

Review of *The Dark Side of Charles Darwin: A Critical Analysis of an Icon of Science* by Jerry Bergman

Master Books, Green Forest AK, 2011, 270 pages , \$13.99

When Jerry Bergman debated arch-evolutionist P.Z. Myers in November 2009, the most dramatic reaction of the ideologically mixed crowd of about 500 came when Dr. Bergman suggested a connection between Darwin and Hitler. The reaction was a sustained growling noise. Further interactions on that topic in e-mails and on Dr. Myers famous blog [www.scienceblogs.com/pharyngula](http://www.scienceblogs.com/pharyngula) – a sort of literary “Jerry Springer Show” – indicated that no amount of data would allow such a sacrilegious conclusion among the faithful.

Jerry Bergman, with his characteristic thoroughness, has systematically dismantled the glowing reputation of the man often cited as the most important scientist of all time. But, of course, it will not be enough to sway those whose powers of yarn-spinning are regularly exercised in the defense of evolution itself. In fact, in an uncanny manner, evolutionary thinking has taken on the form of Aristotelian science that was challenged by Francis Bacon when he argued for deductive reasoning from the data instead of inductive conclusions from authority. Now Darwin is the authority and since “evolution is true,” any apparent discrepancies must eventually and inevitably be solved. Also as Galileo’s descriptions of craters on the moon – in the perfect heavenly sphere – were unthinkable to that cosmology, any faults in the author of *On The Origin of Species* or the application of his ideas cannot be true.

The fact that Darwin could be described as a “nice person” although with idiosyncrasies, makes his ideas all the more dangerous than if he were a demonstrable psychopath. Yet Bergman’s book lays out the data showing Darwin’s clear religious motivation, unable to accept a God who allowed injustice – putting it in the most stark terms, to “kill God.” Still, there is a great deal of ambivalence in Darwin’s writing, best explained as an attempt to avoid offending his cultural peers and his believing wife. Darwin’s psychological and psychosomatic illnesses are clearly elucidated but it is also shown that although this diminished his public defense of his theory – which he left to energetic followers, like Huxley – he was able to carry out an extensive correspondence with the aim of making converts, not to mention to continue his writing.

It is well known that much if not all of Darwin’s theory was borrowed – even plagiarized – from many who came before him and he had great trouble in acknowledging this, even when grudgingly forced to do so. But the sloppiness of his scholarship, from failing to label specimens to changing the content of old papers to reflect later thinking would today be considered worthy of censure.

Also, although unlike his latter day disciples, he clearly saw the need for an adequate explanation of the variation on which natural selection works, what he leaped to was pangenesis, a form of inheritance of acquired characteristics by the movement of “gemmules” from all parts of the body to the gametes. He had previously rejected this Lamarckian idea but when no other mechanism was viable, he returned to it and stuck with it despite experimental evidence to the contrary. Darwin’s alteration of photographs in a

study intended to show the animal origins of facial expression shows a disregard for the facts when a point needs to be proved. In these ways, he served as a role model for all who have followed in his footsteps.

Darwin's clear opinion that some races are inferior and his support of at least "passive" eugenics are clear from what he has written. The typical defense that he opposed slavery is clarified in that he also opposed cruelty to animals – although his was not the case when as a younger man he enjoyed killing to a degree far beyond the typical hunter mentality. He was convinced that the higher races would eliminate the lower and even used the word "exterminate" although he shied away from actual killing in favor of preventing reproduction of the less fit. Also, Darwin's documented conviction that women were evolutionarily inferior to men and more like children did not, of course, lead him to the conclusion that they should be eliminated!

To be sure, Darwin's ideas were taken in many directions in which he did not directly participate. But the danger to morality and social stability, not to mention compassion, were probably part of the reason for Darwin's mental distress. The Darwin-Hitler deniers want a smoking gun – a secret conversation that, of course, could not have been possible – and fail to admit that they understand the power of ideas in history. Hitler's programs were completely consistent with Darwin's ideas and just added the political will to stop being passive and get on with it. The fact that racism and sexism predated Darwin does not invalidate the observation that he allowed proponents of those "isms" to become "intellectually fulfilled scientists."

Each chapter is a unit unto itself with a "Chapter Synopsis" at the beginning and "Conclusions" at the end. Because of the format, some anecdotes and quotations are repeated in subsequent chapters. I would have liked to see something about whether Darwin really had access to Mendel's book before publishing his. An index would have been helpful as well. There are some typos, probably untamed "spell check" additions, like "Ernest" instead of "Ernst" Haeckel on page 26, "psychic" for "psychiatric" on page 97 and "micro" for "macro" evolution on page 268.

This is a valuable book and a reminder of the strong delusion that pervades academia.

Reviewed by

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