

# *John F. Haught's Theological Contributions*

with Gloria L. Schaab, "An Evolving Vision of God"; Ann M. Michaud, "John Haught—Finding Consonance between Religion and Science"; Ted Peters, "Constructing a Theology of Evolution"; Robert E. Ulanowicz, "From Pessimism to Hope: A Natural Progression"

## CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF EVOLUTION: BUILDING ON JOHN HAUGHT

by *Ted Peters*

*Abstract.* The construction of a distinctively Christian "theology of evolution" or "theistic evolution" requires the incorporation of the science of evolutionary biology while building a more comprehensive worldview within which all things are understood in relation to our creating and redeeming God. In the form of theses, this article brings four support pillars to the constructive work: (1) orienting evolutionary history to the God of grace; (2) affirming purpose *for* nature even if we cannot see purpose *in* nature; (3) employing the theology of the cross to discern divine compassion in the natural world; and (4) relying on the divine promise of new creation. Among other things, John Haught's blueprint has located the pedestals on which these pillars will stand. For this groundwork, Haught deserves thanks.

*Keywords:* eschatology; evolution; God; John Haught; purpose; suffering; theistic evolution; theology of the cross

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Theologians find themselves under increasing pressure to construct an interpretation of biological evolution that honestly reflects what science tells us about the natural world. More: A constructive theology of evolution must be applicable to the facts of biological life, comprehensive in scope, logical, and internally coherent; and it must critically distinguish between the solid science of evolution and the smoke and mirrors put up by ideologies such as atheistic materialism. Still more: Such a theology of evolution must be energized and directed from within by its own religious vision,

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[*Zygon*, vol. 45, no. 4 (December 2010)]

© 2010 by the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*. ISSN 0591-2385

[www.zygonjournal.org](http://www.zygonjournal.org)

taking aggressive initiative rather than merely reacting defensively to the challenges of Charles Darwin and his atheistic disciples. Since the days of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, theologians have sought to describe all things in reality in terms of the God of creation and redemption. Contemporary science daily alerts us to the complexity and beauty of reality, and this makes the theologian's task an ongoing one.

The gravity and urgency of today's challenge is raised in a recent *Unitarian Universalist* magazine article.

The theory of evolution by natural selection has important implications for theology and religious belief. At the most obvious level it undermines a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation. At the next level it throws doubt on the notion of divine purpose in creation, since natural selection maintains that the only purposes of organisms are to survive and reproduce. And finally, it questions whether a divine creator is necessary at all. (Murry 2009, 27)

When under such an attack, one is tempted to mount a defense. But should defense provide the sole motive?

The theistic evolutionist may be tempted to bunker down to avoid getting wounded in the crossfire of the doubters—creationism and intelligent design firing from one side and atheistic materialism shooting from the other. However, evolutionary biologist Francisco J. Ayala provides the ammunition to take the initiative: “the message has always been twofold: (1) evolution is good science and (2) there need not be contradiction between evolution and religious beliefs” (Ayala 2007, 5). Generated by a faith seeking understanding, the theologian should draw energy and direction from an internal desire to widen our understanding of nature's world in light of the God of creative and redeeming grace.

John F. Haught surveys the land on which to construct a theology of evolution. Here is Haught's blueprint: “A theology of evolution is a systematic set of reflections that tries to show how evolution, including those features that scientific skeptics consider to be incompatible with religious faith, illuminate the revolutionary image of God given to Christian faith” (Haught 2001, 49). Haught combines an apologetic defense against “scientific skeptics” with the larger strategy to “illuminate the revolutionary image of God.”

In what follows, I would like to bring four support pillars to the theological construction site. By themselves they are insufficient to construct an entire theology of evolution; yet, in my judgment, they are necessary to prop up the superstructure. In the form of theses, these four support (1) orienting evolution to the God of grace; (2) affirming purpose *for* nature even if we cannot see purpose *in* nature; (3) employing the theology of the cross to discern divine compassion in the natural world; and (4) relying on God's promise of new creation. Among other things, Haught's blueprint has located the pedestals on which these pillars will stand. For this groundwork I want to thank him and continue building.

Thesis #1: The construction of a Christian version of *theistic evolution* requires placing life's evolution on planet Earth within the larger framework of cosmic history, a history culminating in the future new creation promised by our gracious God.

One of the theologian's tasks is particularly pertinent to this thesis, namely, worldview construction. The challenge of evolutionary theory to Christian worldview construction was not overlooked by Karl Rahner.

Is a continuous development of the cosmos from its simplest and most original components right up to its present differentiation and complexity, the realm of living being included, acceptable to Christian faith in such a way that it can leave this whole evolution to natural science as a thesis or hypothesis, and then, at most, afterwards include this evolution in a Christian conception of the world? Our answer is yes. (Rahner 1988, 38)

Yes, the challenge for the theologian is to construct a "conception of the world" that includes cosmic as well as earthly evolution.

Salient among the characteristics of both biological evolution and physical cosmology in our post-Newtonian era is temporality. Both cosmology and evolution exhibit change over time. Both dimensions of nature are inescapably historical. "The cosmos has a history" (Polkinghorne 2008, 707). Like Russian dolls, Earth's history fits within the larger cosmic history stretching from the Big Bang to the present. And "history is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology," asserts Wolfhart Pannenberg rightly (1970–1971, I:15). For the theologian, nature fits within history. Like a story being told, the end of this cosmic history still lies in our future. What Christian theology adds to any strictly naturalist accounting of the history of nature is the divine promise, the promise that creation will find its fulfillment in new creation.

Would a strictly naturalist rendering of Darwinian evolution suffice for theological construction? Willem Drees contends that a naturalistic interpretation would have all the advantages of a religious one and fewer disadvantages. He launches his proposal: "A naturalist evolutionary perspective can do justice to the richness of experience and to our sense of morality" (Drees 1998, 304). No doubt, evolutionary interpretations of human morality shed light on just this topic, human morality. However, Haught reminds us that the "reduction of religion to the status of being nothing more than a provider of morality fails to get at the heart of what religion is" (Haught 1993, 20). Religious traditions in general and Christianity in particular make claims about more than human moral behavior. They make claims about ultimate reality. They make claims about the origin and future of creation. They make claims resting upon special revelation that purport to convey insights gained from sources beyond what nature as nature can reveal. A distinctively Christian version of theistic evolution will coordinate what is learned from special revelation with what is learned

through natural revelation. Rather than a *natural theology*, this first thesis presses us toward a *theology of nature*.

Ian G. Barbour explains why. "Scientific research finds only law and chance, but . . . since God's action would be scientifically undetectable, it could be neither proved nor refuted by science. This would exclude any proof of God's action of the kind sought in natural theology, but it would not exclude the possibility of God's action affirmed on other grounds in a wider theology of nature" (Barbour 1998, 432). I would add: "A Theology of Nature starts from faith; but then it takes initiative for raising hypotheses that re-interpret what science tells us about nature" (Peters 2005, 2).

What Haught calls a "theology of evolution" is most frequently dubbed *theistic evolution*. According to "theistic evolution," writes Robert John Russell, "God creates the world *ex nihilo* with certain fundamental laws and natural constants, and God acts everywhere in time and space as continuous creator (*creatio continua*) in, with, and through the processes of nature. God's action is trustworthy and we describe the results through these laws of nature. The result is the evolution of life. In essence, evolution is how God is creating life" (Russell 2006, 28). Note the dynamism in Russell's definition. Life is not something already created, already done, so to speak. It is ongoing. In addition to establishing the universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, God's creative work continues, *creatio continua*. And this divine creativity that both sustains the universe in its very existence and fosters developing newness within the universe has a future.

Theistic evolutionists have been engaged in worldview construction since the days of Darwin. Their enterprise has met with criticism. "The problem with theistic evolution, as far as many scientists are concerned, is that we do not normally think of the laws of nature as entities capable of seeing and planning for the future. . . . Theistic evolutionism was trying to incorporate the supernatural into the natural, leading the philosopher John Dewey to scoff at it as 'design on the installment plan'" (Bowler 2007, 20). This criticism derives from the methodological commitment made by researchers to seek strictly causal explanations, natural explanations. Strictly natural explanations preclude any supranatural interventions. Miraculous divine intervention is expelled from the methodological naturalism common to laboratory researchers. This methodological expulsion of intervention is satisfactory to most of today's theistic evolutionists, because they seek a noninterventionist understanding of divine action. God acts in, with, and under nature's laws and processes. Divine action and natural processes are conceptually compatible, at least according to theistic evolution.

For the most part, theistic evolutionists try to describe God's action in nature's world in a noninterventionist yet objective fashion. To rely on a divine intervention would be to rely on the equivalent of a miracle. Yet, here it is the nonmiraculous activity of God in creation that draws the theologian's gaze. Russell provides this noninterventionist model with a

name, NIODA: “I call this type of divine action *non-interventionist view of objective special providence* or *non-interventionist objective divine action* (NIODA)” (Russell 2008, 117).

The theistic evolutionist is concerned not about God’s miraculous works but rather about God’s nonmiraculous works. Peter Bowler overstates the case while distinguishing the position from interventionism: “Theistic evolution . . . seeks to combine creationism’s commitment to the argument from design with the evolutionists’ insistence that nature is governed by law rather than miracle” (2007, 113). The domain of knowledge for theistic evolution is the domain shared by both science and faith, namely, the world of nature. As a methodological choice, the theistic evolutionist attempts to explain God’s work to sustain the framework of nature along with God’s work within nature. This theological method neither affirms nor denies God’s work in miracles.

There may be one exception: that of the promised new creation, anticipated in the Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ. Scientific cosmologists cannot predict on the basis of present knowledge that the future of our physical universe will culminate in the fulfillment symbolized by the biblical “kingdom of God” or “new creation.” God’s gracious promise of cosmic transformation is dissonant, not consonant, with the future of the universe as scientists now project it. If God keeps this promise of eschatological transformation and renewal, it is not clear yet whether this would require interventionist or noninterventionist divine action.

Whether the advent of the eschatological new creation is the result of natural or supernatural processes, theistic evolution pictures “our evolving universe, in all of its temporal and spatial grandeur, as moving toward an ultimate fulfillment, a new creation in the Christ who is yet to come” (Haught 2001, 64). Beginning with the end of the story—a vision of creation’s fulfillment in the new creation—the natural world constitutes a history of God with the creation. With considerable enthusiasm Michael Dowd trumpets: “*Evolutionary Christianity is an integral formulation of the Christian faith that honors biblical and traditional expressions, conservative and liberal, while enthusiastically embracing a deep-time worldview. Evolutionary Christianity represents the entire history of the universe in God-glorifying, Christ-edifying, scripture-honoring ways*” (Dowd 2007, 75).

Thesis #2: Even though we cannot rightly ask evolutionary biologists to discern divine purpose *within* nature, the Christian theologian posits that God has a purpose *for* nature.

Today’s theistic evolutionist wants go where Denis Edwards takes us: “I would want to argue that God is not to be understood as another factor operating alongside natural selection, or in addition to it, but is rather to be understood as acting through it” (Edwards 1999, 52). God’s action in

nature's world can be discerned in, with, and under natural processes, including natural selection. Yet, to assert such a thing is not easy. This is because natural selection, as well as all that happens in evolution's story, is a chance process devoid of purpose or direction.

The methodological naturalism that frames today's research into evolutionary biology turns a blind eye to purpose, at least in the sense of a built-in entelechy providing biological life with meaning and direction. Evolution has no goal, no anticipation of fulfillment. "The evidence of the fossil record is against any directing force, external or immanent, leading the evolutionary process toward specified goals. Teleology . . . is, then, appropriately rejected in biology as a category of explanation" (Ayala 2000, 19). If the theistic evolutionist wishes to deal with evolutionary science on its own terms, it must incorporate and interpret this nonteleological perspective. Haught refers to this rejection of teleology as "cosmic pessimism": "Cosmic pessimism is the conviction that the world has no transcendent origin and no divinely shaped destiny. 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" (Haught 1993, 17). This is unacceptable to Haught, so he lifts up as an alternative what he calls the "religious vision of reality" (1993, 15). Note that the religious vision is pitted as an alternative to cosmic pessimism. In contrast, I am suggesting that the theistic evolutionist incorporate cosmic pessimism within the religious vision replete with purpose.

This may be difficult for the theologian, however. To think of the natural world as the creation of a loving God eschews nihilism and pessimism. The very idea of creation implies purpose; and we mean purpose in its grand and overarching scope. The nonteleological view of nature in science cannot be allowed to have the last word. This leads to our second thesis: Even though we cannot rightly ask evolutionary biologists to discern divine purpose *within* nature, the Christian theologian posits that God has a purpose *for* nature (Peters and Hewlett 2003, 159; 2006, 120; 2009, 77). On the one hand, the theologian recognizes and even applauds the new knowledge produced by a scientific method that sets purpose aside. On the other hand, the knowledge gained from this method should be dubbed partial rather than comprehensive. A more comprehensive religious vision would place the contingent events of nature within the larger story of God's purposeful history with creation.

Beginning with Darwin and continuing from the late nineteenth century well into the twentieth, the issue of purpose within evolution appeared as the issue of progress. Does change over time amount to progress? We can see progress in technology. But, is biology progressive? Darwin himself affirmed at least a loose connection between evolutionary biology and progress. The law of progress is not an invariable rule, but in general we can expect evolution to move life toward perfection. "As natural selec-

tion works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection” (Darwin [1859] 1964, 489).

Darwin’s disciples of today, in contrast, deny progress in nature; they even deny that Darwin himself affirmed progress. Daniel C. Dennett, for example, writes, “Global, long-term progress, amounting to the view that things in the biosphere are, in general, getting better and better and better, was denied by Darwin, and although it is often imagined by onlookers to be an implication of evolution, it is simply a mistake—a mistake no orthodox Darwinians fall for” (Dennett 1995, 299).

How does one resolve this apparent dispute between the master and the disciple? One way would be to admit that life today is much more complex than it was in earlier times. For the first two billion years of life’s history on our planet, simple microbes reigned. Even today they constitute the majority of living entities. Yet, gradually over time multicellular organisms developed, leading eventually to intelligence and to *Homo sapiens*. As Niels Henrik Gregersen puts it, “though Dennett may be right that Darwinian Theory does not entail a predictive theory of steady universal progress, it is hard to disregard the empirical fact that, on a whole, evolution has shown many cases for speaking, at least retrospectively, of an overall trend towards biological complexity” (Gregersen 2006, 8).

Despite the fact that an overall direction toward increased complexity is observable, scientists deny that this is the result of a *telos* (purpose or end) built into the fabric of nature. Natural selection is the only principle evolutionary biologists appeal to, and they contend that increased complexity has appeared in evolutionary history because it has passed the adaptability test. Complex species are more reproductively fit. If Earth’s environment were to undergo a rapid change—from an asteroid impact, for example—post-impact nature might select for simpler life forms. Our planet might return to a state where only bacteria survive in the struggle for existence. Progressive complexity is by no means assured by a built-in natural *telos*.

Yet, because purpose and meaning are so important for the theologian, it is hard to resist the temptation to look to nature and ask about its purpose and meaning. Philip Hefner tries to mine nature for its divine riches. “Nature is revealed to possess the character of a project. . . . The Christian faith proposes that nature’s project is God’s project” (Hefner 1998, 329). He adds, “this implies that God intends the created natural order to discern its purposes and values freely and likewise to behave freely in accord with those purposes” (Hefner 1998, 355). Now, we have been warned by the methodological naturalists that no entelechy is to be found by digging into nature. Still, Hefner persists. What he finds in nature—that nature is a divine project—is what he previously put there. That is, on the basis of special revelation and his knowledge of God’s project, he looks at nature

and finds that it appears to be a divine project. Hefner's method draws upon a theology of nature, even if it resembles a natural theology.

Theistic evolutionists of the late nineteenth century were uninterested in addressing a purposeless or unguided natural realm. They grabbed onto the apparent conflation of evolution with progress. They embraced progress in both biology and civilization. "Liberal thinkers have tried to find a way of accepting that we may be the product of nature, while portraying nature as something capable of lifting its products steadily up toward higher things" (Bowler 2007, 26). A remnant of this liberal confidence in progress surfaces in Haught's work. In place of mere complexity he puts beauty. The natural world is progressing toward increased beauty:

We can still plausibly contend that the universe *as a whole* has advanced in a *general* direction since the time of cosmic origin. At the very least the universe for billions of years has been in the business of bringing about living and thinking beings. In an even broader sense there has been an ongoing cosmic trend toward complexity, and toward more and more intense versions of ordered novelty—that is, toward *beauty*. (Haught 2001, 110)

It is my recommendation that today's advocate of theistic evolution avoid endorsement of progress on two counts. First, teleology is no longer acceptable within a strictly scientific account. "Theologians must accept that there is no built-in trend toward humanity. Darwinism offers only an open-ended, haphazard, and largely unpredictable model of progress" (Bowler 2007, 223). Second, internal to Christian theology is the doctrine of sin. This understanding of the human condition challenges the doctrine of progress when applied to morality or to the achievements of human civilization.

Christians have traditionally assumed that history is not progressive: humans have fallen from an original state of grace through Original Sin, and can only gain salvation through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. To argue . . . that we have risen from the apes as part of God's plan is to miss the point of Christianity's belief that we are contaminated by sin, that the divine purpose has been frustrated by humanity's willful separation from God after its creation. (Bowler 2007, 27–28)

Even if the theistic evolutionist finds it difficult to reaffirm the historicity of an Adamic fall, the constancy of human sin and the tragedy of human suffering pop the balloons of naive doctrines of ascending progress. Creation, including the human place within it, is estranged from God and from the essence God has intended for us. No amount of technological progress can overcome this fundamental estrangement. The imputation of progress into evolutionary biology would be subject to the same theological critique. Perhaps it is to the theologian's advantage that today's evolutionary biologists remove progress, as well as any other purpose, from their investigations.

Theistic evolutionists must incorporate a science that has already expunged purpose. Chance, purposeless chance, must be interpreted in light



of a theology of nature. Arthur Peacocke puts the mandate this way: “It is chance operating within a law-like framework that is the basis of the inherent creativity of the natural order, its ability to generate new forms, patterns and organizations of matter and energy” (Peacocke 1998, 363). Theologians wishing to honor science as scientists themselves see it must take randomness and chance and purposelessness into their doctrines of creation. Like a daily vitamin pill too large to swallow, theologians must gulp and force it down into their intellectual systems.

This move does not require the complete abandonment of purpose. It does require that our understanding of purpose be derived from our theology of nature, not from the science that describes nature. Hence, I do not recommend that the theologian try to locate purpose or direction or even value *within nature* itself. Rather, along with my research colleague Martinez Hewlett, I recommend that theologians affirm a divine purpose *for nature*. This divine purpose should be sought where it belongs, namely, in God. The purpose for the long history of nature over deep time is not located in a built-in *telos*. It is located in the will of God. Our loving and gracious God draws the universe from nonexistence into existence; and this God sends the creation sailing down the avenue of time toward an eschatological goal. That goal is the new creation, the renewed or transformed creation where “the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:5–6 NRSV).

We do not require that we see this purpose when looking solely at natural developments. This purpose or direction will be retroactively imparted by God in the eschatological consummation. Purpose comes from the end looking backward, not from a potential lying in wait at the beginning. In fact, the Greek word for end, *telos*, means end both as final state and as purpose or goal. It is the divine act of redemption that determines what previous creation will have meant, and this can be discerned only eschatologically. It is omega that determines alpha.

Thesis #3: By drawing upon the theology of the cross to interpret God’s relation to the natural world, we look for divine compassion expressed toward the “unfit” as well as the triumph of the “fit” in the struggle for existence.

The most difficult knot for the theistic evolutionist to untie is not how to interpret Genesis in light of deep time and speciation, or how to reinterpret an ancient Bible in light of the modern world, or how to locate intelligent design in irreducibly complex organisms. The entangled knot is the problem of suffering. How can we justify God’s permitting eons and eons of suffering by sentient beings? How can we call God a loving creator when the natural world is replete with the predator-prey mechanism, and where

uncountable species go extinct? How can we justify God's bringing into existence a jungle of blood "red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson 1850)?

Hefner formulates the challenge and emphasizes the degree of difficulty confronting the theologian.

Natural selection resists not only theological, but also all human interpretation, for two fundamental reasons: (1) to empirical observation, the processes of selection seem to be without overall purpose or meaningfulness, and (2) they appear to be replete with what humans consider to be evil, pain, injustice, and disregard for persons . . . nowhere do the problems of theodicy bear down with greater weight and urgency than in the consideration of the processes of natural selection. (Hefner 1993, 42–43)

For those theologians who rely upon the free-will defense of God in the face of evil, God is justified because this is the price the world pays to obtain the allegedly valuable product, human freedom and moral awareness. If we want free will, we have to accept the suffering produced by free will. So the argument goes. However, this no longer suffices in a post-Darwinian era. The Darwinian story of Earth's evolution introduces the human race only in a later chapter. Violence and suffering had been around for billions of years before free human beings could add to the bloodshed. Human sin and human-caused suffering only added to the existing travesty. If "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23 NRSV), what can we say about the death that preceded human sin?

The theodicy question is not unique to the theistic evolutionist. It has been posed from the time of biblical Job through the millennia down to the present. What is distinctive about the present challenge is the evolutionary assumption that violence and death are what we humans have inherited from the natural world that gave us birth. Sin is original in the sense that it preceded our human origin, and we cannot escape it.

I do not expect today's theistic evolutionist to accomplish what the theological giants of the past have failed to do. Still, the challenge lies before us: What resources within Christian theology should be called forth to meet the Darwinian variant on the theodicy problem? I recommend that we appeal to the theology of the cross—that we interpret the natural world through the lens of Jesus' cross.

The theology of the cross is a distinctive theme coming from the Lutheran branch of the Reformation. It begins with the revelatory character of the cross of Jesus Christ and makes two points. First, God remains mysterious even in revelation. This is a paradox. We look at the cross whereon a dying man suffers, and we see the God of life and healing. This double meaning is puzzling and disorienting. What we expect and hope for in God is not what we see in the revelation of the cross. We want to see a God of power and eternity; we see a God present in weakness and death. The God revealed in the cross of Jesus is not the God we would expect or desire to have were we to go shopping for a pet deity. This God who participates

with us in suffering and death hides what we want to see, namely, the power of healing and life.

Second, entailed in what was just said, God is a victim of suffering and evil, not the author or perpetrator. God shares in the victimization of us mortals who face pain, agony, loneliness, and separation from life. In fact, God shares in the suffering of every creature in this creation.

Lutheran physicist and theologian George Murphy takes the cross of Christ and applies it to creation, even to the evolutionary process. "The crosslike pattern of creation means that Christ crucified has cosmic significance" (Murphy 2003, 330). He interprets suffering in nature as victimizing God: "In natural selection God is not understood as a deity who forces millions of generations through suffering and extinction without himself being affected by the process, but rather as a God who participates in the processes and shares in the suffering and death of the world. The price paid for the development of life is paid not only by God's creatures but also by God himself" (Murphy 2002, 211).

Peacocke, an Anglican, incorporates a version of the theology of the cross within his theistic evolution. "God suffers in, with, and under the creative processes of the world with their costly unfolding in time." He proceeds to place this shared suffering within the life of "*a God who suffers eminently and yet is still God, and a God who suffers universally and yet is still present uniquely and decisively in the sufferings of Christ*" (Peacocke 1998, 371).

Roman Catholic John Haught finds that he too can make this point when affirming God as Trinity. "This is the God who suffers along with creation and saves the world by taking all of its evolutionary travail and triumph into the everlasting compassion. . . . The doctrine of the Trinity implies that Christ's life, suffering and dying are internal to, not outside of, God" (Haught 2001, 124). When facing the terror of deep time and the darkness of suffering that predation and selection require of both those creatures who survive and those that do not, Haught illumines nature with the light of the cross:

Reflection on the Darwinian world can lead us to contemplate more explicitly the mystery of God as it is made manifest in the story of life's suffering, the epitome of which lies for Christians in the crucifixion of Jesus. In the symbol of the cross, Christian belief discovers a God who participates fully in the world's struggle and pain. . . . Evolutionary biology not only allows theology to enlarge its sense of God's creativity by extending it over measureless eons of time; it also gives comparable magnitude to our sense of the divine participation in life's long and often tormented journey. (Haught 2000, 46)

The God in Haught's theology of evolution is "both *kenotic love* and *the power of the future*" (Haught 2000, 110). Just what does he mean by this? Haught connects this God with a nature that is autonomously creative. For nature to be both autonomous and creative, it requires divine absence.

What God makes absent is his power; God still seeks to guide the world by luring or coaxing it toward increased beauty, toward perfection. God engages in self-restraint, self-removal. This is creation through letting-be. Haught places this divine activity in the category of kenosis, or divine self-emptying, and he applies it to God's creative relationship to the world. He also applies it to the concept of grace, saying that God graces the world by withdrawing and allowing creative self-organizing to develop. Divine self-restraint is the way in which divine self-giving love is manifest in the natural world.

It is the self-withdrawal of any forceful divine presence, and the paradoxical hiddenness of God's power in a self-effacing persuasive love, that allows creation to come about and to unfold freely and indeterminately in evolution. . . . The arena into which God withdraws in order to allow for the relatively autonomous self-creation of evolution is that of the unavailable but infinitely resourceful future. (Haught 2000, 97)

This divine withdrawal or kenosis leads Haught into a double commitment:

God's will is that the world become more and more independent, and that during its evolution its own internal coherence intensify, not diminish. But this *absent* God is *present* to and deeply united with the evolving world precisely by virtue of selflessly allowing it to achieve ever deeper autonomy—which occurs most obviously in the evolutionary emergence of human freedom. (Haught 2000, 114; emphases added).

Now, which is it? Is God absent or present?

I need to be critical of Haught's appeal to kenosis here. He seems to be saying that in order for nature to be creative on its own, God needs to be absent. When God withdraws, nature becomes free to pursue its own creative course of evolution. Violence and suffering and death become nature's way of self-organizing, and the now absent God has chosen to avoid intervention to prevent this. Haught's view of the kenotic God thus approaches that of deism, according to which the otiose deity permits natural selection without intervention. However, Haught invokes the theology of the cross, wherein God is present with the creatures, sharing creaturely suffering. Which is it: a God who is absent or a God who is present?

This is not the right way to apply the concept of kenosis, in my judgment. The concept of kenosis in Philippians 2:7, where Christ "emptied himself," was not intended to indicate the creator's self-withdrawal to tacitly approve nature's violence. Rather than identify kenosis with divine self-limiting to permit suffering and death, it would be better to say that in the incarnation God limits his eternity to enter into time, limits his infinity to become finite, limits his divine life to enter into creaturely death, limits self to ingress into the other. The theology of the cross points to a present God who is at one with our weakness, not to an absent omnipotent God. Rather than bless through withdrawal "survival of the fittest," in

the cross God becomes one with the unfit, with those who do not survive. Divine identification with the unfit becomes the key that unlocks the door to true life, eternal life.

Another Roman Catholic thinker, Celia Deane-Drummond, comes closer to the position I advocate here.

Those creation theologies that focus simply on the return to a state of blessedness in the beginning fail to consider in sufficient depth the horror of creaturely suffering that has become known to us through an understanding of evolution. One alternative might be simply to accept such suffering as part of the process. . . . Yet the cross challenges any such acceptance; rather we are left with an image of a co-suffering God who identifies with the victims of such a process, rather than the process itself. (Deane-Drummond 2000, 236)

Haught does not represent a “return to a state of blessedness,” to be sure, but his particular use of kenosis risks affirming a divine “acceptance” of the world’s suffering.

In summary, I do not expect the theistic evolutionist to solve the problem of evil any better than those theologians who have gone before us. Nevertheless, in constructing a theology of evolution I believe it is illuminating to apply the theology of the cross to suffering in the natural world. Here is Murphy again: “The only real Christian theodicy is the passion of Christ. This is not an explanation of evil but a claim that God suffers *with* the world from whatever evil takes place” (2003, 87).

Thesis #4: By drawing upon the biblical promise of *new creation*, we understand evolutionary history as ongoing, and we look forward to the consummation yet to come.

“Hope is angry for a better world,” writes Janet Soskice with poetic power (2000, 86). Looking forward toward a better world gives Christian hope its distinctive future orientation, its eschatological vision. Can we interpret the history of biological evolution in light of hope? Can we view our past as a prelude to a future? Can we place nature blood “red in tooth and claw” within a vision of its future transformation? Can our theology of evolution invoke the concept of redemption? “The science-theology dialogue has often concentrated on matters closely related to the doctrine of creation. That is understandable, but it runs the danger of separating the dialogue from the message of salvation” (Murphy 2003, 35). Can we draw the promise of salvation into our vision for creation?

Sarah Lancaster answers by emphasizing the continuity as well as the discontinuity between what we have inherited from our evolutionary past and God’s promised transformation. “Transformation is not a change to something that we never were or never could have been; instead, it is a change from one way of actualizing our possibilities to another way of doing so . . . we have come to have a capacity for God, and evolution must surely play a large role in making us what we are” (Lancaster 2005, 208).

Salvation consists of fulfillment; the key is that fulfillment requires transformation.

One of the strengths of Haught's work is the large role he gives to eschatological transformation. Here is what the world looks like as constructed by his vision. Divine action for Haught includes the impartation of information. Informational patterning is a metaphysical necessity. Information is required for one thing to be distinguishable from another thing, or from no-thing. Evidently, information is noncoercive yet alluring. How does impartation of divine information fit with evolution's self-organization? Haught holds that self-organization is spontaneous but that God integrates particular evolutionary achievements into more comprehensive wholes of meaning. "Information 'works', we can say at the very least, only by *comprehensively* integrating particulars (atoms, molecules, cells, bits and bytes) into coherent wholes" (Haught 2000, 75). Rather than emergence from below, Haught advocates integration from above.

From this one might conclude that the future is constantly reinterpreting the past—that is, future comprehensive wholes draw past particulars into new patterns of coherence. This restructuring of the past through the holism of the future warrants the introduction of the Christian doctrine of eschatology. Haught asserts that it is the divine promise of future renewal that opens the present moment up to creative advance. "It is the arrival of the future, and not the grinding onward of an algorithmic past, that accounts for the novelty in evolution. . . . It is not the occurrence of contingency that brings about the future; rather, it is the arrival of the future that allows events to have the status of contingency, that is, to be more than just the inevitable outcome of past deterministic causes" (Haught 2000, 87). The power of God's future is the ultimate metaphysical explanation for the physical reality of which we are a part. "I would argue that it is precisely the implied metaphysics of the future that can best account for the three cosmic qualities—chance, lawfulness, and temporality—that allegedly provide the raw stuff of biological evolution" (Haught 2000, 94).

Haught's metaphysics of the future includes the extraordinary insight that God's eschatological promise is itself the power that releases the present moment from the grip of the past and opens us to the possibility of the new. God's final future will not be merely the endpoint in a series of events; rather, it is the dynamic power that makes the present what it is and that allows temporality to establish its linear sequence of events. "It is *the coming of the future* that pushes the present into the past and permits a linear sequence of events to occur. In other words, it is not the blind movement of the past toward the future that endows the universe with its temporal character. Rather, it is the constant arrival of a new future" (Haught 2007, 95). Every moment we experience transformation, at least in the minimal form of opening up new possibilities. What God's final or eschatological future promises is redemption through divine transformation.

God's future, according to Haught, is what is eminently real. It is the reality toward which all is being drawn. The future empowers every present moment to run its course and slip into its past, a past from which we in the new moment are now liberated. The future is also the dimension from which God comes to renew the creation. Because God's future grounds metaphysical reality, it must apply to physical reality as well. At minimum we have a uniformitarian understanding of divine action—God's future is acting in every moment—, but, because of the dynamism of the interaction of the future with the present, Haught most likely belongs in the camp with the noninterventionists. Remaining to be explained is whether the final eschatological renewal of creation will be the result of an interventionist or noninterventionist act of divine grace.

As we can see here, the eschatological future is not merely an add-on, an additional conclusion to the ordinary course of time. It is more than merely the last chapter in the cosmic story. The eschatological future is itself the factor that makes nature's evolution into God's creation. By "creation" we refer not strictly to our origin, to Genesis, to the Big Bang, but rather to the entire cosmic and terrestrial history that we today experience as ongoing. "Cosmic and biological evolution instruct us as never before that we live in a universe that is in great measure not yet created. . . . In an evolving cosmos, created being as such has *not yet* achieved the state of integrity" (Haught 2003, 168). This "state of integrity" is yet to come. It will come when nature will have been created, culminated. This is what is promised, promised by God for the creation. "The notion of an unfinished universe still coming into being . . . opens up the horizon of a new or unprecedented future. . . . *Esse est adventire*. In its depths, nature is promise" (Haught 2003, 170).

Now we may ask once again: Does evolution have a direction, a *telos*? Recall how for Haught its self-organization is autonomous in the absence of a withdrawn God. This means that whatever purpose evolutionary creativity has derives not from an embedded entelechy but rather from its future place in the comprehensive renewal of creation. "Rather than attributing to God a rigid plan for the universe, evolutionary theology prefers to think of God's vision for it. Nature, after Darwin, is not a design but a promise. God's 'plan,' if we continue to use the term, is not a blueprint but an *envisagement* of what the cosmos might become" (Haught 2000, 175).

#### CONCLUSION

"Today it is from the scientist and not from the priest that most people ask for explanations capable of responding to their essential anguish or their quest for origins," quips Jacques Arnould (2009, 311). The problem with this situation is that the scientific interpretation of our physical reality is

only one part of an adequate description of reality as a whole. What the priest or the theologian can offer is a more comprehensive worldview that incorporates, but is not limited to, what the scientist can say. In our discussion here, we specifically ask the theologian to incorporate the natural world as the evolutionary biologist sees it; we also ask for a comprehensive theology of evolution that orients the story of life on Earth toward God's grand history with cosmic creation.

John Haught has helped to draw a blueprint to guide the construction of a healthy theistic evolution. I have sought here to draw attention to some of the foundational pedestals and pillars upon which the superstructure of a theology of evolution can rest: (1) we need to orient evolution "red in tooth and claw" to the God of grace; (2) we should affirm purpose *for* nature even if we cannot see purpose *in* nature; (3) we can benefit by applying the theology of the cross to discern divine compassion in the natural world; and (4) we should trust in the biblical God's promise of new creation. Much more needs to be built into this constructive theology, but, with Haught's design, we are off to a good start.

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