

My Genes Made Me Do It: Biological Determinism

The notion that human behavior is shaped primarily by our hereditary predispositions has become a powerful force in Western thought in the past century. Many sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists today claim that behaviors, such as kindness, marital bonding, and self-sacrifice, but also marital infidelity, incest, infanticide, abortion, and even rape are programmed into our psyche by our evolutionary heritage. This reduces human agency and relativizes morality.

Richard Weikart is professor of modern European history at California State University, Stanislaus, and Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture. He has published six books, including most recently *The Death of Humanity: And the Case for Life* and *Hitler's Religion*. He has also published extensively on the history of evolutionary ethics, eugenics, social Darwinism, euthanasia, and scientific racism. He has been featured in several documentaries, including Ben Stein's *Expelled*, as well as on many radio programs. He recently produced a documentary to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation called *Exploring the Reformation and Revivals in Germany*, which is available on youtube.

- I. Victor Frankl: Holocaust as product of nihilistic philosophies

- II. Recent examples of biological determinism
 - A. Robert Wright and adultery
 - B. Steven Pinker and infanticide
 - C. Richard Dawkins

- III. Secularists (atheists and agnostics) see humans as cosmic accidents
 - A. Product of mindless evolution
 - B. Human behavior is determined, either by biology or environment

- IV. Biological determinism became influential during the Enlightenment
 - A. Rise of materialism
 - B. La Mettrie wrote book *Man the Machine* (1747)

- V. Became stronger force intellectually in late nineteenth century
 - A. Francis Galton and eugenics movement
 - B. Scientific racism

- VI. By early 20th century eugenics and scientific racism were powerful movements
 - A. Dominated biology, anthropology, and medical textbooks in Europe
 - B. Hitler embraced a radical version of biological determinism

- VII. Biological determinism declined in mid-20th century

- VIII. Reemerged in 1970s and thereafter
 - A. E. O. Wilson and sociobiology
 - B. Evolutionary psychology

- IX. Critique
 - A. Reduces human agency by denying free will
 - B. Relativizes morality, eliminating human rights

Suggested Readings:

Richard Weikart, *The Death of Humanity: And the Case for Life*. Washington, DC: Regnery Faith, 2016.

Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics and Racism in Germany*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Diane Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present*. Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995.

E. O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. Wilson is a secularist who founded sociobiology.

Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. Viking, 2002. Pinker is a secularist who embraces evolutionary psychology.