

Divine Action in the Present Age

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Introduction

One of our deepest intuitions is that loving relationships involve freedom. It is difficult -- if not impossible -- to imagine ongoing love relations in which one person entirely controls the other. We might debate the type, degree, and extent of personal freedom that love requires. But our experiences of love invariably suggest that loving relationships require some measure of freedom.¹

John Wesley recognized the integral connections between love and freedom. “All of the manifold wisdom of God (as well as all his power and goodness),” says Wesley, “is displayed in governing [humans] as [human]: not as a stock or a stone, but as an intelligent and free spirit.”² Wesley says elsewhere that “the whole frame of divine providence is so constituted as to afford man every possible help, in order to his doing good and eschewing evil, which can be done without turning man into a machine...”³ In his sermon, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” Wesley reminds his readers that “You know how God wrought in your own soul when he first enabled you to say, ‘The life I

¹ I have argued in many publications that love is best defined as acting intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being. I have argued that scientific research on love might be sufficiently grounded and the love research program expanded if scientists, theologians, and philosophers employed this definition.

² Sermon 67, “On Divine Providence,” paragraph 14, *Works*, 2:541.

³ *Ibid.*

now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me....’ [God did not] take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil; he did not *force* you; but being *assisted* by his grace you ... *chose* the better part.”⁴

Randy L. Maddox summarizes Wesley’s thoughts on matters of divine love, power, and creaturely freedom. Maddox says that “perhaps the best way to capture Wesley’s conviction here is to say that he construed God’s power or sovereignty fundamentally in terms of *empowerment*, rather than control or *overpowerment*.”⁵ Maddox reminds his readers that Wesley was fond of saying that God works “strongly and sweetly.”⁶ Another word Wesley used -- “woo” -- illustrates well the way in which God lovingly acts in relation to creatures. Wesleyans today naturally use words such as “call,” “summon,” and “persuade” to talk about God’s loving action when relating with creatures to whom God grants freedom. Wesleyan scholars have explored over the centuries the importance of divine love and creaturely freedom for doctrines of salvation, sanctification, biblical inspiration, ethics, and a host of related issues.

In this paper, I argue that a Wesleyan theory of divine love and creaturely freedom might 1) suggest a theological methodology that is complimentary to science and 2) provide an answer to how we can love those whom current scientific theories regard as unlovable. My proposal draws upon, develops, and then extends Wesley’s own insights in the endeavor to serve the present age generally and compliment science specifically.

⁴ Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,’ paragraph 11, *Works*, 2:489.

⁵ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood, 1994), 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The Proposal

John Wesley had a healthy respect for and knowledge of the science of his day. Although he rejected scientific theories that directly opposed central theological doctrines, he appropriated much scientific evidence and many scientific theories in his quest to understand reality. Many contemporary scholars in science-and-theology research⁷ continue the way of Wesley by considering what the evidence and theories from theology and science might tell us about existence.⁸

⁷ A close examination of theology reveals that many theological traditions are compatible with the general themes and structures of science. John Hedley Brooke, for instance, has argued extensively that theology has not been predominately antagonistic to science. “Serious scholarship in the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion,” notes Brooke. “Conflicts allegedly between science and religion may turn out to be between rival scientific interests, or conversely between rival theological factions” (John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 5). Because scholars today are discovering this compatibility, a contemporary revolution is occurring as scholars ask questions about God within the orbit of science and questions about science in the orbit of theology. Various labels are given the ways that science and theology are understood as compatible. Barbour identifies two as “dialogue” and “integration” (Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, ch. 1). Ted Peters and Ernan McMullin call the relation science and theology best enjoys, “consonance” (Peters, “Theology and Science: Where Are We?” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 31:2 [June 1996]: 323-343; McMullin, “How Should Cosmology Relate to Theology? *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Arthur Peacocke, ed. [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981]). David Ray Griffin uses the word, “harmony,” to argue that science and theology can work together peacefully if we discard particular unessential doctrines present in some ways of thinking scientifically or theologically (David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, ch. 1). All of these labels suggest that science and theology can be related positively, although the two are not identical.

⁸ I join many contemporary scholars of science and theology who adopt a critical realist stance with regard to theological language and hypotheses. Critical realism rejects the notion that we

Recent scientific research provides ample evidence that at least some humans – and apparently some nonhumans – express love. Creatures act in ways that promote well-being, and sometimes their primary motive is to enhance the well-being of others. Contemporary sociobiologists argue that kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and related theories of altruism generally explain loving action insofar as organisms act for the good of others. Scientific disciplines outside sociobiology have adopted versions of these hypotheses as well. These theories propose that the only candidates for love are those creatures expected to reciprocate or those creatures genetically similar to the lover. To say it another way, creatures – both human and nonhuman – act for the benefit of relatives and those from whom they expect some benefit in return.

Recent work in sociobiology has re-envisioned a little-known Darwinian theory called “group-selection.” Group-selection theory proponents suggest that altruists sometimes assist those with a different genetic lineage and those unable to reciprocate the altruist’s love. Altruists offer such assistance only to those in their own groups, however. Evolution favors groups whose members act for the good of fellow members. Evolutionary theory is compatible with the notion that groups comprised of altruists flourish when competing with groups comprised of egoists.

Prominent theories in sociobiology cannot explain well, however, why some individuals act altruistically for the good of outsiders and opposition groups. Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, for instance, admit that “group selection favors within group

can know with certainty that our language corresponds fully with God. Critical realists suggest, however, that what creatures say about the Creator and creation may be partially correct. Models, analogies, hypotheses, and metaphors may refer truthfully to the divine and to the world. Just as critical realists in science adopt hypotheses to account for what seems to be true about the created world, so critical realists in theology adopt hypotheses for what seems to be true about God.

niceness and between group nastiness.”⁹ Strangers and enemies are not loved. There is currently no scientific theory that explains well why one might love those deemed unlovable.¹⁰

Sociobiology and theories from other sciences do not elucidate the drive and actual practice of promoting *overall* well-being, however. Promoting overall well-being would at least sometimes include loving enemies, strangers, and those deemed unlovable. John Wesley considered loving those deemed unlovable central to a Christian ethic. In fact, Wesley believed that Christians are less inspired to love their enemies if they believe that God’s love does not include God gift of freedom. In his sermon, “Free Grace,” Wesley argues that the freedom-depleted doctrine of predestination “tend[s] to destroy several particular branches of holiness. Such [branches] are meekness and love,” says

⁹ *Unto Others*, 9.

¹⁰ David Sloan Wilson extends the group-selection hypothesis even to explain religion. Religious groups are “rapidly evolving entities adapting to their current environments,” says Wilson (David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002], 35). These entities have moral systems that define appropriate behaviors for their members and prevent subversion from within. In particular, says Wilson, “a religion instructs believers to behave for the benefit of their group” (96). Judaism, early Christianity, and Calvinism are examples of religious groups whose beliefs and rules benefit members and allow these groups to out-compete other religious groups. Religions that promote intra-member cooperation will survive and reproduce better than competitors whose members do not cooperate. However, religious groups do not promote well what Wilson calls, “universal brotherhood” (217). Religions seek only to benefit faithful members.

Wilson’s group-selection hypothesis with regard to religion seems verified in at least some instances. A glance at world history reveals wars between those avowing allegiances to differing religious traditions. Contemporary conflicts between Christians, Jews, and Muslims serve as painful illustrations of inter-religious hostility.

Wesley, “love ... of our enemies, of the evil, and unthankful.”¹¹ Many contemporary people believe that overall well-being must be promoted if interpersonal, inter-tribal, inter-religious, and international hostilities are to be overcome. Humans must not restrict their love only for those near and dear.

The foregoing suggests that the present age needs a theory to account both for the truth that love can benefit those dear, near, and in one’s group *as well as* the truth that sometimes creatures should and do act to benefit outsiders and enemies. The theory would be especially strong if it were theologically and scientifically viable.

One possible theory for why at least some humans can love *all* others – including enemies, outsiders, and those deemed unlovable -- says that God provides unnatural or supernatural power to enable this love. In their natural state, says this theory, humans only promote their own well-being and the well-being of those near and dear. Proponents of this view say that science explains natural love, but God supernaturally empowers at least some to go above and beyond nature. Often part of this theory is the notion that creatures naturally express *eros* but require divine action to express *agape*.

Theologian Martin C. D’Arcy advocates the theory that creatures naturally love those near and dear but need supernatural help to love outsiders and enemies. “We can advance a high theory of love by making full use of natural love,” says D’Arcy, “but the keynote of it will always be possessiveness. Our neighbors will be loved like to ourselves; they will be as it were another self.... In Christian Agape the complete revelation of love is given. Here the finite is lifted to a new degree of being, whose limit is measured only by the necessity of its remaining a human person. This new life which

¹¹ Sermon 110, “Free Grace,” paragraph 30, *Works*, 3:548.

is thus set going is a pure gift and beyond the natural capacity of the finite human person.”¹²

The natural/supernatural scheme that D’Arcy and like-minded theologians advocate presents several problems. It implies, for instance, that important aspects of creaturely love can be adequately understood without any reference to God. It seems to deny the Christian claim that “love is from God” because “God is love.”¹³ Divine inspiration is only necessary when nature proves insufficient to empower love of those we consider difficult to love.

The natural/supernatural scheme is also vulnerable to the God-of-the-gaps problem, whereby science is believed to explain fully all but a few God-inspired occurrences. Unexplained events, says the God-of-the-gaps theory, require appeal to the mysterious workings of deity. When science provides hypotheses to explain fully what was previously inexplicable, divine action provides no explanatory role either ontologically or epistemologically. A function for the supernatural disappears. The natural/supernatural scheme is methodologically inadequate for science and theology research, with theology most often bearing the brunt of this inadequacy.

Instead of adopting the natural/supernatural scheme in which some creaturely love can be fully explained without reference to God, I suggest that an adequate explanation of *all* creaturely love must include a necessary role for divine action. Love for oneself, love for those near and dear, and love for outsiders and enemies require God’s activity. To put

¹² M. C. D’Arcy, *The Heart and Mind of Love: Lion and Unicorn: A Study in Eros and Agape* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 363, 370. This quote does not represent D’Arcy’s only view on the relation of nature and grace. D’Arcy presents a kaleidoscope of opinions on the relation, with no coherent explanation of the differences.

¹³ 1 Jn. 4:7-8

it another way, the present age requires a God hypothesis to account for how limited creatures can express both limited and unlimited love. And this hypothesis must include a robust role for incessant divine action rather than seeing God's influence as an occasional add-on.

In contrast to the natural/supernatural scheme, another theory suggests that only God expresses authentic love. Only God can love enemies, outsiders, and those deemed unlovable. Creatures cannot love at all. This theory -- divine unilateralism -- contends that any expression of genuine love is entirely an act of God, and creatures contribute nothing. Only God loves.

Anders Nygren, perhaps the 20th century's most influential love theologian, advocates divine unilateralism. Nygren contends that the only authentic love is *agape*, and God is the only agent who expresses *agape*. "The Christian has nothing of his own to give," says Nygren. "The love which he shows his neighbor is the love which God has infused in him."¹⁴ He likens creatures to tubes that pass genuine love received from above to others below. The tubes/creatures do not contribute to the character or shape of this love.¹⁵ "It is God's own *agape*," Nygren asserts, "which seeks to make its way out into the world through the Christian as its channel. What we have here is a purely theocentric love, in which all choice on man's part is excluded."¹⁶

There are many reasons to reject divine unilateralism. For centuries, theologians have noted that it implies absolute determinism, divine predestination, and lack of

¹⁴ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper and Row, 1957 [1930]), 129.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 735, 741.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 218, 213

significant creaturely value. Divine unilateralism entails the notion that God acts alone, single-handedly, to secure any good that occurs, because evil creatures are incapable of promoting well-being. John Wesley's insights related to prevenient grace as co-operant grace provide a way to overcome these deficiencies. Wesley generally rejected divine unilateralism, when defined as God overpowering or not empowering creatures.

Divine unilateralism should also be rejected for what it implies about science. It denies that science tells us anything important about creaturely love. Science is superfluous; all scientific love research ultimately amounts to nothing. Divine unilateralism is a methodological dead end for science.

It is here that my uneasiness with the so-called "intelligent design" movement emerges. In one sense virtually all Christians affirm intelligent design, because they believe that God is intelligent and creating entails some sense of design. But contemporary intelligent design theory goes further than this general sense. As I read them, intelligent design theorists suggest that the irreducible complexity of some organisms require unilateral divine action. Natural causes and explanations have nothing to contribute to these special cases of irreducible complexity. Many contemporary scientists are naturally reticent to embrace a methodology based on divine unilateralism, because such a methodology rules out natural causation to explain the evolution of a particular organism.

In contrast to divine unilateralism, an adequate explanation for how and why creatures might love enemies, outsiders, and those deemed unlovable includes a necessary role for God *and* creatures. Creaturely love is not the work of God alone. Creatures are not tubes, channels, or conduits through which God unilaterally acts to promote well-being. An adequate hypothesis for how creatures can express limited and

unlimited love must include reference to creaturely contributions. And an explanation emphasizing necessary creaturely contributions is compatible with a scientific methodology that seeks explanations about existence that necessarily include creaturely causes.

I offer a third scheme for explaining how creatures might love enemies, outsiders, and those deemed unlovable – as well as those near and dear and themselves. The scheme I suggest follows the path of John Wesley by arguing that love is God’s chief and central attribute. Love is an essential attribute of God, because God’s nature and name is love.¹⁷ To be more specific, it is necessarily the case that God acts intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (which includes past divine actions), to promote overall well-being. Loving others is not an arbitrary divine decision but an aspect of God’s eternal, unchanging nature. God cannot not love. God is love.

In suggesting that love is an essential aspect of the divine nature, however, I am not suggesting that God has no choice whatsoever with regard to love.¹⁸ *That* God will love others is necessarily the case. However, *how* God loves others is a free choice on God’s part.¹⁹ This distinction requires further explanation.

¹⁷ Instead of “essential,” some philosophers prefer “superessential” to refer to divine attributes. The latter term implies that a particular attribute applies to God in all possible worlds. I mean for “essential” to imply the same.

¹⁸ For a stimulating discussion of the relation between the divine will and divine nature with regard to love, see various essays in a book edited by John Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001). See especially “God’s Power: A Process View,” by Ian Barbour, “Cosmos and Kenosis,” by Keith Ward, and “Creation out of Love,” by Paul Fiddes.

¹⁹ On this, see Thomas Jay Oord, “Divine Love,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays*, Thomas Jay Oord, ed. (Kansas City: Mo.: Beacon Hill, 2002).

In ongoing love relations, we can rest assured that God will always act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God's own past actions), to promote overall well-being. This steadfast love is necessary to what it means to be divine. The fact that God loves others, therefore, is an aspect of God's eternal essence. Love is, primarily, a feature of God's nature.

The manner in which God chooses to promote overall well-being, however, arises from how God sympathetically responds to others. There is neither a formula, an agent, nor circumstances exterior to God that entirely determine what these divine choices will be.²⁰ How God loves others, therefore, is a matter secondarily of the divine will.

Presupposed in the claim that God's love is full-orbed is the notion that God is a relational being. As relational, God is affected by those to whom God relates. For some time, relational theologians have rejected the idea that God is an aloof and distant monarch uninfluenced by others.²¹ Instead, relational theologians like myself affirm that God suffers and is passible, to use the classic language. This means that God is influenced by the ups and downs, joys and sorrows, sins and loves of others. God is not in all ways transcendent. God is the best and most moved mover.²²

²⁰ Just as creaturely love sometimes takes the form of *agape*, *eros*, or *philia* and these forms can be mixed, God also expresses *agape*, *eros*, and *philia* and sometimes these forms are mixed. In *agape*, God intentionally responds to ill-being by promoting overall well-being. God's *eros* appreciates the value of others and seeks to enhance that value. And God expresses *philia* by working cooperatively with creatures to increase the common good. God's love is full-orbed.

²¹ Ronald Goetz notes that "the rejection of the ancient doctrine of divine impassibility has become theological commonplace" ("The Rise of a New Orthodoxy," *The Christian Century* 103/13 [1986], 385).

²² The notion that God is the most moved mover, rather than the unmoved mover, derives from Abraham Heschel. Various process theologians employ the phrase as well. Clark Pinnock titles

Although nondivine others affect this relational God, God's nature as love remains unchanging. God's eternal nature remains constant. However, the particular way God loves others – *agape*, *eros*, *philia* – is influenced by the condition of the beloved. Science suggests that a creature's own characteristics and its relations with others influence the form and extent of a creature's love. The theology I propose suggests that God's own characteristics and God's relations with others influence the form and extent of divine love.

God is always present to all creatures, and God's omnipresence plays a crucial role for understanding divine action in relation to creation. With the exception of divine love, omnipresence may be the divine attribute theologians least emphasize. By omnipresence, I mean that God is present to all things.²³

Here, Wesley's emphasis upon divine omnipresence is particularly helpful. "God acts everywhere," says Wesley, "and therefore is everywhere... God acts ... throughout the whole compass of his creation; by sustaining all things... every moment superintending everything that he has made; strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures."²⁴ I propose, in fact, divine omnipresence provides empirical grounds for hypotheses about divine action in relation to creaturely love. Admittedly, the word "empirical" extends beyond the domain of what can be perceived by our five senses. But "empirical" is an important word for this

one of his books that promotes the idea that God is affected by others, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001).

²³ For a Wesleyan reading of divine omnipresence, see Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), especially chapters 4 and 6.

²⁴ Sermon 118, "On the Omnipresence of God," paragraph *Works*, 4:42-43.

context because of what it implies for our thinking about God as an actual actor in the world.

God is not only present to all things, but God enters moment-by-moment into give-and-receive interaction with others. God acts in relation to others as both the ideal recipient and the ideal contributor. As the omnipresent ideal recipient, God takes in the experiences of all others. God does not look at creation from a distance, as if a spectator on the sidelines who occasionally gets in the game. Rather God is present to all things, all the time, and God experiences the experiences of others. Because God is the all-embracing one who sympathizes fully with all others, God possesses the capacity to assess flawlessly what is required to promote overall well-being at any particular moment in any particular place.

God not only loves incessantly and by virtue of divine omnipresence loves *all* others. God also calls creatures – both human and nonhuman – to promote overall well-being. God is the ideal contributor. This contributory call entails empowering and inspiring creatures to love given the capacities of each creature. The God hypothesis I am proposing suggests that all creatures feel God's direct, causal call.

The call to love that God gives each creature is, in one sense, no different from the causal influence that other creatures exert. In a universe of cause and effect, divine efficient causation is a cause of the same metaphysical kind as creaturely causes. No appeal to mysterious divine action is necessary; special pleas to inexplicable supernaturalism are not required. God's influence upon creatures breaks no theoretical principles pertaining to the metaphysical laws that apply to all existents.

If God exerts causal influence as an efficient cause and relationally assesses the states of all others, God must possess a physical (and mental) aspect. To say that God

has a physical aspect that exerts causal influence, however, need not conflict with the claim made by most theistic religions that God is a spirit. It does conflict, however, with the positivistic claim that the physical aspects of all beings must be perceptible by a human's five senses. But positivism so understood cannot account for inevitable aspects of existence, let alone justify its own agenda. As a being with an aspect of physicality, God's action in the world is in principle conceivable in the broad language we use to describe cause and effect generally.

I propose that 1) a spiritual entity – God – with a physical dimension exists [and perhaps there are more], 2) this spiritual entity exerts efficient causation, and, furthermore, 3) we perceive the influence of this entity nonsensorily. God is a spirit whose invisible physicality affects others in a way analogous to the physical influence – whether sensory or nonsensory -- that other beings exert. This claim that we perceive in ways other than our five senses is fitting for a Wesleyan, given that Wesley postulated that God has given humans a spiritual sense so that they may perceive spiritual realities not available for apprehension through typical sensory perception.²⁵

²⁵In *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Wesley explains this perceptual faculty: “Seeing our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses, it is certainly necessary that you have senses capable of discerning objects of this kind -- not only those which are called “natural senses,” which in this respect profit nothing, as being altogether incapable of discerning objects of a spiritual kind, but *spiritual* senses, exercised to discern spiritual good and evil. It is necessary that you have the *hearing* ear, and the *seeing* eye, emphatically so called; that you have a new class of senses opened in your soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood to be ‘the *evidence* of things unseen’ as your bodily senses are of visible things, to be the avenues of the invisible world, to discern spiritual objects, and to furnish you with ideas of what the outward ‘eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard’ (*An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, 32, *Works* 11:56-57). See also Wesley’s sermons “The New Birth” and “On Living Without God.” I argue my claim that nonsensory perception is preferable to Wesley’s language

In other ways, however, God's call to love is different from the influence that creatures exert -- although in these ways God is not an exception to the metaphysical principles that science should presuppose and not contradictory to the principles of what should be regarded as empirical. First, God's call is different in that God always influences creatures to act in ways that optimize overall well-being. God's essence is love, and this means that God loves relentlessly. God's power invariably urges all things toward the common good. By contrast, creatures sometimes influence others to choose ill-being. Whereas creatures love sporadically, God's love is steadfast and never failing.

God's causal action in our cause-and-effect universe is different from other creatures, secondly, in that only God is a necessary cause in every creature's love. Without divine influence, no creature can love. By contrast, any particular creature is a contingent cause for the love of others. No one creature's influence is required for another creature to promote overall-well being. Divine action is required for creatures to live, and move, and have their being. Creatures are, to use the words of theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, "utterly dependent" upon God to be empowered and inspired to love.²⁶

Third, God's influence is different from creaturely influence in that God takes into account the influence of others and persuades each creature to respond in a way that promotes overall well-being. God presents the possible options for action to creatures, and those options arise from past creaturely and divine actions. God inspires creatures to

of spiritual senses in my essay, "Prevenient Grace and Nonsensory Perception of God in a Postmodern Wesleyan Philosophy," in *Between Nature and Grace: Mapping the Interface of Wesleyan Theology and Psychology* (San Diego, Calif.: Point Loma Press, 2000).

²⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989 [2nd Ed., 1830]). The translation of *schlechthinig* as "utter" is my own, but this translation is not unique to me.

love given what is possible in the particular circumstances each creature faces.²⁷ God's call is situation specific.²⁸

²⁷ The notion that God offers possible options for action to creatures is perhaps best articulated in the writing of many process theologians. See, for instance, John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), Marjorie Hewett Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), and Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978; orig. ed., 1929).

²⁸ The divine/creaturely synergism I advocate allows one to embrace what David Ray Griffin calls "variable divine influence." God's influence upon others, says Griffin, is always formally the same but variable in content (Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 147). God acts as a necessary cause that empowers each creature in each moment of life. I claim that God calls each to act in ways that will promote overall well-being. In this, all creatures feel divine causation in the same formal way.

Divine influence, however, is variable in its content and effectiveness. The content of God's call depends upon the particularities of each creature in each moment. Creatures are diverse, and they dwell in diverse environments. God's specific influence upon an electron, for instance, will be different in content from God's influence upon a worm. God's specific call for a child will be different in content from God's call for an adult. God's omniscient assessment of all conditions provides God with the resources to tailor perfectly the call to love for each creature.

Divine causation is variable in its effectiveness, because creatures may respond in various ways to God's calls. When creatures respond well, God's activity to promote overall well-being is most effective. Because some creatures are highly complex and possess a greater degree of freedom, God presents a vast array of possibilities to them in each moment. God empowers them to choose among these possibilities and inspires them to choose that which promotes overall well-being. When creatures respond appropriately to God's calls to love, the common good increases.

The variability of a call's effectiveness is not based upon God's decision to exert either maximal or minimal influence upon others. God's desire for the promotion of overall well-being prompts maximum divine effort in each moment to enhance the common good. Deity does not rest passively, waiting to be prayerfully inspired to love. Divine love is relentless and steadfast; God never takes a holiday from love.

The similarities and differences between the divine agent and creaturely agents that I have briefly outlined provide the basis for overcoming the problems inherent in natural/supernatural and divine unilateralism schemes noted earlier. Divine causation is neither an occasional add-on nor an eclipse of creaturely causation. Creaturely love requires God's empowering and inspiring call, and yet God does not interrupt the natural causal relations. When creatures love, they respond to the divine call to promote overall well-being. This compliments a scientific methodology that explores creaturely causes and explanations. And this scheme only contradicts those methodologies that suggest creaturely causes and explanations are necessary and sufficient in themselves.

This scheme admittedly envisions the omnipresent God as not outside or beyond the universal laws of cause and effect. In doing so, it provides empirical and conceptual grounds to hypothesize that God influences creatures in ways that encourage the enhancement of overall well-being.

Given these hypotheses, I can now suggest how limited creatures may express unlimited love. While the extensivity of localized creatures is necessarily limited, creatures are constantly influenced by One whose awareness is universal. This omnipresent Being assesses in each moment what should be done to promote the common good. In addition, this being knows what each particular creature should do in any particular moment to promote overall well-being. Creatures can express unlimited love, therefore, because they have access to One with an unlimited perspective. To use the language of Pitirim Sorokin, unlimited love requires maximal extensivity.²⁹

Creatures with narrow sympathies and restricted extensivity are not prevented from

²⁹ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16.

contributing to the common good, because their maximally extensive Creator envisions the good of the whole and communicates to creatures what contribution each might make.

Most of the time, the best way for a particular creature to promote overall well-being is to act in ways that simultaneously promote the creature's own well-being and the well-being of those near and dear. In an interrelated universe, the mutual benefit of the actor and others often overlaps. Sometimes the promotion of overall well-being, however, requires self-sacrifice for the good of those near and dear. Scientific studies showing that creatures often act for the good of those genetically similar to themselves or members of the same group verify this. Other times, love involves acting for one's own well-being at the expense of the well-being of some others. This self-affirming action can sometimes enhance overall well-being. Self-love that deprives resources from some others is sometimes appropriate.

God's love as all-pervasive, optimally sensitive, and perfectly influential provides grounds to affirm that creatures sometimes act for the good of outsiders, enemies, and those deemed unlovable. Limited creatures express unlimited love if they respond appropriately to the call of the omnipresent One who knows what the common good requires and assesses perfectly what each creature can contribute to attaining that good.³⁰

³⁰ To say that all creatures have access to a universal Agent who calls them to promote the common good should not be taken to imply that creatures know with absolute certainty the specificity of these calls. Creaturely limitations remain. We discern God's moment-by-moment calls in the context of a wide variety of relations, emotions, and obligations. God's influence is part of a multi-lateral array of other influences. Our ultimate justification for choosing to act in one way to express love rather than in another is the imprecise intuition that God calls us to act in such a way. Tools and practices are available to help creatures better discern God's call to love. Over the millennia, religious people have discovered means by which they can assess with greater accuracy – but not with absolute certainty – God's leading. Religious people improve their skills

When one does not regard the omnipresent God as outside or beyond the universal laws of cause and effect, one can offer empirical grounds to hypothesize that God causally influences creatures in ways that encourage the enhancement of overall well-being. And when God is a necessary cause, it is plausible to speculate that creatures rely upon God's call when choosing to love outsiders and enemies, those near and dear, and themselves.

The scheme I have outlined draws from, develops, and extends John Wesley's own conceptions of divine love and creaturely freedom. I believe that divine love and creaturely freedom as understood in this way provides fertile ground for conceiving of divine action in an age of science.

at discernment when they engage in activities such as contemplation, living in loving communities, confession, worship practices, education, meditation on sacred scriptures, and following the ways of the exemplars. Some ways of living and relating enhance our ability to detect divine appeals.