

**John F. Haught**

*Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life.*

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The evolution wars have produced a seemingly endless spate of popular books on the theological and philosophical implications of evolutionary theory—which is to say, an endless spate of books dedicated to either debunking Darwin or debunking God. Haught's aim in this slim and accessible volume is to map out a middle course between these familiar extremes by showing that one can be a committed evolutionist without compromising one's faith. But Haught's goal is not simply to show that Darwin and God are consistent in the anemic sense in which any two unrelated propositions are consistent. Rather he aims to provide, as he provocatively puts it, a 'theology of evolution' (xvii). It is Haught's view that evolutionary theory and Christian theology actually complement one another, so that our knowledge of the one inevitably deepens our understanding and appreciation of the other.

Haught's book begins with the obligatory chapter on Darwin. It has become something of a genre convention for authors to appeal to Darwin and his personal life in order to show that the old sage would have approved of—or at least been sympathetic to—the author's own position. Haught's appeal though is modest. Darwin's notebooks and personal correspondence reveal that he appreciated and even wrestled with the theological implications of his theory and that, in contrast to the 'in-your-face evolutionary atheism of our own times.... [Darwin] was far from being fully comfortable with what he thought he had discovered' (15). The point, of course, is to distance Darwin from the likes of Dawkins and Dennett, who revel in the brand of atheism that Darwin's discovery made possible. Darwin, thinks Haught, would have preferred what Haught urges to be the middle way between naïve theism and atheistic naturalism.

The second of Haught's alliteratively titled chapters (Darwin, Design, Diversity, Descent, Drama, etc.) carries much of the book's argumentative burden. In it Haught argues, first, that evolutionary explanations (and scientific explanations more generally) do not compete with theological explanations, as the two occupy different explanatory levels, and, second, that evolutionary-cum-scientific explanations of nature are inevitably incomplete and require theology for their completion. As one might imagine with so ambitious a task, the chapter leaves some loose ends, but the general thrust of Haught's thinking is clear enough.

One of Haught's central contentions in this chapter is that both camps in the evolution wars subscribe to the same flawed theology—inherited from William Paley—

according to which God is a kind of divine engineer, postulated by theology in order to explain the appearance of design in the natural world. Once we subscribe to such a view of God, Haught argues, it's inevitable that we'll interpret theology and science as competing explanations of the natural world. Haught's complaint is that this entire line of thought confuses explanations of natural phenomena, which are the province of science, with what he calls 'ultimate explanations' (18). It is not always clear just what Haught means by ultimate explanations—or why he believes theology rather than, say, philosophy, is the discipline that provides them—but he seems to be gesturing toward teleology. He begins with the familiar idea that 'everything in our experience can be explained at multiple levels of understanding, in distinct and noncompeting ways' (22). The existence of a book, for example, can be explained by appealing to the printing press, the author's communicative intentions, or the publisher's invitation. It is clear that these different layers of explanation are not in competition with one another—the printing press and the publisher's invitation both, in different ways, explain the existence of the book. There is, however, an ordering among these layers. The operations of the printing press explain why the book exists, but the publisher's desire to publish the book explains why the printing press went into operation at all. Explanations that appeal to the publisher's desire are therefore deeper—more ultimate—than explanations that appeal merely to the printing press.

The intended analogy isn't far to find: 'divine influence would stand in relationship to natural selection's production of adaptive design comparably to the way in which my publisher's desire to have a book on Darwin stands in respect to the working of the printing press that produced this page,' Haught writes (25). Natural selection explains adaptive design, but neither evolutionary biology nor the rest of science can explain why we live in a universe in which the enabling conditions for natural selection exist. Thus the *ultimate* explanation of design requires appeal to God and His divine intentions.

This appeal to layered and ultimate explanations accounts for why science needs theology; but why does theology need science? In the series of chapters that follow, Haught takes up just this question. In his view, Darwin's debunking of special creation is actually salubrious for theology because it forces us to 'look for God not in the design but in the drama of life' (58). If, as Haught believes, Darwinian evolution reveals that the history of life has a narrative structure, then we can begin to ask about the meaning of the whole. In other words, Darwin's debunking forces us to focus on the most important of all theological questions:

Theologically speaking, the central point of interest is whether the Darwinian drama should be read as a tragedy or comedy. Do all of the countless moments of the life-story add up to absurdity and nothingness in the end? Or is there a direction to the story, and possibly even a redemptive climax yet to come, an outcome that might give a lasting

meaning to it all? (54)

Haught opts for the comedic interpretation—in part because he believes that the history of life demonstrates a clear movement in the direction of greater complexity. Gould, however, exposed the fallacy in this tempting line of thought. If evolution begins with simple organisms, and if there is lower limit to simplicity, then even random, directionless evolution will inevitably lead to greater complexity. But while the trend toward greater complexity does not support directionality, it is certainly compatible with it, and this is all Haught really needs. Indeed, much of Haught's point about theology and science occupying separate explanatory domains is that any sequence of natural events is compatible with there being a 'hidden meaning' to the whole (69). If evolutionary naturalists are correct in insisting that there is no hidden purpose to the evolutionary process, then the evolutionary drama is a tragedy—perhaps even a farce. But, Haught insists, science itself cannot answer this question, for 'meaning or purpose simply cannot show up at the level of scientific analysis' (70).

The idea that evolution has not only a direction but a divine purpose runs up against the problem of evil, for how could a benevolent deity create by means of a 'struggle for existence'? Haught appreciates the problem and grapples with it in what is probably the book's most interesting chapter, appropriately titled 'Death'. Appealing to Tillich's conjecture that 'beneath our human anxiety about death lies a more fundamental concern, that of being forgotten forever,' Haught suggests that all of the struggle and suffering involved in evolution's creativity will be redeemed if 'there is something that gathers up, and holds in eternal memory, the stream of events that make up the drama of life and the cosmic process as a whole' (103). It's doubtful in the end that this completely addresses the worry, but the chapter is filled with subtle insights that concern some of the deepest and most disturbing questions we ask. No one can accuse Haught of having avoided the difficult questions.

Before concluding with a chapter on Chardin (whose influence is apparent in the preceding chapters), Haught provides a critique of what he takes to be the most egregious overreach of evolutionary naturalism—the attempt to explain both morality and religion in evolutionary terms. His contention is a reasonable one—that evolution explains at most the elementary stages of these human activities but cannot explain their most advanced manifestations. His contention is so reasonable, in fact, that one fears his opponents might actually be straw men. For example, Haught allows that while there may be valid evolutionary explanations of 'how our moral instincts came to be part of human existence, the question still remains as to whether evolutionary biology is enough to *justify*...serious moral imperatives' (118). It's difficult to imagine anyone who would seriously contest this claim, for the idea that evolutionary theory could ground ethics is a particularly transparent form of the naturalistic fallacy.

Haught's book provides an important and rarely voiced perspective, and is

recommended on these grounds alone. Philosophers, however, will be a little frustrated that some of the arguments are a bit underdeveloped and some of the conceptual points a bit unclear. This is perhaps inevitable in a book aimed at a wider audience. More serious is the false dichotomy that rears its head from time to time—as when Haught contrasts scientific with theological attempts to provide ultimate explanations, or scientific with theological attempts to ground morality. There is, of course, a third option—and Haught of all people should know better. It may be that neither science nor theology provides ultimate explanations. It may be that philosophy does.

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