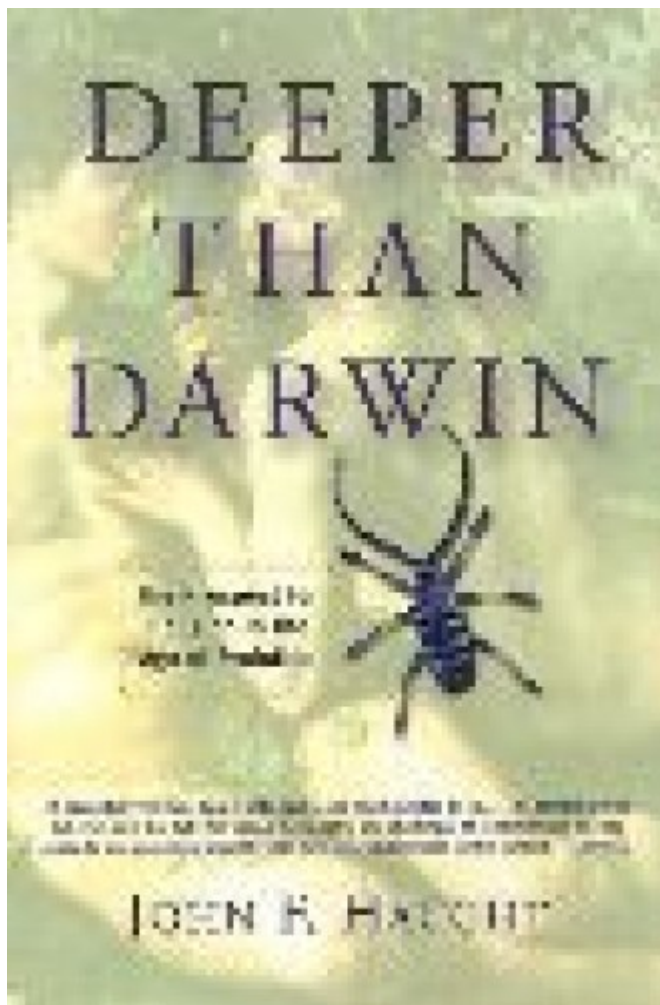


Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in an Age of Evolution

reviewed by [Stephen J. Pope](#) in the [July 13, 2004](#) issue

In Review



Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in an Age of Evolution

John F. Haught
Westview

Here is the mature thought of one of the academy's most eloquent and learned scholars of religion and science. John F. Haught is both a distinguished professor in the theology department at Georgetown University and director of the Georgetown Center for the Study of Science and Religion. He has earned an international reputation as a fair, learned and ecumenically minded systematic theologian.

Haught constructs the framework for his book from the insights of a variety of theologians, philosophers and religious thinkers, especially Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. But he does not adopt their ideas uncritically. His thesis is that evolutionary reductionism fails to grasp the full theological and religious implications—the “depth”—of the vision of life presented by evolution.

Haught's book, then, is less about the “historical Darwin” and his insights than it is about the weaknesses and oversights of Darwinism, especially in its most recent versions in sociobiology and evolutionary psychology. As one who seeks, and expects to find, an ultimate convergence between science and religion, Haught takes it as axiomatic that the truth experienced in religion and reflected on in the theological disciplines is consistent with the findings of the biological sciences. Any lack of consistency indicates a need to reexamine the formation and theoretical elaboration of science and theology.

Mistaken are those who condemn either science or religion on the basis of an excessively narrow and false view of one of these enterprises. Scientific materialism is as much a problem as is biblical literalism, for neither do justice to the complexity of the phenomena found in science and religion. Evolutionists who dismiss religion as superstitious and authoritarian fail to accommodate the great swaths of religious traditions that are neither. Evolutionary materialists fail to acknowledge the ways in which their speculative theories and implicit premises are philosophical and, in particular, metaphysical rather than scientific.

Religious literalists suffer from analogous defects, failing to see the empirically predictive nature of some of their assertions and refusing to recognize the human and historical character of the religious claims they make. Even God's revelation, Haught notes, is communicated in human terms—treasure in earthen vessels.

Haught calls for all partners in the conversation to recognize that explanations of natural phenomena, including the human, can function on a variety of “levels” and

that these levels need not compete with one another. He adds his voice to such balanced explorers of religion and science as John Polkinghorne, Ian Barbour and Arthur Peacocke. He shares with them a view of God akin to that of process theology: God as a divine Being engaged in the process of natural becoming without being identical with it; a divine Being marked by vulnerability and engaged in a suffering love for the world and all its creatures.

Haught believes that science does have important implications for theology. Scientific knowledge of the evolutionary process calls forth an awareness of its complexity, chaos and radically unfinished nature. Seen in this light, the Christian affirmation of providence focuses strongly on the future and issues in the virtue of hope. God does not “design” nature in the manner expected by the intelligent-design school, but rather calls forth the potentialities of nature in an ever increasing flow of creativity and empathy for creatures.

The real depth of nature lies in its relation to divine creativity and its expression of divine love. Human beings are called by their very nature as creatures to participate in an ongoing, open-ended process. In doing so, we are able to come to a deeper consciousness of divine love, to choose freely to cooperate with it, and thereby to contribute to the flourishing of the creation.

Readers of Haught’s previous work, especially *God After Darwin*, will already have come to appreciate the care with which he writes, the respect with which he treats his subject matter, and the love for nature and humanity that pervades his work. *Deeper Than Darwin* is intended for a broad readership. Haught is able to make complex arguments comprehensible to interested nonspecialists. He is a model public theologian whose work deserves attention and appreciation.