

THE ORDER OF LOVE AND RECENT CATHOLIC ETHICS: A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL

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MANY SCHOLARS of Christian philosophy and theology might presume that there is little need in theological ethics for further research on the topic of love. Earlier twentieth-century works such as Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros*¹ and Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*² dwelt on the distinctively Christian nature of *agapē* and its presumed radical opposition to all merely human forms of love and friendship, infected, as was claimed, by egoism. Major Catholic texts such as Gérard Gillemann's *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*,³ Martin D'Arcy's *The Mind and Heart of Love*,⁴ Robert Johann's *The Meaning of Love*,⁵ and Jules Toner's *The Experience of Love*⁶ creatively employed recently developed philosophical methodologies—personalist, existentialist, phenomenological, and experiential—to deepen, intensify, and extend traditional Thomistic insights regarding the “love of friendship” (*amor amicitiae*) and the mutual complementarity of *agapē*, *erōs*, and *philia*. For the latter authors, our created capacities for natural love are taken up rather than negated within the Christian moral life.

These and other texts triggered such a voluminous output of articles and books on love over the last fifty years that one might assume this subject to be over researched and outdated. Yet the theme of love has been at the heart of Christian morality from its inception and, in spite of the degree of effort expended on it, remains subject to conflicting

¹ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1982).

² Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

³ Gérard Gillemann, S.J., *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, trans. William F. Ryan, S.J., and André Vachon, S.J. (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1961).

⁴ Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J., *The Mind and Heart of Love—Lion and Unicorn: A Study in Eros and Agape* (New York: Meridian, 1956).

⁵ Robert O. Johann, S.J., *The Meaning of Love: An Essay Towards a Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1966). Johann's contribution to questions of human nature and love continued to develop beyond that presented in *The Meaning of Love*. His later writings, most notably *Building the Human* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), draw upon American pragmatism but do not substantially reverse the basic lines of interpretation of love or of the relation of the human to the biologically natural found in the earlier texts.

⁶ Jules Toner, S.J., *The Experience of Love* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus, 1968).

interpretations and moral evaluations. E.g., recent theological preoccupation with the specificity of Christian ethics and, in Catholic circles, the ongoing debate between an ethics of autonomy and a *Glaubensethik* (faith ethic) reflect in part a controversy over the meaning of Christian love and over the relation between Christian love and natural love.⁷

This essay cannot resolve all of these issues. It intends to pursue a much more limited goal set by the failure of recent Catholic treatments of love to attend sufficiently to the problem of its ordering. Pursuing the implications of a characteristically Catholic assumption of the complementarity of Christian love and human nature, I will explore the possibility of critically appropriating recent scientifically-based theories of human altruism within a Christian ethics of love. One strength of the natural-law tradition is its openness to empirical and scientific information and theories and its employment of these in its account of human nature and morality. Today human sociobiology constitutes one such source for Catholic ethics, but it has been avoided or ignored by Catholic moralists. My thesis is that recent insights into the evolution and natural ordering of altruism provided by contemporary behavioral biology, and especially human sociobiology, can act as correctives to certain deficiencies that characterize recent Catholic ethics, particularly those regarding its neglect of the traditional notion of the "order of love" (*ordo amoris*). In particular I argue that contemporary behavioral biology enables us to perceive better the limits to human love, the biological basis of human sociality, and the natural basis of the ordering of love.

I will proceed in three stages: first, I examine the major strengths and weaknesses of recent Catholic approaches to love, using that of Karl Rahner, S.J., as my major example; second, I review Thomas' account of the *ordo amoris* and its basis in human nature; and third, I examine at length some of the major insights from contemporary behavioral biology regarding altruism, particularly the theory of "kin altruism." My major purpose is to reestablish the traditional "order of love" as a central concern in present-day Catholic ethics, and to indicate the relevance of contemporary insights in the natural sciences for our reflection on these matters.

⁷ "Natural" in this paper contrasts with "revealed," not with "graced." The autonomy position is exemplified in Joseph Fuchs, S.J., *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality*, trans. William Cleves et al. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1983), and the *Glaubensethik* in the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar, e.g., "Nine Theses in Christian Ethics," in *Readings in Moral Theology 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1980) 190-206. For a helpful review and analysis of the debate, see Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1985) esp. ch. 6.

RAHNER ON INTERPERSONAL LOVE

Karl Rahner's seminal article, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God,"⁸ provides a helpful illustration of some of the typical strengths and weaknesses of recent Roman Catholic treatments of love, most importantly their pronounced emphasis on existential dyads and the related failure to address the question of priorities. The other prominent texts mentioned above will be cited as pertinent to our argument.⁹ The burden of Rahner's article is to identify love as the connecting link between social action and Catholic spirituality (which obviously at times has been given otherworldly and quietistic interpretations). The general thesis of Rahner's article is well known in Catholic circles: that, "wherever a genuine love of man attains its proper nature and its moral absoluteness and depth, it is in addition always so underpinned and heightened by God's saving grace that it is also love of God, whether it be explicitly considered to be such love by the subject or not."¹⁰

Rahner is typical of contemporary Catholic theologians in general when he insists on the importance of understanding "what love is in itself," and yet fails to tell us precisely what he means by the term.¹¹ He does, however, tell us what love is not. Love is not, pace the manualists, primarily a duty, a heartless fulfillment of commandments, a sheer act of the will.¹² Without carefully defining the term, Rahner clearly understands love in terms of mutuality and communion, in sharp contrast to theologians like Nygren who define *agapē* as self-sacrifice¹³ or those who

⁸ Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of God and Love of Neighbor," in *Theological Investigations* 6 (New York: Seabury, 1969) 231-49. See also Karl Rahner, "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," in *Theological Investigations* 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1966) 439-59.

⁹ Other major treatments of love beyond the relatively few discussed here include Jean Guitton, *Essays on Human Love*, trans. Melville Channing-Pearce (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951); John Burnaby, *Amor Dei* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1947); John Cowburn, S.J., *The Person and Love: Philosophy and Theology of Love* (New York: Alba, 1967); Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1953); Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R., *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, trans. Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S., 3 vols. (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963).

¹⁰ Rahner, "Unity" 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 232.

¹² *Ibid.* 244. For example, Thomas Slater defines charity as "an act of the will by which we love God for his own sake above all things, and our neighbor for the sake of God." He reminds us that, whatever the status of our tender feelings, "charity belongs essentially to the will" (*A Manual of Moral Theology*, 2 vols. [London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1925] 1.115-16).

¹³ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*; also Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), vol. 2; and Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1978).

understand it in terms of impartiality or "equal regard."¹⁴ The chief biblical authorities in Rahner's argument, not surprisingly, are Johannine and Pauline, with their preeminent sense of *agapē* as "fraternal charity."¹⁵ Rahner as a Catholic theologian is not satisfied with the simple language of "love," but rather wants to speak about "charity" (*caritas*), and in its scholastic sense, i.e., not as philanthropy or altruism, but as the infused supernatural virtue of the love for God. For Rahner, as for Thomas, the divine-human relationship is analogous to friendship: through free and forgiving self-communication, Rahner writes, God becomes a "partner" in a personal and direct relationship between himself and man.¹⁶ This shift from law and obligation to interpersonal love leads to an emphasis on compassion and active service, the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25:34-46) being particularly important throughout Rahner's writings in this regard.¹⁷

The plausibility of Rahner's thesis rests on two "preliminary remarks," the full philosophical and theological warrants for which neither can nor need be reviewed here.¹⁸ First, he claims that the a priori, transcendental formal object of all concrete acts of neighbor love is God, whether or not this is explicitly recognized by the subject as such. Second, he maintains that all genuinely moral acts, i.e., those acts which involve "the full exercise of [a person's] free self-disposal,"¹⁹ are also at least implicitly salvific acts, in that each and every truly free and fully human act of the person constitutes a response not only to its immediate categorical object but also, at least implicitly, to God, its inescapable transcendental horizon. Thus, he claims that "wherever there is an absolutely moral commitment of a positive kind in the world and within the present economy of salvation, there takes place also a saving event, faith, hope, and charity, an act of divinizing grace, and thus *caritas* is exercised in this."²⁰

The heart of Rahner's interpretation of the religious significance of love lies in the centrality of personhood, and he is typical of recent Catholic theologians in drawing on Martin Buber's "philosophy of dialogue," and particularly his discussion of the "I-Thou" relationship, in explicating the meaning of personhood.²¹ The fully human world is not

¹⁴ Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1972).

¹⁵ Rahner cites John 15:12 and 1 John 4:7, 11. Pauline concern to build up the Christian community in fraternal charity is displayed, e.g., in 1 Cor 8:3 and 1 Cor 13.

¹⁶ "Unity" 245.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 234.

¹⁸ See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978) 1-137.

¹⁹ Rahner, "Unity" 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2d ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). See also D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* 364; Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 45-47; and Toner, *The Experience of Love* 134.

just personal, it is *interpersonal*. A person is "from the very first moment of his existence and throughout, the being that achieves a relationship with itself precisely by achieving a relationship with the 'other,' in the first instance the other creature, the 'Thou.'"²² Indeed, transcendental experience of the eternal Thou is made possible through categorical encounters with concrete, individual Thous. The experience of God, Rahner argues,

is possible only in and through man who has *already* (in logical priority) experienced the human Thou by his intramundane transcendental experience (of his *a priori* reference to the Thou) and by his categorised experience (of his concrete encounter with the concrete Thou) and who only *in this way* can exercise the (at least) transcendental experience of his reference to the absolute mystery (i.e. God).²³

The hallmark of personhood for Rahner is freedom, and not simply freedom of choice but, more importantly, freedom of "self-disposal," "the capacity of the one subject to decide about himself in his single totality."²⁴ Sounding very much the existentialist, Rahner claims that freedom is not simply the "capacity to do this or that but (formally) a *self*-disposing into finality; the subject (from a formal point of view) is always concerned with itself."²⁵ Just as in the act of knowing the "a posteriori object is the necessary mediation of the knowing subject to itself,"²⁶ so in love, communication with the personal Thou is the necessary mediation of the subject to herself. Rahner here gives a transcendental rendering of a deeply Christian vision in which the person finds herself ultimately by losing herself in the love of another person. In this context it does not seem to be an exaggeration for Rahner to say that neighbor love is not just one moral act alongside others, as it tended to be for the manualists, but "the basis and sum total of the moral as such."²⁷ For this reason, Fuchs, essentially explicating Rahner, writes that, "love of neighbor is *the* absolute value of every human morality."²⁸

Rahner's emphasis on freedom generates a more open-ended ethic than that provided by traditional natural-law approaches. He does not phenomenologically differentiate among the "different concrete forms of

²² Karl Rahner, "Why and How Can We Venerate the Saints?" in *Theological Investigations* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 13.

²³ Rahner, "Unity" 245.

²⁴ Rahner, *Foundations* 94; see also his "Theology of Freedom," in *Theological Investigations* 6 (1969) 178-96.

²⁵ Rahner, *Foundations* 240.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Josef Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970) 123.

love"²⁹ or develop a casuistry of the *ordo amoris* but maintains more generally that, in a transcendental way, all concrete forms of neighbor love act as mediations of the love for God. This accords with Thomas' position that in charity the various material objects of love in different relationships are all loved under the formality of the love of God (*ST* 2-2, q. 23, a. 1). The radical experience of God, Rahner maintains, "can be made only in an always already going-out into the world which, understood as the whole of man, is primarily the people *with whom* he lives."³⁰ Though true of all human relations, particular emphasis is given to "our turning towards the people we live with, and . . . our explicit communication with them."³¹ All human relations fall within the ambit of the biblical claim paraphrased by Rahner, that "whoever does not love the brother that he 'sees' also cannot love God whom he does not see, and . . . [that] one can love God whom one does not see only by loving one's visible brother lovingly" (1 John 4:7, 11).³² Commitment to social action and the common good is not inconsistent with this construal of neighbor love. Yet more attention is given to qualities like trust, openness, and availability that are more common to true friendship than to traits, particularly commutative justice, that characterize anonymous or strictly social role relations.

There can be little doubt that personalist approaches to love like Rahner's provided an attractive and much-needed alternative to the legalism, minimalism, and the more abstract, impersonal language of the neo-Thomistic manuals that dominated pre-Vatican II moral theology. Personalist reflections on the fact that we live in a socially and interpersonally constituted world plumb deeply into our social nature, which Thomas himself observed in our need for friendship, our lack of self-sufficiency, and our tendency to form political community (*ST* 2-2, q. 44, a. 2).³³ We have learned from the personalists to recognize more deeply our intrinsic relationality, the fact that we are not primarily isolated individual entities but rather constituted in relationship with other persons. Buber's philosophy of dialogue suggests an underlying recognition of the significance of communication and language, and therefore of community, as constitutive of interpersonal life.

These approaches to the moral life also suffer from some weaknesses, however, which form the context for the constructive agenda of this paper. First, the primary and almost exclusive framework for understand-

²⁹ *Ibid.* 244.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 246.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* 247.

³³ See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 3.2.117, in Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith, Summa contra gentiles Book Three: Providence, Part II*, trans. with intro. Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956) 127-28.

ing the lived world in Rahner's perspective is interpersonal. The individual is depicted primarily as a unique personal self in relation to other unique persons. Knowledge of the nonpersonal world is regarded as "less profound" than personal knowledge of the inexhaustible features of subjectivity and therefore its significance is downplayed or ignored altogether.³⁴ Personalism and existentialism incline their adherents to dismiss or at least to minimize the significance of the nonpersonal context of human life as "merely" extrinsic, objective, and abstract. As Gilleman and others have noted, the strong reaction against the rigidity, negativism, and impersonal tenor of the manuals led to a heightened emphasis on the freedom and originality of the human person, and to a concomitant neglect of what had been understood to be the objective constituents of human nature, and the traditional basis of the *ordo amoris*.³⁵

Second, and related to the previous point, Rahner's tendency to view the person primarily as a unique personal self in relation to other unique persons contributes to a neglect or understatement of features of love that highlight the need for discrimination, particularly those arising from the complex setting of multiple relationships posing conflicting claims on the agent. Rahner assumes the moral legitimacy of the general priority of primary relations—e.g., that in general we are justified in loving close family members more than strangers, and in caring for close friends more than acquaintances—without giving any explicit justification for this practice.

The *égoïsme à deux* that tempts personalism needs to be corrected by a greater attention to the ways in which we are embedded in a social network, a "web of interconnection,"³⁶ and not just moving between various unconnected, self-contained intersubjective relations. Rather than narrowly focusing on the love between two communicating, mature adults, we need to attend to the multitude of interacting relations within which we are immersed. Human love is not only simple and dyadic, but complex and multiple; it involves not only existential encounters, but relationships extended over time. We need to attend to the moral pull of kinds of relationships which evoke greater love despite existing prior to free choice, full knowledge, and complete self-disclosure. Attachment

³⁴ See Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 33–39 on "taleity" and "ipseity."

³⁵ Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity* xxi–xxxviii.

³⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1982) 57. For related themes, see also Ruth Smith, "Feminism and the Moral Subject," in *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985) 235–50; and Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Abortion, Autonomy, and Community," in *Abortion and Catholicism: The American Debate*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Thomas A. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 85–97.

theorists, for example, help us to see that rather than being exclusively the result of fully self-conscious human freedom, human bonding at times is constituted and maintained by deeply biologically based affective capacities and inclinations that cannot be ignored by realistic attempts to understand love.³⁷ Since it is not originally founded on self-disclosure and the "reciprocity of consciousness" described by Nédoncelle, the parent-infant bond is the prototypical case of this kind of love. It is also the kind of love that highlights the need for ordering.

NATURAL BASIS OF THE *ORDO CARITATIS*

A case can be made that Thomas Aquinas, in question 26 of the *Secunda secundae* of his *Summa theologiae*, provides the classic account of the ordering of priorities in the Christian moral life. The notion of "order" involves an understanding of what comes "before" and what comes "after" in any serially related collection of objects: "wherever there is a principle, there must needs be also order of some kind" (2-2, q. 26, a. 1).³⁸ The axiomatic principle for Thomas is that all things are to be loved in relation to God; systematic explication of the basis, contours, and details of this order is the task of question 26 of the *Secunda secundae*.

The most general lines of Thomas' *ordo caritatis* are drawn by Augustine's treatment of the subject in Book I of *On Christian Doctrine*: we are to love first God, then, in order, the self, the neighbor, and our own body.³⁹ His positive answer to the question, "Whether we ought to love one neighbor more than another?" takes issue with those unnamed authors (including Augustine) who maintain that Christian love requires that we feel the same level of concern for all persons even if, due to the conditions of finitude, our external acts cannot be identical for all.⁴⁰ Thomas' rejection of this principle and his advocacy of gradations of affections rests on the fundamental premise that "the affection of charity, which is an inclination of grace, is not less orderly than the natural appetite, which is the inclination of nature, for *both inclinations flow from Divine wisdom*" (2-2, q. 26, a. 6; my emphasis). Rahner, as we have seen, described morality as "the free personal acceptance of one's own pre-established nature,"⁴¹ but this "nature" is construed by him almost

³⁷ John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss 1: Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); and M. D. S. Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978).

³⁸ All references to Thomas in the text will be to the *Summa theologiae* unless otherwise noted. The translation used is St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

³⁹ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) 1.28.19-20.

⁴⁰ This position in some ways anticipates Outka's "equal regard."

⁴¹ Rahner, "Commandment" 441.

exclusively in terms of transcendental freedom and transcendental love. The claim that the divine governance is expressed through the ordering of natural appetite (in Thomas' sense, of course) places love in a much broader context than that found in Rahner's almost exclusive emphasis on God's appeal to human freedom. In the order of grace, as in the order of nature, there is a proportion between outward acts and interior affections. This profoundly teleological belief provides Thomas with the basis to conclude that "the affection of charity [is] more intense toward those to whom we ought to behave with greater kindness" (q. 26, a. 6).

Yet we might ask, what about Jesus' apparent rejection of the primacy of blood loyalties? "If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and his very self, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). In this as in other sayings, Jesus apparently even condemns love for the self. Thomas was of course well aware of Lk 14:26 and similar passages, and interprets them as requiring, not an abolition of love of family and self *simpliciter*, but rather their false and improper counterfeits. Whereas *caritas* subordinates love of self to love for God, *cupiditas* reverses this order. Charity by implication respects a parallel distinction between ordered and disordered kin loyalties (see 2-2, q. 26, a. 2). Just as improper love of self in fact amounts to "hatred" of self (2-2, q. 25, a. 7; 1-2, q. 77, a. 4, ad 1), so, by implication, disordered love of family entails a *de facto* "hatred" of family, i.e., a disordered attachment that frustrates and undermines its own true good (see 2-2, q. 26, a. 7, ad 1). As the "form of the virtues" (2-2, q. 23, a. 8), charity actually intensifies, perfects, and elevates (rather than obliterates or abandons) the moral virtues that govern domestic love and justice.⁴² Presumably the distinction between proper and improper love provides a principle for interpreting and reconciling other biblical passages relevant to the ordering of love, such as 1 Cor 10:24: "Let no one seek his *own* good but the good of his neighbor," and Phil 2:4: "Look to each other's interest and *not merely* to your own" (my emphases).

The critical point is that Thomas' interpretation of the order of love is developed through a careful appropriation of available Aristotelian human biology. Reliance upon science is authorized and indeed encouraged by the theological belief, cited above, that God orders human life, and love in particular, through our innate inclinations, including those on the biological level of our natures. Science, along with revelation, tradition, and experience, is useful in the ongoing attempt to clarify and understand the human good. Seen from this perspective, one indicator

⁴² For a helpful treatment of the relation of charity to the natural law in Aquinas, see J. M. Aubert, "La spécificité de la morale chrétienne selon saint Thomas," *Le Supplément* 92 (1970) 55-73.

of the decadence of the moral manuals is their tendency to lay out the conclusions of Thomas' order of charity without drawing on Aristotelian biology for its justification, and without supplying any other evidence for their interpretations of this order. The typical manualist treatment of the order of charity thus enumerated a list of moral obligations without supplying the kinds of supporting evidence provided by Thomas himself.⁴³

Though it may seem quaint (if not perverse) to our ears, the ninth article of question 26, "whether we ought to love our children more than our father," provides an illustration of the kind of question Thomas addresses in his treatment of the order of charity. Thomas' answer relies upon Aristotle's account of reproductive biology, according to which the husband's form ("the active principle"), contained in the seed, is "implanted" in the wife's uterus (which supplies the "passive and material principle").⁴⁴ Thomas argues that the more a being is like God, the greater its objective goodness is, and therefore the more it ought to be loved. These premises lead Thomas to conclude that a man ought to love his father more than his children because the former, as the natural principle of his being, is "a more exalted good and more like God" than the latter (2-2, q. 26, a. 9). The order of nature is explicitly confirmed in the traditional axiom, attributed to Ambrose, that "We ought to love God first, then our parents, then our children, and lastly [among these objects] those of our household" (2-2, q. 26, a. 9).

We find that the order of love is actually composed of various subspecies of love, each appropriate to a different kind of relationship. Thus while the ordered love of subjects apprehended under the general rubric of "honor" gives primacy of place to one's parents as the principles of one's very being, the ordered love of objects to which we are most closely attached biologically gives primacy of place to one's children. Descriptively, Thomas argues, we can make the following generalizations regarding parental love: (1) parents love their children as "parts" of themselves, and therefore parental love, more than any other kind of love, is akin to self-love, (2) parents know better the biological origin of their children than children know their own biological origin, and this knowledge grounds a stronger love, and (3) parents love their children for a longer

⁴³ See Thomas Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology* 1.91, or Henry Davis, S.J., *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, 4 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), 1.319-21. This is not to suggest that no arguments are offered whatsoever, but only that the kinds of arguments given—biblical, common sense, Thomistic axioms, etc.—do not display the careful use of up-to-date scientific information of the sort employed by Thomas. The same argument can be made about the few contemporary attempts to speak about the ordering of love, e.g., Louis Janssens, "Norms and Priorities in a Love Ethic," *Louvain Studies* 6 (1977) 207-38.

⁴⁴ See Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 1.20.729a10, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941) 675-76; see also 2.4.738b23.

period of time, and therefore more strongly, than their children love them (2-2, q. 26, a. 9). The common human evidence of these traits and behaviors gives witness to the deeper fact that nature inclines us to act in these ways. Because nature reflects the divine governance, Thomas argues, our caring ought to be strongest of all for our own children.

The Aristotelian biology employed by Thomas is obviously archaic and unacceptable. Yet our immediate rejection of questions such as "Whether a man should love his father more than his children?" should not obscure the fact that in his treatment of this question Thomas actually makes the less objectionable claim that, for the most part, we have qualitatively different *kinds* of love for these two objects; other things being equal, we have a greater love of care for our children and a greater love of honor for our parents. These distinctions are still pertinent today.

Yet James Gustafson rightly points to Thomas' "classicism" when he argues that the latter's "effort to develop an 'order of charity' implants on the dynamism of human nature a rigidity that violates it."⁴⁵ Gustafson is thus correct to speak of dynamic patterns and processes of *ordering* rather than a static order of love.⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that Thomas' attention to the objective constituents of human biology does not obscure his awareness of other aspects of human nature (e.g. reason), the centrality of moral formation, and the significance of situational or concrete personal factors. Underscoring the typically Thomistic claim that moral generalizations hold only "for the most part" (*ut in pluribus*), Thomas notes that "virtue and vice may make such a difference in such like matters, that friendship may be diminished or destroyed" (2-2, q. 26, a. 10). Though connections rooted in biology are given a *prima facie* moral priority "in matters touching nature," i.e., in providing the material necessities of life, the innate orientation of human biology does not swamp other considerations in concrete moral decision-making. Thus, to mention just one example, unfair partiality toward kin in fact constitutes the sin of "respect of persons" (2-2, q. 63, aa. 1-2). The critical point here is that the particularities of individual lives are considered in tandem with the basic constituents of human nature, including its biologically based tendencies and needs; they do not render the latter irrelevant, as is sometimes suggested by existentialism and personalism. Following Thomas' lead, it would seem that contemporary Catholic authors need to pay more attention to the order of nature upon which these various approaches of Christian neighbor love depend. One such source is provided by contemporary sociobiology.

⁴⁵ James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1981, 1982) 1.312.

⁴⁶ Idem, "Nature: Its Status in Theological Ethics," *Logos* 3 (1982) 5-23.

SOCIOBIOLOGY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE NATURAL

Since the publication of Edward O. Wilson's Pulitzer prize-winning *On Human Nature*⁴⁷ thirteen years ago, sociobiology has been at the center of debate over questions of the evolution of human nature, altruism, and morality, and the possibility of finding a "natural" basis of ethics.⁴⁸ As a development of Darwinism, sociobiology, or neo-Darwinism, must be understood as an attempt to provide a scientifically grounded alternative to the cultural determinism that pervades the social sciences. Biologically based interpretations of some fundamental human inclinations, including human social tendencies, or of what Wilson calls "genetically influenced behavioral predispositions,"⁴⁹ provide us with a more substantive grasp of the fact that, as philosopher Mary Midgley claims, the human species, like others, "consists in a certain range of powers and tendencies, a repertoire, inherited and forming a fairly firm characteristic pattern."⁵⁰ Sociobiology is best employed by theologians to provide an alternative to the extremes of biological determinism, according to which human behavior is rigidly codified in our genes, and sheer biological potentiality, according to which, as paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, one of sociobiology's sternest critics, puts it, our nature is "capable of the full range of human behaviors and *predisposed toward none*."⁵¹ Sociobiologists argue that we are emotionally predisposed toward certain kinds of helping and cooperative behavior, though these predispositions are deeply informed by social, cultural, and personal factors.

Sociobiologists, like the personalists, also describe, analyze, and attempt to account for human sociality, but by this term they refer to biologically based behaviors such as our proclivity to live in groups, to interact with others, to form long-lasting bonds within and between generations, to engage in repeated interactions within small, relatively stable social groups that often include close genetic relations, to develop

⁴⁷ Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1978). Major texts of article length are found in James H. Hunt, ed., *Selected Readings in Sociobiology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980); and Richard D. Alexander and Donald W. Tinkle, eds., *Natural Selection and Social Behavior: Recent Research and New Theory* (New York: Chiron, 1981).

⁴⁸ See Gunther S. Stent, ed., *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon: The Presuppositions of Sociobiological Research* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1978); Richard D. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987); Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Evolution, Morality, and the Meaning of Life* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

⁴⁹ Wilson, *On Human Nature* 89.

⁵⁰ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Biological Roots of Human Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1978) 58.

⁵¹ Stephen Jay Gould, "Biological Potential vs. Biological Determinism," in *The Sociobiology Debate: Readings on Ethical and Scientific Issues*, ed. Arthur L. Caplan (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 349 (my emphasis).

highly complex divisions of labor, etc. Most importantly, sociobiology points to the biological basis of altruism and its related emotional mediator, empathy.

Sociobiologists differ from theologians like Rahner in interpreting human love itself, like human nature from which it flows, within the context of a vast evolutionary framework rather than in a narrowly interpersonal one, in viewing human affective and social capacities as the natural outgrowth of millions of years of hominid evolution and as having been continually subject to the shaping influence of natural selection.⁵² Sociobiologists view humanity as one form of life within an enormous, interdependent, and highly complex organic world, as ordered biologically, dependent on, and participating in, the natural whole, and, in contrast to personalism and existentialism, located within a vastly enlarged time and space framework.⁵³

According to Midgley, evolutionary theory interprets human nature from "the long evolutionary perspective," within which it "fall[s] into place as one remarkable variation among many others on a vast but coherent evolutionary range."⁵⁴ Whereas contemporary Catholic authors take pains to emphasize the *sui generis* qualities of human love, this evolutionary and biological context encourages critical comparison between aspects of human love and analogous phenomena in other social species. Awareness of common descent and the phylogenetic origins of human sociality (knowledge of which is, admittedly, rather sketchy and the subject of dispute⁵⁵) suggests important degrees of continuity between human and prehuman love. Knowledge of the emotional capacities and social behavioral tendencies of nonhuman animals also provides a conceptual backdrop against which the distinctive features of human love stand out—particularly aspects of love that reflect a substantial sense of identity and personal history, as in qualities like intimacy, fidelity, and,

⁵² Particularly interesting in this regard are studies of the stages of innate sociality in protohumans. See J. Owen Lovejoy, "The Origin of Man," *Science* 211 (1981) 341–50; H. Kummer "Analog of Morality Among Nonhuman Primates," in *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon* (see above, n. 48); C. Boehm, "The Evolutionary Development of Morality as an Effect of Dominance Behavior and Conflict Interference," *Journal of Sociological and Biological Structures* 5 (1982) 413–21; and Jane Goodall, "Continuities between Chimpanzee and Human Behavior," in G. L. Isaac and E. R. McCown, eds., *Human Origins: Louis Leaky and the East African Evidence* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Benjamin Cummings, 1976).

⁵³ On the significance of time and space frameworks, see James M. Gustafson, "Ethical Issues in the Human Future," in *How Humans Adapt: A Biocultural Odyssey*, ed. Daniel J. Ortner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1983) 497–98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 94–95.

⁵⁵ See the scientifically informed speculative account given in Sydney L. W. Mellen, *The Evolution of Love* (Oxford/San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1981) 1–128.

as D'Arcy puts it, "a regard for the other as other."⁵⁶ Human love is in fact unparalleled in the animal world, and is among the most recent (on an evolutionary time scale) and uncommon of evolutionary adaptations. This evolutionary framework, as Midgley writes, "is no derogation of [humankind's] essential dignity, because dignity is meaningless without a context."⁵⁷

Whereas we think of altruism in terms of helping behavior primarily motivated by concern for someone else, sociobiologists define altruism as action which contributes to the fitness of another person at the expense of one's own fitness.⁵⁸ Sociobiological altruism thus attempts to prescind completely from questions of motives and intentions, a necessary methodological principle when the object of study includes behavior like mutual grooming in primates, bird alarm calls (which put the bird in serious risk of predation), and cleaning symbioses in fish. Put in these terms, we can see why the presence of altruism has provided a challenge for evolutionary theorists from Darwin on. How can altruism evolve by natural selection, when altruism (understood biologically) detracts from individual fitness?

The neo-Darwinian answer to this question is twofold: special preference for kin, the theory of "kin selection" or "kin altruism,"⁵⁹ on the one hand, and special preference for those to whom one is connected in reciprocal relations, the theory of reciprocity or "reciprocal altruism," on

⁵⁶D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* 248. Love for "the other" is also given a pronounced emphasis in more recent texts, as in Bruno Schüller, "The Neighbour's Neighbour," in *Wholly Human: Essays on the Theory and Language of Morality*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1986) 129-49. According to Schüller, "moral goodness consists in *altru*-ism, in the recognition of the other as another and in caring for him. Altruism as living for others is called 'love of neighbor' in New Testament or Christian terms" (147).

⁵⁷*Beast and Man* 71. It can be added that the Thomist belief (supported by Gen 1:26; see *ST* 1, q. 93) that persons have a sacred dignity, in virtue of rationality and freedom, is not incompatible with the gradual evolution of these capacities by means of natural selection.

⁵⁸Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1975) 3. Contrast with Bernard Williams, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-72* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1973) 250-65. For a helpful analysis, see Brian C. R. Bertram, "Problems with Altruism," in *Current Problems in Sociobiology*, ed. King's College Sociobiology Group (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1982) 252-67. It should be noted that "love" is not to be equated with either sense of altruism. The best secondary source on Thomas' notion of love is Fredrick E. Crowe, "Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas," *TS* 20 (1959) 1-40, 198-231, 343-96.

⁵⁹These concepts were first explicitly formulated in neo-Darwinian terms by W. D. Hamilton, "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior I," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7 (1964) 1-52; and J. Maynard Smith, "Kin Selection and Group Selection: A Rejoinder," *Nature* 201 (1964) 1145-47.

the other.⁶⁰ The former is most important for the purposes of this paper, since it can provide a contemporary functional equivalent to the role Aristotle's biology played in Thomas' order of love. Evolutionary theorists argue that early Pleistocene hunter-gatherer bands made discriminations of caregiving based on kinship, pair-bonds, and reciprocity.⁶¹ The evolutionary argument for altruism is that millions of years of natural selection have given us a biologically based emotional predisposition to give special preference to kin and friends rather than to strangers. Neo-Darwinians argue that altruism has been deeply ingrained in the human "biogram," our genetically based biological nature, by millions of years of natural selection, ultimately because genetic constellations that inclined their bearers to be more successful parents left more copies of themselves than did those alternatives that were less successful.⁶²

Human nature has evolved in such a way as to include natural capacities and inclinations to altruism and related emotional and affective capacities like empathy, sympathy, and compassion. While some sociobiologists, particularly the popularizers, defend a form of psychological egoism, others maintain that genuine moral altruism and its psychological mediator, empathy, have evolved so as to be essential traits of human nature.⁶³ As philosopher Michael Ruse observes, "As part of our biology, we have feelings of sympathy and caring for others. We do desire the well-being—the happiness—of others, as well as of ourselves, and judge that this desire is a good thing. That is one of the key conclusions of modern evolutionary biology."⁶⁴

Sociobiologists give ample evidence of the fact that human nature is characterized by a deep-seated ambivalence rather than by either pure altruism or relentless egoism. Wilson's *On Human Nature* is pervaded by a sense of duality, or multiplicity, some tendencies inclining us to

⁶⁰ The seminal text is Robert L. Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 46 (1971) 35–37.

⁶¹ See Lovejoy, "The Origin" (see above, n. 52) and G. L. Isaac, "The Food Sharing of Protohuman Hominids," *Scientific American* 238 (1978) 90–108.

⁶² Wilson, *On Human Nature* 153.

⁶³ One group of sociobiologically informed psychologists argues that human nature has evolved to be highly egoistic, hedonistic, and/or aggressive, and that human survival has only been made possible by the socialization of altruistic behaviors that override our nature. This perspective is exemplified in Donald T. Campbell, "On the Conflicts between Biological and Social Evolution and between Psychology and Moral Tradition," *American Psychologist* 30 (1975) 1102–26. The alternative position, that human nature has evolved to possess genuinely altruistic as well as egoistic emotional predispositions, is found in Martin Hoffman, "Is Altruism Part of Human Nature?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40 (1981) 121–37 and in John Chandler, "Ethical Philosophy," in Mary Maxwell, ed., *The Sociobiological Imagination* (Albany: State Univ. of New York, forthcoming).

⁶⁴ Michael Ruse, "The Morality of the Gene," *The Monist* 67 (1985) 180.

service and communion, others to domination and isolation. We humans have evolved, for example, to be both naturally aggressive and naturally altruistic, and different personal and cultural contexts shape the presence, development, proportion, and expression of these natural tendencies in individual lives in astoundingly different ways.

Intraspecific aggression is also a product of our evolutionary heritage and poses special problems for the development and maintenance of prosocial bonds, especially for those who would advocate a more universal ethic. Evolved aggressive tendencies constitute a significant disruptive influence on the kinds of trust, acceptance, openness, and fidelity analyzed and promoted by Rahner and others. What are now taken to be undesirable traits, such as conformism, suggestibility, nepotism, ethnocentrism, self-deception, racism, excessive competitiveness, and "moralistic aggression,"⁶⁵ are, according to sociobiologists, specific expressions of a more general evolved human tendency common to many social species to form "in-groups" and "out-groups" that at one time provided adaptive advantages to members of the species, e.g., in defense against external aggression.⁶⁶

Greater knowledge of these and other aspects of human nature as it has evolved alerts us to the need to curb natural tendencies that in a disordered form pose a threat to human love and concern. Attention to conflict and alienation encourage us to recognize the fact that positive coexistence (both interpersonal and social) does not come spontaneously but must be humanly achieved. Sociobiologists alert us to the myopia and narrow exclusivity of kin preference and to the instrumentalism and prudentialism of reciprocity, as well as to the dangers stemming from pressures to advance within various "dominance hierarchies," particularly when they are amplified in highly competitive urban technological societies.

From a Thomistic perspective this is to say that we have evolved in such a way that the *partial* order supplied by the biological aspects of human nature needs to be complemented and directed by reason. Whereas subrational animals are guided to their proper ends by instinct (what Thomas calls the *naturalis aestimatio*), we humans are given much less direction by our natural inclinations (see 1-2, q. 91, a. 2). Reason must complete the partial ordering of powers, needs, and desires that

⁶⁵ Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," *Quart Rev Biol* 46 (1971) 19.

⁶⁶ On "clique selfishness," see Campbell, "On the Conflicts between Biological and Social Evolution and between Psychology and Moral Tradition" (n. 63 above), and "Comments on the Sociobiology of Ethics and Moralizing," *Behavioral Science* 24 (1979) 37-45. See also Wilson, *On Human Nature* 149-67, and R. A. Levine and D. T. Campbell, ed., *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1972).

constitute our evolved emotional repertoire. Natural law is not a matter of blind conformity to nature, but of intelligently pursuing true human fulfillment (2-2, q. 94, a. 10).⁶⁷ Thomas' position is fully in accord with Midgley's understanding of human instincts as "open" rather than "closed," that is, as strong general tendencies to certain kinds of activities, like the tendency to take care of your children and siblings, rather than fixed behavior patterns whose details are precisely determined genetically, like the carefully scripted nest-building behavior of some bird species.⁶⁸ The ordering responsibility of human reason is displayed in our tendency to elaborate and guide our prosocial and altruistic natural tendencies, and also to inhibit, control, or at least channel our egoistic and antisocial inclinations. Thomas' position is reinforced in Midgley's claim that "reason" is precisely "a name for organizing oneself" in the midst of conflicting needs, inclinations, and desires, for choosing concrete priorities in light of some conception of our good.⁶⁹

Reservations Regarding Sociobiology

Before proceeding further, a cautionary note regarding the use of sociobiology may be helpful. I agree with Midgley that "we cannot deal with sociobiology on tribal lines. It is neither a heresy to be hunted down, nor a revealed doctrine necessary to academic salvation. It is instead the usual kind of mixed picnic hamper which needs to be unpacked, filled with the usual mixture of the nutritious and the uneatable, insights and mistakes, old and new material."⁷⁰ Two points should be mentioned in pursuit of a properly critical reading of sociobiology.

First, just as we must resist the spiritualistic abstraction into which contemporary Catholic authors sometimes unintentionally drift, so must we unequivocally reject the reductionism and materialism that plagues sociobiology. The Thomistic anthropology advocated here provides the resources for affirming the evolved basis of human sociality without also falling into the sociobiological trap of attempting to reduce personality to animality,⁷¹ the organism to its genes, or the individual person to a mere part of an anonymous collectivity (as suggested in population

⁶⁷ See Vernon Bourke, "Was Aquinas a Natural Law Theorist?" *The Monist* 58 (1974) 53-66.

⁶⁸ Midgley, *Beast and Man* 51-82, 331-44. On open and closed instincts, see also E. Mayr, "Behavior Programs and Evolutionary Strategies," *American Scientist* 62 (1974) 650-59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 654.

⁷⁰ Mary Midgley, "Rival Fatalisms: The Hollowness of the Sociobiology Debate," in *Sociobiology Examined*, ed. Ashley Montagu (New York: Oxford Univ., 1980) 17.

⁷¹ D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart* 248.

biology).⁷² We need neither religious angelism nor the sceptical materialism that it provokes, but rather a more balanced appreciation of the biological within a personalist Catholic anthropology.

Second, we must recognize the biological basis of emotional capacities that give rise to human love but reject the fatalism of sociobiological reduction of human reason, will, and freedom to illusory manifestations of the genetically controlled "neuronal machinery" of the brain. We need to accept neo-Darwinian claims that nature is orderly, from the micro-biological level on up the scale of life, that natural events are parts of causal sequences, that members of the species *Homo sapiens*, no matter how noble, are not entirely exempt from the laws of biology, and that biological and genetic causes provide the necessary but not sufficient basis for the exercise of human moral and emotional capacities. However, we obviously cannot accept Richard Dawkins' sociobiological description of human beings as really "survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes."⁷³ The error of sociobiological fatalism lies not in its uninhibited recognition of biological causality, but in taking it to be a quasi-exclusive causal factor and in minimizing the force of a multitude of other causal factors (personal, cultural, economic, etc.). Midgley is correct to observe that those who advocate biological determinism share with their antagonists, the cultural determinists, the same fault of "tunnel vision, the belief that one kind of explanation necessarily excludes another."⁷⁴ Against this kind of fatalism, we must recognize that human motivation is best understood through the examination of multiple and interacting causes, a truth that more recent sociobiological "gene-culture" theory has itself attempted to incorporate.⁷⁵

⁷² This was a major issue during the personalist controversy of the 1940s, and is reflected in D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart* 104–6 and 189–94. For criticisms of personalism, see P. Descoqs, "Individu et personne," *Archives de Philosophie* 14 (1938) 1–58; Charles de Koninck, *De la primauté du bien commun contre les Personnalistes. Le principe de l'ordre nouveau* (Québec: Univ. Laval, 1943); and Jules A. Baisnée, S.S., "Two Catholic Critiques of Personalism," *Modern Schoolman* 22 (1945) 59–75.

⁷³ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1976) ix.

⁷⁴ "Rival Fatalisms" 34.

⁷⁵ See Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1981), and idem, *Promethean Fire: Reflections on the Origin of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1983). These texts criticize early sociobiology for underestimating the significance of culture, learning, and mind. They confess the radical error of strictly applying behavior genetics to humankind and argue instead that "Behavior is not explicit in the genes, and mind cannot be treated as a mere replica of behavioral traits" (*Genes, Mind, and Culture* 2). An alternative "gene-culture coevolutionary" model is found in L. Cavelli-Sforza and M. Feldman, *Cultural Transmission: A Quantitative Approach* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1981). "Gene-

Yet though they have recently attempted to address some of the major philosophical problems in a serious way, sociobiologists seem to continue to fail to understand that the most important features of human life are in fact not open to biological explanation. Though ostensibly arguing from purely empirical and scientific resources, Wilson's attempt to reduce higher human behavior to nothing but the result of biological imperatives actually reflects at its roots an uncritical acceptance of metaphysical materialism, an unargued positivist belief that ultimately only material things and activities, verified by scientific methods, are ontologically real. Exclusively biological accounts of fully human behavior will always fall short and even distort their object.

The body, a central category for existentialism, personalism, and phenomenology, provides a helpful illustration of this point. Through the body we participate in reality and in an intersubjective world. The body is not a mere "thing," but is expressive of intention and a bearer of intersubjective meaning. We live not only as an aggregate of bodies in a group, like individual zebras in a migrating herd, but in an intersubjective world in which we meet, love, share, and communicate. A handshake or kiss does not constitute the simple external interaction of material objects, but rather an interpersonal encounter: a gesture of greeting exchanged between two people that expresses intersubjective intentions and affections, deep interpersonal bonds and loyalties. A strictly biological account of this interchange completely misses its more distinctively and deeply human sense. Because they attempt to reduce higher levels of meaning to lower, sociobiologists have not been generally successful in attempting to persuade other academics that sociobiological principles can explain all social behavior, including morality and religion.

Given the claim that the most important features of human life are not open to biological explanation, what can possibly be the value of sociobiology for our understanding of the Christian ethic of love? Before addressing this question, we need to note that, from a Thomistic standpoint, information and insights provided by sociobiologists pertain primarily to the level of natural inclinations that we share with other animals, though they also provide the organic and rudimentary emotional basis for distinctively human love (1-2, q. 94, a. 2). The lower inclinations we share with subrational animals provide indications of aspects of the human good, but their properly *human* meaning is only grasped when they are ordered to the higher inclinations that constitute our nature as

culture" theory developed in response to strong and persuasive criticisms of reductionism and genetic determinism in early sociobiology by texts such as M. Sahlin's *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1979).

“rational animals.” “Person” is related to “biogram” as higher to lower, but in such a way that the latter is incorporated and completed by the higher values and ends of the former. This position contrasts with the view that we are basically spirits which are essentially unaffected by our biological substrate, on the one hand, and its opposite, that we are basically fitness maximizers whose moral commitments are ultimately in the service of “genetic interests.”

With these reservations in mind, the remainder of this study will attempt to make good on the claim that a critical and selective appropriation of sociobiology can contribute to our interpretation of the ordering of love in two fundamental areas.⁷⁶ First, the theory of kin altruism supplies biologically based interpretations of the natural gradation of special relations, upon which can be based an ordering of love. Second, the theory of reciprocity highlights important features of social life and morality that need to be respected and promoted within an ethics of love.

Kin Altruism and the Ordering of Love

Kin altruism contributes to our treatment of the ordering of love in three primary ways: first, it highlights the multiplicity of objects of love and the problem of priorities; second, it helps us understand the natural basis of the ordering of love; and third, if we grant with Thomas that moral values can be based on natural inclinations, it provides natural grounds for a moral justification of the gradation of love. First, it can be recalled that Rahner tends to neglect or understate features of love that highlight the need for discrimination, particularly those arising from the complex setting of multiple relationships posing conflicting claims on the agent.

According to the laws of the evolutionary process, “promiscuous altruism,” i.e., altruism practiced “without discrimination of kinship, acquaintanceship, shared values, or propinquity in time or space” is not possible and therefore some form of priority system is necessary if altruism is to persist over time.⁷⁷ Sociobiologists in particular attend to the biological bases underlying the common human experience of emotional conflict and inner tension caused by conflict between claims made by various objects of affection and loyalty. They are acutely aware of this kind of tension and ambiguity, and force us to take this problem more seriously. Wilson, for example, strongly argues that the evolutionary

⁷⁶ I select a few key insights from among a vast array of sociobiological writings. Because of my limited competence, I must rely on arguments from scientific authorities considered to be the most reliable and philosophically plausible. The selective appropriation of sociobiology which I attempt strives to be generally consistent with the position developed in the writings of philosopher Mary Midgley, especially in *Beast and Man*.

⁷⁷ Garrett Hardin, “Discriminating Altruisms,” *Zygon* 17 (June 1982) 172.

process has not led to a preestablished harmony of human values. On the contrary, "the individual is forced to make imperfect choices based on irreconcilable loyalties—between the 'rights' and 'duties' of self and those of family, tribe, and other units of selection, each of which evolves its own code of honor."⁷⁸ In a similar vein, Trivers' analysis of "parent-offspring conflict" systematically explicates ways in which intergenerational conflict has been built into the genetic basis of love by the evolutionary process.⁷⁹

The unique and most important contribution of sociobiology to recent interpretations of love is provided by "kin selection," the theory of the evolution of "genetically based emotional predispositions" that give special preference to biologically related kin. Kin preference, at least within the nuclear family, is a tendency that almost all of us experience in our own lives and may be one of the most intuitively compelling tenets of sociobiology. It helps us understand why, for example, we form particularly close bonds within our immediate family, why we tend to give unparalleled degrees of care to closest kin, and why "expectations of reciprocity vary inversely with closeness of kinship."⁸⁰ Kin-selection theory explains why "the greater (more costly) the help, the more likely the help is coming from kin."⁸¹ Despite many exceptions, as Thomas noted, ties of blood seem to be the strongest and most durable of bonds, and it does seem to be the case, for example, as Wilson puts it, that "altruism appears to be substantially hard-core when directed at closest relatives."⁸²

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Sociobiology* 129.

⁷⁹ Robert Trivers, "Parent-Offspring Conflict," *American Zoologist* 14 (1974) 249-64. Ethologists also show a marked sensitivity to the limits imposed by human nature on the scope of love. Ethologist Eibl-Eibesfeldt points out that "Our reason can fully grasp the commandment to love all fellowmen, but, as we are now constructed, we are not capable of fulfilling this commandment. We experience warm feelings of love and friendship only as a bond with individuals, and with the best will in the world, this cannot be altered" (Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Love and Hate: The Natural History of Behavior Patterns*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan [New York: Strachan, 1974] 97).

⁸⁰ Susan M. Essock-Vitale and Michael T. McGuire, "Predictions Derived from the Theories of Kin Selection and Reciprocation Assessed by Anthropological Data," *Ethology and Sociobiology* 1 (1980) 237. This is not to deny the obvious fact that individuals feel differently about family attachments within and across cultures. For a sociobiological account of kinship variations, see, e.g., Pierre van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View* (New York: Elsevier North Holland, 1979).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 236. See also Raymond B. Hames, "The Allocation of Parental Care Among the Ye'kwana" in *Human Reproductive Behavior: A Darwinian Perspective*, ed. Laura Betzig, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, and Paul Turke (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1988) 237-51.

⁸² Wilson, *On Human Nature* 158. Recall that in "hard-core" altruism the "bestower expresses no desire for equal return and performs no unconscious actions leading to the same end" (149-67). "Hard-core" altruism, according to Wilson, is directed exclusively toward close kin. This is not to overlook the unfortunate but common direction of "hard-core" violence and destruction at close kin.

Both attachment theory and kin-selection theory provide valuable information and insights into the earliest glimmerings of the natural ordering of love. Sociobiologists argue that the patterns of interaction that lead to bonding between newborn and caregiver are not arbitrary, but rather powerfully directed by genetically based emotional predispositions. This very elemental desire to form and maintain deep bonds of attachment, occurring predominantly between parents and newborns, provides an obvious selective advantage to members of the species by supporting the extended parental caregiving needed during the infant's prolonged process of physical, cognitive, and psychological maturation. Thus, sociobiologists argue, despite identical genetic relations one is normally even more affectively bound with one's children than with one's siblings.⁸³ The felt importance of these kinds of bonds is registered in the general sense that heterologous methods of fertility technologies, i.e. those involving either third party donors or surrogate mothers, may reflect a dualistic denial of the deep significance of the corporal and kinship aspects of the relationships they create.⁸⁴

Moreover, there are good psychological as well as biological grounds for affirming that relatively stable and secure bonds of love within the family create the emotional basis for a later extension of love to persons outside the family and that the quality of these early bonds continues powerfully to inform subsequent adult affectional bonds.⁸⁵ Sociobiological accounts of the genetic basis of familial love confirm in some detail the common sense intuition that mature interpersonal love depends upon affective and social capacities developed first in some form of family life. Ordinary human experience discloses to all of us the sharp contrast between the effects on children of loving and predictable parental care, on the one hand, and parental indifference or rejection, on the other. In keeping with their emphasis on mutuality rather than self-sacrifice or

⁸³ Robert Trivers, "Parental Investment and Sexual Selection," in *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man*, ed. B. Campbell (Chicago: Aldine, 1972) 136-79.

⁸⁴ See Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Women, Marriage, Parenthood: What Are Their 'Natures'?" *Logos* 9 (1988) 11-35, esp. 22-26.

⁸⁵ See Jerome Kagan, *The Nature of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 240-76; Melvin J. Konner, "Biological Aspects of the Mother-Infant Bond," in *Development of Attachment and Affiliation Processes*, ed. Robert Emde and Robert Harmon (New York: Plenum, 1982) 37-159; Michael Rutter, "Early Sources of Security and Competence," in *Human Growth and Development*, ed. Jerome S. Bruner and Alison Garton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 33-61; Martin L. Hoffman, "Altruistic Behavior and the Parent-Child Relationship," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31 (1975) 937-43; and M. H. Ricks, "The Social Transmission of Parental Behavior: Attachment Across Generations," in I. Bretherton and E. Waters, eds., *Growing Points in Attachment and Research* (Monographs of the Society for Research on Child Development vol. 50, nos. 1 and 2: 211-227 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1985)).

equal regard, authors like Rahner are in a position to see intrafamilial love as a central locus of the ethics of love rather than as merely peripheral because of its preferential nature.⁸⁶

Before going on to examine the relevance of kin selection for the ordering of love, it may be helpful to discuss briefly two factors through which kin altruism is mediated: culture and personality. Cultural differences regarding kinship are consistent with the claim that human nature is comprised of "open" instincts, strong but general tendencies to certain kinds of activities, rather than rigidly driven by genetically determined "closed" instincts.⁸⁷ Human social evolution, unlike that of less complex species, is not "hardwired," as Wilson puts it, but rather mediated through the workings of human intelligence. "Genes hold culture on a leash," Lumsden and Wilson argue, but apparently the leash is pretty long: "culture is not just a passive entity. It is a force so powerful in its own right that it drags the genes along. Working as a rapid mutator, it throws new variations into the teeth of natural selection and changes the epigenetic rules across generations."⁸⁸

Sociobiologists themselves have increasingly recognized that human behavior, including altruism, is appreciably influenced, and in innumerable complex and subtle ways, by culture and history. Persons or communities do not somehow blindly and inflexibly apply an inviolate, neatly defined, and clearly stratified rank order of priorities in the fashion of sterile castes of worker ants, nor is there a cross-culturally uniform order that mechanically determines altruistic obligations by some kind of a detailed arithmetical calculation of "coefficient of relationship" and cost-benefit ratio.⁸⁹ Theories of kin altruism focus on the evolutionary basis of affective predispositions rather than on behavior genetics. "The point is," Wilson argues, "that the *underlying emotion*, powerfully manifest in virtually all human societies, is what is considered to evolve through genes,"⁹⁰ a point amplified in psychologist Martin Hoffman's research

⁸⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) and Outka, *Agape*. The position suggested here stands in sharp contrast to both Kantian and utilitarian forms of impartiality, according to which the "moral point of view" considers each individual impartially and independently of all "idiosyncratic preferences" and personal attachments. The Kantian form is displayed in Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1983) and Outka, *Agape*, and the utilitarian form in Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (New York: New American Library, 1981).

⁸⁷ Midgley, *Beast and Man* 51-57, 331-44.

⁸⁸ Lumsden and Wilson, *Promethean Fire* 154.

⁸⁹ See Mary Maxwell, *Human Evolution: A Philosophical Anthropology* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1984) 55; and Midgley, *Beast and Man* 119, 350-57.

⁹⁰ Wilson, *On Human Nature* 153 (my emphasis).

on the human capacity for empathy as the most flexible and appropriate proximate source of altruistic behavior.⁹¹

Sociobiological appreciation of the significance of culture in the development of altruism complements Catholic "personalistic" approaches to the natural law.⁹² The less substantive, more interactionist view of the human person that is given in Rahner is radically at odds with the notion that there is one order of value for all times and all persons. Indications taken from the perceived ordering of human nature should be seen as significant sources of moral insight but not deontologically determinative. Biological facts and tendencies by themselves cannot be taken as determinative of who ought to be loved and cared for, but rather as significant factors supporting and shaping some persisting and morally very significant relationships. Clearly, the particularities of individual lives make all the difference regarding the concrete, existential relevance of the order of nature, as Thomas recognized (recall our discussion of 2-2, q. 26⁹³).

Given these qualifications of kin-selection theory, what is its normative significance? Kin preference is valuable for parents and their children, but also for communities, societies, and the human species as a whole. It is good, in other words, that we feel strongly about our families, take care of family members, especially the young, teach our children to love and care for theirs when the time is right, and try to work for a society in which families thrive and children are loved and respected.

Why does this obvious point need to be even mentioned, let alone given a moral justification? Moral justification is necessary first because Catholic thinkers have suffered from the problem of assuming the moral priority of special relations without offering any coherent and substantive basis for doing so. We are now in a position to argue that this kind of moral selectivity is ethically justified from a personalist interpretation of the conditions of human well-being based on the natural ordering of love illuminated from the perspective of kin-selection theory. If we can grant with Thomas that moral values are based on natural inclinations, we can draw on sociobiological information and insights into our natural preferences for kin to illumine one important arena of moral value. Kin selection can play an important role not only in understanding natural

⁹¹ "Is Altruism Part of Human Nature?" On human nature as altruistic, see also C. Daniel Batson, "How Social An Animal? The Human Capacity for Caring," *American Psychologist* 45 (1990) 336-46.

⁹² See Bernard Häring, "A Personalistic Approach to the Natural Law," in Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey, eds., *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968) 199-218.

⁹³ See pp. 262-65 above.

preferences, but also in morally authorizing the giving of special moral priorities to care of close family members. Restating Thomas' naturally based order of charity in an evolutionary context, we can argue that kin altruism, like other natural inclinations, reflects the divine ordering.⁹⁴ Contemporary biology modifies some of the precise details of the material content of Thomas' order of love, e.g., the claim, reflecting archaic Aristotelian reproductive biology, that we ought to honor our father more than our mother, because only the former is the active principle of our being (2-2, q. 26, a. 10). Yet kin-altruism theory, appropriated in a Thomistic context, upholds the claims that we ought to love some persons more than others, that we ought to love close kin more than other people, at least with regard to "things that concern nature," that, other things being equal, we ought to have greater love of care for our children, honor for our parents, and intimacy with our spouses (2-2, q. 26, aa. 9-11).

What is required is not a physicalist conformity to an extrinsic biological pattern, but rather attentiveness to the natural conditions of human flourishing and to our natural inclinations to the human good (1-2, q. 44, a. 2). Whereas earlier forms of Catholic personalism and existentialism encouraged a movement *from* "respect for blood relationships" *to* "respect for the human subject" as such,⁹⁵ the ethical position proposed here advocates *both* a love for all persons *and* a Christian incorporation of the moral centrality of natural priorities. The universal nature of this love will be taken up below, after a discussion of the contribution of reciprocity theory to our understanding of the ordering of love.

Reciprocity and the Ordering of Love

Rahner recognizes that the fullness of love resides in mutuality or communion.⁹⁶ Robert L. Trivers' seminal article, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," attempts to account for forms of altruism among unrelated or distantly related individuals in cases ranging from cleaning symbioses in fish and bird alarm calls to human rescue behavior and the

⁹⁴ The authorization offered here is not based on divine command, but on the natural law belief that the human good is that which fulfills human nature, adequately considered. The use of information regarding human nature in ethics, of course, immediately raises the "is-ought" question. This paper cannot provide a satisfactory philosophical defense of the kind of critical natural law theory presumed here. It can be noted, however, that the position assumed here, in which the "ought" is dependent on the "is" but not without remainder, finds significant affinities with the philosophical perspective developed by Gerard Hughes, *Authority in Morals* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1978).

⁹⁵ Joseph T. C. Arnst, O.P., "Natural Law and Its History" in *Moral Problems and Christian Personalism, Concilium* 5, ed. Franz Böckle (New York: Paulist, 1965) 53.

⁹⁶ On reciprocity, see Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 45-46.

"prisoner's dilemma."⁹⁷ Trivers lists the following kinds of widespread human altruism: (1) helping in times of danger (e.g., accidents, predation, intraspecific aggression); (2) sharing food; (3) helping the sick, the wounded, or the very young and old; (4) sharing implements; and (5) sharing knowledge.⁹⁸ To account for the extension of these behaviors to unrelated and distantly related individuals, Trivers attempts to explain the adaptive advantages accruing to systems of exchange which he termed "reciprocal." Put in simplest terms, Trivers argues—and perhaps "speculates" would be a more appropriate verb here⁹⁹—that "reciprocal altruism" evolved because of the evolutionary advantages it tended to provide to those who practiced it, "advantages" understood primarily in terms of cost and benefit to the "altruist."¹⁰⁰

Trivers' is one of the most prominent among a variety of interpretations of reciprocity, which vary in their determination of both the object of "altruism" and the intent of the "altruist." Three typical approaches to reciprocity can be found in the literature. First, in the "direct trade-off" approach, the "altruist's" act is conditioned on a direct return of benefit, as, for example, in baboon mating coalitions.¹⁰¹ Second, in the "potential individual return" approach, the "altruist's" act depends on some form of potential for individual return, the benefit of which outweighs the cost entailed in the "altruistic" act. This approach, displayed in some forms of alarm calling and group defense, does not mandate actual return, but only that the actual cost does not exceed the benefits entailed by the potential return of future assistance to the agent, as in human drowning rescue behavior.¹⁰²

Calculation of benefit disqualifies these approaches as genuinely al-

⁹⁷ See Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism" 51; Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Reciprocity theory was also anticipated by Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, 2d ed. (1874) ch. 5, p. 499: "Each man would soon learn that if he aided his fellow-men, he would commonly receive aid in return. From this low motive he might acquire the habit of aiding his fellows."

⁹⁸ "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism" 45.

⁹⁹ According to Trivers, "There is no direct evidence regarding the degree of reciprocal altruism practiced during human evolution nor its genetic basis today" (*ibid.* 48). Gould criticizes Trivers for not showing why reciprocal altruism could not be simply the product of cultural rather than biological evolution ("Biological Potential vs. Biological Determinism" 348). The argument of this book rests more heavily on kin altruism than on reciprocal altruism, the status of which seems to be that of an interesting and attractive hypothesis but one which has not received the same scientific support as has kin selection.

¹⁰⁰ Trivers, *ibid.* 36.

¹⁰¹ On food sharing, see B. C. R. Bertram, "Living in Groups: Predators and Prey," in J. R. Krebs and N. B. Davies, eds., *Behavioral Ecology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) 92. On baboon coalitions, C. Paker, "Reciprocal Altruism in *Papio anubis*," *Nature* 265 (1977) 441-43.

¹⁰² Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism" 35-36, 48.

truistic, and their impracticability and narrow individualism give rise to a third, weaker but more plausible account. "Indirect reciprocity"¹⁰³ sees "altruistic" acts as investments in a social network within which the agent is a beneficiary, at least over the "long haul." It need not be predicated upon possibility of reciprocation from its beneficiary, for the altruist functions as a medium for assistance to the group. As Ruse puts it, "I help you, but do not necessarily expect you personally to help me. Rather, my help is thrown into the general pool, as it were, and then I am free to draw on help as needed."¹⁰⁴

Reciprocity theory of course cannot be taken over as a completely exhaustive account of friendship and social cooperation, just as kin-selection theory cannot be taken to provide a comprehensive explanation of familial love. Most important, interpersonal reciprocity as depicted by Rahner transcends sociobiological reciprocity, both in the descriptive sense of expressing psychological and emotional capacities not reducible to biological forces and in the moral sense of involving genuine self-gift.¹⁰⁵ Trivers' egoistic model of reciprocity, moreover, obviously cannot be identified in a simplistically straightforward way with the personalist notion of reciprocity. The latter involves the interpersonal mutuality of true friendship, which is based on "direct love" of the other for his or her own sake.¹⁰⁶ Reciprocity theory calculates the costs and benefits of actions in quid pro quo terms, and so stands in diametrical opposition to the traditional Christian affirmation of the equal dignity of all persons and the duty to treat persons in need as did the good Samaritan, regardless of whether it is "profitable," genetically or otherwise. The Christian "Do unto others" will never be confused with the more sociobiological-sounding, "What have you done for me lately?" In the Christian ethic, Wilson's "hard-core" as well as "soft-core" altruism must be extended to nonreciprocators,¹⁰⁷ including those who are, in a general sense, socially and economically "unproductive" (e.g., the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, etc.). In this sense, we work against

¹⁰³ R. D. Alexander, *Darwinism and Human Affairs* (Seattle, Wash.: Univ. of Washington, 1979).

¹⁰⁴ Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," *Zygon* 21 (March 1986) 105.

¹⁰⁵ By "transcends" I mean that interpersonal reciprocity involves attitudes and affections that cannot be fully understood or completely generated by biological features of human nature, without remainder. The capacity for mutuality must of course lie within and to some extent depend upon our biological natures, otherwise we would be "disembodied spirits."

¹⁰⁶ See Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 45-46.

¹⁰⁷ According to Wilson, for the good of the human race we must work against "pure, hard-core altruism based upon kin selection" and build social harmony through the extension of "soft-core" reciprocity (*On Human Nature* 155-59).

biological "nature" as sociobiologists depict it, in light of higher values grasped on the interpersonal level.¹⁰⁸

John Stuart Mill warned us of people who are "very amiable and delightful to those with whom they sympathize, and grossly unjust and unfeeling to the rest of the world."¹⁰⁹ The Christian ethic of love complements natural preferences with an expanded sense of moral responsibility for those who lie beyond the narrow circle prescribed by inclusive fitness theory. It also rejects all forms of sinful exclusivity toward those who lie on the margins, or altogether outside, of our various communities (recall Rahner's use of 1 John 4:7, 11¹¹⁰). According to Thomas, "when it is said: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor,' it is evident that we ought to look upon every man as our neighbor" (2-2, q. 25, a. 6; also 2-2, q. 78, a. 1 ad 2). The neighbor in real need in fact claims *prima facie* priority over all others, and hence in cases of urgent need we ought to care for strangers rather than friends (2-2, q. 31, a. 3 ad 1). From a Thomistic perspective the tribalism and moral parochialism traced by sociobiology are signs of sin, disordered love, and evidence of our fallen state rather than of human nature *per se* (1-2, q. 85, a. 1). The egoism described by sociobiologists reflects the dominance of "love of concupiscence," and for Thomas, the disordered self-love that gives preference to the private over the common good is a sign of the corruption of nature as God intends it (1-2, q. 74, a. 4; 1-2, q. 109, a. 3).

Despite these problems, reciprocity can contribute to understanding of the ordering of love. First, it provides an evolutionary account of why we are a bond-forming species, and why we have emotional predispositions to give special moral priority to people who lie outside the family circle. Generally, sociobiology calls our attention to the many ways in which love and caregiving are bound up with various kinds of reciprocity. Recent studies show that from the very beginning even the infant-caregiver relationship is marked not only by dependence but also by complex and subtle forms of preconscious interdependence and what biologist Robert

¹⁰⁸ Sociobiologists themselves propose that we work against those aspects of our nature that threaten our present social and even biological existence. They are not Spencerians or social Darwinians who claim that what has evolved is *ipso facto* morally good. One of the tasks of culture, in fact, is to correct the antisocial tendencies that evolved over the course of our primate and especially hunter-gatherer past. Wilson, for example, hopes that "New patterns of sociality could be installed in bits and pieces" into human nature, despite the fact that it rests on a "jerrybuilt foundation of partly obsolete Ice Age adaptations" (*On Human Nature* 208).

¹⁰⁹ John Stuart Mill, "Three Essays on Religion," in *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society*, vol. 10 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1969) 394.

¹¹⁰ See n. 8 above.

Hinde calls “proto-intersubjectivity,”¹¹¹ and thereby affords us a new perspective regarding the extent to which human social life from its earliest moments is built upon mutuality.¹¹² If parent-child love provides the roots of trust, intimacy, and caring in adult life, later peer relations, marked by greater equality, and being less imbalanced and asymmetrical, similarly enhance the development of emotional capacities important for adult mutuality. The ability to sustain and extend reciprocity in a variety of relationships is integrally related to mature affective and social competence: the condition of the kind of I-Thou relationships that the personalists so eloquently describe.

An important moral implication we can draw from these biologically based perspectives is that processes and patterns of reciprocity need to be recognized, properly appreciated, and supported within the ethics of love, contrary to illusions of radical independence that underlie some of the rhetoric of total self-sacrifice. As a matter of fact, reciprocity and cooperative assistance are much more common forms of interpersonal interaction than either altruism or self-sacrifice. Ordinary experience seems to confirm Trivers’ claim that the golden rule is found most frequently in relationships between reciprocators. And though it need not have the dominance ascribed to it by sociobiologists, even the considerations of cost effectiveness that Trivers points to are not totally foreign to ordinary human caregiving.¹¹³

Second, reciprocity theory also conveys a wider truth that social life outside as well as inside the family circle is permeated with helping behavior and reciprocation. In fact, according to Wilson, “[r]eciprocation among distantly related or unrelated individuals is the key to human society.”¹¹⁴ Accounts of altruism directed toward a social network lead us to see the person not as an isolated individual, as does the prevalent “social atomism” of liberalism, but rather as a participant embedded in a much larger social whole.¹¹⁵ As Rahner observes, we cannot say we love God when we fail to love the visible neighbor, but the same truth applies to the “invisible” neighbor as well, the “nonperson” in Gutiérrez’ lan-

¹¹¹ Robert L. Hinde, *Toward Understanding Relationships* (New York: Academic, 1979) 31).

¹¹² T. Barry Brazelton, Barbara Koslowski, and Mary Main, “The Origins of Reciprocity: The Early Mother-Infant Interaction,” in *The Origins of Behavior: The Effect of the Infant on Its Caregiver*, ed. Michael Lewis and Leonard A. Rosenblum (New York: Wiley, 1974); and K. Kaye, “Towards the Origin of Dialogue,” in *Studies in Mother-Infant Interaction*, ed. H. R. Schaffer (London: Academic, 1977).

¹¹³ Marshall D. Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, ed. M. Banton (New York: Praeger, 1965).

¹¹⁴ Wilson, *On Human Nature* 156.

¹¹⁵ See Mary Midgley, “Toward a New Understanding of Human Nature: The Limits of Individualism,” in *How Humans Adapt: A Biocultural Odyssey*, ed. Donald J. Ortner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1983), 517-46.

guage.¹¹⁶ This shift in perspective provides basic biological grounds for reflecting on the expansion of moral concern beyond the narrowly interpersonal sphere.

Third, the kind of attention given by sociobiology to the wider social context of interpersonal relations promotes a deeper recognition of social responsibility, i.e., of responsibility for the good of various communities and for the good of the collective human community as well, than one finds in exclusively interpersonal anthropologies. A greater sense of the dependence of persons on larger communities and of the interdependence of communities could correct the excessive emphasis on the interpersonal realm and the occasional suggestion of its self-sufficiency.¹¹⁷

We need to recognize that the context of personal life is an extensive and complex network of social relations, and to appreciate a range of social connections much wider than those of personal love. The person is constituted not only in relation to other dialoguing subjects but also in relation to various groups as parts of larger social wholes. As Midgley puts it, "We are incurably members one of another."¹¹⁸ Persons are understood in an even larger framework when related to social patterns and processes that are common to the species. They are related to social realities, moreover, that, in temporal terms, stretch across millennia (both past and future) and, in spatial terms, extend to the global human community.

Against the "social atomism" of the reigning liberal model of human nature, the sociobiologists, as we have seen, argue that society is not the invention of deliberate, socially neutral, self-interested calculation, but rather the product of evolution. The person is naturally oriented not only to other "Thous" but to the group. He or she is not only "born in [interpersonal] reciprocity"¹¹⁹ but also is naturally adapted to develop and thrive in human community; membership in the group precedes, rather than proceeds from, individual relationships.

¹¹⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983) 57.

¹¹⁷ It could be noted that these weaknesses of personalist-inspired moral perspectives are sensed and responded to in John Paul II's notion of "social love" in the recent encyclical *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo rei socialis)* in *Origins* 17 (March 3, 1988) 641-60. The concept of "social love" and the opposition to the moral myopia engendered by radical individualism have deep roots in the tradition of magisterial social thought. See Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) and David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

¹¹⁸ Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (New York: Penguin, 1983) 21.

¹¹⁹ Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 46.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to argue that the new and rapidly expanding writings of sociobiologists, at least in the highly selective and modest, reconstructed form drawn upon here, can correct some of the noted deficiencies within recent Catholic treatments of love, particularly those regarding the ordering of love. It does not argue that Christian theologians should become sociobiologists. Far from rejecting Catholic perspectives inspired by personalism, phenomenology, or existentialism, I have attempted to place their insights on interpersonal love in a richer, more realistic, and more complex context. We need to consider the person as part of the natural biological order, rather than as either a mere organism or a wholly immaterial transcendental subject. We need neither angelism nor materialism, but a balanced appreciation of all levels of human nature—personal, social, and cultural, but also biological—and a greater understanding of how they interpenetrate and mutually affect one another. The contributions of sociobiology to Catholic accounts of love can be summarized briefly.

First, sociobiology helps us to view human love and altruism within a vastly expanded temporal and spatial context. Kin altruism and reciprocal altruism point to the fact that our extended social field encompasses not only intimate friendships but also extended kin, neighborhood groups, and local communities. Following the ethologists, the sociobiologists understand human altruism in the context of animal social behavior, which allows us to perceive those features of altruism which it shares with other species as well as those which are *sui generis*. Paying attention to the evolutionary origins of human affective capacities encourages us to notice their complexity: aggression is mixed with sociality, egoism with altruism, fear with gregariousness. It allows us to get beyond what Midgley calls the “colonial” view of integrity, according to which order is imposed from without or above human nature, and to see it as an achievement that in part draws upon the natural social capacities and tendencies that are part of our evolutionary heritage. It also allows us to see the antisocial components of human nature and attend to areas which require reordering. Theologically, sociobiologists help us to understand more realistically the “sin” to which we are prone (disordered self-love, disordered in-group affiliation, etc.) as well as the “nature” that is healed, perfected, and elevated by grace.

Second, a serious appropriation of evolutionary biology leads us to give full attention to the nature of the human person as evolved, embodied, and, to some degree, affectively ordered by its biologically based emotional constitution. We are not free-floating subjectivities, spirits in the

world, or “disembodied intelligences, tentatively considering possible incarnations,” but, as Midgley insists, concrete, embodied human beings with “highly particular, sharply limited needs and possibilities.”¹²⁰ While the personalists are correct in claiming that the person is a unique, irreplaceable mystery that is “born in reciprocity,”¹²¹ dialogue, and mutual consciousness, it is also the case, as Wilson writes, that “each person is molded by an interaction of his environment, especially his cultural environment, with the genes that affect social behavior.”¹²² The existential realization that to love someone involves a risk and entails a commitment based on trust must be balanced with awareness that love is not always exclusively the product of the spiritual interaction of two free-floating, fully consenting transcendental subjectivities. We are human beings whose love is shaped in particular ways by our evolved natures and not in other ways; the variation of human affection is extensive but not infinite. As we move even further away from angelism, we realize more thoroughly, as Midgley puts it, that “We are not just rather like animals; we *are* animals.”¹²³ Regarding the ethics of love, we are not free to love and care for all people in the same way, or to love all people with the mutuality encouraged by Rahner—a realization that is resisted by one-sided emphases on existential freedom, or on the radically voluntary nature of love.

Third, primary relations of family and friendship need to continue to be taken for what they are: natural, good, and deserving of special moral priority. Reciprocity and kin-selection theories account for biologically based human inclinations to form individualized attachments and to give the highest moral priority to primary relations. Both sources recognize that family and close friends on the whole demand more attention, evoke greater degrees of self-denial and altruism, and exert greater influence on the governance of our daily lives than do other relationships. This pattern is natural and should be retained in the Christian ethics of love, though without the myopia and exclusivity that mark disordered special loyalties.

Fourth, sociobiological analyses of the biological basis of the natural gradation of primary relations can be taken as a naturalistic basis not only for understanding, but also for morally justifying, the ordering of love. The natural basis of the Thomistic priority of moral responsibility toward those to whom we are more closely bound is reaffirmed by contemporary evolutionary biology. While partiality is frequently based primarily on personal rather than biological grounds, at times personal grounds may overlap with and even express biological ordering and fulfill

¹²⁰ Midgley, *Beast and Man* 71.

¹²² Wilson, *On Human Nature* 18.

¹²¹ Johann, *The Meaning of Love* 46.

¹²³ Midgley, *Beast and Man* xiii.

natural desires. Thus there are, for example, both personally and biologically based reasons for loving one's children and for giving them greater care than other persons; and a simplistic identification of either one of these dimensions as *the* motive would be artificial and simpleminded. The human person may be oriented by her emotional constitution to love "the nearest and the dearest," but the concrete shape that love takes in each person's life is the result of the exercise of human freedom rather than a mechanical execution of blind, fitness-maximizing biological imperatives.

Fifth, evolutionary theorists from Darwin to this day have argued that kin preference provides a natural basis for expanding the range of human altruism.¹²⁴ Authentic interpersonal love results in part from the directing and maturing of innate affective and social capacities; it is, as Midgley notes, "part of our animal nature, not a colonial imposition."¹²⁵ As for Thomas, other-regarding love and altruism are seen as going *with* rather than always *against* the grain of essential aspects of human nature. Rather than being simply transcended, suspended, or eliminated, then, natural human social capacities can be developed, unfolded, and amplified in a Christian ethic of love.

Finally, it can be suggested that sociobiological attentiveness to our common descent, genetic inheritance, and present species membership provides a basis for what Scheler called an "emotional realization of the unity of mankind as a species."¹²⁶ Personalism always struggles against a temptation to withdraw into what Johann calls "an exclusive mutuality that is indifferent and even hostile to the interests and claims of the larger community in which we find ourselves."¹²⁷ This point is underscored by sociobiological attentiveness to our insufficient awareness of the relativity of local in-groups and their tendency to erect fixed boundaries in order to exclude members of out-groups. The strong sense of the "otherness of the other" developed in personalism is necessary, particularly as a counterweight to the potentially dehumanizing effect of viewing

¹²⁴ The theme of extending human concern for others through an expansion of natural social capacities is anticipated in David Hume and developed by Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, esp. bks. 4 and 5. Darwin writes, for example: "The moral nature of man has reached its present standard, partly through the advancement of his reasoning powers and consequently of a just public opinion, but especially from his sympathies having been rendered more tender and widely diffused through the effects of habit, example, instruction, and reflection" (*Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, 2d ed., ed. Philip Appleman [New York: W. W. Norton, 1970] 201).

¹²⁵ Midgley, *Beast and Man* 260.

¹²⁶ Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954) 98.

¹²⁷ Robert Johann, "Love and Justice," in *Ethics and Society: Original Essays on Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. Richard T. DeGeorge (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) 39.

the individual as a part of a larger whole, but "otherness" must be appreciated within the larger context of basic human commonality and solidarity. Evolutionary theory provides grounds for seeing each person primarily as a fellow human being rather than as first and foremost a member of another income level, profession, race, nation, ethnic group, tribe, etc. These implications of sociobiology work against a narrow ethic according to which, "the importance of each individual [is] devalued in proportion as it is more distantly related."¹²⁸ This deeper sense of the unity based upon our common humanity can promote empathy and, wherever possible, altruism, and encourages us to the deeper sense of the "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" of humanity that lies at the heart of Rahner's portrayal of the religious depth of all interpersonal love.

¹²⁸ David P. Barash, *Sociobiology and Behavior*, 2d ed. (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982) 74.

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