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Founders' Scholarship Essay

January 25, 2013

The Ill Effects of *The Origin of Species*

One of my favorite books is *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis. The last in the Narnia series, it tells the story of the final days of Old Narnia and the beginning of New Narnia. The story ends with the main characters entering a paradise-like place through a stable door after fighting a long war. As the young princes and princesses of Narnia are marveling at this wonderful country, they become aware of a group of dwarves huddled in a circle. These dwarves refuse to see the world around them and stubbornly declare that they are in a dark and dirty stable. Even when the great lion, Aslan, roars in their faces, they hear nothing and call the children crazy. Aslan mournfully explains, "They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out" (131-35).

C.S. Lewis masterfully stirs in us a hope and excitement for Heaven. However, in the midst of this excitement, he also stirs in us a sadness toward those who can't see the truth. The dwarves, even in the midst of Heaven, face-to-face with Aslan, refuse to acknowledge truth and mock the children for their belief. Today, we are surrounded by people who have imprisoned themselves in the same way. They have convinced themselves that there could not possibly be a God and, in doing so, have trapped themselves in a dirty stable like Lewis' dwarves.

In the 19th century, this concept of reality without God became widely accepted through the publication of Charles Darwin's book *The Origin of Species*. In the book, Darwin

presented a theory to explain creation without a creator. *The Origin of Species* had a detrimental effect on Western Civilization by removing God from the story of life.

On November 24, 1859, Charles Darwin published *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Often shortened to *The Origin of Species*, this book presented Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection. He was not the first to present evolution as an explanation for how things came to be (and in fact, was in a race to be the first to present his natural selection theory), but the publication of this book popularized the concept for the everyday man.

Ker Than, Senior Editor of *TechNewsDaily* defined natural selection as, "the process by which organisms change over time as a result of changes in heritable physical or behavioral traits." These changes occur so that the the organism will have a better chance of survival and more chance of producing offspring in their environment. Darwin believed that, given enough time, this process could create new species all together.

Darwin's original theories have been challenged and debated since they were first introduced. However, whether or not all the claims he made in *The Origin of Species* are accepted as truth, his claims did change the way people view the world. Although people before Darwin's book were not all Bible-believers, they generally acknowledged a creator and upheld the unique dignity of men. *The Origin of Species* changed that by reducing the story of creation, and specifically mankind, to a mere mechanical explanation. Man became a part of a machine and lost his divine purpose. Jacques Barzun stated, "This denial of purpose is Darwin's distinctive contention...The sum total of the accidents of life acting upon the sum total of the accidents of variation thus provided a completely mechanical and material system by which to

account for the changes in living forms.” He continued, “Matter and force...explained our whole past history and presumably would shape our future” (qtd. in Percy, Thaxton 114).

The acceptance of Darwin’s theory removed God from the equation. Francis Schaeffer described modern man’s state saying, “They have no place for a personal God. But equally they have no place for man as man, or for love, or for freedom, or for significance” (*How Should We* 166). The Bible teaches that creation has great value because it was created by God. Further, it teaches that we specifically have great value because we are created in God’s image. Reality hinges on these two facts. Modern man has accepted a false premise and things are now falling apart. This makes sense since Colossians 1:17 tells us that, “in Him all things hold together” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). Trying to explain the origin of species, particularly of mankind, without God as the basis only leads to devaluing humanity as a whole and devaluing ourselves personally.

Herbert Spencer, who coined the term “survival of the fittest”, along with many others, helped popularize Darwin’s theory. Through these people, the theory entered into ethics and morality creating “social Darwinism.” Darwin said in *The Origin of Species*, “Multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.” Once this mindset entered into the social realm, it opened the door for racism, ableism, classism and other forms of prejudice.

Social Darwinism set the stage for the Holocaust in World War II. Adolf Hitler was greatly influenced by Darwin and Spencer. Francis Schaeffer noted that Hitler wanted to replace Christianity with “the ethic of strength over weakness” (*How Should We* 151). Out of this belief came the attempt to create a “master race,” and the murder of 11 million people not deemed “perfect” followed.

We still see the Social Darwinist mindset at work. On January 22, 1973, the *Roe v. Wade* United States Supreme Court decision legalized abortion. On December 12, 2013, Belgium passed a law allowing terminally ill minors and adults with dementia to be euthanized. If people have been led to believe that they are merely a part of a machine in the process of perfecting itself, that the weak should and *will* die out, we're faced with the horrifying fact that these laws make sense. We now live in a world where human beings are not valued, a world that finds killing acceptable. Humanity as a whole has been stripped of its worth.

The acceptance of the ideas introduced by *The Origin of Species* has also left man with no basis for personal value. Darwin's theory tells us that our purpose is to survive and to reproduce. However, this isn't much of a meaning when we compare it to our true identity in God. Man is frustrated because he has accepted a false belief about who he is while reality contradicts those beliefs. In response to this frustration, people have started searching for meaning elsewhere.

In the name of reason, Darwin reduced man to nothing more than an accident of life. However, this doesn't line up with the basic facts man inherently knows about himself. As a result, modern man is looking beyond reason to find his source of meaning. Philosophers like John Paul Sarte, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Aldous Huxley, and many other modern thinkers have tried to give meaning to life through some personal action or experience within oneself. Karl Jaspers introduced an idea stating that one could find meaning to life through a non-logical and non-communicable "final experience." The French existentialists Sarte and Camus said that meaning was found through an act of will. Huxley presented drugs as a way to find meaning within one's own head. But, since each one of them had removed God from the

picture, they only found despair (Schaeffer, *God Who is There* 13-25; *How Should We* 167-174; *Escape* 237-244).

Today, we see this mindset at work. Throughout high school, I've watched many old friends get caught up in this way of thinking and turn to drugs, alcohol, and partying to find their meaning. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, "[a]bout 17 percent of American high school students are drinking, smoking or using drugs during the school day" (Kuczynski-Brown). For multiple generations, we've accepted that we are nothing greater than purely mechanical beings and our behavior reflects that.

Attempting to explain the origin of species without God as the basis has only led to devaluing humanity as a whole and devaluing ourselves personally. The acceptance of Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*, removed the basis for life by removing God from the story of life and thus, was the most detrimental piece of literature for Western Civilization. Today we live in a world filled with people crying out for meaning and value and they are unable to find it. Like the Narnian dwarves, they are stuck in a dirty stable blind to the magnificence of the creation around them.

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