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After Darwin, Aquinas: A Universe Created and Evolving

Theological implications of evolutionary biology seem to run the gamut from various forms of a "new atheism," according to which the acceptance of contemporary science requires a denial of the existence of God, to radical revisions of divine omnipotence, immutability, and of what it means for God to be Creator. John Haught famously remarked: after Darwin "any thoughts we may have about God can hardly remain the same as before." The novelty, dynamism, chance, and self-organizing principles in nature may well challenge some notions of God as orderer and designer, but they do not challenge the conception of God, especially a transcendent God who is Creator of all that is, in whatever way things are, set forth by Thomas Aquinas. Nor must one limit divine omnipotence to make room, so to speak, for a vibrant natural order discovered by science. In fact, developments in evolutionary biology after Darwin encourage a reaffirmation of Thomas' understanding of both God's creative act and the relative self-sufficiency of nature. Thomas helps us see that we need not choose between a robust understanding of divine causality and the appropriate autonomy and dynamism of the created order. God is not a cause among other causes in the world such that the more one attributes causal efficacy to God, for example, the less one would have to attribute causality to nature. Creation, as Thomas understands it, makes evolutionary processes possible and intelligible.