

COV&R Proposal 2004  
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### **Eugenics, the Girardian Theory of Sacrifice and the New Darwinian Ethics**

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, some philosophers and biologists have begun to reassess the relevance of Darwinian thought for ethics in a way that mimics their 19<sup>th</sup> century ancestors. What they have proposed is a new naturalistic ethics based upon competition and natural selection. The pedigree for this kind of ethical thinking stretches back at least as far as John Hobbes and forms a line of descent including David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and Charles Darwin. Earlier theoreticians and ideologues on both the left and right—and as diverse as H.G. Wells, Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels, Adolf Hitler—all advocated programs of eugenics and justified them according to a utilitarian interpretation of Darwinian theory. In similar fashion, left and right wing thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century—thinkers such as Robert Nozick, Peter Singer, Lee Silver, *et al.*—and have begun to re-appropriate Darwinian theory as a justification for eugenics.

It is my purpose in this paper to argue that though most ethical systems recognize sacrifice as moral action, the *utilitarian* appropriation of Darwinian theory—especially inasmuch as it leads to a justification of the eugenics of the “winnowing of the human stock”—is analogous to the sacrificial scapegoating of innocents. After showing that the kind of sacrifice recognized with each ethical system is driven by a specific axiology (or theory of value), I will show why modern varieties of naturalism—and Darwinian naturalism, in particular—are especially inclined to lead to a moral justification of scapegoating. Next, I will show the meta-ethical problems connected with Neo-Darwinian naturalism and naturalism in general. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that Darwin’s thought is susceptible to another kind of interpretation, one that need not lead to the valorization of eugenics. In other words, Darwinian evolutionary theory may be read in ways that do not lead to sacrificial scapegoating.