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# CHAPTER THREE:

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## *AN EVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGICAL METAETHIC*

### **3.0 Introduction**

The first chapter dealt with a ‘traditional’ framing of good and evil within a theological context which was heavily influenced by Augustine; the image of God having created a perfect world and instilling in it moral rubrics subsequently neglected by humanity. The second chapter then, in part, dealt the approach to good and evil as explicated by sociobiologists in light of their attempts to reconcile Darwinian principles with altruistic behaviour. Whilst it was argued that such sociobiological appreciations of morality do not fully discount the theological understandings explored in Chapter One, there are aspects of such understandings that require revision in light of evolutionary theories of morality. For example, the traditional narrative understood goodness as an intrinsic element of creation, and thus, evil was a conspicuous feature of the world which demanded explanation. Evolutionary explanations of ethics reverse this demand, by demonstrating the principles of struggle evident in evolution and questioning the origins of good. As such, this asymmetrical shift must become an important element in a revised theological appreciation of ethics and good/evil.

Sociobiological theory therefore, provides significant motive for constructing a coherent metaethic which definitively supplants the concept of a ‘golden age’ of goodness which humanity is trying to recover. A reframing of the asymmetry in traditional searches for the cause of evil is needed; evil did not enter the world through a primordial misdeed, as with Augustine’s hermeneutical representation of the fall, but only gained intelligibility as a concept itself in the evolution of morality, or in a more anthropocentric view, with the

evolution of human moral consciousness. The traditional understandings of the fall maintain some merit in light of evolution – for example, our understandings of the evolutionary principle of competition might lend scientific credence to the aspects of original sin which view humanity as destined for evil – if evil is equated with selfishness (see section 1.1). However, as an overarching metaethic the traditional fall narrative fails on the issue of a primordial good. Thus, there is a need to shift away from traditional understandings of the fall in light of sociobiology.

The crux of this chapter therefore, is to outline a theological approach which appreciates the need for a paradigm shift with respect to the framework of good and evil. Such a paradigm shift will be largely (though not wholly) attributed to our growing appreciation of evolutionary theory. Contributions towards such a shift in worldview have been made by a number of scholars in modern theology. Particularly with regard to theologians engaged in the theology-science dialogue, there is a discernable tendency to now envisage the world as developing rather than having been created perfect; a move from the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* to *creatio continua*, in line with our understanding of the ongoing process of evolution. However, specific problems and issues within this shift can be identified, which lead me to suggest that particularly pertaining to a metaethic, such a theological approach needs further reflection and refinement. Consequently, this leads me to pose four distinct criteria which much be addressed in a theological worldview appreciative of evolutionary ethics; i) it appreciates the evolving nature of the world, the evolving nature of goodness, and the evolving nature God's creative action ii) it makes reference to the divine, iii) it provides a response to the theodicy question, and iv) it appreciates our present responsibilities.

Section 3.1 will demonstrate that sociobiology has influenced theologians such as Neil Messer and Patricia Williams to discard the traditional notion of goodness being an

intrinsic element of creation. I will then argue that sociobiology actually offers a replacement of sorts for our understanding of the origins of good and evil; they only became intelligible with the evolution of morality. Only when the ability to reflect upon right and wrong (which is, it is maintained, a characteristic only humans possess) can actions be considered morally good or morally evil. This is in contrast to the traditional conceptual scaffolding of a preordained good which human moral reflection was then measured against. Therefore, the sociobiological account of the knowledge and causal origin of ethics arguably has a significant impact on the conceptual status of ethics, i.e. whether ethics can transcend its context; if morality (that is beyond the altruism evident in other animals) only emerges with humanity, then is morality inherently anthropocentrically subjective? – this issue was also addressed section 2.5.

In contrast to the vision of an instantaneous creation, section 3.2 will then explore how certain theologians have altered their interpretation of God's creative action in light of our evolutionary understanding. The third section of this chapter, section 3.3, will then explore proposals for an eschatologically focused theology in light of evolution; the view that evolution is progressing towards a specific goal, namely, a divine Omega. On this issue, theological appropriations of evolution may not be able to derive explicit support from evolutionary theory, as evolution is not understood as goal-oriented; Gould stressed this point in his popular metaphor of winding back the tape of life and letting it run again, and the unlikely possibility that anything like humans would reappear.<sup>355</sup> This raises the issue of teleology, which will be also be discussed in this section. In contrast to theologians who draw upon interpretations of evolution which signal some form of teleology, it will be contested in this section that conscious teleology emerges only with the evolution of the moral sense and is not *a priori*. Notwithstanding, the developmental aspects of such

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<sup>355</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *A Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*, (London: Vintage, 1990) p. 51

eschatological or teleological theologies are worth noting. Sections 3.1-3.3 therefore, deal with the first criterion set forth above; appreciating the evolving nature of the world, the evolving nature of goodness, and the evolving nature of God's creative action.

With respect to the emphasis on ongoing development in sections 3.1-3.3, the question of how the divine is reflected in this framework becomes apparent. If the divine is not reflected in the direct design of life and the world, as with William Paley's argument from design and other notions of an instantaneous creator, then it needs to be asked how the divine is reflected, if at all, in an evolutionary or developmental worldview. Section 3.4 will address this question and follow John Haught in referring to Paul Tillich's idea of God as depth, thus responding to the second criterion set forth above. Section 3.5 will then expound on how a developmental or evolutionary view can provide a response to the theodicy question – as required by the third criterion. It will then be discussed in section 3.6 how the shift in theological understandings of the world, which stem largely from evolutionary theory, can be appreciative of present moral responsibilities. In this section, it will be argued that an immanent model of God, such as that explored in section 3.4, coupled with evolutionary ethics, provides reasoning for acknowledging present ethical imperatives, as required by the fourth criterion. Section 3.6 will then outline how the respective themes raised in the chapter culminate to satisfy the four criteria outlined.

### **3.1 A Shift in the Framework for Understanding Good and Evil**

Evolutionary accounts of ethics demonstrate that moral behaviour as manifest in humans has arisen after an immensely long period of time, like all other features of the biosphere. As a result, contrary to the traditional image of divinely created perfection, goodness has only recently emerged in evolutionary history. It follows therefore, that the universe underwent a vast period of moral indifference (save to the extent of potentially moral extraterrestrials and

again distinguishing between morality and functional altruism); the universe was originally amoral. The traditional portrayal of the biblical narrative begins to buckle as a framework for understanding good and evil when this realisation is taken into account. As discussed in Chapter One, the Augustinian answer to the theodicy problem, postulating that humanity turned its back on a created perfection, no longer seems adequate in light of the evolutionary view. This forces a substantial reframing of theological understandings of the good and evil; goodness enters the world at a much later stage than originally assumed by Augustine and his followers.

This realisation recalls a key issue for theological conceptualisations of the world; namely, the subjectivity of goodness (also discussed in the previous two chapters). If goodness was not as once thought, instilled as a steadfast and ontologically objective set of moral precepts, then it leads one to ask how we come to know the good and whether our knowledge of the good reflects any underlying moral framework. Of course, it has been common to reject this implication of sociobiology. Theologians such as Keith Ward (noted in the previous chapter) and John Haught insist on the need for an objective, underlying morality in nature that reflects the will of God.<sup>356</sup> Our knowledge of this underlying morality, in the views of Ward, Haught and other like-minded theologians, comes from revelation – specifically in their context, from reflection on the Christian scriptures. As such, there is a type of moral frame of reference against which behaviour can be assessed; a frame of reference they feel is missing from purely sociobiological accounts.

Against their apprehensions regarding sociobiological accounts of ethics, it is contested in this thesis, that rather than being deficient of a moral frame of reference, sociobiological accounts actually provide an indication of the good; evolutionary explanations of ethics offer a glimmer of hope/goodness, they show a crack in the surface of

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<sup>356</sup> John Haught, *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and the Dream of Life*, (Kentucky: Westminster, 2010) p. 119

what otherwise seems a nihilistic world (this theme will be explored in greater detail in the next two chapters). As argued in the previous chapter, sociobiological accounts of ethics do not diminish their significance nor deny their metaphysical reality. It can be through evolutionary ethics that we come to know the good. From a Christian context this could be immediately critiqued as making Christian revelation redundant and adopting what theologian Alistair McFadyen terms a ‘pragmatic atheism’ where reference to God makes no difference in how one acts.<sup>357</sup> However, it will be argued later that Christian ethics could be understood as a manifestation of the good to which nature points. Here, I follow Neil Messer in drawing (loose) parallels between evolutionary accounts of ethics and Karl Barth’s appreciation of sin.<sup>358</sup>

Barth is critical of humanity’s attempts to comprehend sin and provide for itself criteria to become its own law-givers, accusers and judges.<sup>359</sup> For Barth, the human quest to distinguish between good and evil is an element of the sin of pride – perhaps it could also be equated to an element of the innate want for more in Rousseau’s *amore propre*, or Augustine’s original sin. Barth suggests that our perceived knowledge of good and evil is merely self-deception and delusion, which results in us eschewing the good and doing evil.<sup>360</sup> True knowledge of good and evil in Barth’s view is beyond the scope of human comprehension. He then argues that it is only through knowledge of Christ that we “really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man.”<sup>361</sup> Barth can find support for his view in the biblical narrative. The pervading traditional representation of good and evil, as discussed, originates in Augustine’s portrayal of the fall from paradise. However, a closer analysis of the scriptures indicates that the fall plays a relatively minor

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<sup>357</sup> Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 8

<sup>358</sup> Neil Messer, *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics*, p. 165

<sup>359</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: IV.1*, pp. 388-389

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389

role – this was noted in Ricoeur’s exegesis in section 1.4. In the scriptures, it is only after Christ that Adam gains his significance as the culprit of original sin; it is only in comparison to the good of Christ that the sin of Adam becomes explicitly known. In less allegorical terms then, this corresponds directly with Barth’s assertion that it is only through the goodness of Christ, that sin or evil can be understood. Similarly, in sociobiological terms, it is only with the evolution of goodness/morality that discussion of evil/sin is intelligible. Thus, the biblical narrative reflects the introduction of moral awareness through the origins of good, manifest in Barth’s view with Christ.

Barth should be critiqued here, though, in terms of the broader dialogue between theology and the sciences. Such a resolutely Christ-centric appreciation of good and evil is inadequate in this broader setting. Messer, despite being explicitly supportive of Barth, acknowledges this point. He notes that attempting to affirm a cosmic and universal salvation through Christ can seem a “scandalous thing to say in a pluralist world.”<sup>362</sup> However, the parallel could still be drawn, that it is only after goodness emerges that any sense of good and evil enters our ontological picture of the world. If we learn from evolutionary theory that there was no created perfection where goodness was established, then there must have been a transitional period or point where goodness enters – again, if goodness is taken to only be fully intelligible in light of humanity or indeed other hypothetical morally reflective beings. At this point, the world ceases to be amoral. Barth identifies this as the Christ event; thereafter, a true understanding of good and evil can transpire. A broader understanding appreciative of evolutionary ethics could in parallel assert that only after the point where human morality emerges, can an understanding of good and evil transpire. This is not necessarily to suggest that there was no animal sin/suffering before human morality evolved, but rather, that our unique appreciation of morality – what Darwin felt was the most

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<sup>362</sup> Neil Messer, *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics*, p. 211



important distinguishable trait of humans – allowed for a full realisation of what we now consider as good and evil, right and wrong.<sup>363</sup>

Messer, following from Barth, then suggests that Darwin and his sociobiologist heirs perform the role of ‘masters of suspicion’.<sup>364</sup> Messer proposes that evolutionary accounts of ethics have helped to unmask our human pretensions regarding our knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, he feels, sociobiology can assist theology in developing a “more trustworthy foundation on which our moral life may be built.”<sup>365</sup> The scientific theories which underpin sociobiology offer theology a more reasoned vantage point to develop a moral framework; it helps theology engage in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the first task of Christian ethics, namely, to invalidate our perceived knowledge of good and evil – though Bonhoeffer still presents humanity as “falling away” from God.<sup>366</sup>

The cardinal point here, is that our knowledge of good and evil can no longer be understood as instilled in a primordial creation. Rather, it enters much later, after the good has evolved or in Barth’s view, is brought through Christ. Good and evil enter the world then, relatively recently. The position defended here, is that it is through the evolution of morality that good becomes intelligible. In some respects, this echoes Spinoza’s objections to the theodicy problem stated in Chapter One; it is only in relation to human senses that anything is considered evil – there is no Platonic idea of evil independent of human minds. Moral good and moral evil exist as a result of evolved behavioural traits as explored through sociobiology; only with human consciousness can altruism transcend its behaviouristic functionality and really be considered moral. Representations of an archaic covenant or social contract seem too blunt to be consistent with what we learn from sociobiology. Notwithstanding, as argued in the previous chapter, this does not diminish the reality or

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<sup>363</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 63

<sup>364</sup> Neil Messer, *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics*, p. 172

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172

<sup>366</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith, Eberhard Bethge ed., (New York: Touchstone, 1995) p. 21 [Originally published 1949]

significance of moral values. Moreover, as will be discussed in section 3.4, our evolved sense of moral values can still be viewed as a reflection of the divine.

A similar position has been defended by Patricia Williams, though she is more concerned with the nature of morality (i.e. whether or not there is a normative morality evident in nature) than with its origins. Williams offers a critique of Christian ethics, when such ethics are premised by the notion of an inherent goodness in nature – what she understands as a natural moral law. She feels that such visions of morality are far too simplistic, as sociobiology indicates that some aspects of ‘nature’s way’ are deemed sinful (e.g. polygamy), whilst others are deemed good (e.g. altruism).<sup>367</sup> The distinct caveat mentioned in the previous chapter again emerges here, which relates to the complexities of natural law and the subsequent difficulties in making any definitive statement about it; as Stephen Pope writes, Aquinas’ work has always been discussed selectively.<sup>368</sup> However, this caveat conversely strengthens Williams’ stance, as it is the over-complexity of relations between sociobiology and natural law that for her, prevents there being any cohesion. In this sense, her view differs in nuance from that of Pope and Arnhart in the previous chapter. The position defended in this thesis does coalesce with Williams by pointing out that sociobiology “disproves” a simplistic vision of morality as innate in nature.<sup>369</sup> Consequently, there is clear evidence of a need for a shift in thinking of good and evil as innate concepts created with the world. Furthermore, as seen in the writings of contemporary theologians such as Messer and Williams, this shift is in part catalysed by evolutionary ethics.

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<sup>367</sup> Patricia Williams, *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) p. 156. It should be noted that whilst Williams interprets sociobiology as promoting polygamy, others such as Stephen Pope have suggested the opposite; that natural selection favours monogamy. Stephen Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love*, pp. 86-87

<sup>368</sup> Stephen Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love*, p. 159

<sup>369</sup> Patricia Williams, *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*, p. 156

### 3.2 The Shift In Understanding God's Creative Action

Traditional understandings of God-as-Creator envisage a creation event, and thereafter, a God who maintains direct involvement with the world, usually through miracles. This is, of course, somewhat of an oversimplification and there are important texts which are exceptions to the more common Christian representations of creation.<sup>370</sup> Indeed, Augustine's own reading of Genesis was far more nuanced than proposing an instantaneous or hexaemeral (six-day) creation. Augustine astutely differentiated between the "Let there be..." and the "Let the... bring forth..." – the "Let the... bring forth..." representing a less stringently instantaneous creative action. As Ernan McMullin states, through this distinction Augustine had discussed a developmental understanding of creatures and humans' coming into being long before Darwin.<sup>371</sup> Furthermore, according to McMullin, it was only since the sixteenth century that a literal interpretation of Genesis became popular.<sup>372</sup> Despite noting these points, the developmental nature of evolutionary theory has still spawned the need for a reconsideration of how God creates and acts. In this respect, there has been a discernable shift in certain theologians' thinking towards viewing God as creating and acting through or with the laws of nature (perspectives on divine action will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter). In contrast to envisaging God's creative action at the beginning, there has been a discernable shift among certain scholars towards viewing God's creative action as ongoing; a point which has been presented as an eschatological view, as will be explored in the next section.

In an originally unpublished essay of 1920, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin considers the traditional way of understanding God's operative activity in the world as a dominant causality among other causalities, "a force interpolated into the series of experiential

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<sup>370</sup> For an overview of such exceptions, see Irish theologian James P. Mackey, *The Scientist and the Theologian: On the Origin and Ends of Creation*, (Dublin: Columba, 2007) pp. 12-33

<sup>371</sup> Ernan McMullin, 'Darwin and The Other Christian Tradition', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 46.2 (2011) pp. 296-306

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 303-306

forces.”<sup>373</sup> He states that although this image of God’s action has been often “more or less unconsciously accepted”, it is a rudimentary understanding which cannot be taken as it stands.<sup>374</sup> Teilhard uses the analogy of a sphere packed with a large number of springs to represent nature’s causality – each spring represents a causality and impacts on other springs. He envisages the traditional notion of God as another spring, though one which is more dominant; God is a causal force, in the same way that Peter or Paul were causal forces.<sup>375</sup> In this representation, God acts in particular events in nature. However, Teilhard is discontent with such a view. He proffers another way in which to view God’s action, “A first, and peculiarly divine, way by which the First Cause can affect lower natures consists in its ability to act *simultaneously on their whole body*.”<sup>376</sup> Rather than acting on specific events, Teilhard views God as acting on all events at the same time. In his analogy of the sphere of springs, Teilhard imagines God as “exerting so skilful a pressure over the whole of the surface of the system at once that it can, infallibly, produce whatever modification it wishes at any point inside the sphere.”<sup>377</sup>

From this vantage point, Teilhard sees God as acting through nature, as opposed to *contra naturam*, as in the more traditional perspective of miraculous events. Teilhard thus suggests that God is active where we “see only the work of nature.”<sup>378</sup> This is not quite to suggest that Teilhard was proffering a pantheism of sorts – indeed such compartmentalising of thought patterns may take us too far away from the discussion at hand, although in recent years there has been some interesting discourse regarding how models of divine action through nature could be expressed and categorised.<sup>379</sup> Interestingly, though, Teilhard does himself raise the issue of pantheism and reflects positively upon its concern with viewing

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<sup>373</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 25

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>379</sup> For example, see Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2004)

the world as “the Whole”; this admiration of pantheism was in contrast to the widespread association of such philosophies with paganism and anti-Christianity at the time of writing.<sup>380</sup> In any case, what is evident in this aspect of Teilhard’s writing is the shift away from an ancient and instantaneous creation, which God later intervenes in, and towards the recognition of a more intrinsic relationship between the divine and the natural. As such, Teilhard is in a certain sense, presupposing a natural approach to theology; again, a theme which will be analysed in the next chapter.

As it pertains to the topic of evolutionary theory, Teilhard is explicit in stating that our scientific study of the universe and humanity is indicative of an evolutionary process.<sup>381</sup> Consequently, Teilhard sees God as working through the processes of evolution, of which, it is maintained in this thesis, evolutionary ethics is an important element. Teilhard’s understanding of the God-world relationship thus catalyses him to propound on the nature of God’s creative action. In line with evolutionary theory, and in contrast to the view of a Creator who completed heaven and earth with all their array<sup>382</sup>, Teilhard envisages an ongoing, evolving creation. He seeks to realise the presence of the divine current running beneath the causal nexus of the world; to comprehend “creative transcendence through evolutive immanence.”<sup>383</sup> Such a vision of creation is in stark contrast to the traditional representations of a perfect creation as extrapolated from the Genesis narrative.

Whilst there are various idiosyncrasies with regard to particular perspectives on divine creative action, some of which will be explored in the next chapter, a shift in thinking regarding God’s creative action is also present in a number of more recent scholars; that is to say, despite significant differences, there is an evident shift in contemporary theology towards viewing God as continually creating through the physical laws. Teilhard’s theology,

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<sup>380</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, pp. 59-64

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>382</sup> Such as that stated by Pius XII, ‘Man Ascends to God by Climbing the Ladder of the Universe’, *Papal Addresses to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, p. 81

<sup>383</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, pp. 59-64

as we shall see, still offers a blueprint for modern theologians' approach to evolution and as such, his work has been held as a prominent example of a revised approach to considering God's action, but there are others. Arthur Peacocke, for example, proposes a view which envisages God acting through what he calls 'whole-system causation'; God acts upon the whole of the universe and thus influences events from the top down.<sup>384</sup> Peacocke acknowledges that in light of evolutionary theory, the temporal framework which shaped Judeo-Christian religious beliefs now has to make way for an image of God continuously creating.<sup>385</sup> Concurrent endorsements of a continuing creation can be found with Ian Barbour and others.<sup>386</sup> The theologian Robert John Russell, for example, explains that "an increasing number of theologians working to appropriate a scientific perspective seem to agree on the emerging vitality and importance of *creation continua*."<sup>387</sup> An ongoing creation is also a key theme of process theology, based upon the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.<sup>388</sup> Consequently, there is evidence of a shift in theological worldview away from the traditional image of an instantaneous (or at least hexaemeral) created perfection. However, a continuous creation may still be considered haphazard, aimless or with no particular goal. On this point, there has been a marked emphasis on viewing this continuing creative process as teleological and eschatological.

### 3.3 The Shift Towards an Eschatological View

Teilhard sought to outline an ontological vision which is reflective of the evolutionary nature of the living world as we have come to know through evolutionary science. Therefore, he suggests a shift from the traditional tendency to look back to God at the

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<sup>384</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Paths from Science Towards God: The End of all our Exploring*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001) pp. 109-110

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-67

<sup>386</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, (London: SCM, 1990) p. 181

<sup>387</sup> Robert John Russell, *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega: The Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) p. 35

<sup>388</sup> See John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1977)

beginning, and look towards God as the future; he proposes an eschatological focus for theology:

Ever since Aristotle there have been almost continual attempts to construct 'models' of God on the lines of an outside Prime Mover, acting *a retro*. Since the emergence in our consciousness of the 'sense of evolution' it has become physically impossible for us to conceive or worship anything but an organic Prime-Mover God, *ab ante*.<sup>389</sup>

There is therefore, a decisive shift evident in his thinking, from the idea of God as Alpha to an eschatological vision of God as Omega – biblical support for such an Omega vision of God can be found in Revelation 2:13. The concept of an instantaneous, perfect creation is not agreeable with Teilhard. In fact, he goes as far as to suggest that there is an ontological contradiction latent in the association of the terms 'instantaneous' and 'creation'.<sup>390</sup> Moreover, he argues that in the case of a static creation, God is necessarily structurally independent of his creation, and is thus, "without any definable basis to his immanence."<sup>391</sup> The static creation is interpreted as Teilhard as too separatist; indeed such a view may be deistic in its character. In Teilhard's view of God working through the laws of nature, God has a more intrinsic relationship with the world; God is involved in the here and now (however, he still emphasises God as Omega, which will be the subject of critique in section 3.6).

John Haught thus categorises Teilhard's theology as a 'metaphysics of the future'.<sup>392</sup> In Teilhard's theology, not only does he emphasise the developing, evolving nature of the world, but also, he suggests it is progressing towards a point; God as Omega. He takes from science the idea of a world in a process of maturation, that will in the

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<sup>389</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 240

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

<sup>392</sup> John Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, (Oxford: Westview, 2000) p. 83

Christian worldview, eventually be unified with God in the eschaton.<sup>393</sup> On this point, Teilhard may differ from the approach of scientists such as Jacques Monod, who interprets evolution as governed purely by fortuity and totally unrelated to whatever its effects on teleonomic functioning.<sup>394</sup> However, Teilhard is adamant that his eschatological vision is no mere “flowering of the imagination” or metaphorical understanding, but is grounded in literal, scientific terms.<sup>395</sup> In his reading of evolutionary science, he recognises a distinct orientation – a teleology of sorts, though the notion of teleology in evolution can be problematic, as will be discussed below.

Teilhard’s teleology is somewhat similar to Hegel’s philosophy of mind/spirit (depending on the translation of the German term *geist*), in that they both view mind/spirit as an epoch of nature – though Teilhard’s vision is explicated more in terms of evolution than Hegel’s pre-evolutionary philosophy.<sup>396</sup> Teilhard perceives the state of nature as an original state of discordance or purposelessness – perhaps comparable to more modern understandings of evolution such as Monod’s. In the ‘tree of life’, Teilhard posits that originally, humanity was no more than one line among many others.<sup>397</sup> However, at a certain point, he suggests that life perforated a significant boundary when consciousness emerged, “But it happened, for some reason of hazard, position or structure, that this sole ray among the millions contrived to pass the critical barrier separating the Unreflective from the Reflective – that is to say, to enter the sphere of intelligence, foresight and freedom of action.”<sup>398</sup> The emergence of mind in life was for Teilhard a momentous event which

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<sup>393</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘Turmoil or Genesis?’, Ian G. Barbour ed., *Science and Religion: New Perspectives on the Dialogue*, (London: SCM, 1969) pp. 225-226 [Originally published 1947]

<sup>394</sup> Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1974) p. 114 [Originally published 1970]

<sup>395</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘Turmoil or Genesis?’, p. 226

<sup>396</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 517 [Originally published 1813]

<sup>397</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘Turmoil or Genesis?’ p. 222

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222



represented a transition in evolutionary nature from a state of aimless meandering to one with distinct progress:

[T]he whole essential stream of terrestrial biological evolution is now flowing through the breach which has been made. The cosmic tide may at one time have seemed to be immobilised, lost in the vast reservoir of living forms; but through the ages the level of consciousness was steadily rising behind the barrier, until finally, by means of the human brain (the most “centro-complex” organism yet achieved to our knowledge in the universe) there has occurred, at a first ending of time, the breaking of the dykes, followed by what is now in progress, the flooding of Thought over the entire surface of the biosphere. Thus regarded, everything in the history of the world takes shape, and what is better, everything *goes on*.<sup>399</sup>

Teilhard refers to the emergence of consciousness as the “sequel” to the monumental event of the origin of life itself;<sup>400</sup> it is the key for explaining the progress of evolution. Consciousness, for Teilhard, is something which is markedly unique from the rest of life. In his view, human consciousness can be clearly discerned as the goal of evolution (of course this differs significantly from the understandings of biologists such as Monod), as he states:

If the universe, regarded sidereally, is in process of spatial expansion (from the infinitesimal to the immense), in the same way and still more clearly it presents itself to us, physicochemically, as in process of organic involution upon itself (from the extremely simple to the extremely complex) – and, moreover, this particular involution ‘of complexity’ is experimentally bound up with a correlative increase in interiorisation, that is to say in the psyche or consciousness.<sup>401</sup>

He sees in evolution an evident convergence towards consciousness.<sup>402</sup> Consequently, his interpretation of evolution is decidedly teleological, allowing him also, to interpret evolution

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., p. 222-223

<sup>400</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, (London: Fontana, 1965) p. 165 [Originally published 1955]

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., p. 329

<sup>402</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 141

eschatologically. Although Teilhard's writing predates much of our modern knowledge, it has also been suggested more recently that evolution is somehow converging towards certain goals. One proponent of such a view is the British palaeontologist Simon Conway Morris, who suggests that the reoccurrence of certain physical characteristics in life is indicative of a general teleology in the evolutionary process.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, reminiscent of Teilhard's suggestion that consciousness is exhibitive of a deeper purpose within the unfolding drama of the cosmos, the physicist Paul Davies asserts that the self-genesis of self-awareness in the universe is "no trivial detail, no minor by-product of mindless, purposeless forces."<sup>404</sup> Therefore, Teilhard's views on consciousness do have modern parallels (though particular issues with the concept of teleology will be addressed below).

Teilhard builds upon the idea that evolution seems to be progressing, with consciousness signalling a significant milestone along the way – an idea he speculated would soon become generally accepted.<sup>405</sup> In his eschatological theology, he maintains that the universe is continually being created and progressing towards a goal in the future, a unification of consciousness, "Through its axial, living, portion, the universe is drifting, simultaneously and in just the same way, towards the super-complex, the super-centred, the super-conscious."<sup>406</sup> This future pinnacle, what Teilhard calls the 'Omega Point', is for him the source of salvation in a Christian context, "Surely, this 'Omega Point' (as I call it) is the ideal place from which to make the Christ we worship radiate."<sup>407</sup> He goes further, then, by postulating that at this Omega Point, the conscious aspects of the universe will converge upon themselves – this, he feels will be humanity's redemption. At this point, Teilhard feels

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<sup>403</sup> Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. xii

<sup>404</sup> Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning*, (London: Penguin, 1992) p. 232

<sup>405</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 141

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143

he has produced a new theology, though the notion of a convergence of consciousnesses at the Omega seems highly speculative.<sup>408</sup>

### *Clarifications on Teleology*

A shifting attitude towards a more progressive vision of the world in line with evolutionary theory is thus evident in Teilhard's work. The conceptual deviation away from the traditional 'backwards-looking' framework for understanding humanity and the world gives way to a 'forward-looking' understanding. The world is not, as Plato thought, a creation made as perfect as possible, but rather an incomplete 'work in progress'. There is, in Teilhard's theology of Omega, a discernable teleological element – a problematic concept which requires clarification.

Teilhard's advocacy for a shift in perspective of the religious worldview, from a historically felled creation to an unfinished, eschatological view, has been taken as a framework for modern dialogue between theology and evolution, notably by John Haught. Haught points to Teilhard, suggesting that he was one of the first scientists to fully realise that the world is presently and continually coming into being.<sup>409</sup> Haught takes from Teilhard the idea of progress in evolution; that there is a definitive "coming of future" evident in the process.<sup>410</sup> He feels that, "in spite of the protests of many biologists, a cosmological perspective shows that there is a net overall advancement or "progress" in evolution after all."<sup>411</sup> However, this concept may lead Haught into an intellectual cul-de-sac, given that he is very much aware and appreciative of the "randomness, struggle and seemingly aimless

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<sup>408</sup> However, some parallels, however tenuous they may seem, could be drawn with more modern theories in cosmology around the Omega such as that of David Deutsch – despite his idea of Omega being atheistic. David Deutsch, *The Fabric of Reality*, (London: Penguin, 1997) pp. 344-366

<sup>409</sup> John Haught, 'In Search for a God of Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 37.3 (2002) p. 540

<sup>410</sup> John Haught, *God After Darwin*, p. 83

<sup>411</sup> John Haught, 'In Search for a God of Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin', p. 541

meandering that the evolutionary story of life discloses....”<sup>412</sup> How can Haught reconcile the vision of progress he takes from Teilhard, and the chance and necessity of the evolutionary process?

He attempts to reconcile this dichotomy by allowing for a “loose kind of teleology.”<sup>413</sup> He suggests that whilst evolution has the freedom to explore a multitude of avenues, he places constraints on such possibilities; the possibilities of life are not limitless.<sup>414</sup> As a result, Haught rejects the view of biologists who view the evolutionary process as completely governed by chance and necessity. Regarding how such ‘limits’ to the possibilities of evolution may actually apply, Haught refers to Morris’ theory of evolutionary convergence mentioned above.<sup>415</sup> The independent recurrence of particular features of life, (eyes and limbs, for example) leads Morris and Haught to the conclusion that there are underlying parameters within which evolution operates. Consequently, Haught adheres to a vision of evolution which from the outset, is governed to proceed in a certain way, culminating eventually in human consciousness. His approach seeks to appreciate the habituality and redundancy, along with the novelty of the evolutionary narrative.<sup>416</sup>

Although adopting Teilhard’s framework for revising traditional understandings of God’s creative action brings more consonance between a religious worldview and evolutionary theory, Haught’s reliance on Morris’ theory of convergence can be disputed for at least two reasons. Firstly, although Morris’ argument has been adopted by theistic interpreters of evolution – John Polkinghorne is another example<sup>417</sup> – a hermeneutic of suspicion is immediately required when approaching such a position, particularly given that

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<sup>412</sup> John Haught, *God After Darwin*, p. 113

<sup>413</sup> John Haught, ‘The Boyle Lecture 2003: Darwin, Design and the Promise of Nature’, *Science and Christian Belief*, 17.1 (2005) p. 14

<sup>414</sup> John Haught, ‘Purpose in Nature: On the Possibility of a Theology of Evolution’, Simon Conway Morris ed., *The Deep Structure of Biology: Is Convergence Sufficiently Ubiquitous to Give a Directional Signal?* (Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation, 2008) p. 230

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230

<sup>417</sup> John Polkinghorne, ‘Rich Reality: A Response to the Boyle Lecture by Simon Conway Morris’, *Science and Christian Belief*, 18.1 (2006) p. 34

Morris' view may be an attempt to rebel against, as he himself writes, "our deracinated and nihilistic culture...."<sup>418</sup> More significantly still, evolutionary theory has been interpreted more commonly as an open-ended, indeterminate process; that the apparent teleology or patterns are merely a reflection of the self-contained processes of evolution themselves (prominent examples of such a view include Gould and Dawkins).<sup>419</sup> Secondly, and more pertinently from a theological perspective, is the acute implications for the problem of evil that evolutionary convergence brings; it implicitly denotes God as the creator of a process that is teeming with suffering from the outset (see section 1.6.2) – though this is stated whilst also being mindful of the fact that the interpretation of a 'world teeming with suffering' could be challenged.

Teilhard, as we shall see in section 3.5, believed the problem of evil was made impotent in light of a creation that is still being created. However, if creation has in place particular guidelines which it must follow, as in Morris' understandings of evolutionary convergence, then it must be asked why these guidelines allow for suffering. The degree of teleology implicit in evolutionary convergence, however "loose" it may be, inevitably revitalises the problem of evil. Indeed, Teilhard may well have agreed with Haught and Morris, but what I adopt from Teilhard in this thesis is to place greater emphasis on the notion that teleology emerges only once that sphere of intelligence has been penetrated – see the previous section.

In opposition to this assertion, the position could be defended that teleology was present throughout the process. In fact, if the first instance of true teleology in evolutionary morality for instance, is its manifestation in human behaviour, then this may ignore the long history of the development of morality in other species; altruism is not specific to humans, and therefore, to suggest that teleology only emerges in human manifestations of evolved

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<sup>418</sup> Simon Conway Morris, 'Evolution and Convergence: Some Wider Considerations', Simon Conway Morris ed., *The Deep Structure of Biology: Is Convergence Sufficiently Ubiquitous to Give a Directional Signal?* p. 46

<sup>419</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *A Wonderful Life*, p. 51, see also, Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden*, p. 155

morality may be a self-contradictory statement. Cambridge theologian Sarah Coakley, in her Gifford Lectures of 2012, developed such an argument which could be used as a critique of my view in this regard. She notes, with reference to the work of biologist John Maynard Smith, that evolution has seen various transitions, originally from the inorganic to the organic, then from individually-replicating molecules to chromosomes, from prokaryotes to eukaryotes, from single-celled organisms to multi-cellular organisms, from individuals to groups, and so on.<sup>420</sup> She argues that evolutionary theory has indeed presented an image of the world that is seemingly “progressivist”; it has a sense of development.<sup>421</sup> Consequently, she suggests, “It would seem, then, that teleology – in this first and basic sense of goal-directed forms of life – is impossible to completely expunge from evolutionary-biological analysis....”<sup>422</sup> In contrast to the views of those such as Dawkins, who suggest that speaking of nature in terms of purposes or goals is an erred projection of human concepts onto a purposeless nature, Coakley feels that purposeful language can be appropriate. Alisdair MacIntyre offers a similar perspective, as he writes that when we speak of gorillas or dolphins acting for a purpose, we are not using such language merely analogically, but rather, univocally.<sup>423</sup>

There are two distinct problems, however, with this assertion that teleological language is appropriate when discussing non-human life. Firstly, it may be conflating the purpose of individual organs or animals, with the purpose of nature. There is no contradiction in suggesting that animals (gorillas or dolphins for instance) do indeed act purposefully, with holding that there is no inherent purpose in the evolutionary process itself. Secondly, it may conflate the notion of teleology and development; as Coakley rightly

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<sup>420</sup> Sarah Coakley, ‘Teleology Reviewed: A New “Ethico-Teleological” Argument for God’s Existence’, The Gifford Lectures, University of Aberdeen, 2012, [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/gifford/documents/Gifford\\_Lecture\\_5\\_-\\_lecture\\_text.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/gifford/documents/Gifford_Lecture_5_-_lecture_text.pdf) accessed 15<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2012 p. 11

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>423</sup> Alisdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need Virtues*, (Illinois: Open Court, 1999) p. 64

asserts, evolution does present an image of progression or development to some extent – yet this development does not imply teleology. Development can be non-teleological.

Coakley herself acknowledges that use of such teleological terminology can be deeply problematic, and she therefore ensures us that she does not use the term ‘teleology’ in an extrinsic or theological way.<sup>424</sup> She claims that she is not suggesting that this apparent teleology should be explained by referral to an extrinsic designer, for this she rightly indicates, could be seen as a “last gasp of the extrinsic ‘God of the gaps’ ....”<sup>425</sup> Moreover, as Coakley dutifully points out, the phenomenon of seemingly teleological structures of evolutionary order could easily be attributed to the evolutionary processes themselves.<sup>426</sup> Pertaining to morality, then, viewing the overall evolutionary process as non-teleological as I do, could be ‘explaining away’ morality, as several critics suggested in the previous chapter. Why should one consider human morality as indicative of anything more than a facade for genetic desires, when this is how one views altruism in the rest of the natural world?

The answer I propose, also mentioned in the previous chapter, is that human morality is reflective of a particularly significant transition in evolutionary history, a notion taken in part from Teilhard. Though altruistic behaviour exists among animals, there is something distinct about human morality. For example, Coakley refers to humanity’s capability for ‘supernormal’ morality, which becomes the context for theological reflection.<sup>427</sup> This refers to the concept that human morality can transcend its genetic predispositions and become an indiscriminate moral sense – for example, in the Christian notion of *agape*. The advent of human consciousness, and hence free will, moves morality out of the realm of evolutionary functional behaviour, as evident in ants and bees etc., to a

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<sup>424</sup> Sarah Coakley, ‘Teleology Reviewed’, p. 11

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 19

genuine morality. To use Dawkins' phrase, the rebellion against the tyranny of our genes signifies 'something more' – which will be equated to Paul Tillich's notion of depth in section 3.4. It is this supernormal morality that, as discussed in the last chapter, is an emergent property, and thus not completely explicable in terms of functionality. With the onset of human supernormal morality, indications of actual teleology, in a more theological understanding, emerge. It is the evolution of morality that points to a greater depth in the natural process, rather than the seeming physical convergences throughout.

Consequently, evolutionary theory has a marked impact on how theology presents its understanding of morality, good, and evil, by forcing a shift in understanding away from one of historicity, and perhaps, to one of futurity, as expressed in the work of Teilhard and adopted by Haught – though there are also further problems with this eschatological view which will be discussed in section 3.6. For Haught, a major implication of this shift in worldview is that it provides hope – thus, being congruent with the central message of this thesis, “One implication of our living in an unfinished universe is that we can become attuned to the deep promise of nature only by wagering to indulge our native propensity to hope.”<sup>428</sup> So the shift in worldview does contribute to the central argument of this thesis, though I will be more specific by highlighting evolutionary ethics as the indicator of hope/teleology.

Notwithstanding, it must also be acknowledged here that we (theologians and others) should be very cautious in how we approach the idea of progress towards the future; I have suggested that an appropriate way to proceed is to envisage evolution as an aimless process until the unique period of the evolution of consciousness, or more specifically here, morality. Contrary to the notions of evolutionary convergence, or indeed intelligent design or biblical literalism, it is only at this point, that discussions of conscious teleology become

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<sup>428</sup> John Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin*, p. 50



intelligible. It could be then asked, whether or not there was any necessity that morality would evolve. This is where, as Teilhard suggested, creation can be seen as “an adventure, a risk, a battle” – though this does not subtract from the religious picture.<sup>429</sup> The very idea of morality or consciousness being a foreseen event may in fact diminish its significance. Haught goes as far as to suggest that a world which was foreseeable by God becomes a pointless puppet.<sup>430</sup> Haught’s sentiment may be too strong in this respect, and thus a weaker (though similar) premise is accepted here; knowing the outcome of events may diminish their significance. Conversely, one could argue that, for example, re-reading a novel where one knows the outcome may not be pointless; even if the outcome is known, intellectual stimulation, enjoyment, etc. can still occur. However, I argue that such a reading would not be as significant as the first reading of the novel; it is akin to watching a sporting event already knowing the outcome; not completely pointless perhaps, but less significant than if the result were not yet known.

Teilhard poses similar reflections with respect to the significance of unforeseen events by referring to the biblical narrative. He suggests that the expiatory vision of a transgression which God could have averted is difficult to look upon sympathetically.<sup>431</sup> If God had planned the world, then the inevitability of the fall would not represent much of a transgression, but merely be the manifestation of planned events. It is only when we opt for a panoramic perspective of the universe in a struggle against evil in being created, that goodness can take on the importance and beauty which it should be afforded.<sup>432</sup> Furthermore, as stated in section 3.1, it is only with the evolution of the moral sense that talk of evil becomes intelligible – a framework of morality predictive of human pain and suffering would allow the theological critic to argue that evil is a condition from the outset,

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<sup>429</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 84

<sup>430</sup> John Haught, *Christianity and Science*, p. 94

<sup>431</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 84

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84

and thus, a responsibility of an architect image of God. Therefore, there is significant reason to adhere to a non-teleological model of the world up to the point of the emergence of human consciousness/morality (though strictly speaking, this is not as much a ‘point’ as a period).

The cardinal message from the above analysis, is that evolutionary theory has forced a shift away from visions of a historical fall, and towards more developmental (or often eschatological) conceptions of the world; this shift is evident in varying degrees in the theology of Teilhard, Haught and others. Although the thrust of sociobiological theory under specific investigation in this thesis had not emerged at the time of Teilhard’s writing, he was fully cognizant of the implications an evolutionary worldview brought for theological understandings of good and evil. Teilhard was certainly aware that his views represented a deep shift from the prescribed Catholic vision as set forth in the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Yet his scientific background forced him to strongly appeal for renewal on this important understanding:

I fully appreciate the seriousness of the changes introduced by these new views. I am familiar with the solemn decrees of the Council of Trent on the subject of original sin. I am aware of the infinite network of formulas and attitudes through which the idea that we are the guilty children of Adam and Eve has percolated into our Christian life. Yet I beg my readers to reflect, calmly and impartially... for all sorts of reasons – scientific, moral and religious – the classic *depiction* of the Fall has already ceased to be for us anything but a straight-jacket and a verbal imposition, the *letter* of which can no longer satisfy us either intellectually or emotionally. In its material representation, it no longer belongs either to our Christianity or to our universe.<sup>433</sup>

### **3.4 The Divine in an Evolutionary Worldview**

Having expressed how evolutionary theory has forced a re-imagined outlook on the ontological framework within which good and evil are understood, attention must now be

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., p. 86

given to how the divine may be understood within this framework. As Haught points out, on this issue, he finds Teilhard's theology deficient.<sup>434</sup> Whilst Teilhard succeeded in articulating the importance of evolution for religious ideas of reality and human existence, Haught suggests that "his own efforts to construe a 'God for evolution' stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions demanded."<sup>435</sup> In this regard, Haught makes the valuable suggestion that we should look to and perhaps build upon the theology of Paul Tillich.<sup>436</sup>

Haught expresses disillusionment at the fact Christian theologians have, with the exception of a small minority, neglected the natural world – theology predominantly exists as divorced from the cosmos.<sup>437</sup> A preoccupation with the transcendent 'beyond' has led to a spurning of the immanent 'here' – a critique of religious thought also expressed at least implicitly by Nietzsche's fictional *Zarathustra*, "I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, who instead sacrifice themselves for the earth, so that the earth may one day become the overman's."<sup>438</sup> Ultimately, Haught still feels that Tillich's theology falls short of a proper integration of theology and evolution; Tillich's idea of existence erupting as a separation from a Platonic notion of being still, for Haught, places too much emphasis on a narrative of loss followed by a sought-after reunion.<sup>439</sup> That caveat being acknowledged, however, Haught still points to Tillich's notion of our having the courage to orient our lives towards the future as a key step towards a theology of evolution.<sup>440</sup> Tillich appreciates our responsibility to become participatory, creative co-creators in an interdependent world.<sup>441</sup> This theme is echoed and explicitly articulated in

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<sup>434</sup> John Haught, 'In Search for a God of Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin', pp. 540-541

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 540-541

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 542

<sup>438</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Adrian Del Caro and Robert. B. Pippin eds., (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 8 [Originally published 1885]

<sup>439</sup> John Haught, 'In Search for a God of Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin', pp. 549

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 551

<sup>441</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 46 [Originally published 1952]

more modern theological dialogue with evolutionary theory, such as that of Philip Hefner who argues that our existing and participating in our evolutionary reality is God's will.<sup>442</sup> Therefore, given that Tillich does appreciate our responsibility in a forward-looking metaphysic, it may still be instructive to refer to Tillich as it pertains to envisioning the divine in the evolutionary setting presented above.

The developmental or evolutionary aspects of an eschatological theology, such as those of Teilhard and Haught, are appropriate reflections of what we have learned from evolutionary theory. In addition, it has been asserted in this chapter, that any sense of teleology only emerges with the evolution consciousness and the moral sense – it is that sense which, in line with Paul's Adam-Christ dichotomy, signifies a transition in the world from moral indifference to a moral reality; it is only with the good, that we really know the bad. What is to be added to this perspective here, is how one envisages God in this context; no longer is the architect, expiatory vision of God appropriate. It is proposed thus, that Tillich's understanding of the divine as depth is a good candidate for a suitable understanding of the divine in light of our understanding of nature and evolutionary ethics.

Tillich takes as his starting point, scriptural references to the theme of depth, "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). He uses the concept of depth not as spatial, but as a lexical symbol for a spiritual dimension.<sup>443</sup> The banalities of everyday life, Tillich writes, are surface-level distractions which drive us from own existence, as opposed to us being in command of it – and here is where Haught's apprehension about the inadequacies of Tillich's theology may be apparent, as it is still quite transcendental.<sup>444</sup> True being, Tillich feels, is beneath our surface experiences; there is a depth beneath our day-to-day experiences, which he identifies as true being. It is this infinite and inexhaustible depth

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<sup>442</sup> Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Religion and Culture*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) p. 27

<sup>443</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of Foundations*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1966) p. 59 [Originally published 1949]

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

which Tillich identifies as God.<sup>445</sup> The aspects of our human experience, which seem to be more than what we experience on the surface level, are indicators of depth. Tillich notes that it is that spiritual dimension which religious symbolism attempts to signify. In the context of this thesis, it can be argued that consciousness (as with Teilhard) or the evolution of the human moral sense, are examples of indicators of depth. They point to something emergent, something more than the sum of their parts: ‘depth’.

Viewing morality or consciousness in this way as an indicator of depth is not to stand in opposition to a physicalist view, as advocated by philosophers of mind such as Daniel Dennett.<sup>446</sup> It is to acknowledge that consciousness and morality are emergent properties – they can be somewhat explained by reference to physics/chemistry/biology, though this does not diminish their reality or significance (recall the discussion on emergence and reductionism in Chapter Two). Therefore, even though Tillich’s concept of the divine as depth is rather transcendentalist, this does not prevent one from adopting it as an element of a theology that does appreciate the natural world – in other words, to adopt Tillich’s notion of depth is not to persist with a theology which Haught classifies as “divorced from the cosmos” but rather to contribute to a theology that is in fact, inspired by the cosmos, or more specifically in this case, the evolutionary process and evolutionary ethics.

Admittedly, as any critic could point out at this stage, Tillich’s notion of the divine as depth is deeply ambiguous. However, this critique may stem from an intellectual paradigm which seeks clarity when none may be possible. In this regard, Coakley makes the relevant point that since the advent of science, which she approximates with Francis Bacon in the sixteenth/seventeenth century, there has been a shift in theological understandings of God which in line with science, seek God in the natural world. She argues that those such as

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>446</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 33

William Paley and modern intelligent design proponents are attempting to rationalise an extrinsic divine designer “who implicitly inhabits the same time and space spectrum as the creation itself, and thus competes for space within it.”<sup>447</sup> These understandings of God, she feels, have shrunk to mechanistic accounts of efficient causation; they are nothing like “the earlier, scholastic, divine Being as found in Thomas Aquinas’ theology: atemporal, possessed of all omni-perfections to an eminent degree, the necessary sustainer of all that is, and utterly ontologically distinctive *qua* creator ‘out of nothing’.”<sup>448</sup>

Therefore, Tillich’s association of the divine with depth, whilst perhaps not in line with modern preoccupations with clarity and temporality, is more akin to the God of classical philosophers such as Aquinas. Tillich explains that depth then, whilst perhaps ambiguous, abstract, and ineffable, can be evidenced in many places, for example, in the characters of those with whom we form interpersonal relationships on a daily basis; we can dig deeper into people’s true being.<sup>449</sup> Interestingly, Tillich also finds support for the reality of depth with Nietzsche, who despite his advocacy of atheism, wrote, “The world is deep, and deeper than the day could read. Deep is its woe. Joy deeper still than grief can be. Woe says: Hence go! But joys want all eternity, want deep, profound eternity.”<sup>450</sup>

The apparent reality of depth can be taken then as indicative of the divine. For Haught, more specifically, it is indicative of a progressive creation; he considers particularly important Teilhard’s vision of God as Omega.<sup>451</sup> In this sense, he consolidates Tillich’s idea of God as depth with Teilhard’s eschatological theology. God is evident in the depth of experience, though the world is an ongoing creation. Therefore, Haught provides a metaphysical appropriation which places God at the end of creation – one which fits far more comfortably with our knowledge of evolution than the traditional framework of an

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<sup>447</sup> Sarah Coakley, ‘Teleology Reviewed’, p. 7

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>449</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of Foundations*, p. 60

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>451</sup> John Haught, ‘In Search for a God of Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’, pp. 542

instantaneous creation. Concurrent themes which stress the futurity of God can also be found to varying degrees in other important theologians such as Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg.<sup>452</sup> In addition, it could be argued that the evolution of morality is an appropriate indicator of teleology, and thus, depth – though I differ from Haught on *a priori* teleology/eschatology.

### 3.5 Eschatology and Evil

The move towards an evolutionary or eschatological worldview explored thus far in this chapter has been largely concerned with metaphysical systems. However, Willem B. Drees makes the important assertion that eschatology could be viewed as a counterpart to axiology; a reflection upon values, “... the task is to detect what is going on in the events that take place and to determine in which direction we should go.”<sup>453</sup> Moreover, Drees suggests that a merging of an axiology with a cosmology (whether or not one assumes that cosmology to be eschatological or not) is a heuristic formulation of what theology is or should be.<sup>454</sup> Drees’ statements here are particularly judicious in the context of the current discussion which very clearly treads between axiological and cosmological frameworks; how our broader, metaphysical or cosmological picture of God and creation is influenced by our understanding of evolutionary morality. Consequently, Drees advocates that eschatology should be understood as “... almost the worldly component of a *theodicy*, a defence of the compatibility of a good God with the evil in the world....”<sup>455</sup>

Although evolutionary theory re-frames the question of how evil entered a world made good, it does not fully negate the problem of evil. The Augustinian theodicy which underpins the traditional appreciation of good and evil is indeed made obsolete in light of

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<sup>452</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations: VI*, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969) p. 60, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, (London: Search, 1977) p. 57

<sup>453</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God*, (Illinois: Open Court, 1990) p. 117

<sup>454</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Creation: From Nothing Until Now*, (London: Routledge, 2002) p. 60

<sup>455</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, pp. 119-120

sociobiology. But the problem remains; why would God create a world which exhibits so much pain and suffering? Moreover, as Messer notes, even the Augustinian vision of sin/punishment becomes problematic on a reading of Genesis; why did God create the subtlest of all creatures, the serpent?<sup>456</sup> So the theodicy problem must be kept in mind when formulating a new metaphysic/metaethic to succeed the Augustinian conception. A new vision must acknowledge the theodicy problem whilst at the same time be appreciative of evolutionary ethics.

However, as noted in the first chapter, there has been some hesitation regarding such a revision; theologians such as Johnathan Chappell, Raymond Schwager, and R.J. Berry persist in some notion of a fall, albeit modified to be amenable to scientific theories (see section 1.5.1). More previously, the significant contributions to this field by Teilhard were strongly opposed, thus highlighting some scepticism regarding moving away from traditional representations of a sin/punishment theodicy. Teilhard was eventually forbidden to teach in the Catholic Institute in Paris because of the perceived unorthodoxy of his beliefs.<sup>457</sup> Furthermore, in his encyclical *Humani Generis*, Pius XII implicitly condemned Teilhard's thinking and persisted with a more traditional understanding of original sin.<sup>458</sup> Teilhard's theology, which was deeply influenced by his background in palaeontology and what he saw as a progressive world, conflicted starkly with the mainstream notion of an *ex nihilo* creation as expressed in Pius XII's 1941 address to the Pontifical Academy of Science (though Pius XII did later acknowledge the advances in evolutionary science in his *Humani Generis*).<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Neil Messer, *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics*, p. 196

<sup>457</sup> Don O'Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History*, (London: Continuum, 2007) p. 158

<sup>458</sup> Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, (Rome: 1950)

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html) accessed 18<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2013

<sup>459</sup> Pius XII, 'God the Only Commander and Legislator of the Universe', *Papal Addresses to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, p. 92



Despite this resistance, Teilhard made some headway with the theodicy question by considering how an eschatological vision of an evolving creation negates in his opinion, the problem of evil. In an evolving, unfinished creation, evil becomes a natural feature. This approach is not wholly dissimilar to the one which will be advocated in the next chapter; at this point, however, a framework for responding to theodicy which is consistent with what we learn from sociobiology, must be considered as another element of the broader shift in worldview.

#### *Moral Evil as a Consequence of Incomplete Progress*

Teilhard's outlook on theodicy is an interesting element of his eschatology, and is relevant in the context of this work given the centrality of theodicy in the Augustinian framework for appreciating good and evil explored in Chapter One. Teilhard's eschatological metaphysics discounts the traditional sin-punishment model, and as a result he must consider how this problem may be appropriated in his new 'metaphysics of the future'. The crux of Teilhard's approach to the problem of evil is ultimately perhaps one of resignation as he feels it is a conceptual fantasy to envisage a world without evil.<sup>460</sup> He challenges an implicit assumption of the problem, namely, that God could ever "draw from non-being a world without sorrows, faults, dangers – a world in which there is no damage, no breakage."<sup>461</sup> For Teilhard, evil is a strictly inevitable concomitant of creation, as Matthew (18:7) exclaims, "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come...."<sup>462</sup> The shift in the conceptual asymmetry of good and evil – from conceiving a good creation, questioning evil, to a natural struggle for existence, questioning goodness – is very much evident in Teilhard. He writes how the challenge for the religious worldview is no longer to expiate and restore a lost perfection, as in the Augustinian tradition, but to create and fight against

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<sup>460</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 33

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

evil.<sup>463</sup> Put simply, evil is the antithesis to creation; in Teilhard's words, it is the "negative of the photograph... the shadows on the landscape... the abysses between the peaks."<sup>464</sup>

By positing that evil was not necessarily a positive force but rather a necessary by-product of an unfinished creation, Teilhard is comparable to Augustine's notions of evil as privation of good – see section 1.3. However, Teilhard's assessment of creation contrasts with the conventional *ex nihilo* view. He is emphatic that a paradisiacal past is an untenable vision in light of our understanding of evolution, "Yet, however far back we look into the past we find nothing that resembles this wonderful state. There is not the least trace on the horizon, not the smallest scar, to mark the ruins of a golden age or our cutting off from a better world."<sup>465</sup> He acknowledges that the history of the world is dominated by pain and suffering, and thus to combine the doctrine of the fall with our scientific outlook, would lead us to become "victims of an error in perspective."<sup>466</sup>

Notwithstanding his repeal of a more historical appropriation of creation and the fall, Teilhard does continue to use the concept of original sin, though re-imagined to appreciate evolutionary theory. In his understanding of an evolving, unfinished creation, evil is an intrinsic side-effect. Therefore, he uses original sin to represent the "actual medium in which the totality of our experience develops."<sup>467</sup> The Fall is understood not as a historical event, but rather, "as a general condition affecting the whole of history."<sup>468</sup> Original sin is not a teaching of science or theology, Teilhard writes, but a teaching about human nature; this understanding of original sin gives further weight to the parallels drawn in Chapters One and Two, between original sin and the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Huxley, and perhaps even Darwin.

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 147

<sup>464</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 339

<sup>465</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 47

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 47

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p. 149

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 191

Although Teilhard's opinions on evil are worth noting, Drees argues for emphasis to be placed on an eschatology which expresses concern for justice and the brokenness of creation – in other words, an eschatology that make a contribution to theodicy.<sup>469</sup> Consequently, it could be argued that Teilhard's negation of the problem of evil is insufficient. If Drees' argument is taken on board, then it is important to consider how current injustice may be understood as an element of our worldview, in a way which is also fully cognizant of evolutionary ethics. As noted in Chapter One, the existence of injustice or evil has been a staple argument in the arsenal of religious critics, as well as eliciting many attempts to reconcile divine beneficence with experienced reality. Despite this plurality, John Hick discerns two major approaches from the history of Christian thought; one he attributes to Augustine, and the other, to Irenaeus. Substantial arguments have been presented hitherto, which have demonstrated the serious deficiencies in Augustine's theodicy in terms of understanding original sin and the fall as a historical narrative in light of evolution – despite of course noting the correspondences between original sin as an outlook on the human condition and the Darwinian principles of survival of the fittest. Therefore, I look to Hick's understanding of Irenaeus for a response to theodicy that can comfortably coalesce with the developmental nature of evolutionary theory (again, being mindful of the use of the word 'developmental' and whether or not this is taken to be *a priori* development, or development from within – as discussed in section 3.3).

It has been maintained here that evolutionary theory requires theologians to make a definitive shift away from the Augustinian understanding of the fall and develop a framework that is more developmental, or perhaps eschatological, in its orientation. This shift in focus, I have argued, can be discerned in the writings of Teilhard, and more recently Haught, amongst others. As noted above, Teilhard does give some attention to the theodicy

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<sup>469</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, pp. 118-122

question in the context of his evolutionary theology. Hick's approach is similar, and could therefore also be considered an element of an appropriate response to theodicy that fits within an eschatological framework; it is an approach which could be called 'developmental'. Regarding this response to theodicy, two points must be made.

Firstly, what Hick calls an Irenaean theodicy is not a theodicy explicitly pronounced in the writings of Irenaeus. Rather, Irenaeus is discerned as the first great Christian theologian to think along systematically developmental lines and thus, Hick feels, it is proper that Irenaeus' name be associated with this type of theodicy.<sup>470</sup> A more accurate description of what Hick terms an Irenaean theodicy would be to point out that a particular understanding of evil and the world was common amongst early Eastern Christian writers, and Hick's own view seeks to return to this position as an alternative to the more dominant Augustinian representation of a fall narrative. Secondly, what spurs Hick to seek an alternative to the Augustinian view is what he feels is the "radical incoherence" of the Augustinian model itself, whereas in this context, an alternative to the traditional narrative is being sought due to its inadequacies in light of evolutionary theory.<sup>471</sup>

Furthermore, in turning to Hick and his Irenaean theodicy, the distinction between natural and moral evil becomes important. In light of evolutionary theory, and specifically evolutionary ethics, Hick's Irenaean theodicy is an appropriate starting point for a response to theodicy with regard to moral evil, that is, the moral imperfections of humanity poignantly apparent throughout our history. Natural evil is not as easily reconciled in this view, and my motivation for departing from his view in that respect will be discussed in section 4.2.2. Hick summarises the Irenaean theodicy in contrast to the Augustinian tradition as follows:

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<sup>470</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 215

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250

Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God's plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt.<sup>472</sup>

The crux of this theodicy, is that humanity's moral sense is at present, deeply imperfect and incomplete, thus accounting for acts of moral evil. Our sinful nature is not a stark rebellion against a perfect creation, but rather, a corollary of our incomplete development.

Irenaeus' own view of a developing morality is articulated by distinguishing between the 'image' and 'likeness' of God in Genesis 1:26, a distinction which Hick considers exegetically dubious. As Hick explains, "His view was that man as a personal and moral being already exists in the image, but has not yet been formed into the finite likeness of God."<sup>473</sup> The *imago dei* as Irenaeus understands it, pertains to humanity as personal and moral beings. The likeness of God, however, pertains to a certain valuable quality of life which reflects the divine, "This represents the perfecting of man, the fulfilment of God's purpose for humanity..."<sup>474</sup> Irenaeus pictured humanity as transitioning from the image towards the likeness. In a similar vein to Teilhard, the Irenaean theodicy is thus "developmental and teleological. Man is in the process of becoming the perfect being whom God is seeking to create."<sup>475</sup>

This developmental understanding of our morality aligns comfortably then, both with a developmental metaphysic, and an evolving picture of human morality understood through evolutionary ethics. Our appreciation of evolutionary ethics requires a necessary

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid., pp. 214-215

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., p. 254

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 254

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 256

shift in understanding towards a developmental worldview, such as outlined in this chapter, and subsequently, it requires a developmental theodicy to replace the previously dominant Augustinian theodicy. Irenaeus' theodicy as explored by Hick, is an example of such a theodicy. It becomes then, a further example of a shift in theology towards a more developmental vision; in Hick's account, human morality is developing towards a goal, the 'likeness' of God, and is thus eschatological (which for Hick, culminates after death).<sup>476</sup> The evolving view of morality as understood through evolutionary ethics endorses this shift, given the mutual emphasis on development or progress (though of course, evolutionary accounts of ethics are not necessarily eschatological, and thus it is the developmental aspects of eschatological theology I adopt, rather than the eschatology itself). Yet a developmental view still requires a theodicy, and this necessary theodicy may be found with Hick, at least as it pertains to moral evil. If this theodicy is coupled with the developmental aspects of the metaphysical frameworks of Teilhard, Haught, Tillich, Rahner, Pannenberg and others, it provides a theological view which has consonance with evolutionary theory, or more specifically, evolutionary ethics.

### **3.6 Eschatology and Present Moral Responsibilities**

Whilst there has been a decisive shift in thinking towards a developmental or eschatological view in certain branches of contemporary theology, inspired either by evolutionary theory (as with Haught/Teilhard) or by the apparent self-defeating statements of the Augustinian view (as with Hick), such an eschatological worldview could be problematic. Although it can be contended that the eschatology and theodicy explored above are appropriate responses to evolutionary theory, it must be understood that they are not without their own inherent problems. One substantial caveat is identified by Drees; an eschatological vision

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., pp. 341-352

may render itself acquiescent to present injustice, “An evolutionary faith is in danger of subsuming present suffering and injustice under a future happiness and thus becoming the optimistic expectation of ‘an other time’.”<sup>477</sup>

Upon reflecting on our knowledge of evolutionary theory, theologians such as Haught have placed greater emphasis on development, progress and future. Haught for example, is explicit in this regard; his worldview is anticipatory, “grasped by the futurity of the divine promise.”<sup>478</sup> Similarly, although Hick’s Irenaean theodicy can account for current suffering as a result of incompleteness, it is expectant that perfection will eventually be manifest in a ‘good eschaton’, as Hick explains, “This is the belief that the Kingdom of God, as the end and completion of the temporal process, will be a good so great as to justify all that has occurred on the way to it, so that we may affirm the unqualified goodness of the totality which consists of history and its end.”<sup>479</sup> Such a hopeful vision may be, as Drees suggests, in danger of diverting our attention from the injustices of the present. The anticipation of a future perfection which will appear irrespective of current evils provides no incentive for us as humans to become responsible and participatory co-creators.<sup>480</sup> It should be noted, however, that in this regard, the Augustinian conception fares no better, as it too expects perfection in a spiritual realm, again diminishing the relevance of the present, and our activities of the present.<sup>481</sup>

An important point can be taken from Drees with regard to why even an eschatological theodicy such as that of Hick/Irenaeus might be considered insufficient. Our understanding of cosmology clearly indicates the vastness of the timescale we occupy. Therefore, when we think of the eschaton in relation to cosmology, we realise that this event may be billions of years away, perhaps with the burning out of the sun or the eventual

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<sup>477</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, p. 148

<sup>478</sup> John Haught, *Christianity and Science*, p. 46

<sup>479</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 238

<sup>480</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, p. 151

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151

demise of the universe, be that through heat death, a ‘big crunch’ or another scenario. Therefore, by locating hope/perfection and the justification of evil at the Omega, as in the theology of Teilhard, Haught, Hick and others, it is so far away that it becomes severely diluted. As Drees explains, the locating of hope in a bright future puts it at too great a distance, “The next few generations, say children and grandchildren, have relevance by virtue of their relation to us. Beings a few thousand generations hence, or even much further away, do not inspire us to do something about the quality of their lives.”<sup>482</sup>

We are left then, with the question of how to interpret the divine and a metaethical to frame discussion on good and evil in light of Drees’ critique of the perhaps untenable emphasis on the distant future apparent in eschatological visions. In highlighting the problems with a God “pushed to a distant past or future”, Drees then argues that it is in fact the present that is God’s primary locus.<sup>483</sup> However, he goes on to also place emphasis on God’s otherness, thus returning to the image of the God of the philosophers, such as Aquinas. This makes evident again the distinction drawn by Coakley between an atemporal God, and the temporal idea of God evident in William Paley and others’ search for a ‘God of the gaps’.<sup>484</sup> The term Drees uses to describe God’s relationship to the world is ‘present transcendence’.<sup>485</sup> God is other than the world, though not at a distant past or distant future, but in the present. This otherness, could be equated to what Tillich terms ‘depth’, and was argued in section 3.4 to be a suitable understanding of God. Moreover, if we recall the previous chapter, evolutionary understandings of ethics stress the role of consciousness. Therefore, an evolutionary understanding of ethics appreciates the importance of our present responsibilities in moral behaviour; we cannot rely on our nature, nor can we rely on a future so distant it becomes irrelevant. We must rely on ourselves and our present consciousness.

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p. 205

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., p. 199

<sup>484</sup> Sarah Coakley ‘Teleology Reviewed’, p. 7

<sup>485</sup> Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, p. 199



We may not need evolutionary understandings of ethics to be moral and appreciate our present responsibilities, but in a metaphysical framework, these understandings can provide more support for acknowledging our responsibility than eschatological worldviews alone.

### **3.7 Culmination of Evolutionary and Axiological Themes**

Consequently, whilst evolutionary theory has in part inspired a shift to an eschatological vision in contemporary theology, there are issues with such a shift; namely, the relegation of the present into irrelevance, and the non-directionality of evolutionary theory. Notwithstanding these important problematic issues, the developmental aspect of the eschatological worldview is something worth retaining, given its clear consonance with evolutionary theory and evolutionary ethics. Again, this is not a mere compliant accommodation of science in a cheap attempt to retain intellectual credibility in a scientific age, but a commitment to acknowledging the progress that science has made in contributing to our understanding of the world. Therefore, as stated in the introduction, what is required is an axiological theology that satisfies the following four criteria; i) it appreciates the evolving nature of the world, the evolving nature of goodness, and the evolving nature of God's creative action ii) it makes reference to the divine, iii) it provides a response to the theodicy question, and iv) it appreciates our present responsibilities. I argue that elements of the above theologies satisfy these four criteria when conjoined with our understandings of the evolution of our moral sense.

Firstly, the evolving view of the world as made known through evolutionary science has clearly been accommodated by contemporary theologians, Teilhard in particular, and those such as Haught, on whom Teilhard had an instrumental influence; therefore, the first criteria has been satisfied. However, as this developmental view is considered, for the purposes of clarity, distinct issues require attention, for example, whether this evolving

world is considered teleological (either broadly teleological as with Haught and others who lean on the thesis of evolutionary convergence, or teleological after the sphere of intelligence has been penetrated – I argue in favour of the latter). Secondly, the question of how the divine is reflected in such an evolutionary worldview becomes important; a developmental vision of the world may correspond to evolutionary theory, but if it makes no reference to the divine it can hardly be considered theological. On this point, I have argued that the introduction of values to the world through the process of evolving ethics offers a glimmer into what Tillich terms ‘depth’ – that depth being the divine. The ambiguity of this notion was noted as a distinct caveat of this argument, however, it was noted that this caveat may stem from a cultural preoccupation with clarity – though this is not to say that we frivolously abandon the search for clarity, rather, it is an acknowledgement of subjective realities. Therefore, the natural evolution of morality is seen to be reflective of God’s values.

The third criterion is the requirement for a theological worldview grounded in evolutionary theory to provide a response to theodicy. This, I have suggested, can be found in Hick’s representation of Irenaeus and the vision that moral evil exists as a result of our incomplete moral development; morally, our species is still in its infancy. In this context, this response to theodicy was presented with a focus on moral evil and not natural evil, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Moreover, as Drees has pointed out, such an eschatological theodicy may diminish the importance of the present and our responsibility to react against injustice. This problem begets the fourth criterion; the need to appreciate our present responsibilities. In response to this, viewing our values as emergent from evolutionary ethics satisfies this criteria, because it places the responsibility on human consciousness. As argued in the previous chapter, evolutionary ethics demonstrates that our moral values are our responsibility; they were not established in an archaic society or provided by a primordial covenant. Rather, our moral values are the result of a long process

of evolution and are now governed by our own consciousness and free will. We are not being blindly led by genetic determinism nor are we bound by sacred laws; we are the commanders of our own moral code, and as with the second criterion, we can see God's values reflected through our evolved sense of right and wrong.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In congruence with evolutionary theory, there is evidence for a shift in theological thinking from viewing good and evil within the scheme of a fallen perfect creation, to conceiving a continuous creation; *creatio continua*. This changing of perspective was demonstrated in this chapter by highlighting five distinct theological themes and discussing how attitudes towards these themes can progress in light of evolutionary theory. The first of these themes was explored in section 3.1; the framework for understanding good and evil. Progress in evolutionary theory has made evident the fact that goodness is not latent in creation, as assumed in traditional theological and philosophical systems – an assumption which spawned the asymmetry of the theodicy question and inspired Augustine's portrayal of the fall; goodness was taken as a given, whilst evil required explanation. A new approach to understanding good and evil is evident amongst contemporary theologians such as Messer and Williams, who now appreciate sociobiology and how good and evil may only become intelligible concepts subsequent to the evolution of morality.

The second of these five themes was investigated in section 3.2, which discussed approaches to God's creative action that can be re-appropriated to be accommodative of an evolving world. Section 3.3 then discussed the third of these five themes; a move towards an eschatological picture of creation. In this approach, humanity is progressing towards perfection at the eschaton, rather than attempting to restore a historical perfection that went awry. Section 3.4 outlined an approach to the divine that was consistent with this renewed

evolutionary theological framework. This approach followed Haught in relying on Tillich's understanding of the divine as depth. Section 3.5 then explored how an evolutionary or developmental theology could provide a necessary response to the problem of evil. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 thus discerned the fourth and fifth respective theological themes which exhibit a decisive shift in contemporary theology post-evolutionary theory.

Furthermore, section 3.6 discussed the issue of how our present responsibilities could be appreciated within the context of a developmental worldview. Section 3.7 then outlined how various issues raised throughout the chapter culminated to satisfy four distinct criteria set forth in the introduction. The culmination of these points is illustrative of my own position with regard to a theological framework for morality that is appreciative of evolutionary ethics. The central argument of this thesis is to show how evolutionary ethics can provide a glimmer of hope in what may otherwise be considered a nihilistic world. In presenting this argument, this chapter has acknowledged the theological context within which this thesis rests, which is characterised by a marked emphasis on a continuing creation and development – an emphasis that is inspired in no small way by evolutionary theory.