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ETHICS AND DARWINISM [PART I]

Trevor Major

Charles Darwin never lived to enjoy the popularity of his own theory. It would take another few decades for “descent by modification” to dominate the biological sciences. Certainly, he won some important victories. The *Origin of Species* (1859) gave impetus to the growing naturalism of the day. It devastated the prevailing religious dogma of species fixity, and thus undermined ecclesiastical authority on scientific matters. This success attracted a host of social and political reformers who wished to attack the conservative influence of the Anglican church. If evolution could challenge the status quo in science, then perhaps it could challenge the status quo in fields as far flung as law, economics, social policy, and ethics. Yet Darwin, who shared the reformers’ liberal leanings, saw no application of his theory outside biology.

The willingness to appropriate evolution, and the motivations behind it, has changed little in the last hundred years. Darwinism continues to attract an enthusiastic bevy of supporters who see the work of natural selection in every part of the Universe, from physics to psychology, and from genes to human culture.

As I hope to show in this article, the attempt to derive ethics from Darwinism is flawed fundamentally, and the implications certainly are not consistent with a Christian world view. Also, I would like to look at a relatively new idea that attempts to extend biology into the realm of sociol-

ogy via an extremely bad analogy. Darwin, it seems, was right to be suspicious: even he would not condone the subjecting of all human endeavor to the workings of natural selection.

SOCIAL DARWINISM

The Obsession with Progress

It is easy to underestimate the social and historical context in which Darwin operated. This is not to say, in the spirit of relativism, that natural selection, like any theory of science, is true only for a certain time and place. However, we have to remember that Darwin wrote during the Victorian era—a time in which Englishmen and women were enamored with the ideal of progress (Gregory, 1986, p. 379). This, really, was a carryover from the Enlightenment. It was an optimistic view that humanity would improve itself through education and liberty.

The beneficiaries of England’s spreading empire and booming industry could see how far they had come, how “right” it seemed that their nation should be so great, and how this exalted condition must be written into the course of “nature.” The liberals of that day wanted government to step out of nature’s way. They thought that an individual could improve his lot in life only by greater personal freedoms and less government interference (Desmond and Moore, 1991, pp. 217,294-295).

When putting on its kindest face, this view seemed to express a hope that God was working providentially through some sort of natural process to bring about a better world or, what really mattered, a better England. There was hope for the poor after all, but God, not man, would see to it. In its grimmest form, progress came by blind, ruthless competition. Nature had sorted society into the privileged few and the starving masses. Laws that favored the poor were futile because they ran contrary to the what the forces of nature had wrought. One day, the poor might find themselves in a better position, but only if the conditions of nature changed accordingly.

Serious proposals along these lines existed long before Darwin’s views on the natural world took shape. For instance, the seventeenth century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, described humanity as being in a “war of all against all.” As far as he could tell, a properly organized society was just a convenient way to rise above that constant struggle. In 1798, Thomas Malthus put forward his “principle of population,” which argued that strife and famine occurred when the rate of population growth exceeded available resources. It was in this period that Europe was starting to experience a population boom, mainly through a decrease in mortality. In 1800, the world’s population numbered perhaps one billion; it doubled in the next 130 years. Celibacy was about

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the only form of population control entertained at that time, although it was no more practiced than it is today. This left only two possibilities: either provide more resources, or allow war, disease, and starvation to run their course.

The work of Malthus attracted Darwin's attention, too, although more for its scientific applications. Darwin realized that the descendants of a single pair of mice, or humans, or elephants, would overrun the world in a few generations. Yet this was not happening. Why? Because, Darwin concluded, nature preserves only those individuals that have the instincts, behaviors, and physical traits necessary for survival. Producing more offspring than can possibly survive "is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (Darwin, 1859, p. 63). This suited some of Darwin's readers just fine. Seeing the Malthusian principle in all of nature served only to reinforce their belief that large "adjustments" in population were a fundamental feature of the world, and not something to be avoided by social welfare.

English philosopher, Herbert W. Spencer, became the most famous proponent of this reading. His utter commitment to the inevitability of progress led him, on principle, to adopt a strongly evolutionary outlook. In his view, progress permeated everything; nothing could stay the same. Matter, animals, and human societies began in an indistinguishable, homogenous form, and progressed to a state of increasing specialization and individuation. Just as there were many types of bees, and many types of deer, each adapted to its own special place in nature, so an advanced human society was one in which there was a "division of labor." Of course, this just happened to describe industrialized Britain of the nineteenth century. If this were the latest stage of development, then it must be the highest stage of evolutionary progress. Those individuals who survived this stage would be "the select of their generation." When Spencer penned these words in an article on Malthus in 1851, the Great Famine in Ireland had taken a million lives, and blindness due to malnutrition was becoming widespread. But for Spencer, Ireland's misfortunes

merely showed what happened when people multiplied beyond their means of support (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 394). The best course of action, Spencer argued, was an extreme *laissez-faire* economy and government. Individuals should be allowed to do whatever they want. Let them exercise restraint or multiply at will—nature would determine the outcome.

After reading Darwin, Spencer came to adopt natural selection as the force behind this progress, but the exchange of ideas went both ways. Spencer convinced Darwin to adopt his own phrase, "survival of the fittest," in place of Darwin's cherished "natural selection." According to Spencer, and others, Darwin's phrase left the impression that nature might have some sort of intelligence or mind that was doing the selecting. Darwin agreed only grudgingly, and the evolutionist never had a high opinion of Spencer's work. Ironically, the volatile mix of inevitable progress and Malthusian theory came to be known as "social Darwinism."

Spencer garnered respect both at home and in the United States. The momentum grew in this country with the work of sociologist William Graham Sumner. As in England, social Darwinism was seen to endorse the uneven distribution of wealth and power, and lend credence to ruthless business practices. Not surprisingly, the famous tycoons of the late 19th century adopted Spencer and Sumner as their intellectual guides. After reading Spencer, Andrew Carnegie "remembered that light came as a flood and all was clear." James J. Hill proclaimed: "The fortunes of railroad companies are determined by the law of the survival of the fittest." Similarly, John D. Rockefeller concluded: "The growth of the large business is merely survival of the fittest.... This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely working out of a law of nature." Both Hill and Rockefeller ran operations that were found to be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Apparently, competition was good, but no competition was even better! After making their fortunes, Rockefeller and Carnegie won renown as philanthropists, donating hundreds of millions of dollars to education, museums, and research, but rarely if ever to the poor directly.

As a popular doctrine, Spencer and Sumner's social Darwinism fell out of favor on both sides of the Atlantic. Several horrifying events, such as the American Civil War, and certainly the First World War, dashed the romantic, Victorian illusion of inevitable progress. Also, scientists—the people who handled Darwin's theory on a day-to-day basis—came to realize that the biological process of evolution had little or nothing to do with the organization of human society. It was impossible to judge that one form of society, or one group of individuals within a society, was "more evolved" than any other.

Arguments Against Social Darwinism

Apart from going out of fashion, social Darwinism made a number of critical errors. First, the people most in tune with Darwinism consciously rejected the idea of progress toward fixed goals or ideals. In the process of evolution, there must be no design or purpose. Bertrand Russell diagnosed this obsession with progress as a "human conceit" first staggered by its kinship with the ape, and then recovered through a "philosophy" of evolution (1981, p. 24).

As Darwin envisioned it, a species may appear to make progress one moment, only to become extinct the next, depending on the whims of nature. In an early notebook, Darwin wrote: "In my theory there is no absolute tendency to progression, excepting from favourable circumstances." His young disciple, Thomas Henry Huxley, took pains to get this message across. In his view, the idea that evolution leads to perfection is a fallacy that pervades "the so-called 'ethics of evolution'" (1896, p. 80). Huxley drew a distinction between the "natural process" of change at the biological level, and the "ethical process" of change in society. Progress in human societies would come by resisting, not following, our natural desires. Although he denied it at first, Darwin eventually came to believe that humans were able to rise above their "natural" states. He even sent money to the South American Missionary Society so that they could "civilize" the natives of Tierra del Fuego (Desmond and Moore, 1991, 574-575).

Huxley's distinction highlights a second and fatal weakness in social Darwinism. From the process of natural selection, people like Spencer wanted to derive an ethical system. They wanted to suggest what was right and wrong, or good and bad, based on Darwin's observations. Yet such a move from nature to morality always has proved highly problematic. How, exactly, do you get from **is** to **ought**? We may be able to describe the actions of the majority, for instance, but why should this **prescribe** the standards of morality? Many people may find a certain activity pleasurable. Does this make the activity good or right? One law may benefit more people than another. Does this make that law good or right? Most people traveling on a particular stretch of highway may be going 10 miles per hour above the posted speed limits. Should we now condone the actual average speed?

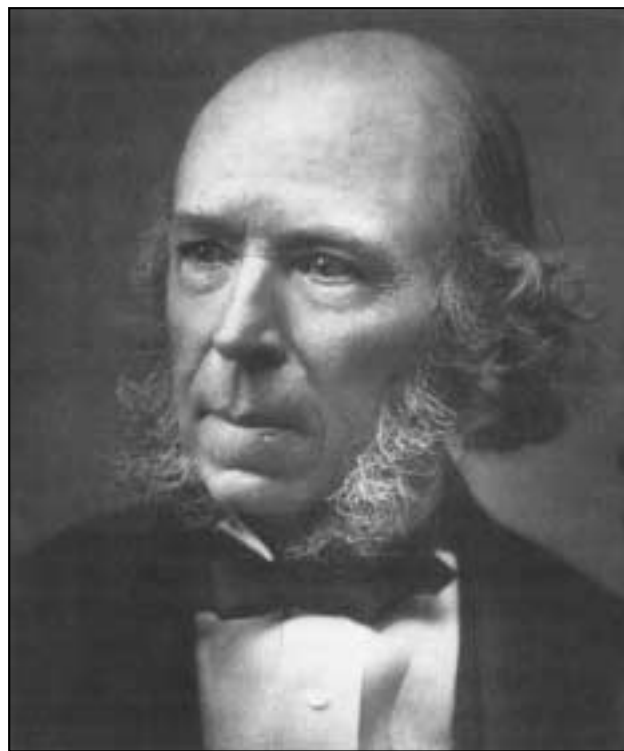
So, even if natural selection works in nature by changing the size of finch beaks or preserving antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, how can it be right or wrong in a moral sense? If a lioness attacks and kills a baby zebra, is that right or wrong? If a late snow storm kills a newborn lamb, in what way is this good or bad—morally speaking? Human sensitivities aside, we understand that this is "nature's way."

Is that not the whole point, though? We cannot put our sensitivities aside. We imagine ourselves in the place of the zebra or the lamb, and we cringe because we would not want to be in their place. Yet, despite these feelings, we cannot hold nature responsible for what it does.

This is what makes recent talk of extending human rights to animals, such as great apes (gorillas, chimps, and orangutans), seem fundamentally confused. Since these animals appear to have a consciousness or self-awareness like humans, so the argument goes, we ought to include them in the moral sphere. Other activists feel that this is too narrow: we need to extend the moral sphere beyond ourselves and great apes to any sentient creature that can suffer or feel pain. But is this enough? What about fears, beliefs, or hopes? By reasonably good analogy we extend our own knowledge of such states to other people. But the analogy begins to break down as we go further afield. What does suffering really mean for a chimp? a sparrow? a trout? a newt? These questions are not just rhetorical. The fact is, we don't know what it's like to be a newt, and vice versa.

And why stop at consciousness or sentience? People who advocate bringing animals into the moral sphere have a name for their opponents: "speciesists." It's a

Herbert W. Spencer believed in evolution before Darwin published his Origin of Species in 1859. Spencer took progress to be a "law underlying the whole organic creation." The path of human evolution, he thought, would bring increasing survival power through greater individualism. Governments, with their help for the poor, constraints on labor practices, and compulsory state education, stood in the way of "progress."



mouthful, but the comparison to “sexist” or “racist” is supposed to be obvious. So why don’t we call these advocates “consciousnessists” or “sentientists” or some other equally unpronounceable slur, depending on where they happen to draw the line of admissibility into the moral sphere? The problem with all these suggestions is that they are just as arbitrary as any attempt to draw the line based on skin color or sex. The boundary of the moral sphere is drawn, not by brain functions or biology, but by the potential for moral agency. Being a moral agent means being able to choose between right and wrong, and being able to act on that choice. Only then can the results of our choosing be judged worthy of blame or praise, yet judging involves others deciding whether we could have acted differently. As far as we know, humans are the only earthly creatures capable of being moral agents. This is not to say that animals could not be the recipients of moral concern, but this makes them moral patients, not moral agents. As agents, we hold other agents responsible for their actions, regardless of whether those actions are directed toward plants, animals, people, property, or whatever. If a man acted cruelly toward an animal, it is not the animal that judged those acts to be cruel, but other moral agents. The animal may have experienced pain or suffering, but we have no idea whether it could grasp the concept of cruelty in any moral sense.

This is not intended to be the last word on the animal rights movement. What I hope to have shown, however, is that all sorts of difficulties arise when we go to nature for our morality. Animal rights advocates make comparisons between animal and human suffering, and leap from there to a demand for moral equality, ignoring the significant question of what it is to be moral. Social Darwinism makes the same sort of mistake. As Huxley saw so clearly, you cannot leap from evolution (which has little if anything to do with human social relationships) to morality (which has everything to do with human social relationships). The processes working on human biology, and the processes working within human society, operate at two different levels.

Social Darwinism and the Bible

At the risk of stating the obvious, the teaching of Christ is incompatible with social Darwinism. This is not to say that the Christian life does not include competition and struggle. After all, it was Paul who said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). He assured the Ephesians that we wrestle, not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12). And the apostle Peter, perhaps more than any other New Testament writer, reinforced the inevitability of suffering for one’s faith, and encouraged watchfulness and strength in the face of adversity (e.g., 1 Peter 1:6-7,13; 2:19-21; 3:14,17-18; 4:1,12-16,19; 5:8-9).

In Christianity, however, competition and struggle are **means** to an end, not an end in itself. For someone who believes he lives in a dog-eat-dog world, the aim is to be top dog. But for Christians, the ultimate goal is to spend eternity in heaven with God, the highest good is to love God, and the second highest good is to love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-31). When an argument broke out among the disciples, Christ assured them that if “anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). And it was Christ Who left us the greatest example by putting the whole of humanity ahead of His own life (John 3:16-17). In this world, at least, an ethic that always puts the interests of others above the interests of self is not the best survival strategy.

As we have seen, the better course of action for the social Darwinist is to allow “nature” to take its course. At most, like the great American philanthropists mentioned earlier, he would allow the poor to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. We may think this has a parallel in a famous biblical passage: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). However, the Bible shows a great deal of compassion toward the poor. Under the Mosaic law, for example, the poor were granted the following provisions: they were not to pay interest on loans (Exodus 22:5); they were allowed to

use a field, vineyard, or olive grove that was left at rest every seventh year (Exodus 23:11); they were allowed to gather from the corners of the field, and to pick up any grain, grapes, and olives left over after the harvest (Leviticus 19:9-10); they were not to be discriminated against, and the rich were not to be favored, in judicial matters (Leviticus 19:15); their labor was not to be abused or exploited (Leviticus 25:34ff.; Deuteronomy 24:12-15); and when in need, they were to receive loans (interest-free) or outright gifts (Deuteronomy 17:7-11; cf. 17:1). Surely, all such provisions were designed to help the poor, and not to see them eliminated from society.

We should note, also, that Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonians applied to those who could work, and chose not to. It did not apply, for example, to orphans and widows without any means of support (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). Finally, there were times when the will and ability to work were not enough, and direct donations were needed (as we see in the relief sent to Judea; Acts 11:28-29).

A critic might allege that such examples prove that we are, in the end, selfish brutes. Human society has adapted by inventing rules that keep our overwhelming desires for self-preservation and self-gratification in check. Did Paul not say, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25)? Actually, this seems to be a classic chicken-and-egg problem. In other words, which came first: the desire to lie, wage war, steal, and murder in a peaceful society, or the desire for harmony, love, and compassion in a dangerous, violent society? Evolution would have us believe that the second scenario is true—that ethics came along after the emergence of the human species from an ape-like ancestor. However, the Bible comes down on the side of the first scenario—that it was man’s initial condition to be peaceful, and then came Satan. If the rules had not been violated—if there had been no sin—then Adam and Eve would have remained in paradise (Genesis 3:22-24). God’s laws exist, not to stop us from being who we are (rational creatures able to make choices both good and bad), but to judge the choices we make (2 Corinthians 5:10).

SOCIOBIOLOGY

Social Darwinism, in the form advocated by Spencer, has not survived to the current era as a viable intellectual idea. You still may hear people mention “survival of the fittest” to justify some particularly ruthless business practice or political strategy. Unfortunately, in cases like these, any justification will do, including an appeal to Scripture (this is one reason why I wanted to lay out the biblical view).

Nonetheless, new Darwinian views of society arise on occasion. A few paragraphs earlier, I took sides with Huxley in arguing that the process of natural selection has little if any application to human social relationships. Today, there is a view that the course of evolution has **everything** to do with human society. This is a subtle shift. It is not a case of going back to Spencer. No one would be foolish enough to bring up social Darwinism—at least not in so many words.

Let me begin by casting this new approach in a generous light: Rather than trying to **invent** an ethical system based on evolution (as did Spencer), these new ideas attempt to **explain** morality in evolutionary terms. Usually these ideas fall under the heading of sociobiology—a term coined by Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson. As he defined it, sociobiology is “the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior” (1980, p. 4). The “all” here refers to all animal societies, and not just human society. According to evolutionary theory, humans are just ani-

mals descended from other animals. There is no comfortable divide, not even in morality. Regardless of quaint words such as “marriage” or “adultery,” what we find in the mating strategies of chimps, rats, or fruit flies applies directly to human practices and conventions.

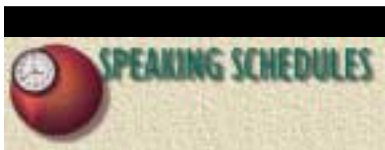
Yet, is it reasonable to reduce morality to biology? As we saw in the case of animal rights, there does seem to be a fundamental divide between humans and animals. This is not because they have feathers or scales and we don’t, but because they lack the capacity for moral agency. Is there something, therefore, about our “quaint” morality that we can explain away as nothing more than animal urges? Is the propagation of our genes our sole mission in life?

Sociobiology nearly always seems to answer, “Yes.” For example, a survey among university students in Australia found that women were more attracted to slim men. There does not seem to be much of a story there, so medical reporter Melissa Sweet (1997) went digging for something more interesting to say. She ended up consulting Dr. Tim Flannery, of the Australian Museum, who simply dismissed this trend as a “passing fad.” In reality, women could care less about appearance. To ensure “evolutionary success,” all women really care about is their prospective mates’ “status, power and money.” So, wives think mistakenly that they came to love their husbands, perhaps attracted initially by a sense of humor, or strength of character, or even good looks. But no, when a wife tells her husband, “I love you,” she really is

saying “I value your ability to pass my genes on to the next generation.” What, then, could cause these young Australian women to disregard their evolutionary dispositions? Is this a behavior that will prove evolutionarily unsuccessful and, as a result, a whole generation of Australians will have less chance of survival? Will those women who desire status, power, and money in a man, and ignore less important features such as kindness or good looks, pick the best mates, and in so doing pass this superior sense of survival on to their daughters? Eventually, will the behavior trait of preferring-slim-men go the way of the dodo? Perhaps there are a number of “cuddly” young men who hope so.

The strongest, and most sobering examples can be found in the area of marriage and family. There is, for example, the “Cinderella effect,” which shows that stepchildren occupy a dangerous position in society (Daly and Wilson, 1988). In the U.S., according to homicide statistics from 1976, infants (aged 0-2 years) living with one or more substitute parents are 100 times more likely to suffer fatal abuse than infants living with natural parents. Similarly, statistics from Canada for 1974-1983 show that children in this same age group are 70 times more likely to die at the hands of stepparents.

The explanation for this effect, according to Daly and Wilson, is that evolutionary selection has favored such homicidal behavior. It is in the interests of the stepfather to withhold parental support from offspring who do not carry his genes. He does this by killing any stepchildren, especially babies that require a long-term commitment of resources. As proof, scientists cite similar behavior among nonhuman populations. In the case of the Hanuman langurs (a type of monkey that lives in India), males eventually lose their harem to a challenger. The new male frequently will kill his predecessor’s infant offspring. Theoretically, the mothers would stop nursing, thus making them available to mate and produce the successor’s own offspring. This behavior would ensure that a new male would make as many living copies of his genes as possible before he, too, was chased out of the harem (Zimmer, 1996, pp. 73-74).



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If similar behavior occurs in humans, so the argument goes, then culture does not exempt us from such evolutionary forces. How, then, do we explain the “Brady Bunch” effect? That is to say, why is it that most stepparents get along quite well with their stepchildren without murdering them? According to Daly and Wilson, this is a matter of reciprocity, otherwise known as “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.” Or, to put it in evolutionary terms, “I’ll not get in the way of your genetic legacy if you’ll not get in the way of mine.” What we interpret as love or altruism becomes a cultural mask for genetic self-interests.

However, the evidence does not demand this interpretation, even in those few cases where stepparents mistreat their stepchildren. The statistics seem to show no more than the following: (a) people are more likely to be in conflict with someone nearby that they know (i.e., a family member), than with someone further away whom they do not know (i.e., a perfect stranger); and (b), when family conflict occurs, the most defenseless members are vulnerable to a person with the least parental attachment. It is quite a leap to conclude that unknown genes from some unknown past are predisposing men to kill other men’s babies.

GENES AND BEHAVIOR

Where, in fact, is the proof that evolution has selected a trait for wiping out one’s stepchildren? Another way of posing this question is to ask, “Where is the gene for infanticide?”

The point is this: genes store the code that a cell uses to make proteins. These proteins may have one or more roles to play in forming structure (hair, bone, etc.), regulating functions (hormones), transporting substances, defending against intruders (antibodies), or catalyzing chemical reactions (enzymes). So, what proteins incite a man to kill his stepchild? Does a child emit some sort of chemical, like a pheromone, that causes a violent reaction among all genetically unrelated people in close proximity? [We may have met some children like that, but it would be nice to see the evidence supporting those feel-

ings!] Would it not be evolutionarily more advantageous to preserve a gene for something (again, like a pheromone) that endears a child to both its parent and stepparent? Does a human adult male really benefit from infanticide? If he murders the children of his wife’s former marriage, would the reciprocity principle not go by the way side? Could the wife trust her infanticidal husband if they had children of their own?

These questions, and their lack of answers, highlight the problem of applying natural selection to features of human populations. In this case, it is very difficult to say how or why natural selection would have preserved a genetic trait for infanticide. This especially is true given the relatively low incidence of infanticide in human societies when compared to animals such as the Hanuman langurs. Thankfully, infanticide remains an abnormal behavior, and cannot be an important survival strategy in our own species.

A comment by Stephen Jay Gould seems appropriate at this point. While he admits that evolution could have programmed humans to, say, distinguish between members of our own group and members of other groups, this in itself does not compel us to wipe them out. Here is an outspoken evolutionist who rejects the idea that genes determine behavior. His comments relate to genocide, but they could apply to infanticide, rape, adultery, or other behaviors attributed to our supposed evolutionary heritage:

An evolutionary speculation can only help if it teaches us something we don’t know already—if, for example, we learned that genocide was biologically enjoined by certain genes, or even that a positive propensity, rather than a mere capacity, regulated our murderous potentiality. But the observational facts of human history speak against determination and only for potentiality (Gould, 1996).

Stepfathers have the potential to murder their stepchildren. Ethnic groups have the potential to wipe out other groups. Spouses have the potential to be unfaithful. As crime statistics and news stories show, humans seem to be capable of nearly unlimited wickedness and cruelty. How-

ever, we know that most humans for the majority of history have survived quite well without engaging in these activities on a widespread, consistent basis. It is very difficult, therefore, to invoke natural selection—a supposed regularity of nature—to preserve such traits.

[to be continued]

AUTHORS NOTE: This article was extracted, and has been significantly revised, from a chapter manuscript that appeared in *Dangerous Isms*, ed. by B.J. Clarke (Southaven, MS: Power Publications, 1997).

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MORALS, ETHICS, AND WORLD VIEWS

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

The late philosopher/theologian, Edward Carnell, in *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, made the following observation in his chapter on ethics.

It is evident that we must act, if we are to remain alive, but we find ourselves in such multifarious circumstances that it is difficult to know at times whether it is better to turn to the right or better to turn to the left, or better not to turn at all. And, before one can choose a direction in which to turn, he must answer the question, better in relation to **what** or to **whom**? In other words, if a man is going to act **meaningfully** and not haphazardly, he must rationally count the cost; he must think before he acts. Right judgment, then, and proper actions always go together (1948, p. 316, emp in orig.)

Dr. Carnell's point is well taken. Each of us **must** act as we face opportunities and challenges that require not only forethought and decision, but commitment and dedication. Right judgment and proper actions **do** go together. If we desire to think carefully, choose wisely, and act forcefully, what standard(s) shall we use to ensure that our thoughts, choices, and actions are, in fact, correct? What shall be our moral/ethical compass?

Morality (from the Latin, *mores*, meaning habits or customs) is the character of being in accord with principles or standards of right conduct. Ethics—the discipline concerned with what is good and bad or right and wrong—deals with moral principles and values.

Morals and ethics are important to all people, regardless of their world view. The late atheistic evolutionist of Harvard University, George Gaylord Simpson, stated that although in his estimation man was “the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind,” nevertheless “good and evil, right and wrong, concepts irrelevant in nature except from the human viewpoint, be-

come **real and pressing features** of the whole cosmos as viewed by Man—the only possible way in which the cosmos can be viewed morally because **morals arise only in man**” (1967, p. 346, emp. added). Indeed, the words “ought” and “ought not” are as much a part of the atheist's vocabulary as they are the Christian's. The question is: If good-and-evil/right-and-wrong are “real and pressing features,” how are we to determine what thoughts and actions fall into those categories?

Atheism contends that each individual should make that determination—separate and apart from any objective, moral standard. Simpson wrote:

Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria of right or wrong (1967, p. 346).

It hardly is surprising, then, that the *Humanist Manifestos I & II* (atheism's “Bill of Rights”) boast:

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous** and **situational**, needing no theological or ideological sanction.... We strive for the good life, here and now (1933/1973, p. 17, emp. in orig.).

As a “naked ape” in an “accidental Universe,” man's morals and ethics are viewed as “autonomous” and “situational.” That is to say, something becomes “right” because the **individual** determines it is right on a case-by-case basis, thus invalidating the concept of common moral law applied consistently. For example, if a sane man decided it was “right” to kill his business competitors, upon what basis could we (justifiably) ask someone (e.g., the police) to stop him without denying his autonomy and thus violating (and ultimately invalidating) the very principle upon which this ethic is supposed to

work? But then, who really wants to live under such a system? As Wayne Jackson has noted:

No sane person will argue that absolutely “anything goes....” One may indeed become so insensitive that he abandons virtually all of his personal ethical obligations, but he will never ignore the lack of such in those who **would abuse him** (1984, p. 320, emp. in orig.)

If humans are merely “matter in motion,” if no one piece of matter is worth more than any other piece of matter, if we are autonomous, if the situation warrants it, and if we can further our own selfish interests by doing so, could we not lie, steal, maim, or murder at will? If not, why not?

Compare that kind of thinking, however, to the moral/ethical instructions contained in God's Word that teach us to: love all people—friend and foe alike (Matthew 5:44); treat others as we would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12); help those who are afflicted (James 1:27); aid those who are less fortunate (1 John 3:17); embody joy, peace, patience, kindness, and meekness (Galatians 5:22-23); and do good unto all men (Galatians 6:10). Then answer this question: Who would you rather have as **your** neighbor—a person who practices the brand of situation ethics advocated by atheism, or a Christian who practices the kind of objective morality taught in the Bible? Kind of makes you think, doesn't it?

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

APOLOGETICS PRESS TURNS 20!

Come celebrate with us. We're not a teenager any more! It was twenty year ago—1979 to be exact—that we began the work of Apologetics Press. The plans for the fledgling idea were sketched out on scrap pieces of paper (literally) in a friend's living room. When the work began, we had a couple of boxes of stationery, a couple of typewriters, and a lot of big ideas. But that was about it. However, as the old saying goes: "That was then; this is now."

We spent the first year and a half securing Federal and State non-profit status, setting goals and objectives, and planning future publications. In January 1981, the first issue of *Reason & Revelation* rolled off the presses. In September 1985, we moved into a beautiful, two-story, 11,000-square-foot building that was debt free upon completion. It always has been our policy not to use Apologetics Press funds to pay professional staff salaries. As a result, since we did not have to pay interest on a building loan, or staff salaries, the sizable savings that resulted allowed us to produce many more materials and services than would have been possible otherwise. Along the way, we have been aided in our efforts to proclaim and defend the Truth by a small but faithful cadre of financial supporters that has sacrificed unselfishly to see the work prosper.

And prosper it has! The work has grown from an annual income measured in five digits in its infancy to approximately half-a-million dollars last year—almost all of which is funneled directly back into the production of additional materials. Our flagship publication, *Reason & Revelation*, is now in its nineteenth year of continuous, uninterrupted publication. Its sister journal, *Discovery* (the first issue of which was published in January 1990), is a monthly magazine on Scripture and science for children that is now enter-

ing its tenth consecutive year. Both journals are printed in an eight-page format on attractive enameled paper in full color. We also publish books, video tapes, tracts, article reprints, audio tapes, research articles, and other items.

The same goals, objectives, and business principles that we laid out in 1979 on scraps of paper remain in effect today. We wanted to produce the highest-quality materials that were both scientifically accurate and biblically sound. We wanted our products to be as inexpensive as possible so they never would be beyond anyone's reach financially (we take our non-profit status **very** seriously). We wanted to become a "clearinghouse" for those who needed answers to questions on apologetics and evidences. We wanted to mail our publications into jails and prisons. And we wanted people to know that when they needed help, we would do our very best to provide it.

Today, products and services from Apologetics Press are used literally around the world. Subscriptions to our journals are at all-time highs. Correspondence levels are breaking all records. We are mailing huge amounts of material to prisoners (*Reason & Revelation* always has been offered free of charge to those who are incarcerated). New products for children and adults are in various stages of production, and more are being planned. Our new twentieth-anniversary catalog has just been mailed. Truly, the future looks brighter than ever. The Lord—in ways almost beyond our ability to thank Him—has provided blessings that we never could have imagined, much less expected. We owe so much to so many. I invite you to join just as we celebrate twenty amazing, productive, happy years. And if we may be of assistance to you in any way, please call on us. As always, we are here to serve.

— Bert Thompson

