

Birds Trust Their Wings, Sharks Their Teeth,

and Humans Their Minds:

The Critical Intelligence Argument Against Naturalism

In what follows I discuss John Haught's 'critical intelligence' argument against naturalism. First I will outline Haught's version of theistic evolution. Then I will discuss the case he makes against naturalism with his 'critical intelligence' argument. And finally I will evaluate Haught's 'critical intelligence' argument against naturalism.

I.

Haught is a theologian who has developed a version of theistic evolution in several books: *God After Darwin* (2000, 2008), *Deeper than Darwin* (2003), and *Is Nature Enough?* (2006). Theistic evolutionary theories are not new. In Darwin's time, theorists such as Asa Gray and Alfred Russell Wallace held theistic evolutionary theories; they both retained a supernaturalist aspect in their evolutionary theory because of what they understood as the inability of a naturalistic theory of evolution to account for the human mind.¹ Haught, too, is extremely doubtful that a naturalistic theory of evolution could account for the ultimate emergence of critical intelligence, even if we assume deep time (2000: 182; 2006: 94, 111).

¹ Similarly situated in this tradition of theistic evolution is the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II (1997) and Cardinal Christoph Schönborn (2005), for largely the same reasons offered by Gray and Wallace, maintain that a purely naturalistic theory of evolution cannot fully explain the human mind. Even Pope Pius XII (1950: 287) said evolution is an open question, as long as it is confined to the development of the human body.

Haught's work provides a recent example of a sustained effort to work out a theistic model of evolution. As an expert in this area, Haught was called to testify in the 2005 court case in Pennsylvania (*Kitzmiller et. al vs. Dover District School Board*), in which a suit was brought against the Dover School Board because it proposed to incorporate "intelligent design" into high school biology classes (Haught 2008: xi). Haught testified that teaching intelligent design, as a religious notion, is inappropriate for biology classes. The court ultimately ruled that teaching intelligent design in science classes would be a violation of the 1st Amendment's Establishment Clause (Haught 2008: 194).

For Haught, God is the ultimate explanation for evolution and the cosmic process (2000: 165). He believes there is a way of reading evolution that is consistent with science *and* religious hope (2003: 25). Although many evolutionists espouse metaphysical naturalism, Haught says their metaphysical commitments should not lead us to suppose that an evolutionary understanding requires a commitment to metaphysical naturalism. For, Haught claims, "there is absolutely no reason why evolutionary science cannot be methodologically naturalistic—following the proper decision of all science to leave out any appeal to nonnatural explanations—without being metaphysically materialistic" (2000: 32). Haught's approach is to assent to *methodological* naturalism and concede from the outset the general integrity of Darwinian science (2000: 14; 2003: xi).

Haught accepts the disorderly, undirected aspects of evolution that evolutionists say are part of the life process, which are features of natural history he says proponents of intelligent design theory pass over (2000:4).

Nature is ordered, yet open to disorder ... Contingency doesn't prevent order from emerging. Natural selection is rigorously lawful, yet open to indeterminate new creation.

The world has a temporal character that allows evolution to occur. (Haught 2000: 96)

Haught concurs with evolutionists that the unfolding of natural history is not

linearly progressive. For vast periods of time little happened, and much of the history of life's evolution can be captured in the image of a randomly branching bush. (2000: 117)

Haught accepts that the cosmos is an unfinished process, since there is undeniable evidence that the universe is *still* being created and is not an orderly design (2000: 6). He sees that nature itself is inherently historical, and the cosmos has always had a historical character, given the 'big bang' cosmology to which most scientists today subscribe (2000: 156).

That the evolution of life on earth is a very long story is extremely important for Haught. The details scientists are actively engaged in working out, in his view, cannot undermine the fact that the universe is one long story, which is continuing to unfold. For Haught, the fact that the universe is still unfolding provides us with a basis for religious hope (2003: 25). He calls the fact that the universe is indeed one long story the *narrative cosmological principle* (2003: 61). According to Haught (2000):

it could be argued that because of recent science's discovery of nature's fundamentally historical character, we may with more confidence than ever locate *the whole cosmos*,

and not just human affairs, within the horizon of the promise that molds the experience of Israel, Jesus, and his followers. (156-7)

Haught views the unfolding universe as one long experiment in self-actualization. The “experimental self-actualizing” of the universe takes deep time in order to play itself out (2006: 190).

Haught denies that naturalistic evolutionists have told the *whole* story about how life evolves; he calls it a reading problem (2003: chp 2). Taking things too literally, as he sees it, affects not only religious fundamentalists but scientists as well (2003: xv). As he puts it: “Some evolutionists think that naturalism can give an ultimate explanation of everything” (2006: 15). In contrast, Haught describes different ways of reading reality, because solely relying on one way of reading reality will result in an incomplete account. To be fully explanatory, Haught says we ought to employ many different frameworks, only one of which being scientific. To presume that only science has a corner on true claims about reality is restrictive and reductive. To explain his position Haught uses the notion of a layered explanation:

Suppose that a wood fire is burning in your backyard. Your neighbour comes over and asks you to explain why the fire is burning. A very good response would be: it is burning because the carbon in the wood is combining with oxygen to make carbon dioxide. This is an acceptable explanation, and for a certain kind of inquiry it is enough. Still, there can be other levels of explanation. For example, you might just as easily have answered your neighbour’s question by saying: the fire is burning because I lit a match to it.

And a third answer might be: “The fire is burning because I want to roast marshmallows.” Different levels of explanation, as is evident here, can coexist without conflict. “I want to roast marshmallows” does not in any way compete with physical explanations of the burning wood. I do not respond to my neighbour: “The fire is burning because of chemical combustion *rather than* because I want marshmallows.” “I want to roast marshmallows,” in fact, cannot be squeezed into the explanatory slot that focuses on the chemistry of combustion and my overarching purpose of wanting something to eat. (2006: 16)

In terms of the three different layers of explanations, this time in an example about water boiling on the stove because I want a cup of tea, Haught observes:

Here we have three logically distinct explanations. All are correct and relevant, but they cannot be reduced to or mapped onto one another. Each adds something important to an understanding of why the water is boiling, and it does so without conflicting or competing with the others. (2006: 70)

Haught’s layered explanations approach also applies to human behaviour. With regard to evolutionary explanations of human behaviour, Haught argues that exclusively biological explanations come up short. Just as the story of life on earth and the origins of human critical intelligence are not wholly captured by scientific explanations, the biological sciences cannot fully explain and understand human behaviour by reducing it to genetic explanations. For

Haught, Darwinism does not tell us everything we need to know about life (in the biographical sense), or about living a life (again, biographically) (2003: xi).

II.

Having provided a brief sketch of Haught's theory of theistic evolution—his positive case—I will now turn to the case that Haught makes *against* naturalistic version of evolution and naturalism generally. Haught wishes to go beyond merely showing that a theistic model of evolution is a plausible and live hypothesis. He goes further and mounts a two-pronged attack on naturalism. The first, more modest, part of his attack on naturalism is developed in two different ways; one focuses on the abilities of the human mind and the other concerns ethics. Here I will only discuss his argument about the mind.² The gist of this first argument against naturalism is simply that naturalistic versions of evolution will fall short in capturing the mind. Call it the *ineffectiveness of naturalistic theories of the mind* argument. Haught writes:

Materialist metaphysics can provide no illumination regarding the surprising emergence in evolution of what we all know immediately as the experience of our 'subjectivity.'
(2000: 88)

² With regard to ethics, Haught frames the argument in the following way. In your own mind right now, the three spontaneous acts of cognition (experience, understanding, and judgment) seem to be following "persistent and ineradicable imperatives at the foundation of your consciousness" (Haught 2006: 33). The persistent and unavoidable imperatives are: 'be attentive,' 'be intelligent,' and 'be critical,' respectively. But at work in your mind right now there is another cognitional act, one that has the most to do with ethics: it is the cognitional act of 'decision,' and *it* is driven by the imperative to 'be responsible.' Haught contends that in the natural imperative to *be responsible*, the human mind anticipates the future. For Haught "the naturalist's own moral aspirations cannot be explained fully in naturalistic terms any more than can critical intelligence" (2006: 148).

As an evolutionist about the human mind, Haught insists that “Our capacities to perceive, understand and know have come to birth from within the bowels of earth and evolution” (2006: 95). As I said above, Haught accepts the general integrity of Darwinian science. Nevertheless, he claims there is a problem encountered when naturalism attempts to account for the subjectivity and critical intelligence of the human mind. For Haught, the human mind spontaneously performs different acts of cognition and it “*cannot help* passing through the three distinct but complementary acts: experience, understanding and judgment” (2006: 32-33). Experience, understanding, and judgment are the main elements of subjectivity. Collectively, Haught calls these features of the human mind *critical intelligence*. Naturalism, he asserts, simply cannot account for the emergence of critical intelligence.

Even though physical and evolutionary explanations are necessary for any rich understanding of critical intelligence, these cannot be sufficient to explain the trust that any knower places in the imperatives of the mind. (Haught 2006: 90)

The issue and challenge of explaining the *trust* that a knower has for her own mind brings Haught to his second, more assertive argument against naturalism. Call it the *trustworthiness of critical intelligence argument*. He aims to show that naturalistic theories of evolution are self-refuting because they would undermine the trust we put in our own critical intelligence.³ Haught introduces this argument in *Deeper than Darwin* (2003: 97-9), but more fully develops it in *Is Nature Enough?* (2006). If we look upon critical intelligence, he says, as “an incidental,

³ Haught is making an argument similar to Alvin Plantinga’s argument against naturalism.

unplanned byproduct of evolution” we will have “failed to justify the *trust*” we put in this intellectual capacity (2006: 112). Haught believes that naturalists who view critical intelligence as an accident of evolution unwittingly undermine the confidence we could justifiably place in the spontaneous workings of critical intelligence (2006: 113). Since we *do* spontaneously put trust in our own minds and we *are* confident in our intellectual capacities, therefore naturalism and the human mind’s experience of subjectivity are at cross purposes (2000: 88). So for Haught, naturalism is actually inconsistent with the trust we place in the imperatives of our minds (2006: 36). He asks: “is the creed of naturalism consistent with the trust that you are now placing in the imperatives of your mind?” (2006: 36). No he says. Haught regards this as a “self-contradiction of evolutionary naturalism” (2006: 107); and he takes it to be such a strong argument against naturalism that it “spells the end of naturalism as a plausible creed” (2006: 88).

Theistic evolution has an advantage over naturalistic evolution, he says, because when faced with explaining how human critical intelligence can have such confidence in itself, a theist can say that the human mind has been grasped by a transcendent truth. The reason that we as intelligible subjects spontaneously put so much trust in the desire to know is because of our mind’s native anticipation of a transcending fullness of truth that has *already* grasped hold of us (2006: 91). Haught also says that

a theological understanding ... can explain, in a way that naturalism cannot, why the intelligible subject spontaneously puts so much trust in the desire to know. Truth, after all, can flourish only where there is something to value, and value has to be rooted in what is imperishable. (2006: 138)

III.

Haught's theistic model of evolution is plausible and I think can be regarded as a live hypothesis. Beyond the interesting features of his model that I outlined above, Haught's model has even more to offer, which I haven't had space to get into, such as how his model of evolution characterizes God. Haught attempts to make sense of the disorderly and undirected aspects of biological evolution by characterizing God not as a designer, but as a God of love. Rather than an overly involved designer intent on controlling how creation will unfold, Haught portrays God as a loving parent that allows creation to develop and unfold in an undirected and sometimes wasteful manner, as a loving parent allows an undirected child to make his or her own mistakes. This is how Haught can make sense of various evolutionary oddities such as the fact that 99.99% of all species that have ever existed are now extinct (Raup 1991: 4). According to the paleontologist David Raup, it may sound strange, but it's true, that to a good approximation, all species are extinct. Along the same lines, Richard Dawkins, quoting his colleague Robert May, says: "To a good approximation, all species are insects" (1989: 251). By not emphasizing God as a designer, Haught sidesteps bothersome questions about why, if God is a designer, are the majority of all species that have ever existed now extinct, and why are there so many species of insects? And Haught does not have to say, with the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane, that the creator, if He exists, has "an inordinate fondness for beetles."

Although Haught's positive case for theistic evolution has attractive qualities, his negative case against naturalism seems rather weak. With regard to his argument that a naturalist metaphysics can provide no illumination regarding the surprising emergence in evolution of subjectivity and critical intelligence, it seems to me that he is offering an *a priori* argument. But whether a naturalistic explanation will or will not ever be able to capture subjectivity and critical

intelligence could just as well be an empirical issue. The fact that the mind acts spontaneously with regard to subjectivity and critical intelligence is not reason in itself to think that a naturalistic model could not in principle unpack a collection of underlying physical processes stacked upon themselves that give rise to subjectivity and critical intelligence. To simply say that the structure and subjectivity of critical intelligence remain “unilluminated” by contemporary physicalist theories of mind is not enough to show that a physicalist theory cannot one day more fully illuminate the nature of the mind (Haught 2006: 132).

For the purposes of evaluating Haught’s *trustworthiness of critical intelligence argument*, consider the following rendering of the argument.

1. If critical intelligence were an accident of naturalistic evolution, then that would undermine the confidence we place in the spontaneous workings of critical intelligence.
2. We *do* spontaneously put trust in our own minds and we *are* confident in our intellectual capacities.
3. Therefore, critical intelligence cannot be an accident of naturalistic evolution.

Granting the truth of premise two seems uncontroversial. Premise one is the heart of the argument, and it may very well be false. First, given what we know about the biological process of evolution, traits can become more and more sharpened over successive generations. Our cognitive characteristics have perhaps become more and more fine-tuned through the chiseling effect of natural selection. And this would mean, of course, that we could be *more* confident of our critical intelligence, when we view it from the perspective of evolutionary naturalism.

We needn't take this line of thought too far, though, since critical intelligence is fallible, and cognitive mistakes are possible. Darwin's mole rat example, and Gould's Irish elk example, and don't forget the subtitle to Raup's book about extinctions—"bad luck or bad genes?" But Haught is extreme to the opposite side of the spectrum when he says that Darwinian adaptation would "negate the trustworthiness of all human thought" (2006: 207). I won't say that because of the chiseling and fine-tuning of cognition that humans are infallible in their critical intelligence, but neither should we say that *all* human thought becomes untrustworthy if we take evolutionary naturalism seriously. A naturalistic account of critical intelligence will grant that we make mistakes, we are gullible, we're not critical enough, our thought processes become clouded by feelings and emotions. All of this is still consistent with saying that our cognitive skills—warts and all—may simply be a product of evolution by natural selection.

Another point against the first premise of the *trustworthiness of critical intelligence argument* is that it claims that because a trait or a skill is an accident of naturalistic evolution, that undermines the confidence we have in the workings of that trait or skill. But this doesn't seem true. As the title of my paper suggests, and any evolutionist including Haught would assent, naturalistic models of evolution recognize the success birds have in flying and the success sharks have in killing their prey. These traits and skills are only "incidental and unplanned byproducts of natural evolution," as Haught hastens to point out, yet birds that fly and sharks that kill can be very confident of these traits and skills that they possess. So why shouldn't humans also trust their minds and their own spontaneous trust and spontaneous workings of their critical intelligence, even if these traits and skills *are* products of natural selection?

As above, yes our critical intelligence is fallible, and we make cognitive mistakes, but is the very process of critical intelligence called into question simply because it is the product of

an undirected and purely naturalistic meandering of evolution? I don't think that it should, and so Haught's first premise I see as false and his *trustworthiness of critical intelligence argument* coming up just as short as his *ineffectiveness of naturalistic theories of the mind* argument.

It does seem that Haught exaggerates when he says his case "spells the end of naturalism as a plausible creed" (2006: 88). We seem to be faced more with an antinomy between theistic evolution and naturalistic evolution, to borrow a concept from Kant. And because what is at issue is not the scientific credentials and integrity of evolutionary science but the *metaphysics* one is prepared to link with evolution, this could even be regarded as an antinomy of pure reason.

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