

Darwinism as a Factor in the Twentieth-Century Totalitarianism Holocausts

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Abstract

The movement today known as Darwinism was one of the factors leading to the loss of an estimated over 400 million lives, as well as enormous suffering inflicted on more than a billion people. It is well-documented that Darwinism was a major influence in the rise of Naziism and Communism

and it was one of the factors involved in numerous wars and conflicts. The death toll from several holocausts and wars is enumerated. The role of Darwinism and other factors leading to these holocausts and wars is evaluated and contrasted with the Bible's teaching on war and racism.

Introduction

It is well documented that acceptance of Darwinism and loss of basic Christian influence were factors involved in the rise of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism (see Azar, 1990; Bergman, 1999; 2001a; 2001b). In the words of Azar (1990, p. 218) the "vicious ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century—Communism, Fascism, Nazism—paid homage to evolution." Holden notes that Darwinism had

been used to provide intellectual support to a multitude of cruel and vicious policies. Causes which have been justified by Social Darwinism include, slavery, imperialism, racism, genocide, the Holocaust, Fascism, Communism, war, and not helping the poor, to name but a few. Where previously there was no clear intellectual justification for most of these causes, Darwin provided one, and ... his justification had the backing of many reputable scientists of his day. ... among historians with no axe to grind this is not controversial, although it is rarely expressed this directly, that Darwin must be listed as one of those responsible, along with numerous Nazis, for the Holocaust. Similarly Darwin must take an impossible to define share of the blame for many other horrors of history, some of it quite recent history (2000, pp. 2,3).

Although Darwin's goal in developing his concept of evolution was very clear, he never openly or directly challenged the Scriptures or Christianity because he felt that an indirect approach was far more effective (Perloff, 1999 p. 152). He wrote in 1873 to his son that openly opposing

Christianity was far less effective than a "back door" approach:

Last night Dicey and Litchfield were talking about J. Stuart Mill's never expressing his religious convictions, as he was urged to do so by his father. Both agreed strongly that if he had done so, he would never have influenced the present age in the manner in which he has done. His books would not have been text books at Oxford, to take a weaker instance. Lyell is most firmly convinced that he has shaken the faith in the Deluge far more efficiently by never having said a word against the Bible, than if he had acted otherwise. ... I have lately read Morley's *Life of Voltaire* and he insists strongly that direct attacks on Christianity (even when written with the wonderful force and vigor of Voltaire) produce little permanent effect: real good seems only to follow the slow and silent side attacks (quoted in Himmelfarb, 1962, p. 387).

A common objection to the conclusion that Darwinism had some important influence on the Nazi and Communists holocausts is that Darwin himself was evidently a good husband, an excellent father, opposed slavery, and never openly opposed Christianity. In response to this Holden concluded the fact is "Darwin was the first Social Darwinist" and the argument that you "can't blame him for the Holocaust" because "as a person he was not such a bad guy" is erroneous

unless you are going to claim Darwin was a deeply stupid man, (an opinion I certainly don't hold), he must have known the use of his theory would be put to. Darwin's personal qualities also seem irrelevant... Hitler was nice to his dog and mistress ... absolving Darwin for the crimes of other Social Darwinists, is like Dr. Frankenstein saying, "That monster I created, the killing spree it has gone on, well, it is nothing to do with me" (2000, p. 4).

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Holden also concluded that Darwin “clearly” anticipated the use to which his theory was applied, that Darwin was a racist, and he anticipated

the alleged “perversion” of his theory, and his theory DID result in a lot of suffering (the only question being how much we can attribute to him, which is historically unanswerable with precision), then although I hesitate to use the term, judged by its historical impact it seems to me [to] be quite reasonable to call Darwinism evil. Especially since the theory is basically dogma and can not as claimed explain the origin of species ... if the theory was true, one could hardly criticize it, as any attempt to censor science is dead wrong, and if that is the way the universe is, we just have to get used to it (2000, p. 4).

Less well known is the influence of Darwinism as one of the causal factors of World War I. In the 1870s and 1880s, the philosophy of Darwinism spread throughout the Western world “where it exerted a considerable influence, before reaching its apogee in the radical racist theories of National Socialism (the Nazis)” (Wehler, 1985, p. 179). One of many turn-of-the-century examples of the voluminous literature devoted to popularizing Social Darwinism is the 1913 literary opus written by General Bernhardt, *Vom Heutigen Kriege*, which expounded the thesis that war was a biological necessity because it helped rid the world of the less fit.

This view was “not confined to a lunatic fringe, but instead won wide acceptance especially among journalists, academics and politicians” (Carr, 1979, p. 217). These views were dominant at the highest echelons of the German government and intelligentsia. At the outbreak of World War I the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, shared the widespread belief that a conflict between the superior and inferior races was inevitable (Carr, 1979, pp. 216–219). In 1912 the German monarch even referred to World War I as a Darwinist “selectionist racial war,” with the Slavs and other inferior races (Kellogg, 1917). Holden notes that the

widespread and complacent attitude that war was inevitable, natural, and beneficial in weeding out the inferior races, is generally cited as one of the many causes of the first world war by careful authors. An American, Colonel House, was appalled by the attitude of resigned complacency and belligerence he saw when he visited Europe in 1913, and which was to a very large extent the fault of Darwin’s writings. Further evidence of how seriously Social Darwinism was taken at the turn of the century is provided by the propaganda issued by the Pan-German league and other groups within Germany (2000, p. 1).

For this reason, the losses caused by World War I also should be included as part of the estimated death toll caused in part by the Darwinism movement.

The Cost of World War I

Over 5,300 major formal wars have occurred in the last 5,000 years, producing a cost in money and loss of lives far worse in the 20th century than ever before. A rough, conservative estimate of the number killed in Western wars alone for the last four centuries is 68 million (Hersch, 1931; Wright, 1942).

One Harvard study evaluated the 902 major wars that occurred between 500 B.C. and A.D. 1918, and concluded that the number of combatants and casualties involved in the first World War was seven times larger than all of the 901 previous recorded wars combined (Foster, 1945, p. 6). Germany’s losses in World War I were estimated at 1,824,000 dead and 4,247,600 wounded; Russia’s losses were 1,664,800 dead and 3,784,600 wounded. The total dead from all fighting for World War I was over 23,000,000 (Roberts and Kloss, 1979, p. 153), and both military action and war-caused disease and famine deaths were estimated to be over 40,000,000 persons (Hersch, 1931).

The Cost of World War II

The total direct and indirect cost of World War II was *four times* greater in extent than World War I—around four trillion 1945 dollars (Foster, 1945, p. 6). It took the lives of over 40 million civilians and men in uniform, which was about the size of the under 18 population living in the entire United States at the time (Grattan, 1949). These losses must be viewed in terms of Hitler’s inhumanity. For example, as to his designs on his former ally, Russia, Payne notes:

Unlike Timulane, Hitler never offered excuses for his massacres. He gave orders that Leningrad should be leveled to the ground and the entire population massacred, and he reserved a special fate for Moscow. Not one person was to be left alive and not one stone was to be left standing on another, and the rubble of the city was to be concealed under a vast lake. The Sonderkommandos were under orders to kill men, women, and children, and those who showed signs of squeamishness at the prospect of killing women and children were to be severely punished... Jews, Poles, and Russians were subhuman and did not deserve to live (1973, p. 67).

The human lives lost due to the second world war from both military action and war-distributed disease is estimated at over over 60 million (Wright, 1942, p. 245). Germany lost 6.9 million soldiers on the Soviet front, and an estimated 27.5 million Soviet citizens died fighting German troops. In addition, millions of fatalities related to the war occurred, such as the 1.5 million who died of hunger in Leningrad during the conflict. The total number of people who died from war-related hunger and illness alone was estimated at around 12 million.

In Germany, fully half of all adult males were killed or wounded (Freed, 1970). The direct cost of World War II to America alone was estimated at \$263 trillion (the amount is the dollar value of the time; source U.S. Government Statistics). The official American fatality number for World War II was 402,339. Since World War II, humans have fought over 125 wars, including the longest one in U.S. history, Vietnam (Morrow, 1982, p. 88).

The term holocaust usually refers to the Nazi murder of European Jews, but Germany is not the only civilization that has indulged in massive slaughters of its own population (Rabinowitz, 1979). Actually, several major slaughters in history were more massive than the Jewish holocaust, and all these were triggered by communist movements (Azar, 1990).

The Crimes of Communism

Until recently, the four major histories of the Stalinist era were Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge* (1989), Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror* (1968), Antonov-Ovseyenko's *The Time of Stalin* (1981), and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974). Antonov-Ovseyenko's *The Time of Stalin*, according to Stephen Cohen (1981, p. viii), a professor of Soviet politics at Princeton, is one of the more important recent works on the Communist holocaust. Antonov-Ovseyenko was the "only child of a martyred Soviet founding father to emerge as both a witness and a historian of Stalinism." His father, a noted Bolshevik revolutionist who led the party seizure of the Winter Palace in October of 1917, served in the nascent Soviet government and rose to Commander and political chief of the Red Army. Antonov-Ovseyenko estimated 81 million persons died during the first thirty years of Soviet rule (1981, pp. 210–213).

Although some nations may exaggerate their losses in order to encourage sympathy, or even to justify building a strong military defense, in this case the actual tragedy probably is greater than most estimates because the full effects of a major war never are known until decades after the fighting ends. Wounds sustained during battles often do not result in immediate loss of life, but may well shorten it. Soldiers commonly die from war-injury complications

twenty, thirty, or more years later, such as the man who died almost thirty years after a bullet lodged in his neck during World War II (it could not be removed safely, and slowly shifted, causing his death many years later). This and many other similar war-related fatalities were not counted as such.

The Death-Toll of Communist Revolutions

Modern "communitistic" revolutions, according to a 1983 Foreign Affairs Research Institute report, resulted in about 140 million deaths. The report included all premature deaths from execution, man-made famine, imprisonment, deportation, slave labor, and civil and international warfare. The coalition counted 46.2 million Asian, 45 million Soviet, and 3.6 million European victims of Communism from 1917 to 1967, reaching the fairly comprehensive sum of 139,917,700 deaths.

The Chinese communist death toll far exceeds that caused by the Axis war, both before and during the Second World War. Walker (1971, p. 15) estimated as many as 63 million persons died as a result of Chinese Communism from 1927 to date.

Schwartz (1972; 1985) claims that Mao Tse-tung's "Great Cultural Revolution" holocaust alone was responsible for some 29 million deaths and the disruption of the lives of 600 million people. Others concluded that the number was closer to 35 million. Sonam Topgyal (1984, p. 7) estimated that the Chinese murdered 1,278,387 persons during their 33-year rule of Tibet alone. Specifically, 174,138 Tibetans died in prison and labor camps, 156,758 were executed, 432,607 died fighting, 413,151 died of starvation, 92,731 of torture, and 9,002 of suicide. Of the more than 7,000 active monasteries present in the Himalayas before the 1950 Chinese takeover, only six remain.

Other Communist-Produced Holocausts

Dolot (1985) claims the Ukrainian communist holocaust cost 7 million lives. Dr. Schwartz's research foundation claimed that over 2 million persons were killed by the Pol Pot Cambodian government. *Facts on File* (February 20, 1981) quoted a February 5th United Nations human rights panel report which concluded that the five-year-long Pol Pot regime genocide was "without precedent in our century, except for the horror of Naziism." Once the communists took control of the country in April 1975, millions were killed, including entire villages and communes, pregnant women or women who had just given birth, old people, entire families, newborn babies, and even mental patients (February 2, 1979, *Facts On File*).

Hawk (1982, p. 21) places the number massacred from 1975 to 1978 as high as 3 million. According to Sihanouk (1979, p. 77), Radio Hanoi reported that Pol Pot liquidated 3 million Cambodian men and women. Sihanouk, Cambodia's first head of state after the revolution (he resigned on April 2, 1976), feels this estimate is exaggerated, but agrees that the number was high and that "the remaining five million Khmers were barely holding on after three years of forced labor, hardships of every variety and suffering were unparalleled in all of human history." These "slaves," the author reminds us, were doctors, students, or civil servants. Many of these who fled traveled through mine fields in a desperate attempt to reach the border, but barely one-tenth made it. The rest died, were captured, or were murdered. The elimination of so many competent personnel rendered the nation's industrial and military complex virtually useless.

With War Comes Disease and Famine

One disastrous consequence of war is not only the direct killing, but the spread of disease both among humans and domestic animals (especially cattle) by the soldiers. War commonly causes a major disruption of both food supplies (production and distribution) and the economy, resulting in famines and food shortages. The 1914–18 war caused "appalling mortality from disease ... and spread by the native carrier corps recruited by the British and German forces in connection with the East Africa campaign" (Goldthorpe, 1978, p. 25). In the West alone, the 1918 flu outbreak caused over 40 million deaths. Although Western governments later took vigorous action to deal with the plague, the war caused much of the problem and greatly impeded progress for years.

Famines were sometimes a deliberate ploy by a government to pressure recalcitrants into acquiescing (Dolot, 1985). Antonov-Ovseyenko claims the 1932 Soviet holocaust caused famine "was the only artificially produced famine in history" (1981, p. 64). He concluded that Stalin's forced collectivization, his liquidation of the Kulaks, and forced famine cost close to 22 million lives. In an attempt to summarize the communist holocaust, one of the most extensive studies that had access to the formally top secret Soviet archives produced an estimated death number of about 100 million (Courtois et al., 2000, p. 4).

Since 1980 One in Every Four Nations Was at War

A Washington think-tank study found that forty-five nations—a fourth of the world's countries—were involved in a war during in the last decade. *The Center for Defense In-*

formation's "World at War" report listed forty wars: ten each in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, seven in Latin America, and three in Europe. Most of the bloodiest of these conflicts involved communist takeovers or wars in Cambodia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Philippines, Vietnam, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Ethiopia with a grand total of about 4.5 million dead (Center for Defense Information, 1998, p. 2).

The Communist conflicts since 1900 add up to a loss of over 200 million lives—almost the population of the United States (the fourth most populous nation today).

More recently, 31 "major armed conflicts" in 27 countries were fought in the world since 1994! According to Sampson (1978), over 25 million persons have been slaughtered in mostly communist wars since 1945—as many fatalities as occurred in both the world wars. Wright estimates that at least 10 percent of deaths in modern civilization can be attributed to war (1942, p. 246). Sampson (1978) estimated that since 1945 not more than twenty-six days existed in which a hot war was not occurring somewhere in the world, and he asserted that most of these were communist inspired. The total *indirect loss* of life from war-related disease and injury is probably another 20 million. An example of the still continuing effects of communism is:

Forty years ago, Cambodia was the most developed and cleanest nation in Asia. Phnom Penh was a showcase city with public services, promenades, and city gardens. Then, in 1970, the country was plunged into [war]... between Marxists and government forces... When the Marxist Khmer Rouge forcibly took control of the nation in 1973, the nation rapidly deteriorated to a Third World wasteland. ...Vast tracts of farmland stand idle. Nearly 4 million uncharted land mines, still hidden in rice paddies, keep agriculture and development at bay. Almost daily, farmers are killed or maimed by the anti-personnel devices that were planted during fighting more than 20 years ago. ... Despite these devastating political and economic problems, it is the HIV/AIDS infection rate that may destroy the people. By the end of this year, health officials expect 40,000 full-blown cases of AIDS in Cambodia. ... Health officials say 250,000 Cambodians are already infected with HIV. The number grows by 100 people per day. When Cambodia's 7,346 "commercial sex workers" (the politically correct term for "prostitute") were surveyed, 43 percent tested positive for HIV. "Commercial sex workers" and their customers account for the spread of nearly all cases of HIV/AIDS in Cambodia (Dabel, 2000 p. 29).

It is clear that the Darwinian and anti-Christian revolutions were two important causal factors of these wars and holocausts that have cost tens of millions of lives, *much* of

our wealth, and have brought abject poverty to the lives of much of the world's masses. Over sixty percent of the world's population now lives in poverty, and about half of these in serious poverty, with 400 million on the edge of starvation. The additional money required to bring the world's population up to an adequate level of food, health, and housing was estimated a few years ago at around 20 billion dollars a year. This huge sum was about what the world spent at the time either for war or the preparation for war every other week, most of which until recently involved communist inspired conflicts. And it now costs over 25 billion dollars annually just to take care of America's war-injured, much of this at Veterans Administration hospitals under government expense.

Putting This in Perspective

It is important to note that other factors aside from Darwinism were important in the development of twentieth-century totalitarianism inspired holocausts and wars. This review focuses only on the influence of Darwinism. Other papers would be required to evaluate the other factors. It is important to stress that many historical factors leading to holocausts and wars predated the growth and development of Darwinism. Some of these factors also played a role in the emergence of Social Darwinism. For example, the work of Kant, Hegel, Comte, and especially those thinkers that were part of the so-called enlightenment with its emphasis on extreme rationalism and the inevitability of "progress," all had an important impact on Western thought prior to Darwin. Darwin was in many ways following in the footsteps of these thinkers. Later, Marx, Nietzsche and others were important leaders whose ideas contributed to Darwinism and served as factors leading to conflict. The so called rationalism movement was also critical, and had such a profound impact upon Western Europe and Christianity in the late 1600s that Samuel Johnson commented that the average Sunday sermon in England was an indictment of the twelve apostles for lying.

Darwinism by *itself* does not inevitably lead to fascism, communism, capitalism, or cold-blooded tyranny. Darwinism was widely accepted in England and the United States—none of which developed totalitarian systems like those in Europe. We must also look to other factors to help understand the development of totalitarianism. For example, Communism was a product not only of Darwinism but also of, the so called enlightenment thinkers, a particular social system, and history itself.

Darwinism was an important step in the process that led to totalitarianism, however, while nationalism and the drive for power and empires were also important. The fierce nationalism and imperialism that so infected Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries also helped to lay

the foundation for, and the acceptance of, a particular form of Darwinism.

Under Lenin and Stalin, the U.S.S.R. became a bloody "evil empire" partly because Russian Communism became materialistic, atheistic, and absolute. Stalin did not starve to death 6 million Ukrainian Kulaks solely because he was a Darwinist. His immediate reason was that the Kulaks resisted his collectivization program. Likewise the confiscation of their grain supplies helped to feed Moscow. Darwinism, though, clearly helped to justify his yearnings for national glory and collectivization, especially by helping to negate the teachings of Christianity.

Expanding national territory has the obvious motivations of power, wealth and glory, but Asimov shows that *even here* Darwinism was important:

the European nations were expanding overseas in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, and it was somehow taken for granted that it was right for them to do this because the European white man was inherently superior to people of darker skins and should take over as a matter of course. ...This view seemed to be made "scientific" by the works of ... Herbert Spencer, who applied the views of evolution, first elaborated by the English naturalist Charles Robert Darwin, in 1859, to society. ...Spencer coined the phrase "Survival of the fittest" and in 1884 argued, for instance, that people who were unemployable or burdens on society should be allowed to die rather than be made objects of help and charity. To do this, apparently, would weed out unfit individuals and strengthen the race. It was a horrible philosophy that could be used to justify the worst impulses of human beings. A conquering nation could destroy its enemy (as the Americans destroyed the Indians) because it was "more fit," and it could prove it was "more fit" because it destroyed its enemy. Indeed, the exploitation of the rest of humanity by white Europeans could be made to seem a noble gesture—as the superior Whites reached out to help the inferiors on other continents by employing them as servants and allowing them to live on scraps.... There were many in the United States who were affected by the Spenserian philosophy and who ached to have the United States help spread the blessings of imperialism, especially since the "end of the frontier" in 1890 seemed to leave American expansive energies with little to do at home (1977, pp. 89–94).

Another important factor causing holocaust deaths was anti-Semitism which was deeply entrenched in European culture long before Darwin. Pogroms and terrible bigotry were common place, and Hitler found many of his fellow normal "Christian" Germans receptive to his anti-Semitic harangues and legislation partly because Christianity had lost much of its life and influence. Darwin reinforced exist-

ing prejudices against Jews, but was clearly not the only factor.

The loss of Christian influence and the corruption of the church were also critically important. The early Christian church was strongly opposed to war, and consistently supported helping the weak and less powerful (Bainton, 1960; Nuttall, 1971; Marrin, 1971; MacGregor, 1954). The Scriptures clearly stress that we are to “make every effort to do what leads to peace” (Romans 14:19). And I Thess. 5:13–15 commands Christians to “live in peace with each other...help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other.” All of this is in contrast to the communist and totalitarian philosophy, which stresses violent revolution and a dictatorship by the proletariat as the “scientific” solution to human problems.

These scriptures focus on individual personal relationships, and their application clearly is not limited to interpersonal conflicts but applies to intergroup conflicts as well even though theologians generally explain them by referring to the dictum that we only as individuals, are to pursue peace and to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). It is a truism but worth remembering that had Hitler, Stalin, Marx, and the others not rejected Biblical Christianity in favor of a secular “enlightenment” worldview, they would not have accepted the inhumanity inherent in the Nazi/communist systems, and the hundreds of millions of lives lost in the holocausts reviewed above may never have occurred. But Biblical Christianity has “the last word” on all these atrocities because it holds out the prospect of the resurrection of the dead as seen in Isaiah 26:19: “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy; Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”

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Book Review

Handbook: Creation, the Flood and Historical Dating by John G. Read Apocalypse Press.* 2000, 206 pages, \$12.95

[Continued from page 24] (instead of the universally accepted 763) and Sargon's accession during 722–721 that he accepts. He believes (p. 108) that "So, king of Egypt" (2 Ki. 17:4), to whom Hoshea, king of the northern kingdom sent messengers, is Shabako, from the twenty-fifth dynasty, though some say So is the Nile delta city Sais, not the name of a Pharaoh. However, So could not be Shabako who began ruling no earlier than 716 BC; well beyond 724 when Hoshea sought help.

Read presents New Testament chronological data as well (pp. 111–122). On p. 122a mistake calculates that it is 2,000 years from Oct., 1 BC until Oct., AD 2001. Because it is a year from 1 BC until AD 1, that time span is 2,001 years. (He predicted Christ would return during the seventh lunar month of 2001 that has now gone by without Christ's return having occurred.) Misspelled words occur on p. 99 and elsewhere.

Read is the first creation author I am aware of dealing with an argument against an old earth because of the slowing of the earth's rotation (pp. 145–151). Another new idea he mentions is that the quantity of nitrogen in the sea suggests an age limit of 13,000 years (pp. 191–193). On pp. 175–189, he mentions interesting radiocarbon dating anomalies, such as living Antarctic seals dating to thousands of

years, the Rampart Cave ground sloth dung deposits, discordant Stonehenge tree remains, and a mud turtle from Montezuma Well (AZ) that was dated at 15,000 years before present, though it died only during 1961. Read presents interesting geological, radiometric, and geophysical data that are readily understood by non-specialists. Perhaps some of the ideas are worthy of consideration and further development notwithstanding the problems with his biblical chronology.

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