

God After Darwin

1. Evolution's Challenge to Faith

July 23, 2006

9 to 9:50 am in the Parlor

All are welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 827

J o h n F. H a u g h t



God After Darwin

A Theology of Evolution

God After Darwin. A Theology of Evolution.

John F. Haught,
Westview

Press, 2000.

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John F. Haught
**Responses to
101 Questions
on God and
Evolution**



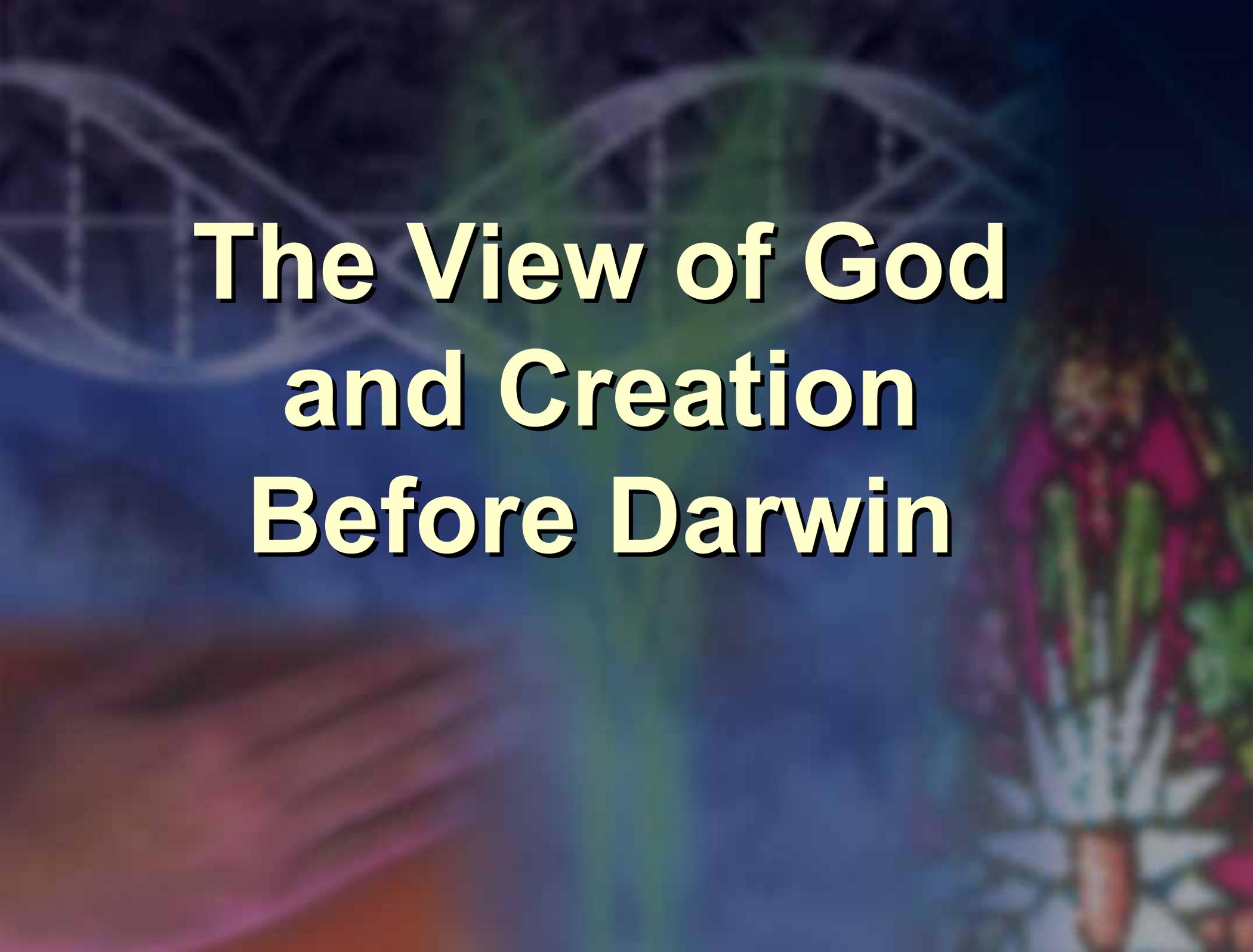
**Responses to
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John F. Haught,
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Photos captured from the on-line interview with Dr. Haught at: <http://MeaningOfLife.tv>



The View of God and Creation Before Darwin

Views Before Darwin

Creation

- ✚ Traditional theology describes three dimensions of God's creative activity:
 - 1. original creation (*creatio originalis*)
 - 2. ongoing or continuous creation (*creatio continua*)
 - 3. new creation or the fulfillment of creation (*creatio nova*)
- ✚ **Original creation** is emphasized. Creation was primarily something God did in the beginning.
 - All aspect of creations: lifeless matter, plants, animals, and finally human beings, were all planned “in the beginning.”
 - When God was done, he rested, and saw it was good.
 - God, who is both Alpha and Omega, is conceived of more in terms of “Alpha” than “Omega.”

Views Before Darwin

God the Designer

- ✚ The diversity of life through the creation is a manifestation of God's overflowing creative exuberance.
- ✚ The wondrous intricacy of living things displays God's skill as **designer**.
 - It also serves a proof of God's existence.
 - William Paley (1743-1805) in *Natural Theology*: if you find a watch lying on the ground and examine its inner workings, you can only conclude it was made by an intelligent designer with a purpose.
 - God is the **divine watchmaker**.

Views Before Darwin

Great Chain of Being

† God created distinct “**levels**” or **hierarchy of being**:

- Inanimate matter
- Plants and Animals – life contained an intangible quality that distinguished it from mere dull matter.
- **Human Beings** – the highest level of being on earth, imbued with mind and soul, and made in the very image and likeness of God.

Views Before Darwin

Eschatology

- ✚ **Eschatology** = “the last things” (from Greek *eschaton* = “edge,” or “last,” “final”)
- ✚ Human beings are intended for a life with God (usually conceived of as abiding “up above us.”)
- ✚ The rest of creation functions primarily as a “stage,” a “training center” and/or “testing ground” for human beings to:
 - Assess their worthiness to live with God.
 - Prepare them for a life with God.
- ✚ Our “training center / testing ground” is not quite as nice as God intended because of the “original sin” of Adam and Eve.

Views Before Darwin

Revelation

✚ **Revelation** = the communication of God's selfhood to creation.

✚ God reveals God's self to human beings through:

- Personal communication via the Holy Spirit
- **Natural theology** – God communicates something of God's self through the product of God's creative work and *design* -- nature.
 - William Paley (1743-1805): the “book of nature” could lead us to God as much as the Bible itself.

Views Before Darwin

Divine Love (= Grace)

† God's **love and grace** is focused on human beings, made in God's own image and likeness.

Views Before Darwin

Divine Power

✚ God's **power and might** is manifest through:

- The **orderliness** of creation, obeying fixed laws that God has laid down.
- God's **ultimate plan for creation**, which was formulated at the beginning of time when God first created, and whose the timeline for fulfillment is known only to God.

Views Before Darwin

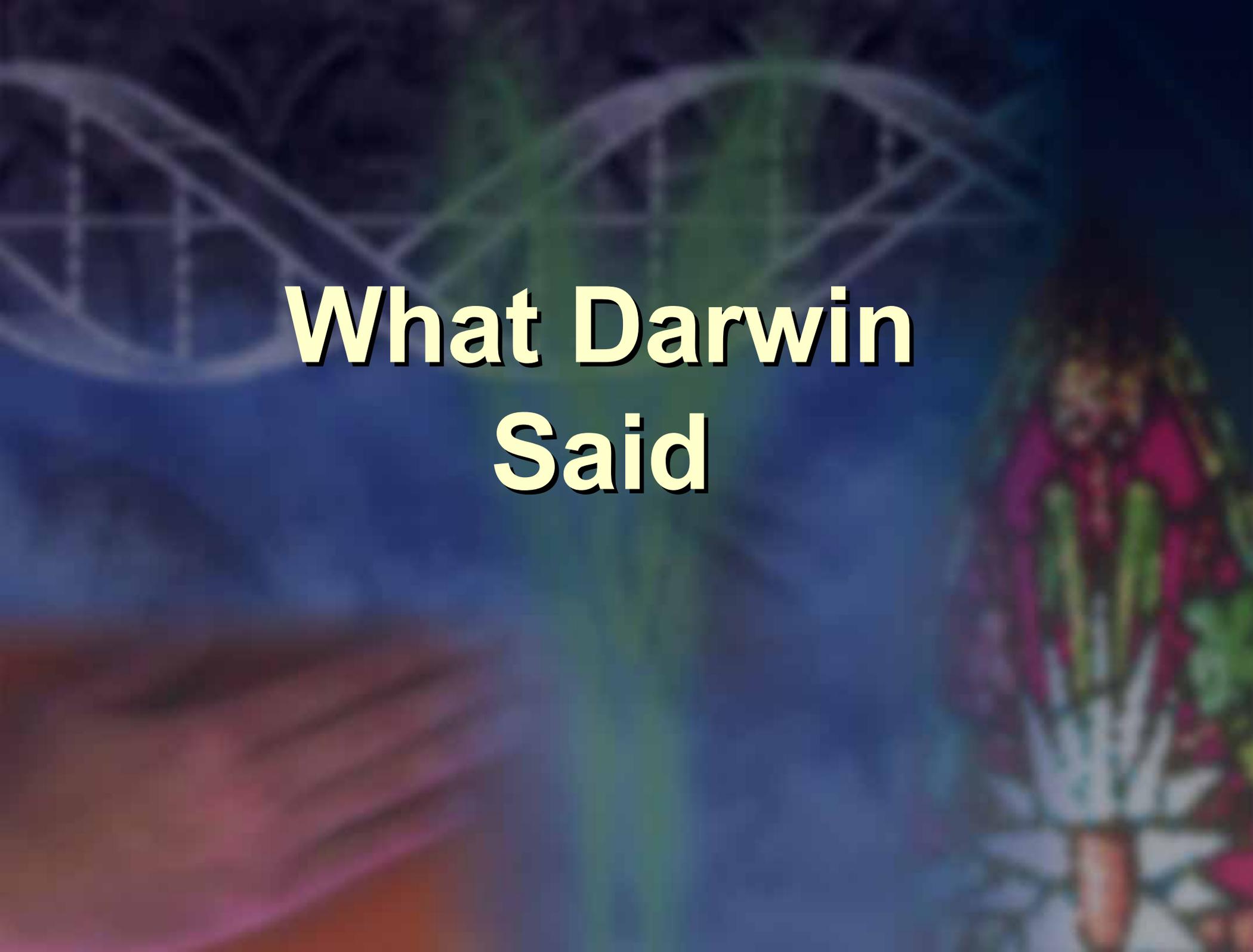
Redemption

✝ God sent his only son into the world to **redeem** or save us from our sins, that we might one day live with God, as God intends.

Views Before Darwin

The Impact of Evolution

✚ The science of evolution throws into question some of these views, and challenge us to deepen and enlarge our understanding of others.

The background is a composite image. On the left, there is a faint, light blue DNA double helix. In the center, a green and blue globe of the Earth is visible. On the right, there is a colorful, abstract plant-like structure with shades of purple, pink, and green. The overall background is a dark, textured blue.

What Darwin Said

What Darwin Said

Charles Robert Darwin

† Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882)

† Born in Shrewsbury, England.

† His mother died when he was eight, a traumatic event in his life.

† Went to Cambridge (1828-1831) with the intention to become an Anglican country cleric.

What Darwin Said

Charles Robert Darwin

- ✚ At Cambridge, Darwin read William Paley (1743-1805) and was impressed by Paley's views on natural theology and how the "book of nature" could lead one to God.
- ✚ After Cambridge, he focused on geology, and spent five years (1831-1836) on the HMS *Beagle*, commissioned to survey the coast of South America.
- ✚ His observations over those 5 years led him to formulate in 1838 the theory of evolution (he called it "descent with modification")

What Darwin Said

Charles Robert Darwin

✚ The theory changed his own life and religious beliefs.

- Darwin wrote in his autobiography: “disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete.”
- His loss of faith was also influenced by the deaths of both his father and his 10 year old daughter.

✚ A modest and unassertive man, he did not publish his theory of evolution until 20 years later.

What Darwin Said

Darwin's Theory

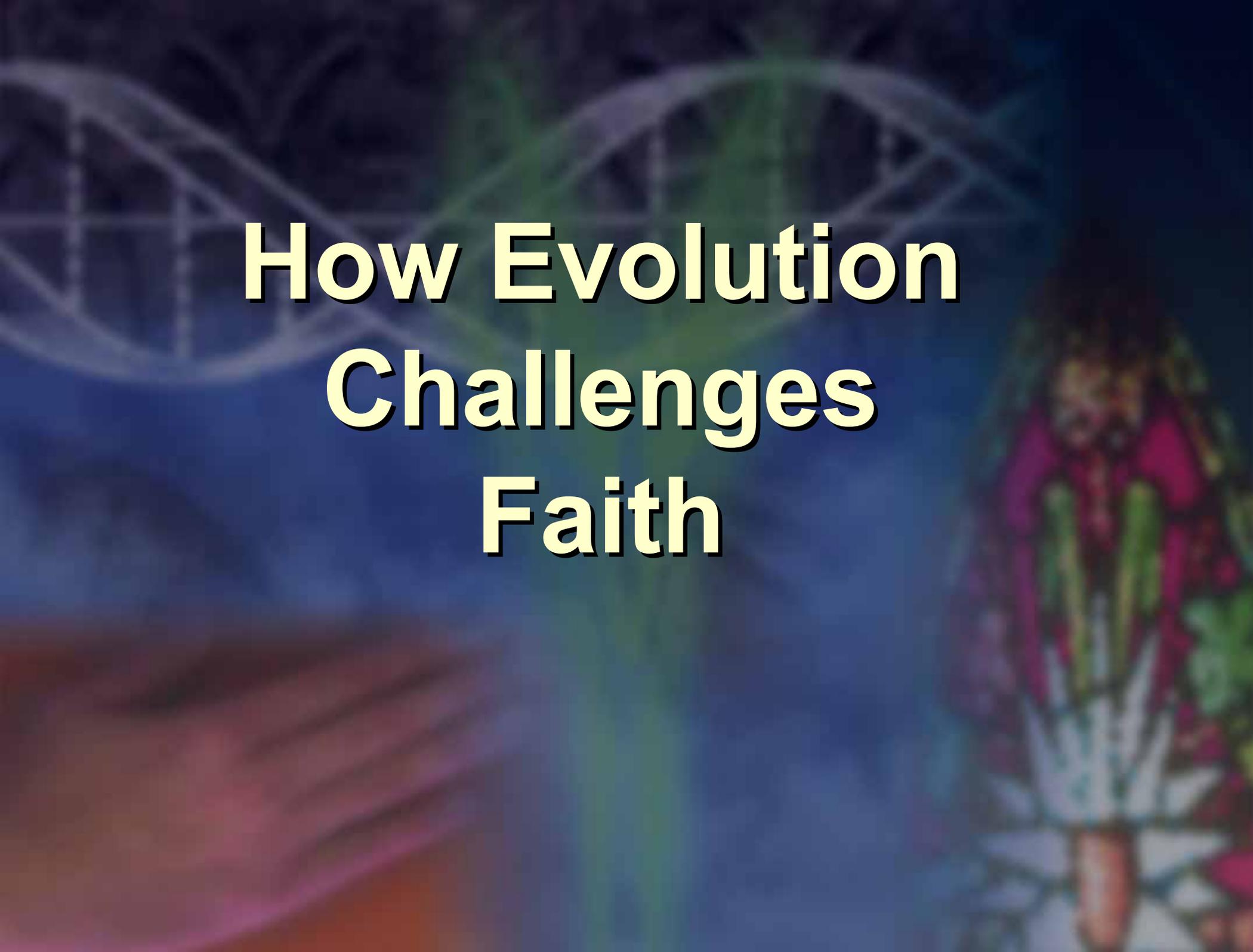
✚ Two main facets of Darwin's theory:

- 1. All forms of life, including human beings, descended from a common ancestor by gradual modifications.
- 2. The mechanism of this gradual modification is **“Natural Selection”** =
 - organisms with characteristics that better adapt them to their environment will be *“selected” by nature* to survive and have offspring.
 - organism whose characteristics are “non-adaptive” to their environment will perish.

What Darwin Said

neo-Darwinian Synthesis

- ✚ The modern theory of evolution (= the “**neo-Darwinian Synthesis**”) is essentially Darwin’s theory brought up to date by our knowledge of genetics and molecular biochemistry.
- ✚ All life can be explained by the combination of:
 - 1. accidental, chance events or contingencies (**chance**)
 - a genetic mutation that lead to new characteristics in an organism
 - a natural disaster that changes the environment that an organism must adapt to
 - 2. the deterministic laws of natural selection, chemistry, and physics (**law**)
 - 3. enormous depths of time (**deep time**)



How Evolution Challenges Faith

The Challenge to Faith

Darwin's Dangerous Idea

‡ The modern American philosopher and atheist Daniel Dennett reflects the view of many when he wrote that Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is a "*dangerous idea*," showing:

- the lack of any higher meaning behind life,
- the irrationality of believing in a creator God.

The Challenge to Faith

Darwin's Dangerous Idea

✚ There are actually *two* ideas in Darwin's theory that might be “dangerous” for faith:

- **1. All life, including human beings, comes from a common ancestor.**
- *Problem:* there seems to be no “**Great Chain of Being:**”
 - Human beings are fully part of a continuum of life, with no clear “discontinuity of level of being” to define them as existing at a higher level of being than other forms of life.
 - In other words, there is no sharp “ontological” discontinuity between human beings and the rest of nature.

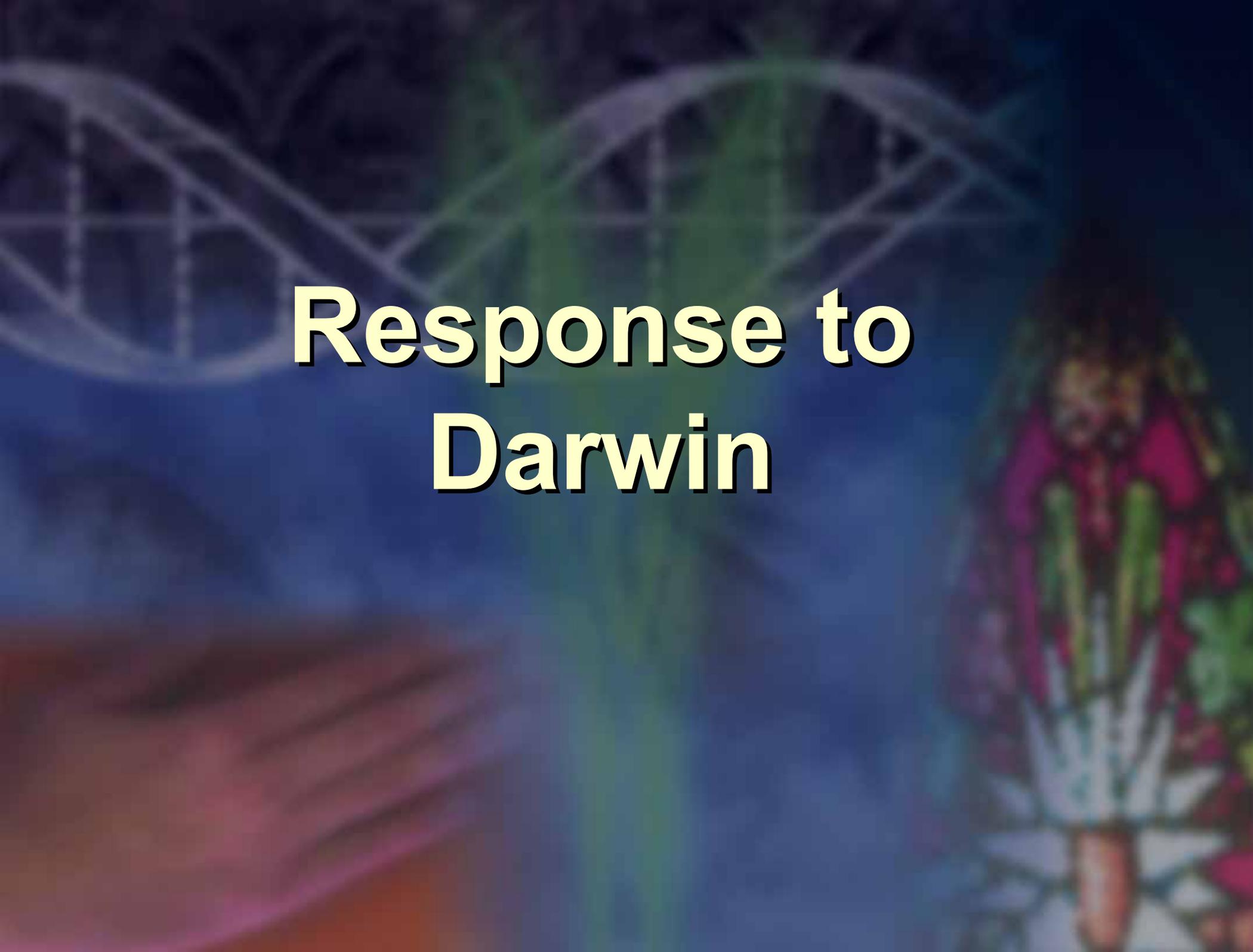
The Challenge to Faith

Darwin's Dangerous Idea

■ 2. Natural Selection

■ *Problems:*

- The “raw material” of **Natural Selection** are changes that arise accidentally or randomly. There is no need for the involvement of divine intelligence.
- The ruthless, competitive aspect of **Natural Selection** seems incompatible with a universe “in the bosom of” a compassionate God.

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Response to Darwin

Responses

Three Types of Response

- ✝ Theology has responded to the “dangerous idea” of evolution in three ways:
- 1. **Opposition.** Theology and neo-Darwinism are irreconcilable views of reality. One of them must be wrong.
 - 2. **Separatism.** Theology and neo-Darwinism differ so widely in their methods that they really do not compete in explaining reality.
 - 3. **Engagement.** Theology must engage evolution, for theology must be consistent with all truths, including the truths of Darwinian biology. Evolution is a gift to theology, giving us an opportunity to rethink and deepen our views of God and creation.

Responses

Opposition

✚ **Scientific Materialism.** *Theology is wrong.*

- **Materialism** (also known as **Physicalism** or **Naturalism**): the view that matter-energy is the only reality.
- **Scientism**: the only path to truth is through the methods of science. That is, all real things make themselves available in a scientifically measurable way.
- **Scientific Materialism**: materialism + scientism.
- Daniel Dennett is an example of a scientific materialist.
- Note that science uses a *methodology* of searching for explanations only in the realm of matter-energy. Use of this *methodology* however does not require that a scientist be a materialist and deny the existence of other realms of reality besides matter-energy.

Responses

Opposition

✚ **Creationism.** *Evolution is wrong.*

- Creationist agree with the Scientific Materialist that theology and evolution are irreconcilable.
- They argue that the Bible's account in Genesis of God's "special creation" of life is a more plausible explanation of life than the theory of evolution.

Responses

Separatism

✚ **Separatism.** Science and theology deal with completely different levels of being and reality.

- Science: deals with the physical or mechanical causes of events.
- Theology: deals with the meaning and ultimate explanation of things.
- There is *no overlap* between these two fields and hence *no possibility* of conflict.

Responses

Engagement

- ✝ **Engagement.** Theology cannot hold the science apart, for what we learn about the physical universe clearly must impact our view of the Creator of that physical universe.
- ✝ In particular, theology must “take evolution into the very center of its reflections on the meaning of life, of God, and of the universe.”
- ✝ Two modes of Engagement of Theology and Evolution:
 - 1. Natural Theology
 - 2. Evolutionary Theology

Responses

Engagement – Natural Theology

- † **Natural Theology** looks for evidence of God in the physical world.
- † Evolution has caused modern, Post-Darwinian Natural Theology to look for evidence of God's direct design not in life, but in the fundamental laws of physics, and in cosmology, the science of the origin of the universe.

Responses

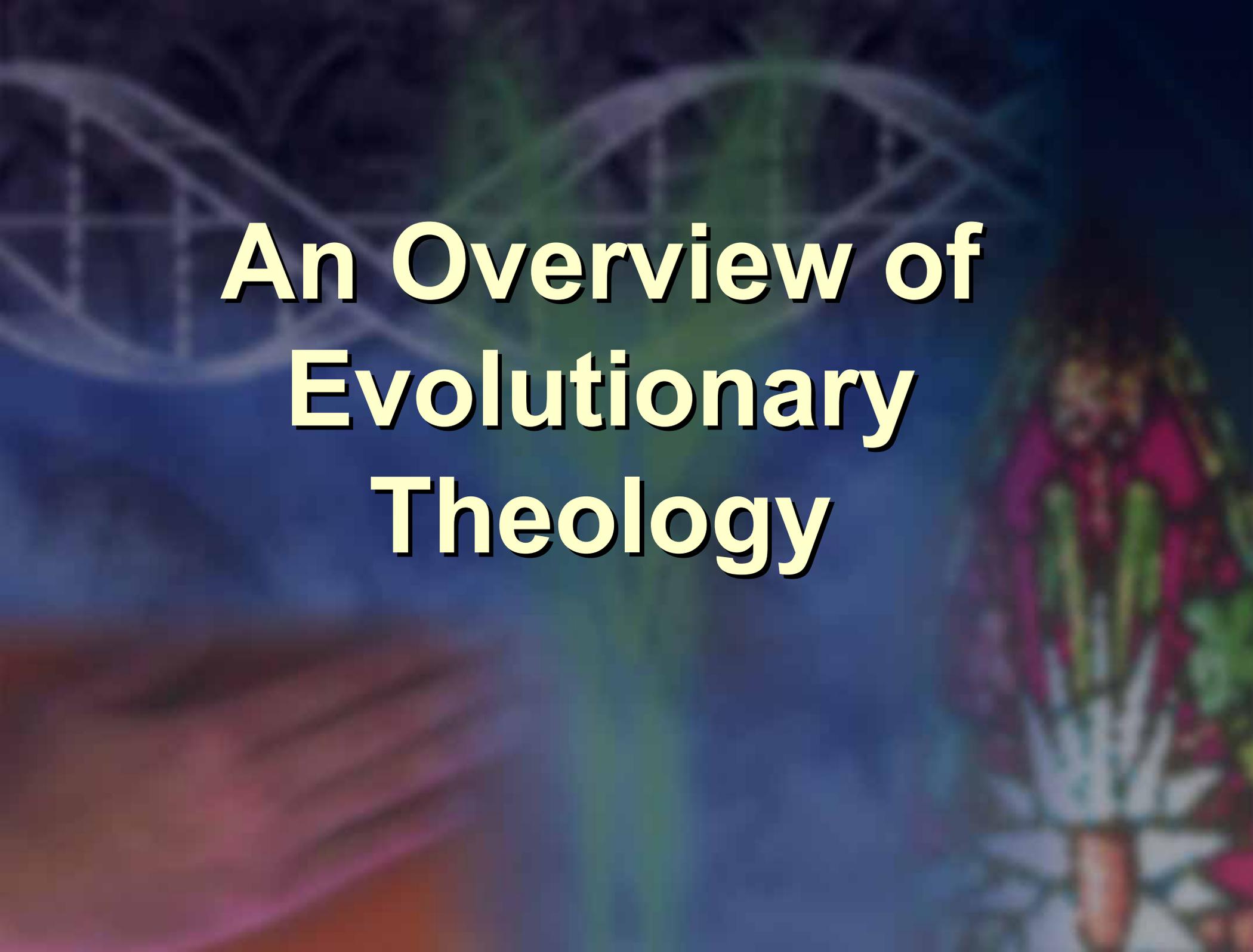
Engagement – Natural Theology

- ✠ For example, the element of carbon seems essential for life, and physicists have found that the initial conditions at the “Big Bang,” and the constants in the laws of physics are incredibly “fine tuned” to produce carbon.
 - The slightest change in one of the physical constants or initial conditions would have produced a lifeless universe without an abundance of carbon.
- ✠ The only way out of this “fine-tuning” is to imagine that our universe is one of an enormous number of other universes that differ in the values of their physical constants and initial conditions, and the right constants and initial conditions exist *by chance* in our universe.
 - However, the “other universes,” most dead and lifeless, cannot be detected from our universe, and therefore this speculation is not “physics” or science, but speculation about a **metaphysics** (= “after” physics = outside the natural world = a supernatural world).

Responses

Engagement – Evolutionary Theology

- ✝ This series will explore the other mode of engagement: evolutionary theology.
- ✝ “Evolutionary theology claims that the story of life, even in its neo-Darwinian presentation, provides essential concepts for thinking about God and God's relation to nature and humanity.” (Haught p. 36)
- ✝ “Evolutionary theology seeks to show how our new awareness of cosmic and biological evolution can enhance and enrich traditional teachings about God and God's way of acting in the world. In other words, rather than viewing evolution simply as a dangerous challenge that deserves an apologetic response, evolutionary theology discerns in evolution a most illuminating context for our thinking about God today.” (Haught p. 36)

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An Overview of Evolutionary Theology

Evolutionary Theology

Overview

- ⊕ Here we briefly survey some of the thinking in evolutionary theology.
- ⊕ We will flesh out and explore these ideas further over the next several sessions.

Evolutionary Theology

Creation

- ✠ Traditional theology describes three dimensions of God's creative activity:
 - 1. original creation (*creatio originalis*)
 - 2. ongoing or continuous creation (*creatio continua*)
 - 3. new creation or the fulfillment of creation (*creatio nova*)
- ✠ In an *evolving* cosmos, *creation is still happening*. Creation is present now as much as it was in the beginning. God's creation is *unfinished*.
 - Part of the reason for the evil and suffering of this life is due to the *unfinished* quality of creation.

Evolutionary Theology

Divine Love (= Grace)

- ✝ God's **love and grace** is not merely focused on human beings. God loves *all the world* and all its elements fully and unconditionally.
- ✝ Love does not absorb or annihilate or force itself upon another. Love treasures the "Otherness" of the Other and so longs for Other's independence, which allows a dialogical intimacy essential to a loving relationship.
- ✝ In creation, God created a world that was Other than God, and gave it the ability to be self-creative. God's love and grace for creation involves letting the world "be itself."
 - Evolution in part can be considered a manifestation of the self-creativity of the universe

Evolutionary Theology

Revelation

- ✚ **Revelation** = the communication of God's selfhood to creation.
- ✚ We should not be surprised that God's creation would be an *evolving* universe:
 - Modern science has revealed the unimaginably vast scope in space and time of the universe. Yet God is infinitely greater than God's creation.
 - Evolution itself may be thought of as a *process of God's revelation to creation*, as the infinite mystery of God being poured out into the creation.
 - A finite world cannot receive the fullness of an infinite God in one moment. It must adapt to God's revelation of God's self by gradual expansion and an ongoing self-transcendence, externally manifested as "evolution"

Evolutionary Theology

Eschatology

- ✚ **Eschatology** = “the last things” (from Greek *eschaton* = “edge,” or “last,” “final”)
- ✚ Human beings are intended for a life with God, and long for the fulfillment of life with God.
- ✚ The *rest of creation*, unfinished, *also* longs for its completion (*creatio nova*).
 - As St. Paul writes, all of creation “groans” for ultimate fulfillment.
- ✚ The rest of creation is much more than a “stage” for our training or assessment.

Evolutionary Theology

Divine Power

- ✠ God's **power and might** is manifest through a *persuasive love*, not a coercive love.
- ✠ A “persuasive” divine love, unlike a coercive love, is compatible with human freedom, as well as with a “prehuman spontaneity” or “free process” that allowed creation to evolve into something Other than the creator over billions of years.
- ✠ God is the source not only of **order** in creation, but also of **novelty** and **possibility** in the evolving world.
 - God is more interested in “adventure” than the status quo, and God's will is for the creation to search for more and more intense forms of ordered novelty = the maximization of cosmic beauty.

Evolutionary Theology

Divine Power

- ✠ In giving the creation freedom to be itself, God does not have a **plan** for creation so much as a **vision** for creation.
- ✠ God is more Omega than Alpha. God is the “Absolute Future,” towards which all of creation is moving as it “groans” for fulfillment.

Evolutionary Theology

Redemption

- ✠ God sent his only son into the world to **redeem** or save us from our sins, that we might one day live with God, as God intends.
- ✠ The whole world is also in need of redemption. God “feels” the world and is influenced by all that happens in the world’s process of creation. The waste, the perpetual perishing, and suffering of the evolving, unfinished creation is all “saved” or redeemed by being taken up eternally into God.