

CHRISTIANITY AND EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS: SKETCH TOWARD A RECONCILIATION

by *Patricia A. Williams*

Abstract. Evolutionary ethics posits the evolution of dispositions to love self, kin, and friend. Christianity claims that God's ethical demand is to love one's neighbor. I argue that the distance between these two positions can be interpreted theologically as original sin, the disposition to disobey God's command and practice self-love and nepotism rather than neighbor-love. Original sin requires Incarnation and Atonement to unite God and humanity. The ancient doctrine of the Atonement as educative does not invoke the Fall. Its revival may help reconcile Christianity and evolutionary ethics.

Keywords: Atonement; Christianity; evolutionary ethics; love command; original sin; Michael Ruse.

Michael Ruse and his commentators have offered a fascinating and stimulating discussion of Christianity and evolutionary ethics in the March 1994 issue of *Zygon*. Neither Ruse nor his critics seem to feel that reconciliation between evolutionary ethics and Christianity is possible. In contrast, I think reconciliation between them is feasible. In this essay, I attempt to sketch such a reconciliation. Before doing so, however, I want to make a few preliminary remarks about doctrinal history and doctrinal skepticism within Christianity, for a historical and skeptical perspective on Christianity facilitates the reconciliation.

DOCTRINAL HISTORY

I assume that readers of *Zygon* do not think that religions are unchanging and eternal, dropped upon humanity from on high, lacking any relationship to the historical and cultural settings in which they developed. However, Ruse (1994a,b,c), George Williams (1994), and Michael

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Bradie (1994) all have tended to season some Christian doctrines with this fundamentalist flavor. Among these doctrines is that of the Atonement, and since I will comment upon it later, I will here use it as an example, making a few brief and very simplified remarks on its historical and cultural contingency, with the reminder that all other Christian doctrines (and all scientific theories, too) share such contingency.¹

Doctrines of the Atonement are attempts in Christian theology to explain how Jesus' life and death effect a reconciliation, or union, between a mortal and sinful humanity and the eternal and holy God. I say "doctrines" because there are many of them, none of which has been accepted as an official formulation in orthodox Christianity. Influenced by Greek culture, many early Christians believed that virtue depends on knowledge and sin is the result of ignorance. They therefore construed Jesus' life and death as an example to humankind, conveying knowledge of virtue to human beings, thereby effecting Atonement.

Because almost everyone in Christendom before modern times believed that Adam and Eve were historical figures and their Fall a historical event, many Christian theologians incorporated the Fall into their explanations of the Atonement. In a world in which dualistic beliefs were common, as they were throughout the early Christian era, theologians construed the Fall as the event that enabled the devil to enslave humanity, and they asserted that humanity has to be purchased from its bondage. Jesus' death paid the price, redeeming humanity from its thrall to the devil.

In a culture in which the devil is thought to exist and in which the Fall is a historical event, this version of Atonement doctrine makes sense. Later in theological history, when dualism is less acceptable, this interpretation declines before one that avoids reference to the devil. For the devil, God is substituted: now Jesus is the ransom paid to God's justice, and Jesus' death is a sacrifice to God. Given the notion of sacrifice as a bargain with or a bribe to the gods, this interpretation is not illogical, and the oddities of the demands of trinitarian doctrine are at least partly worked out by Saint Anselm on the grounds that God, being infinitely offended by human sin, requires an infinite sacrifice as satisfaction for that sin, making the sacrifice of beast, human, or angel inadequate.

Versions of this interpretation are what the authors of the *Zygon* articles denigrate (see Ruse 1994c; Williams 1994). Saint Thomas Aquinas used elements of it when he developed his interpretation of the Atonement, and therefore it is a doctrine that the Roman Catholic church still tends to promulgate, making it one of the best-known interpretations today. Nonetheless, a version of the early, educative view survived contemporaneously with it through the pen of Peter Abelard.

Protestant reformers revised much of the Thomistic doctrine, eschewing satisfaction theory. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin tended to see humanity as utterly sinful, completely helpless to rescue itself, and deserving eternal damnation. In this climate, Jesus becomes a substitute for mortal sinners, bearing vicariously the punishment they actually deserve.

In the modern world, which no longer takes the Fall as history, the devil as existing, sacrifices to gods as efficacious, or humankind as utterly depraved, interpretations of doctrines that invoke these things may be expected to appear "patently absurd" (Williams 1994, 39). But when placed into their respective historical and cultural contexts, none of these ideas is absurd. The context, of course, has changed, but this is not news to nonfundamentalist Christians (see, for example, Bultmann 1958; Busse 1994; Hefner 1994; Spong 1991, 1994).

DOCTRINAL SKEPTICISM

It may surprise those who have ground their theological teeth on the dust of Christian fundamentalism to discover that a deep stream of skepticism has flowed through Christian theology from its inception. Christian skepticism has three primary sources. First, early Christian theologians were aware that a message packaged for Jewish audiences would not convince Greeks because of cultural differences. Thus, Saint Paul addresses Jews at the synagogue in Antioch and preaches Jesus as the messiah whom their scriptures foretell (Acts 13 : 16-41). On the other hand, when he speaks to the Greeks of Athens, he preaches Jesus as judge of the world, appointed by God the creator, and he equates the creator with the unknown God to whom Athens had erected an altar (Acts 17 : 22-34). Paul, of course, is more Jew than Greek, but he must have been aware that he was indulging in cultural sleight-of-hand in one or both places and that the packages were not the message. Such relativistic treatment of cultures and images has long been a necessary staple of successful biblical translators who must supply a cross-cultural meaning (see Bratcher 1971).

Second, skepticism arises when Christians note the metaphoric nature of language, as they must when the devil is made an anthropomorphic slave owner. Thus, Williams (1994) is too literal when he claims that he knows what a father is, that a certain amount of DNA transmission is definitive. Is not George Washington, then, the father of his country? As the New Testament makes clear when it refers to God as "father," the term is used in a variety of metaphoric ways: God forgives like a father, as in the case of the prodigal son (Luke 15 : 11-32); God cares for humankind like a father (Matt. 6 : 25-33); God is a father from whom one inherits as a (metaphoric) son, so that all Christians, male and female, bond and free, are "sons of God" and inheritors of God's

kingdom who address God as *abba*, father (Rom. 8:15–16), even as Jesus did (Mark 14:36). As many theologians have been aware, all of the language is metaphorical. God as father, creator, judge, almighty, redeemer—these are all human terms, applied to a nonhuman being, hence necessarily metaphors, and anthropomorphic, and inaccurate.

Williams (1994, 38) asks, “Which of the Jewish myths does he [Ruse] think a Christian can do without?” Almost half a century ago theologian Rudolf Bultmann answered Williams’s question. He comments, “The course of history has refuted mythology” (1958, 14), then lists some of the refuted myths. Among them are the conception of the kingdom of God, apocalyptic, the devil as ruler of the world, the three-story universe, and miracles, including the idea that supernatural powers intervene in the course of events (Bultmann 1958). Today, theologians express similar views about the mythological nature of much biblical imagery and Christian belief. For example, Bishop John Spong rejects Jesus’ physical resuscitation while nonetheless maintaining that Easter is central to his understanding of Christianity (1994). It appears that Christianity can do without a great many myths.

Christians of mystical inclination treat their own religious experience skeptically, questioning the origins of that experience and the accuracy of the images that come to mind during meditation and contemplation (Underhill [1911] 1926). They are aware of the symbolic nature of the images, and many are poets, imbued with the poetical use of language as symbol. Thus, the symbolical nature of language and story are a part of the heritage of both biblical and mystical Christianity.

The third source of Christian skepticism is the Christian concept of God. God for the Christian is nonhuman, an alien being, a reality of a different order, “wholly other,” to use theologian Karl Barth’s expression. If we today wrestle with the problem of getting to know the alien other sex, albeit human, how much greater must be the difficulty of knowing the alien God who is not human. Perhaps this being, like the very stuff of which our material universe is made, is theoretically unknowable. For scientist and theologian alike, the idea of theoretical unknowability supplies the foundation from which ultimate skepticism must spring. No matter what our experience, experimental or personal, it is not adequate to the *Ding an Sich* of exotic lepton or alien God.

Michael Bradie thinks that religion rejects another sort of skepticism, methodological skepticism. He comments that religion seeks “final resolution” “comfort, solace, and infallible certainty” (1994, 51, 52), whereas scientists “revel in the fallibistic products of human reason” (1994, 52). However, a contrary case can be made. Many scientists enter science because science seems so certain, so unambiguous, so clear, so amenable to the exactitudes of mathematical resolutions. Many scientists have

clung with unwarranted faith to their outmoded beliefs, failing to negotiate paradigm shifts (Kuhn 1970). On the other hand, not a few religious people, particularly those with mystical tendencies, relish uncertainty and ambiguity and enjoy religion precisely because it seems a quest without end.

Those who feel most deeply that neither science in general nor evolutionary ethics in particular can be reconciled with Christianity might take a different view if they had a less fundamentalist, more historical and skeptical approach to the Christianity they eschew.

RECONCILIATION

As a philosopher of biology, I agree with almost everything Ruse has to say. I agree that human beings are the products of evolution, inheriting much from their nonhuman ancestors. They have evolved dispositions of certain kinds. These dispositions may be enhanced or nullified by cultural and environmental factors, and/or parts of a culture may be amplified through the dispositions. Human beings seem to have evolved to be rule-governed, to judge in terms of right and wrong, and to see at least some of these judgments as objectively binding. In addition, although Ruse does not emphasize it, human beings have evolved the ability to abstract and to reason.

I raise no objection to Ruse's analysis of the Love Command: the weak interpretation enjoins human beings to love self, kin, and friend; the strong interpretation enjoins love of neighbor as oneself, counting each as one and only one. And genuine moral effort is required to keep either interpretation of the command. I also think that Ruse is right that the weak interpretation receives direct, natural support from evolved dispositions but that the strong one does not.

I differ with Ruse on three important points. First, I disagree that the strong interpretation of the Love Command is so foreign to humanity that it appears "morally perverse" (Ruse 1994a, 19). Second, I disagree that the existence of God is refuted by either the problem of evil or the findings of evolutionary ethics. Third, I disagree that Christianity is undermined by evolutionary ethics. Rather, I think that foundational Christian doctrines receive support from human sociobiology in general and evolutionary ethics in particular. Thus, in contradiction to Ruse and most of his commentators, I think Christianity and evolutionary ethics can be reconciled.

In the remainder of this essay, I will argue for that reconciliation, dividing the argument into four parts to coincide with four Christian issues with which Ruse and his commentators take umbrage. Those issues are the problem of evil, original sin, Christology, and the Atonement. I begin with the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil. The problem of evil is not an empirically based problem, and therefore it is not amenable to resolution by science. Nonetheless, understanding its logic will clarify two points. First, it does not lead to atheism, as Ruse thinks. Second, the existence of original sin (or of evil in the world) is compatible with the existence of a benevolent God.

The problem of evil is conceptually simple and clearly logical. It is this. If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, and if God created the universe, then, logically, the universe would contain no evil. However, the universe does contain evil (in the form of undeserved suffering, at the least). Therefore, either God is not omniscient, or not omnipotent, or not omnibenevolent, or not the creator of the universe.

It is possible to argue the one point remaining, namely, that the universe really does not contain evil; certainly its containing evil is not a direct fact of observation. However, here I will accede to the general desire to stay within the bounds of common sense on this matter, and therefore I will grant that the world contains evil. But this does not refute the existence of God. God could have left the creation to lesser beings (not Christian doctrine, but held in Greek, Gnostic, and Oriental thought), or God could be very powerful but not omnipotent; knowledgeable but not omniscient; good but not omnibenevolent.

Which of the omni-characteristics to weaken is a vexed issue. Because, like Ruse, I want a real religion and a God worthy of worship, I do not want to weaken the attribute of benevolence, for I do not think that an evil God is worthy of worship. Because I am in deep sympathy with Dostoevsky's Ivan, whom Ruse invokes (1994c), I incline to weakening God's omniscience. Perhaps God did not foresee all that would happen as the evolutionary process ran its course on planet Earth and/or did not foresee the Inquisition, the Holocaust, or innumerable other historical horrors.

My point here is an old one: the intractability of the problem of evil does not disprove the existence of God. It merely leads to the logical requirement to weaken one of God's traditional attributes. From this point of view, it is possible that original sin is part of the human endowment, an unforeseen product of evolution.

Original Sin. The Christian doctrine of original sin is complex, and, like the Atonement, many of its versions treat the Fall as a historical event. Its essence, however, is simple. It claims that people are naturally disposed toward sin and naturally indisposed to obey God.²

Although not under that rubric, Ruse broaches the topic of original sin when he discusses the ultimate foundations for morality (1994a). His position on those foundations is roughly this: either human beings evolved morals indistinguishable from those that God commands, in

which case God's commands are redundant, or they evolved morals different from those that God commands, in which case God's commands are, from a human perspective, morally perverse. Ruse holds that the former case "imputes a teleological flavor to the course of evolution which is alien to modern science" (1994a, 23). I will deal with these issues one at a time.

The teleological flavor of modern science is a complex question, especially in biology, where organs have functions and therefore exist for a purpose (hearts to pump blood, for example). This purposefulness imparts a teleological flavor to biology. Based on contemporary mathematical cosmology, the anthropic principle provides an argument for teleology in the cosmos. By this principle, the cosmos is held to have developed in such a manner as to be life-promoting and, hence, oriented toward the eventual evolution of human life (Barrow and Tipler 1986). Thus, teleology is not quite so alien from modern science as Ruse would suppose.

Nonetheless, the possible coincidence between the evolution of human moral dispositions and divine moral commands might be merely that—coincidental, not teleological. As Ruse argues elsewhere (1989), the foundational structure of moral dispositions in all social creatures is likely to be similar. Hence, if God's morality is a social morality (an intriguing possibility for a trinitarian deity), human and divine morality are likely to coincide at a deep level without the evolution of human morality having been a result of God's plan. Ruse evokes the possibility of such coincidence in his discussion of the weak interpretation of the Love Command, whereby our moral obligations are to ourselves, our kin, and our friends. As Ruse notes, this sense of obligation to self, kin, and friends is approximately what sociobiology predicts of human ethics, because evolution promotes altruism toward kin and reciprocity toward nonkin, with whom we cooperate for mutual benefit. If God decrees the weak interpretation of the Love Command, then the divine decree is redundant. If divine moral commands are redundant, Ruse feels, the existence of God is disproved.

Ruse's logic here is not clear. If human beings behave as evolutionary ethics predicts, this might prove both God's existence and divine benevolence: what a grand plan, that humanity should naturally do and want to do what God commands! Under this scenario, humanity is heaven-bound by nature, with little need of grace. Yet, these sociobiological predictions often are erroneous, as the abuse of children, rape of relatives, and exploitation of co-workers prove. The existence of a divine command might help straying humanity walk the narrow path.

Whether or not such predictions are correct, the world this version of evolutionary ethics envisions is one without original sin. In it,

human dispositions and God's decrees coincide. Such a world would not necessarily be sinless, for actual sins could arise, confounding prediction. The creatures of such a world might be either "self-tempted, self-depraved" as John Milton judged of Satan's defiant band ([1674] 1966, 3, 130) or tempted by their depraved contemporaries or degraded environments.

An analogy may help clarify my point. Human beings are said to have a natural, evolved disposition toward sweet tastes and a disinclination for bitter ones. Yet some people cultivate a taste for bitter foods and drinks. This taste for the bitter is an acquired taste, not a natural one. In a world without original sin, actual sin might resemble an acquired taste, and like acquired tastes, it might be passed from generation to generation through familial, clan, or national culture.

Of course, sociobiological predictions about human behavior are more complex and less sanguine than Ruse suggests, predicting the evolution of dispositions toward deceit and power-mongering among both kin and neighbors (Trivers 1974). So even under the weak interpretation of the Love Command, there is room for original sin, the natural, evolved inclination toward selfish deceit and unfair advantage.

According to Ruse, the strong interpretation of the Love Command exhorts us, against our evolved inclinations, "to love everyone: family, friend, nodding acquaintance, and enemy, and apparently no distinctions are to be drawn. Indeed, one is positively to forgive enemies, virtually without limit" (1994a, 17). Ruse adds that he feels "uncomfortable with a god who demands of us (what our nature leads us to regard as) the morally perverse" (1994a, 19). In other words, human evolved nature leads people to reject the strong interpretation of the Love Command as immoral.

Clearly, Ruse contrasts the demands of the strong interpretation of the Love Command with the inclinations of our evolved nature. I agree with his contrast. However, I disagree that human beings find the strong interpretation of the Love Command immoral. Rather, people recognize those who have lived by the strong interpretation of the Love Command as moral leaders—Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa come immediately to mind. People consider these figures not moral perverts but moral exemplars. It is true that many people say, "Not I! I'm no saint," but this is to recognize one's own weakness, not the moral perversity of stronger souls.

Such ideals are not alien but are logical extensions of deeply felt moral obligations to others. The appeal of humanists such as John Stuart Mill ([1863] 1987), Alan Gewirth (1978), and John Rawls (1971), who argue for a version of universal morality from diverse premises,

suggests that the strong interpretation of the Love Command is an extension of human moral equipment. Arguing from sociobiological theory to universality in morals, Peter Singer (1981) makes this connection explicit. The strong interpretation of the Love Command is an extension of the dispositions evolved through kin selection and developed through abstraction and logic. When people abstract and think logically, they arrive at something like Mill's ethical position, a position Ruse admires: logically, each person counts as one, and each should therefore promote the welfare of all equally.

Yet, the gap between natural inclination and logical conclusion remains untouched by Mill's argument, accounting for a perennial objection to it: Mill's argument offers little motivation for people to treat themselves as only one among others and to promote others' welfare equally with their own. Ruse is right. People do love themselves and their relatives more than those in equal or greater need. It is this fact about humanity that strongly supports the existence of original sin, the sin inherent in human nature due to the action of natural selection, the sin of exclusive self-love leading to self-aggrandizement, nepotism, and greed; the sin of exclusive in-group pride, promoting out-group belittlement, deceit, racism, slavery, and genocide.

I do not need to list cases. There are too many; they are too familiar. And Ruse's analysis of forgiveness is also right. The natural person, the person acting on evolved dispositions and easy rationalizations, will not forgive 70 times 7 and will feel morally justified in not doing so. Such abundant forgiveness is not natural. That is the point of the story: to forgive even a fraction of 490 times is not within evolved human capacities; it requires the grace of God (this interpretation I owe to Michael Schmied). So Ruse's analysis offers solid grounds for believing in an updated, evolutionary version of original sin. The strong interpretation of the Love Command, the interpretation God is said to endorse, stands over against evolved human dispositions, convicting humankind of original sin. However, the command is not alien or perverse, for in high human moments, in the human ability to think abstractly and logically about moral questions and to apply that thought to human lives, people see that the strong interpretation of the Love Command is a logical extension of natural morality. But human nature rebels. Hence, the need for God's command conjoined with divine grace—grace, the God-given ability to rise above evolved nature and do the right thing, not as God's robots acting out of character and against human inclination, but because grace can enable each human being to become that kind of person.

Ruse suggests that this sort of stance cannot prevail against a kind of species-specific moral relativism. He argues that, if people's ancestors

had been termitelike creatures with a nutritional need similar to earthly termites, a nutritional need to eat each other's feces, then they would think that such ingestion would be ethical and, in doing so, they would be ignoring and ignorant of God's will (1994a). Again, Ruse's logic is not clear. If the strong interpretation of the Love Command is that rational creatures love one another, and if the nutritional need of such creatures is for their kind's feces, then to share one's feces would be to meet one's neighbor's real needs. Such sharing would be an act of neighbor love and therefore ethical. The fortunate creatures' evolved dispositions would coincide with God's command. If such were their total ethical situation, they would not need the sort of help that Christianity claims comes with the advent of Christ.

Christology. I continue to maintain that the logic of the early and medieval church is valid, on the whole, and that, therefore, Christian doctrine is not nonsense. On the other hand, I agree with most of the commentators that some of the alleged facts on which Christian doctrine is based are not believable to scientifically educated people, and that, therefore, many of the doctrines seem nonsensical today. However, in Christological doctrine there is no factual basis amenable to scientific refutation. The doctrine is a conceptual and logical one. Thus, it is not directly challenged by evolutionary ethics. Nonetheless, in raising the issue of trinitarian doctrine, Ruse and Williams have raised the issue of Christology, and because some understanding of Christology is important to the final section of this essay, I will treat the doctrine briefly here, beginning with the general Christian concept of God.

The Christian concept of God is more or less as follows. God is different from human beings, not human but an alien being, of a different substance from human substance. God is alive, not with biological life, but with life of a different sort. God is holy and pure, not sinful as human beings are. God is eternal, not mortal. In a word, God is transcendent and distant.

Substance is a technical term that needs explanation here. In Greek philosophy, a substance is that which makes an entity what it is, and without which it would not be what it is. Thus, when trinitarian doctrine claims that the Son is "eternally begotten of the Father" and "of one substance with the Father" (Nicene Creed, traditionally thought to have been formulated at the Councils of Nicaea, 325 C.E., and Constantinople, 381 C.E.), it is making a claim about the divinity of the Son. He really is fully divine. He is God.

The idea of substance is metaphysical, and it is incommensurable with modern physical notions. Thus, when Williams (1994) says that he knows what a son is and insists that the trinitarian concept "Son of God" be construed in modern biological terms of sperm and genes, he

is making a category mistake. The Second Person of the Trinity was not “eternally begotten” by God’s sperm. God’s life is not biological. Sonship here is a metaphor, meant to capture the substantial identity of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. That this Son is said to be “eternally begotten” of God whereas human beings are said to be “created” by God is meant to capture the metaphysical idea that the Second Person of the Trinity is of one substance with the Godhead, whereas humankind is of a different substance—not begotten but created, as I might create a figurine out of clay.

There is a second strand to the Christian concept of God. God is a God of love who loves human beings and seeks them. Human beings share in divinity insofar as they are created in the image of God—an image damaged or erased (theologians differ) by the Fall. Unity between God and human beings is possible, and, insofar as they share in God’s eternal life through God’s self-giving love, human beings may acquire eternal life. In a word, God is immanent.

A major difficulty posed by the concept of the one God as transcendent yet immanent is this: how is it that the transcendent God can be so immanent in a human being that unity between them is possible? God and humanity, after all, are of different substances. What could unite them? A solution developed after four and a half centuries of debate among Christians. God and human beings can be united through the person of Jesus Christ, because Christ is both fully human and fully divine. He is human from the substance of his mother, Mary, and divine from the substance of his father, God, two substances without confusion, yet one person without division. This is the Christological formulation of the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.). Despite its difficulty and technical language (glossed over here in my brief English paraphrase), it sufficiently resolved the logical tension posed by the immanence in humanity of the transcendent God to be accepted by the Greek and Latin churches and to survive the Reformation as well. In this formulation, Christ is the requisite mediator, a mediator not in the anthropomorphic sense of one who pleads the human case before the God-the-judge but a mediator in the metaphorical sense of a bridge. Christ’s substance is human, and therefore human beings can be united with him. His substance is also divine. He is God. United with his single person, human beings can be united with the Godhead. The Christology answers coherently the question raised, even as Ruse wants.

The Atonement. The logic of the Christology of Chalcedon requires an incarnation but not an Atonement. As I have adumbrated earlier, Atonement theology is a vast ocean shifting through cultural changes, and most of the ancient doctrines are either factually or morally

unacceptable to those who live on the threshold of the twenty-first century. However, there is one interpretation of Atonement doctrine that has considerable affinity with modern scientific thinking, namely, the educative interpretation. The educative interpretation of the Atonement rests on the premise that human beings are remarkably free—free to make their own choices, free to choose between good and evil. Sociobiology supports this point of view.

Biological and sociobiological research have shown that, compared to other animals, human beings are extraordinarily flexible, able to adapt to unique environments and to control the environment as no other animal can. In other animals, behavior seems partly or wholly innate. For example, there are birds that sing their species' song because they are born with specific brain structures (Balaban, Teillet, and Douarin 1988). Their song is neither learned from their environment nor created, but is hard-wired into the brain. Other animals seem to be unmediated products of the interaction between genes and environment. Diet in caterpillars, for example, influences whether they develop the appearance of a flower or a twig. Their genes allow for either possibility. After hatching, if they ingest flowers, they will resemble the flower; if twigs, twigs (Greene 1989).

One sign of flexibility beyond unmediated gene-environment synergy is the use of tools. Excepting human beings, nonhuman primates use tools more than all other animal groups, yet their repertoire is limited to three categories: threat or attack; food acquisition and preparation; and shelter and self-cleaning (Smuts et al. 1987). On the other hand, human beings use tools for every purpose imaginable and even build tools to make other tools. In addition, in human beings no behavior seems entirely fixed. Even the strongest dispositions can be overruled. Hence, some people starve themselves to death for a cause despite innate hunger and the desire for life. Others lead celibate lives by choice despite the strong pull of evolved sexuality. Others live in solitude despite human beings' strong social nature. Others sacrifice their own welfare and that of their children for strangers, as did some of the people of Le Chambon during the Nazi era (Busse 1994) despite the evolved human tendency to favor kin over strangers.

It is possible that the unusual flexibility human beings have inherited is not part of God's teleological plan but an unforeseen result of evolution. Evolution has made people far more flexible than other animals. People form more extensive kinship networks than other animals, developing clans and nations, but, as a result, they engage in devastating wars. People have long memories and creative imaginations, enabling them to learn from the past and plan for the future, but, as a result, death becomes a harm for them, for it marks an end to all the

plans and aspirations memory and prescience make possible. Human beings can abstract and therefore develop commitments to transcendent ideals such as justice and truth, but, as a result, they embrace prejudice and falsity. Against much Christian doctrine that erroneously connects original sin with a historical Fall from excellence, modern evolutionary theory suggests that people have evolved unique abilities. Yet, people also suffer unique harms. A benevolent God might well perceive such creatures as worthy of special attention, worthy of salvation, worthy of eternal life—worthy, yet unable.

Unique human attributes may require unique divine aid. People need role models in order to show them how to channel their unwieldy flexibility and to redirect their selfish dispositions. One of the strong biblical as well as doctrinal claims of Christianity is that God provided role models through judges, kings, and prophets and then by incarnation. In his humanity, Jesus furnishes an example of how to live. Because he also is deity, he reveals what God is like.

Jesus reveals a God who is different from the ancient gods. They needed human beings to feed them so that they might eat, be strong, and provide aid. To feed the gods is one of the oldest reasons for sacrifice. But this is not the God whom Jesus reveals. His God is one who comes to the people and feeds them, feeds them so abundantly that basketsful remain (Matt. 14 : 15-21; 15 : 32-38; Mark 6 : 35-44; 8 : 1-9; Luke 9 : 12-17; John 6 : 5-13).

From this perspective, the crucifixion and the Atonement are both educative. Jesus is doubly an example. He is an example of the perfect human being, giving himself for others even unto death. He also is the perfect revelation of God, a God prodigally self-giving, self-giving in the humility of the Incarnation and the degradation of the Crucifixion. In that degradation, the self-giving of God to humanity is complete. It seems especially complete under Spong's interpretation of post-Crucifixion events. Spong speculates that Jesus' body was buried with those of other criminals in a common grave and that the grave was never located (Spong 1994). In this scenario, God in Christ joins and identifies with the most despised out-group, becomes one of the despised among a pile of dead Jews bulldozed and buried in mass graves after the Holocaust.

Nor is this the ancient God who gives the law. Rather, this God breaks the law, breaks it because the strong interpretation of the Love Command is the foundation of all other laws (Matt. 22 : 36-40). Jesus disobeys the law. He breaks ritual laws, works on the Sabbath, forgives sins, and remits the legal penalty for adultery. His followers also break laws. They obey visions that tell them to ignore Jewish dietary rules (Acts 10 : 10-15) and to mingle with gentiles, converting them not to

Jewish law but to Christian freedom (Acts 11:1-18 and 15:23-31). They are expelled from the synagogues for not keeping the laws of the Torah (Acts 21:27-28) and persecuted by the state for not keeping the laws of Rome (Justin 1877).

This is the God whom Jesus reveals, a God who helps human beings break their biological laws, their evolved dispositions toward exclusive love of self and kin, because the higher law is the strong interpretation of the Love Command. The synoptic gospels offer an example of biological law-breaking at its clearest, an example that suggests that the contemporary religious passion for "family values" is a mask for biological passions rooted in kin selection. When Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are awaiting him, he replies, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother'" (Matt. 12:48-50, tr. RSV; also see Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21). Jesus eschews his biological family for his family of affiliation, then extends affiliation to the rejected, including Samaritans, gentiles, adulterers, women, and slaves. In part, then, the Atonement may be seen as an indictment of evolved dispositions that exclusively promote the welfare of self and kin.

CONCLUSION

I have offered a preliminary sketch of a possible reconciliation between Christianity and evolutionary ethics. The reconciliation depends upon the distance between evolutionary ethics and the strong interpretation of the Love Command. The strong interpretation of the Love Command represents the highest human ideals. Yet human beings have evolved not to follow it but, on the most generous construal of human sociobiological relationships, to adhere to the weak interpretation, loving self, kin, and friend and denigrating and excluding strangers. Theological assessment of this situation suggests that natural human life is pervaded with original sin. Because human beings have not evolved naturally to follow the strong interpretation of the Love Command, they need help if they are to do so.

Christianity claims that God helps. God does not condemn humanity for its natural dispositions. Rather, God recognizes humanity's divine potential resting in its evolved capacities for impersonal reason and love, fidelity and prescience, and so effects salvation through the incarnation and the Atonement. In these actions, God gives humanity three things. First, God offers an example of how human beings should live with one another by serving the stranger and the outcast even unto death. Second, God reveals the divine character, a revelation of copious

self-giving, a self-giving that enables humanity to break cultural and biological laws to follow the strong interpretation of the Love Command. Third, God provides a bridge between divinity and humanity in the unitary person of Jesus Christ, a bridge to eternal life because Christ unites in his person mortal humanity and the eternal Godhead.

NOTES

1. For short articles on Christian doctrines and their historical development, see Cross and Livingston (1974) and Ferguson et al. (1990). Walker (1959) provides a lucid history until modern times. For a sustained narrative treatment with references to other religions, see Armstrong (1993).
2. See Philip Hefner (1993) for a somewhat different slant on original sin.

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