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# Embodied Image of God

## Evolutionary Anthropology in Theological Perspective

Gregor Etzelmüller

### Abstract

A convincing theological anthropology has to be an interdisciplinary anthropology in theological perspective. Current research on the human phylogenesis as well as on our ontogenesis demonstrates, that we become what we are in an intercorporeal exchange. The human being is an ultra-social animal. As embodied beings, human persons are not sovereign, yet they are free to show themselves ever anew. If we interpret Evolutionary Anthropology in a theological perspective, we can say: God has created the human being by evolutionary processes (firstly) as an ultra-social being, which is (secondly) free to show itself in a new manner and stand (thirdly) in risk to construct a strict in-group-out-group bias. With reference to these three points the article argues, that God aspires humans to transcend their selfishness and their tendency to produce a common enemy by showing themselves in a new manner as persons who live in solidarity with those who have been injured, raped, exploited and destroyed. To be the image of God means to be called to communicate trust, hope, and love and to build congregations and communities shaped by these attitudes.

In 1983, Wolfhart Pannenberg published his famous *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (1999). On the one hand, Pannenberg, with his work, has opened up the theological discourse on humanity for the debate with philosophical anthropology, the humanities and the sciences. To make clear that theology speaks about the real human being, theology has to seek the dialogue with contemporary anthropological research. A convincing theological anthropology has to be an interdisciplinary anthropology in theological perspective. On the other hand, Pannenberg accepted the anthropological findings only as “a provisional version of the objective reality, a version that needs to be expanded and deepened by showing that the anthropological datum itself contains a further and theologically relevant dimension.” (Pannenberg 1999, 19–20). This aspiration of laying a foundation for theology in interdisciplinary dialogue is, however, no longer shared today. The life blood of interdisciplinary work is to be willing to learn from others, on both sides, and to renounce paternalism. Interdisciplinary dialogue thrives when it aims to “rethink and reconstruct” one’s own beliefs, “to pursue overlapping concerns and identify shared problems, and even parallel research trajectories.” (van Huyssteen 2006, 16). In fact, “no one disciplinary voice, and no one set of judgments, practices, or principles, will be able to claim absolute priority over, or be foundational for, any other.” (Ibid., 40–41).<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Ultra-social Animal – a Heart Open to the Fellow-human Being

Already with a view to human history on the grand scale we will have to say that, as a lone wolf, the human individual would not have survived at all. In order to persist, humans depend on cooperation. Therefore, Michael Tomasello speaks of the human being as an ultra-social animal (cf. Tomasello 2014, 188). Illustrations from prehistory are the communal hunt, communal childcare, the building of bridges, and protection against predators. Charles Darwin did not even shy away from characterizing the human person as “one of the most helpless and defenceless creatures in the world.” (Darwin 2004 [1871], 83) Yet, according to Darwin, it is precisely this specific vulnerability that makes humans socially cooperative:

“We should [...] bear in mind that an animal possessing great size, strength, and ferocity, and which, like the gorilla, could defend itself from all enemies, would not perhaps have become social; and this would most effectually have checked the acquirement of the higher mental qualities, such as sympathy and the love of his fellows. Hence it might have been an immense advantage to man to have sprung from some comparatively weak creature.” (Darwin 2004 [1871], 83–84).

Our human ancestors “were put under some kind of selective pressure to collaborate in their gathering of food—they became obligate collaborators.” (Tomasello 2009, 75). Given this necessity, they responded with “skills and motivations for shared intentionality” (ibid., 85), became “more tolerant and trusting of one another” and finally created “institutional practices” (ibid., 54; see also 60–98).

The phenomenon we can describe when taking into account human natural history on the grand scale, we are also able to discover in our own development, in the ontogenesis. We become what we are in an intercorporeal exchange. That is already true for the embryo, which develops within the womb, the lived body that surrounds it. Likewise, babies and toddlers get to know their bodies in intercorporeal communication. Immediately after birth, newborns learn how to use their bodies by imitating certain bodily routines like opening their mouths and protruding their tongues (cf. Meltzoff/Moore 1983). Starting between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> day, neonates also imitate movements of the lips and manual gestures (cf. Meltzoff/Moore 1977; Gallagher 2013). At the age of nine to twelve months, infants “begin to ‘tune in’ to the attention and behavior of adults toward outside entities.” (Tomasello 1999, 62; see also 61–70). Thus, a new form of intercorporeality emerges: joint attention, which is of vital importance for the “uniquely human pattern of cultural evolution.” (ibid., 34; see also 39). Children are introduced to their culture through the embodied processes of imitation and instruction. They learn what people do and how to behave in certain situations through physical imitation.

However, intercorporeality is crucial not only in early development, but in no less than every other aspect of human life.

“As soon as we come into contact with another person, our bodies interact. They size each other up, as if by direct physical contact, triggering subtle sensations in each other. We are entering a kind of force field, an independent sphere of interplay that we cannot regulate and control, at least not without significant limitations. Our bodies understand each other, although we cannot tell precisely how, by virtue of what that happens.” (Fuchs 2004, 87).

Since our bodies understand each other, the human being is characterized by an embodied openness to others. The theologian Karl Barth writes, “human nature [...] consist[s] in the freedom of a heart [...] open to the fellow-human being.” (Barth 1960, 278). Of course, people can also opt against such openness to the other person; even worse, they can abuse it in order to harm others. Empathy is even a requirement for torture due to the fact that a torturer would need to know how to hurt the other person. Nevertheless, the human person is a being that is bodily affected by the suffering of others. “The human person does in fact follow the voice and impulse of their own heart by being human.” (ibid., 268).

In the narrative of the good Samaritan, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan are all said to have seen the man who was robbed. However, simply seeing the robbed does not result in the help that is necessary; the priest and the Levite see the man in misery, yet they walk past. The Samaritan, on the contrary, helps the battered man, and that is because he did not only see him, but rather he “was moved with pity,” *esplanchnisthē* (Luke 10:33). He allows himself to be touched and affected by someone else’s misery, and in being affected, he is moved, even grasped, physically. The noun that is used here, *splanchnon*, which occurs only in the plural, denotes the inner organs. The Acts of the Apostles use the word in its physical sense; in describing Judas’ suicide, the text says, “all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18). So, the Samaritan feels the other person’s suffering in his own body, in his inner organs. The reason he acts in a way that the passersby did not is that he allows the physical experience shape his action.

In Luke, Jesus narrates this parable to illustrate the command of love of neighbor. Yet we cannot command anyone to feel compassion, which after all is a pathic event. The philosopher Gernot Böhme solves this apparent paradox persuasively: “The commandment to love our neighbor does not summon us to have a certain affect, but rather not to drown out the natural participation in the suffering of others.” (Böhme 2008, 198). As bodily beings we have always already been affected by the suffering of others (cf. Tomasello 2009, 1–20)—and the commandment of neighborly love calls on us to allow this affect-based participation in the misery of others to shape our own action.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Human Freedom

Humans are shaped by others, they exist only in living connections with others; yet, through their action, they can contribute to the shaping of the “web of human relationships” (Arendt 2018, 184) in a unique way. As embodied beings, human persons are not sovereign, but they are free (cf. *ibid.*, 234–235) to show themselves ever anew. The Gospel of Luke illustrates this state of affairs by portraying Jesus as reacting in a unique way even in his passion, in the moment of greatest suffering. In the moment of his crucifixion, Jesus says: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

Even the human freedom stands similar to the specific human sociality in an evolutionary continuity. Latter cannot be conceived of without the rise of social instincts among animals. The evolutionary benefit of social instincts can help explain why “helping others with simple physical problems [...] is a naturally emerging behavior” (Tomasello 2009, 7; see also Tomasello 2014a, 50–51). Children as young as two years old, regardless of their culture, show such behavior, which can also be observed in elephants and chimpanzees (cf. Tomasello 2009, 8–12). Just as the human sociality is in evolutionary continuity to the kingdom of animals, so evolution has paved the way for human freedom in other life forms. This makes sense against the backdrop of everyday experience, but also from the perspective of the natural sciences:

“In observing other creatures struggling to continue their existence—starting with bacteria that actively swim away from a chemical repellent—we can, through the evidence of our own experience and the Darwinian evidence of the continuity of life, view inwardness and purposiveness as proper to living being.” (Thompson 2010, 136).

Organisms—natural forms that live and move autonomously—are always characterized by a limited range of behaviors that are not determined by external factors, and thus by the freedom to behave in varying ways:

“Animals differ from machines by the fact that their behavior is *unpredictable*. Stimulus and response [...] are only weakly coupled; i.e., the response that stimuli trigger is not highly stereotypical; rather they *modulate* the animal’s autonomous activity, so that a certain behavior by the organism is only modified in its *probability*.” (Fuchs 2013, 113–114).

We only need to keep our eyes open in nature to confirm this analysis.

“For example, consider a squirrel on one tree branch gearing up to jump to another. One can see the muscles preparing, but in some cases the squirrel decides the leap is too far and so, after feigning some jumps, climbs down the trunk and then back up the other branch. The most straightforward description of this event is that the squirrel is observing and evaluating a simulation of what it would experience if it leaped” (Tomasello 2014a, 14),

Hence, based on its evaluation, the squirrel decides to jump or not to jump. Even animals are not determined to jump—in this sense, they can say *no*. In laboratory conditions, it has been shown that in behaving in one way or another, even fruit flies freely discover an open space to maneuver (cf. Heisenberg 1983, 75; 1985; 1997; 2002).

Since, in contrast to the plant, the animal is dependent on nutrients that are not immediately available, the animal has no choice but to become active. Not only does it need to maintain its metabolism; it needs to move from one place to another in order to be able to maintain its metabolism in the first place. “Survival becomes a matter of performing discrete actions; it is not assured by organic functioning, but requires alertness and effort.” (Jonas 1996, 73). Together with the requirement of active behavior, a space for maneuver opens up that demands—and thus presupposes—that animals weigh their options and reflect their behavior, even if only in elementary ways. We cannot deny a certain form of symbolic distance on their part. “If humans are related to the animals, then the animals are also related to humans and therefore, in degrees, possess that inwardness which humans, their most highly advanced relative, are aware of in themselves.” (ibid., 63 [translation altered]). Once we take seriously that all human life stands in evolutionary continuity with other life forms, the strict distinction between nature and freedom dissolves. The human freedom to bring forth novelty is prepared for in our natural history.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the remarkable extent to which human life is characteristically shaped by choices. In human life, “even the most instinctual part of behavior—sexuality—is open to the extensive freedom of personal decision.” (Portmann 1990, 67). Philosophical anthropology has identified the reason for this notable reduction of instinct in a particular form of natality takes in human life. Since human babies are “physiologically premature infants,” (ibid., 50 [translation altered]; see also 50–54) human life is less restricted to instinctual behaviors. By consequence, human beings depend on learning from others how to live.

In turn, the fact that human beings are born as physiologically premature infants points to two further circumstances. Firstly, we remain dependent on the intercorporeal exchange with others; secondly, we are free to take even a self-critical stance to our own behavior.<sup>3</sup> The human person

“can replace the loosened connection to present things and their demands with a freely chosen attachment to an imagined unconditioned and its demands. He can posit transcendent goals for his conduct and actually does so in such things as faith, devotion to an absolute ideal [...] or even a delusory construct of his fallible understanding of values.” (Jonas 1996a, 175)

### 3. Mimetic Learning and the Greed to Have What Another Owns

The human sociality and the human freedom are, on the one hand, the result of a long evolutionary process. On the other hand, humans are distinguished from other organisms, primates especially by the capability of cultural learning. Humans “can learn not just *from* the other but *through* the other” (Tomasello 1999, 6). To learn ‘*through* the other’ means, in an elementary sense, to learn by imitating the other’s physical behavior. By imitating the other, synchronizing with the other, we are experiencing the world from the other’s perspective—through their body, as it were.

Among humans, the practice of mimetic learning is particularly important. It becomes manifest even in so-called over-imitation. “Over-Imitation has been consistently documented for children, but not for young and older chimpanzees [...] and it has been demonstrated in a cross-cultural context.” (Froese/Laevens 2014, 2). Starting at about three years of age, children tend to imitate other people’s actions overly precisely. (cf. Hoehl et al. 2014). In contrast to chimpanzees, for example, toddlers imitate even those actions that are obviously not necessary for reaching a given goal (cf. Horner/Whiten 2005, 164). Toddlers imitate bodily procedures even when they think nobody is watching or when they are encouraged to pursue the goal in the way that seems best to them. They “will continue to overimitate even when doing so imposes motivationally salient costs.” (Lyons et al. 2011, 1163). Toddlers trust others by going along with the bodily actions of others. This opens up to them a whole array of practical options for action even before they understand their point. Bodily imitation is the tipping point at which natural evolution shifts into cultural development (cf. Etzelmüller 2016). “The neonate’s ability to learn from observation and to imitate behavior, which is present from early on, creates the possibility to transmit cultural knowledge.” (Hoehl/Pauen 2013, 150). The imitation, or mimesis of others, liberates people from the need of having to re-invent the wheel; instead, people can build on what they have learned from previous generations (cf. Tomasello 1999, 4–5). This unique mode of “social transmission” (ibid., 5) works like a “ratchet effect,” (ibid.) which speeds up cultural development dramatically.

Yet, the imitation of others does not only allow for a cultural dynamic. Picking up on clues in biblical traditions, René Girard has called attention to the ambivalence of learning by imitation. By imitating another person I start desiring what the other desires (cf. Girard 2001, 9–10)—and this is the origin of violence. “If individuals are naturally inclined to desire what their neighbors possess, or to desire what their neighbors only desire, this means that rivalry exists at the very heart of human social relations.” (ibid., 8). It is a crucial task of the legal sector to hem in the violence that results. The legal traditions of the Bible have recognized the significance of

*mimetic desire* for the emergence of violence. In this vein the Tenth Commandment says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exod. 20:17, see Deut. 5:21). Likewise, in the Letter to the Romans, Paul sees the entire Old Testament law summed up in the commandment, “You shall not covet.” (Rom. 7:7) The background of potential conflict is crucial here, which suggests that it is “not desire as such that is forbidden, but coveting what belongs to others.” (Jewett 2007, 449)

While learning by imitation makes human culture possible in the first place, it is at the same time a source of violence. Societies deal with the resulting problem of violence by diverting violence, deflecting it in the direction of others. When people are introduced into their culture via the imitation of others, societies tend to “reject ... the individuals who don’t fit their conception of what is normal and acceptable.” (Girard 2001, 26).

Studies in developmental psychology in fact show that imitation learning, the specific human method of cultural learning, fosters conformity (cf. Haun/Rekers/Tomasello 2014); it results in clear views of who belongs to the in-group and who does not (cf. Tomasello 2009, 94). Even before children begin to speak, they tend to imitate exactly the actions of those people whose native language they speak. “By 14 months, they have begun to participate in truly cultural learning, copying in-group members more faithfully than out-group members.” (Buttelman et al. 2013, 427). Imitation learning causes elementary school children to develop “a clear in-group bias.” (Buttelmann/Böhm 2014, 926).

Societies deal with the problem of violence that results from the imitation of others by yet more imitation: by acting in certain ways, people communicate social expectations about action. In this way, others are ostracized who then absorb the violence that would otherwise continue to fester within society.

By imitating others in our environment, we will have good chances of reaping their approval. However, in doing so, we block out the fact that we are on a path that is detrimental to life. Precisely that was the experience of the Apostle Paul that has profoundly undermined his trust in human cultural achievement. He acknowledged that he himself, while persecuting Christian congregations, had been doing death’s bidding while thinking he was living in accordance with God’s justice. Paul writes that “as to zeal,” he was “a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” (Phil. 3:6) In his life, a behavior that on an intersubjective level could be called just went hand in hand with passionate violence against outsiders.

From the perspective of evolutionary biology, such a connection between solidarity towards the in-group and violence to outsiders is a successful adaptation (cf. Tomasello 2009, 99–100). For that reason, it is not only the individual that runs the risk of becoming an agent of violence by desiring what others desire. Due to embodied imitation learning, there is a continuous risk for all human groups, peoples, and nations to become agents of violence. This violence, in turn, presents a danger to the individual: since embodied beings have a tendency to imitate their environment, they are in danger of being ‘infected’ by the rage and the violence they witness in their environment.<sup>4</sup>

However, we would miss an important insight into the real threat of humanity, if we understood the cross of Jesus Christ, like Girard does, merely in the context of “collective violence” and “collective murder.” (Girard 2001, 95). Varieties of collective violence, including communal murder, can be observed also among chimpanzees and are part of human history as well. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus was also exposed to such violence, and at two places the gospel speaks of an attempted stoning (John 8:59, 10:31). However, Jesus’ crucifixion differs from spontaneous collective violence due to the fact that it was the result of a legal process. The gospels portray the crucifixion as the joint work of law, religion, education, and public opinion (cf. Welker 2013a, 193–195). The natural history of sin reaches its climax not simply in forms of collective violence, but in the fact that it subverts, of all things, those forms that are intended to overcome natural forms of violence such as law, religion, education and public reason.

#### **4. Cultural Beings by Nature and God’s Destiny for the Human Being**

Humans are cultural beings by nature. To a large extent they shape their own behavior by learning and imitating other humans physically, rather than following natural instincts. Clearly, the development of the human person is shaped by her cultural environment. At different times and in different contexts, the human person develops differently. Based on this mutual interdependence of natural and cultural processes, we can conclude, “what is prefigured already in nature is the mere fact of culture, but not its particular shape” (Landmann 1961, 60). There is no culture which derives from human nature, from the human essence, by necessity:

“For that reason it is not correct either to conceive of culture in the singular as a human creation. Humans do not create culture in the singular, but particular people create their own culture. Humanity creates cultures. That humans may create culture in the first place already implies that they create them again and again in different ways, that they may create the most diverse cultures.” (ibid., 26).

This also brings into view yet another way in which biblical traditions and evolutionary anthropology are in agreement. The latter shows that, by nature, humans are destined to be cultural beings and to learn how to live by living in community with others. Since people are given the freedom to complete their nature themselves, however, nature does not determine what direction human cultural development should take in particular. The destiny of a human culture reinforces an irreducible plurality of human cultures. Biblical traditions take very seriously the fact that nature does not decide for people what kinds of lives they are to live, that nature does not provide people with ultimate guidance. Biblical traditions and evolutionary anthropology agree that nature does not decide about the destiny of our lives in advance. In this sense, there is no natural law that could provide ultimate guidance for us.

Those who see the true human person in the crucified Christ will contend that it is part of the human condition to be vulnerable; yet by the same token they will dispute that the human condition includes a life lived “in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner.” (Nietzsche 2006 [1887], 50).<sup>5</sup> The crucified Christ convicts humanity of its inclination to live its life in this way, yet he denies that such life would disclose what it means to be human. Instead, the crucified Christ calls for repentance—which means to discover true humanity, one’s own humanity, in lived solidarity with those who have been injured, raped, exploited and destroyed.

This call of the crucified Christ stands in accordance with the legal traditions of the Hebrew Bible: Both, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament Ethics do not merely argue for the rules of fairness and justice, but what is more, for the rules of mercy. The biblical legal corpora do not only regulate legal communication between equals, aiming at justice; but even regulate relations with the socially underprivileged, aiming at mercy (cf. Welker 2013b). The legal corpora of the Hebrew Bible attribute rights to the enslaved, the impoverished and debtors, to foreigners, widows, and orphans. Israel’s social legislation is meant to allow the socially disadvantaged to experience God’s liberating action, giving them the dignity of legal agents, liberating them from slavery, and opening up to them opportunities of social mobility.

If we interpret Evolutionary Anthropology in a theological perspective, we can say: God has created the human being by evolutionary processes (firstly) as an ultra-social being with the freedom of a heart open to the fellow-humans being, (secondly) as free to show itself in a new manner and (thirdly) as in risk to construct a strict in-group-out-group bias. With reference to these three aspects we can say in accordance with the biblical traditions: The God, who has revealed in Israel and within Israel in Jesus Christ, aspires humans to transcend their selfishness and their tendency to produce a common enemy by showing themselves in a new manner as

persons who live in solidarity with those who have been injured, raped, exploited and destroyed. To be the image of God means to be called to communicate trust, hope and love like God, to build congregations and communities shaped by these attitudes—and to contribute to the building up and preservation of social systems in which fairness, mercy, and the search for truth are vital factors.<sup>6</sup>

## **5. The Gratitude for Creation and the Theory of Evolution**

When we consider biological evolution, it is fascinating how just small changes in an organism's anatomy can enable new forms of communication and thus of cultural development. People can follow someone else's gaze, understanding that they want to point something out without words, and our species has even developed a highly differentiated language. These facts depend on small but significant modifications to the human anatomy.

What distinguishes humanity from other primates appears to be the human ability of shared attention. I recognize that someone else wants to point something out to me, and, thus, I can not only learn from others but also through them. In children, the ability to recognize that another person wants to show me something emerges in the ninth to the twelfth month of life. For that reason, Michael Tomasello speaks of a “nine-month revolution.” (Tomasello 1999, 61–77).

“At nine months of age human infants begin engaging in a number of so-called joint attentional behaviors that seem to indicate an emerging understanding of other persons as intentional agents like the self whose relations to outside entities may be followed into, directed, or shared” (ibid., 61).

The nine-month revolution presupposes, however, that human babies can track the views of their adult care givers. In humans, this ability of following someone's gaze is due especially to a particular feature of the eye. People can follow someone else's gaze only because the visible part of the sclera of the human eye is three times larger than in the other Great Apes (cf. Tomasello 2010, 169–167; cf. Kobayashi/Kohshima 2001). In the terminology of evolutionary biology, a mutation has occurred that caused a change in the human phenotype, which then allowed for new types of intersubjectivity—i.e., those types which are among the foundations of a specifically human culture.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the human development of language. Human language would be inconceivable without a specific change in the human body in evolution, in which the position of the larynx shifted:

“A comparison of the mouth-throat-region between human beings and chimpanzees shows that the human larynx is located much further down than that of the chimp. In human beings, this results in an enlarged

resonant cavity that can be so well modulated as to produce over 100 different sounds, notably vowels.” (Fuchs 2013a, 23–24).

The lower location of the larynx results in an anatomy that implies a potentially life-threatening disadvantage, which is the intersection between the trachea and the esophagus. Due to this anatomical peculiarity, humans can suffocate from choking on food. Nevertheless, this variant has prevailed in human evolution: the “advantage of differentiated linguistic communication” (ibid.) apparently outweighed the risk of choking. The gain in a more precisely differentiated language is of the utmost importance for human cognition, given that language is the “formative organ of thought,” (von Humboldt 1999, 54; see also von Kleist 1951, 42–46) that speaking plays a crucial role in the development of thoughts.

We can say, then, both with regard to the specifics of the human eye and to the position of the human larynx, that evolution brings forth bodily variants that allow for new forms of intersubjectivity that are then selected for. Bodily forms have been evolved that enable cultural development, and conversely, natural forms are positively selected for on account of these cultural developments. In this sense, nature and culture influence each other mutually. The co-evolution of natural and cultural characteristics can indeed evoke awe in us.

We get a better understanding of why we can be grateful for creation precisely while affirming the theory of evolution once we ask what makes people in fact fill those possibilities with life that have been opened up in evolution. In itself, a lower position of the larynx does not bring forth language. So what prompts human beings to make use of the possibilities opened up by a modified position of the larynx? Regarding individual development, this question is not difficult to answer: “The human person can only develop these biological predispositions in contact with others.” (Fuchs 2013a, 24; cf. Donald 2001, 250–252). A person needs to be addressed in order to learn to speak. Regarding the evolution of the species, the question cannot be answered empirically. The moment in which a human person used language for the first time is hidden from us under the veil of ignorance.

From a perspective that affirms its adherence to the Jewish-Christian tradition, the fact that a person learns to speak by being spoken to can be interpreted this way: people are only enabled by God’s address to make use of their natural possibilities, thus becoming human. Certainly, we must not confuse this perspective with a scientific hypothesis that addresses matters that are—in principle—hidden from us. Rather, here I am drawing on a fundamental, historical experience from the Jewish-Christian tradition, which is that God addresses persons in promise and commandment. From a theological perspective, this is what makes human persons human. Nevertheless, I am articulating this perspective in such a way that it remains compatible with approaches in evolutionary biology and in the theory of embodiment. This approach takes

seriously that humanity is in evolutionary continuity with other forms of life, but also the fact that an evolutionary transition to using symbolic speech was highly improbable, as highlighted by Terrence Deacon.<sup>7</sup> To speak of God as the creator is to envision God as unlocking possibilities to human persons in evolution and luring them into making use of these possibilities. “He is the mirror which discloses to every creature its own greatness.” (Whitehead 2009 [1926], 155).

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<sup>1</sup> This is the view of the South African theologian J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, who is originally a student of Pannenberg's and taught in Princeton for many years. The following picks up arguments from my anthropology *Gottes verkörpertes Ebenbild* (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Johnson 2015, 137: “But if the passions have a logic all their own, and can speak truth to us about the state of affairs in which we find ourselves, why should our first moral obligation be to suppress them, or control them? Wouldn't it make more sense to pay attention to the passions and to learn from them?”

<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, this was already Charles Darwin's view. Cf. Darwin 2004 [1871], 137–138: “At the moment of action, man will no doubt be apt to follow the stronger impulse; and though this may occasionally prompt him to the noblest deeds, it will more commonly lead him to gratify his own desires at the expense of other men. But after their gratification, when past and weaker impressions are judged by the ever-enduring social instinct, and by his deep regard for the good opinion of his fellows, retribution will surely come. He will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame, this latter feeling, however, relates almost exclusively to the judgment of others. He will consequently resolve more of less firmly to act differently for the future; and this is conscience; for conscience looks backwards, and serves as a guide for the future.” Although acting at the impulse of instinct, human beings are able to resolve to act differently.

<sup>4</sup> Girard illustrates this dynamic with the story of Peter in the passion stories: “His love for Jesus is not in question; it is as sincere as it is profound. Yet as soon as the apostle is plunged into a crowd hostile to Jesus, he is unable to avoid imitating its hostility.” (Girard 2001, 19).

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche suggests that “life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics.” (Nietzsche 2006 [1887], 50).

<sup>6</sup> See for a more nuanced view on the topic of the human destiny Etzelmüller 2011, chapter 8.

<sup>7</sup> What makes the evolutionary transition to symbolic language special is that it rests on several conditions that, taken together, are extremely unlikely. In order to communicate by linguistic means, early hominids needed “to learn a set of associations between signs and objects, repeat them over and over, and eventually unlearn the concrete association in favor of a more abstract one. This process had to be kept up until the complete system of combinatorial relationships between the symbols was discovered.” (Deacon 1998, 402).