

VALUE-DRIVEN: THE GROUNDING OF MORALS IN EVOLUTIONARY AND RELIGIOUS NARRATIONS

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How can evolution as a scientific concept ground or support an ethics based on religious beliefs and how can a religious morality¹ be underpinned by a scientific claim (here, it is evolution) that in the mind of the public is associated with anything but the ethical. That science and religion have no connections has been the subject of many theories. One of these theories is the naturalistic fallacy, a claim proffered mostly by biologists.² This paper, by having reservations on the claim of naturalistic fallacy, would show that science and religion can interface through the phenomenon of value analyzed through the concepts of ethics and aesthetics. This position claims that value is a by-product of the evolutionary process which is its own narration backed in many instances by religious narrations whose own conceived values at times paradoxically clash with the evolutionary adaptations.

VALUES, ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

What is valued stakes a claim on an organism's behavior which is drawn by what is attractive in the environment. Thus, values have implications for ethics and aesthetics both of which have some

1. A distinction can actually be made between "ethics" and "morality". Here, ethics refers to a universal or philosophical system of principles and values and their application, whereas morality refers to standards or values of a social group, like a religious group, or simply an individual. Overlapping can always occur and, in fact, some would just interchange the two concepts.

2. Paul Ehrlich, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000); Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).

bearing on morality, including one that is inspired and critiqued by religious narratives.

NATURALISTIC FALLACY: FROM “IS” TO “OUGHT”

Biologists, *qua* biologists, would strongly assert that there is nothing in the evolutionary outcomes which tells us what we should do.” They claim that to establish an “ought” from an “is” is a “naturalistic fallacy.”³ The process of evolution simply goes its way without consideration for what is morally good or morally bad among theistic believers or what is ethical or unethical in general. According to this view, evolution does not offer any clue or clues on how behavior ought to be conducted. For the evolutionists to admit a moral dimension to the evolutionary process of nature and of life might make divine intervention inevitable. The ongoing intervention of a supernatural agent would destroy the sacrosanct principles of Charles Darwin, one of which is the absence of divine design or purpose.

The naturalistic fallacy is a critique on the belief that what happens in nature is good. In this philosophical system, it is assumed that in evolution we can discover what is right and that the good can be boiled down to what is evolutionarily successful. Certainly fallacious it is if we agree with Moore, Pinker, and Ehrlich who would not want anything to do with the fallacious belief that “what happens in nature is good.” Social Darwinism confuses social successes like wealth, power and status with evolutionary success. Does the fact that something is true like the existence of our appendix mean that we ought to have it? That evolutionary success and goodness are not the same thing; this seems to be the implication of the criticism against the naturalistic fallacy.

The idea that you cannot derive an “ought” from an “is” is definitely a threat to the traditional believers of the theory of natural law. It is bad enough that some would use the theory of evolution

3. P. Ehrlich, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect*, 309; S. Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, 150.

as a basis for denying the existence of a God-sanctioned moral universe, now they would also dismiss the natural law theory which claims that in nature we discover moral norms (“from the way they are, things ought to be”). The defenders of the natural law theory fear for a possible outcome of such denial: either an all out nihilism in morality or some kind of a situational ethics that reduces everything to relativism.

THE VALUE PHENOMENON: “IS” GENERATES “OUGHT”

The claim to fallacy is that since the evolutionary facts do not make normative claims, therefore, there are no moral claims that result in the process. Are there really no such claims? Some would disagree. Hefner, for instance, says that “the oughts are values that arise from and in response to the needs, which occur objectively in human nature.”⁴ Needs are facts that we can describe just as they are but they always call for interpretation and the attempt to interpret calls for some kind of evaluation, at least, from the interpreter’s interest. What follows is to call something good or bad, based on needs and wants as facts. Midgley argues that it is “hard to see what would be meant by calling good something that is not in any way wanted or needed by any living creatures.”⁵ Thanks to empirical science, we can now describe objectively and verify truly the wants and needs of the living species.

Even as evolutionary thinkers keep on harping that one cannot derive an “ought” from an “is,” that moral norms cannot be justified merely by the processes of nature, here is, according to Allchin,⁶ a paradoxical situation. If the naturalistic fallacy is true as claimed, how come the human nervous system as a product of evolution seems to violate that very principle?

4. Philip Hefner, “Sociology and Ethics,” in *Religion, Science and Public Policy*, ed. Frank Birtel (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 131.

5. Cited by Hefner, “Sociology and Ethics,” 131.

6. Douglas Allchin, “Morality Sans Fitness: Aesthetics and Reframing the Evolutionary Problem of Ethics (2006) in www.my.pclink.com/~allchin/papers/sans/htm (accessed 09.10.2006).

Our brains do value things and produce moral “oughts,” both for ourselves and for others. From where do these “oughts” emerge, except a history of events in the physical universe that, under most interpretations of natural selection, have no identifiable final purpose or inherent value themselves? If adaptations are, as claimed by some evolutionary thinkers, products of blind contingent history (not a value-driven process) why, then, do humans, along with other animals, produce value?⁷

I suppose there would be some evolutionists who have the paradox quite figured out. But they would be hard tasked to deny that in pursuing their line of reasoning and defending their position, they are already to a certain extent admitting that there are values, at least, worth discussing, if not to quarrel about. But, before anything else, there is a need to ask who does the valuing and what values are there, in general?

VALUING BY LIVING ORGANISMS (HUMANS, TOO)

Those values which are connected to a certain extent to feelings of animals as well as of humans are called perceived values.⁸ These have been observed among mammals, demonstrated in simple experiments with rats which did not only learn to perform certain actions for a desired result but also learned through experiment that certain actions produce pleasant or painful consequences. The Russian psychologist, Pavlov, confirmed that in his classic experiment with a dog, nonhuman animals have the capacity, too, to do “ranking of goodness” which is related to valuing. Capuchin monkeys in one experiment expressed their feelings of being treated unfairly. Of course, these perceived values found in mammals, both human and nonhuman, are functional to the survival of the individual.

There are cases, however, in which our congenital emotions clash with the higher-level value or ethics. Our genes may goad us to be selfish, greedy, and aggressive in certain moments. That is

7. Ibid.

8. P. Ehrlich, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect*, 310.

understandable given the working of natural selection for the fitness of the individual that will transmit the genes. As such, the abstraction we call humanity or society does not have genes. So, the genes encourage and even push the individual to take care of the self and the kin, too, even at the expense of others. But, in retrospect, what is baffling for pure evolutionists is the emergence of the value of altruism and cooperation which natural selection has tolerated. These are the values that are not easily perceived by individuals because it takes a group to “conceive” them⁹ who have opted for group (species) adaptation.

Altruism and cooperation are functional in the mechanism of natural selection but this cannot explain the more grandiose experiences of humans that are not just related to the “expectations” of the selection but are even contradictory. We can even say that in value-centered emphasis, some values, too, are functions of the same mechanism of evolution, but “genetic evolutionary processes cannot produce the altruism that transcend the selfishness of the genes.”¹⁰ Ehrlich depicts cultural evolution as the vehicle of the beyond-the-kin altruism and the social and intellectual values, which through human interaction and feedbacking can also be called conceived values.

Related to altruism is empathy; and the evolution of the capacity for empathy is above all directed to the members of our species. This empathy is helpful in dealing with other members of our group and “appears to have brought with it a value of caring for them.”¹¹ This author further takes note that “we often see improvement of others’ welfare as a reward in itself, not just a contribution to the goal of improving our own”.¹² This, too, is an instance of valuing something for its own sake (just enjoying the reality of something or a relationship), rather than merely as an instrument to get to another value.

9. Jimmy Belita, *God Was Not in the Wind. An Evolutionary Understanding of Popular Religion in the Philippines* (Manila: Adamson University Press, 2006), 63.

10. P. Hefner, “Sociology and Ethics,” 127.

11. P. Ehrlich, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect*, 313.

12. Ibid.

What differentiates us from the determinism that befalls the nonhuman organisms is the capacity of the human species to value behaviors and pass a judgment on its appropriateness or lack of it. In choosing what behavior to take, one must have the facts in tandem with a stated set of values and a method of resolving conflicts among them.¹³ For example, in the case of a person with appendicitis, what choice is he or she to make? Appendicitis is a fact, whether we value it or not, but an act that is responsive to the reality of that bodily fact should be value-laden. Pinker's way is that "given the fact of appendicitis, the value that health is desirable, and the conviction that the pain and expense of the operation are outweighed by the resulting gain in health, one ought to have the operation."¹⁴ The above statement exemplifies Allchin's statement that "while evolutionary explanations can rescue us from nihilistic relativism, they cannot rescue us from the challenge of analyzing and debating our individual and collective values." In short, moral choices for humans are actualized in the cognitive system of the human species and should not be construed only on biological evolution.

The concession to conceived values of the species via the cognitive system as the source of ethics implies a pluralistic approach to ethics. There is always a danger to pluralism in the possibility that someone like Hitler would claim as a conceived value the destruction of a certain type or race of people. Encountering dilemmas such as this, genetic evolution shifted gear and rummaged among its module templates which include, among its richness, philosophy and religion. Evolution, after all, is a means but the means cannot choose the ends. Goals, purposes, aspirations, and dreams exist which are the "oughts" that humans assign upon themselves. Nature has to wait for philosophy and religion to chart those goals and purposes. Philosophical tradition sums the issue of goals, purposes, and values in the three-fold reflection on the true, good and the beautiful. Religion conceives of the same and underpins their existence from the agency of a Creative Agent.

13. D. Allchin, "Morality Sans Fitness."

14. S. Pinker, *The Blank Slate. The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, 164.

Linking Ethics and Evolutionary Aesthetics

The fact that organism is in the “business” of valuing leads to a series of important questions: How does an organism value? How does it characterize one possible response as worth pursuing, while other alternatives are suppressed or not followed? Up to this point, Allchin reminds us that in this question we are inevitably operating within a cognitive system where to ask how one values (its science is called axiology) is equivalent to asking how one learns.

Learning in evolutionary psychology is structuring or restructuring “its neural network to favor certain responses (from among those possible or projected) that might ultimately, foster its survival and reproduction?”¹⁵ Let us translate this to the human situation. For humans, an ethical act or behavior is one form of actualizing the expected “ought” in response to various stimuli of a given situation. Morality is how people habitually value behavior in a social context. In reframing the biological dimension of ethics as a matter of valuing, we depart from the natural law approach in which the act intended carries with it an intrinsic moral value regardless of who values it and regardless of where it is valued.

In the adaptationist framework of evolutionary psychology, the objects of study are not the ethical behaviors themselves but the cognitive processes by which organisms establish value in the first place. We have pointed out the close relationship of the good to be pursued and its accompanying attractiveness to an organism. Hence we should also explore more closely the relationship between ethics and the science of sensory cognition (or traditionally called aesthetics) and their relationship to epistemology which is the science of knowing. The three-pronged relationship unifies the ancient philosophers’ triad of the good, the true and the beautiful. Reality will really be handicapped when one in the triad is missing for the truth of value from the evolutionary framework is inseparable from the discussion of aesthetics in the broadest sense.

It is safer to describe aesthetics as broadly as possible, enough

15. D. Allchin, “Morality Sans Fitness.”

to recognize it from other categories. An evolutionist's search for the origin of aesthetics in natural selection would have to begin in the nonhuman world. Darwin, for instance, made a remark concerning our admiration for beauty as only a more sophisticated or sublime way of being drawn to an attractive being, the way a female pheasant is drawn to her male counterpart enveloped by bright plumage and becoming a potential mate in the process¹⁶ Some plants want to be perceived as attractive or beautiful so as to be eaten with its indigestible seeds scattered later through the eaters' excreta. Other plants produce bright flowers which lure nectar sipping birds or insects whose hairy legs or bodies allow pollens to get attached for pollination thus ultimately disseminating the genes. In the animal world, the male can strut feathers or mane to attract the females.

The truth of beauty in the receiving end becomes a good to be sought for by the one who is concerned about disseminating his genes. Thus, the aesthetics in all species can be functional (attractiveness) for the dissemination of the genes, which spell survival of the species. For humans, it is observed that the beautiful is functional too in that it is an incentive for the pursuit of the good; but, in an instance, the beautiful becomes an end in itself for "contemplation" or for "enjoyment" not because it is functional but because it simply IS. The beautiful is a testimony to itself, unapologetic for its own existence; you either admire it or you don't. But, in the moment of being taken by the beautiful, the person cannot remain indifferent; there is always that invitation from what is contemplated for a transformative response from the one that contemplates.

The learning process is never a simple passivity before beauty but a creative act; even of creating beauty for our cognitive powers enables us to predict the consequences of our actions. In the triad of the good, the true and the beautiful, where the good to be anticipated can be shown through statistical data and historical precedents and where the true is the undisputed reality, the beautiful is the free play between the real truth in life and the practical good. The imagined reality, thus, is all in harmony. That is why it is also important to bring

16. D. Allchin, "Morality Sans Fitness."

in here one Kantian aspect of pure beauty which is “the disinterest of the spectator.”¹⁷ In this instance, pure beauty no longer gives sensuous satisfaction nor does it generate any desire to possess the object. It just has a grip on our attention without having to do anything else except contemplate the object itself, enjoyed for its own sake. Isn't it that in morality, at least, in religion-inspired ones, we are “obliged” to rise above ourselves, because we cannot be authentically religious without having in a manner transcended ourselves? Not to be obliged is to be unfaithful to our transcendental state. Thus, findings of pure beauty and being disinterested lead us to a state of “obligatoriness,” that is, the moral state. Enjoying a beautiful sunset or a pleasant company shows there is harmony in the world, and we subsequently oblige ourselves to act and behave that will even add to it.

IF ETHICS IS LINKED TO AESTHETICS, MORALITY IS A HUMAN ART

If we accept ethics as linked to aesthetics in which we are involved in being open to beauty and creating beauty, moral acts which are actualization of ethics are forms of art. Morality becomes an art in a very broad sense, in that aesthetic has some bearing on the pursuit of the good. Ethical concepts can be enriched by aesthetic notions. Justice, for example, is an ethical issue that enables the wronged party to pursue whatever is necessary to get what is due him or her. However ethical are the measures taken to pursue justice, if they are totally devoid of aesthetical value, like harmony, it can still be asked how real and true that justice is. Aesthetic experiences parallel ethical relationships and are mutually reinforcing. Johnson¹⁸ in his work on the imagination and ethics portrays the kind of analogical relationship of aesthetic notions and ethical realities. Allchin encapsulates it for us:

[T]he emotional resonance of aesthetic experience parallels empathy; harmony (of color, shape, rhythm, etc.) pairs with

17. Arnold Perey, “The Aesthetics of Evolution (July 27, 1983),” <http://www.Perey-anthropology.net/Evolution.Aesthetics-TRO.htm> (accessed 09.10.2006).

18. M. Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

social “harmony”; the principle of unity within diversity evokes the balance of individual liberties and social responsibilities; and the centrality of creativity helps us to recognize the role of imagination in resolving moral dilemmas. How can we maintain that at the level of cognitive mechanisms, the process of aesthetic valuing is qualitatively distinct from ethical valuing?¹⁹

Ever since organisms were able to learn, the aesthetic sense has always accompanied learning and knowing. Memory, problem solving, learning and valuing are all adaptive behaviors of an organism in the face of the environment’s stimuli. What made Archimedes get out of the bathtub and shout *eureka*, unaware of his nakedness, when he discovered the phenomenon of volume and weight of metals through his bathtub experience? It was actually that positive or aesthetic feeling of discovery after, I suppose, some sleepless nights of negative feelings towards an unsolved problem. How do we make out of “*aha*” experience and the “*yahoo*” reaction of William Roentgen for a sudden insight on radioactivity and Alexander Fleming’s own reaction to his accidental discovery of antibiotics. The brain must have valued certain behaviors like discovery and problem-solving for which an aesthetic feeling is some kind of a reward. In short, the ethical is a behavior that suits the good of the species and the aesthetic is the “beautiful feeling” that accompanies it; next time that same beautiful feeling may come first signaling the organism to a behavior that is deemed ethical through experience.

Pure beauty which elicits aesthetic feelings and its obligatoriness which calls for ethical response are all included in the cognitive process of learning. The past which is being remembered has been selected for its positive feedback for the present. The future has to be shaped by the positive feelings of discovery, problem-solving, and creativity by means of which an organism goes beyond or transcends survival and reproduction. Behavioral patterns are statements about advantageous acts in the past; any plan for the future cannot ignore that input. But, moral act is realized in the present and takes aim at the future with all its possibilities. Guided by aesthetic

19. D. Allchin, “Morality Sans Fitness.”

sense and drawn by the good, individual or individuals help actively and creatively in the realization of future possibilities.

Evolution does not offer a telos or an ideal target to be attained. That is understandable because evolution is only a means and the means do not determine the ends which humans have set for themselves. It is enough that nonhuman organisms adapt in order to survive as individuals or as a species but humans always try to reach beyond their grasp. Adaptive behaviors appropriate for humans at some instances give way to a reality beyond the evolutionary process of natural selection. Looming large, but in a way unobtrusively and not following the laws of evolution, is a reality that is mysterious, meaning, not known through reason but not necessarily unreasonable. In fact, what (something aesthetic) begins as a clue to what is good ends up being a clue to what is Beauty, the ground of Being, whose existence believers need to respond to.

EVOLUTIONARY-AXIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MORALITY

A moral system that is derived from an act of valuing, which includes the aesthetic sense, needs the accompanying method and content of theological aesthetics and the liturgical imagination. Religious symbols disclose structures that tell us who we are and norms that direct us to what we can become.

THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

That mysterious reality, called God by believers, has been given the credit of disclosing the ultimate truth, good, and beauty and subsequently revealing religious norms appropriated as religious morals. Even if we bracket off just the question concerning the reality that undergirds theistic belief, we would be greatly tasked to explain the undeniable authoritativeness of these religious morals. Religious moralists would always have to include in their sources the endearing stories and narratives of a religious tradition. We have been used to reading stories of creation and redemption as simple moral stories; it is about time we read them as instances of aesthetic primordial relationships that suggest what subsequent moral behavior to do. The truth of the story is in its beauty and is paradigmatic of

the good to be attained and wherever the truly beautiful is expressed, a religious dimension surfaces.

Christian believers can really presume that there is beauty in the values bequeathed to them in the Scriptures and in enduring interpretations of the narratives contained in them. The beauty of these values, however, does not remove their function in the evolutionary process. Morals, even described as Christian, have to be adaptive to the conceived values of secular society which primarily are for the survival of the species. At the beginning we rejected a nihilistic view of evolution; instead, we have opted for one that aims at the ongoing human flourishing as actualized by needs to be satisfied. Christian morals, however, have to be faithful to the values of the Christian narrative, a mixture, too, of the mythical and the historical a narrative suffused with the mysterious presence of God. Where else would we turn to initiate discussion on God except to the Bible which contains Salvation History, the interpretation of which might need a new hermeneutics in the light of our evolutionary axiological approach to morals?

Biblical literature is rich in paradoxes and expressions of contrasts which certainly are effective in evoking analogical and aesthetic feeling. David Tracy's "analogical imagination" and Balthasar's "non-reductive unity-in-difference" allow our minds to feast on the effective contrasting of binary pairs like "the visible forms of earthly beauty and the invisible light of earthly beauty," "God the eternal Creator and the finite created world," "the order of creation and process of redemption," "free will and grace," and so forth.²⁰ Preserving their difference and appreciate their juxtaposition without fusion or playing one off the other dialectically is the way of theological aesthetics. Precisely in aesthetics, the "difference" is celebrated. The accompanying paradox is really never meant to be solved, for to have it solved is to see it lose its power to disclose a mystery. Whereas Protestant theology with its tendency for dialecticism would enforce the either-or implication of God's sovereignty vis-à-vis human autonomy (thus, neutralizing the paradox), Catholic

20. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

theology in its inclination for sacramentality and mediation would rather maintain both and approach to the divine and human autonomies. For Balthasar, human autonomy does not mean absolute sovereignty in one's lonely existence but rather to be with others and ultimately to be with the Ground of Being.²¹

Religious believers now do not have a monopoly on communitarian values which in our exposition can be derived from evolutionary psychology and biology. A biologically based moral system includes these values as members of the social species flourish in the environment of group adaptation. The difference that religion makes is the aesthetical that it offers through its narratives in the process of pursuing the good. The experiences of "contemplation" and "prayerfulness," of harmony and unity, all of which we associate with religious experience, provide the reminder that the openness to beauty (aesthetics) should accompany the commitment to the good (ethical) supported by reality (truth) contained in the group's myth and, for Christians, in the narratives within the metanarrative of salvation.

Theological aesthetics which is used to interpret religious narratives can be applied to science-religion interfacing in the phenomenon of values. Any value has a biological grounding and brings with it a therapeutic feeling of well-being; its religious underpinning gives it an ultimacy that overwhelms those who are open to it and is experienced as grace. Value which is an offshoot of the evolutionary process is found to have a utilitarian function in that process but it is perceived more as a value regardless of function. Religious narratives are full of those manifestations of values incarnated in people and in events where they are prized just as they are with hardly any regard of their biological purpose. Religious narratives contain the good to be attained and the good with which to attain. The ethical good to be attained like peace, justice, and love is inseparable from the emotional resonances that accompany them.

In a biologically based morality, we see the eventual inseparability of the ethical and the aesthetic, that is, the good and the beautiful. This goes too with relationships. Group adaptation and group values of social species can be said too of some social

21. *Ibid.*, 40.

animals and primarily primates which manifest empathy an aesthetic and therapeutic experience considered to be the beginning of moral sensitivity found among the primates. Moral psychology tells us, in addition, that empathy is the heart of Christian morality²² and the purveyor of compassion, which turns the beautiful and the true to an effective good in those who suffer from want. But among the social species in a mammalian world only the human species engage in religion, a phenomenon that provides the self-transcending humans with ultimacy and finality, which, among Christians, are correlated to God.

It seems that our conventional image of God is no longer adequate to symbolize the discovery of our human existence as engaged in the process of evolution. The image of the Supreme Being and the Unmoved Mover has some bearing on our moral system that claims to be religion-inspired. It gave rise to a moral paradigm in which the law is the framework. Because of the sovereignty of God's will expressed through divine laws, we resort to blaming victims in their sufferings; after all, logically, they must have committed violations against the laws of the Supreme Being. This "God" vindicates His/Her laws and is not expected to humble the Divine Self.

But isn't that contradicted by the Pauline expression of God's *kenosis* in which the Divine actually humbled Itself? Isn't it that the God as a Supreme Being is very limiting and would logically cater only to those who have measured up to Its holiness? On the other hand, the New Testament image we have of God in the context of the Kingdom is of kenotic nature that allows continuous creation for the maximization of beauty in the complexity and diversity of life. The divine *kenosis* is actualized, too, in God's infinite patience that allows billion of years through evolution's trial and error to come up with an *imago Dei* in you and me. Why did not God just intervene to fast-track the evolution of the human being? God could have but did not. This so-called divine economy is reflected in God's

22. Charles M. Shelton, *Morality of the Heart. A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1997).

respect for nature's way and human freedom. That is why God can rightly be described as the Being that lets be.

God's kenotic love can also be read in the biblical image of the Kingdom, an inclusive gathering of people as they live out its characteristics of peace, justice, love and reconciliation. There is a pastoral implication to this. Ultimately, prophets and advocates, once they have delivered their piece in not so pleasant circumstances, should yield to the apostles of unity and harmony. The ugly circumstances that accompany the fight for justice and equality should not be pushed by nature's capacity for vindictiveness but should be pulled by the call for the beauty of wholeness and harmony (Belita, 215).

THE LITURGICAL IMAGINATION

Because the human species have opted for group adaptation, group values like cooperation and self-sacrifice for the group are prevalent. The liturgy is one group activity that reinforces a communal identity through a communitarian celebration. Though celebrated locally, the liturgy points to a celebration of an eventual gathering of all humankind. The liturgy is an "as-if" aesthetic celebration which now transcends the "ugly" milieu that arouses the community's prophetic sense in its unpleasant fight against injustices and oppressions. But since the ethical is inseparable from the aesthetic, there is really no excuse from a dignified liturgy that promotes unity and harmony in the community. A milieu in itself of this kind provides the framework that facilitates a moral life. The celebration of the liturgy eases up the tension that arises precisely because, as we are engaged in the trivial activities of survival, we are drawn into fuller beauty.²³ Liturgy admits, too, the marginalized and that adds up to fuller beauty. When we exercise compassion through a life of solidarity with the suffering, signified by the celebration of Jesus' own redemptive suffering which we mark in the liturgy, we are contributing to the making of beauty in the form of a community that integrates "a plurality of contrasting constituents."²⁴

23. John F. Haught, *God After Darwin. A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 132.

The liturgy is an aesthetic activity which celebrates a true, good, and beautiful relationship between God and humans and among humans themselves. An anthropologist, looking as an outsider at a liturgical celebration, would only see a means to an end, like group solidarity for instance. But, for believers the celebration as an act of worship is an end in itself and is celebrated for its own sake. Precisely, when it is celebrated for its own sake, it “eternalizes our commitments, makes us admirable to one another, elevates the human person to the summit of creation, and gives sense and direction to our lives.”²⁵ The irony is that the celebration for its own sake serves those functions when people are ignorant about them because they give their attention to God, oblivious to everything else. The implication for religious worshippers is that a celebration is not functioning effectively if it is celebrated for other agenda, other than a celebration of God’s grace. This is the kind of orientation brought about by the aesthetic sense that enables the worshippers to open themselves to Beauty through the beautiful liturgy. The liturgy is not a utilitarian commodity; it is a celebration of Being.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS: WHERE THE “IS” AND THE “OUGHT” ARE ONE

Ethics is in the enterprise of discerning what is to be observed from the end of the biological need and what culture requires for further humanization. The task is a constructive one for it is going to prescribe what measures to take in order to adapt to an environment. The moralist in this regard is not just an analyst; he or she is also an artist that has a vision of what is the end-value for a group of people or for the whole species. That vision has been traditionally contained in the myths and narratives of the people. The modern mind goes beyond the myth by adding history to it and what we have is the historical narrative of the human species whose flourishing is ongoing and whose members dream and take active part in bringing about fullness of what is true, good and beautiful. We certainly need here a moral imagination for a program that is

24. *Ibid.*, 135.

25. Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 43.

cautious, exploratory and, in part, empirical that will root morality in the needs and values of the human species.

That is why it is important that the empirical be included in morals that are not simply descriptive but also normative and sensitive to the context. The moralist, as an artist, should not only formulate but should also operationalize principles, using data of social research. Operationalizing also means to craft practical rules that will facilitate their reception that means formulating them in a way that continuity with traditional values is perceived,²⁶ at the same time exposing values tested and proven to be universal, as social scientists say they are. Lest we think that the moral artist will manipulate and follow the “anything-goes thinking,” let us be reminded by evolutionary psychology that altruism and empathy are hardwired into the brains of the social species and are highlighted and enhanced by humans.

The Christian moralist will be greatly handicapped if he or she ignores biblical images like the covenant, the Kingdom of God, etc. The moralist looks at what sciences are uncovering like the basic needs of humans that make the foundational constitution of humanity from their evolutionary past that includes the ecological system in the planet earth. There is really nothing wrong with the theologian attributing basic values to the ongoing creation of God. New insights into our creatureliness are God’s way of telling us who we are.

We are an image of God, but the image is still in process, begun in the prehuman past and envisioned to be fulfilled in the eschaton. The religious symbol contains the “already” and the “not yet” (another paradox), the “is” and the “ought.” Hefner gives the example of the religious symbol, the covenant, which speaks of “the belonging-together of God, land, people, and individual one with another.” That covenant relationship constitutes the “is”. The “ought” is the performance of action appropriate to that belonging together.²⁷ Humans cannot claim equality with God, therefore, the covenant relationship is bound to be asymmetrical. But, then, why

26. Albert Musschenga, “Empirical ethics: context-sensitivity or contextuality? (2003),” in <http://www.bezinningscentrum.nl/teksten/bert/empiricaethics.htm> (accessed 09.20.2006).

has God emptied the Divine Self in a kenosis and by grace elevated human nature to a supernatural level if not to arrive at a covenant with symmetry, an aesthetic quality? The aesthetics involved in such covenantal relationship is a revelation of value and is prescriptive of how humans should live with one another and with nature.

THE AESTHETIC-AXIOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

Both science and religion have corresponding qualities that allow them to elicit aesthetic sense from the human species. Consequently, perception and conception of values are made possible by such quality. From the respective expressions (feeling of awe) of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein on the mystery of the cosmos²⁸ we may conclude that for them the universe is not just the sum total of what humans can weigh and measure. There is more than just the empirical and the functional. In just contemplating the mysterious universe, we may surmise that beside their scientific logic, Newton and Einstein possessed, too, an aesthetic sense that was translated to “superpersonal ethical values” that indicate life is meaningful as well for them.²⁹ Was not this the aesthetic sense that gave Einstein, a scientist, a moral sense that made him express to an American president his misgivings about the atomic bomb? An implication is that, in moral education, it might be the aesthetical consideration that would be more effective in persuading the learners to embrace peace, justice, and integrity of creation.

There comes a point that a value, even a scientific value, is celebrated for its own sake or is enjoyed aesthetically and is subsequently sacralized. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever,” says a poet. It can only be made forever or eternal through a religious language, product of a modular structure in the human brain specifically to do the valuing with ultimacy, thus being engaged in a

27. P. Hefner, “Sociology and Ethics,” 113.

28. Arthur Deikman, “A Functional Approach to Mysticism,” in *Cognitive Models and Spiritual Maps*, eds. Jensine Andresen and Robert K.C. Forman (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2000), 75-91; here, 75.

29. John Haught, *Science and Religion. From Conflict to Conversation* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 29.

religious experience. A value sacralized draws us to an eternal commitment that will continually goad the imagination and stimulate the template in our brain to identify problems and find solutions, to be curious about new alternatives and explore possibilities. In a word, our species is engaging in a scientific process unavoidably after an aesthetic experience of a value that consequently leads to a moral consideration.

Lastly, the aesthetic-axiological approach is in continuity with the Catholic traditional teaching on the law of nature, but nature now seen as incessantly evolutionary. Consequently, the physicalistic label (derogatory at that) and the static character that have been attached to the traditional theory of natural law can now be avoided since we insert nature, that is evolutionary and adaptive, into the realm of value or that we see valuing as an in-built process within nature. Value has a resonance both in science and religion and both appreciate beauty which is the clue to what is good and true.

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