of outgroup altruism, or the Christic call for costly love (Matt. 5:43-45). That is, in the words of Aubrey Moore, how can the facts of nature flesh out the acts of God?16 Denis Edwards, who concludes that humans must be partners with God because of our technological power, notes that although Christianity is a part of evolutionary history, it also offers an element of inclusivity that overrides the selfish impetus underlying natural selection.17 He articulates his argument in dialogue with Sallie McFague, who argues that Christian faith is something independent of both cultural and genetic evolution because it compels solidarity with the vulnerable and oppressed.18 Neither biological nor cultural evolution explains self-sacrifice to the point of death, in solidarity with the needy, she argues.19 Douglas Hall identifies a “tension” that exists in the application of the Christian message to the human quest for meaning and purpose, such that, “what has come to be in and through Jesus as the Christ is as ‘unnatural,’ as discontinuous with nature, human potentiality, or merely historical providence as a child emerging from the womb of a pure virgin.”20 John Hare presents a similar argument, noting that, “if evolution were proposed as a

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17 Denis Edwards, Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 144.
19 McFague, 174.
substitute source of the moral demand, we would be in danger of losing both morality and responsibility.”

The distinction, however, between cultural and genetic evolution, with Christian faith as something beyond the explanatory powers of both, oversimplifies natural selection and overlooks the inseparable interactive quality of genetic and cultural evolution. Moreover, the exclusion of a Christian ethos from earthly processes, whether natural or human, implies a God of the Gaps argument, reminiscent of Asa Gray, William Paley, and Alfred Russel Wallace’s reliance on supernatural intervention to explain the human being. Turning to Thomas Aquinas’s idea of natural law as something which all humans have “written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:14-15) and to Augustine’s “seminal reasons” (rationes seminales or rationes causales)—the idea that God created life by initially seeding “potencies” to be realized developmentally over time—I can draw on the work of Craig Boyd, Larry Arnhart, Joseph Poulshock, Alister McGrath, and Christopher Boehm to flesh out the conclusion that biological and cultural evolution are formative of the Christic call, yet do not undermine its imperative, nor its divine origin. In this sense, knowledge of evolutionary origins may demonstrate the value of the Golden Rule for creaturely flourishing and provide us with the motivation to meet its imperative.

To grapple with this notion of Christian vocation as a discernment of and cooperation with divine agency in creation, it is important to recognize culture and technology as players in the evolutionary processes out of which they were produced. That is, human beings, as


biological creatures, have been shaped *physiologically* by the communities and cultures in which we have lived but over which we now have power and influence as self-conscious and self-aware free creatures. The import is significant considering that the internet, the digital camera, and satellite communications are enabling an awareness of the earth and its inhabitants as one large and very vulnerable “ingroup.”23 The individual coming from a technologically rich continent like North America can no longer justifiably claim ignorance of, nor indifference to, threatened genocide or ecological disaster simply because it happens on the other side of the earth. In a sense, Teilhard’s Noosphere is being realized. Christ, the divine *sophia*, immanent in nonhuman creation and uniquely incarnate in human beings as “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) draws attention to the common status of creation as *imago Dei*, and to our responsibility as creatures, uniquely self-aware and technologically able, to care for both our human and nonhuman “brethren in pain, disease, death, suffering and famine.”24 Recognizing that this technological power has given us knowledge of, and power over, our global village as one vast ingroup, we need to examine our evolutionary history and the factors that have made us successful as relational beings living in community.

In terms of Christian theology, the historical person of Christ reveals that the ultimate ground is in us as *free* human beings struggling against selfish drives, to reject or to embrace—to crucify or to follow. In Christ we can interpret God to be active *in us* in a unique and novel way, which has been realized through the evolutionary processes of group and social selection. But in Christ’s persecution we can also see the fallen aspect of our nature, which is governed by fear.

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and greed. The same technological wizardry that enables empathic awareness of our global village also feeds our baser instinctual drives for power, to wreak geopolitical and ecological devastation, and to crush those who stand in our way. My thesis has approached the challenge and possibility posed from the perspective of Christian faith, that the providential agency of a divine *sophia* or *logos* (revealed in Christ as costly love) may be discernable in our evolutionary history, shaping human physiology and human conscience, in the context of a groaning creation to offer material for our action as made in the image of God.
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