

Darwin and Evolution: Interfaith Perspectives

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Chapter Five Why Would God Use Evolution?

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Is this a fair question?

The scientific view of the natural world is allegedly quite different from what you would expect if the universe is freely created and sustained in existence for some pur-

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1. This paper comes from lecturing over the last eight years in 'God and the Natural Sciences', a second and third year subject in the History and Philosophy of Science programme at the University of Melbourne. An average enrolment is over one hundred students, with believers and unbelievers in roughly equal numbers forming 40%, and agnostics 20%, of the total respectively.

pose by a God who is wholly good, all powerful, and all knowing. This is because, firstly, the universe operates according to blind causal processes, with increasing entropy, all headed for the big freeze. There is an inference from blind, to purposeless, to Godless. Secondly, for many people evolution involves so much suffering and death that it seems to be obviously not good and so could not be part of a universe created by a wholly good God. Their point is that you would expect a wholly good, all powerful and all knowing God to create a different kind of universe. Surely such a God would create a world with all the positive values of evolution but without the suffering, pain and death involved.

Both challenges presuppose an argument from this idea of God to the kind of world such a God would create so as to be able to say that the actual world is very different. But no such argument is presented either in support of these challenges, nor, as far as I can see, is it presented in any rebuttals.

One way all these matters might be clarified is if there was an argument as to the kind of world such a God would create and this argument offered a good answer to my question: 'why would God create and sustain the universe in existence for some purpose *and* within the universe use evolution by natural selection to bring life into existence?'²

2. This question and its answer is relevant to C Southgate's postulate that God had no other way to bring life into existence but by Darwinian evolution. Southgate is explicit about having no argument for this postulate. See C Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and The Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

From the phrasing of this question it should be understood that I accept Darwinian evolution as the best scientific account of the evolution of life on planet earth. It should also be understood that I want to keep in the foreground of this discussion the idea of the all powerful, all knowing, wholly good God who creates the world for some purpose. I accept this idea of God from the standpoint of a Christian, who hears the good news of the triune God, as the narrative of a vulnerable God who proves invincible.³ This good news is what frames my life and thinking, and I will selectively draw on but not elaborate this framework in what follows.

Given that I accept evolution as the best scientific account of how life came into existence and that I believe in God as the creator of the universe I think my question is inevitable and therefore a fair question. Not everyone will agree. Here are some concerns from the side of theology.

Asking why God uses natural selection to bring life into existence seems to constrain divine freedom, or to call God to account, or provide a defence of God. Theology may judge this to be an unfair question for God's freedom is not to be constrained; it is God who calls to account rather than being called to account; God is under no obligation⁴ to explain anything, and no defence of God is needed or possible.⁵ I accept all of these theological considerations though I will not use them to silence

3. See WC Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

4. See M McCord Adams (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

5. A point made by Barney Schwartz, Religion Editor for *The Age*, in a public debate at the University of Melbourne, 2009.

questions, and certainly not my question. For questions indicate a quest and the quest *may* be faith seeking understanding. On the other hand, we all know that silencing questions *may* be an ungodly exercise of power.

Take, for example, the confrontation in Job 38-41, where God speaks to Job from the whirlwind: 'Who are you O mortal to question the ways of God?'. No calling of God to account, or so it seems. Yet for most of the book Job asks his questions, considers he is able to reason with God, and refuses to be silenced by his 'friends'. In the end Job is vindicated by God against his friends. But there is more. Faith cannot allow this reference to Job to be used in God's name to constrain the questions people ask God. As presented in the book, God does not answer Job truthfully but rather piles up question after question, each of which has only one well-known answer, and which Job has nowhere denied. In the light of Christ can this be an adequate representation of God? A truthful answer would be for God to tell Job about the wager with Satan that Job's fidelity to God was not conditional upon his being blessed and so Satan was allowed to test Job with all this suffering. Would this not be a place where the truth would set Job free? A godly and engaging speculation is to consider what Job's response might have been. I am not denying that God has the last word. Indeed, as a Christian, I delight that God's 'last word' has already started to arrive in Christ, the definitive anticipation of the final coming of the reign of God in glory. It is the nature of this 'last word' that concerns me. On this matter I do not let the ending of Job have the last word.

A different sort of objection is that if this is a fair question it promotes seeking a fair answer, and any 'fair' answer suggests we can do science from theology. But that cannot be right, for theology and science are very different. Therefore there must be something wrong with the question. On the other hand, I will argue that this 'suggestion' is quite mistaken about the relationship between theology and science.

Is there a fair answer?

To help address this question I draw on the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, from the thirteenth century. Many people have gone this path before me and among Anglican theologians I especially acknowledge Austin Farrer.

Why go back to the thirteenth century? Firstly, because there can be no question of us constructing our theology *ad hoc* to fit the findings of our scientific cosmology, especially the central points of our understanding of God; and secondly, because of the value Aquinas' theology has for our question.

In particular I want to explore Aquinas' discussion of two questions in his *Summa Theologiae*: *whether all things are governed by God immediately?*⁶ and, *whether God is active in every agent cause?*⁷

These are pertinent questions for considering the kind

6. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter ST], Volume 14, *Divine Government*, translated by TC O'Brien (Spottiswoode, Great Britain: Blackfriars, 1975), Question 1a, 103, Article 6, 25-27.

7. Aquinas, ST, Question 1a, 105, Article 5, 75-79.

of world God would create. There were competing teachings on these questions from Christian, Jewish and Muslim philosophers.⁸ One view was that the causal powers we think we see at work in the world, like the warmth of the sun's light melting snow, are just mere appearances. In reality it is God in the sun's rays that is the power at work bringing about the effects we observe. Aquinas has a different view, namely that God is the primary cause, creating from nothing and sustaining in existence the secondary causes we see operating in the world. Thomas' view of 'secondary causes' is often mentioned in the 'science and theology' scene but what I feel is not sufficiently stressed is the strictly *theological* reasoning that drives Thomas' argument.

According to Aquinas, God is the very essence of goodness, that than which none greater can be conceived. Therefore we should allow this superlative to serve as a criterion informing our thinking and speaking of God.

Therefore we should prefer to say that God creates things, with real causal powers, rather than with no real powers. This is because it is a greater exercise of power, which creates things that are not only good in themselves but the cause of good in others.

Aquinas also argues that if creatures did not exercise any power they would appear have a pointless existence, with the concomitant implication of a lack of power in

8. GB Deason, 'Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature', in *God and Nature, Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, edited by DC Lindberg and RL Numbers (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986), 167-91.

their creator to create things without their own powers; we should not attribute such lack to God. God acting as the first cause to bring things into existence with their own real causal powers, in no way makes the activity of the secondary causes superfluous—at least not for this kind of God.

For Aquinas, God creates things in such a way that things have the dignity of also being causes, rather than, I would add, the indignity of also not being causes. On similar reasoning we should say that God maximises these features of creation, rather than minimises them.⁹ We should therefore prefer to say that this God creates a life-producing universe, which is better than only producing an inert universe, or a merely mechanically interactive universe. Therefore we should expect that things make other things and overall creation makes itself as much as possible as a life-producing universe. Of course this is easily extended to a life-producing universe that produces intelligent life, whether that life is like us or otherwise.

A student wanted to know on what basis I claimed such a life-producing universe was 'better'. There was a suspicion that I was projecting my own values onto God. It is a 'better' type of creation because compared to other possible types of creating just mentioned, creatures so created are more like the living God who brings into being

9. This provokes the question of whether any harm done along the way undermines the good produced by this way of creating. The question is addressed below.

that which does not exist, who is therefore not only good in God's self but the cause of good in others.

This understanding of God claims to express at least one thing that is of *value* to God as creator: creatures as co-creators. And that value is distinguishable from whatever God's purpose may be in creation, for we have reached these conclusions by only *mentioning* that God has a purpose in creating but not *using* any idea of what is that purpose.

I am attempting to indicate the kind of universe we might expect such a God to create. So far it is a universe where created things have their own God-given powers; it is a life-producing universe that produces intelligent life as an integral part of the living things produced. There is more to say about the kind of universe we might expect such a God to create. For example, there is the obvious need for order sufficient for living things to live and be sustained by the universe that produces them. A disordered universe could not instantiate the value of creatures as co-creators. So we should expect a lawful universe, though at this stage we cannot say what its laws would be. Will they be 'blind' natural laws? Yes, because the argument makes no use of 'divine purpose'. Therefore any intelligent life produced by this universe would be unable to observe a purpose or goal imminent in the operation of this universe, including all the life-producing processes.

Now let us suppose that God wants to create such a universe. How would God do this? Here are two possible ways.

In one way God says, 'Let there be X!', where X is just such a life-producing universe, with living things, includ-

ing intelligent life, specially created, as Genesis 1 is commonly interpreted by, say, William Paley.

Imagine the same world, which God creates by a different means. That is, by saying 'Let there be Y', where Y is a universe of different kinds of basic things all with their own specific, limited powers operating lawfully, so that the universe by its own powers produces many more kinds of things including living things, including intelligent life, namely, a life-producing universe with the kind of sufficient order discussed above. Given Aquinas' argument, we should prefer to say that God creates a life-producing universe, according to the second approach.

This view happily parallels Augustine's and Aquinas' reading of Genesis 1.1-2.4, according to which the earth receives causal powers to produce plants in due course. Aubrey Moore¹⁰ uses this theological tradition to argue against the doctrine of 'special creation' as a recent innovation from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to which theology is not bound (*Paradise Lost* was much loved by Darwin, who took it with him on the Beagle.)

This view of the kind of universe we should expect this God to create also explains why God is not always intervening into the universe as a causal power like the God-given powers of created things. This does not mean God is absent from the universe since the creator's upholding of everything in existence is an utterly intimate relationship with every created thing, nor does it necessarily exclude any kind of special action by God.

10. See the discussion by Aubrey Moore, *Science and the Faith: Essays on Apologetic Subjects* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1889), 171-81.

Of course, what we want to know is what a life-producing universe would look like in actuality. For theological reasons this is not something theology can answer. Theology says God creates freely.¹¹ Therefore pure thought alone will not be able to deduce what the contingent, God-given, particular processes of this life-producing universe might actually look like. To see this one has to go and investigate the particular processes with one's senses. But because God is not only free but rational, with the widest sense of rationality, including what I call 'unruly reason', the universe embodies rational order and so inquiry into the universe must be both intelligent and sensory. This goes some way to characterising sensory or empirical inquiry which would take different forms depending on the forms of rationality involved and the way what there is, is manifest to our senses.

One form of empirical inquiry was pursued by Darwin in the five years on the HMS Beagle, bringing to light a vast number and variety of observations, and specimens in some of the most challenging environments in the world. Thank you Charles Darwin, naturalist *extraordinaire*! Subsequently, through exchanges with many people Darwin gathered a still wider body of data. With this

11. Peter Harrison has questioned this view an historically important part of the rise of experimental philosophy. However I am here proposing it as a theologically relevant consideration. It assumes a rationalist and voluntarist account of God creating the universe, though not the extreme voluntarism that proposes God could have ordered creation in any way God chose, or continue to do so from moment to moment; see P Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

collection of data and with a lot of hard thinking Darwin eventually proposed his theory of evolution, subsequently developed in many ways. This theory tells us that we live in a life-producing universe, where life, including intelligent life, is produced by the lawful operation of blind causal processes, able to be studied not only by biology, but also by chemistry, physics and cosmology.

This helps us towards understanding why God would create a world in which life is brought into existence by something like Darwinian evolution. It expresses the value to God of creating in this way—namely, it is a better type of creation, in which as much as possible, creatures are co-creators. This type of creation is not determined by the purpose God has in mind for the created universe for we have made no use of any idea of divine purpose to reach these conclusions. This is a theologically grounded view, which for theological reasons waits upon the natural sciences to tell us what a life-producing universe looks like in fact, and this without prejudice to what poets and artists might also show us with their different sensitivity to the universe and awareness of different intelligibilities. An example of such sensitivity is Gerard Manly Hopkins, poet *extraordinaire*.¹²

This argument undermines the inference from 'blind' to 'Godless' with respect to the blind natural processes of the universe. Here we see that God deploys these processes as the way God maximises the value of creatures as co-creators in a life-producing universe and this because

12. See the discussion of Hopkins by Southgate, *The Grooming of Creation*.

God is wholly good. There was always something wrong with the simple inference from 'blind' to 'Godless' because, of course, we are surrounded by technology operating according to 'blind' processes, which have been deployed by human agents for a reason. In this case we are concerned with whether God has a reason for deploying blind causal processes. Here the 'reason' is not a purpose but a value—creatures as co-creators.

At least four more issues need attention, one of which will be addressed very briefly. Firstly, does the discussion so far entail the idea that God creates the best of all possible worlds? Happily it does not. Secondly, just what impact does the introduction of the idea of divine purpose in creation have on what kind of universe we should expect God to have created? Thirdly, the universe is increasing in entropy, heading for the big freeze, a 'dead end' universe; this does not accord with the idea of God creating the universe with some purpose. Fourthly, would a truly good God really be so excessive, so 'reckless' as to maximise the value of creatures as co-creators? This leads to the so-called problem of 'natural evil', since this maximising of the value of creatures as co-creators is what enables us to identify evolution by natural selection as the way in which this value is realised in this universe.

The purpose of God in creating a life-producing universe

The idea of God's purpose will introduce three new notes: firstly, the creation of persons; secondly, the revelation of God; and thirdly, the deeper ordering of the created uni-

verse. The first step is to consider what we can say about God's purpose in creation.

According to the theological frame of the good news mentioned earlier, the purpose of God is accomplished in the final coming of the reign of God, prepared from the foundation of the world. It is the goal of the divine economy for the whole creation to bring all things in heaven and earth into a unity in Christ, whereby God will be all in all.¹³ The whole creation is groaning as in childbirth waiting for the resurrection of the children of God¹⁴ so that it too might be set free from the bondage of decay to which it was subjected in hope.

Bearing this in mind I want explore the idea of divine purpose for the whole creation informed by Aquinas' dis-

13. I stand in the tradition that takes the incarnation as the inner meaning of creation rather than as a consequence of the fall. I have barely made use of this aspect of the theological frame in which I am working. A history of this theological tradition in the church has been given by BF Westcott, in 'The Gospel of Creation', *The Epistles of St John* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 273–315. I was first introduced to this idea by the Rev Dr Barry Marshall when I arrived as an Anglican ordinand at Trinity College in Melbourne in 1962. I had little idea of what it meant except that the idea evoked in me a sense of standing on the edge of a large, but strange space I had never known before. Drawing on Rahner, Denis Edwards has recently deployed this incarnational theme to speak about the one divine action in Christ from creation to consummation. See D Edwards, 'Resurrection and the Costs of Evolution: A Dialogue with Rahner on Noninterventionist Theology', in *From Resurrection to Return: Perspectives from Theology and Science on Christian Eschatology*, edited by J Haire, C Ledger and S Pickard (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007), 120.

cussion of God's governing the universe in which created things having their God-given power.

Aquinas tells us that governing is for the sake of the governed, to bring them to their perfection. That form of government is better which communicates a higher perfection. I take it that a higher purpose in government aims at a higher perfection. So we are asked to think that God's government of creation is for the sake of creation, to bring created things to their perfection. Since a higher purpose brings a higher perfection, what might that higher purpose and perfection be?

A wholly good God is an all-loving God whom we should say would seek to bring all things into a loving, just relationship with this God. No greater perfection is possible for created things that did not include this. So we should prefer to ascribe this purpose to God rather than any lesser purpose.

So far this view of the divine purpose in creation entirely accords with scripture. Again, this form of theological reasoning makes no claim to know what is the 'best' purpose God would have in creating this universe.

But not all created things necessarily have the power to enter into such a relationship. For this reason a created universe must also produce not only intelligent life, but intelligent life in a form I will call 'persons', who thereby have the capacity to enter into such a relationship with this God, both on its own behalf and as representing and leading all other things. For this reason also, this personal form of intelligent life is an integral part of this universe, embedded and embodied in this universe. This understanding of 'person' is determined by whatever is needed

to enter into a loving and just relationship with God. What that might be calls for further reflection in the light of the revelation of God.¹⁴ It will also require us to think about the fundamental ontology of the world, so that eventually embodied persons could evolve.¹⁵

14. This introduction of 'persons' brutally condenses many important issues directed to different fronts. Most importantly I am drawing on the views of J Zizioulas and C Gunton that the idea of being as being in communion or persons as persons in relation, is to be traced back to the transformation of the Greek understanding of being by the Cappadocian Fathers in their Trinitarian theology. Gunton emphasises the idea that this is a reversal of Feuerbach's maxim: theology is anthropology. This is a very different account of person compared to the mainstream modern western view from Descartes, including the materialist account when the 'ghost' has left the machine. See JD Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, edited by P McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006); and C Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), Chapter 5.

15. See W Hasker, 'On Behalf of Emergent Dualism', in *In Search of Soul: Four Views of the Mind Body Problem*, edited by JB Green and SL Palmer (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 82. Hasker proposes an emergent dualism, whereas at this stage I prefer the idea of an 'articulated unity'. I can also happily borrow from Karl Rahner to express my orientation to a 'richer ontology': '[I]f everything exists only by having its origins in God, then this means not only that all things in their variety proceed from one cause which, because it is infinite and all-powerful, can create the most varied things. It also means that this variety manifests an inner similarity and commonality, and that this variety or differentiation forms a unity in its origin, its self realisation and its determination—that is, it forms a single world . . . a human person is not a contradictory or merely provisional composite of spirit and matter, but is a unity that is both logically and really antecedent to the differentiation and distinction of its proper elements' (K Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 181–82).

For such personal embodied life to enter such a relationship presupposes, we must assume, that God makes God known to these creatures in ways appropriate to such a personal relationship; that these creatures are capable of knowing God in ways appropriate to such a relationship; that these creatures do so freely and therefore that they may accept or refuse such a relationship. We should expect that the universe created by God would be such as to allow God to personally reveal God to intelligent life, inviting them to enter into a loving relationship with God, however that may take place. What cannot be anticipated from the idea of a wholly good God is that God would be revealed as the triune God or that the Son of God would become incarnate. This is the importance of drawing the regulatory sentence concerning God in the foreground of the discussion from the framework of the good news of God revealed in Christ.

We now can appreciate that the kind of world God creates would somewhere include the divine initiative to freely reveal God for the purpose of inviting intelligent life, representing and leading everything else, into a loving and just relationship with God. But this personal revelation with its invitation is at the same time a revelation of God's purpose in creation. The created order must serve this purpose but is not encumbered with the requirement of disclosing this purpose. It has the privilege of making manifest the working out of the value to God of creatures as co-creators. This is another insight into the congruence of revelation and reason.

Such a universe must be ordered in particular ways. It must be ordered in a way that serves God's purpose,

which is for the creation to enter into a loving and just relationship with God. The universe in all its parts, including embodied persons, must in some sense be ordered to this end so that this end is ultimately not alien to the created universe, nor any part of it, when and by whatever means God brings this purpose to fulfillment. The previous discussion of the lawful ordering of the universe in ways that realise the value of creatures as co-creators remains. Though this lawful order is not now fundamental it too must serve this ultimate purpose by helping bring forth embodied persons and by making God known.

How the latter takes place is a theme for another time.

What shall we say about this fundamental order of the universe? A scriptural answer would refer to the divine economy for the whole creation lately revealed in Christ. All things are created in the Word and in the Word is that life which lightens every human being. This created order, that is 'flesh', is such that it is possible for the Word to become flesh and dwell among us. If so then the creation is ontologically ordered to there being two natures, human and divine, in the one person of the Word (I am here assuming a classical Christology). I take this to be the theological basis for the ontology of the created order including human beings who are persons, in the image and likeness of the person of the Word, to exercise 'dominium'. Ontologically the created order as such is not alien to the Word and perhaps even more importantly the Word become flesh is, ontologically, not alien to us—notwithstanding the dreadful dissonances and resonances between the incarnate Word and the way human beings live.

This fundamental order must allow intelligent life to have the freedom to align with or go against God's purpose. The ordering of the universe must allow this personal form of intelligent life to freely, purposefully and intelligently establish their lives in their own terms, even against the purpose of God. This means that the divine purpose cannot be so written into the operation of this universe and so impose itself on life and intelligent life that no other order can be established on top of or against the underlying order created by God. This ordering of the universe must be capable of being disposed to the purposes embraced by personal intelligent life, even against God's purpose, even though that other order has no ultimate future, since it has no place in the purpose of God. On this view the only future that is coming is one that comes from God.

The 'dead end' universe

Evolution depends on the fact that the universe is everywhere increasing in disorder even though there are some local regions, such as planet earth, where the process of increasing disorder is for a while locally reversed by the self-organising capacities of matter.

It has been an open question as to whether the universe would go on expanding into the 'big freeze', or collapse back into the 'big fry'. Recently it became clear that some time back the universe began expanding at an accelerating rate, though no one really knows why. We are heading for the 'big freeze', billions and billions of years into the future: a cold, dark, undifferentiated sea of low-grade

energy.¹⁶ Complete disorder. No distinctions. A dead universe.

There is a connection to be made between this 'reality check' and the earlier discussion of the value to God of creatures as 'co-creators' in a life-producing universe. For we can now at least begin to see that the increasing entropy, and all that goes with it, is the way God enables created things to be co-creators. Our reflection allows us to theologically frame and thereby make some sense of increasing entropy.

Nevertheless the prospect of a 'dead-end' universe is hard to reconcile with there being any purpose for the whole creation. Are we reduced to 'bolting on' the resurrection or pulling it like a rabbit out of the divine hat? Is there no inner link, no underlying intelligibility? God is the one author, working everywhere for the one purpose in both creation and its consummation, which includes 'redemption' from the power of pursuing a path that has no ultimate future. Therefore we must suppose there is in the mind of God, and embodied in all God's works, some kind of internal connection between creation, redemption and consummation. This motivates us to seek an understanding that can hold all this together.

My response is to return to the discussion of God's purpose in creation to make a point I could easily have made earlier. The purpose of God in creating includes drawing created things into a loving and just relationship with this

16. See RJ Russell, 'Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology', in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* edited by T Peters, RJ Russell and M Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 2002), 6.

God. Should we say that relationship is a brief encounter, the equivalent of 'a one night stand'?

For an all-loving God I would prefer to say that the relationship is one in which all created things explore the length, breadth, height and depth—without limit—of a relationship with God.

Let us hold together the thought of this God creating co-creators via the means of increasing disorder and creating with the purpose of the whole creation entering into such a relationship with this God.

Rationally, this would mean that the increasing disorder and all that goes with it, including the prospect of the 'dead end' future for the universe should not be thought of as having the last word. Those processes serve the value to God of creatures as co-creators. The purpose of God presupposes that value but goes beyond it to the gift and invitation to what does have the last word, namely the still greater good of unending life with God for the whole created universe.

According to this purpose we should think that the conditions under which the life-producing universe evolved and produced life will be transformed. Rather than a dead end, we should think of the physical conditions of the universe being transformed in a way that allows this purpose to be fulfilled.

For many Christians the bodily resurrection of Jesus would then be interpreted as the anticipation, ahead of time, of this transformation of the universe. This is now no 'bolt on', no rabbit out of the hat. It is precisely the bodily resurrection of Jesus which is the great sign that there is a future for our material universe beyond the big

freeze, that God's goodness has the first and the last word for all the processes of creatures as co-creators.¹⁷ This strengthens the inner link we found when we realised that we had a theological framework within which to make some theological sense of the increasing disorder of the universe. We now see that the same theological perspective rationally leads us to expect a transformation of the conditions under which the whole universe operates. This is the theological perspective developed from Aquinas, within the context of the good news of Jesus the incarnate Son of God, who died for us and was raised from the dead, who will come again in glory.

The problem of 'natural evil'

The argument that God maximises the value of creatures as co-creators is the basis for identifying evolution by natural selection as the way in which this value is realised in this universe. In view of the cost to creatures, which of course such a God would know, the question is, would a truly good God be so excessive, so 'reckless' as to maximise this value? Surely such a God would give weight to compassion for suffering creatures and therefore: (a) not maximise the realisation of the value of creatures as co-creators in the first place;¹⁸ and (b) act in the world to

17. This immediately opens more questions about how all life that has perished in the evolving cosmos will be included within the resurrected universe. See Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, Chapter 5 for a discussion of current positions on this matter in the science and theology scene.

18. For example, there would be less suffering pain and death in the

relieve suffering. This is the theme of one of my lectures in 'God and the Natural Sciences'.

This theme seeks a character reference for God, for the kind of good that God is. Or, if God is that 'reckless' can we still say that God is wholly good? As a Christian I offer three reasons for thinking that God is that excessive. One is the parable of the prodigal son. The young man's demand for half the inheritance is outrageous because it dis-closes his wish that his father was dead. But what is even more outrageous is the boy's father giving him half the inheritance and letting him go. This might be considered a 'reckless' act for there is no knowing what will happen to his son. I retell the story, explaining that the parable invites us to think of God like the father in the story. Even if the father is thought to be reckless, can anyone say that he did not love his son? At this point in the lecture Neil, a student, called out, 'Yes, the father is not only reckless, but also cruel!' The lecture theatre went very quiet. I said to students that here they are presented with two different views of the 'good'. One says the father is reckless and loving and so too is God. The other, that the father is reckless and cruel and if God exists, so too is God. We allowed the difference to stand.

I go onto say that the parable speaks of a truly good God in a way that supports the idea that this God, the creator of the universe, would be so 'reckless', even fool-

world if such a God were to create all species in one act of special creation and so edit out the long process of evolution. There would still be a great deal of life produced, so that it would be a life-producing universe. Why wouldn't a truly good God create such a world?

ish, in liberally giving to created things real powers and therewith the dignity of being co-creators in a universe that is life-producing.

Secondly, I point out that this God is no less excessive and loving in creating intelligent life with personal freedom to exercise its extraordinary God-given power for good or ill. All the ill use of these powers in causing suffering to other human beings and other forms of life is comparable to or even greater than the suffering produced by evolution. Opposition to the idea of God creating and giving creatures real powers to be co-creators, displayed in using evolution to bring life into existence, ought to oppose the idea of God giving human beings power and freedom to use it. This would be to argue that God should not have created this kind of universe.

There is a third reason for thinking of God as being so 'reckless' in giving created things real powers. These created powers are visited upon God who submits to them, in all their disorder, in order to limit, transform and overcome them in the life, death and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God.

This wholly good God is so excessive, so 'reckless' as to maximise the value of creatures as co-creators in a life-producing universe. In our universe this takes the form of Darwinian evolution by natural selection.

The two challenges (blind universe, natural evil) presuppose that the natural universe is different from what you would expect were the universe to be created for some purpose by an all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good God. The argument for what kind of world we should expect such a God to create shows there is no basis for this

presupposition. There is no basis for the inference from blind natural processes to a purposeless universe and no basis for saying that the suffering and death which Darwinian evolution involves is a 'natural evil'. The natural universe is not different from what you would expect an all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good God to create.