

To be presented at Harvard Divinity School, December 9, 2005.

Altruism, Teleology and God

Alexander R. Pruss

1. Introduction

There is a long tradition of arguments for the existence of God. Early examples include Aristotle's cosmological argument in Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*, arguing that if there is change, there must be at least one unchanging and perfect being that originates all change, while the first chapter of Romans and chapter 13 of the Book of Wisdom insist that "from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wis. 13:5, NAB). This tradition continues, and indeed starting in the 1950s, analytic philosophy has seen an impressive resurgence of more and more careful formulations and criticisms of arguments for the existence of God. I shall show how the phenomenon of altruism yields a theistic argument.

Some arguments for the existence of God proceed by pure reasoning alone and yield ontological arguments like Anselm's, while others depend in part either on particular empirical claims (e.g., the argument from miracles or the argument from religious experience), or on general empirical claims, such as that there is motion, consciousness or life.

The pattern of the arguments based on general claims is usually simple: (A) There is a general fact about reality, say that there is change or that there are complex organisms. (B) One argues that either the best or the only explanation is to be found in some state of affairs that includes the existence of a God-like being. And so (C) one concludes that a God-like being

exists. When the general fact is something undisputed, and debate focuses on two questions: (1) Is there a better non-theistic explanation? and (2) Is there an explanation at all?

Empirically-based arguments can be divided depending on the kind of general claim that is to be explained. It might be something at least *prima facie* value-neutral, such as that something contingent exists or that there is change. This yields a “cosmological argument”, an argument from general features of the universe, like the one in Aristotle. Or we might have a fact that is deemed to have a special value, such as that the universe is beautiful or that there is life and this yields a “teleological” or “design argument”, perhaps like the one in the Book of Wisdom.

Each kind of argument has advantages and disadvantages. The great advantage of the cosmological argument is that there are few competing explanations for the kinds of facts it purports to explain. One cannot explain why something contingent (i.e., something whose existence is not logically necessary) exists without invoking the activity of a non-contingent being, and the only model we have for how such a being could produce a contingent state of affairs is by virtue of a free choice. In particular, science is unable to address the question, since scientific explanations are in terms of the activities of contingent beings, like particles or fields or quantum vacuums, and hence cannot explain why it is that there are any such beings at all.

Contemporary philosophical discussion of cosmological arguments has, thus, led to the realization that the key issue is whether questions such as “Why are there contingent things at all?” have answers *at all*. If they do, then there is not much plausible competition to the theistic answer. Philosophical atheists tend to deny that there is an answer at all, thereby denying the Principle of Sufficient Reason that states that every contingent state of affairs has an explanation. The crux for cosmological arguments, then, is whether this principle is true (see Pruss, 2006)..

The question whether there is an explanation *at all* does not seem as pressing for many teleological arguments. The value-laden features of the world that teleological arguments begin with are relatively more specific, as they need to be specific enough to make clear their value. The normal course of human reasoning, in science and everyday life, presupposes that specific facts we meet with all have explanations. Otherwise, one might absurdly believe that a hypothesis, say the germ theory of disease, is the *best* explanation of some phenomenon, while yet holding that the phenomenon perhaps has *no* explanation. Even those who deny that there is a reason why there is motion think there is a reason why quartz crystals have the shape they do. Whether they are consistent in denying the one and accepting the other is another question, to which I believe the answer to be negative.

2. Teleological arguments

In the case of teleological arguments, most of the discussion focuses on whether the proposed theistic explanation is indeed the best or only explanation. Here science can become relevant as a possibly competing provider of explanations. One of the classic lines of teleological argumentation was from the complex structures of the biological world. Just as a watch we came across would be supposed to have a designer even had we never seen a watch before, likewise, William Paley insisted in his 1802 *Natural Theology*, organs and animals have a designer.

Darwin seriously damaged the previously great plausibility of the argument from organic complexity. Evolution with natural selection purported to explain the very same features, such as complex organs, that the theistic account had claimed to explain. Moreover, evolution gave specific explanations for some facts where the teleological arguers could at most vaguely say that “God has some purpose or other for this.” A more detailed explanation is generally to be

preferred to a vaguer one, and so the teleological argument from organic complexity has fallen into disrepute, though recently it has been taken up by Intelligent Design theorists.

The argument from organic complexity is but one of many teleological arguments. There has been much discussion (see, e.g., Leslie, 1990) of the fine-tuning argument that claims that there are constants in the laws of nature, such as the constant G in the law of gravitation, whose values are not explained by science but are necessary for life as we know it, since if the constants were significantly different, stars, planets or carbon atoms would not have formed. The best explanation of why the constants have the values they do, the argument contends, is that God wanted to make life possible and set up the laws of nature with that goal in mind.

Both the organic complexity and fine-tuning arguments claim to give a theistic explanation of a fairly specific and valuable feature of our world. That the feature has value is what makes the theistic explanation get off the ground, since then an intelligent being has at least *a* reason to produce it, and so an explanation can be given in the form: “An intelligent being produced this feature *because* the being knew the feature to be valuable.” Life *is* valuable, and so an intelligent being has a reason to produce laws of nature that make life possible. On the other hand, natural processes are presumably indifferent to value, and so the fact that life is valuable in no way increases the probability of its arising naturally.

The fine-tuning and organic-complexity arguments are ones where the teleological explanation is potentially in competition with a scientific one. If a scientific explanation is found that is richer in detail or predictive power, then the argument will be undercut, as was the case with Paley’s argument when the work of Darwin came out. We may define a God-of-the-gaps argument as an argument that infers the existence of God as part of an explanation of the kind of

phenomenon that in principle could have a scientific explanation, so that a theistic hypothesis is posited in order to compensate for a gap in *current* science. Were someone to rest her faith solely on a God-of-the-gaps argument, she would have to anxiously scan the headlines of scientific journals lest a superior scientific explanation be found one day and undercut her faith.

A God-of-the-gaps argument has the liability in that it is always in principle possible that clever scientists will find a non-theistic explanation for the phenomena. Nonetheless, it is still possible for a God-of-the-gaps argument to provide evidence for the existence of God. When we engage in reasoning about the world, we must go by the best science of our day, rather than looking towards an unknown science of the future. Current physical theories, as far as I know, do not give us any evidence for thinking that there exists a scientific explanation of the values of the constants in the laws of nature. Yes, this is something of a sort that *could* have a scientific explanation, but until such a scientific explanation is *actually* given or sketched, the fine-tuning argument does indeed provide evidence, though of course not irrefutable evidence, for the existence of God.

Typically the arguments of Intelligent Design proponents are also of the God-of-the-gaps kind. For instance, Michael Behe (1996) claims that current science cannot explain various biological phenomena, as they would require multiple simultaneous mutations. Even if he were right, the argument would be of the God-of-the-gaps kind, since it is *in principle* possible for science to explain how multiple simultaneous mutations might occur. But again it is important to emphasize that showing that an argument is of the God-of-the-gaps kind is not a refutation.

3. Principled teleological arguments

An argument that is not of the God-of-the-gaps kind I will call “principled.” Such an argument offers a theistic explanation for something for which a scientific explanation is in principle impossible. In such an argument, to establish that the theistic explanation is the best one, one first establishes the impossibility of a scientific explanation, and then shows that theism provides the best of the non-scientific explanations.

Most cosmological arguments are principled while many teleological arguments are of the God-of-the-gaps kind. Many, but not all. Richard Swinburne (1968) gave a principled teleological argument based on the question why the universe behaves in an orderly way. Since science always explains things in terms of deeper order, it cannot explain why there is order at all. Theism, on the other hand, can explain order in terms of a creator’s intentions. Swinburne’s argument can, of course, be challenged by competing philosophical explanations, but not by a competing scientific explanation. At the same time, the argument *does* rely on the scientific observation that there is order: the sun sets every night, dropped things almost always fall, etc. I shall argue that thinking about altruism yields another principled teleological argument, one that once again needs to be scientifically informed.

4. Altruism

Human beings exhibit altruism: they do things for the benefit of others without expecting to be repaid in kind. There are always cynics who suspect ulterior motives, but the cynics are wrong.

The simplest way to see that they are wrong is to consider a very simple example I once heard: You're asked by a stranger what time it is, you look at your watch, and you answer to the best of your knowledge. While it is possible that you enjoy the gratitude you will receive or you are afraid that the stranger will later turn out to be important in your life, introspection shows no such considerations in the action. Any insistence that there is an ulterior motive here seems to be based on *a priori* preconceptions.

Next, we can point to empirical work. Monroe, Barton and Klingemann (1990) interviewed in depth thirteen gentile rescuers of Jews from the Holocaust. The interviews were carefully conducted to find out their motivations, and were apparently able to rule out any non-altruistic motives, such as feelings of heroism, expectations of honors, or hopes for an afterlife. Rather, all of them acted, at great risk to themselves, because they believed something that they expressed through words such as: "All human beings belong to one ... family" (*ibid.*, p. 119)

Thirdly, altruism makes rational sense. We human beings, at least sometimes, act on rational grounds—a cynicism that denies this would be self-defeating, since if correct, then the belief in the cynicism would itself be non-rational. Now, a crucial step in our maturation process is the realization that in important ways we are no different from other people. If I cut you, you bleed as much as if I cut myself. Once I see this, I realize that to do good to another is just like doing good to myself: the same kind of effect results, namely a good to a person. Moreover, most of us love ourselves. In loving ourselves, we see ourselves as *lovable* and hence as the kinds of beings that are worth doing good to, without further motive. But if we are not significantly different from others, then others, too, are worth doing good to, also without further motive. And if they are worth doing good to, then, insofar as we act in the light of what is worth doing, we

will do good to them. Sometimes we do act in the light of what is worth doing, and so sometimes we will do good to others, without further motive.

This kind of an argument for why we should act altruistically was given by Thomas Nagel in his classic *The Possibility of Altruism* (1978). Admittedly, it is true that many philosophers think this argument for acting altruistically is fallacious. I happen to agree with Nagel, but no matter: even if the argument is fallacious, still some people are convinced by it and when they act on this conviction, they act altruistically.

Altruism, thus, is a phenomenon in the human species. It is a phenomenon that has significant objective value and hence is something a God might intend. Thus it is a plausible candidate for a teleological argument. We may, further, quickly and naively say that evolution cannot provide an explanation for altruistic behavior since such behavior confers an adaptive advantage on the recipients of altruistic behavior but not on the altruist herself.

This would, however, be a God-of-the-gaps argument. It rules out a scientific explanation not by means of a principled argument that a scientific explanation is impossible, but by arguing that a natural selection explanation is impossible. But Darwinism does not exhaust the possibilities of science and there are non-Darwinian biological explanations.

Furthermore, there *are* scientific explanations in terms of natural selection. These tend to focus on kin selection, reciprocity and/or convenience of calculation. In the early hominid setting, most altruistic behavior would benefit close kin. Since one's kin are likely to share a significant part of one's genes, quite possibly including any altruism gene, natural selection favors such altruistic behavior.

Moreover, if one has an altruism gene and so do others, and if one's altruistic behavior is focused on those who are somehow recognized as fellow altruists and thus likely to reciprocate, a selective advantage is conferred on the altruists. (Note, though that reciprocity-based accounts make altruism always be in danger of instability, since if any non-altruistic individual gets a mutation that allows it to mimic whatever marker it is that marks out the altruists, then that individual will do better than any of the real altruists.)

Finally, it is worth sometimes doing things where one cannot see how it would be reciprocated, because to have to take the time to calculate in each case what exactly is optimal from a self-centered point of view would be counterproductive.

There are, we know, serious technical problems with each proposal, and more sophisticated versions that attempt to deal with these. It seems to be an open question whether they succeed. Let us grant for the sake of argument that the technical difficulties can be overcome, and an evolutionary account can be given for altruism. Nonetheless, a *principled* teleological argument based on altruism can be given. In fact, *two* such arguments can be given, the second predicated on the failure of the first.

5. The normalcy of altruism

The first argument has been given in more general form by Plantinga (1993), though my treatment will also consider more recent evolutionary accounts of teleology.

Given that altruism developed in an evolutionarily explicable manner, something else also happened that is not explained in the same way. There was a transition between an animal for which altruistic behavior was not normal to an animal for which it was normal.

Mutations occur in single individuals. When the altruism mutation occurred in only one individual, it was also of no use to her. Reciprocity would not occur and kin selection would be irrelevant as the gene in question would not occur in any kin. It seems that biologically the gene was an aberration, one that impeded survival and reproduction. It was only once the gene had somehow spread to multiple individuals, together with an ability to recognize fellow altruists, that it was of use. At some point there was a transition between altruism being genetically abnormal to its being genetically normal. If an altruism mutation were to occur now in one shark—assuming for the sake of the argument that sharks are not altruists—it would be a defect.

Now, it is tempting to say that the distinction between a gene being normal and abnormal is a purely arbitrary one. However, the distinction has ethical implications that tell against its being arbitrary. There is a difference between *perfecting* a human being by improving their genes, pre- or post-conception, and *correcting* genetic problems, pre- or post-conception. Some people find the idea of perfecting a human being morally repugnant, but even if we set aside such moral reservations, there is a difference between perfecting and correcting. In a limited resource situation, medical triage rightly privileges correction over perfection in matters of equal importance to the patient. Furthermore, absent ethical qualms or barriers of competency or triage, a doctor is arguably always obliged to offer corrective treatment, or to refer a patient to someone else who can do it, while there is no similar obligation in the case of perfective treatment. I shall assume that there are objective moral facts behind these judgments, and so there is an objective difference between the normal and abnormal.

For our first teleological argument, we can ask: “How did the hominids change from altruism being non-normal to altruism being normal? Why is altruism *normal* now?” The

change was a normative one and hence cannot be explained in purely scientific terms. Science, as we understand the word now, says how things *are* and not how they *ought* to be. How things are is, of course, deeply relevant to how we ought to act: that a chemical is a carcinogen is relevant to our choice whether to use the chemical as a colorant in children's cereal, even though it is a further, non-scientific question whether it is good that the children die of cancer.

At times we do not notice the gap between what science says and how we should act, because we take as self-evident ethical truths such as that it is bad that children die of cancer. However, the gap is essential to the successes of modern science. It is widely accepted that it was when science separated itself from a normatively-laden Aristotelian approach to nature that it became capable of the spectacular successes that followed. This is not meant to denigrate normative investigations: this separation may simply be a central instance of the way that specialization has helped scientific progress. The price we pay for this separation is that we always have a further question about the implications of scientific claims for the things we care about in our lives of action. If, on the other hand, Aristotelian science is deemed genuine science, then a *different* teleological argument from the normalcy of altruism can be given, by asking where the normatively laden aspects of reality came from in the first place.

Nonetheless, while a scientific account of the normalcy of altruism is ruled out in principle, a teleological argument that strives to provide a theistic explanation of why altruism is normal still needs to rule out alternate non-scientific hypotheses. The primary such hypotheses stick very close to the science. Thus, one might supplement evolutionary theory with a philosophical hypothesis that says when a given genetic development is normal.

Perhaps the most obvious such account is that when a genetic development spreads to the majority of the members of a species, then it is normal, but this account clearly fails. If I am a world dictator who has a particular liking for one-legged people and I kill off all the people who lack a certain gene that causes one-leggedness, then one-leggedness will be the state of the majority but still abnormal. This example also shows that something can be abnormal even though it is coded for by one's genes.

A classic philosophical account of normalcy is in terms of proper function: a feature is normal provided it serves its proper function—normal eyes are eyes that see. For this to help, we need an account of proper function. The account of Wright (1976) allows proper function to reduce to evolutionary facts: A feature F has G as its proper goal provided that F tends to produce G and F exists *because* it tends to produce G . Thus, eyes tend to produce visual representations and natural selection “made” them because they do this, while hammers tend to drive in nails and they were made by people because they do this. Unfortunately, such an account fails, as Alvin Plantinga has shown. Indeed, my one-leggedness example applies once again. On Wright's account the gene's proper function is the production of one-legged people and the gene has spread through the population precisely because it produces the one-legged people I favor. Yet this gene is certainly abnormal.

There are more elaborate accounts, but each seems subject to counterexamples. Thus, Bedau (1992) has the condition that F exists because *both* it produces G and G is good, but the proper functions of the HIV virus or of a dirty bomb are counterexamples. Or one might require with Koons (2000, chap. 12), that the exercise of the function should contribute to the harmony,

or maybe homeostasis, of the individual, but reproductive functions can be a counterexample then.

A plausible account of defectiveness in general is that an entity is defective in some respect provided that in that respect it is less able to fulfill one of its functions. A hammer is defective insofar as it is less able to drive nails into walls, while a computer program is buggy provided when it does not fulfill the functions that it is designed for. One sometimes hears that something one may not like about a computer program—like the annoying popup box in some Microsoft Word versions offering help with writing a letter—is “a feature, not a bug.” The distinction there is one in terms of the intentions of the designer.

When something arises apart from an agent’s activities, however, there does not seem to be room for an objective distinction between a bug or a defect, and a feature. Given a hammer-shaped rock that is in fact incapable of driving in nails, it makes no sense to say whether it is defective or not. At most one can say whether the aspect of a thing is useful *to us*, but at the same time some things that are not useful to us are *bona fide* features of living organisms, say, a tiger’s ability to hunt humans, while some things useful to us are defects of organisms, such as the seedlessness of a seedless grape.

These considerations suggest that where there is an objective distinction between a defect and a non-defect, there we have an agent behind the entity. Thus, it seems, that what made altruism be non-defective in a hominid population was that it in some way came from or cohered with an agent’s plan. Our best candidate for such an agent is a being like God.

How detailed the agent’s plan and what the methods by which the plan is implemented is a different question. It is quite compatible with the above account that the plan is implemented

by God's setting up a universe where altruism arises precisely through natural causes like those described in evolutionary accounts of altruism, so that an evolutionary development is an instance of normalcy when the development is in accordance with a divine plan (or, more precisely, God's antecedent will) and when contrary to a divine plan, it is a defect. There are also more complex theistic accounts, like those of Aquinas, but this will suffice for simplicity.

6. Maladaptive altruism

For a second teleological argument, consider cases of altruism which are not genetically beneficial even when one considers kin selection and reciprocity. An evolutionary account of altruism requires that the individual finds a way of limiting the altruistic behavior to kin and/or members of a group of reciprocating altruists (insofar as one can tell, given the time needed for the decision) and/or to cases that are not costly. While I have claimed that there is no good evolutionary account of defectiveness and normalcy, let us suppose that there *is* such an account. It is highly plausible that on any such account, it is biologically *normal* for altruistic individuals to limit their altruism appropriately and the failure thus to limit it is a defect.

To make this intuition even more plausible, consider a simple evolutionary account of violence. Clearly, carefully limited violence is adaptive: for instance, violence against hostile out-group members or edible animals. Genuinely unlimited violence, however, is maladaptive: if it succeeds, then one also kills one's descendants, and if it fails, then it gets one killed oneself. If a selection-based account of the normalcy of limited altruism can be given, the same can be done for limited violence. But it is clear that a lack of the limitations on violence is a defect, and structurally this case seems to be just like the case of lack of limitations on altruism, so that the lack of limitations on altruism needs to be acknowledged as a defect by the same token.

A crucial component in an organism in which altruism is selected for is what I will call a “limiter”: a feature of one that limits the benefits of one’s altruism to the cases where reciprocity is more likely or where kin selection may set in or where the cost is sufficiently small that calculation is not worthwhile, etc. This assumption follows from the maladaptiveness of unlimited altruism. Some anecdotal evidence in favor of this assumption is the maladaptive incidence of celibacy among the most spectacular of unlimited altruists. Another is that the prevalence of self-less and major self-sacrifices for the sake of complete strangers is low enough that any instance of it is noteworthy, thereby suggesting that indeed there is a limiter. Without a limiter, altruism in a population will be unstable, since freeloaders will be better off than genuine altruists.

A plausible evolutionary account of normalcy that makes altruism normal will also make the limiter’s functioning normal. My paradigmatic case of a person who does not limit his altruism in an adaptive manner is Jean Vanier who founded L’Arche, a network of “communities of life with people who have developmental disabilities” (www.larchecanada.com), where people can live and pray together regardless of abilities and disabilities. Vanier’s work does not promote the survival of his genes either directly, or in his kin. And while he has gained much as a person from the gifts of those people with whom he has lived, what he has gained is of no value in respect of the passing on of his genes. Further, the people whose welfare he promotes do not contribute to the survival of Vanier’s in-group.

We could try to construct a God-of-the-gaps style of teleological argument from the fact that some people do not limit their altruism adaptively. But it would be a poor argument, because many potential scientific explanations come to mind. Maybe the higher intellectual

skills that human beings have acquired interfere with the instincts to limit one's altruistic behavior. Perhaps Jean Vanier simply happens to have a genetically deficient limiter. Perhaps the ability to recognize fellow altruists has decreased as the proportion of altruists in the population has risen.

But once again there is a normative feature to be noted. It is surely no defect at all in Jean Vanier that his altruism is unlimited in scope. He is living a fully human life through his unlimited altruism. On the contrary, it is a defect in a person to limit altruism. What explains the truth of these normative claims? As I have argued, if an evolutionary grounding can be given for the normalcy of altruism, by the same token the limiter will have to be normal as well. Thus an evolutionary story about the normativity would go the wrong way here: it would claim that it is limiting one's altruism that is normal, and that Jean Vanier's behavior is defective.

We can thus formulate the explanatory question for our second teleological argument as follows: "Why is it not abnormal, defective or contrary to nature when a person's altruism does not fall within the limits which are necessary for altruism not to be evolutionarily maladaptive?" A theistic answer to this question is easy to find. For instance, it might be given in terms of God's having intentionally allowed the hominids evolve in such a way that their limiters might become outstripped by their mental and emotional capacities and so that they might be in the image of God, since the nature of human beings is defined or created or instilled by God's intentions. Given the claim that some but not other outcomes of the developmental process were intended by God, we have an explanation why something may be maladaptive and yet not a defect. If I design a computer virus (say, for an experiment on a closed and secured network) to stop reproducing after seventy days, then the cessation of its reproduction is not a bug.

This yields a principled teleological argument insofar as science cannot answer normative questions at all. Moreover, while our first argument was capable of being challenged should clever philosophers find a philosophical account of normativity as grounded in evolutionary adaptation, this argument cannot be challenged in this way.

Now, there is a plausible, and I expect popular, philosophical answer available to the question of what makes unlimited altruism not be a defect while a lack of altruism is a defect. This answer is neither theistic nor explicitly evolutionary and is simply that we need to distinguish *moral* defects from *biological* defects. Jean Vanier acts contrary to his biological functions (indeed, he lives a life of lay celibacy), but in doing so he is acting in accordance with what is morally good.

This bifurcation between our biological and our moral lives is, however, philosophically perilous. We are animals, after all. If the morally good life is biologically bad, then we really cannot trust our own moral reasoning even when everything is functioning correctly. Our own moral reasoning is biologically grounded to a significant extent. (If not, then the problem of explaining this reasoning yields *another* teleological argument.) The bifurcation leads to a rather Gnostic picture of the human person with a sometimes intrinsically evil biological side and a purer “spiritual” side. On this view it is not simply, as many theologians believe, that our biological side (as well as our spiritual one, for that matter) is “distorted” and does not live up to its vocation, but rather that it can be opposed to right moral behavior even when the biological side is functioning properly, faithful to the nature of humanity. Such a Gnostic view is inferior to the Platonic view on which it is in the nature of the bodily desires to obey the intellect, as on this Gnostic view it is natural for our animal nature, at least sometimes, to be disobedient.

Yet, surely, a good human life is an integrated human life. To think that the highest human good is achieved by doing what is biologically bad for us is to deny our identity as animals. The doctor's job is to make us function biologically correctly, but surely it would not be a part of the doctor's job to restore the limits on Jean Vanier's altruism.¹ Moreover, a disharmony of purposes inside the human being makes one question whether one is indeed dealing with a single entity—that way lies a strong and problematic Cartesianism.

Finally, such a Gnostic view undercuts much of the point of the alleged evolutionarily-induced normativity. If the evolutionary normativity can be opposed to the proper functioning of the person as a whole, then it does not appear capable of doing the job of informing us in, e.g., questions of medical ethics.

If I am right, then to make sense of our lives we need to say *both* that we are animals *and* that unlimited altruism is our vocation. Theism provides an answer to the question of how this is possible: the creator's plan for the human animal includes the exercise of the intellectual and emotional capacities that make it possible to see all humans as our fellows. The exercise of these capacities is not a malfunction or bug, but a feature. This yields a principled teleological argument that points to a creator that values unlimited altruism, not a mere "God of the philosophers" but a creator more like the God of Western monotheism.

This account is compatible with the idea that the capacity for altruism arose under selective pressures that favored individuals who were more altruistic in a limited way, and the capacity for *unlimited* altruism arose biologically, as it were by accident, out of an intellectual and

¹ One might respond that the doctor only makes one function correctly when it is good for one, in a broader sense, to be well. Sometimes that requires not treating a component of a person, say when the treatment is too burdensome. But, nonetheless, treating that component is a part of the doctor's job, albeit a part that the doctor should at present refrain from.

emotional development that overpowered the limits on altruism by showing us that we are all, basically, the same. And while an evolutionarily centered account of normativity would make this development be an aberration, when seen as divinely intended, it is seen as definitory of what the human nature, the nature of an animal that is in the image and likeness of God, is.

Unrestricted altruism may be a side-effect or (maybe spandrel—see the classic paper of Gould and Lewontin, 1979) of restricted altruism and intellectual developments. It is implausible, however, that a maladaptive side-effect that undercuts the evolutionary features which made restricted altruism adaptive in the first place could be counted as anything but a biological defect if normativity is to be grounded in natural selection. Nor can we invoke a principle that all side-effects of biologically normal genetic features are normal. For there is no such thing as a side-effect *purely* of genetic features without environmental influence. And if we allow environmental influences, this principle would make *all* the behaviors of an organism without free will normal, and that would be incorrect—an animal can exhibit abnormal behavior due to environmental influence, such as the ingestion of drugs.

A powerful objection is that I have presupposed here that altruism always has to be limited in order to be selected for genetically. But perhaps unlimited altruism can be selected for in a different way than genetically. Maybe the replicators are, say, ideas. Jean Vanier's work is effective at spreading the Christian ideas that help motivate his love. While his genes are harmed reproductively, his ideas are benefited reproductively and so his actions are *ideationally* adaptive. One does wonder why his love for the mentally challenged should make us any more likely to accept his ideas about this love unless we *already* saw this love as valuable, but let us grant this position for the sake of argument. Nonetheless, unless one makes the *ad hoc* decision

to equate “true” normativity with the results of ideational rather than genetic selection, one has to say that while Jean Vanier’s actions are ideologically non-defective, they are defective biologically, which is all I need to get to the unacceptable Gnostic conclusion that our body and our virtue are *innately* opposed in certain ways, unless one implausibly denies that *limited* altruism is biologically normal.

7. Closing remarks

A principled teleological argument is one that proposes a theistic explanation for a phenomenon that is of a sort that cannot have a scientific explanation. I have given two such arguments for the existence of a creator based not on the existence of altruism, limited or not, but on the normative feature that altruism is the appropriate attitude for human beings. Such arguments are complementary to a search for the explanation of *how* it came that our species exhibits altruism, and is immune to challenge from an alternate scientific explanation, since science does not explain normative facts. Nonetheless, if science discovered that there is no such thing as altruism in human beings, the arguments would be refuted. And if unlimited altruism were found to be biologically beneficial to the individuals exhibiting it, then my second argument would be undercut. A principled teleological argument is not immune to science, then, but is immune to the danger of alternate scientific *explanations*. Likewise, the arguments could be attacked by giving alternate non-scientific explanations.

Let me end with a few words about evil. The problem of evil can be seen as an anti-teleological argument that certain features of our world can be best explained by a hypothesis incompatible with the existence of God. Thus, here, one might try to mount an argument opposed to the ones I have given: If God wants there to be altruism, why is there so much

selfishness? There is no simple answer to this question, or to the problem of evil in general. But we may note that what makes unlimited altruism valuable is not just it betters the lot of others, but that it is an instance of love for one's fellow human beings, and presumably it is this feature that the creator values, since it is this feature that is particularly valuable. Jean Vanier is not just a do-gooder, but someone who warmly loves his fellow human beings, no matter what their abilities or disabilities, with a love that can only be a free choice, and hence a love that one might have chosen not to exhibit. There could be altruistic creatures without the freedom to be selfish, but there could not be genuinely loving creatures without that freedom.

References

- Bedau, M. 1992. "Where is the Good in Teleology?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **52**, 781–801.
- Behe, Michael J. 1996. *Darwin's Black Box*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Stephen Jay Gould and Richard C. Lewontin. 1979. "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B* **205**, 581–598.
- Koons, Robert C. 2000. *Realism Regained: An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology, and the Mind*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leslie, John. 1990. "The Prerequisites for Life in Our Universe." *Truth* **3**, 97–119. Reprinted in R. M. Gale and A. R. Pruss (eds.), *The Existence of God*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003.

- Monroe, Kristen R.; Barton, Michael C.; and Klingemann, Ute. 1990. "Altruism and the Theory of Rational Action: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe", *Ethics* **101**, 103–122
- Nagel, Thomas. 1978. *The Possibility of Altruism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swinburne, Richard G. 1968. "The Argument from Design." *Philosophy* 43.
- Paley, William. 1802. *Natural Theology*.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1993. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pruss, Alexander. 2006. *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, L. 1976. *Teleological Explanations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.