

WHERE THERE IS NO VISION: HOW SCIENCE APART FROM REVELATION LED TO HISTORY'S WORST ATROCITIES

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It is remarkable how the world can be changed by small things. If the average person was asked to recall something world-changing, I would expect that most would speak of the bombing of Hiroshima, the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the attack on the World Trade Center, or some other event in history in which many people were involved in changing the political direction of a nation or region of the world. Descriptions of these moments in history best fit what would seem to be required to change the world; they were large scale, shocking, and forceful. I wonder how many, if asked, would believe that the world was changed by an event much less massive than the ones mentioned above; that widespread change was brought about by the release of a book that contained less than five hundred pages and was small enough to be carried in one hand.

In the year 1859, such an event occurred. The publishing of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* shook the western world. Although Darwin was not the first scientist to propose the theory of evolution, he was unarguably the one to popularize it, and with the release of his book, a new era in modern thought began. Literally overnight, it became plausible to believe that the origin of life could have taken place purely by means of natural processes, and that divine involvement was no longer necessary to explain the wonders of the physical world. While it had not been Darwin's desire to create a problem for the church or for religion in general, *On the Origin of Species* did just that, and its effects continue to be felt to this day, in science, religion, and every area of life.

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It is these effects that this paper seeks to address. It is doubtful that Darwin realized just how much of an impact the theory of evolution would have on mankind. Something as potent as a scientific theory that redefines the origin of life must have far-reaching implications that need to be considered, such as the consequences it would have on the dignity of man and the value of life. It is my desire to discuss these implications, and their consequences for man; to show that Darwinism has provided the philosophical foundation for the worst degradations of human life that the world has ever known. It will be necessary in this study to examine the western world as it existed in Darwin's life and to find what created the environment that gave rise to Darwin's theory, but I believe that we must first establish the Biblical evidence for divine creation, particularly that of man made in the image of God.

Genesis 1:1 states that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."² As the Bible begins with Genesis, and Genesis begins with this statement, it must be noted that the entire Bible is founded on the belief that God created everything, and the past, present, and future are simply the unfolding of his divine plan. The Bible doesn't set out to prove this, as though it were something that required proof. It simply states Genesis 1:1 as plain fact, and it is upon this belief that the dignity of man has hinged in the western world. We go on to see throughout the first chapter of Genesis God's creation of everything on the earth; waters, sky, land, vegetation and all seed-bearing plants, the sun and stars, the fish and birds, livestock, creeping things, beasts of the earth, and finally man.

With the creation of man, we see something special happen; we see God create man in his own image³, breathe into his nostrils the "breath of life,"⁴ and give him the special privilege

² Genesis 1.1. English Standard Version

³ Genesis 1.27 ESV

⁴ Genesis 2.7 ESV

of having dominion over every created thing.⁵ There are two crucial points from these passages that need to be mentioned: First, no other creature in existence is said in scripture to have received the “breath of life” from God. We can safely draw the conclusion that in this breathe of life man was given a soul and faculties that are part of his bearing of the image of God. Second, no other creature is said in scripture to have been given dominion over creation. The dominion that is given to man is thus unique to him. So we see man being given a special privilege to care for and govern God’s creation. From these passages, we see the value of all life, as it is God’s creation that he called good, and we see even more so the evidence of the inherent dignity in mankind and his matchless status among the rest of creation. We are now ready to look at the circumstances of Western Europe that opened the door to the discarding of divine origins, and the embracing of materialist philosophies that brought disastrous results.

Western Europe through the Rise of Darwinism

From the 5th century, after the fall of the Roman Empire, until the end of the 14th century, Europe had been in its Middle Ages, largely viewed as a time of developmental stagnation. In the late 1300’s, the Renaissance humanist movement began in Italy, which placed a new emphasis on the literature of antiquity and its importance to man: “. . . the humanists were engaged in a revival of classical learning and culture, and the notion of a thousand year period of darkness and ignorance separating them from the ancient Greek and Roman world served to highlight the humanists’ own work and ideals.”⁶ The Middle Ages had been filled with corruption, disease, fear, and superstition. The humanists desired to change that by creating a brighter future for medieval Italy, and later the rest of Europe, and knowledge was their instrument of choice for ushering in this new way of life.

⁵ Genesis 1.26 ESV

⁶ “Middle Ages” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/380873/Middle-Ages> (accessed September 13, 2008)

This return to the study of Greek and Latin had a dramatic impact on the view of the common people regarding education, and literacy in particular. The humanist revival affected every area of study, including theology. Under the influence of humanism, a clergyman named Erasmus of Rotterdam, wrote his famous book *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (Handbook of the Christian Soldier), in which he detailed his belief that scripture should be read regularly by everyone, including lay people, so that devotion to God may increase and the church may be revitalized. Alister McGrath, in his book *Reformation Thought: an Introduction*, says “The regular reading of Scripture is put forward as the key to a new lay piety, on the basis of which the church may be renewed and reformed. Erasmus conceived of his work as a lay person’s guide to Scripture . . .”⁷ This idea from Erasmus had an influence in the development of the Protestant Reformation, with Luther’s belief in the priesthood of all believers, and the right of every person to have the scriptures in their own language. This conviction of the reformers led to a push among Protestants to increase literacy among the lay people, that they might be able to read the Bible for themselves.

Along with Protestantism’s desire to educate the common people in the area of literacy, it also encouraged the advancement of other academic disciplines, one of which was natural science. According to McGrath, “Calvin, in fact, may be regarded as making two major contributions to the appreciation and development of the natural sciences: first, he positively encouraged the scientific study of nature; second, he eliminated a major obstacle to the development of that study.”⁸ It is at this time that the study of science truly began to flourish in Renaissance Europe.

⁷ Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3rd edition (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1999) 52

⁸ *Ibid*, 274

It is ironic that Protestant Christianity was one of the major forces behind the development of the sciences, and yet it wouldn't be long before the church would come to be seen by many as one of science's greatest hindrances. The beginning of the strained relationship between science and Christianity came about in the year 1546 with the well-known denunciation of Nicolaus Copernicus's groundbreaking work on heliocentrism titled *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* by the Dominicans Bartolomeo Spina and Giovanni Maria Tolosani, as being unbiblical. Not a great deal of attention was paid to these claims until many years later, when in 1616, the Catholic Church actually forced the publication of *De revolutionibus* to be stopped until the references to the earth moving around the sun could be removed from its pages. The suspension of Copernicus's book came about as a direct result of the infamous conflict between the Catholic Church and Galileo Galilei over the publication of his book *Siderius Nuncius* (Starry Messenger) in 1610, in which he recounted telescopic observations he made which led him to similar conclusions to that of Copernicus. That Galileo made enemies with certain members of the priesthood is no secret, and this was the real cause of the problem he was to face: "There were periods of tension and conflict, such as the Galileo controversy. Yet on closer examination, these often turn out to have had more to do with papal politics, ecclesiastical power struggles, and personality issues than with any fundamental tensions between faith and science."⁹ Despite the absurdity of the suggestion that Galileo was guilty of heresy, in late 1614 or early 1615, his book was handed over to the Inquisition, and an investigation was begun. It was a long and drawn out struggle between Galileo and the Inquisition, which finally concluded in 1633, with Galileo being convicted of grave suspicion of heresy, placed under house arrest for the remainder of his life, and barred from any further writing.

⁹ Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004) 84

While the Catholic Church may have viewed this as a victory, the society around it, increasingly influenced as it was by humanist thought and unafraid of questioning the Church, at least in secret, was largely on the side of Galileo, and the seeds of discord and mistrust were sown between science and the established church. With the Renaissance now in full swing all throughout Europe, and the Catholic Church's apparent unwillingness to embrace the new discoveries being made, the intelligentsia within society quickly stopped looking to the clergy and religion as the hope of tomorrow. There were a few bright moments when the church's teachings seemed to line up with current scientific discovery, as in the case of Isaac Newton's "Celestial Mechanics" in the late 17th century or William Paley's "Natural Theology" in the early 19th century, but as soon as new writings came out which again cast doubt on the validity of Christianity relationship's with science, the church was once again disregarded. Science and philosophy were the new faiths being embraced in intellectual circles, and it wasn't long before serious doubts about the church's place within the discussion of new ideas and the future began to enter the minds of many common people as well. These sentiments continued to grow throughout the rest of the 17th century, and developed in even stronger forms during the 18th century, with the church's role diminishing and its importance marginalized in the eyes of society.

It was this increasing secular optimism in Western Europe that provided the necessary environment for the theory of evolution to develop and take hold. Charles Darwin himself didn't set out to disprove the Bible with this theory, and he had no personal argument with the church, yet it would be his writings that would widen the gulf between religion and science to a degree that many say is irreconcilable. Darwin actually held Christian beliefs earlier in life, and attended Christ's College at Cambridge University, where he read the works of Paley, and was thoroughly

convinced by them. It wasn't until he set sail on the HMS Beagle, and made his many discoveries in the Galapagos Islands that he began considering a purely naturalist, and later agnostic, worldview.

What Darwinism Teaches

There may seem to be a great distance between a scientific theory of materialism and the mass murders of totalitarian dictatorships. The distance is not as great as it might appear, however, and in less than a hundred years, this theory, used as the philosophical basis for some of the most repressive regimes history has ever known, had been taken to its logical conclusion in the killing of multiple millions of people. It is unlikely that Darwin would have approved of such atrocities, yet the view he spelled out regarding the origin and source of life is exactly what removed any concept of value from it, thus paving the way philosophically for these unspeakable acts. These murderous governments and their leaders were simply following his lead and taking Darwinian thought one step further into cold blooded action.

It's no secret that Darwin believed that “. . . all forms of life are postulated as being genetically related and derived from one common source, the simple primitive cell, formed spontaneously at biogenesis by means not fully understood at present.”¹⁰ This of course, means that plant, animal, and man all developed from the same life form. So what does this mean for mankind as the unique image bearer of God? It means that the image of God in man is denied and there is nothing inherently unique about mankind at all: “. . . man bears in his bodily structure clear traces of his descent from some lower form . . .”¹¹ Darwin's theory teaches that all life, including man, simply evolved by the process of random mutations, and ultimately life itself is merely a fortunate accident. If this is to be believed, then the logical conclusion is that life has

¹⁰ A. E. Wilder Smith, *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny: A Critical Survey of the Principles of Evolution and Christianity* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1966) 33

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004) 85

no inherent value. In this view, man is no different than any other form of life, such as the common spider, other than his status higher up the evolutionary chain.

If there is no creator, other than blind chance, then there is no purpose or intent; there is no one to whom we must answer for how we conduct ourselves and treat one another. At the end of the day, we will all go back to nothing. There's no meaning, no justice-beyond what we produce ourselves, no hope. At this point, the leap from accepting man's evolution from a single celled life form to condoning the Soviet gulags and the Nazi death camps isn't that difficult to make. If life has no real meaning or purpose beyond the subjectivity of what we personally attach to it, and there is no creator who must be reckoned with and obeyed, then in the grand scheme of things, the abuse, misuse, and taking of human life is really no different than pulling the wings off of a housefly. "For the genuine materialist there is no fundamental, only a gradual 'evolutionary' difference, between a man and a pest, a noxious insect."¹²

Darwinism and the Value of Human Life

Undoubtedly, some would accuse me of grossly misrepresenting Darwinism and evolution in general. I do in fact believe that the vast majority of Darwinists are every bit as appalled by the unspeakable acts committed by Soviet Communism and Nazi Germany as is the Christian. What I do not believe is the typical Darwinist's explanation of why their view of origins does no damage to the dignity of human life. To make my point, I will quote from Richard Dawkins, considered by many to be the current champion of Darwinian evolution: "Human means special, unique, sacred, of infinite worth, to be venerated as the possessor of 'human dignity.' Animal means to be treated kindly but put to human use, painlessly destroyed

¹² Eric Von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Leftism Revisited: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Pol Pot* (Washington D. C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990) 76. Quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1-2.4 in Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 1997) 15

when usefulness is past, killed for sport, or as a pest.”¹³ He goes on to say “Humans, to the absolutist mind, are forever divided from ‘animals.’ A real, live Lucy would drive a coach and horses through this double standard.”¹⁴ According to this quote from Dawkins, there is really no difference between man and animal. In fact, he calls such a distinction a “double standard”.

It is clear that evolution devalues life in general and human life in particular, and we see how recent evolutionists such as Dawkins have accepted this devaluing, but what of Darwin himself? Did he believe, consistent with his conclusions from his own findings, that human life possessed no special merit among the different forms of life? While he marveled over what he believed to be the complex evolutionary development of mankind, it is obvious from his writings that he ultimately felt that human life was no different than that of any other animal: “With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated . . . We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination . . . Thus the weak members of civilized society propagate their kind. No one who has attended the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the human race.”¹⁵ In other words, it would be better for mankind set aside biblical morality and allow the weaker members of society to die, so that we can ensure that their weaknesses are removed from the gene pool. With statements like this, there can be little doubt that Darwin saw humans the same way he saw any other animal, and ultimately, that he viewed life as expendable.

Darwinism and Marxism

It is upon this foundation that Nazism and Marxism were built. The link between these two extreme political philosophies and Darwinism is well known, though many modern day

¹³ Richard Dawkins, “The Word Made Flesh,” *The Guardian* (December 27, 2001). From *World of Dawkins*. http://www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkins-archive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/2001-12-27word_made_flesh.shtml (accessed on September 14, 2008).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, (accessed on September 14, 2008).

¹⁵ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004) 159

evolutionists do their best to downplay this fact. It becomes very difficult to downplay, however, since Marx himself spoke of the connection: “Darwin’s book is very important and serves me as a basis in natural selection for the class struggle in history . . . not only is it a death blow . . . to ‘Teleology’ in the natural sciences but their rational meaning is empirically explained.”¹⁶ Joseph Stalin, the man who carried on the legacy of Marxism into the mid-Twentieth Century, was also a well-known evolutionist. While he was studying in seminary to become a Russian Orthodox Priest, he came into contact with the works of Darwin and Marx, which led him to renounce his faith and embrace Darwinism and Marxism, which he began propagating to his fellow seminarians.¹⁷ The embracing of Darwinism’s insistence that life has no intrinsic worth, coupled with dictatorial power, led Stalin to perpetrate some of the most inhuman acts ever committed, and the loss of life while Soviet Russia was under his control is well known to be around 23 million.¹⁸ Stalin wasn’t the only communist dictator in the twentieth century to take the Marxist interpretation of Darwinism to its logical conclusion; Mao Zedong, the first communist leader of China is documented to have taken anywhere from 49,000,000-78,000,000 lives.¹⁹

Darwinism and Nazism

Though less lives were lost, the horrors of Hitler’s Nazism are just as infamous, if not more so, as those carried out by Marxist governments. Whether it is due to the racial nature of the Nazi crimes against humanity, or its numerous terrifying details, such as Josef Mengel’s depraved experiments, no one is sure. One thing is clear though, the exploits of the SS will never be forgotten. Like Marx, Stalin, and Mao Zedong, Hitler also crafted his philosophy from

¹⁶ Conway Zirkle, *Evolution, Marxian Biology, and the Social Scene* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia University Press, 1959) 85-87. Quoted in Jerry Bergman, “The Darwinian Foundation of Communism,” *Creation Ministries International*, <http://creationtheweb.com/content/view/1804/> (accessed September 15, 2008)

¹⁷ Bergman, “Darwinian Foundation” (accessed September 15, 2008)

¹⁸ Pierro Scaruffi, “1900-2000: A Century of Genocides,” *World History: A Knowledge Base of History*, <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/history/.html> (accessed September 15, 2008)

¹⁹ *Ibid*, <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/history/.html> (accessed September 15, 2008)

Darwinian thought: “Hitler believed that the human gene pool could be improved by using selective breeding similar to how farmers breed superior cattle strains. In the formulation of their racial policies, Hitler’s government relied heavily upon Darwinism, especially the elaborations by Spencer and Haeckel.”²⁰

An element of the rise of Nazism in Germany that remains baffling to many people, especially many Christians, is how the people of that nation, having had the Word of God for so long, and the church that gave them the Word, could have allowed this tragedy to occur. There are, of course, well-documented Nazi resisters among the German people and clergy, such as the German Confessing Church, but by and large, the people of Germany remained silent while the holocaust took place. How could this happen? “(The) Expunging of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of the divine origin of humans from mainline German (liberal) theology and its schools, and replacing it with Darwinism, openly contributed to the acceptance of Social Darwinism that culminated in the tragedy of the holocaust.”²¹ The removal from the churches of a literal teaching of the first two chapters of Genesis and the concept of man having been made in the image of God is what opened the door to the devaluing of human life and ultimately to mass genocide in Nazi Germany. The spiritual bearings of the nation were all but gone at that point; the church had turned from the inerrancy of scripture, and thus lacked the power to wake the people up, and bring and real correction to the land.

Scripture makes it clear that “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint . . .”²² How fitting this is for the present discussion. When scripture is discarded, the church discounted, and the voice of God is no longer being heard, a vacuum is created. People

²⁰ Jerry Bergman, “Darwinism and the Nazi Race Holocaust,” *Answers in Genesis*, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v13/i2/nazi.asp> (accessed September 15, 2008)

²¹ Bergman, “Nazi Holocaust” (accessed September 15, 2008)

²² Proverbs 29.18 ESV

perish without direction; they must have something they can believe in. When they are desperate enough, they are willing to accept almost anything. In a world that has been taught that God's word is obsolete, people are searching for something to believe in-they're searching for a vision. Darwin, Marx, and Hitler all had a vision that they gave to the people, and the people followed. This is a wake-up call to the church; the people desire vision and it must be given to them. If they do not get it from us, they will get it somewhere. They must, for without it they perish. The irony is that, when given the wrong vision, they will likewise perish from that as well.