

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

by **John F. Haught**

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In this short and very readable book, John Haught offers a fresh understanding of evolution as a means by which God draws creation toward Himself. Contrast this with the often-cited view that God created everything in the past and now sits back to watch the system run.

There is a widespread public perception that science opposes religion; atheists have bullied many believers into accepting their premise that being a scientist demands abandonment of any faith. Evolution is the favorite battleground, the place where you are expected to choose one side or the other. In rejecting atheism, plenty of Christians have thus turned away from science, reinforcing the “either/or” perception of science and religion. The great value of *Making Sense of Evolution* is that it exposes this false dichotomy and explains how science and theology each contribute to a deeper level of understanding.

In several previous books—*God After Darwin* (2000), *Deeper Than Darwin* (2003), and *God and the New Atheism* (2008)—Haught has examined the influence of Darwin on our understanding of God. Here he presents the picture with exceptional clarity and unifies several concepts that previously stood in isolation.

Haught explains that *both* atheists and creationists, although poles apart in other ways, are making essentially the same either/or mistake. He also shows that materialism (evolutionary naturalism) is just as much a religion as any other.

Haught begins by proposing a conversation to which Darwin is invited. In the introduction, Haught is very clear about his own views: the theological interpretation of such concepts as design, descent and diversity “must now undergo drastic revision in the light of evolution. Christian theology cannot responsibly take refuge in pre-Darwinian

understandings of these concepts” (xvii). Haught identifies a major problem: many religious people regard Darwinism as synonymous with atheism, a consequence of the inordinate publicity given to popularizers of Darwinism such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and others. He notes that “Dawkins and Dennett have misled students, professors, and the public into thinking that Darwin was an enemy of all things theological” (xvi). Throughout the book, Haught carefully contrasts the sweeping generalizations of these authors with the specific and limited scientific realities underlying evolutionary facts.

In the first two chapters, Haught carefully defines certain terms and emphasizes that science should not strive to replace theology. The terms “modern synthesis” and “neo-Darwinism” refer to the combination of Darwinism with genetics. “Scientific naturalism” is the creed which holds that nature is all there is. Haught explains how Darwin’s thinking developed over time and how *On the Origin of Species* was written and published.

A key theme of Haught’s book is enunciated sharply when the author makes the following distinction: “Many Darwinians today, the chief being Dawkins and Dennett, do not stop with science. Instead they operate as cryptotheologians by insisting that natural selection is a substitute for the traditional theological accounts. . . . They too are still theologians at heart. . . . They believe that in the quest to find a foundational understanding of design, science and religious faith are locked in a contest to the death” (18). Haught perceives that their energy is misplaced.

Darwin himself always had theology on his mind, which affected his way of thinking about nature. Darwin eventually “traded in” theology for scientific naturalism. With exceptionally clear insight, Haught points

out how confusion about the proper roles of science and theology caused, and continues to cause, the conflict:

By trading in theology directly for science, many evolutionists today are also making another kind of blunder. . . . They are assuming that theology has for centuries been nothing more than a primitive attempt to do science in a pre-scientific age, and that it must now give way to a more reliable kind of science, especially Darwinian biology. Here again the fundamental assumption is that science and theology are playing the same game, trying to provide information about the natural world, and that modern science has proved to be much better at it than traditional theology. (19)

Haught establishes that both atheists and creationists are making the same mistake, assuming that “theology and biology are rivals for explanatory primacy, and one of them has to lose” (18-19).

Early in the book Haught explains the fallacy of trying to substitute science for theology—a pivotal point. Some questions have different answers on different levels, answers that do not conflict with each other because they are responses to the question in different senses. “Science asks how; philosophy asks why” is a familiar expression of this concept.

Throughout *Making Sense of Evolution*, Haught’s attention to different levels of answering questions recurs. In chapter 3 we read, “To make God the answer to scientific questions is to shrivel what infinitely transcends nature into something small enough for mathematical equations to capture. This is bad theology as well as bad science” (31). Similarly, Haught notes, “Neither science nor logic compels us to make an either/or choice. Life’s design and diversity are the results of both evolution *and* divine creativity” (39).

Once the reader accepts this viewpoint, a lot of things become clear, and many seemingly opposed situations are resolved. In fact, Haught’s use of the lens of nonconflicting levels may be why he covers so much in so few pages.

In chapter 4, Haught squarely addresses the body–soul dichotomy: “This picture

of matter giving rise by small steps to life, then to mind, morality, religion, art and culture, has not been easy for all Christians to embrace” (45). Subsequently he reminds us, “Believers can have a sense of being grasped by the divine mystery, but they cannot grasp it themselves” (47).

In chapter after chapter, Haught perceives different levels of inquiry where others have seen only conflict between science and religion. Chapter 5, titled “Drama,” first hints at a concept that will later become clear: God acts *from the future*, drawing evolution forth toward Himself: “Why is the natural world endowed with the exquisite blend of indeterminacy, lawfulness, and temporality, giving it the dramatic substructure that allows an evolutionary story to occur at all?” (62). Haught avoids disputes about design between atheists and advocates of “intelligent design,” preferring to examine evolution at a deeper level. In later chapters he demonstrates compatibility on that deeper level.

Chapter 6 is about *teleology*, the concept that there is a direction to evolution. This, the longest chapter, is still only nineteen pages. Haught concedes that evolutionary biology and biochemistry will not discern any direction, because they do not operate at the right level: “Meaning or purpose simply cannot show up at the level of scientific analysis” (70). The atheist’s view is “a belief for which there can be no scientific evidence, and it is one that demands from science a kind of insight that it cannot in principle ever provide” (70). The atheists’ limitation is described: “It scarcely occurs to them that their idealized divine conjurer would produce only artifacts suitable for a display, not a drama featuring the struggle of life and the transformation of the entire universe into more interesting, if dangerous, modes of existence” (75).

Having shown the inadequacy of the atheistic viewpoint, Haught offers an alternative way of understanding evolution that does not contradict biology but liberates nature “from an endless imprisonment in lifeless and mindless determinism” (73). He introduces this new formulation: “A Christian theology of evolution may assume that God enlivens

and gives meaning to the world not by pushing it forward from the past, but by calling it into the freshness of an always new future” (73). This perspective moves well beyond the familiar arguments by which the concept of teleology is either rejected or embraced. These arguments feature an either/or split, a confusion of levels, and a very restricted picture of God. *Making Sense of Evolution* rises above that.

In chapter 7, Haught urges the reader to leave behind simplistic views of both atheists and creationists and to instead “look down further into this abyss” that Darwin opened (90). Here Haught draws primarily upon the insights of the Christian theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who perceived clearly that treating God as an intervenor or designer diminishes our perception of Him. Haught points out that “the fact that believers persist in linking God directly to special events in nature is one of the main reasons so many scientists find Christian faith incompatible with evolution” (88), and “thinking of God as a kind of cause that can eventually be replaced by scientific explanations is one of the main reasons for the rise of modern atheism” (88).

Death is the subject of chapter 8, and again the emphasis is on distinguishing between levels of inquiry to show that evolution and theology do not conflict: “It is not the job of theology to justify death by situating it solely within the context of a purely naturalistic understanding of the universe” (101). Clearly, theology attends to a level that goes beyond the confines of science, and Haught “makes no attempt to make sense of death by staying within the cramped confines of a naturalistic worldview” (101). Haught draws on the work of the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead when he observes, “An unfinished universe is one in which awareness of God comes only in the mode of promise rather than conclusive comprehension” (108). God remains hidden from us.

Chapter 9 considers the assertion that morality developed only as an evolutionary adaptation. “The evolutionary naturalist’s own highest ethical ideal [is] that of seeking truth for truth’s sake” (117). By taking careful

note of the parameters of the evolutionary naturalists’ *own* code of ethics (especially their insistence on the high moral value of adhering to scientific knowledge), Haught reveals the inconsistency and self-contradiction inherent in their attribution of their ethics only to evolutionary adaptation. After showing that naturalism alone cannot account for morality, Haught explains that “there is no inherent contradiction between a theological account of morality as a response to God on the one hand, and an evolutionary account of the gradual emergence of morality on the other” (124).

Where does the religious inclination of humans come from? In chapter 10, again making distinctions with precision, Haught shows that the scientific materialist position is every bit as much a *belief* as any theist’s position. Scientific materialism “has its origin in an even more fundamental devotion: *scientism*, the belief that science is the only reliable guide to truth” (133). Haught critiques materialism as a belief system, a surrogate religion, and concludes that it is a “self-subverting worldview” (134). Moreover, “it seems prudent to ensure that our grounding beliefs are not self-contradictory, and evolutionary materialism fails to pass this test” because it “is compelled by the logic of its own belief system to make cosmic mindlessness the ultimate foundation and explanation of the human mind” (134).

In the final chapter, Haught assembles all these pieces to make sense of evolution. He draws primarily on the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who synthesized faith and science into a coherent picture of evolution not merely up to the present but into the future as well. Haught observes, “Teilhard’s work has been misunderstood and increasingly ignored by scientists and Christian theologians alike. This is unfortunate as far as any significant theological conversation with Darwin is concerned. . . . It will be essential to distinguish carefully between Teilhard the scientist and Teilhard the theologian” (144). Haught does that well, and presents an excellent summary of Teilhard’s most important insights, which may motivate the reader of Haught’s book to read those of

Teilhard. Haught also shows how Teilhard's view is both Christian and compatible with Darwinian science, looking toward the future from which God is calling us forward. Haught expresses this future-oriented outlook in this entirely optimistic final sentence: "Even though Darwin himself seemed oblivious to the potential his discoveries have to stimulate theological, spiritual, and ethical renewal, his theory of evolution is a great gift to Christian theology and spirituality as they seek to interpret Jesus' revolutionary understanding of God for our own age and future generations" (148).

Making Sense of Evolution distills the essence of previous books by John Haught into a clear exposition of the compatibility between theology and evolutionary science. It discerns different levels on which questions can be answered, and demonstrates the error in assuming that an either/or outcome is required. It reverses the old notion of God's role as a clock maker, offering instead the

more open (and optimistic and hopeful) concept of God calling forth an evolving universe from the future.

Who should read this book? It is not specialized at all. Professor Haught teaches undergraduates, and this text is entirely accessible at the undergraduate level. Church book-discussion groups will find it easy to move through one chapter a week. Brevity makes it easy to digest and comprehend each chapter before going on to the next. I highly recommend it to any scientist open to the idea that science might not encompass *all* possible knowledge and to any Christian open to the idea that evolution might actually be God's method of creating.

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***Ethical Imperialism:
Institutional Review Boards and the Social Sciences, 1965–2009***

by Zachary M. Schrag

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Institutional review boards (IRBs) are such a part of everyday university life that it can be difficult to imagine that they have a history of their own. In this brief and engaging book, Zachary Schrag, an associate professor of history at George Mason University, brings the history of the ordinary IRB to life. At slightly over two hundred pages of narrative text, the book is quite short. Given Schrag's engaging, though at times polemic, writing style, the book can easily be read in a single sitting, like a good piece of historical fiction.

The history of the IRB may not seem an obvious matter of concern for readers of the *NCBQ*, but the book speaks in a lively voice about the concerns of any scholar who wishes to do ethical research involving human sub-

jects. Although preoccupied primarily with the role that social sciences and social scientists did *not* play in the establishment of the IRB system, Schrag's work will speak to bioethicists whose work is subject to IRB review as well as those who serve on IRBs. Specifically, Schrag's treatment of the history of the fight for a more nuanced form of ethical review for social scientists and humanities scholars will resonate for ethicists. The history of a secular-sacred institution like the IRB is also likely to resonate with historians of theological debates and those interested in the evolution of distinct ethical positions in the Church. In short, Schrag's work will speak at some level to any scholar interested in the history of institutions, the ethics of