

# DARWIN'S THREE BIG IDEAS

*that*  
IMPACTED HUMANITY

———— John G. West ————

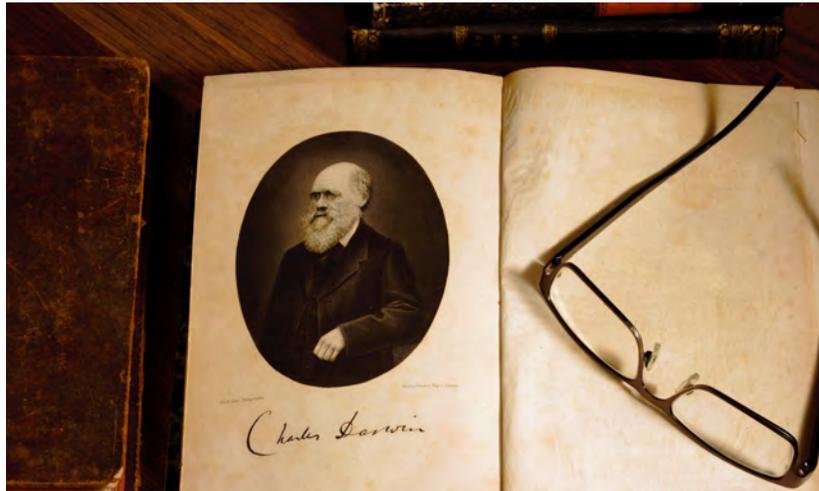
reTHINK  
SERIES

World Work  
ORIGIN  
SPECI

Elliott & Fry

DARWIN

## INTRODUCTION



**I**DEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, AND CHARLES Darwin's theory of evolution is an idea that has had momentous consequences for society. "Darwinian theory is a scientific theory... but that is not all it is," writes philosopher Daniel Dennett. "Darwin's dangerous idea cuts much deeper into the fabric of our most fundamental beliefs than many of its sophisticated apologists have yet admitted, even to themselves."<sup>1</sup>

According to the modern version of Darwin's theory, all living things ultimately evolved from one simple ancestral form through a process of "natural selection" acting on random genetic mutations and recombinations of genes.

Darwin's theory fueled three big ideas with significant consequences for humanity.

1

## **Humans Are Not Unique**

The first idea was that humans are not unique. Darwin himself recognized that his theory diminished the case for human uniqueness, writing in one of his notebooks that “it is absurd to talk of one animal being higher than another.”<sup>2</sup> He also complained that “people often talk of the wonderful event of intellectual Man appearing” when, in fact, “the appearance of insects with other senses is more wonderful.”<sup>3</sup>

Darwinian biologists today relish emphasizing that humans are just another animal. Biologist Charles Zuker says humans “are nothing but a big fly.”<sup>4</sup> Geneticist Glen Evans claims that “the worm represents a very simple human.”<sup>5</sup> A science journalist writes that “there isn't much difference between mice and men.”<sup>6</sup> And the late Morris Goodman of Wayne State University argued that humans are “only slightly remodeled chimpanzee-like apes.”<sup>7</sup>

Darwinian social theorists across the political spectrum make similar claims. John Derbyshire, formerly a writer with the conservative magazine *National Review*, argues approvingly that “the broad outlook on human nature implied by Darwinian ideas contradicts the notion of human exceptionalism... To modern biologists, informed by Darwin, we are merely another branch on Nature’s tree.”<sup>8</sup> Princeton University bioethicist Peter Singer, a political progressive and author of *A Darwinian Left*, agrees. In Singer’s words, Darwin “showed... that we are simply animals. Humans had imagined we were a separate part of Creation, that there was some magical line between Us and Them. Darwin’s theory undermined the foundations of that entire Western way of thinking about the place of our species in the universe.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2

### **Nature Was Produced by an Unguided Process**

A second big idea fueled by Darwinism was that nature is the product of an unguided process. As Darwin himself made clear,

natural selection is an unintelligent process that is blind to the future: “There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.”<sup>10</sup> Natural selection cannot select new features based on some future goal. It only favors traits that are beneficial to survival right now. Consequently, evolution by natural selection is “the result of an unguided, unplanned process,” to cite the words of dozens of Nobel laureates who issued a statement defending Darwin’s theory in 2005.<sup>11</sup>

According to Darwinism, amazing biological features such as the vertebrate eye, or the wings of butterflies, or the blood-clotting system, are in no way the purposeful result of evolution. They are unintended byproducts of the interplay between chance (random mutations) and necessity (natural selection). The same holds true for higher animals such as human beings. In the words of late Harvard paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson, “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”<sup>12</sup> In the Darwinian

worldview, human beings are accidents of natural history, not the purposeful creations of a loving Creator.

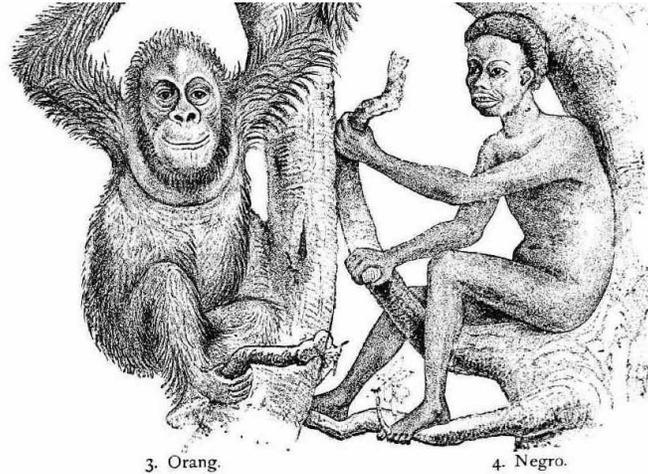
### 3

## **The Engine of Progress Is Mass Death**

A third big idea fueled by Darwin's theory is that the engine of progress in the history of life is mass death. Instead of believing that the remarkable features of humans and other living things reflect the intelligent design of a master artist, Darwin portrayed death and destruction as our ultimate creator. As he wrote at the end of his most famous work: "Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows."<sup>13</sup>

For more than 150 years, these three Darwinian ideas have shaped social beliefs and actions in virtually every sphere of human life, including race relations, medicine, environmentalism, criminal justice, ethics, and religion.

## DARWINIAN RACISM



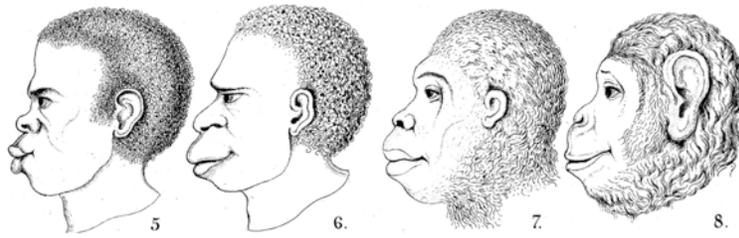
CHARLES DARWIN WAS NOT THE WORLD'S first racist, and he was better than some racists in that he opposed slavery. Nevertheless, Darwin's theory exerted a powerful influence on the development and growth of scientific racism. As Harvard evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould acknowledged: "Biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1859 [when Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species*], but they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory."<sup>14</sup>

Darwin believed that his theory of natural selection provided a scientific explanation for why races should have unequal capacities and

why there were “higher” and “lower” races. The specific traits an animal needs to survive differ based on the animal’s environment. Thus, there is no reason to expect that natural selection acting on different populations will produce the same traits in every population or, in this case, every race. That is why Darwinists *expected* to find differences in the capacities of different races.

Accordingly, Darwin declared that there are significant differences in the mental faculties of what he called “men of distinct races.”<sup>15</sup> He also argued that the break in evolutionary history between apes and humans came “between the negro or Australian [aborigine] and the gorilla,” thus depicting blacks as the closest human beings to apes.<sup>16</sup> Darwin’s supporters further popularized these ideas.

German scientist Ernst Haeckel was a correspondent of Darwin and one of the most celebrated champions of Darwin’s theory in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Haeckel created a widely



disseminated diagram of human evolution that portrayed the evolutionary gap between the highest human and the lowest human as larger than the gap between the lowest human and the highest ape-like creature, which was given African features.<sup>17</sup>

The idea that non-white races represented a throwback to lower stages of evolution was widely embraced throughout the scientific community in the early twentieth century. Consider the views of American biologist Charles Davenport, a member of the National Academy of Sciences and regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern genetics. Davenport was obsessed with the idea that some races were still stuck in lower evolutionary stages. In his words, “it seems probable that in the same country we have, living side by side, persons of advanced mentality, persons who have inherited the mentality of their ancestors of the early Stone

Age, and persons of intermediate evolutionary stages.”<sup>18</sup>

Darwinian racism played a role in the justification of one of the first genocides of the twentieth century. From 1904-1908, the German military attempted to eradicate the Herero and Nama peoples in Southwest Africa. In October 1904, General Lothar von Trotha issued what became known as his extermination order declaring that the Hereros either had to leave German Southwest Africa or face extinction. Herero men would be executed, and Herero women and children would be driven into the desert where they would die of starvation or dehydration.

Von Trotha justified his extermination campaign by an explicit appeal to Social Darwinism, telling one newspaper that human feelings of philanthropy could not override the “law of Darwins [sic], the ‘struggle of the fittest.’”<sup>19</sup>

In the United States, meanwhile, thousands of indigenous people from around the world were put on public display at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904 in what has

become known as a “human zoo.”<sup>20</sup> Those displayed were supposed to represent lower stages of human evolution.

In 1906, the Bronx Zoo in New York City displayed a man from Africa, Ota Benga, in a cage with a monkey as an evolutionary missing link between humans and apes.<sup>21</sup>

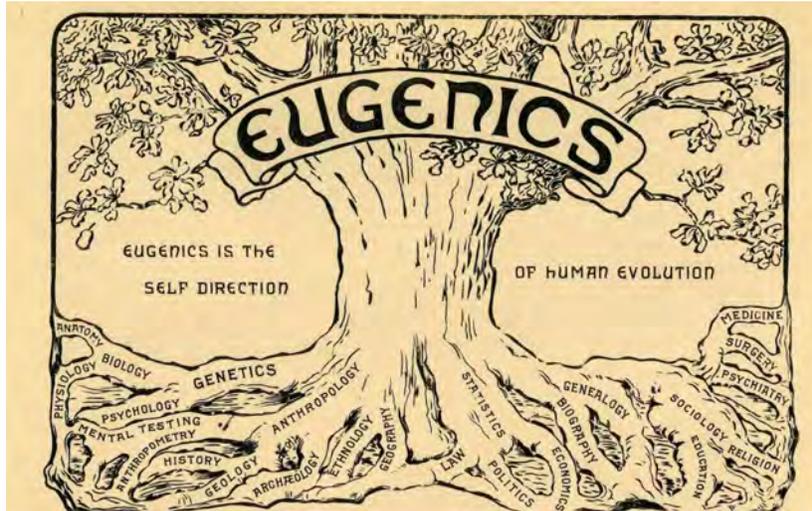
By the 1920s, new immigration restrictions had been imposed in cooperation with Darwinian biologists who decided that certain races were lower on the evolutionary scale and so they needed to be kept out.<sup>22</sup>

Since the civil rights movement, most scientists have abandoned Darwinian racism. But there are exceptions. In 2007, Nobel-prize winning biologist James Watson, the co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, sparked an uproar by suggesting that blacks are biologically inferior to whites. Watson further suggested that human evolution was the explanation for this biological inferiority.<sup>23</sup>

Outside the scientific community, white supremacists in the so-called “Alt-Right” are unfortunately attempting to resurrect

Darwinian arguments for racism previously rejected by the scientific community.<sup>24</sup>

## DARWINIAN EUGENICS



ONE OF THE MOST FAR-REACHING SOCIAL impacts of Darwinism was in the field of medicine. It became known as eugenics, which was described by its proponents as “the self-direction of human evolution.” The inspiration for eugenics sprang directly from Darwin’s theory. In Darwin’s view, the key reason humans developed their outstanding capabilities was not because they were designed that way by a Creator, but because natural selection ruthlessly weeded out the unfit. The problem according to eugenicists was that in name of humanitarianism,

civilized societies were now doing their best to care for those who nature would have killed off. They thought that would lead to disaster.

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin criticized modern society for methodically undermining natural selection's "process of elimination" by offering asylums for the mentally ill, homes for the handicapped, hospitals for the sick, and welfare programs for the poor. Darwin even warned about the dangers of vaccinating people against smallpox, which he thought "preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed." Darwin's stark conclusion: "Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man... hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed."<sup>25</sup>

A kindly man, Darwin was torn by the implications of his theory, and he thought human sympathy would not allow people to follow his theory to its logical conclusion.

Likewise, many of his followers believed it would be too cruel for humans to go back to the law of the jungle. They wanted to develop a kinder way to mimic natural selection through modern science. That was the goal of eugenics.

Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, is generally recognized as the official founder of eugenics, and he actually coined term (adapted from a Greek root word meaning "good in birth"<sup>26</sup>). "Positive eugenics" focused on encouraging those deemed the most fit to reproduce more, while "negative eugenics" focused on curtailing reproduction by those deemed "unfit," including mental defectives and criminals. Eugenics became the consensus view of the scientific community for decades, and it was promoted by leading scientists around the world. In America, eugenics supporters included biologists at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and the National Academy of Sciences.<sup>27</sup>

Today the Darwinian roots of eugenics tend to be downplayed, but the Darwinian rationale for eugenics was explicit in the writings of eugenicists themselves. For

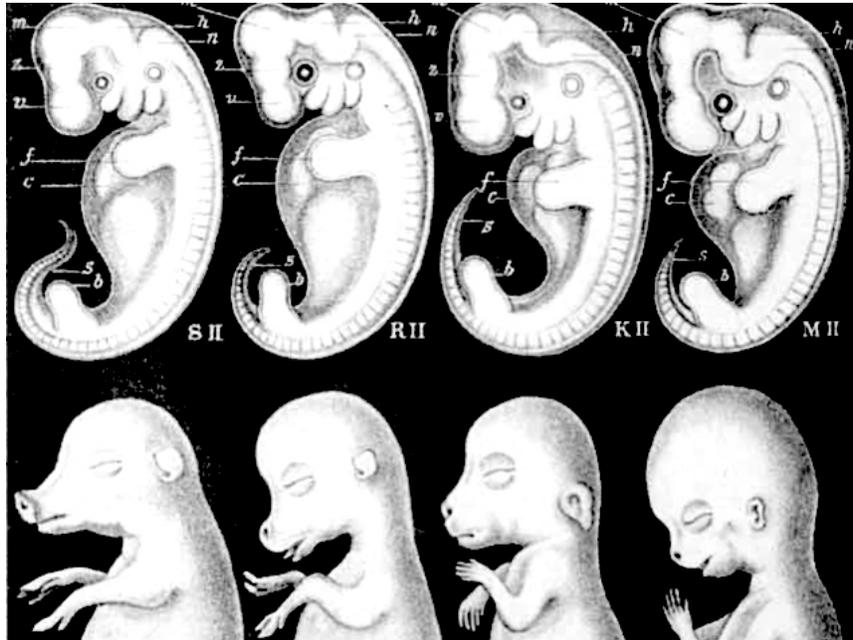
example, Harvard geneticist Edward East insisted that “eugenic tenets are strict corollaries” of “the theory of organic evolution.”<sup>28</sup> Princeton biologist Edwin Conklin similarly advocated for eugenics as a way to undo modern society’s violation of “natural selection, the great law of evolution and progress.”<sup>29</sup>

The impact of eugenics on American public policy was far-ranging, including laws on who could marry, immigration restrictions on races considered lower on the evolutionary scale, and forced sterilization of those considered less fit in Darwinian terms. In America, 60,000 women were sterilized against their will in the name of eugenics.<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere around the world the impact of Darwinian eugenics was even more horrifying. Germany’s eugenics movement sterilized hundreds of thousands of people and murdered 300,000 disabled children and adults, many in gas chambers dressed up as shower stalls. It was during the “eugenic” killings of the handicapped that the Nazis developed some of the methods they used to murder millions of Jews.<sup>31</sup>

After the general public learned about the atrocities committed in the name of eugenics in Nazi Germany, Darwinian eugenics was widely discredited. But Darwinism continued to influence bioethics debates in other ways.

## DARWINIAN ABORTION & INFANTICIDE



SCIENTISTS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS ALIKE have appealed to Darwinian theory to justify abortion by claiming that babies in the womb are not fully human.<sup>32</sup> Invoking an idea known as embryonic recapitulation, these proponents of abortion argue that human infants replay the history of evolution as they

develop in the womb. They go through a fish stage, a lower mammal stage, and more before finally reaching the state of a human being. Thus, if someone aborts an infant while she is still in the fish stage, it is no more immoral than killing a fish.

Embryonic recapitulation is junk science and has been discredited even among evolutionary biologists for decades. That has not stopped this argument from being invoked repeatedly as a justification for abortion in public policy debates. In 1981, for example, University of Michigan geneticist James Neel testified to the U.S. Congress that “[t]he early embryo appears to pass through some of the stages in the evolutionary history of our species. The scientific dictum is: ‘Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,’ which translates into: during embryological development we repeat in abbreviated form many aspects of our evolutionary past.”<sup>33</sup> Neel told lawmakers that because of “these facts,” he found “it most difficult to state, as a scientist, just when in early fetal development human personhood begins, just I would find it impossible to say exactly when in evolution

we passed over the threshold that divides us from the other living creatures.” Neel was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and one of America’s top geneticists.

The recapitulation argument for abortion has continued to resurface. In 1990 celebrated astronomer Carl Sagan and his wife Ann Druyan published a defense of abortion that relied heavily on the idea of recapitulation.<sup>34</sup> In 2007, the late journalist Christopher Hitchens similarly defended abortion by claiming that “in utero we see a microcosm of nature and evolution itself... we begin as tiny forms that are amphibian.”<sup>35</sup>

Another Darwinian justification for abortion focuses on natural selection. Abortion proponents have claimed that spontaneous abortions (i.e., miscarriages) developed through natural selection to weed out the unfit. In their view, medical abortions are merely an example of humans capitalizing on an evolutionary innovation through science. Planned Parenthood official Alexander Sanger has gone even further. He argues that human-directed abortion itself is a product of natural selection. In his words,

“humanity has evolved to take conscious control of reproduction and has done so in order to survive.... We cannot repeal the laws of natural selection. Nature does not let every life survive. Humanity uniquely, and to its benefit, can exercise some dominion over this process and maximize the chances for human life to survive and grow.”<sup>36</sup>

Darwinism has fed into debates over infanticide as well. University of Chicago evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne has argued on his blog for legalizing infanticide for babies with biological defects. He wrote: “After all, we euthanize our dogs and cats when to prolong their lives would be torture, so why not extend that to humans?”<sup>37</sup>

Coyne recognizes that the reason we do not do so is because of a view of human beings that Darwinism has yet to completely overcome: “The reason we don’t allow euthanasia of newborns is because humans are seen as special, and I think this comes from religion—in particular, the view that humans, unlike animals, are endowed with a soul... When religion vanishes, as it will, so

will much of the opposition to both adult and newborn euthanasia.”

## DARWINIAN ECOLOGY



A SIMILAR DARWINIAN DEVALUATION OF human life can be found among some radical environmentalists. In *The War on Humans*, lawyer and bioethicist Wesley J. Smith has documented how the growing coercive utopianism of some environmentalists is grounded in a visceral hatred of humans and the denial that human beings are special or unique.<sup>38</sup> In the words of University of Texas evolutionary zoologist Eric Pianka, “Humans are no better than bacteria,”<sup>39</sup> and “Other things on this earth have been here longer than us... and they have a right to this planet

too—that includes wasps that sting you, ants that bite you, scorpions and rattlesnakes.”<sup>40</sup> Pianka goes on to criticize humans for “sucking everything we can out of mother Earth and turning it into fat human biomass.”<sup>41</sup> Pianka urges the reduction of the Earth’s human population by up to 90% and calls on the government to confiscate all the earnings of any couple who has more than two children. “You should have to pay more when you have your first kid—you pay more taxes,” he insists. “When you have your second kid you pay a lot more taxes, and when you have your third kid you don’t get anything back, they take it all.”<sup>42</sup>

Underlying the radical environmentalists’ hatred for humans is the Darwinian rejection of human uniqueness. Christopher Manes, one of the early leaders of the environmentalist group Earth First!, explains: “Darwin invited humanity to face the fact that the observation of nature has revealed not one scrap of evidence that humankind is superior or special, or even particularly more interesting than, say, lichen.”<sup>43</sup>

This kind of Darwinian misanthropy motivated eco-terrorist James Lee, who in 2010 took staff of the Discovery Channel hostage. Lee called on the Discovery Channel to “Talk about Evolution. Talk about Malthus and Darwin until it sinks into the stupid people’s brains until they get it!” Lee’s stated goal was to save “what’s left of the non-human Wildlife by decreasing the Human population. That means stopping the human race from breeding any more disgusting human babies!”<sup>44</sup>

## DARWINIAN ETHICS



DARWIN’S THEORY HAS ALSO EXERTED A corrosive influence on morality and human accountability. In a Darwinian view, morality is reduced to pre-programmed behavior in

service of physical survival. In the words of Darwinian philosopher Michael Ruse and Harvard evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson, “Morality... is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends... In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate.”<sup>45</sup> As a result, “human free will is nonexistent,”<sup>46</sup> to cite the words of late Cornell University professor William Provine.

Attacks on personal responsibility have featured prominently in Darwinian accounts of human behavior during the past century-and-a-half. For example, Darwinism played a key role in the development of the “new school of criminology” by Cesare Lombroso and others in the late nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> These criminologists tried to find Darwinian explanations for why people engaged in crime, even labeling some persons “born criminals” because they were supposed to be throwbacks to an earlier stage in evolutionary history. Lombroso and his followers repudiated the traditional idea that “crime involved... moral guilt.”<sup>48</sup> Italian Jurist Enrico

Ferri, one of Lombroso's most celebrated disciples, argued that it was no longer reasonable to believe that human beings could make choices outside the normal chain of material cause and effect given the advent of modern science, particularly the work of Charles Darwin. Ferri looked forward to the day when punishment and vengeance would be abandoned and crime would be treated as a "disease."<sup>49</sup>

The diminishment of free will is rampant among today's purveyors of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology proponent Robert Wright, for example, declares that "free will is an illusion, brought to us by evolution"<sup>50</sup> and "in many realms, not just sex—we're all puppets."<sup>51</sup> Wright does add that "our best hope for even partial liberation is to try to decipher the logic of the puppeteer." But if "free will is an illusion," precisely how can we liberate ourselves from "the puppeteer"? And if human beings truly are "puppets" to their genes, puppets whose "emotions are just evolution's executioners"<sup>52</sup> (again quoting Wright), in what sense can people be blamed

if they simply act according to their deepest impulses?

The diminishment of free will and personal responsibility is not the only way Darwinism has impacted morality. Darwinism also has provided a robust biological justification for moral relativism. According to Darwin, specific moral precepts develop because under certain environmental conditions they promote survival.<sup>53</sup> Once those conditions for survival change, however, so too do the dictates of morality. That is why we find in nature both the maternal instinct and infanticide, both honoring one's parents and killing them when they become feeble. Natural selection "chooses" whatever behavioral traits best promote survival under the existing circumstances.

A Darwinian understanding of morality makes it very difficult to condemn as evil any human behavior that has persisted, because every trait that continues to exist even among a subpopulation has an equal right to claim nature's sanction. Presumably even anti-social behaviors such as fraud and pedophilia and

rape must continue to exist among human beings because they were favored at some point by natural selection and therefore have some sort of biological basis. Of course, one could still justly condemn such behaviors if there existed a permanent moral standard independent of natural selection. But the existence of such a standard is precisely what orthodox Darwinism denies.

For the most part, Darwin himself did not press his relativistic analysis of morality to its logical conclusion, but he laid the groundwork for others who came after him, and his ideas helped reshape how people think about morality. In the United States, for example, 55% of adults now believe “evolution shows that moral beliefs evolve over time based on their survival value in various times and places.”<sup>54</sup>

Nowhere has the Darwinian view of ethics had a severer impact than in family life and human sexuality. The thinker most responsible for the breakdown of traditional sexual ethics in Western culture was Harvard-trained evolutionary zoologist Alfred Kinsey. Adopting a thoroughly

Darwinian approach to sexual morality, Kinsey argued that any sexual practice that could be found somewhere among mammals could be regarded as “normal mammalian behavior” and be regarded as unobjectionable.<sup>55</sup>

Today, many evolutionary psychologists have gone beyond mere sexual relativism and are affirmatively arguing against monogamy. They claim that we were bred by Darwinian evolution to have multiple sex partners, which means that we are programmed for promiscuity and infidelity. In their view, the very idea of faithful monogamous marriage contradicts our biology and must therefore be abandoned.

One prominent evolutionary psychologist to advocate this view is Christopher Ryan, co-author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Sex at Dawn*. In the words of Ryan, “Marriage in the West isn’t doing very well because it’s in direct confrontation with the evolved reality of our species.”<sup>56</sup> Ryan says he wants to save marriage by making it consistent with Darwinian biology. For him, that means redefining marriage to include multiple partners at the same time.

## DARWINIAN REJECTION OF GOD



A FINAL PROFOUND IMPACT OF DARWIN'S theory has been in the area of religion, where Darwinism has supplied a potent scientific rationale for atheism. Darwinism does not logically necessitate atheism, but it certainly does encourage it. If nature really supplies proof that the history of life is the product of an unguided process, then that would seem to make an atheist worldview much more credible.

This is why so many scientists have made unguided Darwinian evolution a cornerstone in their case for atheism. Oxford University biologist Richard Dawkins has famously claimed that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."<sup>57</sup> Harvard

evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson has declared that the existence of a God “who directs organic evolution and intervenes in human affairs... is increasingly contravened by biology and the brain sciences.”<sup>58</sup>

University of Washington evolutionary psychologist David Barash makes a similar boast: “The more we know of evolution, the more unavoidable is the conclusion that living things, including human beings, are produced by a natural, totally amoral process, with no indication of a benevolent, controlling creator.”<sup>59</sup>

In a nationwide survey of American atheists and agnostics, nearly seven in ten atheists and more than four in ten agnostics said that Darwin’s unguided mutation/natural selection mechanism made the existence of God “less likely” for them personally. Similarly, more than seven in ten atheists and nearly four in ten agnostics agreed with evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins that “the universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no

good, nothing but blind, pitiless  
indifference.”<sup>60</sup>

But Darwinism’s impact on religion has not been limited to just atheists and agnostics. It also has reshaped how many Christians view of God, especially at Christian colleges and universities, where scientists and theologians have tried to revise Christianity to make it compatible with Darwinism. Because Darwinian evolution is by nature unguided, theistic Darwinists often downplay or reject the idea that God actively directs the development of life.

For example, Anglican priest and physicist John Polkinghorne writes that “an evolutionary universe is theologically understood as a creation allowed to make itself.”<sup>61</sup> Roman Catholic biologist Kenneth Miller of Brown University insists that “mankind’s appearance on this planet was not preordained, that we are here... as an afterthought, a minor detail, a happenstance in a history that might just as well have left us out.”<sup>62</sup> Former Vatican astronomer George Coyne even claimed that because evolution is unguided “not even God could know... with

certainty” that “human life would come to be.”<sup>63</sup>

Other theistic Darwinists repudiate the Biblical doctrine of an historic “fall,” the idea that human beings were originally created good and then fell into sin through a voluntary act of disobedience. According to Christian physicist Karl Giberson, since human beings were created through Darwinian evolution, they were essentially sinful from the start because “Selfishness... drives the evolutionary process.”<sup>64</sup>

Still other theistic Darwinists challenge the idea that God’s handiwork in nature is observable, especially in biology. Christian geneticist Francis Collins suggests that “evolution could appear to us to be driven by chance, but from God’s perspective the outcome would be entirely specified. Thus, God could be completely and intimately involved in the creation of all species, while from our perspective... this would appear a random and undirected process.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, God makes the history of life look “random and undirected,” even though it really is not. Contra Francis Collins, for

thousands of years Jewish and Christian thinkers believed otherwise, maintaining that God's design could be clearly seen throughout nature.<sup>66</sup>

## DARWINISM AS A "UNIVERSAL ACID"



DANIEL DENNETT HAS APTLY DESCRIBED Darwinism as a “universal acid” that dissolves traditional ideas about morality, human responsibility, and God.<sup>67</sup> Without question, Darwinian theory has exerted a revolutionary impact on human society.

Ironically, Darwinism's cultural prestige has continued to expand even while its

scientific basis has sharply diminished in the face of withering critiques in recent years.<sup>68</sup>

Nobel Prize-winning physicist Robert Laughlin at Stanford University has gone so far as to declare: “Evolution by natural selection... has lately come to function more as an antitheory, called upon to cover up embarrassing experimental shortcomings and legitimize findings that are at best questionable and at worst not even wrong.”<sup>69</sup>

If Laughlin and others are right, it may be time to fundamentally challenge Darwinism’s continuing power over our culture.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John G. West is Vice President and a Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute, where he also serves as Managing Director of the Institute's Center for Science & Culture. West holds a PhD in Government from Claremont Graduate University. He previously served as an Associate Professor of Political Science at Seattle Pacific University, where he chaired the Department of Political Science and Geography.

West has written or edited twelve books, including *Darwin Day in America: How Our Politics and Culture Have Been Dehumanized in the Name of Science*, *Darwin's Conservatives: The Misguided Quest*, *The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society*, and *Walt Disney and Live Action*. He also has written and directed many documentaries, including two award-winning films on Social Darwinism: *The Biology of the Second Reich* and *Human Zoos: America's Forgotten History of Scientific Racism*.



This essay was published by Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, a non-profit, non-partisan educational and research organization. The Center's mission is to advance the understanding that human beings and nature are the result of intelligent design rather than a blind and undirected process. We seek long-term scientific and cultural change through cutting-edge scientific research and scholarship; education and training of young leaders; communication to the general public; and advocacy of academic freedom and free speech for scientists, teachers, and students.

*For free articles, videos, and other resources, visit [www.discovery.org/id](http://www.discovery.org/id).*

---

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 18.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Barrett, et. al., *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836-1844* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), "Notebook B," #74, 189.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, #207, 222-223.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in Maggie Fox, "Fly Gene Map May Have Many Uses, Scientists Say," Reuters, March 23, 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in *ibid*.
- <sup>6</sup> Patricia Reaney, "Are You Man or Mouse? Check Your Genes..." Reuters, Dec. 4, 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> Derek E. Wilman, Monica Uddin, Guozhen Liu, Lawrence Grossman, and Morris Goodman, "Implications of natural selection in shaping 99.4% nonsynonymous DNA identity between humans and chimpanzees: Enlarging genus Homo," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, June 10, 2003, vol. 100, no. 12, 7181. Goodman is identified as the contributor of this article to *Proceedings*.
- <sup>8</sup> John Derbyshire, "What's So Scary about Evolution?—for Both Right and Left, a Lot," *Taki's Magazine*, May 19, 2008, <http://www.johnderbyshire.com/Opinions/HumanSciences/darwin.html>, emphasis in original.
- <sup>9</sup> Quoted in Johann Hari, "Peter Singer—An Interview," originally run in *The Independent*, Jan. 7, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060317041348/http://www.johannhari.com/archive/article.php?id=410>.
- <sup>10</sup> Nora Barlow, editor, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809-1882, with Original Omissions Restored* (New York: Norton, 1969), 87.
- <sup>11</sup> Letter from Nobel Laureates to Kansas State Board of Education, September 9, 2005, [https://web.archive.org/web/20051103170647/http://media.ljworld.com/pdf/2005/09/15/nobel\\_letter.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20051103170647/http://media.ljworld.com/pdf/2005/09/15/nobel_letter.pdf).
- <sup>12</sup> George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution: A Study of the History of Life and of Its Significance for Man*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 345.
- <sup>13</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859), first edition, 490.
- <sup>14</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard, 1977), 127.
- <sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), vol. I, 109-110.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. For a further discussion of Darwinian racism, see John G. West, *Darwin Day in America: How Our Politics and Culture Have Been Dehumanized in the Name of Science*, expanded paperback edition (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2015), 144-150 and accompanying notes.
- <sup>17</sup> Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 106-107.
- <sup>18</sup> Charles Davenport, "Scientific Cooperation with Nature: Eugenics," typescript in

---

Charles Davenport Papers, Collection B D27, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 206.

<sup>20</sup> See Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2007); *Human Zoos: America's Forgotten History of Scientific Racism* (Seattle: Discovery Institute, 2018), <https://youtu.be/nY6Zrol5QEk>. More generally, see Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, et al., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, translated by Teresa Bridgeman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> See *Human Zoos: America's Forgotten History of Scientific Racism*; Pamela Newkirk, *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga* (New York: Amistad, 2015); Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume, *Ota Benga: The Pygmy in the Zoo* (New York: Delta, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> West, *Darwin Day in America*, 134-135.

<sup>23</sup> See Charlotte Hunt-Grubbe, "The Elementary DNA of Dr. Watson," *The Sunday Times*, October 14, 2007, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-elementary-dna-of-dr-watson-gllb6w2vpdr>; James D. Watson, *Avoid Boring People: Lessons from a Life in Science* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007), 326.

<sup>24</sup> *Human Zoos: America's Forgotten History of Scientific Racism*; David Klinghoffer, "Evolution and the Alt-Right," *Evolution News and Science Today*, April 14, 2016, [https://evolutionnews.org/2016/04/evolution\\_and\\_t\\_1/](https://evolutionnews.org/2016/04/evolution_and_t_1/); David Klinghoffer, "Evolution and the Alt-Right, Continued," *Evolution News and Science Today*, Sept. 1, 2017, <https://evolutionnews.org/2017/09/evolution-and-the-alt-right-continued/>.

<sup>25</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), xiii.

<sup>27</sup> West, *Darwin Day in America*, 161.

<sup>28</sup> Edward M. East, *Heredity and Human Affairs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 237.

<sup>29</sup> Edwin Conklin, "Value of Negative Eugenics," *Journal of Heredity* 6, no. 12 (December 1915): 539-540.

<sup>30</sup> Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 141.

<sup>31</sup> "Remembering the 'forgotten victims' of Nazi 'euthanasia' murders," *Deutsche Welle*, Jan. 26, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/remembering-the-forgotten-victims-of-nazi-euthanasia-murders/a-37286088>; Leo Alexander, "Medical Science Under Dictatorship," *New England Journal of Medicine* (July 14, 1949), 241: 39-47; Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: "Euthanasia" in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> See West, *Darwin Day in America*, 325-333.

<sup>33</sup> Testimony of Dr. James Neel, May 20, 1981, in *The Human Life Bill: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Separation of Powers of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Seventh Congress, First Session, on S. 158, a Bill to Provide that Human Life Shall be Deemed to Exist from Conception, April 23, 24; May 20, 21; June 1, 10, 12 and 18*. Serial No. J-97-16 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 77.

<sup>34</sup> Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, "Is It Possible To Be Pro-Life And Pro-Choice?" *Parade Magazine*, April 22, 1990, 6.

---

<sup>35</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 221.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Sanger, *Beyond Choice: Reproductive Freedom and the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 292.

<sup>37</sup> Jerry Coyne, “Should one be allowed to euthanize severely deformed or doomed newborns?,” *Why Evolution Is True*, July 13, 2017, <https://whyevolutionistrue.com/2017/07/13/should-one-be-allowed-to-euthanize-severely-deformed-or-doomed-newborns/>.

<sup>38</sup> Wesley J. Smith, *The War on Humans* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Eric R. Pianka, “The Vanishing Book of Life on Earth,” 21, available at <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/courses/bio373/Vanishing.Book.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 17; Jamie Mobley, “Doomsday: UT prof says death is imminent,” *Seguin Gazette-Enterprise*, Feb. 27, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 142.

<sup>44</sup> James Lee, “The Discovery Channel MUST broadcast to the world their commitment to save the planet and to do the following IMMEDIATELY,” archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20101220024835/http://savetheplanetprotest.com/>.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Ruse and E.O. Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethics” in James Huchingson, *Religion and the Natural Sciences: The Range of Engagement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), 210.

<sup>46</sup> William Provine, “Evolution: Free will and punishment and meaning in life” (abstract), <https://web.archive.org/web/20090817085910/http://eeb.bio.utk.edu/darwin/Archives/1998ProvineAbstract.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> West, *Darwin Day in America*, 51-55.

<sup>48</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, translated by Henry Horton (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1968), 376.

<sup>49</sup> Enrico Ferri, “The Positive School of Criminology,” in *Criminology: A Book of Readings*, edited by Clyde Vedder, Samuel Koenig, and Robert Clark (New York: The Dryden Press, 1953), 137-138.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 350.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol. II, 362. Also see discussion in West, *Darwin’s Conservatives*, 19-32; and West, *Darwin Day in America*, 23-42.

<sup>54</sup> John G. West, *Darwin’s Corrosive Idea: The Impact of Evolution on Attitudes about Faith, Ethics, and Human Uniqueness* (Seattle: Discovery Institute, 2016), 10.

<sup>55</sup> See West, *Darwin Day in America*, 271-290.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Ryan, quoted in Thomas Rogers, “‘Sex at Dawn’: Why monogamy goes against our nature,” *Salon*, June 27, 2010, [https://www.salon.com/2010/06/27/sex\\_at\\_dawn\\_interview/](https://www.salon.com/2010/06/27/sex_at_dawn_interview/). Also see Christopher

---

Ryan and Cacilda Jetha, *Sex at Dawn: How We Mate, Why We Stray, and What It Means for Modern Relationships* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011); Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jetha, "Open Marriage: We Don't Believe in Monogamy," *The Times*, July 24, 2010, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/open-marriage-we-dont-believe-in-monogamy-vz6lm77bfzc>.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996), 6.

<sup>58</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), 241.

<sup>59</sup> David Barash, "God, Darwin, and My Biology Class," *New York Times*, September 27, 2014, [www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/opinion/sunday/god-darwin-and-my-college-biology-class.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/opinion/sunday/god-darwin-and-my-college-biology-class.html).

<sup>60</sup> West, *Darwin's Corrosive Idea*, 7, 10.

<sup>61</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos, and Christianity*, rev. ed. (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 113.

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 272; see also 244.

<sup>63</sup> George V. Coyne, S.J., "The Dance of the Fertile Universe," 7, [https://web.archive.org/web/20051104052227/http://www.aei.org/docLib/20051027\\_HandoutCoyne.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20051104052227/http://www.aei.org/docLib/20051027_HandoutCoyne.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Karl Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 12.

<sup>65</sup> Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 205.

<sup>66</sup> See John G. West, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Theistic Evolution, the Early Church, and the Return of Gnosticism, Part 1," in Jay Richards, editor, *God and Evolution: Protestants, Catholics, and Jews Explore Darwin's Challenge to Faith* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2010); William A. Dembski, Wayne J. Downs, and Father Justin B. A. Frederick, eds., *The Patristic Understanding of Creation: An Anthology of Writings from the Church Fathers on Creation and Design* (Riesel, TX: Erasmus Press, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 63.

<sup>68</sup> For recent examples, see Stephen Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2013); Michael Behe, *Darwin Devolves: The New Science about DNA that Challenges Evolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2019); Douglas Axe, *Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition that Life Is Designed* (New York: HarperOne, 2017); Michael Denton, *Evolution: Still a Theory in Crisis* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Robert B. Laughlin, *A Different Universe: Reinventing Physics from the Bottom Down* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 168-69.