

Process Theism and Natural Selection

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With or without mentioning God, relatively repeatable interactions continue (or not) by fitting well (or not) with accompanying interactions. (Inherited traits are a biological example of relatively repeatable interactions.)

This is how process theists view natural selection. It is arguably consistent with just about any "secular" version of natural selection.

The only difference is that process theists like to talk about God as "the wholly interactive," and they include God's interactions along with other accompanying interactions.

If relatively repeatable interactions do not fit well with God's interactions, then eventually they will give way to interactions that do fit well.

This is not "intelligent design." What develops is not predetermined or controlled by any "designer," not even God.

God's relatively repeatable interactions do display persistent tendencies, but these tendencies also adapt to other relatively repeatable interactions, and vice versa.

One tendency is that God's wholly interactive nature never stops influencing other interactions to fit well with one another, resulting in increasingly interactive forms of community (or communion). This is influence, however, not coercion or control. And God is not the only influence toward such forms of community, only the most persistent influence.

So this is a tendency fraught with setbacks. Community is a fragile achievement and is easily destroyed. The only guarantee here is that new forms of community will always emerge from the ruins of prior forms, owing to the influence of the wholly interactive, among other influences.

For process theists, natural selection and the providence of God look pretty much the same. In a world where everything is unpredictably interactive, and nothing is in complete control, something like natural selection, a tendency toward interactions that fit well with one another, is the only providence there can be.

Why speak of the wholly interactive? Because, if reality is fundamentally interactive in all its parts and as a whole, as process thinkers claim, then the only way left to speak of reality as a whole is as wholly interactive. We're not invoking the wholly interactive to "explain" evolution. The only reason to invoke it is that we can't help speaking of reality as a whole. It's not necessary to call the wholly interactive "God." But it's very close to how many devout theists, past and present, have spoken of God, and that's enough to justify using the term here.