

John F. Haught's Theological Contributions

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JOHN HAUGHT—FINDING CONSONANCE BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE

by Ann M. Michaud

Abstract. John Haught has awarded the debates between religion (Christianity in particular) and science a central place in his ongoing corpus of work. Seeking to encourage and enhance the conversation, Haught both critiques current positions and offers his own perspective as a potential ground for continuing the discussion in a fruitful manner. This essay considers Haught's primary criticisms of the voices on both sides of the debate which his work connotes as polarizing or conflating the debate. It also extrudes from Haught's work themes that provide alternative visions. The essay concludes with two questions for further consideration.

Keywords: cosmic pessimism; creationism; critical intelligence; ecology; eschatology; evolution; John F. Haught; hope; intelligent design theory; naturalism; new atheism; panentheism; pantheism; personal God; promise; purpose; scientific materialism; scientific naturalism; value

In the current debates between religion and science, John Haught has taken on the roles of activist and mediator. His purpose is to shift the discussion beyond polarizing conflict and contrast positions that see religion and science as fundamentally at odds with one another or as perpetually parallel to one another because they presumably investigate completely separate issues. He also strives to rectify positions that conflate one discipline into the other by presenting religion as scientific truth or science as its own

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religion. Often, he notes, polarization and conflation develop in tandem within the same position.

As an alternative to positions that stifle further discussion, Haught urges all participants to engage in conversation that seeks consonance between the disciplines, acknowledging that science shapes the understanding of religion and theology and that these in turn undergird and encourage scientific explorations as part of the search for an ultimate meaning that resides fully in God. Such a sharing of visions fortifies each discipline while respecting the contributions of each.

Within the context of this essay, I do not make pronounced distinctions between the terms *theology* and *religion*—religion being the term usually employed in references to the religion/science debates. But it is important as we begin to note a basic, primary difference. Theology is more concerned with the theoretical and religion with the practical aspects. That is, theology is “critical reflection on the meaning of religious symbolism and teaching” (Haught 1990, 9).

In this essay I briefly examine the major positions from religion and science that Haught critiques—those that act as polarizing or conflating elements in the debate—and extract from Haught’s work themes that can function as responses to or alternatives to these positions. I conclude with two questions for further consideration.

POSITIONS FROM RELIGION

Haught explicitly addresses two groups or classifications from religion, creationism and intelligent-design theory, which he believes have stalemated their part of the religion-and-science debates largely through the practice of conflation—“the fusion of science and religion obscures any real relationship between them” (Haught 1995, 14). He does not accept such positions as legitimate articulations of religion *or* science because “in order to relate any two items we must first be allowed to distinguish them, and this is precisely what conflation forbids us to do” (1995, 14). After examining Haught’s critique of these groups, I present three theological ideas that he uses in his own thinking on religion-and-science and apply them to the scientific concept that the creationists and intelligent-design theorists identify as the most problematic: evolution.

Creationism and Intelligent-Design Theory. The classification “creationism” in Haught’s writings broadly refers to positions that believe that evolutionary theory is incompatible with the biblical (Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament) version of creation. Haught singles out for particular attention “scientific creationism” or “creation science,” which “rejects evolutionary theory as *scientifically* unsound, and . . . offers the Bible as the source of an alternative ‘scientific’ theory of the creation of life” (1995, 51). The

most prominent problem with this strand of creationism, Haught points out, is that “creation science” is not actually a science. It is a prime example of conflation—collapsing a literal reading of a religious text into a scientific explanation regarding creation.

A more sophisticated but still problematic proposal for Haught is that promoted by intelligent-design theory (IDT), which holds that material forces and mindless Darwinian mechanisms alone could not account for the vast intricacies of the universe. “IDT’s proposal is that we should read the astounding complexity in living beings as evidence of an underlying ‘intelligence’” (Haught 2003, 88). IDT’s critics, including Haught, assert that this “scientific” theory resorts to a metaphysical explanation too soon, before science has had the opportunity to explore evolutionary possibilities. Equally disturbing to Haught is the insistence by IDT that it is not a theological explanation but “a purely scientific movement of the objectively disinterested human mind” (2003, 89). Haught retorts that he is unable to conceive of what “intelligent design” could possibly point to except some form of divine or transcendent power. In addition, he notes, “it simply cannot be without interest to us that the champions of IDT are themselves nearly always Christian—and occasionally Muslim or Jewish—theists” (2003, 89). But even if such claims are not grounded in religious and theological beliefs, IDT “is nonetheless a concept that belongs at a metaphysical rather than a scientific level of explanation” (2003, 91). IDT is therefore another example of conflation—a metaphysical (and, perhaps, a theological) explanation presenting itself as scientific theory.

In the case of both creationism and IDT, Haught’s message is the same: One may hold religiously, theologically, or metaphysically based understandings of the universe, but one may not claim that such explanations are scientific. To do so is a gross conflation, “an unsatisfactory attempt to avoid conflict by carelessly commingling science with belief. Instead of respecting the sharp differences between science and religion, conflation weaves them into a single fabric where they fade into each other, almost to the point of becoming indistinguishable” (1995, 13). Conflation, Haught argues, is born from the human desire for unity in the way one perceives the world, where all the various pieces are in agreement. But perhaps for some people the motivation goes even deeper, becoming a need not only for unity but for their belief system to be at the core of that unification. Whatever does not apparently harmonize with those beliefs must be made to fit or discarded. Such a need is rooted in more than a simple human desire to avoid conflict and obtain a clear-cut unification of ideas. But, whatever the motive, creationism and IDT remain, in Haught’s estimation, unsuccessful attempts to unify religion and science.

Instead, Haught proposes three religiously and theologically based concepts that permit science to explain evolution but allow the believer to consider how a “new” theory, such as evolution, could exist in consonance

with their religious belief system. I first clarify these terms within the context of Haught's work and then demonstrate how they interact with the scientific notion of evolution.

Purpose, Value, and Promise. The first two of these terms are interactive and, when properly understood, demonstrate the innate worth of all elements of created reality, not merely the human. *Purpose* is the notion that gives *value* to created reality. Purpose cannot be fully understood apart from the idea of value. For Haught "only orientation toward value renders a movement purposeful. So purpose . . . [is] the defining quality of any process aiming toward the realization of value" (1980, 70). Purpose describes the reason for the existence of any creature or thing. Basically, the purpose of any thing is to strive and grow or to evolve toward its fullness of value. Consequently, "aesthetically interpreted, value entails a synthesis of richness with harmony, complexity with order, novelty with continuity, and intensity with stability . . . [and] implies the transformation of contradictions into contrasts that arouse a fullness and intensity" (1980, 70). A form of unity is ultimately achieved, but not by means of conflation. Rather, all of the factors develop together to nourish the ultimate value, and thereby also the ultimate purpose, of each entity.

The term *promise* is multidimensional. Promise entails expectation. In its religious connotation, "to have 'faith,' at least in the biblical sense of the term, is to become skilled in the habit of looking for promise at the heart of all realities and events, even when they are apparently dead ends" (Haught 2004, 118). Promise in this sense is not something already accomplished but something that awaits the inbreaking of meaning, even if it must endure some false starts.

One must hope in promise. Promise takes time to come to fruition, to evolve. Haught is not speaking about the fulfillment of souls or an eventual spiritual heaven (although these also find religious definition in the term *hope*). He is referring to "promise as the culmination of the whole cosmic story, and not just of human history" (2004, 125).

Promise involves trust—in Mystery, in the Divine, in the Transcendent. Promise could even be said to be a means of divine communication, as in biblical accounts, and a means of divine relationality. "The image [is] of a promising God who meets us out of the mysterious future," claims Haught (1993, 86). But promise can be troubling at times. It requires letting go of what is seen and known for what is uncertain. Promise holds no guarantees. It is not a static blueprint of what is to come; it is an invitation to participate in what is to come.

Promise is gratuitous, extravagant, and surprising. Haught equates it with the Christian theology of "grace" (1993, 90). This promise is undeserved, freely given as gift. It is limitless in its possibilities. It cannot be adequately anticipated. Promise requires a degree of openness.

Finally, promise has a futuristic dimension. It is born in God's word of the past; it is active in the present; but it dwells in the not-yet. We shall see how Haught links this theme of promise with the scientific concept of evolution, and, in the next section, how promise takes on a special dimension in his ecological vision.

Haught's Evolutionary Vision. Faith, hope, trust, uncertainty, gratuitousness, extravagance, surprise, and the future—all of these elements of promise come to the fore in Haught's evolutionary vision. "Religious world-views that promote or tolerate a sense of the cosmic futility of human efforts fail to motivate. Human beings need hope in order to live lives of passion and ethical vigor . . . they need a universe that still has room to grow, to become more . . . they need an unfinished universe, and this is exactly what science has given us" (Haught 2007, 161).

In sharp contrast to the creationists' and intelligent-design theorists' dominating divinity who manages every detail of the world and its creatures, Haught's sense of the divine is one in which love sets creation free to develop and evolve: "If God is essentially self-giving love, and if love in turn entails 'letting the other be,' then, theologically speaking, both the world's original coming into being and its indeterminate evolutionary transformation through time would be completely consonant with the Christian experience of God" (1998, 234). Such a perspective still allows for purpose and value in the universe, but in a more freely evolving way: "Purpose is a much wider notion than design, and it can live much more comfortably with chance, disorder, and the abyss of cosmic time than can the all too simple notion of design" (2000, 106).

Moreover, approaching the debate with science from the perspective of cataloguing page after page of evidence of a divine "plan" has failed to convince evolutionists. They counter with their own barrage of examples in which nature carelessly eliminates the weak, wastes time and matter, and rewards violence. "Where is your benevolent God in all of this?" they might ask. Haught instead engages the evolutionists on their own terms. They claim that there is no point or purpose to the universe; nature simply *is*. Haught counters: "Science as such is not equipped, methodologically speaking, to tell us whether there is or is not any 'point' to the universe . . . any respectable argument that evolution makes the universe pointless would have to be erected on grounds other than those that science itself can provide" (2000, 106).

As for creationists and intelligent-design theorists, instead of thinking of God as a designer, Haught encourages them to consider God as self-giving love, the image of God that Christians see in the person of Jesus. Evolution does not negate religion and theology; it merely requires a deeper and more thoughtful, more evolved, vision of what has already been proclaimed. "At its most basic level, evolutionary thought opens up a future in

a manner unknown to our religious ancestors. Once we realize that we live in an unfinished universe, the cosmic future becomes full of possibilities for surprising outcomes that we had never dreamt of before. . . . The future can be fresh and very surprising” (2001, 128).

POSITIONS FROM SCIENCE

Haught respects science as its own discipline, one that “shapes religious and theological understanding,” while “religion supports and nourishes the entire scientific enterprise” (1995, 9). These two distinct areas should each work to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the world that enlightens both perspectives. But, in his estimation, just as not all religious categories contribute to an open, informative discussion, neither do all scientific classifications. Haught engages in his work some of the scientific perspectives that he believes have created an impasse in the debate between science and religion.

Cosmic Pessimism and Scientific Materialism. Haught lists cosmic pessimism as one of the predominant oppositional positions to an open and fruitful discussion in the science/religion debates. Because “such thinkers consider any vision of purpose in the universe to be archaic and illusory. . . . [and] view all versions of cosmic teleology as no more than the psychological projection of our own human longings for significance onto a universe which as a whole is itself pointless” (2004, 14–15), such a view leaves little space for a conversation between science and religion.

Whom does Haught consider to be “cosmic pessimists?” He mentions Carl Sagan, E. O. Wilson, and Stephen Jay Gould by name. Further, he defines the category thus: “By cosmic pessimism I mean the predominantly, but by no means wholly, modern view. . . . that we live in a pointless universe. . . . that lacks any ultimate purpose. . . . It does allow that the world is partially goal-oriented or purposeful in some of its particulars, but it denies that the world is intelligible as a whole” (2004, 17). A problematic element of cosmic pessimism for Haught is its interpretation of natural selection. For cosmic pessimists “the universe, the earth, life and human consciousness originate accidentally out of a process of unintelligible, random events worked over by an impersonal process known as natural selection” (2004, 17). This is quite different from Haught’s vision of evolution and the natural-selection process presented in the previous section.

It appears from this definition that cosmic pessimists grant no value to freedom or creativity. But, surprisingly, they do. In the midst of their denial of final meaning and their “metaphysical gloom” (2004, 17), the same cosmic pessimists who see no future hope are not shy about encouraging human beings to take credit for their own creative accomplishments, accolades to be greatly enjoyed because human beings have brought meaning

where none previously existed. With religious and divine intent and meaning eradicated as false, all meaning, all creative energy, and all purpose in the universe are granted only by the will of free-thinking human beings. There is no need for the transcendent or the divine in the vision of the cosmic pessimist because human beings provide whatever meaning and creativity is necessary. But the world is also temporal and doomed to decay and die, just as the human beings will who give it its meaning. There is no eschatological vision for the cosmic pessimists; this world is all there is. Harsh as it may be, cruelly as it may sometimes treat us, we may as well make the best of it, because “this” is all there is or ever will be.

Scientific materialists, according to Haught, are those who accept that all life is reducible to atoms and molecules; that mind is reducible to brain, which in turn is composed of atoms and molecules; and that the universe as a whole is reducible to mindless matter (1984, 26). For them, the only real phenomena are the physical components of the material world. Life and mind are “epiphenomena,” that is, “secondary and derivative rather than ‘really real’ in themselves” (1984, 27). Wilson adds that, because all phenomena have the same material basis and are subject to the same physical laws, all phenomena can be most deeply understood by scientific analysis (Haught 1984, 27; Wilson 1979, 230).

What leads scientific materialists to these conclusions? Haught cites six causal criteria: the cosmography of classical Newtonian physics; Darwinian evolutionary theory, especially its emphasis on chance and natural selection; the laws of thermodynamics; the geological and astronomical discovery of huge tracts of lifeless space and matter within the universe; the suggestion that life may be reducible to an inanimate chemical basis; and the theory that the mind may be explained in terms of mindless brain chemistry (1984, 25–26).

Haught notes that recent scientific developments, especially in the field of physics, have begun to challenge the roots of scientific materialism; at present, however, this category still holds great sway over the scientific community. Among those in this camp Haught again mentions Sagan, Gould, and Wilson. For the members of this group, there is no need for the divine or the transcendent, and, as we see with Wilson, science is the one necessary method of analyzing all things in the universe.

One of the ways that Haught offers to counter the thinking of cosmic pessimists and scientific materialists in a manner that they can comprehend (although not necessarily agree with) is by using the work of Michael Polanyi. If, as cosmic pessimists insist, “science requires the abandonment of teleology [and ultimate purpose] . . . and religion requires that we embrace it, then logically speaking we would have to make an exclusive choice: either science or religion” (2004, 19). Haught, however, offers an alternative proposition. A religious interpretation that human beings may not be able to entirely comprehend the ultimate purpose of the universe and its

parts (a purpose fully comprehensible only to God) *is* in keeping with scientific thought on the hierarchical organizational patterns that follow the laws of physics and chemistry, such as those proposed by Polanyi, who explains that higher levels “dwell in” lower levels, but lower levels do not of necessity recognize or comprehend such higher levels (Haught 1984, 91–92). If there is a divine purposefulness and teleology to the universe, human beings should not expect it to be obvious to them. “This principle insists that the higher comprehends the lower and dwells in it but is not capable of being grasped in a controlling way by the lower. . . . If there is any purpose in the universe, therefore, we would not be able to arrive at a controlling knowledge of it. Hierarchical thinking is quite comfortable with this confession” (1984, 93).

Haught is not insinuating that such scientific thought proves religious belief in the divine or that religious belief in the divine is thereby scientifically “provable.” That would be conflation. He is claiming that the principles of science can be used to explain how a believing person could include belief in God in a scientifically oriented mindset. Being “scientific” does not require one to be a scientific materialist or cosmically pessimistic, and religion and science are not mutually exclusive. But these are not the only two classifications that Haught views as problematic to advancing open discussion in the science-and-religion debates.

Naturalism and Scientific Naturalism. A sometimes related, but differently emphasized and articulated, scientific approach that finds religion and theology problematic is naturalism. Haught defines naturalism as “the belief that nature is all there is, and that no overall purpose exists in the universe” (2006, 2). He acknowledges that naturalism exists in many forms, including the classic view of pantheism, which equates nature with God. There are even “soft” naturalists who refer to themselves as religious naturalists who “often use religious terminology—words such as mystery and sacred—to express their sense that nature by itself is deserving of a reverential surrender of the mind. Still, even to religious naturalists, nature is all that exists” (Haught 2006, 8).

For Haught, all forms of naturalism have some basic criteria in common: “Naturalism, at least as I shall be using the term, denies the existence of any realities distinct from the natural world . . . which includes humans and their cultural creations. Naturalism either suspends or rejects belief in God” (2006, 2). By the term *God* in this last statement, Haught is referring to a panentheistic view of God “as a creator who is both distinct from nature and deeply involved with it” rather than the pantheistic god(s) of nature or nature itself as god (2006, 30). Because the science/religion debates hold a primary place in Haught’s work, he elects to focus particularly on “scientific naturalism,” which, in addition to adhering to the preceding definition, sees science as the only sensible way of understanding nature.

Haught's argument against scientific naturalism is that it is inconsistent with a person's trust in her/his own mind or "critical intelligence"—the means by which scientific experimentation is conceived, carried out, evaluated, and accepted or rejected. If scientific naturalism fails to cohere logically with the structure of the human cognition that it enshrines—if such a vision of the world contradicts the way in which the human mind operates—it thereby proves itself to be illogical (2006, 36). Haught proceeds to identify several of the workings of the human mind for which such a scientific naturalistic approach fails to account: affectivity, intersubjectivity, narrativity, beauty, and theory. All of these elements, he contends, are a part of the natural world and the natural functioning of our minds, yet scientific theories fail to adequately explain by means of science alone how these functions operate. He does not deny that mind and critical intelligence evolved from a "mindless causal past" (2006, 53) but asks why the scientific naturalist insists on placing trust in these cognitional processes for which her/his scientific theories fail to account. The primary empirical imperative of the mind is to remain open and attentive. Yet Haught observes, "Science is empirical, but it does not attend to everything" (2006, 86). Perhaps science, then, cannot account for everything, even the natural. All the more reason to realize that if there is something "more-than-nature," science alone may be an insufficient means of recognizing and comprehending it.

Haught's critique is engaging, but he could more explicitly recognize in his theology that some scientific naturalists *do* attempt to take into consideration the possibility that something "more-than-nature" might exist, even if such a possibility calls into question the synchronicity of their own theories. Willem Drees, for instance, allows for the potential claims of limit questions. Under such auspices, "religious views of reality which do not assume that a transcendent realm shows up *within* the natural world, but which understand the *natural world as a whole* as a creation which is dependent upon a transcendent creator . . . are consistent with the naturalism articulated here" (Drees 1996, 18), in Drees's own theory of naturalism. This view is consonant in many ways with Haught's own position, unlike the next classification to which we now turn.

The New Atheism—Dennett, Harris, Hitchens, and Dawkins. Haught confronts some of the more recent scientific theorists and opponents of religion by way of his own critical response in his book *God and the New Atheism* (2008). He does not treat each one separately in a systematic fashion, stating that "the new atheists have so much in common with one another as well as with earlier kinds of atheism that what I shall say in criticism of one, apart from some minor discrepancies, generally applies to the others as well" (2008, xiii). Haught chooses to tackle a series of questions or topics and, by way of these, engages their voices. My interest here

is to try to break out some of the specific points of engagement, so I offer briefly for each of these new atheists the major themes or points upon which Haught chooses to interact.

Although Daniel Dennett is not included in the book's subtitle, Haught begins with a reference to his work that offers an overview of the basic position of the new atheists. Dennett believes that evolutionary biology provides the deepest explanation of all living phenomena, including ethics and religion. Haught's first objection to this premise is that an adequate understanding of religion is not a scientifically proven, or even provable, claim. A claim such as Dennett's "is a dogma, a declaration of faith," insists Haught (2008, x). Dennett and the new atheists, Haught implies, conflate science and religion, making science their new theism, or scientism.

A related second objection from Haught is that the new atheists seem not to reference theologians in their critiques of theology and religion; rather, "it is from creationists and intelligent design theists [who themselves conflate religion and science] that the new atheists seem to have garnered much of their understanding of religious faith" (2008, xi).

The new atheists share much in common with scientific naturalists, but there are two specific claims of the new atheists by which they distinguish themselves from scientific naturalism: "Faith in God is the cause of innumerable evils and should be rejected on moral grounds," and "morality does not require belief in God, and people behave better without faith than with it" (2008, xiv).

These points are made clear in the work of Sam Harris, who claims, in Haught's words, that "the purpose of human life is to find happiness . . . we should make it the goal of all ethical existence" (2008, 2). But this goal cannot be achieved by means of faith or the idea of God, because these demand belief without evidence, and "basing knowledge on 'evidence' is not only cognitively necessary but morally essential as well" (2008, 3). Evidence is the evaluation of morality for Harris.

Christopher Hitchens offers a different line of objection to faith, one based on a reading of the Bible. Insisting that sacred texts must be taken literally to be scientifically credible, Hitchens presents a host of contradictions in dates, among the details of Jesus' crucifixion, and particularly in the stories of the infancy narratives in Matthew's and Luke's gospels. He concludes that all four gospels cannot claim "divine warrant" and that the validity of Jesus' existence is itself questionable. In Haught's assessment, Hitchens "seems unaware that exegetes and theologians have known about these discrepancies since antiquity, but they have not been so literalist as to interpret insignificant factual contradictions as threats to the doctrine of biblical inspiration" (2008, 31). (What may offer a basis for further consideration, I would add, are the various methods of "biblical criticism" that have developed in the past century.)

Haught's second major disparity with Hitchens's line of thinking involves the use of "Occam's razor"—the theory promoted by William of Occam, a medieval philosopher and monk, who maintained that whenever multiple competing explanations were available, the simplest one should be chosen. Although this theory has its uses, Haught insists that multiple explanations that exist on different levels are not in competition with one another and can be simultaneously valid. There is no need to insist on explanatory monism between religion and science (2008, 86).

Haught makes the same accusation—explanatory monism—against the thought of Richard Dawkins. But Dawkins comes under fire for several other points. It is Dawkins who puts forth "the God hypothesis"—that is, "the existence of God is a 'hypothesis,' one that functions for believers in the same way as a scientific hypothesis does for scientists" (Haught 2008, 41). He then sets this hypothesis in opposition to evolutionary theory—and science, of course, is to determine which hypothesis bears more scientific weight. Haught insists that theologians and believers must refuse to participate in a debate that introduces God as a hypothesis, because "God is not a hypothesis" (2008, 51) and "any God who functions as a 'hypothesis' is not worth defending anyway" (2008, 43).

Dawkins, like Hitchens, makes use of the Bible to attempt to negate religious vision. But in Dawkins's interpretation the main point of biblical religion is to offer moral edification. He claims that it has failed to do so; moreover, most people do not even attempt to make the Bible the center of their moral lives, so it is an ineffective source of morality. Haught argues that Dawkins has missed the point, even theologically speaking. Morality is not the main point of biblical religion. "The main point is to have faith, trust, and hope in God. Morality is secondary" (2008, 67). Religion and theology cannot be reduced to morality. This shrinking or reducing of religious ideas, or even of God, to a single concept that can then be "argued away" is one of Haught's major objections to the methodology of the new atheists (2008, 43).

Rather than conflating or arguing away the ideas of religion and theology, Haught proposes an eschatological and ecological vision for today that is both rooted in religion and theology and consonant with scientific understanding.

Haught's Eschatological and Ecological Vision. The questionability of eschatology and the means of promoting a viable ecological stance are two of the touchstone questions in today's science-and-religion debates. They also are questions central to Haught's theology.

The term eschatology "comes from the Greek 'eschaton,' a word that literally means 'last.' Traditionally, 'eschatology' denoted the kind of religious speculation that deals with the 'last things' . . . [, which,] at least in

traditional theology, meant death, heaven, hell, and purgatory. In a wider and more original sense, however, eschatology has to do simply with ‘what we may hope for’ (Haught 2000, 147).

“What we may hope for” is most broadly spoken of by Haught as the God of promise and purpose who encourages all of created reality toward its final realization. “Present reality, including the world of nature in all of its ambiguity, is pregnant with hints of future fulfillment” (2004, 102).

What this means more specifically is intimately related in Haught’s theology to the idea of the Christian personal God. The term “personal” God is sometimes misunderstood. It does not connote a belief in an anthropomorphic figure (such as the old man with a long white beard who dwells in heaven). It is only analogously anthropomorphic. Although discussion by way of analogous language (for example, God as Father/Mother) is a valid theological methodology, it is critical to be sure that all involved, from Christian believers to critics who locate themselves outside any religious or theological perspective, comprehend that a personal God is not a God who can be adequately described in anthropomorphic terms. Such images or references are necessary, however, because “all of our language about this mystery [God] necessarily has a symbolic character. Because of mystery’s unavailability we cannot discuss it directly or literally” (1986, 129). Analogous language about God is therefore both indispensable and inadequate.

We do not know precisely what God is, so why assume that God is “personal?” Haught has thoughtfully chosen to “proceed under the assumption that a transcendent reality that does not possess at the very least those qualities which constitute the dignity of human persons, that is, something like intelligence, feeling, freedom, power, initiative, creativity, etc. (though to an eminent degree), could not adequately inspire trust or reverence in human beings” (1986, 6). In addition, Haught’s frequent references to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in his earlier works, and the God of promise and purpose do evoke the sense of a personal, relational God. There is something decidedly relational about Haught’s vision of God. Perhaps “relational” rather than “personal” God would be a more apt descriptive in Haught’s theology. God is “much more deeply *related* to the world than a divine dictatorship would be. God’s power may be said to be relational rather than unilateral. Relational power is much more vulnerable, but, ultimately more influential than unilateral power since it allows for more autonomy, integrity and richness in the world to which God is intimately related” (Haught 2001, 139).

The Christian relates to God as Mystery, Love, Beauty, Ultimate Environment, or Creative Source. And this same God draws humanity and all created reality toward its ultimate fulfillment. “Theistic faith cannot make the idea of a personal God optional. Ultimate reality, the deepest dimension of being, cannot be less personal if it is to command our reverence and

worship. Experiencing ultimate reality only as an impersonal ‘It’ rather than also as a personal ‘Thou’ would leave the believer in God psychically, socially, and religiously unsatisfied” (2008, 87).

This same relational, “personal” God is the basis of eschatological hope for all created reality: “the God of persuasive love is also a fully responsive God. God is so intimately related to the universe that every moment of its evolution is preserved eternally in God’s own feeling and ‘memory.’ . . . Thus God not only creates, but also saves or ‘redeems’ the world from absolute perishing” (Haught 2001, 139). Some form of redemption or eschatological fulfillment awaits not only human beings but the whole cosmos.

Most frequently, Haught refers to such notions with broad strokes, in terms of the loving God of promise and purpose. But more particularly, in Haught’s distinctly Christian perspective, “the entire universe (or multiverse), as it sweeps narratively across vast epochs of time, is continually received into the compassionate embrace of the everlasting Trinity. We may think of God’s Spirit as the ultimate power of renewal that continually places the world in a ‘free and open space’ with an ever-new future up ahead” (2007, 162). In Christian terminology, “‘God the Father’ refers . . . to the infinite generativity out of which new possibilities are always made available to the universe so that it may undergo renewal by the power of the Spirit” (2007, 163). As for the role of Jesus Christ, “God the Son, through the incarnation, concretizes the divine descent in nature and history, gathering all things corporeally to himself and handing them over to the Father, again by the power of the Spirit” (2007, 163). Such a trinitarian perspective will not be new to Christians, but its insistence that the entire cosmos is to be included in an eschatological vision may be shocking to some.

In Haught’s articulation of Christian faith, the eschatological future is linked to Jesus’ own resurrection. “Jesus’ resurrection is the revelation of what nature anticipates, a fulfillment in which life will show itself at last to be more fundamental and ultimately more intelligible than death. . . . Resurrection, therefore, is not an unintelligible interruption of nature but the final vanquishing of deadness and disunity” (2007, 173–74). Unlike the cosmic pessimists in particular, Haught does not see the world as heading toward ultimate destruction and nonexistence. Rather, in some way that we cannot yet fully conceive or articulate, all of creation, human and non-human, eventually will be taken up into a new life in God. From this perspective, it is essential that Christian theology pay more attention to its cosmology, because “it is by anticipating nature’s essential, though not yet actualized, eschatological aliveness . . . that theology will be able to arrive at an accurate reading of the cosmos. Such an approach to understanding the resurrection will have the additional advantage of not conflicting in any way with natural science” (2007, 174).

The place of the cosmos in the eschaton is also the primary reason for Haught's vital interest in ecology. Ecological care is not only sound practice; it has a future import that we cannot choose to ignore.

Thinking back to what was said earlier about promise, we may now consider another meaning: nature as promise. "A Christian environmental theology . . . is ideally based on the promissory character of nature" (Haught 2004, 104). In Haught's theology, all of nature will share in the eschatological vision. Given the eschatological future of nature, "our present environmental care is of a piece with that which we wait for in joyful hope. The continual entrance of the world's future fulfillment into the present makes the present give way and pushes it into the past . . . [but] this past does not simply disappear into nothingness. Instead, it remains a factor in the final future that we anticipate" (2004, 116). Because the entire cosmos has an eschatological future, what we do today that affects the world around us has not only consequences in the present but also grave import for the ultimate eschatological end. "Thus the gravity of our present ecological endeavors is not eroded, but enhanced, by the fact of time's passing" (2004, 116). Contemporary ecological practices are inextricably linked to the eschatological future.

TWO QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

I close this essay with two questions for further consideration by Haught and by all of *Zygon's* readers: (1) Are Haught's classifications or categories too broad, vague, and overgeneralized? (2) Would Haught consider expanding his discussion of a "personal" God?

1. Throughout his writings, but particularly in his earlier work, Haught refers to the positions in religion and science with which he is interacting in terms of classifications or categories: creationists, intelligent-design theorists, scientific materialists, cosmic pessimists, and naturalists. At times he does make reference to particular persons (Sagan, Wilson, Gould) but without expanding on their specific ideas or theories; at times he does separate these classifications into subcategories, as with the naturalists (scientific naturalism, evolutionary naturalism, soft/religious naturalism). Using a different approach in his book *God and the New Atheism* (2008), he refers to particular persons (Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens) and their individual theories as he explores various topics. But in most cases, Haught is speaking primarily in terms of classifications.

My question regarding Haught's work asks whether this category or classification approach is an asset or a detriment to his project. Should he continue using such categories, or would it be more beneficial to him and to the useful application of his theories for him to make specific references to individual persons and their theories? Or should he find a way to present a balance of both types of allusions?

Haught's use of these categories is beneficial in that it allows him to approach what he is investigating in terms of broad strokes. Rather than narrowing the discussion to the voices of a few counterparts, his use of classifications (with occasional specific references for clarification or by way of example) allows for a more inclusive conversation that could be expanded to include any knowledgeable partners who identify themselves as being members of one (or more) of Haught's classifications. It also permits members of these positions to engage in an expanded dialogue among themselves in the public sphere, in which they can clarify and distinguish their own perspectives one from another. All of this helps to encourage and invite extended dialogue, to keep the conversation open and active.

However, by using broad, general classifications to name and describe his antagonists, Haught opens himself and his work to the critique of being vague and nonspecific. Who exactly qualifies as a scientific naturalist? Do all scientific materialists hold the same position, or do they offer different claims in one or more aspects of their work? Do these distinctions affect the validity of Haught's criticisms? It is far easier to make comparisons and draw conclusions when specifics are presented.

I propose that it would be of benefit to the clarity of Haught's work and its useful application in the religion/science debates to increasingly reference particular dialogue partners and their specific theories in his upcoming works. Incorporating this within the framework of broader categories (as in *God and the New Atheism*), which would allow other voices to self-identify and enter the discussion, would create a beneficial balance and hone the authority of Haught's claims by making them sharper, more distinct, and more specific.

2. Would Haught consider expanding his discussion of a "personal" God? I realize that the issue of a personal God is not a simple one, despite its simplistic linguistic phrasing. Haught himself admits that it is "one of the most difficult problems in philosophical and theological discussion" (1986, 6). I do think, particularly in this period of postmodern thought, that it is an important question for religion and theology, although it may be problematic in terms of the dialogue with science.

Most often in his work, Haught speaks of God in general, theistic terms. Given that the very existence of God is questioned by many participants in the religion/science debates, this is sensible; specifically Christian content would further restrict areas of agreement. And even the adoption of a more "scientifically" oriented term for God, such as "Creative Energy," would hardly help, because the issue for most of Haught's dialogue partners from the sciences is not what God should be called but whether God does or needs to exist in their scientifically or naturalistically accounted-for world.

But, theologically speaking, expanding his articulations on the issue of a personal God would lend credence to Haught's insistence that the entire cosmos must be considered in a Christian eschatological vision. This would

also solidify the Christian value of ecology, because the earth and the cosmos would no longer be able to be conceived of as a mere backdrop for human endeavors. Unfortunately, what I have gleaned of Haught's specifically trinitarian, Christian perspective on eschatology is one of the very rare places where Haught engages in such particularities. Further work from him on these matters would strengthen his cosmological, eschatological, and ecological position within theological discussions, especially when issues of religion-and-science are under debate.

But, although Haught's response to the question would have great import for his theological position, one of the major issues of the religion/science debates would remain active: Does a theory that does not include or see the need for a divine presence thereby prove that the Divine or Transcendent does not exist? Or can a theory that believes in and includes the Divine Transcendent offer any persuasive arguments to its skeptics? The religion-and-science debates, it seems certain, will continue.

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