

PHAVISMINDA Journal

Volume 20 (2021 Issue)

Pages: 141-163

Concord or Conflict?
**A Teilhardian-Plantingan Analysis of the
Relationship between Christianity and Evolution**

Joshua Jose R. Ocon
Philosophy Department
San Carlos Seminary
oconjr@scs.edu.ph

Abstract

It is said that science, since the Enlightenment, had advanced with an ever-increasing intensity to reinvent and develop the way we see ourselves and our relationship with the world. The nascent scientific worldview then brought about a profound change in the conception of man's place in the universe, and among the findings of the major scientific revolutions, it was that of Charles Darwin which proved to be most impactful. What sets him apart from his predecessors who attempted to explain the evolution of life is his discovery of natural selection, the theoretical mechanism that supposedly underlies the evolutionary process. Even beyond the scientific field, Darwin's achievement remains prominent up to this day as it has come to be utilized by twenty-first-century intellectuals who champion nonchalant diatribes against the enterprise of faith and religious belief, considered to be in conflict and wholly irreconcilable with the truths that science has unearthed. This led to the emergence of a movement that professes close allegiance to science and downright disdain for religion – New Atheism. This paper aims to analyze the 'conflict' between Christianity and evolution as narrated by neo-atheists, having evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as their foremost representative. Such evaluation employs Alvin Plantinga's epistemological critique of naturalism, complemented by Teilhard de Chardin's conception of evolution as 'hominization' and 'complexification.' Although De Chardin's thought historically precedes Plantinga's, the compatibility of their analyses suggests the scientific, philosophic, and even theological concord of Christianity and evolution.

Keywords: evolution, naturalism, Christianity, consciousness

A Shift in World View

Commonly held yet utterly misinformed, science, like a lamp that has been placed under the bed, had been kept at bay by bat-like religiosity that rigidly embraced superstitious and fictitious beliefs that dominated much of the first millennium.¹ As history progressed and as the lamp of knowledge began to radiate its light, a radical intellectual movement gradually emerged from theological and religious speculations towards the cosmos. This time around, the emphasis was on man, leading to the age of humanism. With the intervention of great men during the seventeenth century, notably Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, a scientific worldview began to encompass every aspect of individual and social life, leading to a necessary reevaluation of the “conception of man’s place in the universe.”²

Such was an instance of a leading *paradigm*, as Thomas Kuhn calls it, that came to face an *anomaly*, that is, the Copernican heliocentric finding that ran counter to a firmly held geocentrism. This ‘anomaly,’ when confirmed by Galileo’s discovery of four of Jupiter’s moons, led to a crisis that involved a “proliferation of competing articulations...the expression of explicit discontent...[and] debate over fundamentals.”³ This inevitably led to the

¹ “The achievements of medieval science are so little-known today that it might seem natural to assume that there was no scientific progress at all during the Middle Ages” (James Hannam, *God’s Philosophers: How the Medieval World Laid the Foundations of Modern Science*, London: Icon Books, Ltd., 2009, ii). The point is that contrary to the widely held assumption of scientific stagnation during the Middle Ages, the rise of modern science is not without antecedent. Some say that even if this antecedence is granted, the Catholic Church’s repressions prevented the eventual fruition of the already existing interests for science as ‘natural philosophy.’ The text cited is a rich source that discusses the falsity of the claim of the interruption of science in the first millennium.

² Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1945), 537.

³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2012), 91. (Original work published in 1962).

rejection of the 'old' paradigm which, in effect, changed man's anthropocentric worldview and replaced it with that which is more cosmological.⁴ It is said that this momentous advancement made by science was responsible for the effacement of man, and the world at large, as the focal point of the universe; a view that the Catholic Church espoused.⁵ This, however, was only the first among the three major revolutions.⁶ Perhaps it pales in comparison with what could be considered as the foundation of evolutionary science in terms of displacing humanity's self-assumed place in the universe.⁷

Alvin Plantinga, whose analysis of the biological evolutionary theory I will be dealing with, affirms this paradigm shift:

⁴ Kuhn notes that "the decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other." *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵ It can be said that although theocentrism, the view that all things are referred to the Divine as the focal point, is the more obvious spirit of the age during the Middle Ages, Christianity's influence on how its adherents understood themselves as humans vis-à-vis their assent to the belief that Jesus Christ assumed humanity is significant for the development of anthropology and an anthropocentric worldview during the medieval period. Bertrand Russell speaks of the Copernican revolution as that which "made it difficult to give to man the cosmic importance assigned to him in the Christian theology," (*The History of Western Philosophy*, 526) and the Church teaches that man is *Imago Dei* after all. Moreover, Wolfhart Pannenberg notes that "Christology has always been influenced by man's changing understanding of himself" ("The Christological Foundations of Christian Anthropology", in C. Geffre, *Humanism and Christianity*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1983, 86).

⁶ While there are more scientific revolutions that have taken place in the context of these paradigm shifts, three are taken to be most notable: Darwinian, as discussed in this essay, and the Copernican and Freudian revolutions. For an exhaustive treatment, confer Friedel Weinert, *Copernicus, Darwin, & Freud: Revolutions in the History and Philosophy of Science*, (Malden/Oxford/Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁷ Historian of science Ian Barbour captures this idea succinctly: "Much of the resistance to Copernicus and Galileo arose because in their cosmologies the earth was no longer the center but only one of several planets going around the sun. Darwin carried further the demotion of humanity from its central place in the cosmic scheme, and this seemed to challenge the biblical understanding of the significance of human life" (*Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1997, 214).

In the seventeenth century, the main source of debate and conflict was astronomical; since the middle of the nineteenth, it has been biological, centering on the theory of evolution.⁸

Common information regarding scientific history informs us that it was Charles Darwin, the pre-eminent naturalist of the Victorian period, who discovered and propounded the biological theory of *evolution*. This is a misconception. Prior to Darwin, there were evolutionary theories already known to the intellectual world.⁹ Darwin's emergence as the foremost evolutionist could be attributed to his discovery of the theoretical mechanism that logically explained the process of evolution:

As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and this be NATURALLY SELECTED. From all the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form.¹⁰

Darwin's achievement was in formulating the theory of natural selection, but there is something more profound in this discovery that sets him apart from

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 7.

⁹ The conception of evolution is already present as early as in Milesian philosophy through Anaximander, which, in turn, inspired the German *Naturphilosophen* like von Schelling and Hegel, French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Scottish publisher and scientist Robert Chambers. Kuhn provides these names as examples of pre-Darwin evolutionists (Cf. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 170). Anaximander's theory of evolution is available to us through the remaining fragments of his work; Lamarck's *opus* on evolution is titled *Zoological Philosophy*, and Chambers', *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*.

¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Croydon: Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd., 2011), xviii. (Original work published in 1859) [Emphasis as in the referenced text].

the pre-Darwinian evolutionists. The theory implies the total abolition of the teleological explanation that accounts for the involvement of “the direction and the guiding force [like God] to the entire evolutionary process.”¹¹ However, it must be noted that Darwin was concerned about the repercussions of his theory to religious belief, which is why he proceeded to lay out a possible synthesis:

I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of anyone. A celebrated author and divine has written to me that he has gradually learned to see that it is just as noble a conception of the deity to believe that he created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms...¹²

Whichever it may be, what is certain is that Darwin had advanced a paradigm that if “generally admitted... there will be a considerable revolution in natural history.”¹³

This point from Darwin proves to be true today, which is why much of the interest in contemporary science is directed towards evolutionary biology. Its foremost progenitor biologist Richard Dawkins significantly contributed in promulgating the non-teleological version of natural selection; “how organized complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without deliberate guidance,”¹⁴ and how natural selection, “the unconscious automatic process... play the role of... the *blind watchmaker*.”¹⁵ Dawkins is significant in discussing the relationship of Christianity and evolution, given that his advocacy for a non-teleological evolution stands side by side with the proclamation of a radically atheistic worldview. It advances, not only the incompatibility of science and religious faith

¹¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 170.

¹² Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 556.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 560.

¹⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007), 141.

¹⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design* (London: Norton Press, 1986), 5.

but also the irrationality of holding such beliefs. It is precisely this ‘conflict’ that this paper analyzes in two parts through Alvin Plantinga’s epistemological method and Teilhard de Chardin’s philosophical and scientific insights: 1) the superficial conflict between evolution and Christianity, and 2) their deep concord.

Plantinga on Dawkins’ Naturalism

Alvin Plantinga’s epistemological analysis of the theory of evolution lays the foundation of the first of the two theses on the relationship between Christianity and evolution. With this, it is necessary to briefly discuss the bigger picture under which this thesis falls, that is, *naturalism*. In its broadest sense, ‘naturalism’ is defined in contrast to ‘supernaturalism,’ which “refers to a God or gods and their intervention in this world of ours.”¹⁶ While the naturalist outlook of the world was already present, particularly in Pre-Socratic philosophers like Democritus, its resurgence in contemporary philosophy owes greatly to the development of the Darwinian theory of evolution.¹⁷

As seen by Plantinga, the ‘conflict’ is in proposing evolution as an absolutely naturalistic process. One cannot believe that there is a divinity responsible for the coming about of life and be a ‘naturalist’ at the same time.¹⁸

¹⁶ Michael Ruse, “Naturalism and the Scientific Method,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant & Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2013), 299.

¹⁷ Dawkins affirms this in contrast to the perspective that sees the world in terms of its being a divine handiwork, a view that he considers as mere “cosmic sentimentality” in the face of Darwin’s discovery. Thus, McGrath says of such stance: “Such naïve beliefs, he argues, might have been understandable before Darwin came along. But not now. Darwin has changed everything. Before Darwin, atheism [and naturalism along with it] was just one among many religious possibilities; now, it is the only serious option for a thinking, honest, and scientifically informed person.” (Alister McGrath, *Dawkins’ God: From The Selfish Gene to The God Delusion* (2nd Edition). Malden/Oxford/Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015, 7-8).

¹⁸ I follow Plantinga’s conception of *naturalism* as being “stronger than atheism” in that one “can be an atheist without rising to the full heights (sinking to the lowest depths?) of

He comes to assert that the term ‘evolution’ “covers a multitude,”¹⁹ that it refers to more than one possible explanation and concepts related to the emergence of life on earth: 1) the ‘progress thesis’ which pertains to life’s complexification from simple life forms over time; 2) the ‘common ancestry thesis’ which proposes that life on earth has evolved from the same life forms, emphasizing the linkage of virtually all organisms in terms of their genealogy; 3) the ‘descent with modification thesis’ which, in relation to common ancestry, suggests that the diversification of life forms came from off-springs differing from their parents and; 4) the ‘naturalistic mechanism’ which is the underlying process of the variation of species that descend from common biological ancestry, synonymous to the theory of natural selection that involves genetic mutations that *only* occur *randomly* or *by chance*.²⁰ Dawkins claims that since the very mechanism that governs the evolutionary process does not require any outside interventions (i.e., God), everything that pertains to evolution must also be unguided and independent of any kind of supernaturalistic phenomenon.²¹ Since evolution can now be explained naturalistically, there is no need now for the ‘God of the gaps’ that filled what was in the past scientifically inexplicable.

Dawkins’ primary hypothesis states that there is a complete Darwinian history for every single contemporary organism as presented in the following premises: 1) there is such a history; 2) there is good evidence to support such a history, and 3) there are *informed guesses* as to how the transitions have

naturalism,” and one “can’t be a naturalist without being an atheist” (Plantinga, Preface to *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, ix). It is precisely this aspect of naturalism that places it in conflict with the Christian *Weltanschauung*.

¹⁹ Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 8.

²⁰ Plantinga refers to this as *Darwinism*.

²¹ “In the case of living machinery [pertaining to organic species], the ‘designer’ is unconscious natural selection, the blind watchmaker” (Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 37). For Dawkins, any attempt at arguing for anything that does not concur with natural selection’s blindness, “blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view,” is laboring under the “illusion of design and planning” often brought up in favor of the divine: “We might give a superior smile at such a superstitious notion. A small amount of order has come out of disorder, and no mind planned it” (Ibid., 21, 43).

occurred, from simple life forms to complex organic structures.²² For Plantinga, there is nothing in such a scheme that suggests evolution's being unguided. What Dawkins suggests is that it is *biologically possible*, not by explicating the processes involved, but only by arguing against the objections that point to natural selection's incapacity to do so. Plantinga notes that there have been significant arguments against naturalism that Dawkins might have deliberately ignored, such as that of John Locke: "it is impossible to conceive that ever-pure incogitative Matter should produce a thinking intelligent Being, as that nothing should of itself produce Matter."²³ Consciousness, as that possessed by human beings, cannot arise from that which has no consciousness such as matter.²⁴ More conspicuous than this is that Dawkins' explanation for the possibility of this hypothesis relies on the *plausibility* of more advanced organisms succeeding lesser life forms by way of random genetic mutation. For instance, the development of the mammalian eye that can be traced, step-by-step in a series, back to the most primordial life form: "it seems to me clear that [it is possible], provided only that we allow ourselves a sufficiently large series of X's."²⁵

Superficial 'Conflict'

Plantinga's epistemological critique thus analyzes the preferability of the hypothesis of unguided natural selection over that of divine design and intervention in terms of *probability*. Dawkins claims that the only possible way through which the world came to its contemporary state is an unguided process of evolution by means of natural selection. For Plantinga, this is not the case. He proposes that what Dawkins argues is that it is not improbable that

²² Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 16.

²³ *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, x, 10, cited by Plantinga in *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 17.

²⁴ The emphasis on 'consciousness' is significant as this would be a focal point in Teilhard de Chardin's philosophy in the latter part of this essay.

²⁵ Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 78. Where X is a continuous series connecting the mammalian eye to the primordial state of life, and further, even to the state wherein life is not yet present in matter.

contemporary organisms have sprung directly from the gradual mutation of simpler life forms that ultimately came from non-living matter; a claim which is not shared by all in the same field of expertise.²⁶ Plantinga presents the logical structure of Dawkins' argument in this manner: "p (complex life forms *directly* evolving from the mutations of simpler life forms) is not astronomically improbable, therefore, p."²⁷ Because of his nonchalant dismissal of the arguments for design and divine intervention, and despite the uncertainty of the theory and its unverifiability, he proceeds to conclude that evolution via natural selection, as backed by a Darwinian history explicated above, is the ultimate explanation for life on earth. Dawkins' conclusion is a quick leap from the mere probability of the theory to its being the sole explanation for the process of evolution and the complexity of contemporary organisms. Much of a "guesswork," as Plantinga notes of Dawkins' response that mentions only the possibility of a "sufficiently large series," for which a certain answer is still "beyond our knowledge."²⁸

Another problem that Plantinga finds in Dawkins' conclusion is the claim that given unguided evolution's being more probable than the theory that the world and life in it are products of design by an intelligent mind, it should be accepted as *the* explanation of the origin of life and its complexity. In this suggestion, Dawkins' false dichotomy that forces one to prefer either naturalism or supernaturalism is not supposedly the case in terms of evaluating the more reasonable explanation. Probability does not ascertain truth. Faced with two or more probable explanations, the determining factor is subject to further discernment. Consider this situation: person P finds a broken vase on a table situated beside a huge window – what would he suppose as the reason for such

²⁶ Plantinga cites Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* (1996) and *The Edge of Evolution* (2007), and Brian Goodwin's *How the Leopard Changed its Spots* (1994) among others, whose biological claims are contrary to that of Dawkins'. According to Goodwin, "It appears that Darwin's theory works for the small-scale aspects of evolution. The large-scale differences of form between types of organism that are the foundation of biological classification systems seem to require another principle than natural selection operating on small variation."

²⁷ Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

a scenario? a) it could be that a strong gust of wind toppled down the vase, causing it to break; b) it is possible that a wild animal entered the window and broke the vase; c) it can be conceived that an ill-tempered person deliberately broke the vase; d) it could even be that the vase was already broken when it was placed on the table. How will P know? All are probable explanations for such an occurrence. The principle of ‘inference to the best explanation’ may apply to this situation but not to the question of the probability of either the naturalistic or supernaturalistic explanation of life.²⁹ Just as there is still much to explain about supernaturalism, there are even more reasons to doubt the naturalistic explanation of life’s complexity. Even Dawkins himself would agree that ‘guess works’ in what is only probable are not scientifically acceptable.

Plantinga’s epistemology turns naturalism over on its head and places the final nail to its assumption on evolution as demonstrated in several of his works.³⁰ This is essentially his contention: If the naturalistic theory of evolution only accounts for survival value as the only standard of cognition in such a way that our cognitive faculty only evolves because of it, then our cognition’s capability of providing us with true beliefs is incredibly low, thus unreliable. Following this, there can be *no true belief*, including belief in naturalism itself – “naturalism is self-defeating, in that if it is true, it is irrational to believe it...it cannot accommodate belief.”³¹ This debate is still raging until now, but it would

²⁹ Plantinga pictures Dawkins’ argument for the preferability of Darwinism in such a manner that by imploring it alongside supernaturalism, “by an inference to the best explanation, we should accept unguided Darwinism” (Ibid., 28). Against this, Plantinga poses the following consideration. First, “there is more to goodness in explanation than the probability of the *explanans*,” which is why if the unlikelihood of the possible explanations will be considered, the obligation to choose between them becomes questionable. (Ibid.) Neither stance, whether naturalist or supernaturalist, must be dismissed on this account, and so Plantinga rightly remarks: “Whatever happened to agnosticism, withholding belief?” (Ibid., 29).

³⁰ Cf. Alvin Plantinga (1993) *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press and Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley (2008) *Knowledge of God*, Blackwell Publishing, among others.

³¹ Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (MA/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 19.

suffice to say that the ‘conflict’ between evolution and Christian theism is merely superficial. To show their reconcilability and concord is now the task at hand.

De Chardin and Evolution

The fine-tuning argument for Design,³² a specific rendition of Thomas Aquinas’ *fifth way*, still holds as the leading explanation that accounts for both the complexity of the universe and the intervening hand of the divine. It has undergone several various modifications³³ from philosophers and scientists alike, with William Paley’s *watchmaker argument* being the most renowned and widely debated.³⁴ Unbeknownst to many is the synthesis that Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin advanced, pointing out that the universe,

³² For an in-depth discussion of the Fine-tuning argument and its variations, confer *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion* (2010, Cambridge University Press), especially William R. Stoeger, SJ, “God, Physics and the Big Bang.” A deductive argument from the plausibility of the fine-tuning argument in the cosmic scale supports the proposition of guided evolution in a relatively minute setting where life is possible.

³³ Among these, worthy of being mentioned is F.R. Tennant’s proposition of a “wider teleological argument’ based on the conditions of distinctively human existence and the interconnectedness of matter, life, and human personality” (Cf. Chapter 9 in Barbour’s *Religion and Science* which also cites Tennant’s *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930). Moreover, in line with the *fine-tuning argument* that follows the fundamental principles of Thomistic teleology, Robert Spitzer notes that “contemporary physicists such as Arno Penzias, Roger Penrose, Owen Gingerich, John Polkinghorne, Fred Hoyle, and Paul Davies have since adduced the plausibility of a designing intelligence from the evidence of contemporary physics,” hence coming up with their respective renditions of either the anthropic, fine-tuning, or a combination of both principles (*New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010, 49).

³⁴ According to biologist and geneticist Francis Collins, even Charles Darwin himself found Paley’s argument for the world’s being finely tuned compelling before he formulated the theory of natural selection. Simply put, the argument goes as follows: suppose one comes to find a stone while crossing a heath; one would not think of how it came to be there, but if instead, one comes to find a watch lying on the ground, one would be driven to ask where it came from – it must have had a *maker* who is intelligent enough to be able to design such an intricate object. The world, as we see it, appears with all its intricacies and complexities, therefore, it must have had an *intelligent designer*. (Paraphrased from Francis Collins: *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, New York: Free Press, 2006, 86-87).

in a gradual and progressive manner, is tending towards a state of greater complexity and increasing consciousness. He understood evolution as a directed procession “from material to the spiritual.”³⁵ It must be noted that because of his unorthodox suggestions for theology in view of such a theory, a *monitum* has been issued by the Church on his works.³⁶ Contemporary Catholic scholarship is undertaking a renewed review of his scientific and theological contributions, enjoying the support of Benedict XVI and even the current pontiff Francis.

At this point, it may be asked why among other contemporary thinkers who have contributed to the discussion on Christianity and evolution, it is De Chardin’s, seemingly archaic, that is being treated here. Two responses can be given. First, young Dawkins himself was intrigued by De Chardin’s synthesis of theology and evolution, as implied in his comment on Peter Medawar’s critique of Teilhard’s *magnum opus*: “His famous annihilation of... *The Phenomenon of Man* might have been thought an unfair attack on the dead, but for the extraordinary influence Teilhard exerted (and still exerts...) over legions of the gullible including, I am afraid, my juvenile self.”³⁷ Although no dialogue had taken place between them, the continuity of De Chardin’s influence makes it worthy to revisit his ideas in analyzing the relationship between Christianity and evolution. Second and more importantly, what sets De Chardin apart from other Christianity-evolution reconcilers is that his theology is understood from an

³⁵ Wolfgang Smith, *Teilhardism and the New Religion: A Thorough Analysis of the Teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, (Charlotte: TAN Books, 1988), 35.

³⁶ It must be noted that Teilhard was censured, not so much his evolutionary theory *per se* but rather its implications to the concept of original sin. In Pius XII’s *Humani Generis*, it is said that when he “condemned opinions that he considered dangerous to the foundations of Catholic doctrine...he referred implicitly to the theological views of Teilhard de Chardin.” (Don O’Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History*, 158). Teilhard’s response expressed his disagreement with the Thomistic theologians he believed to have influenced the pontiff’s stance in the encyclical and opined that his theory provides a better explanation than the Aristotelian-Thomistic framework on subjects like creation, incarnation, and redemption (*Ibid.*). Regardless, the Vatican eventually barred him from teaching and publishing. Confer also the introduction in Teilhard’s *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), Harper & Row Publishers, by Julian Huxley.

³⁷ Richard Dawkins, *A Devil’s Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love*, (Boston/New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 196.

evolutionary perspective in that “matter, life, mind and spirit, the evolution of the universe, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the redemption of mankind, were all explained in the context of a progressive evolutionary process directing the universe toward unity with God.”³⁸

Unlike prominent Christian evolutionary theorists, De Chardin does not approach the subject as a reinvigoration of the teleological worldview that is said to have been eradicated by Darwinian evolution.³⁹ For one, teleology need not be rescued at all because even those who knew of Darwinism’s implications to the then commonly accepted Paleyeian teleology believed that evolution “bore witness to a ‘wider teleology’ rooted in the deeper structure of the universe.”⁴⁰ Thus, says Alister McGrath, teleology, since the beginning of the second millennium, “has re-emerged as helpful and appropriate in certain respects within evolutionary biology.”⁴¹ Francisco Ayala likewise stresses the importance of teleology in explaining biology, although through the lenses of “natural selection working in tandem with random mutations.”⁴² The organisms’ adaptations necessitated by natural selection, from the teleological standpoint, are directed towards an organism’s reproductive fitness – their “phenomenological ‘goal.’”⁴³ Given a judgment without prejudice of any sort, therefore, teleological evolution should stand toe to toe with naturalistic evolution promoted chiefly by Dawkins.

³⁸ Don O’Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History*, (New York/London: Continuum Publishing, 2007), 207.

³⁹ This does not, in any way, imply that De Chardin’s understanding of evolution is non-teleological, but that it is not his primary concern. In Teilhard’s thought, “teleology is displayed in the whole process, not in the design of particular structures,” as in Paleyeian teleology. Barbour notes of Teilhard that “he does not introduce divine intervention to account for particular gaps in the scientific account (*Religion and Science*, 275).

⁴⁰ McGrath, *Dawkins’ God*, 96. McGrath points out how Thomas H. Huxley saw how, despite the demolition of the popular understanding of teleology, a more profound teleology had arisen through Darwin himself.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² O’Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science*, 208.

⁴³ McGrath, *Dawkins’ God*, 97.

A teleological worldview, however, “is open to multiple interpretations – some theistic, others not.”⁴⁴ Springing forth from this admission is a hanging relationship between Christianity and an evolutionary process that, although teleological, is not necessarily in harmony with the Christian understanding of the development of life. De Chardin’s theory, meanwhile, is not contingent on the viability of teleology, and this precisely is what establishes his relevance to the discourse today. Rather than side-stepping to allow naturalism and teleology, theistic or not, to wrestle, and wait for teleology to gain more plausibility in order to accept and accommodate it, Christianity in De Chardin’s vision is unified with evolution wherein both are intertwined and mutually entailing.⁴⁵ This is so to such an extent that the acceptance of one as true should hold for the other and vice versa. Christian theology tacitly implies evolution, and evolution makes complete sense from the Christian purview. Despite the purported criticisms from fellow scientists and theologians, De Chardin’s thought remains unparalleled in its harmonization of two previously assumed polarities and so worthy of being revisited as it regains relevance in contemporary discussions. The problems of his theology are not impervious to purification, while the scientific aspects of his theory remain subject to review as they have been dismissed by skeptics, not purely for scientific reasons but on the ground of its ties with spirituality.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “His unifying vision is indebted to both evolutionary biology and the Christian tradition, and this vision informs all his writing” (Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 247). Moreover, Teilhard himself believes that science, no matter its achievements, cannot reach its limits “without becoming tinged with mysticism and charged with faith,” although he also accepts that “neither can develop normally without the other” (Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 283).

⁴⁶ Regardless of the denigration of his reputation as a legitimate scientist, Teilhard treats Christianity, not merely as a bystander but a rather vital element in interpreting evolution, not only of species but of the world as a totality. Thus, it must be taken into account that even with the “seriousness with which he took scientific data,” a fact often ignored by his critics who see him only as a mystic, he was giving “an interpretation of science [and] not a strictly scientific account,” just as how neo-atheists stand by the metaphysical assumption of a naturalistic evolution. *Ibid.*, 248.

On the truth of evolution, De Chardin is clear that it is an “indubitable fact for science” and “a condition for all thought today,” so much so that theologians must sympathetically understand the idea that humanity was able to develop if they wish to communicate intelligibly and convincingly in the secular age.⁴⁷ Although it does not differ from what science in his time taught, his view of evolution is unique in its return to ‘man’ as evolution’s focal point. Evolution in this sense is a *hominization* wherein “a reassertion... of ‘the unique value of Man’” as the ‘key to evolution’ is accentuated.⁴⁸ Hominization is a phenomenon of convergence in which the *reflecting man* is the highest factor.⁴⁹

De Chardin agrees with his contemporary evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley that “the consciousness of each of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting.”⁵⁰ He questions the naïveté of the naturalists and physicists, at least during his time (though the same can be said for many scientists today), when they tend to see evolution from an outsider’s standpoint as a purely materialistic phenomenon. While he acknowledges their naturalism due to their methods that only seek for material vital stimuli in organisms, like natural selection, De Chardin asserts that a more genuine understanding of the world can be achieved by “following it from *within*.”⁵¹ It is not only the material or biological aspect of a human being that evolution produces but also the consciousness through which

⁴⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), 139. Since Pius XII’s *Humani Generis*’ rather sharp stance on evolution, the Catholic Magisterium, through John Paul II, had come to welcome it with open arms and diminished skepticism: “New knowledge led us to realize that the theory of evolution is no longer a mere hypothesis. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of works that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory” (“Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, October 22, 1996, cited by O’Leary in *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science*, 207).

⁴⁸ Henri De Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*, trans. René Hague (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1967), 93.

⁴⁹ Cf. “Teilhard de Chardin’s Thought as Written by Himself” in Abbe Paul Grenet, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Theories*, trans. R.A. Rudorff (London: Souvenir Press, Ltd., 1965), 148-49.

⁵⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., 1959), 220.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

man sees his belongingness to such a process – “man could not see evolution all around him without feeling to some extent carried along by it himself.”⁵² What seems to have been denigrated by the mechanism of natural selection is now being raised by De Chardin, significantly relating it with what other theorists have overlooked or even dismissed: the gradual movement from plurality to unity in a process of as *complexification* and the evolution of life towards *consciousness*.

De Chardin affirms that life, as it is being pictured by evolution, is biochemically reducible to the gradual building up of matter, beginning with the organization of molecular groupings, towards the “super-complex, super-centered, the super-conscious.”⁵³ Life, in turn, can only complexify if it has undergone a change of state at a given critical point, because nothing in the world, notwithstanding simplicity or complexity, can further develop without decisive adjustments as posited by natural selection. The scientists and scientific findings of his time admit and affirm this when they identify the appearance of thought in evolution as something that corresponds to it biologically, pointing to the world’s movement towards higher consciousness.⁵⁴ De Chardin refers to the phenomenon of consciousness as the “something [that] is carried over” along the evolutionary process, “from one zoological layer to another... [and] what is most physically essential in the planet we live on.”⁵⁵ Even beyond organic species, this tending towards consciousness is seen in different complexifications observed in matter:

The evolution of the simple bodies following the radio-active way, the granitic segregation of continents, the possible isolation of the interior layers of the globe, form no doubt a continuous burden underlying the rhythms of the earth; The axis

⁵² *Ibid.*, 218.

⁵³ De Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 141.

⁵⁴ Among which are John Burdon Sanderson Haldane and Julian Huxley (*Ibid.*, 155).

⁵⁵ De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 147-148.

of geogenesis is now extended in biogenesis, which in the end will express itself in psychogenesis.⁵⁶

Although De Chardin rejects Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's hypothesis of inheritance, he approves his idea of considering the role of an organism's elementary sentience and expression of an energy for life and purpose, the *within of things*. Viewing the evolutionary process from *within*, "we see life at the head, with all physics subordinate to it and at the heart of life, the impetus of a rise of consciousness."⁵⁷ This same impetus that can only be traced from the *within* explains, for De Chardin, the "irreversible advance towards higher psychisms."⁵⁸ It even takes into account, the principle of chance so exalted in naturalism, which is "seized and used by a principle of internal self-organization."⁵⁹

Indeed, the arrival of human beings on the evolutionary scene – "the organized matter [that] marked a critical point on the curve of this evolution"⁶⁰ – has signaled that life has become conscious of itself, beginning from the plurality of simple particles leading to microorganisms, and tending towards the emergence of more complex life forms in organic biomes. De Chardin says that if such a scientific finding will be followed to its logical conclusion, then the existence of an "ultimate center of consciousness and personality"⁶¹ is assured at the end of hominization where the plurality of matter converges at a final unity that is not only organic but also spiritual. This is what De Chardin identifies as the *Omega point* of evolution. In the *Omega* lies the hyper-personalization of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 149. Although far-fetched, De Chardin's (as well as Lamarck's) recognition of this inner impetus for life and, eventually, consciousness, appears to recall Baruch Spinoza's metaphysical conception of each being's *conatus*: "Each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (*Ethics*, III, p. 6.).

⁵⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Man's Place in Nature: The Human Zoological Group*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1966), 108.

⁶⁰ De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 147.

⁶¹ De Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 143.

evolution, which is an “eternal deepening of consciousness.”⁶² In such a scheme, we cannot fail to note how De Chardin emphasizes and elevates the ‘person’ beyond the confines where materialistic scientists placed it in. In a concordant manner, the concept of the ‘person’ is at the heart of Christian anthropology propounded by the likes of Gabriel Marcel and Karol Wojtyla. The *Omega point*, therefore, is the key to understanding the mysticism that vibrantly underlies Teilhardian evolution.

Christ the Evolver

De Chardin asserts that the universe is created by God *evolutively*, thus possessing the energy for the formation of complexifying structures. It was not created in one instantaneous moment in God’s eternal present, but a *creatio in statu viae*, as the Catechism states,⁶³ from the plurality of matter towards convergence in a super-conscious personality. This accounts for the existence of evil that inevitably results from such a slow evolutionary process. We are led to conceive God, not only as the *Prime Mover* that sets all things in motion but more so as the *Omega* towards whom evolution is converging. With this in mind, the *Omega* of evolution and of faith are synthesized in the supernaturally dominating person of Jesus Christ who immersed Himself in humanity so as to become the center of the world and to “draw all things”⁶⁴ to Himself as the final convergence of consciousness, in whom “all things hold together.”⁶⁵ Christ is not only the one who is being worshipped passively. He is the one who acts creatively in evolution so that it may attain its finality in Him as its fulfillment. He IS the *Evolver* in this synthesis of evolution and Christian faith. This envisioning of an ultimate convergent point manifests the congruence of an interpretation of Christian eschatology and evolution’s directionality.⁶⁶

⁶² De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 260.

⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 302.

⁶⁴ John 12:32

⁶⁵ Colossians 1:17

⁶⁶ Cf. O’ Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science*, 101-2.

What, then, is to be made out of the redemption of Christ that is central to the Christian faith? Even De Chardin recognizes that there is an apparent ‘conflict,’ between evolution and the Christian conception of salvation.⁶⁷ The discovery opens a wholly new realm through which man can be known. This dimension “of which there is no explicit mention in the gospel, intervenes and enlarges man’s destiny almost limitlessly.”⁶⁸ With his theological erudition, De Chardin proceeds to explain how this augmented understanding of man contributes to Christology and soteriology. He highlights how Christianity has given primacy to the expiation of Christ in relation to His work of redemption, suggesting a renewed perspective that accounts for an optimistic picture of Christ’s mission, thought of as being reconciliatory, making up to the Father for the faults of mankind. There was, for him, “from the very beginning... a positive element, of reconstruction or recreation.”⁶⁹ From this perspective, the tenets of the Christian faith gain significance in terms of the world’s evolution:

A baptism in which purification becomes a subordinate element in the *total divine act of raising up the world*. A cross which symbolizes much more *the ascent of creation through effort* than the expiation of an offence. A blood which *circulates and vitalizes* even more than it is shed. The Lamb of God *bearing*, together with the sins of the world, *the burden of progress*. The idea of pardon and sacrifice enriched, and so transformed into *the idea of consummation and conquest*. Christ-the Redeemer being fulfilled... in the dynamic plenitude of a CHRIST-THE-EVOLVER.⁷⁰

From all that has been said, Christ can be recognized, therefore, not as an “intrusion into the world” but as the “continuation and fulfillment of a long

⁶⁷ De Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 142.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

cosmic preparation” of the single process of creation and redemption that will ultimately bring the evolutive world into union with God.⁷¹

Christianity and Evolution: Concord or Conflict?

At the outset, a discussion on the context of the development of the theory of evolution showed how a ‘conflict’ had arisen between the previously prevalent Christian perspective and the emergent scientific worldview. While Darwin was cautious of the implications of his discovery of natural selection, neo-Darwinians are more adamant in claiming the certainty of their assumptions on the nature of evolution. Among them, it is Dawkins who notably contributed to the prominence of evolutionary biology, not only in the scientific field but also in the neo-atheistic movement where he is also considered as an intellectual pillar. Through Plantinga’s critique, the naturalistic draperies of Dawkins’ Darwinian evolution have been uncovered. Naturalism is not a necessary aspect of evolution but only a neo-atheistic metaphysical assumption.⁷² It is naturalism, therefore, and not evolution *per se* that is in conflict with the Christian conception of the world and its processes.

⁷¹ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 248.

⁷² In note 17, Plantinga’s picture of naturalism as being stronger than atheism is relevant in that, case in point, contemporary Darwinism, particularly through Dawkins, is assumed as necessitating atheism. It must be clarified that because “naturalism” can also be understood as the proper perspective and method through which the natural sciences ought to examine the cosmos, what is meant here is that which Plantinga presents, as explained. Now distinguished from its naturalistic version, it is clear that contrary to the neo-atheistic evolutionists, evolution *per se* is not atheistic as has always been the case; following McGrath, “Huxley...was quite clear that ‘the doctrine of Evolution is neither Anti-theistic nor Theistic’” (from Thomas H. Huxley, “On the Reception of the Origin of Species.” *In Life and Letters of Darwin*, vol. 2, 202, cited by McGrath in *Dawkins’ God*, 115), and that “as a matter of historical fact, Darwinism was not perceived to entail atheism by the best-informed judges of the time” (*Ibid.*, 117). John Paul II’s stance on the matter is also of great importance as he maintains that there is not only one but several evolutionary theories, multiplied at the scientific level, firstly, through the hypothesizing of various mechanisms (such as the abovementioned four), and secondly, at the philosophic level “where various approaches – spiritualist, reductionist, and materialist [and naturalist, as is the case here for neo-atheists] – were associated with it” (O’Leary, 206-7).

If the ‘conflict’ between Christianity and evolution is only superficial, should it be assumed that their relationship is that of concord and mutual agreement? For De Chardin, this is so as he believes that this conflict between faith and science “need to be resolved...not in elimination, nor duality, but in synthesis.”⁷³ His synthesis, therefore, presents evolution as a process of union with the Omega of reason through consciousness, evolution through convergence, and revelation through Christ. In his “Metaphysics of Union,” the problems present in evolution, the development of consciousness, and in theology, the problem of evil, find a plausible intellectual solution.⁷⁴ He puts succinctly, the detail that neither faith nor science has discredited the other despite centuries of supposed struggles, and the reason that he gives is simply this: “the same life animates both.”⁷⁵ While De Chardin’s project can be criticized as a kind of forced ‘generalized concordism’ to reinforce his personal preferences, he responds by acknowledging that although faith and science “represent two different meridians which it would be wrong not to separate, these meridians must necessarily meet at some point in a pole of common vision.”⁷⁶ It is in this horizon that De Chardin’s synthesis must be understood.

There is still work to be done to solidify the relationship between Christianity and evolution. What has been presented from Plantinga’s epistemology only scratches the depth of his work on the matter, especially on naturalism. De Chardin’s rather unique suggestions that are gaining traction in contemporary discussions once more, concern, not so much how Christianity accounts for the coming about of life in the world,⁷⁷ but rather how it accommodates the theory of evolution in its very core, and *vice versa*. Although De Chardin’s thought precedes Plantinga’s, the compatibility of their analyses

⁷³ De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 283.

⁷⁴ Grenet, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Theories*, 149.

⁷⁵ De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 283.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ He was able to theorize extensively about this in several of his works. Confer *The Heart of Matter* (1976), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., and *Science and Christ* (1965), Editions du Seuil.

effectively points to the scientific, philosophical, and even theological concord of Christianity and evolution. Contrary to contemporary ‘scientific’ detractions to Christianity’s integrity in the face of evolution, there is only superficial conflict but deep harmony and concord that vitalize both Christianity and evolution.

REFERENCES

- Barbour, Ian G. *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd., 1997.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. Croydon: Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd., 2011 (Original work published in 1859).
- Dawkins, Richard. *A Devil’s Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love*. Boston/New York: Mariner Books, 2004.
- _____. *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design*. London: Norton Press, 1986.
- _____. *The God Delusion*. London: Black Swan, 2007.
- De Chardin, Teilhard. *Christianity and Evolution*. Translated by René Hague. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.
- _____. *Man’s Place in Nature: The Human Zoological Group*. Translated by René Hague. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1966.
- _____. *The Phenomenon of Man*. Translated by Bernard Wall. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1959.
- De Lubac, Henri. *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*. Translated by René Hague. New York: The New American Library, Inc. 1967.
- Grenet, Abbe Paul. *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Theories*. Translated by R.A. Rudorff. London: Souvenir Press, Ltd., 1965.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (4th Edition). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2012 (Original work published in 1962).
- McGrath, Alister. *Dawkins’ God: From The Selfish Gene to The God Delusion* (2nd Edition). Malden/Oxford/Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015.
- O’Leary, Don. *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History*. New

York/London: Continuum Publishing, 2007.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011.

Plantinga, Alvin. and Tooley, Michael, *Knowledge of God*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008.

Ruse, Michael. "Naturalism and the Scientific Method," in Bullivant, S. and Ruse, M. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2013.

Russell, Bertrand. *The History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1945.

Smith, Wolfgang. *Teilhardism and the New Religion: A Thorough Analysis of the Teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*. Charlotte: TAN Books, 1988.