

## **A Metaphysics for the Love-and-Science Symbiosis**

“To love is to act intentionally,  
in sympathetic response to others (including God),  
to attain overall well-being.”

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The enterprise of metaphysics is indispensable to religion and to science.

Not long ago, this declaration would have seemed self-evident. Today, it strikes many as controversial. We live in an age in which many scholars are suspicious of the metaphysical enterprise. With Jean-Francois Lyotard, they are convinced of the “incredulity of metanarratives” (1996, p. 482).

This paper bucks the current trend. It offers a metaphysics for that area of science-and-religion research that I call “the love-and-science symbiosis.”

I begin by delineating what I mean by “metaphysics.” The metaphysics that I suggest evades or overcomes legitimate objections to other metaphysical schemes. In the contemporary climate, an apologetic for metaphysics seems required.

After a brief defense of metaphysics, I offer main features of a metaphysical scheme that I believe is most adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis. Drawing from a variety of philosophical traditions, I suggest the bare outlines of what I call a “relational metaphysics.”

Of course, a full explication and defense of a relational metaphysics would require at least one whole book. Throughout the essay, I attempt to avoid technical language so that those whose training did not include graduate work in philosophy might understand my arguments.

### **In Defense of Metaphysics**

In everyday language, one might define metaphysics minimally as a comprehensive proposal for how things work. In the way we act, if not also in our language, we all presuppose that things work in particular ways and for particular reasons. When our general ideas and experiences are critically analyzed and elaborated, explicit metaphysical thinking occurs.

The endeavor to construct a metaphysics involves a rigorous attempt to proffer an all-embracing hypothesis to explain the wide diversity of life's experiences. Obviously, this is an *awesome* undertaking. But because we all assume some explanation for how things work, a rigorously constructed grand hypothesis – a metaphysics – can be profoundly helpful for assessing and addressing the multifarious questions of life.

Defining metaphysics as I do immediately overcomes some contemporary objections to metaphysics. For instance, some, like Richard Rorty, take the Greek word at face value and assume that “meta” + “physics” pertains to what is beyond physical experience. Metaphysics, in this sense, concerns the supra-sensible and ethereal whimsy. According to this view, metaphysics involves developing a system outside verification by, or exemplification in, experience.

In contrast to supra-sensible, ethereal metaphysics, the scheme I present accounts for concrete life experiences. It considers the shared characteristics of all experience, and my

scheme ties its speculations to empirical roots. One might characterize the metaphysics that I suggest as empirically-oriented.

Others suspicious of metaphysics join Soren Kierkegaard and Jacques Derrida in rejecting what might be called “a metaphysics of finality.” Kierkegaard rejected the assumption that one could arrive at a final system to explain everything for all time. Derrida also rejects the assumption of finality and labels it a metaphysics of closure (1964). Today, critics call this finality a “closed system” to emphasize its pretentious claim to need no further adjustment to its account of reality.

In contrast to a metaphysics of finality, the scheme I present recognizes that metaphysical hypotheses are always amenable to adjustment in light of experience. I agree with the metaphysician Alfred North Whitehead when he states that in metaphysics, “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (1978, p. xiv). One might characterize the metaphysics I suggest as provisional.

A third reason metaphysics has fallen on hard times is that many classical systems fail to account for a wide variety of experiences. The makers of these schemes typically ignored the experiences of females, ethnic minorities, the marginalized, and non-humans.

Consequently, some today equate metaphysics with patriarchal, ethnocentric, hierarchical, or anthropocentric oppression.

In contrast to a metaphysics built upon a narrow range of data, the scheme I suggest attempts to account adequately for the widest variety of experience. Whitehead is helpful here as well when he says that the metaphysician must be prepared to “amplify, recast, generalize, and adapt, so as to absorb into one system *all* sources of experience” (1996, p. 149). One test for a metaphysics adequacy is its ability to account for both occasional and

widespread events. It seems probable that if we consider the widest range of experience we are less likely to oppress others than if we adopt no explicit metaphysical scheme whatsoever. One might characterize the metaphysics that I suggest as intentionally inclusive.

Fourth, some have identified metaphysics with a series of true propositions about the world deduced from premises known with absolute certainty. Rightly or wrongly, Rene Descartes' certainty about his own cognition leads some to assume that metaphysics extrapolates a comprehensive view of reality from indubitable bases. Today, many call this epistemic assumption "foundationalist."

In contrast to foundationalism, this metaphysics denies that any creature possesses an indisputable basis from which to inerrantly describe reality. Whitehead's thoughts are also worth noting on this point: "Philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thought . . . [However,] there are no precisely stated axiomatic certainties from which to start" (1978, p. 8, 13). One might characterize the metaphysics I suggest as speculative.

Finally, some object to metaphysics because of its identification with popular spiritualist or psychic types of thinking. If you walked into a Borders bookstore and asked for the metaphysics section, they would direct you to books on magic, fantasy, witchcraft, and New Age.

While these books point to types of experience that must be given a scientific account, what I mean by metaphysics is not directly concerned with fairy tales and magic. Rather than concerned with the incredible, one might characterize this metaphysics as aspiring to the most plausible.

The foregoing identifies some methodological features of the metaphysics that I proffer. To review, I assume that metaphysics should entail a comprehensive proposal for how things work that is empirically-oriented, provisional, intentionally inclusive, speculative, and aspiring toward greatest plausibility. I add to this line-up some additional features. Metaphysician William Hasker identifies these features well as the attempts to attain “factual adequacy,” “logical consistency,” and “explanatory power” (1983, p. 26).

### **A Love-and-Science Metaphysics**

I turn now to a brief account of some general features of a metaphysics that I believe is most adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis. I call this a relational metaphysics, and I draw from a variety of philosophical traditions when constructing it.

Phenomenology, in the philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl, provides a beginning point for this metaphysical endeavor. Although a variety of phenomenological philosophies exist, each shares the basic concern of describing the phenomena of existence. Descriptions emerge from intuitions that are, as Husserl puts it, simply to be accepted as an object gives itself out to be. This acceptance does not mean that the things perceived are immune from further analysis. Nor does it mean that these perceptions contain the whole truth of the things apprehended. Rather, the phenomenological tradition reminds us that metaphysics must remain tied to our perceptions of the actual world – even if these perceptions are partly flawed.

Pragmatism’s chief insights should also be incorporated into a metaphysics adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis. One of its important insights is that our actions reveal general principles of reality. To say it another way, our actions demonstrate that we all

suppose reality to be of a certain nature, even if we may sometimes verbally state otherwise. Pragmatist C. S. Peirce calls the principles of reality underlying our actions “functionally indubitable.” David Ray Griffin refers to them as “hard-core commonsense notions” (2000). In short, we all inevitably act in accord with these principles of existence. An adequate metaphysics must not only avoid proposing hypotheses that contradict the way we inevitably act, but it may also speculate about the identity of these functionally indubitable principles.

A phenomenological account of existence combined with pragmatism’s focus upon actions that reveal fundamental principles provide modes by which to proceed when considering a metaphysics for the love-and-science symbiosis. These philosophical traditions also undergird the love definition that informs the relational metaphysics that I propose.

I define love in this way: To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to attain overall well-being. Loving acts are influenced by previous actions and executed in the hope of securing the common good. I believe that this definition best corresponds to our intuitions, experiences, and carefully considered concepts of love.<sup>1</sup> It also corresponds well with what Stephen G. Post calls “unlimited love” (2003).

The definition I offer suggests that a metaphysics adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis must account for various elements necessary for expressions of love. I call these the metaphysical love requisites, and in the remainder of this paper I explore them.

**1. Actual Individuals in Relation.** The first requirement for love to be expressed is that individuals exist and be in relation. Love requires actual relations, and relations require

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, it also corresponds with the chief insights of phenomenology and pragmatism just mentioned. Perhaps the most detailed philosophical analysis of love is found in Robert G. Hazo’s, *The Idea of Love* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

more than one entity.<sup>2</sup> To put it in terms that philosopher Martin Buber made famous, love requires an I-Thou relationship. Or, as theologian Daniel Day Williams puts it, love requires “individuality in relation” (1969, p. 126). Love is not possible for absolutely one; love requires at least two, although individuals typically love in the presence of countless others. Completely isolated individuals (if such existed) cannot love. To love and be loved require relatedness.

Love not only requires relations between two individuals, it also requires that individuals be, to some degree, mutually influencing. Present individuals are internally related to what has happened in the past, because the past influences those who, moment-by-moment, establish their identities (Oord 2004). Present individuals will be externally related to those who will arise in the future. Whitehead likes to explain external relations as an organism’s influence upon future others by saying that “it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that it is a potential for every ‘becoming’” (1978, p. 22). Just as each organism -- through its internal relations -- drew upon its relations with others as it came into existence, each organism subsequently becomes datum for future organisms as they come into being. As ecological philosophers have been insisting, interdependence within an environment is

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<sup>2</sup> Someone may object to the notion that love implies relations between individuals on the grounds that a solitary individual could love an ideal, possibility, mathematical formula, or other abstract form – none of which are actual individuals that enjoy internal relations. Attraction to these abstractions should be considered love, it might be claimed, because this attraction is an activity that results in the promotion of greater overall well-being among actual individuals. While I would agree that attraction to abstractions may result in the attainment of greater overall well-being, I contend that actual individuals become aware of such ideals only because of prior influence by other actual individuals – be those individuals creaturely or divine. This means that the possibility of loving abstractions arises through internal relations with actual others.

essential to what it means for an actual individual to be.<sup>3</sup> Holmes Rolston, III, puts it succinctly: “Nothing lives alone” (1999, p. 86).

In my definition of love, the phrases, “loving acts are influenced by previous actions and executed in the hope of securing the common good,” are meant to account for this interrelatedness. One’s love always represents a response to the influence of others – whether those others are human, nonhuman, or divine. And loving acts have the common good in mind, because, as theologian Edward Collins Vacek puts it, “love tries to enhance the well-being of the beloved, and it does so not only in the short term and for this or that person but in the long run for as many persons” (1994, p. 182).

Metaphysician Emmanuel Levinas, among other Continentalist philosophers, stresses the importance of recognizing the one to whom lovers relate as truly other.<sup>4</sup> “Metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted,” he states matter-of-factly (1992, p. 78). In his later writings, Levinas views love as reaching out toward the other – in a non-totalizing fashion – with the future of their relation in mind. Levinas puts it this way, “Transcendence, the for the Other, the goodness correlative of the face, founds a more profound relation: the goodness of goodness” (Ibid., p. 269).

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<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis that love requires individuals in relation implies that God, the supreme Lover, has *never* existed in absolute isolation. Although God is unique among individuals (e.g., everlasting, omniscient, almighty, omnipresent), divine love also requires that other actualities exist. God is the only individual who necessarily exists, but God necessarily relates to some finite realm of nondivine individuals. The hypothesis that God has never existed in absolute isolation implies the denial of *creatio ex nihilo*.

<sup>4</sup> Levinas uses “love” (*l’amour*) in differing ways. Early on, it is nearly synonymous with Platonic *eros*. Later, however, he views love as having two aspects: love as ethical transcendence and as desire. For an excellent analysis of Levinasian love and metaphysics, see Stella Sanford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: Athlone, 2000).



In this relational metaphysics, the necessity of relations with others does not exclude the possibility of love for oneself. The love of oneself is either (1) action promoting the well-being of the members of one's own body, or (2) action promoting well-being done in appreciation of one's past personal interaction with others, or (3) action promoting our future well-being – the self we will be – when expecting to interact with others in the future. These cases express interrelatedness, because, in the first, relations exist between members of one's own body, in the second, one acknowledges a relationship with others in one's personal past, and, in the third, one assumes that a future self will someday relate to others and one's present self. All of these actions to love oneself involve relations with those who have come before.

Attaining greater overall well-being often, but not always, includes attaining greater well-being for oneself. Here the interrelatedness of existence is expressed in essential reciprocity. Environmental philosophers have suggested that in a cosmos of interrelated entities, each one's fulfillment connects with the fulfillment of others. The loving action done to attain greater overall well-being often results in the lover enjoying the benefits secured for all. Jesus of Nazareth expressed this concept when he urged his listeners, "give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk. 6:38). Love need not always be self-sacrificial.

Sometimes, however, one may love at one's own personal expense. The author of First John in the Christian scriptures puts it this way: "We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us -- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 Jn. 3:16). Various religious traditions express this altruistic principle in other ways. What these religions share is the belief that sometimes creatures must sacrifice their own well-being for

the good of the whole. Because of the cost to a lover's own well-being, altruistic love is often highly admirable.

**2. Power for Agency and Freedom.** The second requisite for love is that a degree of power be present in individuals. To love is to act, and power is necessary for any action. Without power, nothing can be expressed, thought, believed, spoken, hated, felt, grasped, sensed, or, to encompass all these, experienced. If there is no power, expressions of love cannot be present. The role of power in my definition of love is found in the fact that individuals require power if love involves intentional action.

Philosophies of creativity provide categories upon which this relational metaphysics might draw to formulate its concept of power. "Creativity" is the technical word describing the underlying power manifest in the sheer ongoingness of space-time. Contemporary Eastern philosophers have portrayed this sense of sheer power as "pure energy." Philosopher of nature Henri Bergson calls creativity, "reality itself." Creativity is not an actual object; it is the power of causation expressed in *all* actual objects.

Perhaps the fullest explanation of creativity as power comes from process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. According to him, "Creativity is the principle of novelty. . . . The creative advance is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates. . . . The many become one, and are increased by one" (1978, p. 26.) With regards to love, creativity is love's underlying power.

Power also provides the basis for talking about freedom in love. I define freedom as a choice one makes that is not entirely dependent upon external conditions that make it the case that one cannot do otherwise. Many Existentialist philosophers, notably John Paul Sartre, have stressed the ultimacy of this notion of freedom. And many in the science-and-religion

dialogue contend that love is meaningless if individuals are not free. The commonsense notion that love cannot be coerced -- in the sense of unilaterally determined -- indicates the necessary role of an individual's self-determination. In short, because love requires self-determination and power makes self-determination possible, love requires power.

The claim that love requires intentional action and, therefore, freedom leads to important questions about creaturely mentality, consciousness, and self-determination. Some in the science-and-religion dialogue suggest the evolutionary process led to the emergence of mentality, consciousness, and freedom in only the more complex species.

Others suggest that all existing species -- from the largest and most complex to the smallest and simple -- have some degree of mentality and self-determination. This second hypothesis suggests that consciousness is the only wholly emergent phenomenon of the three. Further scientific research may provide evidence to sway the majority of scholars to adopt one explanatory hypothesis over the other.

**3. Value-Laden Possibilities.** A third requirement for love is that a set of genuine possibilities be available from which actors choose when responding. Unless possibilities that take the shape of propositions for action are present, love cannot be expressed. Because of these possibilities, which arise from the influence of previous individuals and the previous action of the individual in question, actors choose among real options when attempting to love. Love requires that existence possesses genuine value.

We all suppose that some things are better than others. And the best actions done to enhance well-being are those that we typically identify as loving. The possibilities that love

requires provide the context and means for affirming that love is a value-laden activity.<sup>5</sup> Or, as Williams puts it, love “is not formless” (1969, p. 42). Values pertain to that which we appraise as morally better or worse, more or less beautiful, more or less truthful, etc. To love is to actualize a possibility, within the range of what is possible, that secures a degree of overall well-being greater than would have been secured had another possibility been actualized. When an individual actualizes one of the preeminent possibilities presented in a given situation, that individual loves.

Of course, a variety of philosophical traditions have championed the role of values for understanding existence. The influence of Plato is pervasive in this regard. The contemporary Personalist philosophical tradition also provides sophisticated reflection upon the role of values in metaphysics. Early in the twentieth century, Personalists were interested in values mainly as they pertain to humans. In recent decades, however, Personalists have argued that nonhuman interactions express value as well. Frederick Ferre, for example, calls his value-affirming metaphysics, “Personalistic Organicism,” and he argues that “the whole domain of actuality is a pulsing field of achieved and achieving value” (1996, p. 373). It is only in what he calls a “Kalogenetic Universe” – a universe in which all existing things are intrinsically valuable – that one can meaningfully account for Valued Possibilities as fundamental to love. The person whose 20<sup>th</sup> century work is perhaps more important for the

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<sup>5</sup> Some definitions of love (other than my own) may not require values. However, the common way in which people use the word “love” reveals that they believe love to be a value-laden word.

science-and-love symbiosis than any other, Pitirim Sorokin, also provides resources and a metaphysical vision for affirming the necessary role of values.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that love requires possibilities is also important for understanding freedom as inherent in love. I have argued previously that power partially accounts for origination of free choice. But the necessary role of possibilities also partially accounts for freedom. If prior conditions external to the actor were to leave it only one possibility, that individual would not be free. Freedom to love requires that a range of possibilities be available.

This relational metaphysics considers the freedom of individuals to be limited. Freedom does not involve total spontaneity and completely random choice; rather, concrete circumstances limit what is genuinely possible. As Williams puts it, “freedom is never absent from love, neither is it ever unconditional freedom” (1969, p. 116). Possibilities arise out of a context and a history. And those possibilities are laden with values necessary for assessing how one’s free decisions are loving. Freedom to love includes being impelled to choose between a limited number of possibilities that pertain to the chooser’s immediate context.

**4. An Active and Relational Deity.** The fourth requisite for love is the influence of an active and relational deity. An analysis of love is incomplete without reference to divine influence. At this point, I part with those who affirm the superiority of a nontheistic metaphysics.

In order to attain a high degree of well-being, a comprehensive vision of something better, an agent who entertains that vision, and that agent calling upon creatures to enact the vision are all necessary. An active and relational deity is such an agent possessing this vision.

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<sup>6</sup> Sorokin’s scientific interest was sociology, but he was a committed metaphysician. He, like others in the Russian philosophical tradition that influenced him, called his metaphysics, “integral knowledge.”

Power as such cannot be the ground of this vision, because power is neutral as to value. Furthermore, power is not an actuality, so it cannot act. Creatures also cannot be the basis for something better, because, as localized individuals, their vision is limited and their actions are often errant. Creatures cannot adequately envision overall well-being, because their points of view are limited. In order for creatures to express unlimited love, they need access to one with an unlimited perspective. In addition, creaturely limitations and errors, whether voluntary or involuntary, often result in ill-being. Finally, the value-laden possibilities cannot themselves guide lovers, because possibilities are not actual individuals. And like power, the possibilities themselves cannot act because, although real, they are not actual existents.

An adequate metaphysics of love requires the existence of an active and relational deity who is omnipresent. Only an omnipresent individual can have the knowledge (omniscience) required to guide individuals with limited perspectives to secure overall well-being. Localized individuals possess limited perception and the limited knowledge that accompanies such perception. And these limitations prevent creatures from possessing a vision large enough to judge what the common good requires.

In light of these considerations, it becomes apparent that love as the attainment of greater overall well-being requires something more. I submit that creaturely love requires divine activity as its inspiration. And not just any vision of deity will do. An adequate explanation of love requires that an active and relational God exist. A God whose nature includes love as an essential property and who sees all possibilities entertains a vision of something better. God not only entertains that vision but also, in acting in love, inspires love among creatures. When we respond appropriately to divine inspiration, we love. Because of

this love synergism, my affirmation that God exists is neither an *ad hoc* addition included as an afterthought nor the sum total of all that must be said about love.

In this relational metaphysics, God is not an exception to the necessary categories for love. God's loving activity also requires power, possibilities, the existence of other individuals, and, of course, God's own existence. Divine love requires power so that God may act to attain greater degrees of overall well-being. Divine love requires that God envision possibilities that both divine and nondivine individuals can actualize. And God requires nondivine others for love relations to be established. The fact that God necessarily relates with others does not mean that God depends upon others to exist. Rather, deity necessarily exists. There was no force, power, nor individual that originally created God, and God cannot be destroyed by anyone. The fact *that* God exists is fully independent of any finite occurrence.

While no philosophical tradition has the inside scoop on God, some traditions are more helpful than others. Those traditions that present God as genuinely open and related to, while active in, the universe are most helpful for the love-and-science symbiosis. Such a God is the ground of each creature's moment-by-moment existing, and God's activity calls each creature to love. These calls take into account all genuine possibilities for action, including those in which love can be expressed. Having surveyed what is possible, God calls each individual to actualize the option whose effects will likely attain the highest degree of well-being truly possible to be attained in that moment in light of the possible future.

The line in my definition of love, "in sympathetic response to the actions of others (including God)," provides the conceptual home for the claim that love requires divine action. Creatures require an omnipresent agent whose omniscience includes envisioning all

possibilities for action and to whose actions they might respond sympathetically in ways that secure the common good. This sympathy occurs as creatures perceive God through their nonsensory perception, because an incorporeal actuality – like a mind – apparently cannot be perceived by our five senses.

In terms of love, highly complex individuals have the capacity to love, and their loving actions will affect others to some degree or another. As was pointed out earlier, this relational metaphysics adopts the hypothesis that all individuals are necessarily affected *by* others and also necessarily *affect* others. These two notions can be articulated in terms of efficient and final causation. Creatures express final causation, understood as the freedom of self-determination, and exert efficient causation, understood as the effects of their free actions upon others who will subsequently exist.

For one to account adequately for divine love as pervasive and relentless, God must be considered unable to squelch entirely the freedom of finite individuals. Couched in the terms of causation, God cannot be the sufficient cause of creaturely acts if creatures are truly free. A sufficient cause is a condition that entirely guarantees the effect. I argue, however, that God is a necessary cause for every creaturely free act. A necessary cause is a condition without which an effect cannot occur. Supposing that God is unable to act as a sufficient cause allows one to avoid the negative consequences inherent in affirming divine unilateral determination. The problem of evil arises if God possesses the capacity to determine creatures unilaterally. If God can act as a sufficient cause, God is culpable for not having prevented genuine evils that occur in our world. And if God is culpable for genuine evil, God is not love. Because of this, I deny that God can unilaterally determine creatures (Oord 2001).



The causal scheme for love sketched out here bears resemblance to what eighteenth-century theologian John Wesley called “preventing” or “prevenient” grace.<sup>7</sup> Like Wesley, I suggest that God initiates relationships with creatures. In my conception of prevenient grace, however, God necessarily relates with creatures by initiating each moment of their lives. God also presents value-laden possibilities to creatures capable of loving, and God calls these creatures to actualize the love possibilities offered instead of those possibilities available that will not increase the common good.

Prevenient grace as a moment-by-moment gift begins when God acts. God’s actions take into account the previous actions by all other creatures. And God’s actions provide to each creature a range of value-laden possibilities for response. Divine action includes presenting possibilities to each individual that are relevant for each individual in each moment. Those possibilities that reflect the enhancement of overall well-being reflect God’s will for how each individual may love. God acts so that the ideal possibilities for each individual will have the maximum chance for implementation. But increased well-being is not guaranteed, because (1) creatures may freely choose an available possibility made

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<sup>7</sup> The Wesleyan theological tradition has sometimes referred to prevenient grace as the impetus of divine-human “synergism,” as “cooperative grace,” or even as “responsible grace” (See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood, 1994). Some of John Wesley’s own words are helpful in emphasizing the non-coercive status of divine activity toward creation. Divine influences, says Wesley, “are not to supersede, but to encourage, our own efforts” (*New Testament Notes* 1 John 4:8 & Phil. 2:12-13, in *The Works of John Wesley* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975-83; Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-]). God “strongly and sweetly influenc[es] all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures” (Sermon 118, “On the Omnipresence of God,” ¶2.1, *Works* 4:42). Wesley argues that God’s wisdom is “to set life and death before [us]; and then persuade, not force, [us] to choose life!” (*Predestination Calmly Considered*, ¶52, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler [New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], 450). Randy L. Maddox describes Wesley’s conception of the divine-human relationship as “a *dance* in which God always takes the first step but we must participate responsively, lest the dance stumble or end” (*Responsible Grace*, 151).

possible by previous creaturely acts that have generated ill-being, and (2) God does not coerce individuals to select what is ideal.

Creatures subsequently feel God's prevenient action as an efficient cause that furnishes for them options for their own self-determination. In this way, divine action becomes the efficient cause of prevenient grace upon others who, in response, express final causation. The creaturely response to divine prevenient grace in turn furnishes elements for God's own next moment of decision in the divine life. We can love because God loves us, and God's love is fully sensitive to the world in which we live.<sup>8</sup> Or as the Christian biblical writer John would say it, "we love because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19).

Prevenient grace also refers to the idea that deity establishes the basis for free creaturely responses. One of this doctrine's advantages is that it allows one to insist coherently that God reveals Godself to every individual without also requiring that this divine self-disclosure entail unilateral determination. In other words, the doctrine of prevenient grace implies that God's loving activity in establishing relationships is non-coercive. God's prevenient provision of the power for freedom to every creature in every world derives from God's very essence. Claiming that God's relatedness with the world is an aspect of the divine essence implies various metaphysical principles. But because God necessarily provides freedom to all individuals as God essentially relates to the world, it makes no sense to suggest that God could fail to provide freedom to creatures. In other words, prevenient grace as I understand it entails that God cannot withdraw, fail to offer, or override the power for freedom that creatures require in their moment-by-moment life decisions (Oord 2003).

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<sup>8</sup> This scheme corresponds roughly with schemes suggested by process theologians such as David Ray Griffin and John B. Cobb, Jr.

This doctrine of prevenient grace that I suggest also accounts for the belief that all life depends upon God. It does so by entailing that God acts first to establish the conditions of every individual's moment-by-moment existence. Various Christian theories of divine providence and creation express this creaturely dependence upon God. For instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher calls this dependence, "utter," and he rightfully argues that Christian piety originates from the feeling of being utterly dependent upon God (1989). And of course, this dependence entails that creatures require divine action not only to receive value-laden possibilities for action and the freedom to act, they also depend upon deity for life itself.

Finally, I should point out that to argue that a metaphysics adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis requires an active and relational God does not imply that those who do not believe that God exists cannot love. One may be inspired to love even though not conscious of the impetus of that inspiration.

Atheists, agnostics, and those of nontheistic religious traditions may join theists in recognizing and promoting the primacy of love. Of course, theists will differ from these as to love's explanation and inspiration, and theists will likely believe firmly that this difference is highly significant. But varying visions of the Holy, while extremely significant and well worth discussing, need not be seen as the litmus test for who can and who cannot express love. It may be, however, that some visions more adequately explain the phenomena of life, provide a better basis for its purpose and meaning, and empower us to love more often.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that a relational metaphysics can help the love-and-science symbiosis as its participants propose theories to explain the meta issues that inevitably arise in this field.

The relational metaphysics that I suggest evades or overcomes legitimate objections to metaphysics that some have voiced in recent days. It draws upon a wide array of philosophical traditions for its hypotheses about the way things work. I have defined love as an intentional act, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to attain overall well-being. An analysis of love suggests to me that an explanation of love requires at least four categories: actual individuals in relation, power for agency, value-laden possibilities, and an active and relational God. I suggest that God preveniently graces creatures by offering possibilities for free response. When creatures respond appropriately to divine love, they express love.

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