

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND EVOLUTION

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Again: the Anglican thesis is compatibility.

From the beginning, the Anglican tradition was open to Darwin's scientific theory, as we see by the fact that the man lies buried in Westminster Abbey. The thesis that Christian faith is compatible with evolutionary science has been consistently maintained by the Anglican theological tradition; as we are reminded by 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, which easily passed a resolution stating that "acceptance of evolution is fully compatible with authentic and living faith."

This thesis has a name: Theistic Evolution

This is to say, we Anglicans (Episcopalians) are proponents of what is sometimes called “Theistic Evolution.”

In the universe of religion-science conversation, a theistic evolutionist is someone who believes in God as the world’s creator, while also accepting the two “big ideas” of Darwinian evolution: common descent and evolution by natural selection.

Theistic Evolution has been a popular position.

The fact is that, on that broad a definition, many of the most important scientists in the Darwinian tradition have been proponents of Theistic Evolution. The list would begin with Alfred Russel Wallace, who with Darwin was co-author of the theory of evolution by natural selection; and it would include Ronald Fisher and Theodosius Dobzhansky, two early twentieth century scientists who are widely regarded as having saved the theory by re-establishing it on the basis of the new science of genetics. This is usually called the “modern evolutionary synthesis.” Let the record show that two of its leading lights were proponents of Theistic Evolution. In fact, both were active, practicing Christians: Dobzhansky was Eastern Orthodox, Fisher was a member of the Church of England.

Darwin and Theistic Evolution

I think it stretches the term too far to try to claim that Darwin was a proponent of Theistic Evolution. As discussed last week, he called himself an “agnostic,” while continuing on most accounts to think the world probably had some sort of creator. But Darwin made the creator out to be a vague, shadowy, and generally unlikable being.

I am reminded of something Professor John Churchill, formerly Chairman of the department of philosophy at Hendrix, said about his upbringing as a Methodist. He said that as far as he had been able to tell, the Methodists he knew only had one doctrine, which was that “God was nice.”

Darwin didn’t believe even that God was nice! So we could hardly call on him to support our Anglican thesis of compatibility. Even if he never did entirely give up “belief in God,” he surely did give up on Christian faith.

Anglicanism and Theistic Evolution

When people challenge the Anglican thesis of compatibility, they usually do not mean to suggest that Darwin's theory rules out any possible way of conceiving God. The question is not whether evolution is compatible with every kind of faith, but whether it is compatible with our faith—with Christian faith.

That is the question Philip Kitcher raises when he wonders whether Darwin hadn't undermined the values that our church is thought to represent, along with our "cherished beliefs" and "central religious doctrines."

To respond to that challenge, and justify our Anglican thesis of compatibility, we will need to name and interpret some of those cherished beliefs and central doctrines.

Theistic Evolution and “classical” theology

It would be misleading were I to give you the impression that the interpretation of the Christian faith that you are going to hear from me is the only one that is considered to count as “living and authentic” in the Anglican tradition. If you read other books on this subject—by Keith Ward and Arthur Peacocke, for example—you will find that on some major points I differ with some of the better-known Anglican proponents of Theistic Evolution.

That is because my theological approach is to defend and develop the Anglican thesis of compatibility through the framework of “classical theology,” drawing frequently from Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth.

So I am disagreeing with those like Robert Wright who have suggested that, to accept evolutionary science, faith must turn to non-traditional theological interpretations. There certainly are non-traditional theological interpretations available; my aim is to show you why they are not required.

Nor need Christians abandon what Philip Kitcher calls our “cherished beliefs” about ourselves and our “central religious doctrines.” I aim to show that it is by the light of our most important doctrines that we discover the fit and harmony between religious and scientific understanding.

Today's class will present four "theories" of classical theology that explain, defend and develop the Anglican thesis of compatibility, and fill in the meaning of Theistic Evolution

Together with the doctrines from which they draw, these theories begin to flesh out the meaning of our claim that Christian doctrine is compatible with evolutionary theory. We might say that they establish terms of peace between theology and science. These terms are quite different from Robert Wright's "grand bargain"—making a much better bargain, I think, for all concerned.

The theories are:

1. Keller's Theory of "Purposeful Constraint"
2. Kierkegaard's Theory of an "Infinite and Qualitative Difference"
3. Barth's Theory of "A Difficult Union of Opposites"
4. Chalcedonian Christology

“Purposeful Constraint.”

To my knowledge, my dissertation is to use this label, or to package these ideas as a “theory.” The ideas, though, are widely shared by Christian theologians both classical and modern. In fact, this is the point where classical theology and liberal theology most closely match.

Considered as a theory, Purposeful constraint gathers and combines three themes broadly found in Theistic Evolution. (1) This is a valuable world; (2) its values are its purpose, i.e. the reason it exists; and (3) with the values, come certain constraints.

This is a valuable world.

That is not to say “a perfect world,” because certainly from human point of view this world has its share of problems. But it is to say that taken as a whole, and all things considered, this universe is good: better that it had existed, than that it had not.

That is the view of Scripture, which declares that God made the world and saw that it was good. Augustine and Aquinas saw it that way too, but certainly not as something one would take for granted, considering the reality of evil.

You will find them aware of the reality of evil, and you will find them concluding that God knew what he was doing in creating a world where evil exists, and that he surely wouldn't have created it at all if, at the end of the day, the evil in the world had outweighed or could overwhelm the good.

Augustine writes: “Almighty God would in no wise permit evil to exist in His works, unless He were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil.”¹

¹ Aquinas, ST 1a. 22. 2 reply obj. 2, citing Augustine, Anchor. ii.

Something I should point out is that in most respects classical theology offers a “non-anthropocentric” conception of the world.

Brian Davies, points this out in his study of Aquinas. According to Aquinas, God’s concern is not exclusively for humans, for, “instead of having limited responsibility, God has universal providence, which means having care for the goodness of more than one thing.”² Under this care, the “perfection of the universe” plays out as a drama in which human nature enjoys a featured but not exclusively important place.

Lions, live oak trees and mountain ranges are valuable in their own right, and so is the universe taken as a whole.

This assessment of creation is neither cynical, nor naïve.

² Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 162.

This world's values are its purpose.

One of the age-old questions in philosophy is, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Why is there a “world” at all?

Darwin, you may recall from last week, considered that question unanswerable: “The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble to us, and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic.”

In other words, he punts. That has apparently become an ever more popular stance, one would have to say that in many respects it has become the privileged position in modern society.

Following Aquinas, a short answer to the question — “Why is there something rather than nothing?”—would be, “Because God decided to share.”

That is, God decided to share existence, goodness, and activity, with a creation: with lions, live oak trees and mountain ranges, just for starters.

The world is made up of an almost infinite variety of things, living and inert. In creating this great variety of things, God intends that each thing will, in its own way, strive for its own kind’s distinct perfection. According to Aquinas, it takes this great variety in things to in some degree reflect, in a fragmented way, God’s simple, yet complete, perfection:

“Now created things must all fall short of the full goodness of God, so, in order that things may reflect that goodness more perfectly, there had to be variety in things, so that what one thing couldn’t express perfectly could be more perfectly expressed in various ways by a variety of things and this also draws attention to how great God’s perfection is: for the perfect goodness that exists one and unbroken in God can exist in creatures only in a multitude of fragmented ways.”³

So, the first point is that the world is good, and the second is that its goodness, which is of God , is the reason it exists.

³ Ibid., 271. Source: *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.97–8.

Now there is a point that goes with this, that speaks to a very common theological question with specific relevance for evolution.

The question is, what in general, does God have to do with events that happen in creation? For example, what does God have to do with the fact that you decided to come to this class this morning, and with the fact that we could have the class because it didn't snow?

One possible answer is: "everything." God has everything to do with your decision to come, and the weather's cooperation, because both are simply expressions of God's irresistible will.

Aquinas was familiar with that position, as represented by certain philosophers of Islam, whom he described as "sages of Moorish Law." But he rejected that position because he saw it as inconsistent with God's purpose in creation.

If what happens in creation is simply the expression of God's irresistible will, then that makes natural causation and human decision-making superfluous, needless. Aquinas reasoned that this would be inconsistent with God having created in the first place.

So one of the reasons Aquinas gives that we must not, "as [these] sages in Moorish Law would do," conceive of God's activity in such a way as to render nature's action needless, is God's own

goodness, “which in sharing itself out causes things not only to resemble him in existing but also to resemble him in being active.”⁴

So God created a world that resembled him in being good, and resembled him in being active. To put a point on it, according to classical theology, the world does real work. Otherwise, there would be no real point to its existence.

Weather being weather, and you making up your mind, are what God wills, before we come to the issue of whether God wills for you to come to class.

⁴ McDermott, *Aquinas: Selected Writings*, 299–300.

With the values come constraints.

What is a constraint?

Keith Ward defines power as a “cause of change; that which is capable of bringing states or things into existence.”⁵ A “constraint” is then a restriction of power. A “purposeful” constraint is a restriction that has been established for a reason.

With our theory of Purposeful Constraint, the purposes and constraints at issue have to do with God. Theologians have distinguished between three conceivable kinds of constraint on God: *logical*, *absolute* and *conditional*.

To conceive of a *logical* constraint on divine power is to recognize that even God cannot defy the principle of non-contradiction—which is something along the lines of saying that even God cannot make $2+2\neq 4$.

(Aquinas says “it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them.”⁶)

⁵Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 69.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province (Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics / Thomas More, 1948), 1a. 25. 3. corpus.

To conceive of *conditional* constraint on God is to recognize limitations inherent to a given situation. Given situation x , a restriction y applies. Given *this* kind of world, certain limitations apply, even to God. We will return to that in a moment.

In conceiving of an *absolute* constraint, we have in mind a simple lack of capacity to bring a certain state or thing into existence, regardless of conditions. In all situations, $a-z$, restriction y applies. A question about God is whether there are absolute restrictions of his power. Aquinas thought not.⁷ Ward at one point suggests that we are simply not in a position to answer that question.

But as to conditional constraints, those do apply to God. For example, to realize certain particular values in a world with the particular conditions we find in this one, God must accept certain self-imposed limitations. To name one important example: were God to make himself too obvious, then human beings wouldn't, in some respects, be free. A world where the existence of God was transparent would not be a world that could give rise to a Charles Darwin, for example—nor to a class like this where we consider the relationship between his science and faith. And God has decided that a world where a Charles Darwin could exist, is a world worth having.

⁷ “God is called omnipotent because he can do all things that are possible absolutely. . . . for a thing is said to be possible or impossible absolutely, according to the relation in which the very terms stand to one another, possible, if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject, as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as for instance, that a man is a donkey.” Aquinas, ST 1a. 25. 3. corpus.

Ward also invites us to recognize that certain values in this world are inextricably connected with suffering and evil. In making this point, he draws from Aquinas, who reasoned that “If all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe.” The existence of lions, he notes, depends on their killing animals for food.⁸

Ward also suggests that evolutionary science has helped us see even more clearly that, in this world, possibilities for good are tightly bound to possibilities for evil.

Ward says that the problem of pain for theological understanding arises when “we think of God as a person who chooses to cause pain, when God easily need not have done so.”⁹ Evolutionary science though teaches us to recognize conditional constraints on God’s involvement. Central nervous systems evolved through a series of adaptations to the environment. The systems develop a variety of “modes of response” to the environment, including aversion to pain, attraction to pleasure. Both modes are intrinsic to survival, so to some degree pain—emotional and physical—are world necessities. In a world like this, they are unavoidable. We do not object to pleasure, but pleasure and pain stem from the same root. “Pleasure and pain are potentialities that become actualized in the course of the self-development of this universe

⁸ Aquinas, ST 1a. 22. 2. reply obj. 2.

⁹ Ward, *Pascal’s Fire*, 72.

from the ground of their possibility in God, and there is nothing God, or anyone or anything else, can do about them.”¹⁰

Ward regards the view that if God were good he would have given us the pleasure without the pain, as “anthropomorphic” and presumptuous. “We imagine a being,” Ward says of this notion, “that can do absolutely anything—like creating a universe of conscious physical beings evolving by natural selection without any pain at all—and presume that such a being could really exist. But how could we know this? We have no idea of what a supremely intelligent mind would be like and what constraints there might be on what it could do.”¹¹

Ward’s suggestion that this may be an instance of an absolute constraint on divine power marks one clear point of difference between his theology and that of Aquinas, with respect to the meaning of omnipotence.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹¹ Ibid.

Second Theory: Kierkegaard's "Infinite and Qualitative Difference"

One of the marks of classical theology is its radical conception of divine transcendence. That radical meaning is captured in Soren Kierkegaard's insistence that there is an "infinite and qualitative difference" between time and eternity, and between the world and God.

We see this play out in the notion that God exists beyond time, as the creator of time, and that therefore from God's perspective the world's past, present and future are one and the same. This is a big difference between classical and liberal theology.

In a very similar way, for classical theology God also exists above and beyond creation as its "transcendent cause," meaning the cause of everything. If you remember from last week, I said that in evolutionary science there is disagreement on the question of whether evolution has unfolded along the track that it has taken by "necessity," or by "chance."

Stephen Jay Gould thought it was by chance, meaning that if you started the process all over again, from scratch, it's anybody's guess how the world would look like now. Almost certainly, there wouldn't be anything like a human being.

Simon Conway Morris disagrees, and thinks that given the same initial conditions, the same laws of nature, and the same 4.5 billion years, something like a human being would almost inevitably have emerged.

There are theologians today who believe that this scientific disagreement is theologically important. If Gould is right, this is bad for those who believe in God. If Conway Morris is right, that's good.

But Aquinas would disagree, because God's will transcends the distinction between necessity and chance. God just as intentionally, and self-assuredly, have created the result he wanted through a process involving large measures of naturally unpredictability—that is, "chance."

On Aquinas's account, God stands as the "primary cause" of all events in all parts and at all levels of creation, in a way that encompasses all the chances as well as all the necessities of life. In the following passage he speaks to God as "cause" in a sense that transcends our secondary distinction between "what must be" (necessity) and "what can be" (chance).

[God's] will is to be thought of as existing outside the realm of existents, as a cause which pours forth everything that exists in all its variant forms. Now *what can be* and *what must be* are variants of being, so that it is from God's will itself that things derive whether they must be or may or may not be and the distinction of the two according to the nature of their immediate causes. For he prepares causes that must cause for those effects that he wills must be, and causes that might cause but might fail to cause for those effects that he wills might or might not be. And it is because of the nature of their causes that some effects are said to be effects that must be and other effects that need not be, although all depends

on God's will as primary cause, a cause which transcends the distinction between *must* and *might not*.¹²

Timothy McDermott puts it this way: for Aquinas, God is the “doer of the world—the one who's doing the world's being is For his doing is not something we can identify over and above the world's being, it is the world's being as done.”¹³

¹² Timothy McDermott, trans. and ed., *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 282–83. “Source: Thomas's commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, 1.9 (18b26–19a22).”

¹³ McDermott, *Aquinas: Selected Writings*, xxxiii.

An analogy is that God transcends the world occupied by you and me in a manner akin to the way Mark Twain transcends the world occupied by Tom Sawyer, Becky Thatcher and Huckleberry Finn. And, with respect to the worlds they have created, God and Mark Twain are the primary, or transcendent cause of everything that happens. They are “doers of a world.”

Suppose that in Mark Twain’s story, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the town of Hannibal, Missouri had experienced a season of unusually heavy springtime rains—comparable to the Midwest spring of 2008. After weeks of unrelenting storms, the river rises and floods the town. As the imagined story goes, Judge Thatcher breaks his leg trying to rescue the Widow Douglas’s cow. Neither from a reader’s perspective, nor from the vantage of those within the story, would it subtract from Mark Twain’s activity as author for us to reason that it may have rained so long and hard because La Nina had set up in the South Pacific, that the floods downstream had been exacerbated by levee building further up the Mississippi, that if Judge Thatcher hadn’t been a little tipsy, he might have let the cow float by and saved his leg. Nor does it take anything away from the power of La Nina, from the science, politics and economics of levee construction, nor (we imagine) from the genetics underlying Judge Thatcher’s incipient alcoholism, nor the cultural power of his idea of honor, to remember that Mark Twain is the author of it all. He had imagined a possible world and, within his creative limits, had brought it into being, guiding it at every turn.

Thus we try to imagine a set of events as entirely controlled from two different levels, where the levels are altogether different in kind—“infinitely and qualitatively different”—and not therefore in competition. As Tom Sawyer and the imagined fictional events would be to Mark Twain, so are we, with our world, to God.

Do you remember Professor Jerry Coyne’s quip that Darwin had reduced God to a powerless bystander? From the standpoint of classical theology, he is making a “category mistake.” It is as though he were using the fact that Becky Thatcher has a mother and father to rule out a role for Mark Twain in her creation.

Third Theory: Barth's "Difficult Union of Opposites"

This brings us to our third theory, Barth's "Difficult Union of Opposites." This theory recognizes the limitations of the analogy I have just given.

We are in a position to see a sense in which Mark Twain makes all the choices for Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. They do exactly what he has them do. It may seem to many of you, then, that I have asked you to accept the one thing that is even impossible with God: accept a contradiction.

Under the theory of Purposeful Constraint, I said that the world does real work, and that human beings make real choices that are ours, as distinct from God's.

But just now under the theory of an Infinite and Qualitative Difference, I have claimed that there is a sense in which God is the cause of everything, in which the choices are God's, as distinct from ours.

Classical theology maintains that, because of the infinite and qualitative difference between the world and God, these two seemingly opposite truths can be affirmed together. Karl Barth calls this a "difficult union of opposites."

Barth asks: "What is the nature of the relationship between the rule of God and the operations of His creatures? It is true that He directs them all to one goal and subordinates them all to His own operation."

That sounds like the divine determinism espoused by certain “sages of Moorish Law.”

But Barth continues:

“It is also true that He does not suppress them in their distinctiveness over against His own operation, but affirms and honours them.”¹⁴ “It is true” and “it is also true.” This is the recurring pattern in Barth’s discussion of this problem.

¹⁴ Barth, CD III.3, 188.

Let's hear some more.

It is true that God directs the operations of his creatures:

This Lord is never absent, passive, non-responsible or impotent, but always present, active, responsible and omnipotent. He is never dead, but always living; never sleeping, but always awake; never uninterested, but always concerned; never merely waiting in any respect, but even where He seems to wait, even where He permits, always holding the initiative.¹⁵

It is also true that God does not suppress these operations:

And yet it is still the case that all creaturely activity has its own meaning and determination; that Israel itself and all other peoples live out their own individual history; that all men, the obedient no less than the disobedient, think, and speak and act according to the manifest desire of their hearts; that the desert is dreary and the night dark; that the sea roars and honey is sweet; that bread sustains and wine makes glad the heart of man; that everything is and acts as it does.¹⁶

¹⁵ Barth, CD III.3, 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 189.

Thus, Barth concludes that:

Much may vary in the sphere of the divine disposing. In it there is a place for prosperity and adversity, victory and defeat, peril and protection, life and death, angels and demons, even human sin and human liberation. God is Lord in all these things. He is so in very different ways.¹⁷

God's dealings with humankind are the exemplary instance of this difficult relation. God relates to man or woman, Barth says, "not as a stock or stone" but as a "being who can know and will, as a free being, with an appeal to his responsibility, He himself being the One who makes him responsible."¹⁸ Yet with this freedom and responsibility we are in no respect placed beyond the scope of God's exercise of *God's* freedom and responsibility through our thoughts and actions.

This asserts what Wesley Wildman has labeled anthropo-theological compatibilism: the idea that human freedom and natural autonomy are compatible with divine determinism.¹⁹ Indeed, Aquinas

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸ Barth, CD III.3, 148.

¹⁹ Wildman, "Divine Action Project," 39.

and Barth both assert divine action as the condition of natural autonomy and human freedom.

Barth writes:

The very fact that this God rules as creator means that in their own way, and at their own time and place, all things are allowed to be, and live, and work, and occupy their own sphere, and exercise their own effect upon their environment, and fulfill the circle of their own destiny. That He is the Master in all things does not alter the fact that each is allowed to develop in its own activity. On the contrary, the rule and disposition of God consists in the very fact that each may and can do that. And whenever and wherever it does so, it has to thank the divine rule and disposition for it. It could never do it at all unless from first to last it was allowed to do so by the divine rule and disposition. Far from being a threat to its freedom, this is the very reason why at its own time and place, in its own existence and form of existence, it can reveal its highest possible spontaneity, i.e., magnify the Lord who has made it what it is and permits it to work as such.²⁰

²⁰ Barth, CD III.3, 148–49.

There have always been people, both professional philosophers and Christians in the pews, who find this impossible to swallow. May lately have gravitated towards process theology, which doesn't ask us to accept the paradox. But the disagreement goes back much farther in time, virtually to the beginning of the Christian theological tradition. I believe it is accurate to say that, after nigh on to 2000 years of disputation, neither the defenders of the paradox nor its detractors have been able to deliver a knock out blow. I think that by now it has become clear that, on considerations of reason alone, the disagreement will remain with us for the duration.

But I do not think that it remains quite a stand-off once reason begins to chew on considerations of faith—that is, of revelation. Because I feel confident in saying that we see this difficult union of opposites running right through the center of the Scriptures, and our “central religious doctrines.” And the closer we get to Christ, the more powerfully evident it becomes.

Chalcedonian Christology

It is fully manifest, this paradox, in what I would maintain is our very most central doctrine: the Incarnation. The doctrine of the Incarnation identifies the life of Christ with God. As I like to put it, the life of Jesus is God's message to the world: "from before all worlds, this is who I am."

In John's language, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

In the history of theology, one finds a variety of interpretations of the Incarnation. In general, they tend to emphasize either the humanity of Jesus, or his divinity, somewhat to the exclusion of the other. The classical definition comes from the Council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D., and you could very well call it a "compatibilist" definition because it insists that Jesus is "truly" man and "truly" God. His life is his own, just as yours is and mine is. And it is simultaneously the life of God.

Earlier, in our theory of Infinite and Qualitative Difference, we saw that Christians have got God outside the story: Aquinas' notion of a radically transcendent God outside the realm of existents.

Now, we find that God is not content to remain outside the story. By his own choice, to successfully lead it to the fulfillment of its purpose, he elects to live it from the inside too.

Barth writes:

“In being gracious to man in Jesus Christ, God acknowledges man; He accepts responsibility for his being and nature. He remains Himself. He does not cease to be God. But He does not hold aloof. In being gracious to man in Jesus Christ, He also goes into the far country, into the evil society of this being which is not God and against God. He does not shrink from him. He does not pass him by as did the priest and the Levite the man who had fallen among thieves. He does not leave him to his own devices. He makes his situation His own.”²¹

It is as though Mark Twain had written himself into his own book.

This has crucial implications for our assessment of the relationship between Christian faith and evolution. We won't have time to go into them today.

I will just mention that this scenario requires changing our assessment of evolution's implications for the problem of evil in two respects.

First, the passion of Christ has a very strong resonance with what we might call the shadow side of evolution—those aspects of the story Darwin had in mind in musing on the “blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature.” Chalcedonian Christology locates it God on our side of the problem, in the ditch with us as one who also must suffer evil.

²¹ Barth, CD IV.1, 158.

Second, the Incarnation shows God as willing and able to deliver us from evil in the healing ministry of Jesus, and finally to overcome it in the resurrection. It confirms what Augustine and Aquinas had required—that God would not have permitted evil had God not known that he could overcome it and make it serve the good.

This actually has a strong resonance with the brighter side of evolution—and there certainly is one. It is that, out of a sometimes wasteful, occasionally blundering and cruel process, quite remarkable things have happened on the planet earth. As Darwin also writes, there is a “grandeur” in the fact that “from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.”²²

²² Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 648–49.

Historical Relevance

Early responders to Darwin's publication of the *Origin of Species* included liberal clerics such as Frederick Temple and Charles Kingsley, who both took the theory in stride. Darwin had supplied Kingsley with a copy for his review, and Kingsley in turn wrote Darwin that he had come to realize "it is just as noble a conception of Deity to believe that he had created primal forms capable of self-development" as to suppose that species had been introduced by fresh acts of divine intervention. Darwin appreciated Kingsley's support, and quoted his letter in later editions of the book.²³ In place of Natural Theology's idea that species had each been independently created by special acts of God, we now find agreement that God makes things make themselves.²⁴

The question that arises with this liberal solution would seem only too obvious. Does it not leave God with nothing to do? It has the savor of deism, the 18th century model of God as the watchmaker who established the world in the beginning, set it in motion, and walked away.

²³ Phipps, *Religious Odyssey*, 74.

²⁴ Kingsley best selling children's book, *The Water Babies*, written in 1862, has a character who meets the personification of Mother Nature and is surprised to find that making new animals doesn't require more time and effort on her part. She replies, "I sit here and make them make themselves." Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies*, rev. ed (London: Macmillan, 1889), 273, quoted in Peter J. Bowler, *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons: Evolution and Christianity from Darwin to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 116.

But now we can see why theological liberals were not the only Christians who were receptive to Darwin and open-minded about his theory. Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett have turned up a fact that would be surprising to many: B.B. Warfield, one of the formative leaders in early American fundamentalism, was also one of the early theologians to accept that Darwin had probably “got it right.” Warfield grew up in a family of short-horn cattle breeders, a life experience that invested him with an intuitive appreciation for the plausibility of selection. Nor did he find the theory theologically perturbing. This was because the concept that God would make things make themselves was not at all a new, defensive, liberal innovation. Rather, it had been integral to Christian thought for centuries. And its traditional formulation had equipped the likes of Warfield to see through the notion that Darwin’s theory had put the Creator out of work.²⁵

John Henry Newman had been similarly equipped, and he also regarded Darwin’s theory as, in principle, benign. At Oxford, Darwin’s name was being circulated as a possible recipient for an honorary degree. This was in 1870. Edward Pusey had reservations about this, and asked Newman for his opinion. Newman replied that from the standpoint of catholic teaching he could see no good reason why Darwin should not be thus honored, because the theory did not appear to be inherently antithetical to the doctrine of Creation. “If second causes are

²⁵ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 120–25.

conceivable at all,” as he replied to Pusey, “an Almighty Agent being supposed, I don’t see why the series should not last for millions of years as well as for thousands.”²⁶

We note that Newman refers to a conception of “second causes.” Darwin, interestingly enough, had appealed to the same conception near the end of *The Origin of Species*. At this point in the book he was wrapping things up, taking firm and final leave from the supposition that species had been independently and specially created. “To my mind,” he writes, “it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes, like those determining the birth and death of the individual.”²⁷

²⁶ Michael Ruse, *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 298. Ruse cites Newman’s letter of June 5, 1870, to Edward Pusey.

²⁷ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 647.

Surprising Ease

This “theory” was in place long before the rise of evolutionary science and its particular concerns over the causal interplay between necessity and chance. The importance this conception holds for those who want to understand how the science of evolution pertains to the doctrine of Creation would be hard to overstate. Elizabeth Johnson captures the point quite nicely. “Bringing contemporary science’s view of the creative role of chance within law-like structure into dialogue with Aquinas’s understanding of the God-world relation yields interesting results. The latter’s conviction of the integrity of natural causes, while formulated within a largely static worldview, accommodates evolutionary science with almost surprising ease.”²⁸

²⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, “Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance,” in *God and Evolution: A Reader*, ed. Mary Kathleen Cunningham (New York: Routledge, 2007), 297.

