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**DARWIN’S GOD:  
HOW REJECTING DESIGN IMPACTS  
BIBLICAL THEISM**

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## Introduction

Ever since Charles Darwin published his ideas on the theory of evolution, individuals have been passionately pursuing the questions regarding the relationship of Darwinian theory to ethics and morality. Churchmen, philosophers, and scientists alike have made claims for and against the viability of such an endeavor. One of the more recent attempts to construct an evolutionary ethics has been made by James Rachels.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of recognition, Rachels stands in sharp contrast with the more renowned Peter Singer. In *The New Yorker*, Michael Specter characterizes Singer as follows: “Peter Singer may be the most controversial philosopher alive; he is certainly among the most influential.”<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Rachels is comparatively unknown, yet he appears to have made a more significant contribution in unpacking the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. Rachels’s significance is twofold: First, he explicitly sets out to

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<sup>1</sup>James Rachels, *Created From Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-4. Hereafter cited as *CfA*. Rachels' book has a well-done presentation on the history of the debate between Christians and evolutionists regarding the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. See also, C. Leon Harris, *Evolution: Genesis and Revelations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981), 17-18, who also presents a series of fundamentalist assertions regarding the moral implications of evolution. A more general history is found in, Duane McCampbell, "The Development and Failure of the Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Theory of Ethics," *Restoration Quarterly*, 26(1983), 161-71. For conservative Christian overview of evolutionary ethics see, Ian T. Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Toronto, CAN: TFE Publishing, 1984), 340-430. Taylor credits Darwinism for being the root of today's teaching of situation ethics. He likewise cites a humanist author as declaring that Darwin's discovery sounded the death knell of religious and moral values (pages 421-22).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Specter, “The Dangerous Philosopher,” *The New Yorker*, September 6, 1999, 46.

build an ethics based in the “facts” of Darwinism, and second, he seeks to undermine the pillars of traditional Judeo-Christian ethics in order to create a need for a revised ethics. In so doing he engages Christian ethics and theology much more directly and fully than Singer.<sup>3</sup> Thus Rachels, in explicitly seeking to establish a Darwinist ethics at the expense of Christian ethics, stands alone.

Rachels has expounded his moral theory in two key books, as well as in a few articles. The first book he published was a college textbook on ethics, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*,<sup>4</sup> passed through four editions as of Rachels’s death. The second

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<sup>3</sup>A brief comment on the differences between Rachels and Singer is in order. In some ways, they are virtually indistinguishable in their overall thrust, especially in reference to animal rights. Their differences seem mostly to be more in emphases, than in content. However, there are some key divergences that we shall summarize here.

Singer is more explicitly and more purely Utilitarian than Rachels. He builds his ethics first on Utilitarian reasoning, with gleanings from Evolution. By contrast, Rachels directly seeks to build his ethics on Darwinism and ends up with a type of Utilitarianism as the result. Other differences include the fact that Rachels focuses on the principles of equal consideration of interests, and the concept of being subjects of a life, much more than Singer does. Also, Singer regularly invokes and discusses the principle of universifiability, whereas Rachels never mentions it. While both advocate abortion and euthanasia, Singer seems more prone to push the discussion to the extreme possibilities, including the issue of infanticide.

The single biggest difference between them is that Singer will take the principle of utility to the point of rejecting any preferentialism or parochialism so that he sees no difference between one’s moral obligations to one’s family and to poor starving people in India or Africa. By contrast, we shall see Rachels explicitly build such preferentialism into his ethics because it results in a Utilitarian type of good for the community, though the primary motivation is not Utilitarian.

What they share in common is a rejection of any theistic influence in ethics, and a penchant to blame Christian ethics for producing anti-animal morality. Both thus do ethics in a completely secular fashion rooted in human reason. Since Rachels is more explicitly built from Darwinism, and more directly interacts with Christian ethics and theology, he seems more significant for the purposes of this study.

<sup>4</sup>James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986); 3d ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 1999); 4th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 2002). Hereafter will be footnoted respectively as Rachels, *Elements* (1986), *Elements* (1999), and *Elements* (2002). If there is a second

book, *Created from Animals*, sets the philosophical foundations for his ethics, explicitly basing them on Darwinism. Thus, this latter book provides the centerpiece of this study, while his other works play a supplemental role.

### **How Darwinism Interfaces with Traditional Ethics**

In his introduction to *Created from Animals*, Rachels explicitly declares his intent to discuss and explore the moral implications of Darwin's theory of evolution and intimates that Darwinism undermines the foundations of Christian ethics, especially in reference to the issue of human preference in ethics.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that he takes Christian ethics as insignificant. To the contrary, in another work, he makes it clear that the "traditional theory" must be taken seriously, both due to its enormous influence, and due to its being the only fully worked-out, systematically elaborated theory of morality we have.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Rachels does not claim to have falsified the Christian position. In his own words, "I would not argue that Darwinism entails the falsity of the doctrine of human dignity; rather, I would contend that Darwinism undermines human dignity by taking away its support."<sup>7</sup> But how does Rachels see

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edition, it appears to exist only in theory as I have been unable to find a library holding it. However, since there is a third edition, it seems there must have been a second. A fifth edition was published posthumously by Rachels's son, Stuart Rachels, in 2006, and is listed as co-authored.

<sup>5</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 1-5.

<sup>6</sup>James Rachels, *The End of Life: Euthanasia and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4. Rachels's comment seems to have the unspoken implication that with Christian ethics having a nearly 2000-year head start, Rachels's proposed ethics will not be as complete or as systematic since his theory is still in its formative stages.

<sup>7</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 171.

Darwinian evolution as subverting human dignity and thus undermining traditional morality? What is the “support” that is undermined?

### **Two Pillars Grounding Traditional Ethics**

Rachels asks, “What exactly is the traditional idea of human dignity?” He goes on to clarify that his question is focused, not in past historical squabbles, but “in the basic idea that forms the core of Western morals, and that is expressed, not only in philosophical writing, but in literature, religion, and in the common moral consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> Why, then, does Rachels see the doctrine of human dignity as such a critical component of traditional ethics?

In a nutshell, he sees the human dignity doctrine as resting on two premises: “Traditional morality depends on the idea that human beings are in a special moral category. . . . Traditionally it has been supported in two ways: first, by the notion that man is made in the image of God, and secondly, by the notion that man is a uniquely rational being.”<sup>9</sup> Rachels eventually labels these pillars of traditional morality the “image of God thesis” and the “rationality thesis.”<sup>10</sup>

Rachels sees two implications of placing a significant distinction between human and non-human life, especially in reference to the image-of-God thesis. First, human life is sacred and, thus, the central concern for morality is the protection and care of human

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 3-4. Emphasis in original. Rachels later gives a self-summary of his book that recapitulates these very points. See p. 171.

<sup>10</sup>Some examples of this labeling can be found in, *ibid.*, 91, 97, 171.

beings. Second, non-human life is thus less valuable than human life and is therefore not entitled to the same degree of moral protection as a human being. Rachels notes that some take this distinction to mean that “non-human animals” have no moral standing at all. “Therefore, we may use them as we see fit.”<sup>11</sup> How, then, does Rachels perceive the image of God and the rationality theses to support such a distinction between man and animal? Since the image-of-God thesis is where most of his engagement with the theological foundations of traditional ethics occurs, I shall limit this paper to exploring Rachels’s treatment of this issue.

#### Pillar One: The Image-of-God Thesis

For Rachels, the image-of-God thesis may be the most significant underpinning of traditional ethics. He clearly sees this view as rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition, starting with the Genesis account of creation in which man is said to be created in the image of God. Thus, Christian morality, for Rachels, is the prime proponent of the doctrine of human dignity in Western society. Says Rachels:

The Western religious tradition, a blend of Judaism and Christianity, is a case in point. Man, it is said, was made in the image of God, with the world intended to be his habitation, and everything else in it given for his enjoyment and use. This makes man, apart from God himself, the leading character in the whole cosmic drama. But that is only the beginning of the story. Other details reinforce the initial thought. Throughout human history, God has continued to watch over and interact with man, communicating with him through the saints and prophets. One of the things communicated is a set of instructions telling us how we are to live; and almost all those instructions concern how we must treat other humans. Our fellow humans are not to be killed, lied to, or otherwise mistreated. Their lives are sacred. Their needs are always taken into account, their rights always respected. The concern we are to show one another is, however, only a dim reflection of the love that God himself has for mankind: so great is God’s love that he even became

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 86.

a man, and died sacrificially to redeem sinful mankind. And finally, we are told that after we die, we may be united with God to live forever. What is said about the animals is strikingly different. They were given by God for man's use, to be worked, killed, and eaten at man's pleasure. Like the rest of creation, they exist for man's benefit.<sup>12</sup>

Rachels here identifies four key theological themes from the Judeo-Christian tradition that he believes undergird the doctrine of human specialness. However, Rachels will ultimately focus only on one of these four, leaving the other three untouched in further discussion.

The first theological theme, which is the one upon which Rachels trains his focus, is the doctrine that man was created in the image of God, and that all in this world was made for his use and enjoyment—the image-of-God thesis. We shall soon see that for Rachels, the concept of the image of God is the most crucial undergirding principle for establishing the doctrine of human dignity. Thus if the image-of-God thesis can be called into question, a major pillar of Western ethics is thought to have been crumbled. We have seen, however, that Rachels identifies three other theological themes that he believes undergird the traditional view of human dignity.

In the second theme, we saw Rachels make the claim that the human preference found in the Genesis creation story is further bolstered by the biblical account of God's continued watch-care and interaction with man, including communicating with man through prophets, and giving them a set of instructions on how to live (i.e., the 10 Commandments). Thus he alleged that the morality thus attributed to divine prescription is focused on protecting humans from mistreatment, while the animals were relegated to

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 86-87.

human exploitation and use. These provisions are said to be understood by the Judeo-Christian tradition as an evidence of God's great love for mankind, presumably above the animals.

The third theological foundation for human preference presented by Rachels is the doctrine of salvation. In his depiction of Christian thinking, God so loves mankind that He became a man and died sacrificially to redeem mankind. It is implied in the context of the previous quotation that God did not offer to do anything for animal redemption. Thus Rachels asserts that the incarnation is interpreted to mean that animals are less valuable than humans. The use of salvation to bolster human preference has also been depicted by the animal theologian from Oxford, Andrew Linzey. He asserts that the tendency of Christian theology to juxtapose humans over against the animals "is encapsulated in Karl Barth's view that 'God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but man' and that '*this and this alone* was the content of the eternal election of grace' [*sic*]. Given this overarching divine election of divine humanity, it must follow that human kind *is* special, unique, distinct, superior, and so on. . . . The incarnation is used as the trump card to vanquish all other creaturely rights to specialness, intrinsic worth, and respectful treatment."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Andrew Linzey, "Introduction: Is Christianity Irredeemably Speciesist?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press [Illini Books], 1998), xv. Linzey's citation of Barth is, "Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, T & T Clark 1960, pp. 16, 18; . . ." Emphases in original.



In addition to the doctrine of salvation, the fourth and final theological concept that Rachels believes supports the doctrine of human preference over animals is the doctrine of final destiny. Humans are promised the hope of life with God after death. While the exact depiction of the relationship of death and eschatology can be debated,<sup>14</sup> the more important point to this discussion is that traditional Christian theology promises some kind of afterlife in paradise with God, while animals seem to miss out because salvation is presented as human-centered.

Rachels concludes that “the central idea of our [i.e., Western] moral tradition springs directly from this remarkable story. The story embodies a doctrine of the specialness of man and a *matching ethical precept*.” He reiterates the elements found in this story—that man alone is made in the image of God and that creation was made for his use and benefit, and that man is the center of God’s love and attention—and then calls this theological package the “image of God thesis.” He then articulates the moral meaning of the image-of-God thesis as having two dimensions: “The matching moral idea . . . is that human life is sacred, and the central concern of our morality must be protection and care of human beings, whereas we may use other creatures as we see fit.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Not all Christians agree on the exact nature of death, nor of eschatological events. Debates between Dispensationalists and non-Dispensationalists could be cited as one example of disagreement over eschatology within Christendom. Likewise, there is division over whether a soul remains conscious after death. But for Rachels these are moot issues. The issue is that in whatever theological form presented, individual humans are promised the possibility of some kind afterlife while individual animals seem not to be given this privilege.

<sup>15</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 87. Emphasis mine.

Rachels repeats and enlarges these two points by suggesting “some practical implications of the idea of human dignity.” First is the doctrine of the sanctity of human life—*innocent* human life to be more precise. Rachels observes that traditional ethics usually recognizes that “guilty persons—criminals, aggressors, and soldiers fighting unjust wars—are not given this protection, and in some circumstances they may be justly killed.” However, traditional ethics is said to erect an inviolable wall of protection around the innocent. The practical outworking of this doctrine, notes Rachels, is that traditional morality does not permit practices such as suicide, infanticide, and euthanasia.<sup>16</sup> Thus, innocent human life becomes untouchable.

Succinctly stated, then, for Rachels the overall basis of human dignity is rooted in the theological premise that if man is the central object of God’s love and watch-care, then man’s protection should be the central object and focus of morality. Thus the image-of-God thesis becomes the first central pillar for upholding the sanctity of human life over animal life in Rachels’s argument. Having seen why Rachels believes the image of God thesis is a foundational pillar for grounding traditional ethics, we must now examine how Rachels understands Darwinism to undermine it.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 88.

## How Darwin's Theory Undermines the Image-of-God Thesis

Rachels's primary tactic to undermine the image-of-God thesis is to try to show that Darwinian evolution cannot support the kind of theism necessary to produce such a conclusion.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, Rachels offers two aspects of Darwinism that he believes undermine classical theism, and in undermining classical theism, discredit the image-of-God thesis.

### **The Problem of Evil**

The first aspect believed to undermine classical theism is the issue of evil and suffering in the world. As Rachels notes, "The existence of evil has always been a chief obstacle to belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. How can God and evil co-exist? If God is perfectly good, he would not want evil to exist; and if he is all-powerful, he is able to eliminate it. Yet evil exists. Therefore, the argument goes, God must not exist."<sup>18</sup> Rachels then gives a short list of traditional answers offered by theologians "through the centuries," designed to reconcile God's existence with evil, but concludes, "certainly, then, the simple version of the argument from evil does not *force* the theist to abandon belief."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Rachels summarizes his work at the end of chapter 4 in *CfA*, by stating that chapter 3 is dedicated to showing how Darwinism undermines the image-of-God thesis, while chapter 4 is focused on undermining the rationality thesis. See Rachels, *CfA*, 171.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 104. Emphasis in original.

Rachels seeks to break this impasse by arguing that Darwin contributes “two distinctive twists” that strengthen the argument from evil. First, theological arguments justifying the existence of God and the presence of evil in this world center on human suffering, belying the human centered focus of traditional morality. But for Darwin, says Rachels, these arguments assume, based on the creation story, that man has always been a co-occupant with animal and plant life forms on the earth, whereas in the evolutionary view evil and suffering existed for millions of years before man arrived on the scene. Thus, “the traditional theistic rejoinders do not even come close to justifying *that* evil. . . . The evolutionary perspective puts the problem in a new and more difficult form.”<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, Rachels does not further develop this point.

Second, Rachels asserts that Darwin’s theory would expect natural evil, suffering and unhappiness to be widespread as it is, while the divine hypothesis view would not. “Thus, Darwin believed, natural selection accounts for the facts regarding happiness and unhappiness in the world, whereas the rival hypothesis of divine creation did not.”<sup>21</sup>

This second point is especially crucial for Rachels. He notes that Darwin sought an account of origins and life that most easily fits the facts of suffering with the least amount of explanatory contortions. On this account, Rachels claims that “Divine creation is a poor hypothesis because it fits the facts badly.”<sup>22</sup> To put it another way, Rachels’s fundamental argument against the image-of-God thesis, which he claims to have derived

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 105-106. Emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 106.

from Darwin himself, is that the doctrine of creation upon which the image-of-God thesis depends is less parsimonious than Darwinian evolution.<sup>23</sup> Since Darwin has, in Rachels's view, presented an alternative to divine creation that is viable and exhibits greater parsimony, the divine creation hypothesis is now undermined by good reasons. And of course, to spell out the implication of Rachels's argument, if there is no divine creation, and possibly no God, how can man be *created* in the image of God? If man can no longer be the image of God, then that pillar of traditional ethics is toppled by Darwin's theory, and traditional ethics begins to crumble. We now turn to Rachels's second major set of arguments for why Darwin undermines the form of theism necessary for traditional ethics.

### **Teleology: The Central Issue**

Rachels credits Marx for pinpointing the "philosophical nerve" of Darwin's theory in declaring the theory of evolution to be "the death blow . . . to 'Teleology' in the natural sciences."<sup>24</sup> Thus, it may be that the most significant aspect of Darwin's theory is his overall rejection of teleology in nature. Rachels reminds us that "a teleological explanation is an explanation of something in terms of its function and purpose: the heart is for pumping blood, the lungs are for breathing, and so on."<sup>25</sup> Teleology thus implies a

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<sup>23</sup>Tom Regan places much emphasis on the principle of parsimony or simplicity in his argumentation, including some discussion and description of the principle. See *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 21-24.

<sup>24</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 110-111.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* Rachels admits, "It is an exaggeration to say that Darwin dealt teleology a death blow; even after Darwin we still find biologists offering teleological explanations. But

purpose or design, which must have been determined by the intentions of a maker.<sup>26</sup> But there can be no designer in Darwinian evolution, and as Rachels notes, “If there is no maker—if the object in question is not an artifact—does it make sense to speak of a ‘purpose’?” The answer is, “No,” says Rachels. Any purposes attributed are merely those *we* assign. Thus, “the connection between function and conscious intention is, in Darwin’s theory, completely severed.”<sup>27</sup>

Rachels has thus highlighted the debate over the design argument (offered by Paley) which is considered by many to be definitively refuted by Hume.<sup>28</sup> The problem is, notes Rachels, that Hume, and other critics of the design argument, only pointed out logical deficiencies in the design argument, but “they could not supply a *better way* of understanding the apparent design of nature. . . . Darwin did what Hume could not do: he provided an alternative, giving people something else they could believe. Only then was the design hypothesis dead.”<sup>29</sup> For Rachels, then, the significance of Darwin is that he

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now they are offered in a different spirit. Biological function is no longer compared to the function of consciously designed artifacts” (112).

<sup>26</sup>The term "Teleology" is used in two fundamentally different, but related ways. In the philosophical realm, teleology asserts there is some kind of ordering design or purpose in nature that produces the predictable formulas and laws used in the sciences today. The discipline of Ethics also uses the term, "teleology, to designate systems of morality in which good and evil are determined by consequences. Teleological ethics are thus goal oriented instead of duty oriented. For example, the woman hiding the Jew from the Nazis would not worry about duties to tell the truth regardless of consequences, but in teleological ethics, would lie when questioned by the Gestapo with the goal of saving the Jew's life (not to mention avoiding significant trouble for herself).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 120. Emphasis in original.

provided the “good reasons” that Hume was unable to provide, which made the rejection of teleology plausible because there was a viable alternative for interpreting data. It is the fact that Darwin’s theory provided rational reasons for rejecting teleology that makes Darwin’s theory so capable of undermining the image-of-God thesis.

### **Removing Teleology Undermines a Divinely Designed Ethics**

The rejection of teleology is a major weapon in the war to divorce morality from religious and theological grounding. In his textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Rachels notes that, “in popular thinking, morality and religion are inseparable. People commonly believe that morality can be understood only in the context of religion.”<sup>30</sup> Rachels asserts this is partly due to the fact that, “when viewed from a non-religious perspective, the universe seemed to be a cold, meaningless place, devoid of value or purpose.”<sup>31</sup> By contrast, for Judaism and Christianity,

the world is not devoid of meaning and purpose. It is the arena in which God’s plans and purposes are realized. What could be more natural, then, than to think that “morality” is a part of the religious view of the world, whereas the atheist’s view of the world has no place for values?

. . . In both the Jewish and Christian traditions, God is conceived as a lawgiver who has created us, and the world we live in, for a purpose. . . . God has promulgated rules that we are to obey. . . . But if live as we should live, we must follow God’s laws. This, it is said, is the essence of morality.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Rachels, *Elements* (1999), 54. The title of this chapter, “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” also hints at the vernacular view that indeed the one does depend on the other.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

Rachels further intimates that this populist opinion is merely seeking order and design where there are none, for evolution shows us that there is no teleology, no divine purpose, but only blind laws of nature. Thus Rachels clearly tries to show that traditional ethics can only be grounded in the concept of being part of a grand design created by an almighty Creator-God. He clearly asserts that Darwinism undermines this foundation. Peter Singer echoes the same sentiment. “Once we admit that Darwin was right when he argued that human ethics evolved from social instincts that we inherited from our non-human ancestors, we can put aside the hypothesis of the divine origin for ethics.”<sup>33</sup>

The issue here, however, is not the efficacy of the design versus materialism argument. It is, rather, that to accept Darwin’s theory is to accept that there is no purpose or design in nature at all. This completely opposes classic Judeo-Christian theism, in which there is a cosmic design and purpose in which the image-of-God concept plays a specific role. Rachels asks the clinching question: “Can theism be separated from belief in design? It would be a heroic step, because the design hypothesis is not an insignificant component of traditional religious belief. But it can be done, and in fact it has been done, by eighteenth-century deists.”<sup>34</sup>

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Peter Singer, “Introduction,” in *Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>34</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 125.

### **The Retreat to Deism**

Deism, he notes, rejects any personal-relational view of God, replacing that with a God who created natural laws, made the world, and now lets it run itself by those natural



laws. The God of deism is hands-off and not concerned with details. Thus there is theism without teleological design.<sup>35</sup> What is the significance of this for Rachels? Rachels declares, “Since deism is a consistent theistic view, it is tempting simply to conclude that theism and Darwinism must be compatible, and to say no more. But the temptation should be resisted, at least *until we have made clear what has been given up in the retreat to deism.*”<sup>36</sup> And just what is it that must be given up in the “retreat to deism”? Rachels asserts that “when the world is interpreted non-teleologically—when God is no longer necessary to explain things—then theology is diminished.”<sup>37</sup> And how is theology diminished? “The image of God thesis does not go along with just any theistic view. It requires a theism that sees God as actively designing man and the world as a home for man. If, by abolishing the view of nature as designed in substantial detail, Darwinism forces a retreat to something like deism, then we are deprived of the idea that man has a special place in the divine order. Even if we can still view nature in some sense as God’s creation, we will no longer have a theism that supports the doctrine of human dignity.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup>Singer also uses these arguments but in reverse order: “When we reject belief in a god we must give up the idea that life on this planet has any preordained meaning. Life *as a whole* has no meaning.” Thus Singer connects rejection of teleology with atheism. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 331.

<sup>38</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 127-128.

In the words of Sigmund Freud, the God of the deists is “nothing but an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrine.”<sup>39</sup> All that is left is the concept of God as the original cause. But, says Rachels, Darwin has asserted that to say the original cause is God is merest speculation. It can be asserted but no good reasons can be given to substantiate it. And, in fact, Rachels asserts that if we can accept that God is uncaused, then there is no good reason to reject the assertion that the universe is uncaused.<sup>40</sup> Thus what is left is a theism so worthless as to make religious belief essentially nonsense.

Two statements of Rachels bring us to his crowning conclusion: “I have already argued in this chapter that Darwinism undermines theism.” How severe is this undermining of theism in Rachels’s view? Says Rachels, “In summary then, the atheistical conclusion can be resisted, but only at great cost.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed the theological cost is great enough to leave traditional ethics, and its doctrine of human dignity, reeling.

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<sup>39</sup>Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1928), 57. Of further interest is that between pp. 25 and 35, Freud argues that deities are human inventions to personalize the forces of nature so that man can feel he has a relationship with these forces that will enable man to manipulate nature or at least be protected from it. Thus Freud casts human culture as a tool to aid the dynamic of man versus nature. This clearly depicts a culture where man is viewed as special apart from nature and juxtaposed against it. In relation to Rachels’s use of the quotation in the text above, it is significant that Freud asserts, “And *the more autonomous nature becomes and the more the gods withdraw from her*, the more earnestly are all expectations concentrated on the third task assigned to them” (p. 31, emphasis mine). Freud astutely connects autonomy of nature to a withdrawal from divine dominance, thus underscoring Rachels’s assertion that deism is too anemic a theism to support traditional morality.

<sup>40</sup>Rachels, *CfA*, 108, 126.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 127, 126.

## **Analysis of Rachels's Attacks on the Image-of-God Thesis**

### Introduction

Rachels has asserted that any form of theism which maintains belief in Darwinian evolution cannot cogently continue to support and uphold traditional Christian morals and ethics. This is especially critical in the matter of human preference. But how efficacious is this claim? Nearly a decade after Rachels published these assertions, a new theological discipline arose which would provide strong evidence that Rachels's was fundamentally right. Evolutionary theology appeared in the theological arena with a new theological paradigm that seriously sought to incorporate the principles of Darwinian evolution into its thinking.

### Darwinian Theism

#### **Putting Darwin into Theology**

John F. Haught, possibly the leading scholar in evolutionary theology, laments that not only has the discipline of theology has failed to grapple with the implications of Darwin's theory, but neither have the philosophers. "If theology has fallen short of the reality of evolution, however, so also has the world of thought in general. . . . Philosophy also has yet to produce an understanding of reality—an ontology—adequate of evolution."<sup>42</sup> Thus he charges that, "to a great extent, theologians still think and write almost as if Darwin had never lived."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

One might be tempted to think that Haught has forgotten the work of Teilhard de Chardin in combining theology with Darwinian evolution, but Haught assures us otherwise. “Although Teilhard himself was a profoundly religious thinker, he was not a professional theologian, and so his own efforts to construe a ‘God for evolution’ stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions demanded.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Haught believes the challenge of properly accounting for evolution in theology still remains.

Haught responds to this problem by proposing the possibilities of a theology informed by evolution.

Scientific skeptics, of course, decided long ago that the only reasonable option Darwin leaves us is that of a totally Godless universe. That theology survives at all after Darwin is to some evolutionists a most puzzling anachronism. We would have to agree, of course, that if atheism is the logical correlate of evolutionary science, then the day of religions and theologies is over. But as we shall see, such a judgement is hardly warranted. I shall argue in the pages ahead that Darwin has gifted us with an account of life whose depth, beauty, and pathos—when seen in the context of the larger cosmic epic of evolution—expose[s] us afresh to the raw reality of the sacred and to a resoundingly meaningful universe.<sup>45</sup>

Haught expresses high hopes about the prospects of a Darwinian theology: “I cannot here emphasize enough, therefore, the gift evolution can be to our theology. For us to turn our backs on it, as so many Christians continue to do, is to lose a great opportunity to deepen our understanding of the wisdom and self-effacing love of God.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 162.

<sup>45</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 2.

<sup>46</sup>John F. Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 114.

Diarmuid O’Murchu, another contemporary evolutionary theologian, expands on the idea of evolution enriching our view of God: “Evolutionary theology wishes to keep open the possibility that all forms of creaturehood (plant and animal alike) are dimensions of divine disclosure and can enlighten us in our desire to understand God more deeply and respond in faith more fully. Evolutionary theology is committed to a radically open-ended understanding of how the divine reveals itself in and to the world.”<sup>47</sup> This means that in evolutionary theology, nature is not used as evidence to prove classical attributes of God. Rather, both Darwinian evolution and God’s creatorship are assumed to be true. Thus, evolution shows us how God created, and this method of creating, in turn, deepens our understanding of who God is and how He operates.

This, in turn, means that we cannot ascribe specific activity to God. The result, as O’Murchu notes, is that “evolutionary theology borrows liberally from process thought, proposing God’s total involvement in the evolutionary process to be a primary conviction upon which everything is postulated.”<sup>48</sup> O’Murchu further asserts that “the process position challenges the assumption that our God must always be a ruling, governing power above and beyond God’s own creation.”<sup>49</sup> Why is the tendency to favor process theology significant? O’Murchu explains, “What conventional believers find

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Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 88.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

unacceptable about the process position is the notion of a vulnerable God, allegedly at the mercy of capricious forces as are all other creatures of the universe.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the first significant theological impact of Darwin that we shall examine is the limiting of God’s power in order to save His goodness.

### **Limiting God’s Power to Save His Goodness**

The limiting of divine power is one of the first issues that Haught examines in his book, *God after Darwin*. Early in the book, Haught examines David Hull’s argument that the present order is incompatible with the concept of God. Hull asks, “What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomenon epitomized by the species on Darwin’s Galapagos Islands?” He eventually answers, “The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. This is not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”<sup>51</sup>

Haught’s answer to Hull’s unworshipable God involves the call to alter our concept of God to fit the data of modern science. Says Haught,

But what if “God” is not just an originator of order, but also the disturbing wellspring of *novelty*? And, moreover, what if the cosmos is not just an “order” (which is what “cosmos” means in Greek) but a still unfinished *process*? Suppose we look carefully at the undeniable evidence that the universe is *still* being created. And suppose also that “God” is less concerned with imposing a plan or design on this process than with providing it with opportunities to participate in its own creation. *If we make these conceptual adjustments, as both contemporary science and a consistent theology actually require that we do*, the idea of God not only

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>David L. Hull, “The God of the Galapagos,” *Nature* 352 (August 8, 1991): 486. The last lines are quoted in Haught, *God after Darwin*, 6.

becomes compatible with evolution, but also logically anticipates the kind of life-world that neo-Darwinian biology sets before us.<sup>52</sup>

But would this not impeach the goodness of God as Hull has charged?

A number of theologians and philosophers would answer this question, “No.”

Their solution is to argue that natural evil is unavoidable for God because His power is limited. Peter Bertocci argues that “*the evidence indicates God is not omnipotent,*” and

goes on to argue that only by having limited power can God’s moral goodness be preserved.<sup>53</sup> C. Don Keyes states that through the work of Julian Casserley, he has come to the conclusion that

God ought not to be defined primarily in terms of sovereignty and power. The implications of this statement liberated me from interpreting God’s omnipotence as the kind of coercive power capable of always preventing evil. Instead, I now firmly believe with Plato that the goodness of God is his most essential quality and that he is the author only of the good things that happen. Ultimately ‘power’ and ‘good’ are different kinds of reality, but of the two, good is more absolutely attributable to God. The power of the good is almost always indirect.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 6. Final emphasis mine. Later, on p. 38, Haught again appeals to the argument that if God created an unfinished, evolving universe, we should expect natural evil and contingency.

<sup>53</sup>Peter Anthony Bertocci, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1951), 413-414. Emphasis in original. See also 466-467 where he repeats his argument that limited power is the only way to maintain God’s moral goodness.

<sup>54</sup>C. Don Keys, “Julian Casserley’s Hope,” in *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. C. Don Keys, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), xxii-xxiii. Casserley actually says little about God’s power, but what he says seems to agree with Keys’s reaction to his work. In this quote, Casserley is combating a form of humanism he perceives to focus on developing human power but not human morality:

“Strangely enough, most of those humanists who seem drawn towards a humanism of power are precisely the people who are most apt to react against a conception of God as kind of a celestial policeman wielding absolute powers over men. For myself, *I not only object to a conception of God that thinks of him merely, or even primarily in terms of sovereignty and power,* but I object also to any conception of man that thinks of him merely or even primarily in terms of sovereignty or power, and I object to both doctrines for the same reason, that they misapprehend the true value and

Keys gives no good reasons for ascribing goodness as an absolute quality while treating omnipotence as a symbolic or relative quality, other than the ability to explain evil, and possibly the support of Plato. It is also significant, as we shall soon see, that goodness becomes the supreme, untouchable attribute of God to which all other attributes, including power, seem to be subjugated.

Jerry Korsmeyer echoes the refrain in which God's power is limited in order to preserve his goodness.

The painfully slow evolution of life, spreading in great diversity into all available niches, trying out all possible avenues of advance, the huge role of chance, the stumbling advances to greater complexity, all these things suggest a divine nature *at odds with the omnipotent God of classical theism*. The universe, as we know it, was not created in an instant of *absolute coercive power*. The creeping advance of matter and life, the spread of probabilities, the diversity of approaches, *all suggest some sharing of power between Creator and creatures*. It is as though divinity labored to persuade, to lure creatures forward, creatures who sometimes responded to the invitation, and sometimes did not. . . . *The universe's story is suggesting that divine power is different from what we have imagined*. It is like the power of love, persuasive, patient, and persistent. . . .

. . . The idea of creation by persuasion, surprisingly, suggests a Creator much closer to the biblical God of love than that of classical theism.<sup>55</sup>

All of these authors speak as if their position on limiting God's power is so self-evident that there can be no criticism of it.

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excellence of personality [i.e., character]. The person, whether divine or human, finds authentic self-expression in the range and integrity of his loving and in the wide variety of his values. A humanism of power *is as objectionable as the Calvinistic-type of theism* and for precisely the same reasons." J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. C. Don Keys, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 27. Emphases mine.

<sup>55</sup>Jerry D. Korsmeyer, *Evolution and Eden: Balancing Original Sin and Contemporary Science* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 84. Emphases mine.



Eric Kraemer offers three rebuttals to the limited power view of God. First, is God only limited in power as claimed? If He is limited in power, why not in knowledge and goodness as well? Why limit God's power only? Second, he picks up Hume's argument that if God were this limited in power, He should have created fewer animals with better faculties for happiness. Third, Kramer questions if such a limited, imprudent God is worthy of respect and worship. He reminds us that "other great but limited beings, saints and heroes, clearly merit respect, but not worship. Once God is similarly limited, the problem of justifying the worship-worthiness of God needs to be addressed."<sup>56</sup>

### **Claiming a More Exalted View of God**

Haught directly addresses the issue of God's worship worthiness and does so in several places. He states, for example, that "if the idea of God is to arouse our instinct to worship, this idea cannot be smaller than the universe that science has made so conspicuous to us."<sup>57</sup> By contrast, "the notion of God as an intelligent designer is inadequate. The God of evolution is an inexhaustible and unsettling source of *new* modes of being, forever eluding the encapsulation in orderly schemata."<sup>58</sup> The rejection of God

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<sup>56</sup>Eric Russert Kraemer, "Darwin's Doubts and the Problems of Animal Pain," Undated, [http://cal.calpoly.edu/~jlynch/Kraemer\\_Darwin.htm](http://cal.calpoly.edu/~jlynch/Kraemer_Darwin.htm) (6 July 2003). Internal evidence points to this being published sometime after 1996.

<sup>57</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, ix. Interestingly, while Haught here argues that our concept of God must be based on a cosmological perspective supplied by science, in his *Responses to 101 Questions*, he argues that "this is not a God that theology invented just to accommodate Darwin. This is the empathetic God revealed in the pages of the Bible" (124). How can one base his view of God on the scientific discoveries interpreted through the theoretical perspective of Darwin, while not making any accommodation to Darwinism? These two statements concerning the role of science through Darwin seem to disagree with each other.

<sup>58</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 9.

as designer is obviously incompatible with teleology and shows us we are encountering a form of theism devoid of principles of design.

Haught argues that the biblical view of God, which he describes as “the anthropomorphic one-planet deity,” is too small for the evolutionary view of the cosmos. Thus, “the idea of a personal God such as we have in the Bible is a stumbling block for many evolutionary scientists as well.” What we “traditionally called ‘God’ now appears too small for them.” Thus he charges that they turn to Eastern religions “and other forms of mysticism to satisfy their very human craving for infinite horizons.” Haught concludes, “in any case theology must take pains to ensure that our notion of God is not slighter than the epic of cosmic and biological evolution itself.”<sup>59</sup> Haught further asserts that

to insist on a special creation, as many Christians do, is to shrink God to the role of magician. It is also a refusal to acknowledge the creative vocation that all creatures have in some degree, and which we humans have in a very special way. A robust theology of creation finds more to admire in a divine creator who calls this self-creating universe into being, than a ‘designer’ who directly forces everything into a prefabricated blueprint.<sup>60</sup>

Such a God, for Haught, loses some of the traditional concept of transcendence, for he sees God as “immediately operative in the depths of all natural processes. . . . The Spirit of God is hiddenly present in all instances of new creation.”<sup>61</sup> Alluding to Teilhard de Chardin, Haught asserts that the reality of God, from an evolutionary perspective, “begins to shift from the One who abides vertically ‘up above’ to the One who comes into the

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<sup>59</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 36.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

world from ‘up ahead,’ out of the realm of the future.” This is asserted to match the biblical eschatology of Isaiah “where God is the One who ‘goes before’ the people.”<sup>62</sup>

Reversing the analogy, Haught argues for an entering of God into creation.

Evolution happens, ultimately, because of the ‘coming of God’ toward *the entire universe* from out of an always elusive future. And just as the arrival of God does not enter the human sphere by crude extrinsic forcefulness but by participating in it and energizing it from within, we may assume that it does not enter coercively into the pre-human levels of cosmic and biological evolution either. *The coming of God into nature*, like the nonintrusive effectiveness of the Tao, is always respectful of the world’s presently realized autonomy.<sup>63</sup>

Haught here introduces a panentheistic view of a God as the solution to the problem of evil. But why would God want to choose such an unobtrusive means of wooing evolution along? For Haught, “the world is in evolution, then, because God is a God of *persuasive* rather than coercive power.” Based on the assumption that evolution is how God created, Haught argues that “it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Creator does not want a universe that remains content with the way things are, but one that strives adventurously to become something more.”<sup>64</sup> Haught thus sees a God with limited power as more worship worthy.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 53. Emphasis mine.

<sup>62</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 39-40. See also *101 Questions*, 50-51, where Haught gives similar argumentation including the connection to Teilhard de Chardin. In *101 Questions*, question 94, Haught summarizes the theology of Teilhard including the “omega principle” to which the “up ahead” refers. Question 95 expounds on Whitehead’s process philosophy. These two become the pillars for Haught’s evolving reality drawn by a God who lures all in development towards him.

<sup>63</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 99.

<sup>64</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 136-137. See also, idem, *God after Darwin*, 42, where he uses the language of adventure to opine that God values surprises over order. “According to process theology, evolution occurs because God is more interested in adventure than in preserving the status quo. ‘Adventure,’ in Whiteheadian terms, is the cosmic search for more and more intense versions of ordered novelty, another word for which is ‘beauty.’”

Haught is not the only one to argue that a limited God is more deserving of worship than the traditional Christian God. Korsmeyer declares, “our God should be worthy of worship.”<sup>65</sup> In the context of advocating panentheism, Korsmeyer asserts, “The whole of the created universe is within God, although God is other and superior to it. God is both eternal and temporal, and God both includes and transcends the world. But is such a God perfect, and so worthy of worship?”<sup>66</sup> The context seems to imply an affirmative answer. Korsmeyer then defines divinity in a manner consistent with limited attributes: “Indeed, God must be greatest, must be transcendent, in all categories. . . . God is defined as that perfect, supremely excellent being, than which no other individual being could

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God’s will, apparently, is the maximization of cosmic beauty. And the epic of evolution is the world’s response to God’s own longing that it strive towards ever richer ways of realizing aesthetic intensity.” Thus, Haught’s cosmic God of evolution seems more like an adventure addict who gets his ultimate thrill from creating through a totally contingent, random processes that surprise even Him.

Haught by his own admission appears to base this proposal on the argument the from imagination offered by Guy Murchie. See, Haught, *God after Darwin*, 29-30. Says Murchie, “Try to imagine that you are God. This might not come naturally to you. To be God of course you have to be a creator. And a creator, by definition, must create. So you, the creator, now find yourself creating creatures (a word meaning created beings) who have to have a world to live in. But what kind of world should they live in? Or more specifically, what kind of world will you decide to create for them? . . . As for life and adventure, Earth is literally teeming with it. . . . Earth provides the optimum, if not the maximum, in prolonged stimulation of body and mind and, most particularly, she excels in educating the spirit. . . . Honestly now, if you were God, could you possibly dream up any more educational, contrasty, thrilling, beautiful, tantalizing world than Earth to develop spirit in? . . . Would you, in other words, try to make the world nice and safe—or would you let it be provocative, dangerous and exciting? In actual fact, if it ever came to that, I’m sure you would find it impossible to make a better world than God has already created.” Guy Murchie, *The Seven Mysteries of Life: An Exploration in Science and Philosophy* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 621-622.

<sup>65</sup>Korsmeyer, 91.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

conceivably be greater, but which itself, could become greater.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, like Haught, Korsmeyer asserts that God both can and does evolve with the rest of the universe. His power is limited. But such a view produces an intriguing irony.

### **The Hidden, Humble God of Evolution**

Haught proposes that such a pantheistic God is actually more deeply involved in the world than a deity who controls things by external power. His work is “interior to the process of creation.”<sup>68</sup> But why should we believe such a God inhabits nature? Is there any evidence for this conclusion?

Ironically, the answer is, “no.” Three times in as many pages, Haught asserts that the concept of divine humility better explains the evolutionary data than does traditional theology or materialism.<sup>69</sup> In another work, he argues that “nothing less than a transcendent force, radically distinct from, *but also intimately incarnate in* matter could ultimately explain evolution.”<sup>70</sup> Haught describes this immanent presence as God’s “self-withdrawal,” “self-absenting,” and “self-concealment,” so as to not have any external influence or exercise of “coercive power” over the universe.<sup>71</sup> “God is present in the mode of ‘hiddenness.’”<sup>72</sup> Twice more he asserts that God is present in the form of

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>68</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

<sup>69</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 53-55.

<sup>70</sup>Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 163

<sup>71</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 195, 197, 203.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 195.

“ultimate goodness.”<sup>73</sup> Thus Haught associates the limited power of God, represented by His hiddenness, as being ultimate goodness.

It seems ironic, with Haught’s dedication to modern science, that he claims this hidden God can only be detected by faith. Says Haught, “The world is embraced constantly by God’s presence. But this presence does not show up as an object to be grasped by ordinary awareness or scientific method. It is empirically unavailable, in other words. . . . Only those attuned to religious experience will be aware or appreciative of it.”<sup>74</sup> This is amazing! Haught is appealing to subjective experience for a major pillar of his theology. And he makes the appeal more than once: “The raw ingredients of evolution flow forth from the depths of divine love, a depth that will show up only to those whose personal lives have *already been grasped by a sense of God.*”<sup>75</sup> A few phrases later he reiterates, “The very fact that nature can lend itself to a literalist reading is a consequence of the humble, hidden and vulnerable way in which divine love works. The very possibility of giving an atheistic interpretation of evolution is that God’s creative love humbly *refuses to make itself available at the level of scientific comprehension.*”<sup>76</sup>

Haught claims to base this subjective discovery of God in nature from Tillich’s concept of God as infinite depth. Thus,

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 197, 203.

<sup>74</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 60-61. Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 61.

religion is a state of being grasped by inexhaustible depth that lurks beneath the surface of our lives and of nature too. In religious experience we do not so much grasp this depth as allow the depth to grasp us. Depth takes hold of us in such a powerful way that we can neither deny it nor master it, though of course we may try to flee from it. . . . This depth is a “*self-authenticating* force [which] assumes an almost revelatory character. To those who have been grasped by it, everything else pales in significance, including all previous renditions of reality. . . .

. . . When I use the term ‘God’ in this book I intend, nonetheless, to follow Paul Tillich’s claim that God really means depth. . . . ‘God’ means the inexhaustible depth that perpetually draws us towards itself, the depth without which no enduring joy or satisfaction or peace is possible.<sup>77</sup>

So Haught appeals to the self-authenticating nature of divine depth as proof of God’s immanent presence within nature. On the other hand, he does appeal to one vein of evidence that is discernable to the unbeliever as well: Indian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Platonic beliefs are all based on the concept of a hidden, deeper reality than the visible world, and that Christ espoused a similar concept by declaring that God’s Kingdom is within us.<sup>78</sup> Haught thus argues that the panentheistic hiddenness of God is an expression of divine humility to protect the absolute freedom of the universe. This concept of divine humility is significant, for Haught develops it into a metaphysics for grounding his theology.

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<sup>77</sup>Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 27-29. Emphasis mine.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30. O’Murchu also argues a similar point to Haught, using the evolutionary process as a means of revealing the divine. He concludes, “Consequently, revelation may be defined as the process of unveiling in which both the meaning of the world and the meaning of God become more apparent at the same time.” (88, 90) And again it is awakened and sustained by faith. “The faithfulness of the Originating and Sustaining Mystery awakens faith not only in the human heart, but also in the heart of creation itself. Faith invites faith”(34).

## The Metaphysical Foundation of Divine Humility

Haught argues that “the metaphysics of divine humility . . . explains the actual features of evolution much more intelligibly than either of the main alternatives.”<sup>79</sup> But from where does he get ideas to turn divine humility into a metaphysics? In *God after Darwin* we get several clues all pointing to one conclusion: His metaphysics of divine humility is based in the concept of the *kenosis* of Phil 2. Haught declares:

At the very center of the Christian faith lies a trust that in the passion and crucifixion of Christ we are presented with the mystery of a God who pours divine selfhood into the world in an act of unreserved self-abandonment. The utter lowliness of this image has led some theologians in our century to speak carelessly of God as “powerless.” . . . The image of God’s humility does not imply weakness and powerlessness, but rather, a kind of “defenselessness” or “vulnerability.” . . . The image of the self-emptying God lies at the heart of Christian revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>80</sup>

A later statement asserts, “As I have noted, it is in its encounter with the crucified man Jesus . . . that Christian faith is *given this key to God’s relation to the world*. . . . The Creator’s power (by which I mean the capacity to influence the world) is made manifest paradoxically in the vulnerable defenselessness of a crucified man.”<sup>81</sup> For Haught, the

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<sup>79</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 55.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-49. Haught makes use of the theology of Moltmann to help establish the conclusions quoted above. A key quotation of Moltmann is found in, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 88, quoted in Haught, 49, and reads: “This self-restricting love is the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah. Even in order to create heaven and earth, God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as Creator took . . . the form of a servant.”

<sup>81</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 112, 113. Emphasis mine. See also p. 111: “At the center of Christian faith lies the conviction (John 3:16) that ‘God so loved the world that He gave his only Son’ to redeem and renew that world. *Theologically translated*, this text and many others like it imply that the *very substance of the divine life is poured out into*



*kenosis* of Philippians 2, especially as seen in the crucifixion, is the primary way in which God has related to creation, through eternity. “It is to this image that Christian theology *must always repair* whenever it thinks about God’s relationship to the world and its evolution.”<sup>82</sup> This model is one of defenseless, vulnerable love, not supervisory governance.<sup>83</sup>

Bertocci offers an alternative foundation for this view of love. “Plato long ago realized that it was the very essence of love to be in want. . . . Love is beautiful and wise because it seeks the beauty and wisdom it already enjoys but incompletely; it is good because it is lured by a good which it incompletely possesses.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, in the Platonic sense as well, love is seen as fundamentally empty and in need. This Platonic definition seems to exercise great influence regarding how evolutionary theologians define love. But if love becomes defined in terms of God’s defenseless vulnerability, then love becomes defined in terms of giving total, unregulated freedom to the universe and its creatures by his self-emptying.

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*creation*, and that the world is now and forever open to an infinitely replenishing future.” Emphases mine.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 111. Emphasis mine.

<sup>83</sup>In my opinion, Haught has missed the point of Phil 2 which is the voluntary self-sacrifice of God in Christ to provide the perfect obedience necessary to satisfy human duties to God as the sacrificial substitute for all men. Haught seems instead to turn the *kenosis* into the ultimate expression of the modern mentality of victimhood. Christ as victim arouses our sympathies and gratitude, but the substitutionary atonement dimension is entirely missing in Haught.

<sup>84</sup>Bertocci, 457. Bertocci is synthesizing Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 3, *Lysias, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 183-189. Bertocci seems to summarize Plato with a bit more clarity than is actually found in Plato, but the overall concept of love being rooted in desire for good and beautiful things seems to be the foundational concept Bertocci builds on.

### Love's Power Is Non-Coercive

A key implication of this empty, needy love is that it must be non-coercive.

Haught makes this fundamental connection by stating:

The doctrine of grace proclaims that God loves the world and all of its various elements fully and unconditionally. *By definition*, however, love does not absorb, annihilate, or force itself upon the beloved. Instead it longs for the beloved to become more and more 'other' or differentiated. Along with its nurturing and compassionate attributes, love brings with it a longing for the independence of that which is loved. Without such 'letting be' of its beloved, the dialogical intimacy essential to a loving relationship would be impossible. . . .

. . . Divine love does not compel, but invites. To compel, after all would be contrary to the very nature of love.<sup>85</sup>

Kenneth Miller argues in a similar fashion that the divine love is not a controlling power in the universe. "The Western God stands back from his creation, not to absent Himself, not to abandon His creatures, *but to allow His people true freedom*. A God who hovers, in all His visible power and majesty, over every step taken by mere mortals never *allows them the independence that true love, true goodness, and true obedience requires.*"<sup>86</sup> Miller reiterates the argument a little later, declaring: "A world without meaning would be one in which a Deity pulled the string of every human puppet, and every material particle as well. . . . By being always in control, the Creator would deny

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<sup>85</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 39-41. Emphasis mine. Haught repeats these types of arguments on pp. 112-114.

<sup>86</sup>Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 253. Emphases mine. Earlier Miller has argued that "our first step would be to assume that an all-powerful Deity decided to make creatures and to endow them with free will and the ability to make moral choices." How? "The genius of the creator's plan was that by creating a separate world, a world that ran by its own rules, *He would give His creatures the 'space' they would need to become independent, to make true moral choices*" (emphasis mine). See pp. 249-250.

His creatures any real opportunity to know and worship Him. *Authentic love requires freedom, not manipulation.* Such freedom is best supplied by the open contingency of evolution, and not by strings of divine direction attached to every living creature.”<sup>87</sup>

Haught uses emotive and almost pejorative language to describe the traditional view of God in contrast to his humble, vulnerable God.

The God of Jesus is utterly unlike . . . our traditional images of God understood as divine potentate or ‘designer.’ Theology is offended by evolution *only when it assumes a rather imperious concept of divine omnipotence.* . . .

Evolutionary science, however, demands that we give up one and for all the *tyrannical* images we may have sometimes projected onto God. The real stumbling block to reconciling faith and evolution, therefore, is not the sufferings in nature and human history, but our failure to have acquainted ourselves sufficiently with the startling image of a God who seeks the world’s freedom and who shares in the world’s pain.<sup>88</sup>

In another work, Haught declares, “Only a *narrowly coercive* deity would have collapsed . . . creation . . . into the *dreary confines* of a single originating instant.” He further describes such a process as “*freezing* nature into a state of finished perfection.”<sup>89</sup> He calls such a sovereign God “our divine magician.”<sup>90</sup> By contrast, evolution invites us to “recapture the often obscured portrait of a self-humbling, suffering God *who is anything but a divine controller or designer of the cosmos.*”<sup>91</sup> The evolutionary God “refrains from wielding the domineering power that both skeptics and believers often project onto

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 289. Emphasis mine.

<sup>88</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 127. Emphasis mine.

<sup>89</sup>Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 80. Emphasis mine.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 81.

their ideal of the absolute.” Yet God is not “a weak or powerless God incapable of redeeming this flawed universe, but one whose salvific and creative effectiveness is all the more prevailing because it is rooted in a divine humility.”<sup>92</sup>

Kosmeyer makes similar arguments to Haught. “Absolute power is not a trait consistent with a God who *is* love; shared power is. . . . In our neoclassical model, God’s power is solely persuasive. God persuades creatures into being.”<sup>93</sup> Kosmeyer ties this view of God to the worship issue. “A God who is love is worthy of worship; a God who is omnipotent, whose power is coercive, is not.”<sup>94</sup>

Haught welds the concept of non-coercive power to the effectiveness of divine influence. “God’s compassionate self-restraint allows for the world’s self-creation and permits God to be much more deeply *related* to the world than a divine dictatorship would be. God’s power may be said to be *relational* rather than unilateral. Relational power is more vulnerable but *ultimately more influential than unilateral power* since it allows for more autonomy, integrity and richness in the world to which God is intimately

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>93</sup>Kosmeyer, 96. Emphasis in original. In arguing for a power-sharing God, Kosmeyer sounds not unlike Mill. Mill argues that the problem of evil makes us worship a contradictory god, for “the ways of this Deity in Nature are on many occasions totally at variance with the precepts, as he believes, of the same Deity in the Gospel.” The only non-contradictory view of Deity for Mill is one which posits two competing principles or powers, one good and one evil. But this seems, for Mill, to diminish the good god’s power, for, “a virtuous human assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-laborer with the Highest, a fellow combatant in the great strife; contributing his little, which by the aggregation of many like himself becomes much, towards that progressive ascendancy, and ultimately complete triumph of good over evil, . . . as planned by the Being to whom we owe all the benevolent contrivance we behold in nature.” Mill, 113, 116-117.

<sup>94</sup>Kosmeyer, 94.

related.”<sup>95</sup> Thus Haught asserts that, “in the final analysis, persuasive power is more influential, more ‘powerful’, than coercion.”<sup>96</sup> In a different text, Haught expands the argument, declaring: “Process theology responds that if power means ‘the capacity to influence’ then a persuasive God is *much more powerful* than a hypothetical being who magically forces things to correspond immediately to the divine intentions. A coercive deity—one that an *immature religiosity* often wishes for . . . would not allow for the otherness, autonomy, and self-coherence necessary for the world to be a world unto itself.”<sup>97</sup> Haught also ties the concept of a loving, non-coercive deity to a rejection of external influence in a way that essentially demands a wholly immanent view of God. “How effective, after all, is coercive power, even in the human sphere? At best it can manipulate things or persons only externally. *It can never influence from within*, but only superficially from without. In the presence of a vulnerable, defenseless love, however, the world is allowed to experience its *own internal power*—a power of self-creativity that eventually takes the form of human freedom. God’s power is manifested most fully in God’s self-emptying empowerment of the creation.”<sup>98</sup> Haught is looking for the best way

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<sup>95</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 139. Final emphasis mine; all others are original.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>97</sup>Haught, *God after Darwin*, 41. Emphasis mine. See also, Haught, *101 Questions*, where we find question 97: “Isn’t Whitehead’s notion of persuasive power a gratuitous diminishment of God’s omnipotence?” He answers, “Process theology would answer that it is not. For if ‘power’ means ‘the capacity to influence,’ persuasive power has a much deeper impact on the world, at least in the final analysis, than would any hypothetically coercive exercise of force. . . . A world created by divine compulsion would be nothing more than an appendage of God’s own being rather than world unto itself” (138).

<sup>98</sup>Haught, *101 Questions*, 115. Emphasis mine.

that God can exercise non-coercive, freedom-giving power to nature and to man. Thus, for Haught, to avoid external coercion and demonstrate his humility, God must become fully immanent in relation to nature.<sup>99</sup> The God of evolution is, fundamentally, panentheistic and cannot prescribe, rule, or govern. At best God is reduced to the tools of public relations. How then could such a God prescribe absolute, authoritative, unchanging moral standards for us?

### **Rachels's Unfinished Work**

I believe the evolutionary theologians have demonstrated that Rachels is fundamentally correct in his analysis of the relationship between Darwinism and theism. The data from the evolutionary theologians, have repeatedly validated Rachels's position. They have clearly and definitively rejected teleology and thus have emasculated God from being able to actively govern the universe. Any kind of moral prescription will thus be interpreted as coercive and unloving.

Furthermore, it removes the special creation of mankind thus undermining and emasculating the concept of being the image of God. How can man have a special role assigned to him if there is no design? The very doctrine of man being the image of God

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<sup>99</sup>C. S. Lewis offers an important critique of such an overselling of divine love: "It is for people that we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. If God is love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness." Lewis ascribes the emphasis on a non-intervening view of divine love to the desire to have "a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence," who merely wishes that "a good time was had by all." C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), 40-41.

demands design and purpose, which we are told is too coercive to be perpetrated by a loving God. Biblical eschatology was clearly labeled anthropocentric – with obvious negative connotations. Evolutionary theology thus diminishes the moral significance of man just as Rachels predicted. We can see indeed that a deity compatible with the principles of Darwinism is clearly incompatible with traditional Christian morality and ethics. Rachels was fundamentally right. Evolution undermines traditional ethics and especially the doctrine of human dignity.

But Rachels, it seems, could have extended his efforts to undermine Christianity and its moral veracity. While mentioning the doctrines of creation, divine revelation (including the moral law), the plan of salvation, and the eschatological end of the world, he focuses only on creation, and its corresponding need for a teleological world-view. In the other three areas he is strangely silent, not developing any of those issues to any degree of significance. I propose Rachels could easily have gone further than he did.

### **Extending Rachels's Attack**

Rachels alluded to the ten commandments as part of the biblical picture of God's regard for man. But if Darwinism is accepted as factual, then the lack of teleology means there can be no divine design for morality, just as there was none for creation. Why would God avoid design in creation only to have design in morals? The designless theism that Rachels rightly demands of Darwinism would have to eliminate the ten commandments, and all other direct moral guidance by God as shown in the Bible. In

such a scenario sin is eliminated since there can be no divine law or design to violate.<sup>100</sup>

Thus Darwinism clearly undermines the foundations of biblical morality and theism. To put it another way, how can an evolving God prescribe absolute ethical standards?

Morals and ethics would have to evolve with God, man, and the universe. There can be no absolute standards of right and wrong, hence the ten commandments are undermined by multiple means.

Eliminating prescribed morality means you eliminate sin. The elimination of the ability to sin (because there is no divine design such as the 10 commandments) means one would eliminate the need of salvation from sin and its penalty. There would be no need for an incarnation and sacrificial death by Christ, for the biblical description of the incarnation is that of a designed, planned, unnatural act incompatible with Darwinism or a deistic god who uses no design. Removing teleology thus undermines yet another pillar of Christian faith which points to human dignity and preference.

Additionally, if there is no divine design, how can such a theism have any meaningful eschatology? If suffering and death are tools of evolutionary progress, then death and suffering are natural. Death is no longer an enemy as the Scriptures declare (for example, 1 Cor 15:26). If Darwin is right, then why should we hope for the world to come in which death and suffering will be no more (Rev 21-22)? Man's importance in the plan of salvation and divine future is replaced by an uncertain future of natural

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<sup>100</sup>Rom 4:15; 5:13; 7:7. Paul here argues that sin is not reckoned where there is no law and that he would not know what sin is except for the law.



selection, personal insignificance and death. There can be no special destiny since there is no divine design which calls for it.

Furthermore, the destruction of eschatology destroys human accountability to God, a crucial element of morality for it is impossible to have accountability without design. If there is no design, how can there be a judgement?<sup>101</sup> I would propose that without accountability one can not have a genuine morality. If the moral capacity in humans evolved through traits of altruism, as Rachels and others have suggested, then morality merely becomes being helpful to others. But morality is bigger than mere unselfishness. It involves justice and injustice. Thus morality is bigger than the evolutionists tend to depict it. Why argue over moral obligations if there is no accountability? This question begs a question Rachels never addresses: Why be moral?<sup>102</sup> What difference does it make whether one is moral or immoral if there is no accountability to a being with universal moral authority?

Rachels seeks to answer the accountability question by declaring his adherence to the Kantian doctrine that moral precepts are self-imposed upon by the morally and

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<sup>101</sup>For Seventh-day Adventist theology this is especially devastating due to the great emphasis on the “investigative judgment.” Such a judgment is incompatible with Darwinism or deism, leaving man with no real accountability to God. Deism and Darwinism cannot sustain such a doctrine.

<sup>102</sup>While Rachels does not address the question, “Why be moral?” Peter Singer does. Helga Kuhse reports that he wrote his MA thesis on this question, and Singer devotes the final chapter of *Practical Ethics*, “Why Act Morally?” to the issue as well. See Helga Kuhse, “Introduction: The Practical Ethics of Peter Singer,” in *Unsanctifying Human Life: Essays on Ethics: Peter Singer*, ed. Helga Kuhse (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 9; Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 314-79. In a simplistic nutshell, Singer argues we should be moral because it gives our lives meaning and direction in a meaningless world, and brings greater personal happiness than purely self-centered living.

rationally autonomous agent. The penalty for violating these self-imposed moral precepts is, “in Kant’s words, ‘self-contempt and inner abhorrence.’”<sup>103</sup> But there are plenty of people who have no sense of any duty, let alone self-imposed duty, and who feel no “self-contempt,” regardless of their actions. Thus Rachels seems to assert that there is no external accountability in morality. But on what grounds can one argue with the “immoral” person to convince them of their immorality? Rachels offers a corresponding doctrine of treating people as they deserve to be treated. But who decides this issue? If individuals decides just deserts, ethics will degenerate to egoism and vigilanteism. The alternative for Rachels is to argue for a type of contractual morality as a means of protecting one’s own interests. Such an egoistic approach is hardly compatible with Christian morality and ethics, which is based on unselfishness in the kenotic model of Christ, instead of the egocentricism inherent in Darwinism. This contrast of kenotic and egocentric characteristics brings us to the more foundational issue in examining the implications of Darwin for theology and morality: Metaphysical worldviews.

### **A Battle Between Worldviews**

The acceptance or rejection of teleology ultimately a matter worldviews. The problem is that in trying to mix theology with Darwinism, two contradictory worldviews are being melded together in a union that cannot last. One will eventually prevail over the other. Hence, Benjamin Wiker asserts that “it was the materialist prohibition of miracles that provided the strongest acid in dissolving biblical authority, and thereby

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<sup>103</sup>James Rachels, “God and Moral Autonomy,” in *Can Ethics Provide Answers? And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 118.

helped prepare the West for the reception of evolutionary theory as a substitute faith.”<sup>104</sup>

Wiker here makes explicit what Rachels asserted more implicitly: That Darwinism has a metaphysical dimension hidden within the theory. Wiker unabashedly declares that

“Darwinism in its most fundamental sense is not merely biological, but truly cosmological in scope.”<sup>105</sup> Cornelius Hunter concurs, charging evolution with masking its metaphysical tendencies. “Darwin’s great contribution to this tradition [of distancing God from creation to avoid natural evil] was the scientific flavor he gave to the solution, to the point that most readers lost sight of the embedded metaphysical presuppositions.”

These metaphysical presuppositions, according to Wiker, are subject to he calls “the great law of uniformity.”

According to the great law of uniformity, “every distinct view of the universe, every theory about nature, necessarily entails a view of morality; every distinct view of morality, every theory about human nature, necessarily entails a cosmology to support it.”<sup>106</sup> This means that “materialist-defined science must necessarily lead to materialist-defined morality.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, “Epicurus designed a view of nature to fit his desired way of life, a cosmology to support his morality. Modernity began by embracing his cosmology and ends by embracing his morality.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 239-240.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid. Also, “A materialist cosmos must necessarily yield a materialist morality, and therefore Darwinism must yield moral Darwinism” (27).

<sup>107</sup>  
Ibid., 23.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

Because of the great law of uniformity, Wiker further argues that acceptance of Gould's concept of non-overlapping magisteria (science and religion—i.e., materialism and theism) “is bound to fail,” and also that it “is doomed to failure.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, “as a house divided against itself cannot stand, so also our society [or our church], defined by two ancient and antagonistic accounts of nature and human nature, cannot withstand this fundamental disagreement for long.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, we cannot serve two metaphysical masters without one eventually prevailing over the other. Wiker expresses this truth in saying:

Indeed, no greater and more effective alliance has existed for the eradication of Christianity, both doctrinally and morally, than that between liberal Christianity and materialists.

But there are other Christians, those who have made peace with Darwinism, but who resist the encroachments of moral Darwinism—not realizing, in conformity to the great law of uniformity, that acceptance of one must bring acceptance of the other. You cannot accept the theoretical foundations of Darwinism and reject the moral conclusions.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 301. It should be noted that for Wiker, Christianity seems very much tied to Aquinas and Aristotle. This is especially evident on pp. 103-104 where he speaks with great approval of Aquinas's integration of Christianity with Aristotle, followed by allegations that “radical Augustinianism,” which appears to be his euphemism for the Protestant Reformation, as a major aid in reviving Epicureanism. Thus he appears to charge Protestantism with undermining true Christianity without directly saying so. Wiker seems to have created a type of Great Controversy motif, but instead of being framed in terms of Christ versus Satan, it appears to be structure in terms of Aristotle (through Aquinas) versus Epicurus. For the Protestant who claims the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, this is a problematic point for it bypasses the supremacy of scriptural authority, while implicating the Reformation as aiding that which is destructive to Christianity. Wiker's argument that cosmology is the grounding issue is significant and correct. This is why the Bible starts with a cosmology in Gen 1, and why the *Sola Scriptura* Christian should reframe Wiker's motif into Scripture versus Epicurus.

Hence, Darwin's rejection of design has fundamental implications for shaping one's metaphysical worldview, and this worldview is fundamentally incompatible with the biblically based worldview upon which Adventist theology morality has been built. To change worldviews by accepting the Darwinian rejection of design would, therefore, have serious—or more likely catastrophic—implications for our understanding and practice of theology and morality.

### **Conclusion**

We have explored a small portion of how Darwinism impacts traditional Christian morality. There is much more we could have investigated, had the scope of this project permitted. Nevertheless, what we have seen strongly suggests that if biblical authority is diminished and core elements of one's belief system are replaced by Darwinism (or any other form of philosophical materialism), then that person runs a high risk of undermining the very system of morality we wish to uphold. One cannot change their doctrine of Creation without serious consequences looming for biblical morality. Rachels is fundamentally right in his claims about how Darwinism impacts traditional morality.

The scope of this paper has not permitted us to explore all of Rachels's proposed areas of incompatibility of Darwinian evolution for traditional ethics, nor can it cover the Rachels's replacement of human-preference ethics. These areas further bolster his claims that Darwin's theory provides good reasons to consider the pillars of traditional ethics to be toppled, and are more thoroughly addressed in my doctoral dissertation.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Stephen Bauer, "Moral Implications of Darwinian Evolution for Human Preference Based in Christian Ethics: A Critical Analysis and Response to the 'Moral Individualism' of James Rachels." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2006).

In addition, there is fruitful potential to explore Haught's panentheism and its implications for Seventh-day Adventist theology and spirituality in the light of the fact of our past history with pantheism in the late nineteenth century. Can the Seventh-day Adventist Church withstand an infusion of Darwinian metaphysics without a fundamental restructuring of our metaphysical foundations for theology and morality? The great law of uniformity suggests we cannot escape such a metaphysical overhaul unscathed. The resulting changes have the potential to tear down key pillars of our faith such as the atonement, the judgment, eschatology, and morality, but we cannot here pursue all these issues in further detail. There is more work to be done in detailing and developing the implications of worldviews for Adventist theology and morality.

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