

Darwin and the Nazis

By Richard Weikart

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Richard Dawkins, PZ Myers, and some other Darwinists are horrified that the forthcoming [documentary](#), *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, will promote Intelligent Design to a large audience when it opens at over a thousand theaters nationwide on April 18. Ironically, their campaign to discredit Ben Stein and the film confirms its main point, which is to expose the persecution meted out by Darwinists to those daring to criticize Darwinian theory.

One aspect of *Expelled* that troubles Dawkins and some of his colleagues is its treatment of the ethical implications of Darwinism, especially its discussion of the historical connections between Darwinism and Nazism. Isn't this a bit over-the-top, suggesting that Darwinism has something to do with Nazism? After all, Darwinists today are not Nazis, and Darwinism has nothing to do with anti-Semitism.

However, what is most objectionable about the Nazis' worldview? Isn't it that they had no respect for human life? Their rejection of the sanctity of human life led the Nazi regime to murder millions of Jews, hundreds of thousands of Gypsies, and about 200,000 disabled Germans. Where did the Nazis get the idea that some human beings were "lives unworthy of life"?

As I show in meticulous detail in my book, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany*, the Nazis' devaluing of human life derived from Darwinian ideology (this does not mean that all Nazi ideology came from Darwinism). There were six features of Darwinian theory that have contributed to the devaluing of human life (then and now):

1. Darwin argued that humans were not qualitatively different from animals. The leading Darwinist in Germany, Ernst Haeckel, attacked the "anthropocentric" view that humans are unique and special.
2. Darwin denied that humans had an immaterial soul. He and other Darwinists believed that all aspects of the human psyche, including reason, morality, aesthetics, and even religion, originated through completely natural processes.
3. Darwin and other Darwinists recognized that if morality was the product of mindless evolution, then there is no objective, fixed morality and thus no objective human rights. Darwin stated in his *Autobiography* that one "can have for his rule of life, as far as I can see, only to follow those impulses and instincts which are the strongest or which seem to him the best ones."
4. Since evolution requires variation, Darwin and other early Darwinists believed in human inequality. Haeckel emphasized inequality to such an extent that he even

classified human races as twelve distinct species and claimed that the lowest humans were closer to primates than to the highest humans.

5. Darwin and most Darwinists believe that humans are locked in an ineluctable struggle for existence. Darwin claimed in *The Descent of Man* that because of this struggle, "[a]t some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races."

6. Darwinism overturned the Judeo-Christian view of death as an enemy, construing it instead as a beneficial engine of progress. Darwin remarked in *The Origin of Species*, "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."

These six ideas were promoted by many prominent Darwinian biologists and Darwinian-inspired social thinkers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All six were enthusiastically embraced by Hitler and many other leading Nazis. Hitler thought that killing "inferior" humans would bring about evolutionary progress. Most historians who specialize in the Nazi era recognize the Darwinian underpinnings of many aspects of Hitler's ideology.

BUT WHAT DOES THIS have to do with the present? Darwinists today are not Nazis.

If you look back at the six points outlined above, however, you will find that many Darwinists today are advancing the same or similar ideas. Many leading Darwinists today teach that morality is nothing but a natural product of evolution, thus undermining human rights. E. O. Wilson, one of the most prominent Darwinian biologists in the world, and Michael Ruse, a leading philosopher of science (the latter is in *Expelled*) famously stated that ethics is "an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes."

Many leading Darwinists today also claim that Darwinism undermines the Judeo-Christian conception of the sanctity of human life. Dawkins wrote in 2001 that we should try to genetically engineer an evolutionary ancestor to the human species to demolish the "speciesist" illusion that humans are special or sacred. In the same article he expressed support for involuntary euthanasia. Another critic of "speciesism," Peter Singer, one of the leading bioethicists in the world, argues that Darwinism destroyed the Judeo-Christian sanctity-of-life ethic, so infanticide and euthanasia are permissible. James Watson, one of the world's most famous geneticists and a staunch Darwinist, has railed at the idea that humans are sacred and special.

Today's Darwinists are not Nazis and not all Darwinists agree with Dawkins, Wilson, Ruse, Singer, or Watson. However, some of the ideas being promoted today by prominent Darwinists in the name of Darwinism have an eerily similar ring to the ideologies that eroded respect for human life in the pre-Nazi era.

*Richard Weikart is professor of history at California State University, Stanislaus, and author of **From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany** (Palgrave Macmillan).*

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