

The deep and undeniable Darwinian roots of Nazi eugenics

Darwinian Eugenics and the Holocaust

Jerry Bergman

Institute for Science and Catholicism,
Involgo Press, UK, 2020

John Woodmorappe

The Darwinian revolution changed not only our thinking about God and creation, but also about how different groups of people saw each other. The ‘struggle for existence’ that was part and parcel of Darwinism led people to think in terms of inferior and superior races. Such notions were actively promoted not only by the masses, but also by intellectual leaders. This book traces the ugly course of Darwinian thinking. It focuses on the many Darwin-inspired endeavours regarding ‘scientific’ racism, which culminated in German Nazism. The author also has a chapter on how American companies, such as IBM, were complicit in the success of Nazi Germany.

Author Jerry Bergman has nine degrees. He has taught a variety of scientific courses at several universities and has over 1,400 publications in both scholarly and popular journals. His works have been translated into 14 languages, and he has spoken over 2,000 times to college, university, and church groups all over the world.

Evolutionary theory was a big boon to racism

Defenders of Darwin remind us that racism existed long before Darwin. Yes,

it did, but at nowhere near the intensity that it had after Darwin! Moreover, evolutionary theory endowed racism with the authority and prestige of science that it never had before. Author Bergman notes the statements of famous evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould:

“As the late Harvard professor Stephen Jay Gould famously wrote in his book *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, ‘Biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1859, but they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory’” (p. 89).

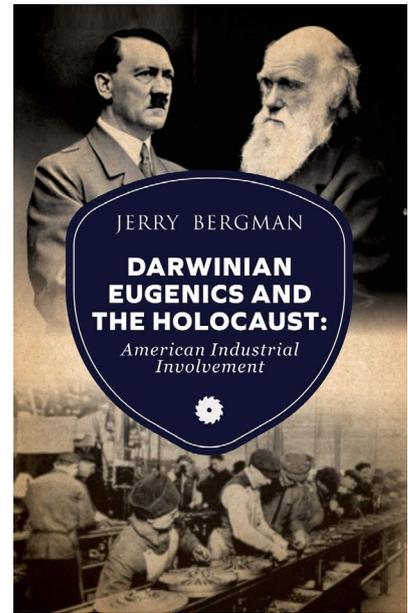
‘By orders of magnitude’: That is saying it pretty strong.

Ian Thomson, who reviewed a book on the 19th century German genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples of present-day Namibia, did not hesitate to finger Darwin as the impetus behind modern racism and genocide. Bergman thus quotes Thomson:

“‘Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, with its brutally materialistic account of nature as bleak survivalism, was made to serve as justification for the extermination of Namibian tribes and, later, for Hitler’s biological anti-Semitism. In a racist age, nature was seen as a competitive market place, where black people were born to be mastered and the fittest survived’” (p. 41).

Darwin’s champion, Ernst Haeckel, was strongly racist

The author elaborates on the fraudulent embryonic drawings of Ernst Haeckel, who was probably the most prominent champion of early Darwinism. Haeckel’s drawings implied that,



not only were blacks inferior to whites, but that blacks were closer to the higher apes than the whites. Bergman gives several examples of this.

In addition, Bergman reminds us that Haeckel’s fraudulent drawings were long uncritically accepted as factual because they supported the evolutionary worldview:

“Haeckel capitulated only in cases where far too many influential people judged his work as grossly inaccurate. Nonetheless, the exploitation of Haeckel’s forgeries by Darwinists and by several science organizations was a major factor that spread widely both Darwinism and racism, not only in Germany, but also in the United States” (p. 35).

Understanding eugenics: effectively a speeded-up evolution

Author Bergman clarifies this matter:

“The control method, called *Positive Eugenics*, involves coercing or bribing those judged more fit to produce more children, while those judged less fit are coerced or bribed to produce fewer children. Conversely, *Negative Eugenics* involves forced sterilization or other means



Figure 1. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, was entangled with Nazi German eugenicists.

of achieving the same goal, such as murdering those ‘less fit’ as done by the Nazis. According to a historian at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Christian Rosen, Ph.D., the goal of eugenics is to move human evolution from the blind, slow process that nature achieved to the intelligent, deliberate, and purposeful guidance of evolution by intelligent, well-educated, humans” (p. 8).

Social Darwinism?

So-called Social Darwinism was not, as nowadays portrayed, some kind of misunderstanding of Darwinism. It was pure Darwinism—as understood by many educated people. This included Charles Davenport, a Phd from Harvard University, and Luther Burbank, the American agricultural genius.

Darwinism and eugenics go hand in hand

H.G. Wells was a major proponent of eugenics. His slide into eugenics was natural. Bergman writes:

“Wells and many others believed that one part of the solution to the problem that Darwin’s theory of

evolution had replaced the Divine Purpose by the process of natural selection was eugenics This goal was to be completed by ‘death’ or ‘mercy killings’ and Wells advocated that those involved in his eugenic world should have ‘no pity’ for the unfit His concern, as was Hitler’s, was to control the ‘laws of evolution so that mankind could become their master rather than their victim.’ ... Wells believed that evolution, when operating on its own, was not ‘progressive’, but needed to be ‘directed’ by the educational elite. This was exactly the view of the Nazi party” (pp. 74–75).

Inadequacy of theistic evolution

The experience of H.G. Wells is instructive. Raised a devout Christian, Wells became influenced by Darwin. He tried to reconcile his new evolutionary belief with Christianity, based on his mother’s reassurances that ‘somebody must have made it all’, as well as Henry Drummond’s work aggressively promoting theistic evolution. Wells saw through all of it. Bergman comments:

“One important reason the formerly devout believer became an atheist was, when he believed in evolution, he could no longer accept Genesis. He logically deduced that, if evolution were true, the basis of Christianity, including the Fall and the sacrificial death of Christ to redeem fallen humans, was all untenable. Wells concluded that Darwinism had dealt major blows to ‘revealed religion but offered no spiritually rewarding alternative to it’” (p. 71).

Evolution as a weapon against God

Jerry Bergman focuses on the modern evolutionist Greg Graffin, a paleontology professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. Like Wells,

Graffin had been a theist who converted to atheism as a result of evolutionary theory. Bergman writes: “Graffin recognized in his Ph.D. thesis that theistic evolution is an oxymoron, and that an irreconcilable contradiction exists between evolution and theism” (p. 18). Graffin was surprised to find that many evolutionists retained a belief in God, and concluded that these scientists were intellectually dishonest in hanging on to God. According to Bergman, Graffin concludes that these scientists “appear to be more concerned about remaining in the good graces of the public than they are about responsibly exploring the implications of their [evolution] worldview” (p. 18).

The Nazis relied on the eugenic policies of the USA

Bergman details the ways that the Nazis admired and imitated American eugenicist thinkers. For instance, Madison Grant (1865–1937) warned against the American Nordic population becoming polluted by inferior races. Grant was strongly endorsed by leading American biologists, notably the later president of the American Museum of Natural History, Henry Fairfield Osborn, Sr (1857–1935).

American immigration laws, designed to screen out ‘inferior’ races, became a model for the Nazis in dealing with Jewish refugees. Laws against ‘race mixing’ in the USA were explicitly copied by Nazi Germany. All this was rooted in evolutionary theory. In fact, Bergman writes:

“Werner Maser, who compiled the book *Hitler’s Letters and Notes*, concluded from his compilation that ‘Charles Darwin, one of Hitler’s ‘teachers’ ... readily adopted his idea of survival of the fittest’” (p. 2).

This had practical consequences. Ernst Rudin (1874–1952), who was Hitler’s director of eugenic sterilization, published articles in *The Birth Control Review*. This journal was edited

by none other than the American Margaret Sanger (figure 1), the founder of Planned Parenthood (p. 177).

U.S. Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendel Holmes became an enthusiastic supporter of eugenics. He once said that “Three generations of imbeciles are enough”, and Bergman notes that “Justice Holmes’ now-infamous summing-up of the case was later quoted by the Nazis to defend themselves in front of the American judges presiding over the Nuremberg war trials” (p. 65).

Nazism was left-wing, not right-wing

Bergman probably ruffles some feathers in making the following comments:

“Politically, the Nazis were generally left, as documented by *New York Times* best-selling author Dinesh D’Souza. A key doctrine of socialism is ‘social justice’. Hitler even used those exact words in *Mein Kampf*. Group punishment (identity politics) is another key doctrine of socialism. If the Jews were the cause of social *injustice* in Germany because they dominated or played a significant role in German professions, finance, business, and culture from about 1820 to 1930, and thereby denied Germans access to these benefits, social justice demanded that they pay reparations to ‘der Volk’” (p. 4).

Modern manifestations of Darwinian eugenic-style thinking

Bergman points out that the ugliness of Nazism discredited Darwinian eugenics, and the 1960s civil rights movement put an end to ‘scientific’ racism. However, this does not mean that eugenics is only of historical interest.

Paul Bowman Popenoe (1888–1979), the coauthor of the widely-used *Applied Eugenics*, therein expressed

admiration for the ancient Spartan and Roman practice of letting weak or imperfect infants die (p. 162). That was then and this is now. Abortion, apart from summarily denying the humanity of the unborn child, has nowadays been used to subtly ‘improve the human race’. Jerry Bergman comments:

“We claim eugenics is dead, but the ‘new-genetics’ is now very popular in the West. New genetics are trying to achieve human perfection by ‘D-Selection’. An example is ‘nearly 2,300 abortions of fetuses with mental and physical disabilities were carried out in the UK alone in 2010’, showing that it is all too easy to be again seduced down the Nazi route” (pp. 182–183).

Conclusion

Darwinian evolution has a dark past that many evolutionists would like us to forget about. Its appearance in the 19th century spawned a range of ‘scientific’ racist theories that were taken very seriously, which caused great harm to people, and which culminated in Nazism in the 20th century. Although racism is nowadays supposedly discredited, the Darwinian notion of ‘a struggle for existence’ lives on in more subtle fashion, and is manifested in such things as the abortion of mentally-handicapped children.

Hans and Sophie Scholl, who went to the guillotine for their defiance of Nazism, chided German Christians for their apathy and inaction in the face of evil, “What did you do about it?” (p. 181). The challenge lives on for Christians in the West today.