

LOVE AND THE ORGANISM: A THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF LIFE

• José Granados •

“The final destiny of all the creation
is the resurrected body.”

Introduction

Does love make the world go around? This popular saying reminds us of the last verse of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: “L’amor che muove il sole e le altre stelle,” “The Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”¹ Dante’s verse refers to God as Love, a Love that is the motor of all things. Does the verse apply to spiritual being only, or is it able to embrace all of reality, including the material world, as well?

This second possibility strikes our modern minds as odd. We would tend to think of it only as a metaphor, an example of poetic license, an illicit imposition of human attributes onto the inanimate realm of things. What, then, are the reasons behind this hesitation?

An initial important reason lies undoubtedly in the dualism that is a hallmark of the Western tradition since Descartes. The French philosopher brought about a clear distinction between two

¹Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145.

worlds: the personal and the cosmological. In the terms of this dualism, concepts that apply to persons (for example, reason or freedom) cannot have any relation to the material or biological realm, and vice versa.²

This mindset led to a particular way of understanding the relation between the sciences. The positivistic sciences remained the realm of objectivity and truth; the rest of reality became subjective, that is, pertaining only to the individual and not a matter of public debate. There appeared, then, the now-widespread idea that all that is left for us to discuss are the natural sciences alone: decisions having to do with religion and morality are subjective and cannot be brought into the public square. It is, more or less, the image used by Einstein when he compared scientific activity to the longing that pulls the town-dweller away from his noisy surroundings (the realm of the uncertain and the subjective) and towards the silence of the high mountains (the region of objective knowledge).³

One consequence has been that objective discussions linked to science are no longer seen as concerned in any way with the moral realm; instead, they are considered pre-moral.⁴ But the result is that man's technological power recognizes no inherent ethical

²Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln, 1963), 15; for an English translation, see *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 25–26.

³Cf. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York, 1954), 225: “[O]ne of the strongest motives that leads men to art and science is escape from everyday life with its painful crudity and hopeless dreariness, from the fetters of one’s own ever-shifting desires. A finely tempered nature longs to escape from personal life into the world of objective perception and thought; this desire may be compared with the townsman’s irresistible longing to escape from his noisy, cramped surroundings into the silence of high mountains, where the eye ranges freely through the still, pure air and fondly traces out the restful contours apparently built for eternity.” The following comments of Ilya Prigogine, *The End of Certainty. Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature* (New York, 1997) on this text are of interest: “But is science as conceived by Einstein—an escape from the vagaries of human existence—still the science of today? We cannot desert the polluted towns and cities for the high mountains. We have to participate in the building of tomorrow’s society” (185); “[W]hat is the purpose of science if it cannot incorporate some of the basic aspects of human experience?” (14).

⁴Cf. David L. Schindler, “The Significance of World and Culture for Moral Theology: *Veritatis splendor* and the “Nuptial-Sacramental” Nature of the Body,” *Communio* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 111–142; see esp. 111–113.

principle, no principle that would emerge from within itself. Every attempt to make ethics relevant for science seems to come from the exterior, from a subjective point of view, and is linked in the end to subjectivity and arbitrariness.

This modern dualism has had its effect on the understanding of love, as well. We can refer, for example, to the Kantian distinction between pathological and practical love. The former is merely an affection and is considered irrelevant for morality, something to be studied, rather, in terms of biology and physics. Practical love is an act of the will, an act that can be commanded, which makes it part of the moral realm.⁵ Because the concept of love seems to have been affected in a special way by modern dualism, a close study of it in particular could prove useful in our attempt to overcome this dualism.

Keeping all this in mind, it is clear that our question of the relation of love to the organism and to physical matter is not simply a speculative one. It carries profound consequences for our culture and for the current problems of our society. A better understanding of this relationship may result not only in a deeper knowledge of nature and how to engage it, but, because a new concept of freedom and love could emerge, in a renewed vision of man as well.

What attempts have been made to overcome this situation, either from the point of view of physics or biology, or from the realm of philosophy?⁶ Does Christianity have something to say to us in this regard? In order to prepare our answer, we will (1) begin with a closer examination of the line from Dante we quoted at the beginning; (2) move to the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who will serve as an inspiration for our approach to the problem; (3) enter into a dialogue on this issue with other contemporary philosophers and theologians; and (4) examine some key texts of the Christian tradition that take up our problem. All the above will (5) provide us with the elements for an answer.

⁵Hume reduced love to an emotion, a subhuman feeling. Kant made the distinction between practical love (an act of the will that can be commanded) and pathological love (an affection). Cf. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Stuttgart, 1967), 37.

⁶It is interesting to notice how Heisenberg relates the problem of the existence of God with the possibility of addressing the whole universe as we would do with the soul of another man. Cf. Werner Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze. Gespräche im Umkreis der Atomphysik* (Munich, 1969), 292–293.

1. *The question among the ancients
and in early Christianity*

When Dante wrote the final verse of the *Divine Comedy*, he was calling on a rich tradition. Let us examine its two main sources: a) the influence of the Greek philosophers and b) the background of Christianity.

a) Dante's thought sinks its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. It suffices to recall, here, Aristotle's doctrine that God moves everything by attracting it: that is to say, by love. This is precisely how God is an unmoved mover.⁷ Aristotle understood this love, present in all creatures, as a tendency or an impersonal interior force that draws the creature to self-realization through acquiring its form. Later on, Plotinus and Proclus will make another point, which, according to some scholars, was already present in Plato: this love that dwells in everything is understood as love for a transcendent God.⁸ This is how the ancients were able to set the movements of the universe into a unified order and to discern within every event a step towards higher levels of reality.

Let us take note that the love in question for these Greek philosophers is the love of creatures for God, not the love of God for the universe. This is because of their conception of love (*eros*) as something related to a need; love sets out from a lack of something; love is always a movement, it is related to motion and not to being; thus, it cannot be attributed to God.⁹

This last point is especially important in regard to the material world, which is clearly different from God. Plato and the Greek philosophers could reach the point of accepting the love of God for the soul or spirit because of a perceived similarity between them. This would not be a case, then, of love for the inferior, but would be, rather, love for the similar. In the case of the body or

⁷Cf. *Met* XII, VII; cf. C. J. Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God: Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Author of the Fourth Gospel," *Vigiliae christianae* 35 (1981): 57–81; 59.

⁸Cf. Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 59.

⁹Cf. *ibid.*, 63: "since *eros* springs from a need, it cannot be attributed to a God." Love for the inferior was called *eros pronoetikós*. Even if this kind of love could be found among humans, it is not proper to God.

material things, any love on the part of God is excluded: it is simply a question of the tendency of all things towards God.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, we find a different conception in Plato's *Symposium*. Here we find the idea of love as a deity relating to everything, something that moves throughout the entire universe. The idea is attributed to Eryximachus, the physician.¹¹ Eryximachus' position does not represent Plato's thought (indeed the idea that love, *eros*, is a god is refuted later on in the speech by Socrates). It seems to reflect the thought of Heraclitus, which was taken over later by the Stoics. In this way they were able to speak of a love that moved everything: it was the divine Logos, which, however, was not transcendent.¹²

Let us summarize the answer given by the Greek philosophical tradition to our initial question: 1) There is a sense in which we can affirm that love moves everything, whether it is love for the transcendent God (the Platonic tradition), or love for the development of the immanent form (the Aristotelian tradition). The ancients were thus able to see the universe as a cosmos, as something ordered by love towards an end. 2) It is significant that Aristotelian philosophy, which took the lower regions of being more into account, could not accept the idea of the presence in all things of a love for the transcendent God, but stopped instead at the level of a love for the acquisition of form. The Platonic tradition was able to support

¹⁰There have been attempts at summing up the thought of the Greek philosophers regarding this point, as though Greek love were only selfish. This is a simplification. Greek love does not start only from below, as a love of man for God, but is founded in an attraction from above. The movement towards God has its origin in God. The mystical trend of Platonism finds its foundations here.

¹¹Cf. *Symposium*, 186 a–b: “if I have learned a single lesson from my own field, the science of medicine, it is that Love does not occur only in the human soul; it is not simply the attraction we feel toward human beauty: it is a significantly broader phenomenon. It certainly occurs within the animal kingdom, and even in the world of plants. In fact, it occurs everywhere in the universe. Love is a deity of the greatest importance: he directs everything that occurs, not only in the human domain, but also in that of the gods.”

¹²It is from this tradition that the following sentence of the *Consolatio philosophiae* of Boethius seems to emerge: “How happy mortals were, if that pure love did guide their minds, which heavenly spheres does guide!” (“O felix hominum genus, / Si uestros animos amor / Quo caelum regitur regat”): cf. Boethius, *Consolatio philosophiae* II, 8, 28–30; cf. C. J. Vogel, “Amor quo caelum regitur,” *Vivarium* 1 (1963): 2–34.

this transcendent love only at the cost of denying some reality to the *regio dissimilitudinis*. 3) In neither tradition can this love be attributed to God: it is a love that is in no way reciprocal. This is especially clear in the case of material things in their total difference from the divine being. The underlying reason for all of this was the association of love with movement and not with being. 4) There was, certainly, an exception in the doctrine of the Stoics. The Stoics accepted that God, as Logos, was the force that binds everything together, including the physical world. In this way they were able to connect physics with ethics, and matter with love. But the price for maintaining the connection was the denial of God's transcendence.

b) Let us turn now to Dante's second source of inspiration: the Christian tradition, which is able to introduce a new element for our perspective. Let us recall the well-known fact that all three books of the *Divine Comedy* end in the same way, with a reference to the stars. When he emerges from the Inferno, Dante is able to see the stars again; when he finds the way out of Purgatory, he is purified and ready to climb to the stars; finally he reaches, in Paradise, the Love that is able to move these very stars. Dante's trip is a trip towards God, and the sun and the stars were considered the highest elements of the cosmos. For Dante these stars refer particularly to the saints who inhabit heaven and enjoy the presence of God.

These stars, by reflecting the light that comes from God, enable Dante to prepare himself to see that light directly. When he reaches the point at which he is able to do this, the highest point of his contemplation, he sees the image of man inside the circle of the Divine Essence: the mystery of the Incarnation and the union between our nature and the divine: "I wished to see how the image to the circle / conformed itself, and how it there finds place."¹³ In the center of the circle Dante finds the image of man, who sums up in himself all of creation and is totally permeated by the love of God. It is through this same vision that Dante is able to be moved by this Love who is God. The material body is included in this movement in a special way.¹⁴ The body belongs thus to these stars, the holy ones, who reflect God's love and are moved by him.

¹³Cf. Dante, *Paradise*, XXXIII, 137–138.

¹⁴Cf. *Paradise*, II, 37–42: "If I was body . . . more the desire should be enkindled in us, that essence to behold wherein is seen how God and our own nature were united"; cf. Guy P. Raffa, *Divine Dialectic* (Toronto, 2000).

At the basis of this new perspective lies one of the fundamental claims of Christianity: the resurrection of the flesh. If the final destiny of all creation is the resurrected body, which St. Paul calls “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44), it ought to form a connection between spirit and body. If this union is the final goal of history, and if, then, this final point has to be thought of in connection with the rest of time, then the body that will become spiritual must be in connection with the spirit already while still on earth. The question we posed at the beginning about overcoming dualism is thus important if we want to account for the very core of Christianity, the resurrection of the flesh.

This union is considered not as something that the flesh obtains by itself, but rather as a being-possessed by the Holy Spirit. “It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail” (Jn 6:63). That means that there is more in the body than simply an inward tendency that pushes it towards God: on the contrary, God the Father himself communicates his own life to the body. Love does not begin, as was the case for the ancient philosophers, in the movements of the world, but in God, who first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10); God is Love, and he establishes (*creatio ex nihilo*) the very being of all things in order to bring them into communion with him.¹⁵

Let us conclude this first approximation to an answer by reiterating the three points that will be most important for characterizing the Christian contribution. First, the idea of love as reciprocal, that is, as communion. Love for God moves everything because God himself is love and loves the world. It is not only a case of love of

¹⁵In these last paragraphs we have begun to speak of the relation between Spirit and body, instead of the relation between love and body. In this regard we can recall the famous sentence of St. Augustine, which shaped Christian thought on love for centuries: “amor meus pondus meum” (my love is my weight). In the context (*Confessions* 9, 10) Augustine is considering the movement of all creation, and especially the weight of things, which inclines them to fall to the earth. This weight that moves everything is used by Augustine to explain love, which is viewed as a force that sets man in motion by attracting him. It is important to notice that the Bishop of Hippo is concerned here with explaining Genesis 1:2, “the Spirit of God moved over the waters.” We can assume thus a connection between the Spirit and this weight that moves everything, not only human beings but material objects as well. Augustine gives a reason for this connection between Spirit and the dynamism of creation: the Spirit is Love and Gift and can be seen thus as the link given by God to the world in order to keep it together (cf. *De Trinitate* XI, 11, 18).

things for God, but also of God's love for things.¹⁶ Second, we find the idea that God loves all of creation and not just the spiritual world (that part of the world that could be considered similar to the divine). There is in God not only love for what is equal, but also love for what is inferior. Finally, this love is set in relation to the Spirit of God.

Does this perspective still have something to say to us today? Is it somehow able to resist being totally overcome by our new, modern vision of the world? Balthasar will provide us with important clues for pursuing our investigation.

2. Balthasar on Spirit and nature

“L'amor che muove il sole e le altre stelle.” The line works well to summarize some aspects of Balthasar's thought. Let us turn to his book *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* [Love Alone Is Credible], which considers three ways of presenting Christianity as credible. Two of them, the so-called cosmological and anthropological reductions, are judged insufficient. They attempt to justify Christianity starting out from the question of the cosmos or the question of man himself. Balthasar argues that it is impossible to reach the mystery of God by setting out from these starting points, and that attempting to do so risks a reduction of God's plan to man's expectations.

It is interesting what Balthasar adds while commenting on the cosmological reduction. This path starts with man's reflection on the cosmos and attempts to present Christianity as a culmination or integration of the fragments of the various worldviews.¹⁷ Balthasar's comment is that this path is no longer feasible, in any case, since the world no longer bears the divine content that it did for the ancients. The physical world is no longer divine; what's more, it is no longer humanized, either—it is experienced instead as mere matter, which means it is experienced as different from and radically alien to man.

¹⁶Vogel, in “Greek Cosmic Love,” claims that the newness of Christianity is a personal God who is able to love what is inferior to him (*eros pronoetikós*), what is different from him. We do not find this either in Plato or in Plotinus. It comes from the history of Jesus crucified.

¹⁷Cf. Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 9–10.

Following this critique, the Swiss theologian presents a third way, the way of love and beauty, as the only path that is able to preserve the mystery of Christianity.

Does this mean absolutely precluding the cosmological path from this point forward? Or could it still be possible, after the total disenchantment of the world, to attempt to take up the cosmological path once again? Based on the reasons presented in the introduction, I think that it will in fact be necessary for us to return to this point. This does not mean abandoning Balthasar's intuition and proposal; on the contrary, what we need is a step further in the direction he indicates. The way of love leads us to consider all of creation anew and results in a new understanding of the cosmos and its dynamisms that will permit us, in the end, to propose the cosmological path itself in a new form.

Balthasar himself seems to attempt such an approach in the final volume of his *Theologik*, in a short chapter devoted to the Spirit as soul of the world.¹⁸ He has in mind the meaning of the Spirit as presented by the New Testament: the Pneuma is the one who comes from God's love and who is obtained for us through the death and Resurrection of Christ. A question now appears on the horizon: is it possible to transfer this Spirit (and by the same token, this Love) to all of creation? Balthasar proceeds to analyze several proposals.¹⁹ He brings out the dangers of reducing the importance of the event and novelty of Pentecost to the laws of nature,²⁰ and underscores the difference between the Spirit who swept over the waters (cf. Gn 1:2) and the Spirit given by Jesus.²¹ He finishes by suggesting the lines of an adequate method: starting out from the death and Resurrection of Christ should shed light on the whole mystery of human history and the constitution of nature. The love that makes the world go around has to do with the suffering love of Christ crucified.²²

¹⁸Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik III: Der Geist der Wahrheit* (=TL III) (Basel, 1987), 383–395. For an English translation, see *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 3: *The Spirit of Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

¹⁹Especially those of Barth and Pannenberg; cf. *TD III*, 386ff.

²⁰Cf. *TD III*, 394.

²¹Cf. *ibid.*, 392–394.

²²Cf. *ibid.*, 395.

We will try to follow Balthasar's train of thought, which offers the possibility to relate love to the natural sciences, most particularly the sciences of physics and biology. It is important to keep in mind that the love that discloses this proposed vision is the love of God manifested in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

*3. The philosophical relevance of the organism:
clues provided by contemporary authors*

Let us return to our initial question: is there any link between the organism and love? The question can be reformulated in a more general way: is there any link between biological processes, which can be measured in a laboratory and determined with precision, and the human realm, where we speak of morality and the good, of freedom and responsibility? Let us examine first the current positions among some representative philosophers of biology. We will move, then, to the work of two contemporary thinkers, Hans Jonas and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

*a. From the selfish gene to altruistic natural behavior,
and beyond*

In current philosophical reflections on biology there exist several attempts to establish a link between ethics and biological theories, with a special focus on the doctrine of evolution. Several scholars try to explain human behavior, at least in part, by considering the data of evolutionary biology and natural selection in particular. In the same way that this mechanism attempts to explain the origin of all life, it also attempts to explain the behavior of the highest, most developed forms, among whom we find the human species.

The different theories of natural selection result in different ways of approaching morality. Of particular importance for our concerns is the question of the "units of selection," that is, at what level does natural selection take place: at the level of the gene, of the organism, or of the group-species?²³

²³Cf. E. Sober, *Philosophy of Biology* (Oxford, 2000), 89–120.

Depending on the answer, we will discover either selfish or altruistic behavior in nature. If the unit of selection is the gene or the organism, then selfishness will be at the basis of all animal, including human, behavior. But if the unit of selection is located within the group, we could see some organisms ready to offer themselves up for the good of the species, thus revealing altruism as part of natural human behavior. Let us briefly consider these two options.²⁴

1) The first option: egoism is the natural mode of behavior and any apparent altruism can in the end be reduced to a more or less sophisticated form of egoism.

The title of a well-known work is significant for characterizing this position: *The Selfish Gene*.²⁵ The biology proposed by the author, Richard Dawkins, has been labeled reductionistic because it explains everything that happens to the organism solely through a consideration of its parts: that is, everything can be explained at the level of the gene. Samuel Butler expressed the same problem thus: “a chicken is just an egg’s way of making another egg.” This means that the organism comes to be seen as a survival mechanism of the gene. We are able to predict everything about the whole by setting out from the part and its selfish behavior, but, at the same time, there is no way that leads back to the part from the whole.

2) This first position has received criticism from biologists who wish to propose a more balanced point of view. Consider, for example, the work by E. Sober and D. S. Wilson, *Unto Others. The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*,²⁶ which advances the thesis that natural behavior is at least in part altruistic, and that natural selection does not behave in a selfish way. On the contrary, there are various examples of self-sacrifice in which one member chooses, for the good of the community, not to live any more.²⁷

²⁴For the following, see the account given by Michael Ruse, *Philosophy of Biology Today* (Albany, N.Y., 1983).

²⁵Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York, 1976).

²⁶Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others. The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

²⁷“[T]he trematode parasite *Dicrocoelium dendriticum*, which spends the adult stage of its life cycle in the liver of cows and sheep The eggs exit with the feces of the mammalian host and are eaten by land snails, which serve as hosts Two generations are spent within the snail before the parasite forms yet another stage, the cercaria, which exits the snail . . . and is ingested by ants. About fifty cercariae

This explanation allows for the possibility of a return from the whole to the part.

These proposals suggest a close relationship between the questions about the organism and those about human moral behavior. They can help us to understand human action, provided that they are not considered an ultimate explanation, which would reduce morality to a natural process.²⁸ If we set the foundations of ethics within a biological process, we lose the novelty contained in human action and freedom becomes something that is simply mechanical.²⁹ Either self-love or love for the species, according to this position, would be the force that makes the world go around. But here love would be little more than a word—it would be reduced to a mere mechanism that is incapable of playing any role in morality as such. Dualism would be overcome, to be sure, but only by eliminating one of the two terms of the problem.

There is another way to explain the relation between ethics and biological science. One representative of this method is the biologist F. J. Ayala,³⁰ who claims that morality has no foundations in evolutionary biology. It is necessary to make a distinction, he states, between the realm of positivistic sciences and the other, separate, realm of reality, which is that of religion, morality, and the

enter the ant along with its meal. Once inside, the parasites bore through the stomach wall and one of them migrates to the brain of the ant . . . causing it to spend large amounts of time on the tips of grass blades. Here the ant is more likely to be eaten by livestock, in whose bodies parasites may continue their life cycle . . . The brain worm, which is responsible for putting the ant in the path of a grazing animal, loses its ability to infect the mammalian host. It sacrifices its life and thereby helps to complete the life cycle of the *other* parasites in its group” (ibid., 18).

²⁸Cf. the discussion as presented by Sober, *Philosophy of Biology*, 206–213. Cf. also Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others*, 3.

²⁹Let us note, in passing, another consequence of this position. It reduces the moral option, in a simplistic way, to a matter of choosing between egoism and altruism. If an intermediate position is found, such as that of inclusive fitness (organisms can grow or develop by judicious donation), it is reduced to a kind of egoism. Any understanding of nature that fails to take the irreducibility of the personal world into account ends up imprisoned within this dilemma: either an egoism as the contrary of altruism, or an altruism as the contrary of egoism. The possibility of overcoming this perspective by a consideration of the *communio personarum* is closed off if we take any form of mechanism as our guiding principle.

³⁰Cf. Francisco J. Ayala, “Intelligent Design: The Original Version,” *Theology and Science* 1 (2003): 9–30.

arts. It is in this latter sphere that questions about human life that science cannot answer ought to be posed. Ayala thus manages to resolve the problem of morality, but only by establishing a separation between nature and the world of spiritual values. The result is that God is confined entirely within the higher layer of reality.

This is why Ayala can claim to be in accord with an essay by D. L. Hull, in which the God of evolution is accused of cruelty.³¹ If we, following St. Paul's advice to the Romans, proceed from this Creator to his works, then, according to Hull, we will find a cruel God who is careless, wasteful, and abusive of his creation. In sum, the God of evolution, the God of science, is a God who does not care for the world and has nothing to do with the Christian or Jewish God.³²

But this does not lead Ayala to the conclusion that we must set religion aside. On the contrary, one can accept the Christian God because he belongs to another realm of reality and thus never enters into conflict with science. In the end, the solution turns out to be simply to disconnect God from creation. But in so doing Ayala ends by defending a dualism of which he is perhaps unaware. Nature becomes closed in on itself and is unable to reveal the face of God.

Let us conclude: the explanations touched on so far result either in a) a materialism or naturalism, whether selfish or altruistic,

³¹Cf. *ibid.*, 32; the reference within the article is to D. L. Hull, "The God of the Galapagos," *Nature* 352 (1991): 485–486.

³²Cf. Hull, "The God of the Galapagos," 485–486: "What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomena epitomized by the species on Darwin's Galapagos Islands? The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain, and horror. Millions of sperm and ova are produced that never unite to form a zygote. Of the millions of zygotes that are produced, only a few ever reach maturity. On current estimates, 95 per cent of the DNA that an organism contains has no function. . . . Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history may be like, He is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not a loving God who cares about His productions. He is not even the awful God portrayed in the book of Job. The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray." Cf. Ayala's statement: "The defective design of organisms could be attributed to the gods of the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, who fought with one another, made blunders, and were clumsy in their endeavors. But, in my view, it is not compatible with special action by the omniscient and omnipotent God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" ("Intelligent Design," 29).

that reduces human action to a natural process, or b) a dualism that separates science and God. This second position seems to be the only one that would justify adherence to religious faith.

In order to consider more rigorous philosophical reflections, we must go back several years and examine the work of a disciple of Heidegger, the German philosopher Hans Jonas. His writings will prove useful in our attempt to arrive at a different approach from those just presented.

b. Hans Jonas

To understand Hans Jonas' approach we must first take a short look at his biography. Jonas studied under Heidegger and wrote a doctoral dissertation on Gnosticism. Heidegger's behavior during World War II was, for Jonas, an important event in the history of ideas. Existentialism showed its incapacity to maintain the authentic existence it preached. What was the problem? For Jonas, the answer lay in the surprising relationship he discovered between Existentialism, on the one side, and the Gnosticism he studied for his dissertation, on the other. The key for understanding the connection was the dualism within both systems, a dualism between man and nature, between the anthropological mode of existence and the being of the rest of the world; it was a case of a total discontinuity for both systems. Lacking any roots in nature, Heidegger's authentic existence remained an absolute freedom that was incapable of opposing the most terrible of atrocities when the time of Nazism came.³³

Jonas attempted to overcome this dualism by connecting the human sphere with the realm of all natural life.³⁴ He started by pointing out the impossibility of understanding the organism in terms of mere matter, which he demonstrated through a detailed analysis of the metabolism of the amoeba. In the metabolic process

³³Cf. Lawrence Vogel, "Hans Jonas's Exodus: From German Existentialism to Post-Holocaust Theology," in Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Ill., 2001), 1–40.

³⁴For the following, cf. Hans Jonas, "Evolution and Freedom: On the Continuity Among Life Forms," in *Mortality and Morality. A Search for the Good After Auschwitz* (Evanston, Ill., 1996), 59–74 and also his *The Phenomenon of Life*.

there is a continuous exchange of matter between the organism and the exterior world. An external observer who considered the entirety of the universe in terms of particles and their movement according to mathematical laws could attempt to explain the living being as a particular combination of matter; however, considering the fact that the matter of the organism continually changes, in the end he would be unable to assign the organism any proper identity at all.

And yet we know that this unity exists. We can be sure, Jonas says, because one is oneself an organism and thus able to see the organism from the inside. This is an advantage, or even, *the* great advantage, of being a body. We can conclude, then, that a) because of metabolism the unity of the organism cannot be reduced to a mechanical one, and b) another explanation exists and is available to us, who are internal observers of the phenomenon of life.

When asked to give a reason for this unity, Jonas answers that the identity of the organism is based on the constitution of an inwardness, an interiority of life, in contrast to a unity of dead matter. This situation can be described as freedom. It is worth noticing that this freedom has its foundation precisely in a dependence on matter: the organism must continually renew its matter in order to live, and this very exchange constitutes its being. The organism must, so to speak, regain its being at every moment, by way of a continuous exchange. Freedom is thus achieved at a great cost: the cost of being always at risk because of having abandoned the peaceful state of, say, a dead stone—and the stone will surely outlast the organism. It is in this way that time, in a different sense from the physical time of matter, comes into play as a fundamental dimension of living existence. For the organism, time means that it must always face the possibility of death.

According to Hans Jonas, then, freedom has to do with the organism and the body. Moreover, it is the primary feature of the organism; it is the feature that allows us to understand its secret. This inwardness, which is always in need of continuous exchange with the exterior world, and the consideration of the stream of time as an interior measure of the organism, together allow for a description of life as an adventure that is always threatened by death. This is why we can call Jonas' attempt an existentialist analysis of all forms of life. This means, of course, an enriched conception of the life even of the amoeba, but it also implies a different concept of existentialism and existentialist freedom.

Let us develop this latter insight. In the case of the organism it is no longer a question of an absolute freedom detached from the material world, but rather a freedom that is dependent on matter and its properties and laws. It is a freedom that needs continual support from the environment, that is always linked to necessity. As the forms of life become more perfect, their freedom increases; so, too, however, does their dependence, so that we can say that the ultimate goal of life cannot be independence as such.³⁵ The increase in freedom means a simultaneous increase in fragility. And these statements hold for human existence as well.³⁶ This is the way Jonas overcomes dualism: progressive spiritualization brings about at the same time a progressive dependence on the environment; a progressive, so to speak, materialism.

Jonas' examination of the amoeba then arrives at the point of *reductio in anthropologiam*: it affects the way we see man. From this point of view we can say that the question of organism and freedom is not merely a speculative exercise, but remains extremely important for a correct comprehension of the human person. If Jonas' account holds true, human freedom always depends on a previous natural order that is the condition for its very existence. The study of nature belongs thus to the study of ethics.³⁷

Can we now move forward to speak, not only of a relationship between the organism and freedom, but also of a relationship between the organism and love? Jonas offers us some hints in this direction. In his understanding, freedom implies a mechanism of transcendence. We can thus identify in this freedom an element of love, understood as a tendency towards the higher levels of life in the evolutionary track. This is how Jonas can accept a kind of love

³⁵“[I]nner identity, by being open to what is outside, becomes the subject-pole of a communication with things which is more intimate than that between merely physical units. In this way the exact opposite of isolation emerges from the isolation of the organic structure” (Jonas, *Mortality*, 69).

³⁶“We note here that independence as such cannot be the ultimate good of life, since life is just that mode of material existence in which being has exposed itself to dependence (of which metabolism itself is the prime form) in exchange for a freedom closed to the independence of stable matter” (Jonas, *The Phenomenon*, 103).

³⁷“[E]thics becomes part of the philosophy of nature. . . . Hence would result a principle of ethics which is ultimately grounded neither in the autonomy of the self nor in the needs of the community, but is an objective assignment by the nature of things (what theology used to call the *ordo creationis*)” (ibid., 282–283).

in the things themselves, an *eros* already present in mere matter that is a striving towards transcendence.³⁸

However, as was the case with the ancient philosophers, this love is by no means reciprocal. In order for freedom to be present, the transcendent God must withdraw from the world and leave it alone. He is in no way present in the normal course of events.³⁹ This *eros* present in things remains a blind force and not a *logos*, it is not a rule or program with a final destination that could be equated to the design of a divine programmer.

This seems to me to be the greatest weakness in Jonas' account. In his explanation of the organism, the dimension of relationship and association has not been taken enough into consideration. On the human level, this results in singling out self-consciousness as the main prerogative of man, without giving any weight to the communion of persons. Ultimately, this fact has consequences for his conception of God and his action in the world as well. Because freedom is the predominant characteristic of life, and because of the way Jonas understands freedom (based, roughly, in self-consciousness and self-determination), the only way of conceiving of God's respect for his creatures is in terms of a withdrawal of the divine being from the world. But we will return to these points later.

c. *Wolfhart Pannenberg*

We turn now to the work of German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has attempted to provide an account of the relationship between theology and the natural sciences, especially physics. In a series of texts written over several years, Pannenberg

³⁸Cf. Jonas, "Matter, Mind and Creation," in *The Phenomenon*, 186.

³⁹Jonas does not view the natural laws in sheer contradiction to divine intervention. This possibility is opened *de iure*, but Jonas rules it out in order to provide an account for the presence of evil, especially as experienced in Auschwitz, where his mother was murdered. On the other side, a revelation is not excluded, but it is possible only through the divine action in man, and not by divine interference with the material world. Jonas explains his ideas on this subject in his interesting account of the importance of Bultmann's work. See "Is Faith Still Possible? Memories of Rudolf Bultmann and Reflections on the Philosophical Aspects of His Work," in *Mortality*, 144–164.

demonstrates the way God is present and at work inside the world.⁴⁰ This presence is important to underscore because the failure to correlate theology with the natural sciences can result in a separation of faith and life that leads to practical atheism. Let us ask then: is there any relation between divine action and natural processes? Pannenberg thinks so, and tries to explain his answer by bringing together two concepts that seem, at first, very different: the concept of “field,” provided by quantum mechanics, and the biblical concept of “pneuma.”

Modern science has developed the concept of a field of force as a means to give a comprehensive view of all physical phenomena. One important feature of a field is that it is not related directly to matter, but rather to space and time. Particles can be viewed as singularities of a field of force, but the field cannot simply be reduced to matter. This is why Pannenberg claims that modern physics is no longer materialistic.⁴¹

We can turn then to the second concept: Spirit. For the Bible, Spirit is not primarily synonymous with “mind” (this notion enters the Christian tradition later on, under Origen’s interpretation), but rather with “wind” or “breath.” It is close to the notion of Spirit found in the Stoics, for whom the Spirit pervaded everything and gave unity to the universe. The Bible maintains a similar notion but with an important difference: according to Scripture, the Spirit is a force that works in creation not only by giving unity to its elements, but also and especially by bringing all things into the dimension of transcendence, that is, into the divine realm.

Pannenberg tries to connect this biblical concept of Pneuma as an all-pervading divine force with the idea of a field. Of course, the meaning the concept acquires here differs from what scientists intend by it. And yet there is a point of connection, for the only thing essential for the concept of a physical field is the existence of space and time, and not necessarily a consideration of matter. This means that we can speak of the Spirit as a field without a material

⁴⁰Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature. Essays on Science and Faith* (Louisville, Ky., 1993); id., “Faith in God the Creator and Scientific Cosmology,” *Communio* 28 (2001): 450–463; id., “Gott und die Natur,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 58 (1983): 481–500; Balthasar gives an account of Pannenberg’s proposal in the third part of his *Theologik*, where he deals with the problem of the Spirit as soul of the world (cf. *Theologik III*, 383–395).

⁴¹Cf. Pannenberg, *Towards a Theology of Nature*, 156.

conception; it suffices to relate the Spirit to space and time. Of course, the connection between God and space and time is a transcendent one, but it exists nonetheless and can be related via analogy to the physical concept of field.

Once this is established, it still remains to make an explicit connection between the concept of “field” and the notion of contingency, which is a crucial association for Pannenberg because of the unique compatibility between the contingency of all events and the novelty of the future. It is this contingency that refutes the deterministic assumptions of mechanistic physics and so allows a vision of God as Lord of history. It is in this way that the physical world remains open to divine action, which is a creative action that is analogical to the way a field works and not in contradiction to it (as would be the case between “spirit” and “matter”). That means that the possibility for transcendence opens up inside the very constitution of the physical world.

Let us summarize the most interesting features of this approach for our present purpose: a) Pannenberg considers the interplay of the Spirit of God not only with the living organism, but with all of creation; b) he offers a vision of nature that, like that of Jonas, is open to divine intervention, to transcendence, and to the novelty of the future; although Pannenberg does not speak of love, he underscores the newness of the action of God and his creative power, which are important features of love; and c) in adopting a theological point of view Pannenberg introduces the biblical concept of the Spirit of life into the discussion, which is important because the presence of the Spirit is the usual path Christian theology takes to approach the issue of love in the world, and so of love moving everything.⁴²

Pannenberg’s attempt, of course, has to be situated within the whole of his theology of history. One important objection can be raised here, which is the matter of the excessive weight Pannenberg gives to the future. It is true that the future is important in human history, but, at the same time, we cannot allow it to obscure the

⁴²Cf. the following sentence by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 2: *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 356: “The formative spirit in nature, as yet unconscious, presupposes an absolute and real Spirit that communicates to it the Idea to be aimed at, namely, man, so that this Idea is always approaching, always realizing itself.”

crucial importance of the present. Love is not only a promise, it is also a presence. We are not only projects to be elucidated by our future, but the reverse is true as well: our present determines the future.⁴³

The contributions of these philosophers and theologians have prepared the way for us to begin to answer our original question. Before moving on, it is interesting to note that both Pannenberg and Jonas draw connections to the same period of history: the first two centuries of Christianity, when Gnostic doctrines flourished and the Stoics still held a prominent place within Hellenism. Both Pannenberg and Jonas fail to consider, however, the answer that some important Fathers of the Church of this time gave to the same challenges. Our own analysis would be incomplete if we did not first turn to attend to the voices of these Fathers.

4. *A theological approach in the second century*

Let us recall that Hans Jonas began his academic career with a dissertation on Gnosticism. His analysis led him to identify Gnosticism with the existential philosophy he had learned under Heidegger. It is, then, interesting to note that the most important forces in countering Gnosticism were precisely the theological efforts of Justin, Irenaeus, and the Church Fathers of the second century. Just as, for Jonas, Gnosticism shed light on today's philosophical problems by illuminating a negative side, could it not also be the case that the way out of Gnosticism provided by these Christian theologians could point to a way out of today's dualism as well?

For his part, Pannenberg bases his argument on the similarities between the physical concept of field and the Stoic doctrine of the Spirit, preferring the latter to Origen's interpretation (Spirit as mind) because he finds the Stoic doctrine closer to biblical thought. It is interesting that we find a similar doctrine of the Spirit in the Church theologians of the second century, either because Stoicism was still influential or because they were closer to the biblical mindset.

⁴³The same criticism can be made of Pannenberg's *Grundzüge der Christologie*. In Pannenberg's Christology excessive weight is given to Jesus' future, with the danger of not giving enough importance to his present identity as Son of God already during his earthly life.

We will therefore examine the answer given to Marcion and the Gnostics by the Fathers of the second century, who will, hopefully, provide us with the theological structure to continue filling out the lines begun by Jonas and Pannenberg.

a) The link between creation and redemption

We will begin by highlighting the interconnection between creation and redemption that was fundamental for the early Fathers of the Church, as the following examples will demonstrate.

In his letter to the Corinthians,⁴⁴ Clement of Rome speaks of the concord and peace of the created universe. The order of natural things is interpreted in terms of subjection to the Lord, as obedience to his will. This obedience results in peace and love between everything, a bond of love that holds the universe together.

The idea has to be understood within the context of the whole letter to the Christians of Corinth, whom it admonishes to obtain unity through the bond of charity (cf. the hymn of 1 Clem 49). When read in this context, the text shows that there is for Clement a real relationship between Christian charity and the obedience that every creature gives to God's rule. Moreover, for Clement, creaturely love and obedience manifest their total potentiality in the Christian people, because love and obedience are in this case related to the revelation of Christ, who died for us on the Cross in order to bring us fullness of peace and reconciliation. An interplay between redemption and the processes of nature is implicit here.

Other authors of the early Christian tradition established the same analogies between the created world and the work of redemp-

⁴⁴Cf. 1 Clem 20: "The heavens are moved by His direction and obey Him in peace. Day and night accomplish the course assigned to them by Him, without hindrance one to another. The sun and the moon and the dancing stars according to His appointment circle in harmony within the bounds assigned to them, without any swerving aside. . . . All these things the great Creator and Master of the universe ordered to be in peace and concord, doing good unto all things, but far beyond the rest unto us who have taken refuge in His compassionate mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the majesty for ever and ever. Amen."

tion. Tertullian explains the theological significance underlying the analogy:

In His works did God write it, before He wrote it in the Scriptures; He proclaimed it in His mighty deeds earlier than in His inspired words. He first sent Nature to you as a teacher, meaning to send Prophecy also as a supplemental instructor, that, being Nature's disciple, you may more easily believe Prophecy, and without hesitation accept (its testimony) when you come to hear what you have seen already on every side.⁴⁵

Among other authors who drew the same comparisons we find, for example, Theophilus of Antioch. He established a relation between the anointment used in the pagan world and the Christian anointment with the oil of God. Just as many objects in the ancient world (e.g., ships, houses, and some tools) were anointed with oil and thus obtained a dynamic perfection, a final preparation, and an embellishment for their use, so were the Christians anointed with the Spirit.⁴⁶ This is not a case of bad apologetics, but of deep theology. Theophilus has in mind a link that unites the created world with the Christian redemption. In the context of biblical tradition, this link is understood as the Spirit of God who gives life to everything.⁴⁷

The first Christians came to the conclusion that there was a link between this Spirit and the Holy Spirit that was given by Christ at Pentecost. The experience of the encounter with the

⁴⁵*De Resurrectione*, XII. Tertullian is speaking of the resurrection of the flesh, attested to by all the natural processes.

⁴⁶Cf. *Ad Autolyicum* I, 12: "And about your laughing at me and calling me "Christian," you know not what you are saying. First, because that which is anointed is sweet and serviceable, and far from contemptible. For what ship can be serviceable and seaworthy, unless it be first caulked [anointed]? Or what castle or house is beautiful and serviceable when it has not been anointed? And what man, when he enters into this life or into the gymnasium, is not anointed with oil? And what work has either ornament or beauty unless it be anointed and burnished? Then the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit; and are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God."

⁴⁷This is clear from the evidence provided by other Christian authors of the same period; see in this regard the important work by A. Orbe, *La unción del Verbo. Estudios Valentinianos III* (Analecta Gregoriana 113; Rome, 1961).

Risen Christ, giver of the Spirit, understood as the fullness of the work of God, was able to shed light on the meaning of all of creation.

b) The Spirit in all of creation

This is the foundation that allowed Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus to distinguish two different stages in the work of creation. First, there was the giving of form and structure, a process that was mediated by the *Logos of God*. Second, there was a primeval anointing with the *Spirit of God*, wherein the world acquired the possibility of movement and life. This Spirit was given first of all by the Father to the Logos, his Son, who was in this way constituted Christ (Anointed); it was then communicated through the Logos to all of creation in different measures according to the different grades of being. It was a function of this Spirit, following the biblical tradition, to move everything forward in a process of transcendence that came to fulfillment only in the human being.

In this way the Spirit was understood as a gift present in creation from the beginning, a gift that ensured the constant action of God in the world. The possibility of a gradual donation of this Spirit was linked to the respect due to the very properties of creation. On the one hand, God respected the reality of everything he brought into existence and did not wish to impose his presence; on the other hand, neither did he want to abandon the work of his hands. By means of the gradual gift of the Spirit he was able to stay inside the world and, at the same time, to create freedom, setting in motion a process of transcendence that respected the interior core of every creature.

What was the goal of this process? The freedom that was brought about by the gift was necessary in order to make this gift greater, for through this freedom a communion between the created world and the Creator was made possible. The initial presence was to become a perfect union. St. Irenaeus of Lyons speaks of the flesh “possessed by the Spirit, forgetful indeed of what belongs to it, and adopting the quality of the Spirit, being made conformable to the Word of God.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸Cf. *Adv. haer.* V, 9, 3.

It resulted, then, that this communion was an initiative of the Father, because the Spirit was his personal gift. “If, however, we must speak strictly, [we would say that] the flesh *does not* inherit, but is inherited.”⁴⁹ In this way the love that was in the creatures was not only the love of the creatures for God, but also the love of God for the creatures; because of this reciprocity, which only the trinitarian God was able to account for, we can speak properly of a project of communion.

It is important to note that this communion was not offered only within the limits of man’s spiritual realm. The crucial point was that communion was offered to all of creation in its material aspect, in precisely that aspect which was clearly different from God. That was the novelty of Christianity, in contrast to the Greek philosophers who had gone before: not only the soul but the body as well, and with it all the created world, could participate in the salvation of God. As one of the oldest texts we have on the resurrection of the flesh, written by Justin Martyr or one of his disciples, puts it:

For this [that the soul lives forever] we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Savior said this, and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing, beyond what we heard from Pythagoras and Plato and all their band, did He bring us? But now He has come proclaiming the glad tidings of a new and strange hope to men. For indeed it was a strange and new thing for God to promise that He would not keep incorruption in incorruption, but would make corruption incorruption.⁵⁰

According to the foregoing, then, the whole movement of creation can be seen as a process in which the Spirit unites, step by step, material flesh with the transcendent God. In this sense the Spirit of life, who gives life to every organism, can be understood as a bond of love between the creation and the Father, aiming always at transcending the present stage, while at the same moment patiently respecting the time and particularity of creatures.

⁴⁹Cf. *Adv. haer.* V, 9, 4.

⁵⁰Cf. *De Resurrectione* X.

c) *The summit of history*

The summit of this process is the center of history, its very densest hours: the death and resurrection of Christ. His filial obedience to the Father culminates and sums up his whole life. Christ's gift of himself is understood neither as an act of pure will or a self-commitment in disembodied freedom, but as the shaping of Christ's flesh, of his human passions, so that they become totally filial and obedient to the Father. This is precisely the work of the Spirit, of the same Spirit that will be given to the Christians gathered at Pentecost. The act of free self-giving by Christ has to do, then, with his organism, with his feelings and sensibilities, which are shaped during his hours of suffering. All this makes his death very foreign to the moral standards of the Greeks, which were based on activity and self-sufficiency and not on the fundamental receptivity that is proper to the flesh.⁵¹

In this way, the Spirit that is present in the organism from the beginning can be understood as a Spirit of love, of filial obedience to the Father. The action of this Spirit was always to realize this love in fullness; it looked ahead to the perfect image of God, the risen Christ, in which the flesh, in a sense, forgets itself and becomes full of the Spirit.⁵² The final goal is then the resurrected body, an organism fully moved by love, in filial obedience and communion with the Creator.⁵³

Let us summarize how the foregoing can contribute to an answer to our original question.

1) Love has to do with the organism by means of the presence of the Spirit of God in the world. This Spirit is a gift to all of creation from the beginning, a gift that comes from the desire of

⁵¹For further justification of these statements, cf. J. Granados, *Los misterios de la vida de Cristo en Justino Mártir* (Analecta Gregoriana 296; Rome, 2005).

⁵²Cf. *Adv. haer.* V, 9, 3.

⁵³Taking this into account enables us to understand the doctrine of the Cosmic Cross, which is present in authors such as Justin and Irenaeus. According to this doctrine, there is a small cross inscribed in every being, in even the smallest organism, because the fullness at which every movement aims is the Crucified Christ who appears as the fulfillment of all of creation. The same Spirit who will advance the surrender of Jesus inscribes a love in all things that is an anticipation of the love shown by Christ on the Cross. On the doctrine of the Cosmic Cross, see D. Wanke, *Das Kreuz Christi bei Irenaeus von Lyon* (BZNW 99; Berlin, 2000).

the Father to make his creation filial so that he will be able to unite it with himself. This love is not only a love of the world, a cosmic *eros*; on the contrary, it starts first in God, who is in himself Love. The Spirit is, first of all, the love of God for his creation: he is the only one capable of starting a process of communion that will draw everything into the divine realm.

2) The participation of the Spirit differs according to the different levels of being of the creatures; here we can speak of analogy. The Spirit's action is dynamic, moving all of creation towards a transcendence. The gradual performance of this movement is able to make provision for the properties of all of creation and to respect the freedom of all beings; thus the project of communion allows freedom to find its proper place, thanks to the gradual donation of the Spirit.

3) The final point of this movement, the risen Christ, allows us to interpret the whole process as the communion of God the transcendent Father with his material creation, which is truly different from him. The work of communion is not a fusion of what is similar (God and the human mind), but God's acceptance and union with what is different and what must receive everything from above (God's union with the human flesh).

In this way the relation between the Spirit and the flesh gives us a theological foundation to speak of the presence of love in the organism, of love that makes the world go around. It provides us with a theology that is able to take into account some of the points raised in the first section. Let us consider our initial question, then, in light of what has been said.

5. The love that moves the world: an attempt to provide an answer

The question of the relationship between love and the organic/physical processes is not just of speculative importance. It is a question of overcoming the dualism typical of our modern time and of enabling a different vision of both nature and the human being. If love has to do with the processes studied by physics and biology, then the natural sciences are no longer closed in themselves as the only place in our society for a common ground of objectivity; on the other hand, if love really is the motor of all things, then human love and freedom are no longer detached from the rest of creation and can be understood in a different light.

a. A point of departure

We have presented the position of a few Christian authors who offer a theological approach to our question. Their faith in the resurrection of the flesh enabled them to have a new vision in contrast to Greek philosophy.

The resurrection of the flesh means that the material world, present in man, enters into total communion with the transcendent God through the life-giving presence of his Spirit who is Love. In this union the creature preserves his dignity and properties as a creature, without being, so to speak, fused with the divine essence. The mortal body becomes a spiritual body.

This idea affirms that at the end of history any dualism between spirit and body will be ultimately unthinkable. But if this union with the Spirit is the final destination of the body, and if this accomplishment is not solely an external one, that is, unconnected to the body's earthly history, then we can say that the Spirit must be present in the body from the very beginning. In other words, if the Spirit is able to become the Lord at the final point of history, it is because He had been in a certain sense the Lord from the very outset.

Thus, starting from the revelation of the destiny of man through Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection, theology is able to shed light on the entire realm of the human sciences. The final point of all, the Father's love revealed in the risen Christ, can illumine the whole creation from its very beginning.⁵⁴

*b. A challenge to philosophy:
the possibility of a new vision*

It is by taking its starting point here, at this final stage in which the body is totally moved by the Spirit who is the bond of charity, that theology is able to propose to the philosophies of biology and science a possible understanding of creation as moved by love, that is, as *already* inhabited by this force that will become fully present at the end of time.

⁵⁴According to the same circularity that occurs between philosophy and theology, as stated in *Fides et ratio*, 73.

This will be important for our understanding of human love, as well. The love we find in the organism is interesting not only as a foreshadowing of human love, but also as an ingredient of it. It will show us how it is possible for the body to be integrated in the human act of love, thus revealing to us in a special way some of the most important features of true love.

This enterprise requires, of course, the proper use of analogy.⁵⁵ If we are to speak of love at the physical and biological level, the term must have an analogical meaning. From the perspective of theology, the analogy is supported by the presence of the Spirit, who is able to be given in different measures, respecting the properties of every creature. By means of this analogy the Spirit of Pentecost can be set in relation to the Spirit of Genesis.⁵⁶ It is God himself, then, who makes the analogy possible by the gradual donation of his Pneuma. The *princeps analogatum* of this analogy is the presence of the Spirit in the resurrected body of Christ and all the saints.

What sort of credence can a philosopher give to the idea that love is present in all physical and biological motions? If the words “freedom” and “love” are to have any meaning when applied to creation, the first thing to be established is the very fact that nature is not simply the deterministic application of mathematical equations to the movements of particles. This shift has long since taken place in modern science: nature is no longer conceived as entirely deterministic; the possibility of newness and surprise has entered the system.⁵⁷ This is a precondition of every discourse that attempts to relate the subhuman world to the human and divine ones.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Cf. Schindler, “The Significance of World and Culture,” 126.

⁵⁶As does Irenaeus when arguing against the Gnostics: cf. *Adv. haer.* V, 3, 3.

⁵⁷Cf., for example, the words of Ilya Prigogine, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry: “What is now emerging is an intermediate description that lies somewhere between the two alienating images of a deterministic world and an arbitrary world of pure chance. Physical laws lead to a new form of intelligibility as expressed by irreducible probabilistic representations. When associated with instability, whether on the microscopic or macroscopic level, the new laws of nature deal with the possibility of events, but do not reduce these events to deductible, predictable consequences” (Prigogine, *The End of Certainty*, 189).

⁵⁸Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, in *C. S. Lewis. Five Best Books in One Volume* (New York, 1969). This openness of nature is necessary in order to understand human freedom. It becomes essential for an understanding of the Christian revelation, for

Inside this open view of nature, the case of life deserves special consideration. It is here that Hans Jonas' analysis of the function of metabolism provides us with a good point of departure. We will now further his reflections towards an understanding of the possibility of love moving the world.

As we have said, Jonas shows that the case of life is unique because an identity of matter is insufficient for giving an account of the unity of the organism: the concept of inwardness is required in order to perceive the particular identity of an organism. This is how he makes it meaningful to speak of freedom even at the very first stages of the development of life, in terms of a detachment from the mere exteriority of dead things. This freedom is not conceived of in a dualistic manner, because the organism always needs the presence and exchange of matter. Jonas maintains that this freedom increases with the complexity of the living being but always in such a way that dependence increases as well; freedom grows at the same pace as dependence and fragility. The more the organism is free and spiritual, the more is it dependent on its environment for survival. In this way the ascent of evolution is not a separation of spirit and matter, but a common increase of both spirituality and materiality.

There is in all this process a striving toward transcendence. How is Jonas able to account for it? It is at this point that the German philosopher speaks of the presence of an *eros* throughout the process. This *eros* is a force that is present in everything, a force that strives towards overcoming the present structure and form. This *eros*, Jonas says, must not be confused with a *logos*. The qualification is important in order to show that there is no global design (*logos*) for the universe, no information present at the beginning that determines the future path.

The absence of a *logos* in nature shows us how, in order to safeguard contingency, Jonas feels it necessary to rule out any intervention of God. God withdraws from the scene of his creation, leaving all the responsibility of the enterprise of evolution in the

God does not reveal himself only in man's interiority (as could be the case for other religions), but in the reality of the flesh, in the concreteness of salvation history. Compare, in this point, the Jewish position of Hans Jonas, "Is Faith Still Possible? Memories of Rudolf Bultmann and Reflections on the Philosophical Aspects of His Work," in Jonas, *Mortality*, 144–164.

hands of the world and, ultimately, of man. Any intervention on God's part would either return things to the same dualism that Jonas wants to defeat (for God is pure Spirit, in opposition to matter) or destroy the autonomy of creation (for if God intervenes, the creature has no space; there is no room left for the adventure of life and the risk of its enterprise). Jonas is concerned with the dramatic structure of human existence itself and supposes that God's presence would destroy this structure.

*c. From a different freedom
to a different love*

Let us now address a weakness in Jonas' approach: his analysis of the organism takes insufficient account of the interaction between different organisms.

The results of some investigations in the realm of physics and biology serve to highlight the fact that systems are no longer considered the sum of different individual particles, granting both the whole's influence over the part as well as the part's over the whole. Jonas was aware of this, but he did not apply it to the interaction among organisms. As has been demonstrated by some biologists, one important factor by which organisms evolve is the symbiotic association among organisms.⁵⁹ In the most developed living beings, we find associations in groups, like bees in a hive or members of a herd, in which each organism subordinates itself to a more complex structure.⁶⁰ That holds true even for the most primitive forms of life; we can mention, for example, the recently discovered fact that if an amoeba finds problems in the process of self-division, it "calls" another amoeba who acts by this process as a kind of midwife to assist the first amoeba.⁶¹

⁵⁹Cf. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes. A Theory of the Origins of Species* (New York, 2002), who do a fine job of making this point, though its importance is somewhat overstated.

⁶⁰Cf. Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others*.

⁶¹Cf. D. Biron et al., "Asexual reproduction: 'Midwives' assist dividing amoebae," *Nature* 410 (2001): 430: "The 'midwife' cell is chemotactically recruited for this mechanical intervention in what is a surprising example of primitive cooperation."

All these facts invite us to conclude that the framework for the emergence of life is not only the interaction of selfhood and the environment, but expands to include the association among organisms and the formation of more complex entities, as well.⁶² The organism goes beyond itself by establishing further cooperation with other organisms; this sort of association is an important step in the ascension of life. We can state along with Jonas that every increase in freedom means an increase in dependence with the material environment; but now we can add that dependence on the environment itself mediates a dependence on other exterior forms of life. It is this latter point that better explains the movement of life towards transcendence.

In this regard it is interesting to consider the analysis of animal life conducted by Jonas, with a particular focus on animal emotions and passions. Jonas describes the passions within to his overall perspective as an increased level of freedom, a new degree of distance from the environment. I think, however, that in doing so he does not fully account for their important role. A more detailed analysis of animal passions reveals the way they enrich animal interiority, especially through contact with other living beings.⁶³ The passions demonstrate the animal's dependence on others and allow for the building up of an enhanced quality of life that begins precisely because of the living being's vulnerability before other organisms.

Analysis of the passions can help us understand what occurs when we arrive at the human level. What human experience is the continuation and overcoming of animal passions? This experience can be only the experience of love, which includes a relationship with others that leads to self-transcendence. Human love must be considered a step forward of a process that began with the very first forms of life.

⁶²The same phenomenon can be described in the inorganic world, as the introduction of the concept of synergetics by some scientists seems to indicate; cf. the work by A. Ganoczy, *La trinité créatrice: Synergie en théologie* (Paris 2003), who gives an account of this theological theories and tries to relate it with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

⁶³Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

The result is that this love cannot be understood as an act of pure will. An essential element of the experience of love is the integration of the world of the passions.⁶⁴ That is the way love makes it possible for another person to affect one's own world; this affection sets man in motion towards the achievement of a communion that must be built up in time in a free and active way by the patient integration of all the affective levels.⁶⁵ We see, then, that by means of this love, man is able to transcend himself and discover his true freedom via an increase of dependence and vulnerability.

Thus the communion of persons, and not self-consciousness alone, becomes the final stage of this process of transcendence that began with the first manifestations of life. Our proposal is that, through use of the analogy of the communion of persons, we can improve Jonas' approach and better arrive at his goal.⁶⁶ For if this communion is present in an analogical way at the origins of life, it is possible to account for the transcendence of the processes of life (which Jonas had difficulties with) while at the same time avoiding the dualistic conception of man (where he succeeded).

On the one hand, the development of life means an increased relationship with and openness to other forms of life that, unlike the surrounding dead environment, are capable of enriching and promoting an organism's life. This increasing openness allows an account of the transcendence of the process. On the other hand, this transcendence is going to be rooted in the body, which allows the living being contact with other forms of life that can enrich his own world. At the human level, the passions manifest in a special way this vulnerability to and dependence on the exterior world.⁶⁷ The passions are an integral part of human love, and they show us how the progressive spiritualization is realized through a progressive dependence and fragility.

⁶⁴Cf. José Noriega, "Affettività e integrazione," *Anthropotes* 20 (2004): 163–176.

⁶⁵Cf. Angelo Scola, *Hombre—Mujer. El Misterio Nupcial* (Madrid, 2001), 96–102. For an English translation, see *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borrás (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

⁶⁶Cf. the comments on *The Phenomenon of Life* in the review by G. Morgan, *Zygon* 2 (1967): 285–289; here, 288.

⁶⁷On the relation between the Spirit and this world of the passions, cf. the recent article by Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Geist und Bewusstsein," *Theologie und Philosophie* 79 (2004): 481–490; 485f.

All of the foregoing opens up the possibility of a new understanding of God's action in the world.

d. God's love inside the world

The use of the analogy of the communion of persons opens up a different understanding of the interplay between God and the natural world.⁶⁸ How can God allow his creation to be itself, which means to be contingent, capable of novelty and of different possibilities of free realization? For Hans Jonas, this is possible through the withdrawal of God from all the natural processes in order to preserve their freedom. But recall that, unlike Jonas, we have placed love, and not freedom only, as the interpretive key of all of reality.⁶⁹ Once nature has been set in relation to love, it is easier to understand the connection between nature and God. The law of all creatureliness is being opened to an external action that causes the creature to grow beyond its own limits.⁷⁰ If God intervenes in this way, he is not breaking the laws by violence, but rather fulfilling them, for these laws are set in accordance with the supreme law of love.⁷¹

The concept that allows us to understand God's way of acting in the world, then, is the concept of *synergeia*, a cooperation that is a way towards complete communion. How is this communion possible, given the difference between the transcendent God and the material world? To give an answer, we must consider the Christian, trinitarian notion of God, which claims that God is in himself communion. If God is understood as a communion that presupposes the presence of difference, then he is able to communicate himself to his creatures, respecting their difference as well. This

⁶⁸Cf. the discussions on this issue known as "The Divine Action Project"; for a detailed account see Wesley J. Wildman, "The Divine Action Project, 1988–2003," *Theology and Science* 2 (2004): 31–75. Modern physics offers various possibilities for understanding this action.

⁶⁹Thus the resurrection of the flesh is no exception, but the fulfillment (in a way, to be sure, that overcomes every possible expectation) of the power already present in creation.

⁷⁰Cf. Pannenberg, "Geist und Bewusstsein," 483.

⁷¹Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Concept of Miracle," *Zygon* 37 (2002): 759–762.

kind of interplay between God and the world is not that of a dualism, but that of a difference that is assumed inside the union of love.⁷²

Such a possibility is explained by recourse to the Spirit, as attested to by the biblical tradition (recall, in this regard, our analysis of Pannenberg's contribution). God can respect freedom because He has the Spirit of Love. The fact that this Spirit can be given gradually to creatures shows precisely this respect for their properties: God adapts himself to their rhythms of growing. That is why God's presence is not one of an infallible guide directing things to a final point of a static, pre-written script. He is able to partake of the adventure of his creation without destroying the risk and contingency in which, according to Jonas, the very significance of the enterprise of life lies.⁷³ The presence of the Spirit of God in the world is the key that allows an explanation of the continual divine action in nature.⁷⁴

Through the participation of the Spirit of life, God is present in living creatures, causing them to transcend their own capacities. As already stated, this transcendence is achieved, not in spite of, but through the dependence of the living being on the material realm. There is an ontological meaning to the scriptural citation: "Power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).⁷⁵ The flesh, weak and vulnerable, becomes the point where the Spirit touches the creature and moves it towards a wider horizon. At the level of man this flesh includes especially the passions and all the world of human affectivity; moved by the Spirit of God, the passions disclose a horizon of

⁷²Cf. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Can Western Monotheism Avoid Substance Dualism?" *Zygon* 36 (2001): 153–177, who maintains that a sort of dualism is unavoidable if God is to be considered active in the world.

⁷³The analogy of communion accounts too for all the waste in creation, a waste that cannot be understood in terms of a rationalistic account (cf. the objection by Hull, note 32: "Millions of sperm and ova are produced that never unit to form a zygote. Of the millions of zygotes that are produced, only a few ever reach maturity. On current estimates, 95 per cent of the DNA that an organism contains has no function. . . . Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history may be like, He is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not"). The meaning of such a waste is easy to grasp for one who loves: *da mihi amantem*.

⁷⁴Cf. Karl Barth, KD III/1, 60; quoted by Balthasar, *Theologik III*, 386.

⁷⁵In this sense the sentence is used by Tertullian (*De Resurrectione* 9) and Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* V, 2, 3; 3, 1).

transcendence within which man can walk towards the complete communion.⁷⁶

*e. The highest point of the interplay between love
and the organism*

Before concluding our reflections, let us consider the summit of the presence of love in history: the death and resurrection of Christ, which theology can view as the accomplishment of all the movements of creation.

We will start with a necessary qualification. Any assertion of love as the rule of all creation must take into account Paul's sentence in Romans 8:20–21: "For creation has been subjected to frustration, not of its own choice, but by him who subjected it—with hope—because creation itself too will eventually be freed from its bondage to decay and brought to the glorious freedom of the children of God." Whatever the analogy between the Spirit of Pentecost and the spirit of life may be, we can never forget that the creation is bound to decay because of the existence of sin. The Cross of Christ means a fulfillment but at the same time a judgment of all the mechanisms of nature.

Therefore, the redemption brought about by Christ also means a change in the understanding of love as mover of all things. This love cannot be conceived of as an uninterrupted ascension into more perfect forms of communion. In some aspects nature can be cruel and destructive, in sheer contradiction to that love shown by Christ in his final hour.

But Paul speaks, too, of the hope that this creation be redeemed. Taking into account all that we have said above, we can interpret Christ's life and Resurrection as the confirmation of all history, as the point where the activity of the Spirit reaches its highest summit. Focusing on this event allows us better to understand how it is that love moves everything.

It was his great love for God his Father that moved Jesus to drink the chalice. But this love was not solely a spiritual one. In the "hour" of Christ the passions of the flesh played an important role and were integrated into this love. The Savior experienced an

⁷⁶Cf. Pannenberg, "Geist und Bewusstsein."

intense longing for God, together with sorrow and even fear, with all the bodily reactions implied therein. All of these elements formed part of his act of obedience to the Father. All of creation, of which man is the synthesis and summit, was included in the body of Christ. It had been assumed by the Son of God and was transformed into the love of the perfect offering by the action of the Spirit (cf. Heb 9:14). Because of the very vulnerability and susceptibility to change of his body, Jesus was able to express in a new form, in the midst of time, his eternal Yes to the Father. “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me Then I said: . . . Behold, I come to do your will, O God.” (cf. Heb 10:5–7).

Only in this way can the bodily suffering of Christ be understood as a preparation for the bodily resurrection, in which the body is totally moved by the Father’s love. St. Paul expresses this idea to the Romans when he speaks of the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). For the Apostle, this redemption that all of creation seeks is equated to sonship and is related to the Resurrection and the spiritual body. The spiritual body is thus conceived by St. Paul as a filial body, a body that is in all things obedient to the will of the Father and docile to the Spirit.⁷⁷

If the Resurrection is the most perfect manifestation and realization of love in history, it is so because love has to do with every organism from the very origins of life. After these reflections we know that all of history can be seen as a progressive increase and purification of this love, an increase that has its summit in the Paschal mystery.

All this can be expressed, coming back to Dante, with the verses that the poet devotes to the Virgin Mary in the last canto of *Paradiso*. In the maternal womb of Mary, the coming of Jesus is not understood as a mere biological phenomenon. Dante saw an interconnection between love and the formation of Jesus’ organism. Thus, he was able to say that in Mary’s womb love was again enkindled: “Within your womb was lit once more the flame of that love through

⁷⁷Cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, “The Redemption of Our Body: The Riddle of Romans 8:19–22,” in *Romans and the People of God. Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids, 1999), 92–114; Christian Grappe, “Qui me délivrera de ce corps de mort? l’esprit de vie! Romains 7,24 et 8,2 comme éléments de typologie adamique,” *Biblica* 83 (2002): 472–492.

whose warmth this flower [the whole Church] opened.” “Nel ventre tuo si raccese l’amore” (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 7).⁷⁸ □

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⁷⁸The image of love as fire is typical for the consideration of love as a passion, as appears for example in the *Aeneid* (cf. IV, 2; IV, 23 et *passim*). This passion will find a final place in the Christian understanding of love, as attested to by Dante when he meets Beatrice at the gates of heaven, with words that echo those of Virgil: “conosco i segni dell’antica fiamma” (*Purgatorio* XXX, 48). For an analysis of love in Dante, cf. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 557–590.

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