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Naturalistic perspectives on the evolution of religion are often assumed to be an insuperable challenge to traditional theological thinking. This may be true for those theological traditions in which religious experience and the concept of revelation are understood in terms of a clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural. However, this distinction is not intrinsic to theological understanding. In recent decades, not only has a new stress on naturalistic perspectives arisen within the science-theology dialogue, but in addition the common understanding of the supernatural has been challenged in terms of traditional theological perspectives

Using my recent exploration of the psychology of religion to supplement arguments set out in my books *Wrestling With the Divine* (2001) and *The God of Nature* (2007), this paper will outline a philosophical understanding in which naturalistic perspectives may be fully embraced within a pluralistic theological framework. When explaining human religiosity, I argue, we may legitimately use the notion of the “psycho-cultural niche” in a way that represents a legitimate extension to the way in which the notion of the ecological niche is used. This must be understood, however, in terms of the growing recognition among biologists that the evolution of certain kinds of creaturely functioning has strongly predictable elements. This has been strongly emphasized by Simon Conway Morris’s exploration of evolutionary convergence, and his understanding is further expanded in my own approach by applying his notion of predictability to the neurological and psychological aspects of religious belief and practice.

I argue in this way that the universe’s development reaches a predictable stage at which a kind of human religiosity develops, and that this predictability may be understood theologically in terms of the divine intention. This approach to the universe’s development does not, it should be emphasized, attempt to rehabilitate the notion of teleology in its medieval form, which historically competed with the notion of a cosmos obedient to “laws of nature”. The approach I advocate – while in a sense teleological in envisaging a predictable “end” - does not challenge or attempt to supplement scientific exploration of the mechanisms involved in the universe’s functioning and development. Rather, it represents a theological interpretation of the results of that scientific exploration.

Within such a framework, scientific insights into the evolution of religion become, not a challenge to theology, but a clarification. Most pluralistic theologians recognise that human religiosity is inevitably expressed very differently in different historical and cultural contexts. Where my approach differs from that of many of them, however, is in its radical naturalism, which sees the divine intention for the created order as built into the laws of nature. A traditional precedent for this, I note, exists in the teleological aspect of the thinking of the seventh-century theologian Maximus the Confessor, and I argue that aspects of his thinking provide a possible framework within which a truly naturalistic theology can forge links with traditional theology