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The Lions Seek Their Prey from God: a Commentary on the Boyle Lecture

John Haught asks how we can reconcile evolution with the idea of divine providence: ‘The major question for theology, now as in the years immediately subsequent to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, is how to reconcile the brute impersonality and blindness ... in evolution’s recipe with trust in divine providence.’ In his book *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?* Michael Ruse¹ focuses on the same point. He identifies as ‘the biggest question of all for the Christian believer is the “theodicy” problem. If, as the Christian believes, God is omnipotent and all-loving, then why evil? If He is all-powerful, He could prevent evil, and if he is all-loving, then He would prevent evil. Yet evil exists.’ For some this is a definitive proof against the sort of God revealed in the Bible. David Hull² has written,

The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror ... Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural selection may be like, he is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not the loving God who cares about his productions. He is not even the awful God pictured in the Book of Job. [He] is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.

This is the sort of interpretation which led to the notorious conclusion of Richard Dawkins³, that ‘Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist’.

Haught gives us four possible answers to the problem:

- Denial of evolution through some form of creationism, whether the classical variety associated with Henry Morris or the contemporary ‘intelligent design’ variety of Phillip Johnson and William Dembski;
- Blind trust in spite of apparent absurdity, since we do not know God’s vision for His creation;
- Evolution as an educational ploy or ‘soul school’ of God to prepare us for eternal life (Heb. 12: 5-13); or
- An assumption that we are merely in an intermediate phase, progressing directionally as complexity and consciousness increase, an idea supported

1 Ruse, M. *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001).

2 Hull, D.L. God of the Galapagos. *Nature* (1992) 352, 485-486.

3 Dawkins, R. *The Blind Watchmaker*, London: Longman (1986).

by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and explicitly expressed in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin.

The last is the possibility favoured by Haught. He seems to see a new natural theology emerging through the Anthropic Principle in cosmology and physics coupled with a Whiteheadian progress in evolution and biology. However, he believes something more is needed:

acknowledging the general cosmic directionality that both Teilhard and Whitehead – each in his own way – articulate is still not enough to constitute a theology of evolution. From a Christian theological point of view, at least, it must also be demonstrated that both the processive character of the cosmos overall, and the troubling Darwinian recipe in particular, are precisely what one would expect if the world is grounded in and ultimately saved by the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Haught suggests that the missing elements may be found in ‘kenosis’: what he calls the ‘descent of God’ with its acceptance of limitations of sovereignty; and what he calls ‘providence as promise’ or the ‘promise of nature’.

Philosophical Systems

A crucial question to ask about Haught’s position (and, indeed, all similar philosophico-rational ones) is how strong is its connection with actual verifiable processes going on in the real world. We can leave aside questions about our ability to discover reality. They do not matter in this context: unless we deny totally the existence of all physical or biological systems outside our own being, we are faced with a non-negotiable set of data that we can in principle investigate. We also have to test its coherence with what we understand of God’s revealing of himself – in his written and living Words and in any manifestations of himself in creation. The apostle Paul pointed out to the pantheists of Lystra, ‘[God] has not left you without some clue to his nature, in the benefits he bestows: he sends you rain from heaven and the crops in their seasons and gives you food in plenty’ (Acts 14: 17). Is it legitimate to see ‘some clue to God’s nature’ in agricultural productivity and the procession of the seasons, or are they merely a consequence of a struggle for existence involving variable response systems – in other words, conventional Darwinian evolution?

Evolution destroyed classical natural theology in two ways. The first was the lengthening of creation’s history. A creator could be presumed to design a perfect organism in an unchanging world, but the perfection would disappear if the environment changed. Ernst Mayr⁴ has described the time factor as ‘the Achilles heel of natural theology’. This is compounded by genetic change: evo-

4 Mayr, E. *The Growth of Biological Thought*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1982), p. 349.

lutionary adaptation does not 'need' a divine designer; it can be regarded as a wholly naturalistic process (This does not mean it is exclusively naturalistic, but it could be – and is often claimed to be such,⁵ 1998). There is no compelling reason to find God in nature unless we have a belief in One who holds the whole in existence, as Colossians 1: 17 and Hebrews 1: 3 indicate – and this is, of course, a circular argument. Nature, ecology, evolution can be 'explained' completely without reference to God. Reductionist naturalism of this sort is logically coherent. This is the claim of Richard Dawkins and his ilk and explains the *angst* of those who want to fill the gap with an 'intelligent designer'. Dawkins' position is entirely coherent and there is no evidence whatsoever for an 'intelligent designer' despite frenzied claims to the contrary by some.

Does Haught's version of natural theology help us to put God back into the world? One strand for him is the Anthropic Principle, frequently hailed as a replacement for the classical Argument for the Existence of God from Design. John Polkinghorne⁶ has written,

Natural theology is currently undergoing a revival, not so much at the hands of the theologians (whose nerve, with some honourable exceptions, has not yet returned) but at the hands of the scientists. There has grown up a widespread feeling, especially among those who study fundamental physics, that there is more to the world than meets the eye. Science seems to throw up questions which point beyond itself and transcend its power to answer. They arise from recognising the potentiality inherent in the structure of the world, its interlocking tightly-knit character, and, indeed, its very intelligibility which makes it open to our enquiry. Thus a physicist such as Paul Davies, who is notably unsympathetic to conventional religion, can nevertheless write, 'It may be bizarre but in my opinion science offers a surer road to God than religion.' [But] we are concerned not only with a revived natural theology but also with a *revised* natural theology. It points to law and circumstance (the assumed *data* of science and so open to scientific inquiry) rather than particular occurrences (such as the coming-to-be of life or of the eye). These latter questions are legitimate subjects for scientific investigation and the attempt to capture them for theology is just the error of the God of the Gaps.

The contention is that the Anthropic Principle stretches credulity to such an extent that it seems highly probable that 'something else' has to be postulated. Is there anything in biology – and specifically, in evolution – that demands 'something else' and helps us to escape the 'cruelty in nature' dilemma? There

5 Drees, W.B. 'Evolutionary naturalism and religion', In Russell, R.J., Stoeger, W.R. & Ayala, F.J. (eds.) *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, Vatican Observatory: University of Notre Dame Press (1998), pp. 303-328.

6 Polkinghorne, J.C. *Science & Creation*, London: SPCK (1988), p. 15

have certainly been many attempts to identify a possible ‘something’. Peter Bowler⁷ has chronicled the resolute attempts by theologians from the late 19th century onwards to find evidence of (especially) progressive trends in evolution which could be interpreted as divine control, but which all proved fruitless (and misled the theologians, who were not *au fait* with developments in science). There have been (and continue to be) determined efforts from opponents of evolution to find flaws or inconsistencies which would give ‘room’ for God to work, but again to no avail.

Another suggested way forward is that of Stephen Jay Gould⁸ who argued that science and religion occupy different ‘magisteria’ and therefore cannot conflict (following, it must be said, a host of others, including Robert Baden-Powell and Rudolf Bultmann). He cites the apparent cruelty of the parasitic ichneumon which troubled Darwin and concludes:

The factual state of the world does not teach us how we, with our powers for good and evil, should alter or preserve it in the most ethical manner. Darwin himself tended toward this view, although he could not, as a man of his time, thoroughly abandon the idea that the laws of nature might reflect some higher purpose. He clearly recognised that specific manifestations of those laws – cats playing with mice, and ichneumon larvae eating caterpillars – could not embody ethical messages, but he somehow hoped that unknown higher laws might exist ‘with the details, whether good or bad left to the working out of what we call chance’. Since ichneumons are a detail, and since natural selection is a law regulating details, the answer to the ancient dilemma of why such cruelty (in our terms) exists in nature can only be that there is no answer – and that framing the question ‘in our terms’ is thoroughly inappropriate in a natural world neither made for us nor ruled by us. It just happens.⁹

The Gould solution seems close to the ‘kenosis’ approach – God has voluntarily relinquished control of ‘the details’ so ‘they just happen’. It is an approach that might have appealed to Darwin himself. He wrote to Asa Gray at Harvard, ‘I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do and I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to be too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars.’ It seemed to him that ‘for an Omnipotent and Omniscient Creator to foresee is the same as to preordain’; he regarded this as ‘an uncomfortable puzzle something analogous with “Necessity & Free-will” or the “Origin of evil”’.

7 Bowler, P.J. *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (2001).

8 Gould, S.J. *Rocks of Ages*, New York: Ballantine (1999).

9 Gould, S.J. ‘Non-moral nature’, In *Hen’s Teeth and Horse’s Toes*, New York: Norton (1983), p. 43.

Obviously if God is not in control of 'the details', we can allow him to be distanced from 'nature red in truth and claw'. Does 'kenosis' help? In recent years there has been a quickening of interest in a theology of kenosis¹⁰. The problem with all discussions about it is knowing how far God's 'emptying' extended. God clearly restricted and humbled himself when he took human form, as the classical passage in Philippians 2: 6-8 states. Logically also, God has drawn back in allowing us to have free will; we are not automata. On the other hand, Jesus retained and exhibited authority over natural forces beyond that of normal humanity: 'Even the winds and waves obey him', while the accounts of the temptations in the wilderness imply that Christ could have escaped them by supernatural agency. In fairness, we have to acknowledge that the extent of kenosis has limits and that we do not know them.

In fact, this ignorance probably does not matter in the context, because Haught uses kenosis to qualify what he calls soul-centred and cosmic directionality in evolution, along the lines predicted or inspired by a Whitehead-Teilhard philosophy. This can be rejected much more easily. Whatever the intrinsic merit of Whitehead's ideas, they have the effect of reducing the significance of events in time, because in Whiteheadian thought reality is a process of becoming, not a static property of objects. Theologically, the distinction between an infinite creator and a finite cosmos is blurred, and it is difficult to maintain the deity of Christ as an ontological, as opposed to, a functional concept. This in turn reduces the significance of the incarnation and the atonement.

This is not the place to criticise process theology, nor am I competent to do so, but it is pertinent to comment on the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin. A succession of scholars have argued that conventional biological evolution is insufficient to account for human nature. Alfred Russel Wallace fell out with Darwin precisely on this issue, although for him the situation was muddled by his acceptance and enthusiasm for spiritism. More recently Julian Huxley claimed that we have passed through the biological phase of our evolution and entered a 'psycho-social phase'. C.H. Waddington believed the same; he called our present phase, 'socio-genetic'. Huxley's views led him to write a long and laudatory Preface to the English edition of Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man*, although he later regretted this.¹¹ Teilhard prodigiously extended these speculations. His published work stimulated and to some extent legitimised thought about evolution in the Roman Catholic Church, but has not contributed significantly to scholarship. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that anyone who has read the review of *The Phenomenon of Man* by Peter Medawar in *Mind*¹² would ever

10 e.g. Peacocke, A.R. *Creation and the World of Science*, Oxford: Clarendon (1979); Polkinghorne, J.C. (ed) *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, London: SPCK (2001); Pinnock, C.H. *Most Moved Mover*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House (2001).

11 Personal comment to H.B.D. Kettlewell.

12 Medawar, P.B. 'Review of *The Phenomenon of Man*', *Mind* (1961); reprinted in *The Art of the Soluble*, London: Methuen (1967) pp. 71-81.

take his ideas seriously. Medawar wrote,

The greater part of it is nonsense, tricked out with a variety of tedious metaphysical deceits, and its author can be accused of dishonesty only on the grounds that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself ... The *Phenomenon of Man* stands square in the tradition of *Naturphilosophie*, a philosophical indoor pastime of German origin which does not seem even by accident (though there is a great deal of it) to have contributed anything of permanent value to the storehouse of human thought... Teilhard habitually and systematically cheats with words. His work, he has assured us, is to be read, not as a metaphysical system, but 'purely and simply as a scientific treatise' executed with 'remorseless' or 'inescapable' logic; yet he uses in metaphor words like energy, tension, force, dimension *as if* they retained the weight and thrust of their special scientific usages. Consciousness, for example, is a matter upon which Teilhard has been said to have illuminating views. For the most part consciousness is treated as a manifestation of energy, though this does not help very much because the word 'energy' is itself debauched; but elsewhere we learn that consciousness is a dimension, or is something with mass, or is something corpuscular and particulate which can exist in various degrees of concentration, being something infinitely diffuse ... Consciousness is an interiority of matter, an 'inner face that everywhere duplicates the material external face, which alone is commonly considered by science' ... Evolution is 'an ascent towards consciousness'. It follows that evolution must have a 'precise orientation and a privileged axis' at the topmost pole of which lies Man, born 'a direct lineal descendant from a total effort of life' ... Teilhard is widely believed to have rejected the modern Mendelian-Darwinian theory of evolution or to have demonstrated its inadequacy. Certainly he imports a ghost, the entelechy or *élan vital* of an earlier terminology, into the Mendelian machine. Inasmuch as evolution is the fundamental motion of the entire universe, an ascent along a privileged and necessary pathway towards consciousness, so it follows that our present consciousness must 'culminate forwards in some sort of supreme consciousness'. In expounding this thesis, Teilhard becomes more and more confused and excited and finally almost hysterical ...

Teilhard regarded himself as first and foremost a scientist; although intriguingly, the Vatican gave as its reason for rejecting repeated revisions of the text of *Le Phénomène Humain* that 'it was not scientific enough'.

At the risk of depending too heavily on him, I think that Medawar's comments on philosophical 'systems' are also worth quoting. In 1963, Medawar gave the annual Herbert Spencer lecture.¹³ Spencer was a contemporary of

13 Medawar, P.B. 'Herbert Spencer and the Law of General Evolution', *Encounter* (1963); reprinted in *The Art of the Soluble*, London: Methuen (1967), pp. 39-58.

Charles Darwin, and a railway surveyor by profession. Ernst Mayr¹⁴ wrote about him, 'It would be quite justifiable to ignore Spencer totally in a history of biological ideas because his positive contributions were nil. However, since Spencer's ideas were much closer to various popular misconceptions than those of Darwin, they had a decisive impact on anthropology, psychology and the social sciences.' He became immensely popular in some North American circles, because he argued that there was a universal struggle for existence and hence unfettered capitalism and individual freedom were natural outworkings of evolution. It is Spencer's 'social Darwinism' rather than Darwin's biological science that should be the proper target of anti-evolutionary invective in the United States. Spencer is really the modern author of Haught's 'cosmic directionality'.

Whereas Darwin offered a theory of evolutionary change, Spencer offered a metaphysic based on change; Darwin's universe was at the mercy of time and chance, Spencer's had a clear and comforting direction; and perhaps above all, where Darwin detected only the amoral processes of reproduction, competition and selection, Spencer discussed the foundations of right conduct in nature – evolution was, to use his term, the 'survival of the fittest'.¹⁵

Medawar judged Spencer

the greatest of those who have attempted to found a metaphysical system on naturalistic principles ... Spencer's greatest contribution to philosophy was his Theory of General Evolution ...[which] in recent years has come back to life, or been propped upright again, in the work of men as far apart as Julian Huxley and Father Teilhard de Chardin, to say nothing of the revival of evolutionary sociology and social anthropology... As his thought developed Spencer came to think of genetic evolution, evolution in Darwin's sense, as no more than one manifestation of a far grander and more pervasive process; and out of this conviction his System grew. Today we realise that philosophers devise Systems because it gives them a nice warm comfortable feeling inside; it is something done primarily for their benefit, not for ours. Spencer would not have taken kindly to such an interpretation... Spencer, like Whitehead after him (the last of the great system philosophers) undertook 'the deduction of scientific concepts from the simplest elements of our perceptual knowledge... The law of evolution holds of the inner world as it does of the outer world'. Mind evolves; and language and musical expression, the plastic arts, and the arts of narrative and dancing, all display one characteristic or another of evolutionary change. Evolution is 'a universal process of things'...

14 Mayr, E. *op. cit.* [4] p. 36.

15 Durant, J. 'Darwinism and divinity: a century of debate', In Durant, J.(ed). *Darwinism and Divinity*, Oxford: Blackwell (1985), p 21.

Medawar is parodying to some extent, but his purpose is serious: science does not progress through adherence to 'systems'. Theories are built up by testing and amending hypotheses. Adaptation through natural selection was a hypothesis put forward by Darwin as the prime mechanism for biological change. It has been tested and retested and is now fully accredited. That is not to claim that it is the sole mechanism that produces the genetical changes we see in the natural world, but it is the only way for adaptation to evolve.

A key test case of its relevance for human nature is behavioural change. The ideas of inclusive fitness and kin selection put forward by J.B.S. Haldane, Bill Hamilton and John Maynard Smith have opened up new avenues of research. Ed Wilson has suggested some experimental tests as to how – and to what extent – they apply in human populations.¹⁶ Richard Dawkins has followed many in speculating about the inheritance and transmission of culture; he has been severely criticised by McGrath.¹⁷ Francisco Ayala¹⁸ has argued that ethical behaviour can be regarded as having been enabled by the emergence of language, not as a primarily selected trait (in the way that animals may be selected for camouflage as a protection against predators), but as an incidental result of other genetical changes. He explicitly distances himself from other attempts to find the grounds of morality in biological evolution. He accuses Spencer, Huxley and Waddington as falling into the naturalistic fallacy, since they use the contribution particular actions may make to evolutionary progress as their criterion of good or evil – which is determined by value judgments about what is progress. It is certainly not clear why the promotion of evolutionary change should in itself be a standard to measure what is morally good, a point made on a number of occasions by Richard Dawkins.

The conclusion from this consideration of systems in philosophy and attempts to extrapolate these to biology is not that the exercise is inevitably doomed, but that it is extremely hazardous and needs very careful justification. Haught follows a well-trodden and fashionable path in subscribing to the pantheism of Whitehead, Hartshorne, Cobb, Teilhard and Moltmann, but it is one that has not found much favour with scientists, although there are exceptions.¹⁹ Is this an area where science parts company with philosophical theology and one where the theologians are driving down a blind alley, like the hapless Charles Gore, W.R. Inge, Charles Raven and their ilk chronicled by Peter Bowler?²⁰ Is the attempt to use pantheism to hold together the immanence and transcendence of God intrinsically doomed because it is so close to

16 particularly in Wilson, E.O. *Consilience: the Unity of Knowledge*, New York: Knopf, (1998).

17 McGrath, A.E. *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life*, Oxford: Blackwell (2004).

18 Ayala, F.J. 'Human nature: one evolutionist's view'. In Brown, W.S., Murphy, N. & Malony, H.N. (eds.) *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (1998), pp. 31-48.

19 e.g. Birch, L.C. & Cobb, J.B. *The Liberation of Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1981); Morton, J. *Redeeming Creation*, Auckland: Zealandia (1984).

20 Bowler, P.J. *op. cit.* [7]

pantheism that, in C.S. Lewis's words, it is a creed 'not so much false as hopelessly behind the times. Once, before creation, it would have been true to say that everything was God. But God created; He caused other things to be other than Himself'.²¹ Are there more convincing theologies?

God, Evil and Darwinism

One of the difficulties of developing a robust theodicy is that pain is a necessary element in survival. If we (or any animal) are indifferent to pain, we would be indifferent to a range of potentially disabling hazards. Pain is an essential part of life.

However, I suggest that it is helpful to distinguish between pain as a biological necessity and 'suffering' as a spiritual or metaphysical affliction. We suffer as a result of a breakdown of relationship with self, others, creation (or environment) or God. Is this a legitimate distinction? It could be used to justify ill-treatment of animals since we might assume that they can 'only' experience pain, but this would be to deny our God-given role to care and nurture creation on his behalf. However, it is useful because it starts to clarify some of the elements in the apparent suffering of 'nature', in part because it directs attention to humankind as 'ensouled animals', *Homo divinus* as well as *Homo sapiens* in John Stott's terminology.²² This is not to assert that animals cannot 'suffer', although it would be expected that humans would be more subject to suffering. The significance of arguing that humans are qualitatively different from other animals because only they are 'made in God's image' is that we have a specific mandate to care for creation and therefore biological processes affecting and emanating from humankind are not the same as those operating within sub-human populations. For Blocher²³ the *imago* defines 'our constitutive relationships'.

This distinctiveness of humans is an essential part of Christopher Southgate's²⁴ approach to evolutionary 'evil'. His argument has four roots:

1. It is God who created and continues to sustain the matter and the natural processes of the universe (the *ontological* root);
2. A principal goal of God in creation is for humans to have a free choice in responding to God's grace (the *teleological* root);
3. The Cross is indicative of God's suffering with Creation (the *kenotic* root);

21 Lewis, C.S. *Miracles*, London: Geoffrey Bles (1947) p.86.

22 Finlay, G. '*Homo divinus*: the ape that bears God's image', *Science & Christian Belief* (2003) 15, 17-40; Berry, R.J. 'Did *Homo sapiens* become *Homo divinus*?', *John Knox Center Publication* (2005).

23 Blocher, H. *In the Beginning*, Leicester: IVP (1984), p. 85.

24 Southgate, C. 'God and evolutionary evil: theodicy in the light of Darwinism', *Zygon*, (2002) 37, 803-824.

4. a. God does not abandon the victims of evolution, and
 - b. We have a calling to take part in the healing of the world, stemming from the transforming power of Christ's work through the Cross (the *soteriological* root).

Southgate finds the first three in other explorations of the subject; he cites Artur Peacocke and Holmes Rolston. He adds the 'soteriological root' because, as he points out, evolutionary theodicy without it is open to the charge that God uses non-human creatures as a means to an end so that they are sacrificed by the very processes which God set in train. He agrees with Peacocke (and *contra* Teilhard) that there is no obvious sense of direction in the current evolutionary process, other than the possibility that humans may be being transformed into a more ecologically aware species, which means for Southgate that we would become increasingly sensitive to the creature-creator relationship hinted at in, for example, the first part of Psalm 19. Consequently 'we humans would therefore offer up in articulated form that creaturely praise which our self-acquired acquisitiveness makes it so hard for us to bear. It would also mean that we would articulate and offer up to God the creaturely pain that goes with the praise.'

The link between salvation and the state of the natural world is made by Paul explicitly in Colossians 1: 19-20 ('In [Christ] God in all his fullness chose to dwell and through him to reconcile *all things* to himself, making peace through the blood of the cross – *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven') and implicitly in Romans 8: 19-22 ('The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed ... with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God'). Cranfield²⁵ has commented on the latter passage:

What sense can there be in saying that 'the sub-human creation – the Jungfrau, for example, or the Matterhorn, or the planet Venus – suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence?' The answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the varied chorus of sub-human life, created for God's glory, is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, *fails to contribute his rational part*.²⁶

Paul's message is one of hope, not travail. Romans 5-8 is a coherent whole – beginning with the declaration that 'we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (5: 1) and ending with a paean of assurance at the end of

25 Cranfield, C.E.B. 'Some observations on Romans 8: 19-21', In *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*, Banks, R. (ed.) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1974), p. 227.

26 my italics.

chapter 8. Wright²⁷ has suggested that Paul had the story of the Exodus in mind when he wrote it. He draws a parallel between the redemption experienced by the Israelites and the freedom of the Promised Land on the one hand, and the redemption of all humankind by Christ and the new creation of which we are heirs on the other. Moule²⁸ interprets Romans 8: 19-22 as meaning that 'man is responsible before God for nature. As long as man refuses to play the part assigned him by God, so long the entire world of nature is frustrated and dislocated. It is only when man is truly fitting into his proper position as a son in relation to God his father that the dislocation of nature will be reduced.' Jones²⁹ has pointed out that the only title Jesus uses for himself is 'Son of Man' (*Adamah* – son of the earth) and on seven occasions he links this with a specific reference to the 'Earth' (Mt. 9: 2-8, 12: 38-42, 24: 27-30; Lk. 18: 8, 21: 35-6; Jn. 12: 23-4, 12: 32-4). He cautions against building too much on this, but it is one more example of the repeated biblical connection between the nature and salvic needs of humankind and God's response through Christ and the Cross.

The emphasis on human involvement and responsibility for our world ('created co-creators with God' in Philip Hefner's phrase) is, as Southgate points out, the converse of Haught's argument that the world contains within itself the seeds of the fulfilment to which God will ultimately draw the creation. Haught writes,

Doesn't the fact that the universe unfolds from simplicity to complexity, that it evolves from mindless materiality through life to conscious self-awareness, justify a religious suspicion that a nurturing divine sponsorship somehow shepherds such a remarkable adventure?... In the depths of Darwin's recipe, it seems to me there resides what we may call the 'promise of nature'. This promissory interpretation of nature, a synthesis of science and a biblical reading of reality, is not only consistent with evolution by natural selection, but it also sets forth an ultimate explanation of the contingency, necessity and temporal openness that permit evolution to take hold in nature in the first place.

I am glad that Southgate disagrees with Haught at this point, because I also have difficulties with Haught's thesis. Southgate's criticism encourages me to believe that I am not missing a crucial nuance. To me, Haught is reading far too much directionality into the process of evolution, much as the early embryologists mistakenly regarded the whole of development as a mere unveiling of the conditions present in the fertilised egg (or, indeed, in the male gamete, since the role of the female was merely to provide nurture). Evolution has certainly involved a massive increase in complexity, but this has not been integral

27 Wright, N.T. 'New Exodus, new inheritance: the narrative substructure of Romans 3-8', In Soderlund, S.K. & Wright, N.T. (eds) *Romans and the People of God* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1999), pp. 26-35.

28 Moule, C.F.D. *Man and Nature in the New Testament*, London: Athlone (1964), p. 12.

29 Jones, J. *Jesus and the Earth*, London: SPCK (2003).

to its progression – there are many examples of loss of complexity, such as the external armour of the early teleosts, reduction of the hind limbs in cetaceans, repeatedly in the development of parasitism, etc. Complexity may introduce new possibilities for an organism, but subsequent response is opportunistic, not inevitable. Conway Morris has documented many such cases. Haught seems to be following a very similar route to the disastrous one taken by the early twentieth-century theologians described by Bowler³⁰ who interpreted evolutionary science as showing an inevitable and non-material progression, and whose project foundered because it strayed away from improved understandings in science and as a faith produced a facile religious optimism wholly ineffective against the tides of Fascism and Marxism.

Southgate recognises that the crunch is whether ‘a redeemed humanity transcends its nature and can thus act on nature to assist in its healing or whether it becomes attuned to its nature so as to dwell reconciled to it’; in other words whether we can be fully transcendent or perfectly immanent in the created world. As he says, ‘Christian theology wants and needs to answer *both* in respect of God and *both* in respect of a redeemed humanity.’

Redeemed Nature

Haught treats creation (or providence) as incomplete, as promise rather than the more usual interpretation as a gift – which he rejects as too instrumental.³¹ Certainly creation has changed from the beginning and is still changing (unfortunately often describe as ‘becoming’ in theological language), but this is only part of the story. In particular, we need to be wary of challenging too strongly the traditional interpretation. The Promised Land with everything needed for its inhabitants was a gift (Deut. 8: 7-10). The Old Testament dialectic of ‘possessed land lost/exiles en route to the land of promise’ is repeated and sealed in the New Testament pattern of ‘crucifixion/resurrection’.³² In Christ, we have already entered into the land of promise, even if we do not yet fully appreciate and appropriate it. Rowan Williams³³ has underlined the centrality of ‘gift’ to the Christian doctrine of creation:

Everything that happens to exist, everything that belongs in the interlocking pattern of the intelligible world, is, and the way it is, in virtue of the underlying reality which is God’s giving. This reality is eternal and self-sufficient in the life of God as trinity, as the everlasting exchange of gift between Father, Son and Spirit; but by God’s free decision it is also the ground for what is not God. The secret at the heart of all things is gift; and

30 Bowler, P.J. *op. cit.* [7]

31 see Haught, J. *God After Darwin*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press (2000).

32 Brueggemann, W. *The Land*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press (1977).

33 Williams, R. ‘Changing the myths we live by’, Environment lecture delivered at Lambeth Palace, 5 July 2004.

the purpose of God in so giving a share in his action ... is that what is not God may be suffused with God's joy.... Theology has to add, of course, that the myth is focussed on history, on certain events...

John Zizioulas³⁴ has pointed out the importance of understanding creation as a gift because of the light it throws on the nature of the giver. He distinguishes those who regard the word as arising and sustaining itself through its own laws from those who understand it as creation; the latter include 'religions that draw their faith from the Bible'. As we shall see, this distinction need not be absolute, but it emphasises that the nature of creation and the process(es) which brought it into being are different. Creation is a gift; it is separate from God, rooted in history, and complete.

Does it help to envisage what a redeemed creation might be? It would be extremely useful to be definite about it. The problem is in extrapolating from the present. Apocalyptic visions, such as the ecological peace described by Isaiah (11: 6-8, 65: 25), do not greatly help because of the intrinsic difficulties of interpreting such passages. They certainly point to a future which is more than a return to the situation existing before the Fall. Indeed, the original Hebrew concept was that only human nature and arable land were corrupted by the disobedience of Adam. Taken as a whole, the Bible points to a renewed rather than a replaced creation, i.e. there will be continuity of many of our familiar processes. Will this include carnivory? Will heaven involve animals eating plants (which were given to animals for food in the Genesis creation story)? The answer is that we don't know. The one definite thing that we can conclude about the New Jerusalem is that God will be completely in charge. To read ecology into the biblical descriptions of the redeemed creation is as fraught as attempting to learn cosmology or geology from the Bible. God has made a covenant with his creatures and he will be faithful; our part is to acknowledge and praise him with our whole being (Pss. 147, 148; Rev. 4: 11; etc).

Conclusion

How does any of the foregoing help the problem about waste and cruelty in the natural world which John Haught set out to discuss? His proposals are not as robust as they may seem on first sight:

- There has been an increase in complexity in living things during evolutionary time, but no obvious progress towards universal (or even limited) peace;
- Philosophical schemes may clarify but cannot replace the understanding of reality; they are necessarily dependent on scientific knowledge;

34 Zizioulas, J. 'Creation theology: an Orthodox perspective', *John Knox Center Publication* (2005).

- Any interpretation of God's work in the world which neglects his saving work is at risk of distorting his relationship to creation.

The heart of the problem is (in Haught's words), 'Christians believe that divine providence is actively, personally and passionately involved in life, whereas Darwinism understands life in terms of purely natural causes.' Haught's solution centres on 'the descent of God' and 'providence as promise'. Whilst accepting these as relevant, I submit that he dismisses too easily the fact that God normally works through the apparently blind processes of what we call 'natural law'. Whatever one believes about kenosis, it was not absolute: the Bible portrays God as continually controlling the history and fate of Israel (both the old and the new Israels, as described in the two Testaments); Christ 'emptied' himself but retained control of his destiny despite apparent defeat. It is worth recalling words written more than a century ago by Aubrey Moore.³⁵ Speaking of the Enlightenment God as 'throned in magnificent inactivity in a remote corner of the universe', he wrote

Science had pushed the deist's God farther and farther away, and at the moment when it seemed as if He would be thrust out altogether, Darwinism appeared, and, under the disguise of a foe, did the work of a friend. It has conferred upon philosophy and religion an inestimable benefit, by showing us that we must choose between two alternatives. Either God is everywhere present in nature or He is nowhere.... In nature everything must be His work or nothing. We must frankly return to the Christian view of direct Divine agency, the immanence of Divine power in nature from end to end, the belief in a God in Whom not only we, but all things have their being, or we must banish Him altogether.

The danger of trying to find God in nature has repeatedly been pointed out; it almost inevitably results in positing a 'God of the gaps' who will automatically diminish as the gaps are filled by new knowledge. The most positive way of understanding God's work derives from the recognition of Niels Bohr³⁶ that 'the attitudes termed mechanistic and finalistic are not contradictory points of view, but rather exhibit a complementary relationship which is connected with our position as observers of nature'. This concept of complementarity has been used profitably and powerfully by many to describe God's work, perhaps most consistently by Donald MacKay.³⁷ From the point of view of complementarity, there is no necessary contradiction between the God of Darwinian evolution and the loving (and all-holy) God of the Bible. If God is truly the author of both a Book of Words and a Book of Works, the challenge is to read them both despite the very different languages they use. I may not be able to understand

35 Moore, A. 'The Christian doctrine of God', In Gore, C. (ed) *Lux Mundi*, London: John Murray (1889), p. 99.

36 Bohr, N. *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*, New York: John Wiley (1958), p. 52.

37 MacKay, D.M. *Behind the Eye*, Oxford: Blackwell (1991) and elsewhere.

why God ‘allows’ parasitism and natural disaster, but neither do I understand why two of my closest friends are crippled with illness nor why my father committed suicide. Jesus did not explain why eighteen people were killed when the tower fell on them at Siloam (Lk. 13: 4). I believe God loves this world despite our spurning of him – he repeatedly tells us so: ‘While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5: 8). I believe he sent his Son to suffer and die for this world. But I do not understand why he did this. I accept it by faith. In the same way – and only by faith – I accept that Christ is creator, redeemer and sustainer of this world (Col. 1: 20; Heb. 1: 3, 11:3). This puts me with Haught’s group which ‘conjecture that what appears to be absurd contingency from a human perspective could be the tangled underside of a tapestry which, from God’s vantage point on the other side, is a tightly woven pattern’. I find no difficulty in agreeing wholly with Richard Dawkins³⁸ that ‘The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference. As that unhappy poet A.E. Housman put it:

For Nature, heartless, witless Nature
Will neither know nor care.’

That is only part of the story.

My belief in purpose and morality is not derived from reason or science. It comes entirely from a belief that only if Christ was truly the Son of God does his life and death – and my existence – make any sense. Once I accept that, the nature and strength of revelation becomes important, and thence an acknowledgement that God must be the creator and sustainer. But I don’t want Haught to lump me with those, who, while ‘trusting that there may be a hidden meaning in evolution, [believe it] would be presumptuous to try to access [it]’. With Job and the Psalmist, I see so much of God’s work in the natural world that I ‘delight in studying it’ (Ps. 111: 2). Michael Ruse³⁹ comes to much the same conclusion in his book *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?* ‘Being a Darwinian does not compel one to be a Christian; but, because one is a Darwinian one is opening the way for someone to be a Christian’. He quotes J.B.S. Haldane:⁴⁰

My suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose. I have read and heard many attempts at a systematic account of it, from materialism and theosophy to the Christian system or that of Kant, and I have always felt that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of or can be dreamed of, by any philosophy.

Later in the same essay, Haldane wrote,

38 Dawkins, R. *River Out of Eden*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson (1995), p. 132.

39 Ruse, M. *op. cit.* [1], p. 142.

40 Haldane, J.B.S. *Possible Worlds*, London: Chatto & Windus (1927), p. 208.

If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically.... In order to escape from the necessity of sawing away the branch on which I am sitting, so to speak, I am compelled to believe that mind is not wholly conditioned by matter....

Put another way, there are intrinsic limits to science; for the eye of faith (which is not the same as a belief in unreason), 'the earth is the Lord's' and he provides liberally for it, including giving food to the lions. 'Countless are the things you have made, Lord...all of them look to you in hope to give them their food when it is due...' (Ps. 104: 24f.).

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