

PRESS RELEASE**Darwinian Conservatism**

by Larry Arnhart

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“Conservatives need Charles Darwin.” That’s the message of Larry Arnhart’s new book *Darwinian Conservatism*.

Ever since the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, political and religious conservatives have had an uneasy relationship with Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Many conservatives accept the Biblical doctrine that human beings were specially created by God in His image. And some conservatives believe that the living world shows evidence of being

the product of an “intelligent designer.” Many of these conservatives fear that the idea of humans evolving naturally from lower animals denies their moral dignity as special creatures of the Divine Intelligent Designer.

Across the United States, religious conservatives have argued that Biblical creationism or “intelligent design theory” should be taught in public school science classes as an alternative to Darwinian evolution. For many conservatives, this is one of the major battles in the culture war between moral traditionalists and atheistic materialists.

Going against this movement, Larry Arnhart aims to persuade conservatives that Darwin is their friend and not their enemy. The author is a professor of political science at Northern Illinois University and claims that a Darwinian science of human nature supports the moral, political, and religious ideas of conservatism. Darwinian biology confirms the conservatives’ realist view of human nature and denies the leftists’ utopian view of human nature as perfectible.

Arnhart sketches twenty natural desires that are innate in human beings as shaped by Darwinian evolution. And he shows how the conservative commitments to traditional morality, family values, private property, and limited government satisfy the evolved natural desires of human beings.

For example, he indicates how the social bonds of marriage and family life defended by conservatives satisfy the natural human desires for sexual mating, sexual identity, and parental care. By contrast, those on the left tend to see marriage and family life as artificial cultural constructions that can be changed, or even abolished, by social engineering directed to absolute sexual equality.

Arnhart has engaged in public debates with conservative proponents of “intelligent design theory” such as Michael Behe, William Dembski, and Jonathan Wells. In this book, he presents his arguments for why these conservatives are wrong to fear Darwinian biology and why conservatives should see Darwinian science as supporting their values. Darwinian evolution is open to a religious belief in God as the First Cause of the evolutionary laws of nature.

The author foresees that over the coming century modern biology will give human beings an ever deeper knowledge of the mechanisms of life and an ever wider power over living nature. But some conservatives fear that this powerful scientific knowledge is dangerous because it tempts human beings to “play God,” perhaps by using biotechnology to abolish human nature. The current debate over the morality of human embryonic stem-cell research shows this fear of modern science among conservatives.

Arnhart claims that a Darwinian view of human nature—including the natural moral desires—can provide moral guidance for biotechnology in a way that preserves the natural virtues of human life.

That’s why conservatives need Charles Darwin.

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