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Evolution and Secular Humanism

Christopher P. Toumey

ANTI-EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT has changed in the late twentieth century. Instead of blaming evolution directly for moral decay and a host of social vices, it assumes that a social force called Secular Humanism is primarily responsible, and that the idea of evolution is only one feature of Secular Humanism, so that evolution is *indirectly* responsible for moral decay. Thus, to understand the ideological basis of modern anti-evolutionism, it is necessary to uncover the moral meanings invested in the term Secular Humanism, and then to see how evolution is thought to be articulated with those meanings. This paper addresses those problems by recounting the history of the fundamentalist idea of Secular Humanism; by describing the substantive content of that idea; and, by explaining how evolutionary thought is believed to be articulated with Secular Humanism.

Modern American fundamentalism has made the creation-evolution controversy a moral issue by linking the idea of evolution to an idea called Secular Humanism. That connection animates contemporary anti-evolutionary thought by giving fundamentalist Christians a reason to believe that evolution is somehow involved in a long list of everything they consider immoral, from abortion to Zen. To appreciate the ideological basis of contemporary anti-evolutionism, it is necessary to understand that fundamentalist Christians explain moral decay in modern America by positing an evil conspiracy named Secular Humanism. Creationist thought, as a product of fundamentalism, is then an exercise in applying that moral critique and conspiracy theory to the ontological issue of origins, by alleging that belief in evolution is part of the Secular Humanist conspiracy.

The plan of this paper is to explore creationist beliefs about evolution and Secular Humanism in two parts. Part I recounts the history of

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the fundamentalist idea of Secular Humanism; it also describes the content of that idea; and it offers a perspective on the cultural realities of humanism and secularism. Part II explains how evolutionary thought is believed to be articulated with Secular Humanism; and, finally, it presents secondary ideas generated from the preceding ones, including beliefs about the moral character of evolutionists.¹

SECULAR HUMANISM

A Brief History of the Idea of Secular Humanism

For most of American history, a Protestant cultural hegemony dominated American public life, especially the cultural climate of the public schools. Evangelical prayers, Bible devotionals, the Common Sense philosophy, conservative admonitions to shun the common vices (justified by Scriptural proof-texts), the evangelical ethos of proselytizing with one's personal witness, the piety of the born-again, traditional gender roles: these features constituted much of the fabric of normative American values. Religious minorities—Catholics, Mormons, Amish, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others—typically conceded the mainstream culture to Protestants and withdrew into religious subcultures. It is not hard to see why many Protestants sincerely believed that America was an intrinsically Protestant nation.

By the late 1950s, however, that Protestant hegemony was coming unglued. Consider public norms for sexual morality. In 1956, a U.S. Senate subcommittee urged that young people needed better—and more—sex education (*N.Y. Times* 21 May 1956), and the commission on family morality of the United Lutheran Church recommended that the church relax its laws on divorce and birth control (*Newsweek* 2 January 1956). The following year, an Anglican assembly declared that it saw no crime in homosexual acts between consenting adults (*N.Y. Times* 15 November 1957), while F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover advised the

¹While my analysis is critical of the fundamentalist idea of Secular Humanism, I do not intend a pejorative definition of American fundamentalists, nor a disregard for their concerns. In this paper, "fundamentalists" means conservative Protestants who diagnose modern American culture as a depraved condition, and who have organized themselves to counter that depravity by enforcing a strict traditional morality. "New Religious Right" is a suitable synonym for "fundamentalists," in this context. If this paper seems disrespectful or overly critical, I regret that. I remind the reader that my criticism is focused specifically on the fundamentalist understanding of "Secular Humanism" and the purported ideological link with evolutionary thought. In addition, my experience has been that most readers, including creationists, who have seen my other work on creationism agree that, taken as a whole, my writing on creationism is fair.

nation that an increase in pornography had caused an increase of sex crimes (*N.Y. Times* 3 May 1957). The Kinsey Institute reported in 1958 that 10% of “upper-class” women became pregnant before marriage (*New York Times* 25 February 1958), and in 1959 a high school teacher in Van Nuys, California, sparked a scandal by eliciting a survey of his students’ sexual experiences (*New York Times* 9 August 1959). This was also the time when *Playboy* made sex almost respectable at the newsstand. The birth control pill, forever to change female sexuality, was approved for public use in May 1960. In short, conservative Christian values regarding sex roles and sexual morality seemed to many people to be desperately under siege.

A series of developments in constitutional law further eroded the Protestant hegemony, as religious minorities established their rights to participate fully in public life, and the public schools, without having Protestantism forced on them. Through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the U.S. Supreme Court used the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to fix a new balance between nonProtestants and the old-time Protestant hegemony, by diminishing the legal status of the latter. The plaintiffs in almost all of these skirmishes were Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Unitarians, and other sincerely religious parties. Very few were atheists or agnostics. Regardless, some conservative Protestants interpreted these events as an attack on American culture by well-organized enemies of religion, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, when the climax of Establishment-Clause litigation coincided with the cultural changes described above.

The suspicion that an evil conspiracy of unbelief had caused those changes was fueled by the two great freedom-of-religion landmark cases of the early 1960s, viz., *Engel v. Vitale* of 1962 (370 US 421) and *Abington v. Schempp* of 1963 (374 US 203), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public schools must not force either group prayer or Bible devotionals, respectively, on their students. From the text of a third decision, the *Torcaso v. Watkins* case of 1961, came a name for the supposed conspiracy: “Secular Humanism.” The plaintiff, Roy Torcaso, an atheist, had been denied the office of Notary Public by the state of Maryland because he would not affirm a belief in God. The U.S. Supreme Court held that he was entitled to that office because Maryland’s policy violated Article VI of the U.S. Constitution (“ . . . no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”). In a minor footnote to his opinion, Judge Hugo Black commented that, “Among the religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of

God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others” (367 US 495). However, the court neither defined Secular Humanism nor gave it special attention. If any formal status for Secular Humanism could have been inferred from *Torcaso*, it was no more significant than, say, the status of Taoism. True, Taoism is a religion, but it was (and is) quite marginal to American culture. It was hardly the source of massive social change. If, in the court’s opinion, Secular Humanism was like Taoism, then it too was marginal; in addition, it was undefined.

Four years later, in the *United States v. Seeger* decision of 1965, the Supreme Court concluded that a sincere personal belief in a Supreme Being constituted sufficient religious grounds for conscientious objector (c.o.) status for draftees. Both Justice Tom Clark, author of the majority opinion, and Justice William Douglas, concurring, mentioned that a professed atheist could not use the *Seeger* decision to achieve c.o. status. Justice Douglas added a brief footnote which cited *Torcaso* as an example of an atheist’s beliefs (380 US 193). In retrospect, it can be seen that Douglas’s footnote truly complicated the legal status of Secular Humanism. By referring back to *Torcaso*, Douglas seems to have reaffirmed that Secular Humanism is a religion, but if so, he and Clark also denied that members of this religion could have the religious status of conscientious objector.

Torcaso and *Seeger* came to be cited in fundamentalist literature as a pair of decisions that made Secular Humanism an “official” American religion (Whitehead and Conlan; LaHaye; McGraw; ProFamily Forum). Fundamentalist authors reasoned that, if the Supreme Court *mentioned* Secular Humanism, then that makes it official. This interpretation takes the two footnotes more seriously than the primary texts they accompany; indeed, neither text even defines the critical term. Furthermore, *Seeger* is irrelevant to the issue of legitimating Secular Humanism, since it expands the significance of theistic religion by giving special status to those who believe in God, while the comment by Justice Douglas plainly separates someone in the position of *Torcaso*-the-atheist from the benefits of this religious status. Nevertheless, *Torcaso* and *Seeger* are the origins of Secular Humanism’s “official” standing, according to fundamentalist belief.

In *Abington v. Schempp*, the Supreme Court commented that “the State may not establish a ‘religion of secularism’ in the sense of affirmatively opposing or showing hostility to religion, thus ‘preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe’ ” (374 US 225). This brings us to two competing theories about the legal status of Secu-

lar Humanism: did the Supreme Court *establish* a religion of Secular Humanism in *Torcaso* and *Seeger*, or did it *dis*establish such a religion in *Abington*? In fundamentalist belief, the answer is “both.” The establishment theory crystallized resentment against the loss of the conservative Protestant hegemony, while the disestablishment theory inspired legal assaults against secular knowledge, including evolution and sex education. An example the establishment-*and*-disestablishment interpretation came from Max Rafferty, the ultra-conservative Superintendent of Public Instruction of California, who in 1969 produced a document which described a moral crisis in America and blamed it on Secular Humanism (Rafferty). Sex education, behaviorism, Marxism, and evolution, it said, could be traced to Secular Humanism, which the document described as “a philosophy of life which rejects traditional standards of ‘morality’ ” (Rafferty:11). Citing *Torcaso*, it said that “humanism is, by definition, a religion” (42). Citing *Abington*, it concluded that the California public schools must not teach that religion (71-72). “The need today,” it stated, “is to contrast the American genius and the American’s reliance on Almighty God with the cold, dreary utilitarianism of the Secular Humanists or Marxists” (68).

Three years later, in 1972, William Willoughby, religion editor of the *Washington Evening Star*, brought suit to compel the National Science Foundation to balance comments on evolution in its publications with statements giving equal credibility to creationism. Otherwise, he contended, the government would be “establishing secular humanism as the official religion of the United States” (Nelkin:100-101). Willoughby’s suit failed, both in federal district court and at the Supreme Court. In 1976, Representative John Conlan, a conservative Republican from Arizona, introduced an amendment to that year’s education appropriations bill, stipulating that no federal funds could be expended in support of “any aspect of the religion of secular humanism.” His amendment passed in the House, but died in the House-Senate conference. Also that year, the school board of Frederick County, Maryland, prohibited “any persuasion of humanism that promotes a religious or irreligious belief” (McGraw 8-9). Two years later, in 1978, Mr. Dale Crowley of the National Bible Knowledge Association sued the Smithsonian Institution on the grounds that an evolution exhibit constituted an establishment of the religion of Secular Humanism. His initiative failed in federal court (*New York Times* 12 April 1978; 14 December 1978; 19 May 1979; *Science* 1 June 1979:925).

A more significant event of 1978 was the appearance of a law review article by John W. Whitehead and John Conlan that contended that

Secular Humanism is a religion in First Amendment terms (Whitehead and Conlan). Two features of that article are especially significant: it offered a theory of the history of Secular Humanism, and it gave some substantive content to that term. The historical theory began with the claim that colonial American society was so intrinsically Protestant that Protestantism should still rule American life. But, continued Whitehead and Conlan, Secular Humanism usurped that hegemony by employing a series of wrong-minded Supreme Court decisions, beginning in 1878 and culminating in the *Seeger* case of 1965. Currently, they asserted, Secular Humanism is so deeply embedded in public life and government policy that it occupies the status which only Protestantism deserves to own. And yet its very success makes it an “established” religion, in First Amendment terms. Thus Whitehead and Conlan offered fundamentalist leaders great optimism by predicting that the First Amendment could wreck their enemy as surely as it had wrecked public school prayer.²

Furthermore, the authors solved a serious problem in the argument against Secular Humanism by defining it—something the Supreme Court had never done. After studying a pair of documents by the American Humanist Association called Humanist Manifestos I and II (*New Humanist* May-June 1933; *The Humanist* September-October 1973), Whitehead and Conlan stated that “Secular Humanism is a religion whose doctrine worships Man as the source of all knowledge and truth, whereas theism worships God as the source of all wisdom and truth” (30-31), and “Along with the evolutionary theory, the centrality and autonomy of Man are the prominent features of Secular Humanism” (44). From the comment on autonomy, they equated Hitler and Stalin with humanism (45), and elsewhere they labeled Secular Humanists as “those who believe in no morals” (19). Thus, after seventeen years of citing one sparse footnote from *Torcaso* and one from *Seeger*, fundamentalist Christians finally had something about Secular Humanism they could describe in detail.

Even at that point, hostility to Secular Humanism was an obscure legal theory. But in 1980 a book entitled *The Battle for the Mind*, by Rev. Tim LaHaye, galvanized fundamentalist fears of humanism by rendering a popular version of the Whitehead-and-Conlan thesis. LaHaye illustrated the evils of humanism by making numerous lurid references to pornography, homosexuality, drug addiction, abortion, and giving away

²For a more conventional account of the legal history of the idea of Secular Humanism, see Hammond.

the Panama Canal to communists. The cumulative product was a vulgar manichaeism: “Only two lines of reasoning permeate all of literature: biblical revelation (the wisdom of God) and the wisdom of man [a.k.a. humanism]” (LaHaye:27). From this, Rev. LaHaye attested that “[m]ost of the evils in the world today can be traced to humanism” (9), and that “[c]rime and violence in our streets, promiscuity, divorce, shattered dreams, and broken hearts can be laid right at the door of secular humanism” (26). He also asserted that Hitler was a humanist (119). (In LaHaye’s book, “humanism” is shorthand for “Secular Humanism,” as if all humanism is equivalent to Secular Humanism.)

LaHaye followed the Whitehead-and-Conlan definition which emphasized autonomy. Thus, “Simply stated, humanism is man’s attempt to solve his problems independently of God” (26), and, “Humanists view man as an autonomous, self-centered godlike person . . . ” (68). Also, he attributed extraordinary importance to Humanist Manifestos I and II, saying that “What the Bible is to Christians, the Humanist Manifesto is to humanists” (85).³

The impact of Rev. LaHaye’s book was startling. “In 1979 many fundamentalists had not even heard of secular humanism. It was not mentioned in sermons and writings. But by the end of 1980 nearly all had adopted it as their enemy” (Hadden and Swann:86). Rev. Lamarr Mooneyham, the Moral Majority leader of North Carolina, said, “I wasn’t aware of the growing influence of secular humanism before the early 1980s. But as I began to address issues facing Moral Majority chapters, at the root of every opposition was an active or passive humanist” (*News & Observer*, Raleigh, NC, 12 May 1985). According to *Newsweek*, 350,000 copies of *The Battle for the Mind* had been sold as of July 1981 (*Newsweek* 6 July 1981:48).

The enemies of Secular Humanism scored a victory when Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, had a provision passed in 1984 to deny funding for the teaching of Secular Humanism. Yet the Hatch Amendment lacked a definition of the thing it decried, and it expired before having any apparent effect on public school education.

The legal strategy of Whitehead and Conlan dovetailed with LaHaye’s sweeping moral critique in the case of *Smith v. Mobile*. Alabama had passed a law in 1982 encouraging school prayer directed by teachers, whereupon an agnostic parent named Ishmael Jaffree challenged the law, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional.

³The content of these manifestos is discussed below.

Federal District Court Judge W. Brevard Hand, a conservative appointed by President Nixon, then “re-aligned” the case so that Christians might do to humanism what Jaffree had done to school prayer. Judge Hand engineered a class action suit in which “all those persons adhering by belief and practice to a theistic religion” could become plaintiffs for the purpose of alleging that Secular Humanism was a religion, and that it was being taught in Mobile public schools, contrary to the *Abington* stipulation (Hand). Thus the trial became a platform for popular hostility to Secular Humanism. It consumed three weeks in October 1986. In March 1987 W. B. Hand delivered his judgment that, indeed, “for purposes of the first amendment, secular humanism is a religious belief system” (Hand), and that the contents of certain public school textbooks represented an establishment of that religion.

To construct a definition of Secular Humanism, Judge Hand heard testimony from numerous scholars. Many identified John Dewey as the most influential humanist thinker in America, whereupon Russell Kirk explained that Dewey’s brand of thought was known as *religious* humanism, and that *secular* humanism arose as a reaction against Dewey’s grandiose vision. In other words, secular humanism constituted the view that humanism ought not to have the status of a religion, as the adjective plainly indicates. Others argued that Secular Humanism was indeed a religion, and Judge Hand leaned toward the latter view. He wrote in his legal definition of Secular Humanism that “[t]he most important belief of this religion is its denial of the transcendent and/or supernatural: there is no God, no creation, no divinity” (Hand). Although he attributed some substantive content to Secular Humanism, he departed from the definition by Whitehead, Conlan, and LaHaye (which had identified Secular Humanism in terms of autonomy), and instead depicted this belief system principally as a negation of the supernatural.

In August 1987, a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Judge Hand, but the panel addressed only the narrow issue of his order regarding textbooks and avoided the larger question of whether Secular Humanism is a religion.

What Is Secular Humanism?

In general, there are two styles of expression by which fundamentalist Christians state the meaning of Secular Humanism. I call these the “negation of personal beliefs” and the “autonomy theory,” respectively.

Consider these four examples of Secular Humanism as a negation of one's personal beliefs:

— The *Bible-Science Newsletter* lists nine components of humanism, viz., naturalism, evolution, faith in humanity, faith in reason and science, relativism, situational ethics, anti-authoritarianism, civil liberties, and globalism (*Bible-Science Newsletter* May 1984: Insert 7).

— A tract titled "Humanism: America's Greatest Enemy" gives these features of humanism: "OK to lie, OK to kill, OK to steal, OK to have pre-marital sex, OK to cheat," plus, transcendental meditation, yoga, witchcraft, masturbation, children playing the roles of homosexuals and unwed parents, survival games, communism, atheism, evolution, and amorality (Bolles).

— A letter to the *Charlotte Observer* states: "Abortion, pornography, evolution, sex and values education, socialism, communism, and bureaucratic government are all part of secular humanism" (*Charlotte Observer* 13 June 1980).

— A pamphlet titled "Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?" says that humanism includes the denial of these beliefs: deity of God, inspiration of the Bible, divinity of Jesus Christ, existence of the soul, life after death, biblical account of creation, and absolute standards of right and wrong; furthermore, it alleges that humanism embraces sexual freedom "regardless of age," plus incest, removal of male-female distinctions, control of the environment, "removal of American patriotism," disarmament, and, finally, "one-world socialist government" (ProFamily Forum).

This last version has circulated widely, often verbatim, though usually without attribution. In North Carolina, I noticed it in a local Moral Majority critique of textbooks from 1981 (NCMM), in a letter-to-the-editor in a small newspaper during a curriculum controversy (*News of Orange County*, 19 September 1984), and in the complaints of the state's severest textbook critic (*News & Observer* 12 May 1985).

Notice how this style of expression attributes substantive content to the term "Secular Humanism." Its authors present precise accounts of their own most precious spiritual values, then, from these templates, they make mirror images by alleging that Secular Humanism is simply the direct negation of all they cherish. Likewise, they offer very honest views of their most troubling fears, then add these to their lists of Secular Humanism's particular attributes, which in turn seem to be tracking their own thinking exactly, value for value and fear for fear. Like sharp shadows on a sunny day, each outline of Secular Humanism faithfully matches each author's profile. Such a definition is very generous in the

way it reveals one's cares and fears—and here I mean no sarcasm—yet it is terribly stingy in the way it assigns nothing to Secular Humanism except a mirror image of one's own thinking.

Although there is some overlap among the four, many items are unique to one particular example or another. The first includes civil liberties, but not masturbation; the second mentions masturbation, but not bureaucratic government; the third has bureaucratic government, but not euthanasia; and so on. This approach has no apparent rules regarding what is to be included and what excluded. The cumulative effect is multiple solipsism. Secular Humanism can mean something different to each enemy of Secular Humanism.

The second way of defining Secular Humanism holds that atheism constitutes a vacuum of ethical values, which is then filled by an attitude of extreme human autonomy: humanity must be its own supreme being since there is none higher. Finally, autonomy is said to lead to anarchy because each individual will live in a world of moral relativism and situation ethics, with no common standard of morality. Thus Secular Humanism is thought to be a slippery slope from atheism to autonomy to anarchy.

Recall that Rev. LaHaye's book and the article by Whitehead and Conlan emphasized autonomy in their definitions. The following passage from a creationist newsletter echoes those views:

When man substitutes his own knowledge and wisdom for the Creator's and allows every man to believe he is a law unto himself, there is no need to recognize the conscientious "absolutes" imposed on him by government. But where does this thinking lead? Can we as a nation survive if we believe in the absolute authority of men and deny the law of God? Can we allow the standard to be the lowest common level to which man can sink? (*Creation-Science Report* December 1978)

Hostility to human autonomy also arises in the comments of creationism's grass-roots activists in North Carolina. Between 1982 and 1985, I studied the creationist movement in that state. One aspect of my research was a series of 51 interviews with people active in the creationist cause (Toumey). Two of my interviewees declared no opinion regarding Secular Humanism, but the other 49 denounced it in terms of the autonomy theory, with several of them asserting that Secular Humanism represents these things:

A worship of man alone; man as the ultimate center of appreciation; man is in control of his destiny; the exaltation of man; man as the Supreme Being; a king-size ego trip; elevation of man to the God level; the captain of his destiny, apart from any deity; man himself determines

what is right and what is wrong; a man-oriented frame of reference; a man-centered religion; man is the measure of all things; the enthronement of man; man is the center of the universe; man is not responsible to a superior being. [All comments are verbatim.]

These grass-roots expressions indicate how completely the Whitehead-Conlan-LaHaye autonomy definition has been accepted. By contrast, none of my interviewees described Secular Humanism according to the negation-of-beliefs approach, which appears to be a literary device reserved for the Religious Right's tracts, pamphlets, and letters to newspapers.

An important relation between the two styles is that the autonomy theory is distinctly more focused than the negation-of-personal-beliefs approach, for it offers hypotheses about philosophical linkages and social causation that can be tested or at least debated. But the idiosyncratic expressions of discontent from negation-of-beliefs style lack such clarity. For example, the autonomy theory states a hypothetical relation between atheism and autonomy, such that atheism is the ultimate cause of anarchy, whereas the proximate cause is autonomy. By contrast, the other approach carelessly lumps together atheism and autonomy, along with many other items. With this distinction in mind, we can weigh the impact of various statements about Secular Humanism. Consider again Judge Hand's opinion in the *Mobile* case, in which he defined Secular Humanism simply as a negation of theistic religion. The judge's Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law add up to an unfocused anxiety in the negation-of-beliefs style. The same is true of Rafferty's definition in the "Guidelines for Moral Instruction" of 1969. As such, the views of Hand and Rafferty are less likely to become a useful legal definition of Secular Humanism than the Whitehead-Conlan-LaHaye autonomy-theory definition.

Either way, the term "Secular Humanism" gives a name to fundamentalist Christians' deep moral outrage about what they deem to be spiritual depravity in this land.

Cultural Realities of Secular Humanism

The views of Conlan, Whitehead, and LaHaye constitute a conspiracy theory. They assume that there is a distinct ideology named Secular Humanism, that there are agents (the "Secular Humanists") who actively promote this ideology, and that these agents can influence or control much of American culture, e.g., U.S. Supreme Court decisions or public school policies. This is a theory of catastrophe, and far exceeds

the simple observation that American culture is becoming more secular as the Protestant hegemony is gradually retired (which indeed is happening). The conspiracy theory depicts all instances of growing secularization in the United States as the result of a single evil ideology, supported by highly organized forces. Here we should consider whether this conspiracy theory is well grounded in cultural reality.

Indeed there is a certain modest reality to Secular Humanism. The American Humanist Association (AHA) has generated a series of documents that brings to life the complaints of Judge Hand, Rev. LaHaye, and their associates. The Humanist Manifesto I, from 1933, is an explicitly antitheistic statement (*New Humanist* May-June 1933). Its 1973 successor, the Humanist Manifesto II, is peppered with religion-baiting hostility, and it also makes claims about human autonomy just as LaHaye and his colleagues charge. "Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction," it alleges, and, "We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility" (*The Humanist* Sept.-Oct. 1973). The humanism stipulated in the Humanist Manifestos I and II, and in Paul Kurtz's definitive essay (Kurtz), is truly a combination of atheism and individual freedom. Kurtz represents the history of humanism to be the history of hostility to religion, with religion defined in terms of ignorance and superstition. In his view, the history of humanism culminates in the modern form called Secular Humanism. (Christian humanism is mentioned in passing by Kurtz, but he implies that this is an illegitimate attempt to co-opt the credibility of humanism.) "Basically," says Kurtz, "secular humanists are atheists, agnostics, or skeptics, and they do not wish to deny that fact" (330). Also in the same essay, he identifies secular humanism as "the modern-day expression of classical atheism" (332). Regarding autonomy, Kurtz writes that "the salient virtue [of humanism] is autonomy" (332).

With those words, plus the texts of the Humanist Manifestos I and II, the AHA delivers to Rev. LaHaye more than enough material to build the argument that Secular Humanism can be reduced to atheism and autonomy.

As to humanism's status as a religion, one reference work states that, "In essence, Humanism is a religion with a nontheistic concept of a supreme Creator" (Shulman:398), and another says that AHA's certified humanist counselors "enjoy the legal status of ordained pastors, priests, and rabbis" (Gale:1607).

And yet these facts deserve a sense of proportion. The seven humanist organizations for which membership data are available have a

gross total of 12,092 members (although the net total is smaller if some groups have overlapping memberships) (Gale:1607-08). Their humanist counselors number fewer than 200 (*The Humanist* Nov.-Dec. 1980:48). Compare these numbers with Rev. LaHaye's figure of 275,000 humanists (LaHaye:179), which he established by citing an off-the-cuff estimate from the *New York Times* (26 August 1973), to which he gratuitously added ten percent, thereby giving the rough estimate an appearance of being a precise quantity. In reality, the two Humanist Manifestos are obscure documents, better known to fundamentalists than to their enemies, and the organizations that endorse the manifestos are far from powerful. There are barely enough Secular Humanists to populate a modest fringe movement, let alone control the moral climate of American culture.

The humanists of the AHA rarely used the terms "Secular Humanism" and "Secular Humanist" until after Rev. LaHaye popularized them. If not for an undefined term in a footnote to the *Torcaso* text, this entity could just as well have been called Institutionalized Atheism, or Atheistic Individualism, or Programmatic Immorality, or any other loosely interchangeable name. But because it acquired the name of Secular Humanism, along with the moral meanings described earlier, and because that term has been used interchangeably with the generic term "humanism," it is common for fundamentalists to believe that humanism and secularism can be folded into one another, as if all humanism is secular and all secularism is humanistic. To contest that error, I remind the reader that, coexisting with the secular forms of humanism, there is a rich tradition of Christian humanism; also, there are forms of secularism that are not at all humanistic.

Historically, the most influential form of humanism was that of *quattrocento* Italian Renaissance thought, which is best defined as the rediscovery and appreciation of the literature of classical antiquity (Giustiniani). By re-examining classical texts, scholars of literature "sought to re-integrate man into the world of nature and history and to interpret him in this perspective" and to free human nature from the constraints of medieval cosmology (Abbagnano:69-72). But, says Abbagnano, "for all its antipathy toward asceticism and theology, humanism did not have an anti-religious or anti-Christian character" (71). Giustiniani seconds that opinion by insisting that it was erroneous for Corliss Lamont to have tried to equate *quattrocento* humanism with hostility to religion (Giustiniani:192-193).

As humanism transcended its literary form, eventually to produce more generalized philosophies of human nature, one of its offspring was

Christian humanism, best represented by the writings of Erasmus. Its Scriptural referents are the life of Jesus and the 8th Psalm:

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

The Protestant Reformation was the principal process through which humanism was integrated into Christian thought (Spitz). More recently, the Black leadership of the American civil rights movement has displayed a very explicitly Christian inspiration. Spanning five centuries, the tradition of Christian humanism embraces the ministries of Martin Luther and Martin Luther King, as well as those of Albert Schweitzer, Angelo Roncalli, and Mother Teresa. Some of the anti-war organizations of the 1960s and 1970s were expressions of this philosophy, and so was one of the principal American groups opposing the Reagan administration policy in Central America in the 1980s, viz., Witness for Peace.

As a formal school of twentieth-century philosophy, Christian humanism centers on the thoughts of Jacques Maritain, who, according to O'Brien,

... saw an integration between nature and grace, so that the capacity for the true and the good inherent in man's nature were fully realizable, not negated or irrelevant, under grace. (O'Brien:1734)

Even Sidney Hook, the arch-antitheologian, saluted Maritain's Christian humanism for opposing totalitarianism at certain critical moments in the 1940s (Hook:336-347).

The American Humanist Association is just as wrong as Rev. LaHaye when it implies that Secular Humanism is the only real humanism. Historically, this modern kind of humanism is very different from earlier forms, especially the *quattrocento* form, which had a much richer religious content than Secular Humanists assume (Giustiniani:192-194). Humanism is not intrinsically religious (whether Christian or whatever), but neither is it intrinsically secular (whether atheistic or otherwise). If the secularists' and LaHaye's misrepresentation of *quattrocento* humanism is corrected, then the Secular Humanism of the AHA is not a continuation of the history of humanism, but rather a digression from it. And if the minuscule numbers of the American Humanist Association are seen in proportion, then it is folly to accept either the claim that Secular Humanism governs all that is bad in Western civilization, or the counter-claim that it produces all that is good. In this way the general

tradition of humanism escapes from being reduced to atheism and autonomy, whether by LaHaye or by the AHA.

Likewise, secularism cannot be reduced to humanism. True, some secularism in modern culture is humanistic, but then some is not. Stalinism and Nazi Fascism were secular enemies of conventional Christian religion, but no humanist would claim that they were humanistic. The "New Age" movement is a secular alternative to Christian spirituality, but it is deterministic in its astrology and antirationalist in its epistemology. In fact, the "Harmonic Convergence" of 16-17 August 1987, an orgy of New Age intellectual confusion, was more a monument to human folly than to human dignity. Paul Kurtz has sensibly attempted to put as much philosophical distance as possible between his brand of humanism and the New Agers (Kurtz).

And so, if some humanism is secular, but much else is not, and if some secularism is humanistic, while much else is not, then the fundamentalist conspiracy theory of Secular Humanism is a profound distortion of humanism. This distortion is grounded in a great exaggeration of the modest reality of the American Humanist Association and its publications. Nevertheless, both a legal strategy and a theory of American culture have been erected on this distortion.

EVOLUTION

Irresponsible Molecules Indicted: Evolution Meets Secular Humanism

Since fundamentalist Christians use Secular Humanism as the framework for their views on immorality, it is necessary for them to incorporate the idea of evolution into Secular Humanism if evolution is to be tied to immorality. This is done in both styles of characterizing Secular Humanism. In the negation-of-personal-beliefs approach, evolution is often listed as one of the many items that collectively constitute Secular Humanism. The first three examples of that approach, above, included evolution, and the fourth cited the denial of the inerrantist account of Biblical creation. But in this approach there are no clear principles for linking evolution to the general term, nor for linking it with the other items in the list. And even though most examples of the negation-of-beliefs include evolution, some others omit it while emphasizing sexual issues, or communism, or "New Age" thought, or whatever, in their own idiosyncratic inventories of Secular Humanism.

A more serious matter is evolution's purported relation to the auton-

omy theory. As Secular Humanism is said to be a process by which autonomy generates anarchy, so evolution is accused of promoting this process by implying that randomness in nature justifies anarchy in society. If so, then people who believe in evolution will think anarchy is good and natural. Thus, evolution is charged with being the natural history of anarchy.

The task of fitting evolution into that theory requires one to represent it as a celebration of randomness: evolution is described in terms of its stochastic features, especially mutation. In 1972 creationists in California accused evolutionary thought of implying that “the origin of the world itself is a matter of accident or chance” (*New York Times* 12 December 1972), and of teaching that “the universe, life, and men are simply ‘accidents’ that occurred by fortuitous chance without cause, purpose, or reason” (*New York Times* 17 December 1972). Also in that year, Dr. Henry M. Morris, founder of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), wrote that, “The very essence of evolution, in fact, is random mutation, not scientific progress” (Morris 1972:271). Later, ICR stated that “Christ offers purpose and hope for eternity; evolution proffers randomness and uncertainty forever” (Morris & Gish:315). In his 1978 lawsuit against the Smithsonian, Mr. Dale Crowley described evolution as “the assumption that man and all life on earth is the consequence of a series of accidents of molecular combination in the dateless past” (*New York Times* 14 December 1978). The *Bible-Science Newsletter* of May 1982 charged that “evolutionists see the world as a result of a series of accidents, without design.” Dr. Morris, in his autobiographical history of creationism, alleges that evolution “necessarily means endless ages of random changes which, in the process, leave untold waste and pain and death in their wake” (Morris 1984:328).

So the problem with evolutionary thought is that, if people believe molecules behave irresponsibly in nature, then they will believe it is acceptable for individuals to behave irresponsibly in society. The most succinct denunciation of this natural history of anarchy comes from R.L. Wysong, who writes:

If life came into existence through purely natural, materialistic, chance processes, then, as a consequence, we must conclude life is without moral direction and intelligent purpose . . . Atoms have no morals, thus, if they are our progenitors, man is amoral. (Wysong:6)

The same complaint resonates in the comments of some of the local creationists I interviewed in North Carolina:

— “If one accepts the evolutionist point of view . . . he’s just a random

produce of molecular collisions. So man is answerable to himself, which I think is dangerous. He then has the freedom to set his own moral standards.”

— “The evolution model says life arose from nothing, by pure random chance . . . This theory of origins is leading to the view that you’re not responsible to a higher authority, that man is only responsible to himself . . . Life is a totally random event. Nothing really happens.”

— “Evolution began by randomness, particles came together and formed something, so that fits in with situation ethics.”

— “Secular humanism is the idea that man himself determines what is right and what is wrong, that he doesn’t have to answer to any higher being . . . An evolutionist who believes that things came about by chance would also say, we are not answerable to any higher being.”

From these statements a simple parallelism can be constructed: evolution is to Secular Humanism as random molecules are to irresponsible individuals.

An obvious major problem with that view is that it eliminates classic Darwinian thought from the idea of evolution. It draws attention to mutation and other stochastic processes of evolution, but it simply overlooks evolution’s deterministic features, e.g., adaptation and differential reproductive success, which together constitute the process of natural selection. In fact, conventional evolutionary thought considers evolution to be an interaction between stochastic and deterministic processes. As Ernst Mayr put it:

As for the objection to the presumed random aspect of natural selection, it is not hard to deal with. The process is not at all a matter of pure chance. Although variations arise through random processes, those variations are sorted by the second step in the process: selection by survival, which is very much an anti-chance factor. (Mayr:53)

And

[s]electionist evolution, in other words, is neither a chance phenomenon nor a deterministic phenomenon, but a two-step tandem process combining the advantages of both. (Mayr:53)

Some opponents of creationism have objected to the distortion which edits out natural selection. Norman Newell complains, contrary to creationist representations, “Most biologists now recognize natural selection as the directive force in evolution. No modern evolutionist believes that evolution is the result of a long series of random accidents” (Newell). William Pollitzer, reflecting on his 1974 debate with Henry Morris, recalls that,

My opponent [i.e., Morris] suggested that evolution must be equated with chance. Yet I see nothing in evolution that denies the laws of cause and effect operating in an orderly universe . . . It is natural selection in its interplay with the changing environment that ensures direction, in contrast to the disorder implied by the word "chance." (Pollitzer:329-330)

This misrepresentation has become fixed in creationist thought because creationism is essentially a by-product of fundamentalism's critique of immorality in American society, as organized according to the concept of Secular Humanism. Creationism must conform to the ideological structure of that critique, particularly the autonomy theory's accusations about anarchy. Thus it must amplify the randomness and mute the Darwinian determinism in its representations of evolution.

Last, there is one more means of connecting evolution to immorality, but this one does so by ignoring the idea of Secular Humanism. It alleges that evolution is *directly* responsible for immorality, without reference to Secular Humanism or any other intermediate forces or values. For example, William Jennings Bryan in 1922 charged that evolutionists "weaken faith in God, discourage prayer, raise doubt as to a future life, reduce Christ to the stature of a man, and make the Bible a 'scrap of paper'" (Bryan).

In the contemporary version of this accusation, Judge Braswell Dean of the Georgia Court of Appeals says:

This monkey mythology of Darwin is the cause of permissiveness, promiscuity, pills, prophylactics, perversions, pregnancies, abortions, pornography, pollution, poisoning, and proliferation of crimes of all types. (*Time* 16 March 1981:82)

Likewise, Mrs. Nell Segraves of the Creation-Science Research Center (CSRC) concludes that:

The research conducted by CSRC has demonstrated that the results of evolutionary interpretations of science data result in a widespread breakdown of law and order. This cause and effect relationship stems from the moral decay of mental health and loss of a sense of well being on the part of those involved with this belief system, i.e., divorce, abortion, and rampant venereal disease. (Segraves:17)

The most prolific and most vehement source of this view is Dr. Morris of ICR, who asserts in *The Twilight of Evolution* that "the deception of evolution" was responsible for Satan's rebellion against God, Eve's deception of Adam, and Satan's deception of the world" (Morris 1963:93). Also, Morris suggests in *The Troubled Waters of Evolution* that

Satan invented evolution at the Tower of Babel (Morris 1974:74-75). Regarding more recent manifestations of evolution, Morris writes that "The foundation of false teaching in every discipline of study, and therefore of ungodly practice in all areas of life, was evolutionism" (Morris 1984:223). He presents specific examples thus:

If man is an evolved animal, then the morals of the barnyard and the jungle are more "natural," and therefore more "healthy," than the artificially-imposed restrictions of pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity. Instead of monogamy, why not promiscuity and polygamy? . . . Self-preservation is the first law of nature; only the fittest will survive . . . Eat, drink, and be merry, for life is short and that's the end. So says evolution! (Morris & Gish:172)

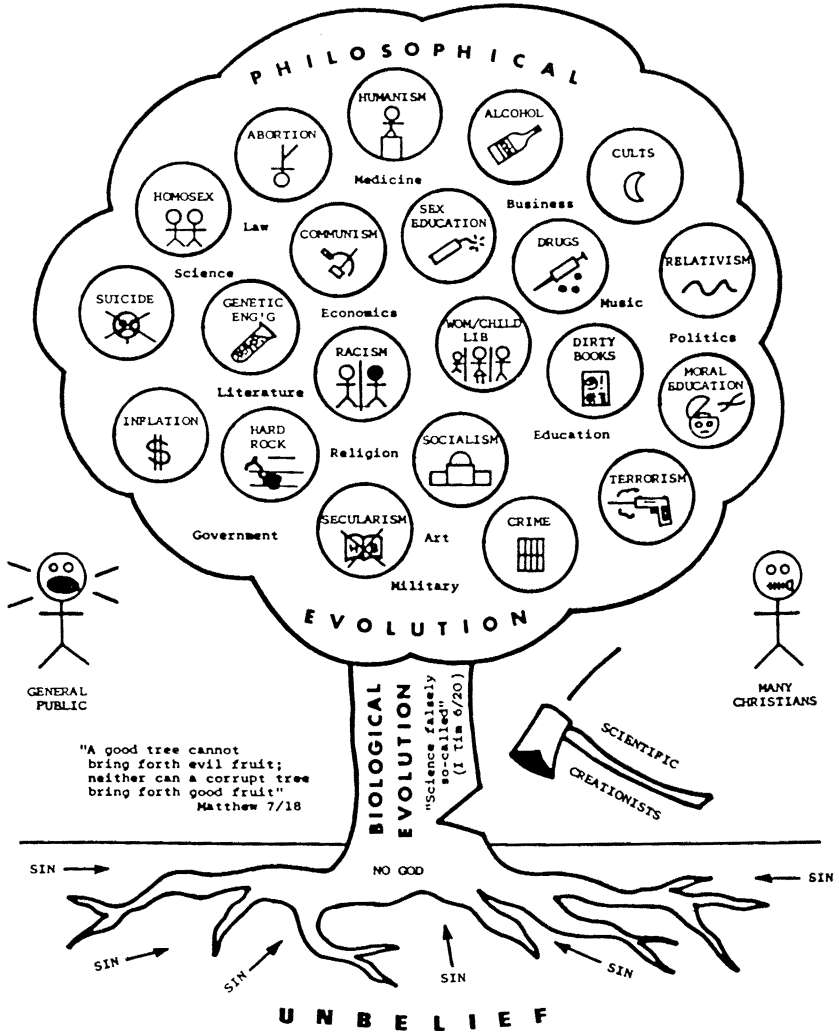
Morris traces pagan religions, humanism, and the "New Age Movement" to evolution (Morris 1982; 1983; 1987), and also holds it responsible for "most of the spiritual and moral problems that have arisen to hinder the gospel" (Morris 1984:352).

Elsewhere, McIver (294-302) and Harrison give additional examples of the accusation that evolution is directly responsible for immorality.

These blistering diatribes are so sweeping that they dissipate their own credibility by failing to specify *how* evolution could have caused so much immorality. In this regard they resemble the various negations-of-personal-beliefs which include evolution but then neglect to relate it cogently to other kinds of iniquity. The "Evolution Tree" of Mr. Richard G. Elmendorf [Figure 1] presents a vivid image of that pattern. Mr. Elmendorf, an engineer whose adamant commitment to creationism is tempered with charm, patience, and good humor, represents evolution to be the trunk from which twenty-one evil fruits grow, including dirty books, inflation, and terrorism. His drawing suggests that those things can be defeated by using creationism to destroy evolution.

Although it is impossible to quantify the authority of each of the three approaches (negation-of-beliefs; autonomy theory; and theory of direct responsibility), the autonomy theory is probably the most influential condemnation of evolution, for it offers a relatively clear plan by which evolution is said to be tied to the grand scheme of immorality named Secular Humanism. The condemnations of autonomy by the creationists in North Carolina suggest that the rank-and-file of the Religious Right have embraced this theory earnestly. The other two approaches draw much attention by virtue of their lurid and sweeping allegations, but they fail to answer the central ideological question which excites modern creationism: how is evolution connected to immorality?

Figure 1 — The Evolution Tree



(courtesy of R. G. Elmendorf)

A Creationist Sociology of Evolutionists and Humanists

If evolution generates immorality, whether directly or indirectly, then those who defend evolution are agents of immorality, whether intentionally or not. That idea establishes one of the most bitter features of creationist thought, namely, a series of vicious denunciations of the moral character of evolutionists. Dr. Henry Morris said in 1979 that Dr. Porter Kier of the National Museum of Natural History displayed “an academic arrogance frequently typical of the nation’s scientific-educational establishment” (*Science* 1 June 1979:924). Richard K. Turner, an attorney for the Creation-Science Research Center, described evolutionists as “pompous and arrogant, just the kind of people that the First Amendment was written to protect us against” (*Science* 20 March 1981:1331-1332).

Secondly, evolutionists are said to be categorically intolerant. The *Bible-Science Newsletter* tells its readers that “Fools despise instruction. This is true of evolutionists who refuse to consider evidence which disagrees with their preconceived ideas of age” (*Bible-Science Newsletter* March 1975, Insert:19). The Institute for Creation Research proposes that biology teachers can be expected to grant scientific credibility to creationism “unless absolutely blind, or dulled by prejudice” (Morris, Gish, & Hillestad:27).

In addition, evolutionists are thought to be systematically deceitful. It is a regular feature of creationism to allege that the fossils known as Java Man and Peking Man are just as fraudulent as Piltdown Man. The *Creation-Science Prayer News* warns that “evolution traps” have “been set by atheistic humanists all over our country . . . The traps are hidden in vacation and amusement locations to put the victims off their normal guard . . . [so that] the tourist [inhales] large doses of evolutionary indoctrination, or even worse, he has parroted it to his children” (*Creation-Science Prayer News*, August 1985). Among the “evolution traps” it identifies are the Grand Canyon, and zoos and aquariums in general.

All the usual impeachments of evolutionists’ moral character are captured concisely by Dr. Duane Gish of ICR in his closing remarks at an October 1981 debate at Liberty Baptist College. In two short paragraphs of text, Gish accused evolutionists of being dogmatic, intolerant, deceitful, arrogant, elitist, afraid of creationism’s truths, afraid of majority sentiment, and accustomed to indoctrinating their students (OTGH).

These judgments are especially vivid in the fundamentalist comic-

book tracts of Jack T. Chick, a California publisher. In *Primal Man?* and *Big Daddy?*, both by Chick, evolutionists included:

- a film director who is bearded, vain, and effeminate, dressed in a purple jumpsuit with a saffron scarf. (Chick 1976)
- a film producer who admits that evolution is “brainwashing these kids . . . Many will lose their souls because of [evolutionist] films.” (Chick 1976)
- a professor of evolution who is fat, bearded, balding, and hysterical. (Chick 1972)

I should note that most of the local creationists I interviewed in North Carolina did *not* echo the bitter slanders by Gish, Chick, and LaHaye.

Occasionally real people are denounced by name (most often Isaac Asimov, Stephen Jay Gould, Carl Sagan, Corliss Lamont and Paul Kurtz), but the more common pattern is to deride evolutionists and humanists in terms so sweeping and so unfocused that all of one’s enemies are interchangeable. Evolutionists are categorically arrogant, say, or all humanists are equally depraved. In this undifferentiated pattern, wherein few of the enemy are cited by name, most of the enemy are faceless. Numerous evolutionists surround us, but most are unidentified; legions of humanists threaten us, but most are anonymous. It is rare, especially in local disputes, for fundamentalists to specify precisely which individuals are the agents of Secular Humanism. Humanism without any specific humanists, so to speak, and evolution without any particular evolutionists.

The creationist commentary on evolution and humanism is a manichean ideology, according to which there are two sets of moral abstractions that struggle against each other to control American culture: autonomy versus piety; immorality versus Biblical belief; arrogance versus humility; and, deceit versus perspicuity. Spiritual character and abstract virtues are thought to determine the collective destinies of humanism, evolution, creationism, and fundamentalist Christianity. Thus it is not surprising that even famous evolutionists and humanists are only ciphers for such wicked qualities as elitism or atheism.

CONCLUSIONS

It is common for enemies of creationism to dismiss it as a simple exercise in Biblical inerrancy. Human evolution faces opposition supposedly because it contradicts Genesis 1:27, and evolutionary chronology is thought to attract enmity because it cannot be reconciled with a

period of six literal 24-hour days. Certainly, conservative Christian values have to be anchored in specific Scriptural proof-texts, yet those points of reference cannot account for the substance or the indignation of creationist thought.

Neither can creationism be reduced to a scientific problem. True, it challenges evolutionary thought on matters of human evolution, the geological record, and the origin of the universe. But in creationist thought there is too much substance that transcends scientific disputation to diagnose it as either an empirical or theoretical problem in science.

The key to understanding the intellectual structure of creationist thought is to see that it is part of a larger body of thought, that is, fundamentalist moral theory. This latter body of theory addresses a broad range of issues and worries about modern American culture and social change. As a result, creationist commentaries on both creation and evolution often refer, directly or indirectly, to the moral meanings that make those issues and worries so urgent to creationists and other fundamentalists. Much of the existential content of creationist thought is a broad cultural discontent, featuring fear of anarchy, revulsion for abortion, disdain for promiscuity, and endless other issues, to which evolution is then appended.

That being so, it is necessary to trace the relationships between those moral meanings and the symbols that convey them. The latter include the citing of footnotes from U.S. Supreme Court decisions, inventories of personal beliefs (from which come inventories of negations of those beliefs), depictions of the idea of evolution as randomness pure and simple, plus certain other devices. One example of the relation between meanings and symbols is that denunciations of randomness in evolution are not exactly denunciations of randomness in evolution. More accurately, they are denunciations of anarchy in American society.

This is not to imply that creationists are necessarily intentionally disguising the moral meanings that give existential substance to their understandings of evolution and Secular Humanism. All of us use symbols—quotes, graphics, figures of speech, whatever—to communicate the moral meanings in our lives, and all of us sometimes have trouble finding the right symbols to express our meanings. The same is true, sometimes, of creationists trying to come to terms with the meanings of evolution and Secular Humanism, and trying to communicate those meanings.

In fact the creationists' problem of meanings and symbols for Secular Humanism is especially complicated, because the scientific issues, like randomness, causation, and determinism, have become deeply

entangled with the moral questions, e.g., order, depravity, or freedom of will. When science is fused with moral meaning in this way, it gives creationists great existential satisfaction, because the result for them is that science makes sense morally. The idea of evolution is situated within the (im)moral history of the idea of Secular Humanism, and it is also positioned within a grand but simple moral drama of good versus evil. Thus numerous problems and worries are united within one overall theory, which makes them seem more tractable. All this is possible because of the moral linkages that tie the specific cause of the creationists into the general cause of modern American fundamentalism.

Because there is so much moral and intellectual content to this body of thought, the concerns of creationists deserve to be understood and taken seriously, even by those who disagree with them, and even if many people habitually underestimate the substantive content of creationist thought. Such understanding is not possible without first realizing that Secular Humanism is the idea that organizes fundamentalist Christians' moral critique of the world around us. One must listen carefully to what is meant when people say that the idea of evolution comes from Secular Humanism.

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