Ernst Haeckel’s *Alleged Tragic Sense of Life and Other Fantasies*: a Review of Robert J. Richards' biography of Haeckel -- The Tragic Sense of Life -- by Daniel Gasman.

Scholars who denigrate Haeckel compared to Darwin are
"miscreant historians." - Robert J. Richards

Peter D. Smith’s misguided review in the *London Times Literary Supplement* [TLS: 7/25/08, pp.12-13] of Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* [University of Chicago Press, 2008], is apparently the unwitting evaluation of a trusting author possessing only limited knowledge of the subject matter and a disturbing unawareness of the extensive body of recent writing and discussion about Haeckel. Notwithstanding Smith’s reverential evaluation, Richards’ biography is actually an elaborate distortion and at times even a fabrication, a work that relentlessly challenges the demands of accuracy in its portrayal of the life and thought of the biologist Ernst Haeckel and the general meaning of Haeckel’s evolutionary science in Nineteenth Century Germany. Richards manipulates his portrayal of Haeckel to such an extent that more often than not only a fictionalized figure emerges, unrecognizable from what is commonly known about Haeckel and his science and philosophy of Monism.

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Among his enthusiastic, but unfounded evaluations, Smith suggests that Richards has successfully severed the link between Haeckel and Nazism and has definitively ‘misplaced Gasman’s’ hypothesis of such a connection. But Smith’s naiveté and Richards’ claims in this regard carry no weight because they rest on untenable historical assumptions and imagined source material. Whatever Richards and Smith have declared about Haeckel and the significance of scattered Nazi opposition to him, the historical record, shows much to the contrary, a clear and unmistakable pattern of influence on Nazi ideology by Haeckel himself and the scientific Monism he created; nothing that Richards suggests in the course of his book comes close to altering this basic reality. Richards’ intellectual acumen is about as reliable as the historical insights of the anti-Haeckel Nazi officials he has serendipitously chanced upon and whose distorted understanding of Haeckel he has embraced with such deference.

For much of his academic career Richards has been on a self-declared mission impossible: to reconcile any perceived differences between Haeckel and Darwin and to establish that Darwin created his evolutionary theories from the same sources in German romanticism that determined

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2 Smith accepts what Richards argues about Haeckel and Nazism. When Richards points out, using faulty logic, that Haeckel and Albert Einstein’s political ideas are the same because the works of both were cast into the flames by the Nazis, Smith echoes the same illogical commentary. ‘Indeed, many contemporary historians – among them Stephen Jay Gould and Daniel Gasman – have regarded [Haeckel’s] influence as pernicious, and even accused him of furnishing the Nazis with racist theories, despite the fact that in the 1930s his books were banned along with those of Einstein. Richards examines these accusations in forensic detail and argues convincingly that they are misplaced.’ The only thing that Haeckel and Einstein have in common is that their books were banned by the Nazis; why this also means that they shared a common Weltanschauung tells us more about the limitations of Richards and Smith’s analytical capabilities than about the history of National Socialism.
Haeckel’s evolutionary science. Richards seems to have been motivated by the conviction that if Haeckel and Darwin can be shown to be theoretically indistinguishable then there is no foundation for assigning Haeckel a role as a progenitor of National Socialism: if Darwin was not a co-founder of National Socialism, then Haeckel, as the mirror image of Darwin, cannot also be burdened with such a grievous liability; Richards insisting over and over again that ‘[Haeckel’s] theoretical convictions hardly differed from those of Darwin’ and that German Darwinismus was interchangeable with the familiar patterns of English science.3

As such, over the years, and based upon questionable logic and history, Richards’ problematic analyses have piled up one factual and conceptual difficulty over another and this is clearly seen again when one disentangles the suppositions of the major claims running throughout his current biography of Haeckel, where Richards seems unable to distinguish between legitimate historical and scientific analysis and uncritical hero worship.4

**Haeckel did not have a Tragic Sense of Life.**

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3 ‘Darwin [can] be accounted a Haeckelian;’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 72. Or as Richards writes further on: ‘The history I have sketched … indicates that Haeckel not only drew on many of the same sources that formed Darwin’s own conceptions, but more importantly, that beneath the distinctively Germanic outer layers, the core of his evolutionary morphology was the same as the Englishman’s;’ 119, n.15.

4 As we will attempt to demonstrate the opinion of Peter Smith that Richards’ *Tragic Sense of Life* is an immensely impressive work of biography and intellectual history … is seriously off the mark. Smith, *Review*, 13.
Richards launches his book on a rather inauspicious note. He proposes as his main theme that Haeckel was guided by a tragic sense of life, bearing great similarities to the religious philosophy expounded by the famous Spanish writer, Miguel de Unamuno: ‘Unamuno offers a clue, I believe, for the solution of the puzzle of Haeckel….’\(^5\) ‘Unamuno,’ Richards learnedly explains, ‘explored what he took to be the soul-splitting experience of Western intellectuals, their tragic sense of life. He depicted the struggles of a skeptical reason, especially in philosophy and science, as courageously insisting that human striving is mortal, that its efforts end in the grave; yet such reasoning, cannot, he thought, overcome the vital desire for life, for transcendence,’ and that reason and life, therefore, are fundamentally at odds with each other; Richards thus insisting that his ‘overarching argument will be that Haeckel’s science and his legacy for modern evolutionary theory display the features they do because of his tragic sense of life.’\(^6\)

The trouble with this erudite exegesis – and Richards’ obvious failure to define exactly what transcendence might have actually signified for both writers – is the fact that Unamuno for the most part conceived his book as an attack on the scientific Monism of Haeckel, which he correctly understood to be the implacable enemy of Christian transcendence. In Unamuno’s *Tragic Sense of Life* – and this is not mentioned by Richards –

\(^5\) Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 10, n.31.
\(^6\) Ibid, 16.
Unamuno denounced Haeckel\textsuperscript{7} in the strongest language possible, and he decried Haeckel’s Monism as a faulty, unsatisfying, and materialistic philosophy because it denied the immortality of the soul: ‘Every monist system will always seem materialist,’ hence deficient, Unamuno declared. Rather, ‘only dualist systems preserve the immortality of the soul, only those systems which teach that human consciousness is something substantially distinct and different from other manifestations of phenomena.’\textsuperscript{8} Therefore, ‘monist tricks are of no use to us. We want the substance, not the shadow of eternity!’\textsuperscript{9} It is anybody’s guess how this explanation by Unamuno of the dualistic meaning of transcendence, his anguished evocation of the tragic sense of life, and his unconditional rejection of scientific Monism and pantheism, can be reconciled with Richards’ flights of imagination about Haeckel’s philosophical links to Unamuno as well as Richards’ invalid account of Haeckel’s supposed quest for transcendence that runs parallel to the religious devotion of the Spanish philosopher.

The truth of the matter is that Richards seems uncomprehending of the central ideas contained in Unamuno’s remarkable philosophical essay. Impressed by the cultural impact of the Darwinian revolution and modern science in general Unamuno was concerned about the loss of meaning in

\textsuperscript{7} Unamuno was hardly complimentary towards Haeckel: ‘There is no point in talking of the indecencies of Haeckel, that master of incomprehension;’ ‘[Haeckel] harbor[s] the pretension of disdaining theology’ and ‘has succeeded [only] in dissipating the enigmas of nature.’ Unamuno, \textit{Tragic sense of Life}, Princeton: PUP, 1972, 106, 258.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 89-90

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 53.
life and the undermining of the traditional religious source of faith and ethics brought on by the triumph of Positivism in the nineteenth century. As a religious thinker, Unamuno suggested that ultimately, human life could only be sustained by irrational Christian faith. For Unamuno it was the tragedy occasioned by the contradiction between the impersonal findings of science and its candid recognition and acceptance of death, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the human need for concrete immortality, and for a transcendent humanistic faith and adherence to ethical values that of necessity had to be sustained devoid of scientific and rational authority; an unresolved dilemma that fuels the tragic sense of life confronting modern man as Unamuno describes it.

But for Haeckel, despite what Richards importunes, no such contradictory tragedy exists for modern man. Haeckel embraced death and the meaninglessness of human existence and rejected any belief in transcendent faith. Death in the Christian sense that Unamuno believed in was not to be defeated by spiritual transcendence, but was rather to be embraced as the evolutionary source of new life. Awareness of Death for Haeckel was not a tragedy, but only a necessary part of the struggle for existence and evolution, that death begets life. Despite what Richards contends, therefore, Haeckel’s position on transcendence, his rejection of all its forms, was the remote antithesis of what Unamuno believed and validated in his classic text.
Furthermore, Haeckel, despite what Richards urges, did not believe, with Unamuno, that reason is the enemy of life nor could Haeckel have accepted Christian-like transcendence since his Monism was totally committed to a philosophy of immanence. Such contradictions inevitably weigh heavily on the truth and present insurmountable intellectual problems for the reader, but Richards is so enamored of his own words, that it does not appear to matter to him that the analysis he offers bears no relation to the Monism of Haeckel nor do they betray an understanding of the thought of Unamuno.10

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that a tragic sense of life implies some aspect of non-fulfillment; that, for example, the attainment of absolute knowledge is forever limited and therefore human beings can never realize certainty in life, especially over questions of morality and the tragedy of human mortality. In other words, Monism is the opposite of a tragic sense of life, because Monism implies total fulfillment based on the absolute reconciliation of opposites. For Haeckel, therefore, the utopian ideal of total fulfillment was possible and he would have rejected as foreign, Unamuno’s concerns. In Haeckel’s *magnum opus, The Riddle of the Universe* [1899] the theme clearly advanced was that knowledge was

10 For example, Richards incorrectly transforms Unamuno into a pantheist in order to show his affinity with Haeckel: ‘Unamuno argued that the desire for immortality, the longing to unite with eternal, divine nature….’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 453. But Richards’ explanation is absolutely untenable and demonstrates how the primary theory of his book is built on a foundation of sand. Immortality for Unamuno was conceived much more in a Catholic sense, meaning a hoped for immortality of the concrete, physical person. As Unamuno wrote in opposition to Monism: ‘No, I do not long to be submerged in the great All, in infinite and eternal Matter or Energy, or in God. I long to possess God, not to be possessed by Him, to become myself God without ceasing to be the I who now speaks to you.’ Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 52-53.
not limited. On the contrary, for Haeckel, all the riddles of the universe had been solved or were on their way to being resolved. Nothing lay beyond the ability of science to comprehend the complete structure of the cosmos. Thus, the aspect of tragedy that Richards assumes in Haeckel is simply not there and once again one is confronted with another of Richards’ counterfeit ideas as applied to Haeckel. His description of what Haeckel advocated or believed might sound profound or innovative, but once considered more carefully is soon revealed to be intellectually hollow.

The tragic loss of Haeckel’s first wife does not suggest transcendence for Haeckel.

In Richards’ analysis style endlessly overwhelms substance and the thinking of Haeckel is continually masked in order to obscure its intrinsically anti-humanistic content. Richards wishes to show that throughout most of his adult life, Haeckel became a victim of tragic personal circumstances and this, rather than straightforward secular monist ideology, accounts for the deterministic and cruel dimension of his evolutionary doctrine. It was, Richards argues, the tragic loss of Haeckel’s first wife, Anna Sethe, in 1864, occurring after a very brief and happy marriage, that accounts, on the one hand, for Haeckel’s embrace of transcendence, but, contradictorily on the other hand, for the opposing
idiosyncratic nature of his aggressively dogmatic evolutionary thought.\textsuperscript{11} ‘Ernst Haeckel,’ Richards writes, ‘experienced the passion for transcendence through a love that lifted him to ecstasy and then crushed him in despair. This experience invaded his insistently rational attitudes, even transforming his science into a means for escaping the grasping hand of mortality,’ that ‘Anna would not die forever.’\textsuperscript{12} Haeckel’s thought, according to Richards, is dialectical, transcendentally optimistic on the one hand, yet at the same time morbidly pessimistic on the other hand; a tragic personal reality that embittered Haeckel and determined the strident nature of his evolutionary Monism, generating a Weltanschauung that emphasized materialism, atheism, and dogmatic and determined opposition to Christianity – attitudes that Richards views only through a glass darkly and seems not to realize how they are totally at variance with transcendence, representing, in fact, and despite any dialectical panaceas, an irreconcilable opposite.

Theorizing of this kind might make for good soap opera, but programmatically considered seems hardly able to reflect the reality of Haeckel’s thought. Despite what Richards argues, therefore, it is beyond the realm of possibility that Haeckel could at one and the same time have plumbed the depths of nature for escape into the realm of transcendence – this would have violated his abhorrence of dualistic religion and his commitment to philosophical and scientific immanence – and then, in a

\textsuperscript{11} Peter Smith accepts uncritically Richards’ idea that the death of Anna Sethe ‘is the key to understanding this militant Darwinist.’ Smith, 13.
\textsuperscript{12} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 11, 128.
totally opposing way have proceeded to embrace a crude materialism that was at war with a supposed faith in transcendence.

In this theoretical construction at odds with itself, Richards offers no explanation and no proofs for his hypothesis apart from a number of appeals to the reader to accept on faith the validity of his speculations. However, when Richards discusses the impact of the death of Haeckel’s wife on his thinking, he quotes from a letter Haeckel addressed to his parents where, not surprisingly, he rejects the idea of man’s transcendence. ‘In a biographical note composed a decade later, Richards observes, Haeckel confirmed that the death of his wife “destroyed with one blow all the remains of my earlier dualistic worldview.”’

Richards’ speculations notwithstanding, therefore, Haeckel’s version of Darwinism and Monism were the product of the intellectual currents prominent in Germany at the time and almost certainly had nothing at all to do with the tragic and sudden passing of his wife in 1864. Haeckel was reflecting, among other influences, the prevailing anti-Christianity of the left Hegelians who were all the rage at the time when Haeckel was a young university student. And in this regard, one might recall the intellectual predispositions of Karl Marx, Haeckel’s contemporary, who was also a materialist and very antagonistic to revealed religion, but did not suffer the same kind of personal loss that occurred in Haeckel’s life.

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Haeckel’s monist ideology, in other words, has roots apart from his own personal tragedy.\textsuperscript{14}

**Haeckel’s science and general view of the world is not the same as Darwin.**

A critical theme in Richards’ book emphasizes that the distinctions that are conventionally drawn between the science and biology of Darwin and Haeckel are misplaced and that the two scientists are really interchangeable intellectual figures. Richards believes that when correctly analyzed, Darwin is actually a Haeckelian and, as has been briefly noted, that his biology draws upon the same sources and closely resembles the science of Haeckel.\textsuperscript{15} However, even if one were to admit that there were some common romantic sources in the scientific theories of Darwin [and this is probably not the case], there remain vast theoretical, cultural, and political differences between the two men and Richards’ suppositions appear to be hypotheses unsupported by the available evidence.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} On the early formative periods of Haeckel’s intellectual and scientific development, see the remarkable analysis of Mario A. Di Gregorio, *From Here to Eternity: Ernst Haeckel and Scientific Faith*, Tübingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005; passim.

\textsuperscript{15} Richards believes that Darwin’s science would have supported the Recapitulation Hypothesis of Haeckel, but this is questioned by Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: the History of an Idea*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 183.

\textsuperscript{16} Richards is aware of the general consensus that Haeckel had distorted Darwin’s science beyond all recognition: ‘Most historians writing during the last thirty years have argued that either Haeckel ignored the most characteristically Darwinian of these areas of concern or that he so grossly distorted them as to produce a monstrous version of the Englishman’s scheme.’ Nothing that Richards advances succeeds in undoing this generally negative consensus about the substance of Haeckel’s scientific work. Richards is not dissuaded in order to continue to maintain that Haeckel and Darwin are the same scientifically. ‘While Haeckel certainly had a distinctive way of expressing ideas, I
As has been frequently observed, Haeckel’s biology assumed the reality of determining forces within nature, a position remote from Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that Darwin did not offer a comprehensive philosophy of life, as Haeckel did. As early as the writing of the *Generelle Morphologie* in 1866, Haeckel presented his evolutionary theory combined with his philosophy of Monism, suggesting that evolution was not just a theory about the development of life and the creation of new species, but a total explanation of the *meaning* of life. This was very different from Darwin who had in the *Origin of Species* simply presented an innovative theory, Natural Selection, to explain evolution. Monism dominated Haeckel’s science and philosophy for the rest of his life, but disturbingly, Richards takes great pains to gloss over this fact as much as possible, generally and uncritically integrating Haeckel’s religious ideas into his science. This allows Richards to portray Haeckel as virtually the same as Darwin and therefore not culpable of having developed a mystical philosophy that would dominate not only his science, but also his Germanic nationalism and proto-Fascism.

In all other major areas as well, a vast intellectual chasm separates the two men. Darwin did not suggest that spontaneous generation had been believed they nonetheless fell essentially within the narrower confines of Darwin’s own conception.’ See Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 135.


18 It is noteworthy that Richards devotes only a limited amount of space in a book of more than 500 pages to a critical analysis of the philosophical content of Haeckel’s Monism and its significance for his science and political outlook. Richards’ evaluation of Haeckel’s Monism hovers between exceptional naiveté and great distortion.
empirically verified, like Haeckel did. Darwin did not proselytize on behalf of the establishment of an evolutionary religion that should replace Christianity, nor did Darwin believe in the existence of a world soul or in pan-psychism or demonstrate a predilection for magic or theosophy, as did Haeckel. Darwin did not offer a comprehensive plan of racial eugenics for the regeneration of society, nor was Darwin an anti-Semite, believing that the Biblical tradition was at the root of the weakness of European civilization; nor was Darwin an opponent of liberalism. Haeckel was absolutely insistent in his support of the existence of the Aryan race and he explicitly lent his scientific authority to the racial-historical theories of Count Gobineau, hardly a view of the world that Darwin would have subscribed to. Darwin was an abolitionist, but Haeckel believed in the intrinsic inferiority of the African peoples and used highly charged derogatory racial-infused language about Africans that would have been abhorrent to Darwin. The obvious reality is that Haeckel’s Darwinism represents an intellectual and ideological universe totally apart from that

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19 This is understood by Richards but he uses a sleight of logic to bring Darwin close to Haeckel: ‘Haeckel believed a stem-tree had to have its roots planted firmly in the ground. In specifying what this might mean, he advanced a proposition of a kind that Darwin only contemplated but did not publicly express: namely, that the most primitive organisms, which Haeckel named “monera,” had to have arisen spontaneously from chemical processes of a distinctive kind.’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 137. In other words, Richards suggests without any foundation, that Darwin held ideas close to Haeckel’s idea of spontaneous generation which in fact is not the case. Darwin in fact, tried to avoid the question of Spontaneous Generation as much as possible, fearing the consequences of a religious reaction to such ideas. On this point see, Bowler, *Evolution: the History of an Idea*, 183.

of Charles Darwin. Any attempt on the part of Richards to draw parallels between English and German Darwinism represents a distortion that journeys way beyond the parameters of acceptable historical evidence and analysis.

One of the pet theories of Richards asserts that Darwin subscribed to a morphological conception of the organic world in the same way as Haeckel and that Darwin accepted the formative influence of basic archetypal organic forms of life that determine the course of evolution. According to Richards, this idealistic sense of the world that has its origins in Goethe and Humboldt influenced Darwin just as much as it did Haeckel. ‘Humboldt’s theories lead, as well, back to Goethe, without whom Haeckel’s science is unimaginable,’ and ‘nature itself in Goethe’s view was a creative font that showered diversity, though along unified trajectories. This fundamental view would … underlay all of Haeckel’s work in science.’ 21 But notably, ‘Darwin himself,’ Richards observes, ‘conducted just this kind of science – a nature philosophy deserving of the name.’ Darwin was, therefore, according to Richards, exactly like Haeckel, a ‘Naturphilosoph.’ 22

In stirring language, Richards glorifies the romantic strain in both Haeckel and Darwin, as if to say that this mode of thought was scientifically and philosophically fruitful. But, as is generally known and conceded, Haeckel’s science and biology ultimately collapsed by the end

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21 Richards, Tragic Sense of Life, 31, 36.
22 Ibid, 120.
of the nineteenth century, that the real weaknesses of Haeckel’s science resided in the fact that he borrowed too heavily from the tradition of German romanticism. In emphasizing this interpretation of nineteenth century evolutionary history, Richards, therefore, presents historians of science with a serious analytical conundrum: if Haeckel’s science was in fact shaped by romanticism and ultimately failed as a consequence, what is the point of idolizing such a methodological approach to investigating the structure of the organic world? And was it, in the end, not the resemblance of the two men, but rather Haeckel’s over reliance on romanticism that clearly distinguished his science from the non-romantic science of Darwin? Richards is so anxious to play the romantic card because of its alluring fusion of poetry and mysticism that he is unwilling to contemplate the damaging historical implications of what he is arguing!

**Richards distorts the Haeckel-Virchow Controversy**

Haeckel’s idea of presenting evolution as a total explanation of the world came into full view in the Haeckel-Virchow Controversy of 1877-1878. Richards asserts that the conflict between the two scientists was waged
over the validity of the Darwinian theory of evolution. But Richards’ seemingly detailed account of the controversy is misleading, because he calibrates his analysis to convince the reader that the substance of the dispute between the two men over evolutionary theory is comprehensively and accurately described in the way that Richards presents it. In reality, like many other parts of Richards’ book, the selection of the material is heavily weighted in order to subvert accuracy.

To be sure, Virchow was far from enthusiastic about Darwinian evolution but he was willing to entertain it as a hypothesis. The issues that he raised in the conflict with Haeckel were not totally over evolutionary theory per se, but the desire on Haeckel’s part to make of evolutionary theory a universal religion and the basis for the state’s educational curriculum, and this forcefully stated desire on the part of Haeckel, Virchow rejected outright. Contrary to Haeckel’s assertions in his rejoinder to Virchow and in Richards’ misleading account of this episode, Virchow made it clear that he was not unalterably opposed to Darwin or to the theory of Natural Selection, but he did take serious exception to Haeckel’s attempt to make of evolution an all-embracing cosmology. He understood that Haeckel’s evolutionary theories were poetic and religious fantasies rather than valid scientific hypotheses and therefore he attacked Haeckel publicly and unflinchingly. Virchow denied that spontaneous generation, pan-psychism, and Haeckel’s other mystical-religious theories were established scientific truths. Above all, Virchow questioned
Haeckel’s desire to turn evolutionary Monist religion into the ideological and ethical basis of the State and the foundation of all education. He sensed the danger: ‘Every attempt to transform our problems into doctrines, to introduce our hypotheses as the basis of instruction – especially in the attempt to dispossess the Church, and to supplant its dogmas forthwith by a religion of evolution – be assured … every such attempt will make a shipwreck, and in its wreck will also bring with it the greatest perils for the whole position of science.’

But how does Richards describe the controversy? He proceeds only with an eye to obscuring the content of Haeckel’s evolutionary Monism. By underplaying, or indeed, leaving out a vital part the controversy, Richards again seriously compromises his material. For Richards the onus is all on Virchow’s misconduct, not on the highly problematic content of Haeckel’s ideas. Haeckel’s belief in spontaneous generation is mentioned, but not Haeckel’s insistence on teaching evolution as a religion and as being employed as an ideological-ethical underpinning for the German state way beyond the idea of Natural Selection itself. Richards misleadingly writes: ‘In 1877, in the wake of Haeckel’s urging that modern science, especially evolutionary theory, be introduced into the lower school curriculum, Virchow protested. He admonished his colleagues not to press for evolutionary theory to be taught in the German

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schools, since, as he argued, it lacked scientific evidence, was an affront to religion, and smoothed the way to socialism.  

But this interpretation of the controversy is erroneous and self-serving, because Richards seldom gives prominence to the fact that there is such a retrogressive, anti-modern mystical-religious content to Haeckel’s ideas, and he struggles to downplay its significance whenever he can.

**Haeckel was a dedicated anti-Semite.**

As we have seen in our previous ‘Rejoinders’ Richards is able to arrive at his exoneration of ‘Haeckel’s alleged anti-Semitism’ by an inexcusable manipulation of evidence, including indiscriminate omission of incriminating material and by offering what can only be described as fantastical interpretations of passages from Haeckel’s writings dealing with the Jews. The misrepresentation by Richards of what Haeckel actually said about the Jews is so odd and so obviously torn out of context and absolutely meaningless that one is reminded of a madcap moment in the film comedy, ‘A Fish Called Wanda’ [if memory serves me correctly] where the ‘London Underground’ is referenced and then understood as referring to a clandestine political or revolutionary organization. Such is the similar disposition of the off the wall content of Richards’ historical

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analysis of Haeckel’s anti-Semitism where words undergo a *reductio ad absurdum.*

Richards repeats the litany that Haeckel has been falsely accused of hostility to the Jews – ‘the tendentious charge of anti-Semitism by Gasman…,’ and Richards then goes on to write: ‘On its face, the indictment seems unlikely, since the most rabid anti-Semites during Haeckel’s time were conservative Christians, such as the Berlin court preacher Adolf Stöcker (1835-1909). It is unlikely that Haeckel would be allied with such Christian apologists, and he loathed Stöcker in particular.’

But this claim which does make historical sense, at the same time, demonstrates a disturbing lack of knowledge about German history and the history of modern anti-Semitism, because it leaves out the emerging school of ‘scientific’ anti-Semitism which Haeckel belonged to. In actuality, no one has made such an implausible connection between Haeckel and Stöcker other than Richards himself in his article on Haeckel’s anti-Semitism that we have criticized in our earlier rejoinders.

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25 Based on literally just a few words of praise in support of some prominent German-Jewish personalities, Richards constructs a whole theory of Haeckel’s philo-Semitism and broadcasts it as an established fact in prominent books on the current state of Evolution. See for example, Robert J. Richards, ‘Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919),’ in Michael Ruse (ed.), *Evolution: the First Four Billion Years,* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2009, 626: ‘[Gasman] ignored Haeckel’s philo-Semitism, an attitude quite unusual for the period.’ Richards has also been repeating this misrepresentation in a number of entries on the Internet, claiming quite incorrectly that Haeckel’s anti-Semitism is a ‘myth.’

26 Flattered as I am, Richards offers no citation to indicate that the change apparently stems from my criticism. There are a number of other instances where Richards appropriates my criticisms, but never cites the source of the corrections. My rejoinders to him are neither mentioned here nor in his bibliography. All this reflects a pattern of professional lapses on the part of Richards, other instances of which I noted in my ‘Second Rejoinder.’
Stemming apparently from my objections to the historically incompetent connection that was made between Haeckel and Stöcker, Richards, in his biography, then altered the position he took in his article where he argued just the opposite position, that if Haeckel had been an anti-Semite he would have allied himself with Adolf Stöcker. Richards now recognizes that Haeckel could not have joined with Stöcker and plays the role of the knowledgeable commentator on the intricacies of German history, but, of course, not enlightening his readers as to why the shift in interpretation was made in the first place.

Even with all the editing, however, Richards continues to be uninformed about the birth and development of ‘scientific’ anti-Semitism concerning which Haeckel was one of the founding fathers and a guiding light. He does not understand that so-called ‘scientific’ anti-Semitism was much more lethal and indicative of National Socialist ideology than the non-racial religious antagonism against the Jews represented by Stöcker. In my book, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, [1998, 2008] the discussion of the Monist writings of the important French proto-Nazi authors Jules Soury and Georges Vacher de Lapouge – both translators into French of some of Haeckel’s major writings and close disciples of Haeckel – make clear that the ideological foundations of National Socialist anti-Semitism can be directly traced back to the specific influence of Haeckel. Of course, Richards does not mention any of this material, because he is determined to sanitize his book and omit any
historical sources that might undermine his fallacious arguments that seek to deny Haeckel’s antagonism towards the Jews and connections with National Socialist ideology in general.

The historical evidence, Richards notwithstanding, shows that Haeckel was at the center of the creation of Nazi like anti-Semitism, and this aspect of emerging nineteenth century hostility to the Jews is *terra incognita* as far as Richards is concerned. In his remarks to Hermann Bahr, Haeckel declared the ‘Jewish Problem’ to be a ‘racial question,’ extolled anti-Semitism as a politically creative force, justified its historical role and held the Jews alone responsible for its appearance, and he demanded that the Jews give up their religious identity and disappear from German life as a separate community – hardly examples of statements Richards believes he has found that prove Haeckel’s philo-Semitism.

Richards then complains that ‘Gasman’s charge of anti-Semitism against Haeckel has been uncritically adopted by many authors. I provide a large list of them in chapter II.’ Why is Richards so certain that these authors have adopted ‘Gasman’s assertions ‘uncritically?’ Richards certainly cannot provide any proof that the material advanced by me is mistaken; quite the contrary. Disturbing also is the threatening tone of

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27 See Rejoinder Three for a discussion of the Bahr Interview with Haeckel about the Jews.
28 Richards informs us that ‘there is simply no reason to believe Haeckel to be racially anti-Semitic, as several historians have assumed.’ But as has been indicated a number of times, in this same interview with Bahr Haeckel declared in non-ambiguous words that the Jewish problem was in fact a ‘racial question.’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 504 n.15.
29 Ibid, 269.
Richards’ charge that historians and others who agree with me or cite my works are somehow guilty of serious scholarly infractions.

Along these lines of thought Richards is unrelenting and goes on to mock my summary of the importance of Haeckel’s influence over the rise not only of German National Socialism, but also the rise of Fascism in general. For Richards these assertions are based on a ‘paucity of evidence….’ Of course, if Richards would refrain from omitting the abundant evidence that incriminates Haeckel in the rise of National Socialism and Fascism he would have at his disposal the proofs he claims to be lacking.

On a number of separate occasions I have urged Richards to take into consideration the entire text of the Hermann Bahr Interview with Haeckel on his attitude towards the Jews, but to no avail; he continues to justify using only a tiny portion of the Interview for his analysis and taking the passages selected out of context, in this way continuing to misrepresent Haeckel’s position about the Jews. In a letter written to the London Times Literary Supplement [9/10/08] I have again pointed this out and it is worthwhile analyzing Richards’ response to me, published a few weeks later on. [9/26/08]

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30 Ibid, 270.
31 See Second Rejoinder to Richards.
32 It should be pointed out that the TLS reviewer of Richards, Peter D. Smith, did not respond to my letter, leaving the reply to Richards. The TLS turned down an offer of an essay to respond more fully to the charges raised against me in Richard’s book, allowing only for the publication of a letter.
In his reply Richards does not properly respond to the charges, but he does reveal how adept he is at dissimulation. Instead of attempting to account for the omitted passages that explicitly demonstrate a commitment to anti-Semitism on the part of Haeckel, Richards continues to portray his truncated version of the Interview as fully indicative of Haeckel’s position on the Jews, and it is obvious that Richards is content to block any inquiry and to remain defensively ensconced in the fictional universe that he has concocted proclaiming Haeckel’s philo-Semitism.33

Thus, while insisting that he is pursuing a nuanced and comprehensive examination of the supposed complexities governing the relationship between Haeckel and the Jews, Richards stonewalls, and doggedly fails to acknowledge the obvious.34 To be sure, at the outset of the Interview, Haeckel made a few positive statements about some prominent and highly assimilated German Jews – along the lines of ‘some of my best friends are Jews’ – but the bulk of the Interview deteriorated into an anti-Semitic diatribe that plainly mocks Richards’ portrayal of what Haeckel actually said.35 It is the height of irresponsibility on the part of Richards to take a few passing comments by Haeckel that are complimentary to a tiny

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33 In fact, Richards registers surprise that I have raised any questions about his account of the Bahr Interview.
34 Towards the end of his book, in the section on historiography and Haeckel, Richards discusses how historians might select quotations that evaluate Haeckel in the context of his times. Richards describes the process as ‘covert’ on the part of the historian and ‘in the light of his or her standards of behavior.’ One can only wonder what Richards’ ‘covert standards’ are in regard to Haeckel. Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 510.
35 Richards claims, using what can only be described as voodoo calculus, that it is actually me who omits revealing sections of the Bahr interview suggesting that Haeckel thought negatively of eastern Jewry only in behavioral and not racial terms. As we have demonstrated, Haeckel was obviously masking his true feelings which were obviously racial. This issue is only settled by reading the entire Interview which has been translated and posted as the third rejoinder. Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 274.
number of highly assimilated Jewish individuals – to take his remarks out of context – and then to conclude that this represents Haeckel’s general position. This is a blatant misrepresentation of the content of the Bahr Interview and needless to add, such an approach is not acceptable for any legitimate historical evaluation of Haeckel and the Jews.

It should be added that in general when criticized about the accuracy and content of his writing, Richards’ responses invariably turn chameleon like. In his letter to the TLS he admits that Haeckel held to racial ideas, but in his biography and against the clearest of evidence, he insists that Haeckel did not define the ‘Jewish problem’ in racial terms36 and adds that ‘[Haeckel’s] tangential reservations [about the Eastern European Jews] were not racial or biological, certainly not of the sort favored by the Nazis, but behavioral and attitudinal, more in keeping with the distaste of the German mandarins for the lower classes of any sort.’37

Haeckel’s standard anti-Semitic subterfuges, however, did not mislead Haeckel’s Jewish contemporaries. If Richards’ analysis is correct that Haeckel was a philo-Semite, then the Jews would have embraced Haeckel as a dear friend. But at least one major German-Jewish newspaper immediately understood the anti-Semitic implications of Haeckel’s duplicitous comments and openly denounced them. The Israelit, the major newspaper in Germany for observant Jews [Frankfurt, 1860-1938]

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36 As has been noted in Rejoinder 3, Haeckel remarked to Bahr that the Jewish problem was a ‘racial question.’ This does not prevent Richards, as has been noted, from stating explicitly in a number of places that Haeckel did not consider the Jewish question a problem of race.
37 Richards, Tragic Sense of Life, 275.
took exception to Haeckel’s portrayal of Eastern European Jewry as a ‘pitiable community’ and pointed out that Haeckel’s insistence that his comments about the Jews were about ‘behavioral and attitudinal’ practices and not racially motivated, were not to be believed and that the Jewish community had to guard itself against the dangerous anti-Semitic attacks of Haeckel especially because they were being advanced by a highly prominent and educated German scientific personality.38

Lastly, one should note that Richards in the TLS provides assurances that he is not attacking my facts, even though his book, quite to the contrary, devotes enormous amounts of space to doing just that: depending on circumstances, therefore, Richards constantly gauges his audience and then shifts his arguments to appease evolving objections to his writing.

**Richards’ ‘Missing Links’**

In his biography Richards has apparently taken the idea of ‘missing links’ to heart and casts into a black hole the voluminous material that disclose incontrovertible connections between Haeckel and Nazism. The lacunae in the sources cited by Richards are enormous and highlight how empty Richards’ allegation is that only a ‘paucity’ of proofs for Haeckel’s link to National Socialism can be found. Richards cannot make such assertions and then go on to omit vast swathes of material that illustrate a

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38 Based on these comments in the Israelit, summarized by Heinz Brücher, Haeckel’s Nazi biographer took pleasure in reporting that the Jewish community experienced ‘terrifying apprehension’ as a consequence of Haeckel’s remarks in the Bahr Interview. See Heinz Brücher, *Ernst Haeckels Bluts-und Geisteserbe*, Munich: J.F. Lehmann, 1936, 118.
very different reality. This lack of citations of relevant material only demonstrates the a priori spirit of Richards’ writing: he knows the truth about Haeckel before even investigating the source material.

Consider, therefore, some of the glaring lapses apparent in Richards’ bibliography: literally not one of the German evolutionary Monist journals is mentioned that frequently gave early expression to Nazi-like ideas framed in a Haeckelian Monist context. This material is indispensable for an understanding of the birth of National Socialist ideology as well as for general insights into the intellectual history of Haeckel’s philosophy and science; but Richards turns a blind eye to such material.

For example, the standard German evolutionary journal *Kosmos*, a major source for Haeckel’s ideas, is not mentioned, a publication appearing over many decades. Nor are there any references to the official journals of the Monist League, *Der Monismus* [1906-1912] and *Das monistische Jahrhundert* [1912-1915]. Missing also are a whole host of journals that were heavily involved with Monism and that also contained close links with the Völkisch and Free-Thought Movements: *Das freie Wort*, *Neue Weltanschauung*, *Dokumente des Fortschritts*, and the *Zeitschrift für den Aufbau der Entwicklungslehre*; and this is only a partial listing of such journals in Germany alone.

References to evolutionary and Monist journals in other countries are also missing, especially Italian and French publications that Haeckel directly influenced and also in some instances becoming a prominent
member of their editorial boards: noteworthy especially the Rivista di filosofia scientifica in Italy, edited by the prominent Italian Monists and proto-fascists, Enrico Morselli, Giuseppe Sergi, and Roberto Ardigò; or the Haeckelian inspired Rivista di sociologia. In these journals the writings of Haeckel and his followers assumed a distinct proto-Fascist content, but they are publications not cited by Richards.

Absent also for the most part are any works that deal with the history of National Socialism in Germany, the history of anti-Semitism, the history of the Völkisch movement, and the history of racial eugenics. Only a handful of standard works in these areas make it onto Richards’ list of noteworthy titles and they play no role in Richards’ general analysis of Haeckel. No books by George Mosse appear, even though they are basic for an understanding of the origins of National Socialism, and many more examples of such missing literature can be given; for example, the important works of Peter Weingart or Michael Burleigh on the history of racial eugenics. Since Richards is so concerned about the history of anti-Semitism one would suppose that references to the relevant literature would be forthcoming; for example, the path breaking publications of Leon Poliakov.39 If relevant material about the connection between Haeckel and Fascism is in short supply as Richards laments, the fault lies

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39 See, for example, the important book by Leon Poliakov, The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe, New York: Basic Books, 1971, which details the role of Haeckel, and others, in fostering racial eugenics and Aryan supremacy. Poliakov’s book shows how the Aryan myth went way beyond the typical racism of the nineteenth century that Richards ascribes to Haeckel in his attempt to clear him of any racial-ideological links to National Socialism.
completely with Richards’ failure to make use of books and other material that is readily available.

A photograph in Richards’ book\textsuperscript{40} documents a group of leaders of the German Monist League that includes Johannes Unold, a prominent Monist leader who served for a time as a vice-president of the organization. His many publications on history and politics written early in the twentieth century are clearly National Socialist in content, but not one of his publications make an appearance in Richards’ bibliography.

An ever present and highly disturbing characteristic of Richards’ book lies in his attempt to dismiss the implications of Haeckel’s role in the birth and evolution of racial eugenics. Richards dismisses, against overwhelming historical evidence to the contrary, any connection between Haeckel’s eugenics and the Nazis. ‘Some historians point to Haeckel’s eugenic ideas as clearing the way for the moral horrors of the Nazis.’ Richards rejects this accusation claiming that ‘one might have a hard time distinguishing between our contemporary tolerance for therapeutic abortion and [Haeckel’s] own more primitive solution to the problems of debilitating and degrading chronic disease,’\textsuperscript{41} a comparison that defies logic and history because one would not have a hard time making such distinctions. He adds that anyway Haeckel would not have advocated the application of his racial-eugenic ideas, but this also flies in the face of all available evidence, especially given the major efforts of the German

\textsuperscript{40} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 373.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 231-232.
Monist League to suggest eugenic policies for the German state.\textsuperscript{42} This attempt on the part of Richards to dismiss Haeckel’s long term significance for the formation of Nazi eugenic policies is an especially reprehensible characteristic of his study.

Missing also are references to the extensive literature dealing with broader aspects of European culture that show the intellectual influence of Haeckel; literally no works are cited about culture and science in Italy and France where the influence of Haeckel ran deep. In other words, in addition to all its other limitations Richards’ book does not provide the reader with a cultural foundation for evaluating the role that Haeckel played in intellectual history, thus undercutting the basis for the sweeping [and incorrect] revisionist evaluations of Haeckel that Richards offers over the course of his discussion.

Noteworthy also is the absence of any extended discussion of Haeckel’s \textit{magnum opus}, \textit{The Riddle of the Universe} [1899]. It is a work given very short shrift by Richards, only a few pages [398-403], and Richards does his best to excuse away its mystical character and never mentions the impact that it had on the burgeoning theosophical and

\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, \textit{The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945}, Cambridge: CUP, 1991, for an extended discussion of Haeckel and his influence over the development of racial eugenics and his ties to Nazi policies. See also the important study, Susanne Zimmermann, \textit{Die Medizinische Fakultät der Universität Jena während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus}, Berlin: VWB Verlag, 2000, for the connections between the scientific traditions which follow from Haeckel’s influence at the University of Jena and Nazi genocide. One of the major figures discussed by Zimmermann is Karl Astel, an important member of the Nazi led \textit{Ernst Haeckel Gesellschaft} at the University of Jena, who also conducted racial research directly under the auspices of Heinrich Himmler.
anthroposophical\textsuperscript{43} movements. Richards wishes to maintain that its content remained within the precincts of conventional science, a position rejected by most prominent scientific contemporaries of Haeckel. Despite Richards’ misleading comments, \textit{The Riddle of the Universe} remains a revealing source of Haeckel’s Monism, mysticism, and ties to theosophical ways of thinking; however its substance does not fit into the a priori constructions of Richards’ account of Haeckel’s thought which attempts to obscure connections with mysticism and other questionable anti-scientific movements. Richards tries to pass the book off as reflecting the state of science at the time as well as contemporary science today, but this is about the same as stating that typical theosophical texts also reflect the state of science today. Richards bends his material to exculpate Haeckel from all scientific criticism that pointed out that the book is far from accurate even in terms of the science of Haeckel’s day.\textsuperscript{44}

The same is true of Haeckel’s fundamentally important essay, \textit{Monism as Connecting Science and Religion} [1892] which I have described as a metaphysical manifesto of National Socialist ideology. This important essay by Haeckel is discussed only briefly by Richards where he again translates a mystical view of the world based on the theory of pan-

\textsuperscript{43} The mystically inclined movement of Rudolf Steiner.
\textsuperscript{44} Richards describes Haeckel’s adherence to the theory of the ether as up to date science at the time. But this is not the case because the Michelson-Morley experiment [1887] had already indicated that the hypothesis of the ether could be dispensed with.
psychism into terms that Richards suggests are compatible with modern science.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to books, journals, and articles, other important indicators of Haeckel’s connection with proto-Nazism are also missing. For example, Haeckel’s prominent membership in the Pan German League, an imperialistic and anti-Semitic organization, a movement which eventually realized its anti-Semitic commitments by expelling its Jewish members; or Haeckel’s membership in the Society for Racial Hygiene which played a role in the propagation of racial eugenics early in the twentieth century.

Richards’ seemingly novel idea that Nazism arose out of ‘genetic and eugenic ideas’\textsuperscript{46} and not because of ‘evolutionary’ ideas is plainly contradicted by the available source material which indicates clearly that eugenic ideas were firmly rooted in Haeckel’s evolutionary science and Monism. Richards’ belief that Haeckelian ideas about evolution did not play a role in fostering National Socialist ideology is therefore historically untenable. Evolutionary ideas, of course, cannot be detached from eugenics and genetics and proto-Nazi writings were suffused with evolutionary conceptions. It suffices in this regard to mention the influential publications of Wilhelm Schallmayer – celebrated by the Nazis as a key ideological racial-eugenic progenitor – who conducted his eugenic activities wholly within the framework of the German Monist League and Haeckel’s general conception of biology.

\textsuperscript{45} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 353-355.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 276.
The attention that Richards pays to the German Monist League is also perfunctory. Before the outbreak of World War I and during the first years of the War, the League adopted a program that clearly embodies one of the earliest statements of National Socialist ideology. But Richards neglects this important part of the history of the German Monist League. On the contrary, he seems to race ahead, as if in panic, and out of sight of all incriminating material.

Missing also in Richards’ book is any mention of Haeckel’s connections and influence over Marxism and Social Democracy. It was the development of Social Democracy that provided at least a partial framework of ideas and political organization out of which National Socialism evolved in Germany and this phenomenon was even more dramatically pronounced in Italy. Mussolini was first a Marxist before becoming a Fascist, and his Fascism was determined by the synthesis between Haeckel’s ideas and Marxian socialism, especially as mediated by the writings and influence of Mussolini’s mentor, Enrico Ferri, an enthusiastic student of Haeckel.

Missing as well in Richards’ book is any mention of the Völkisch movement and ideology, which was influenced very heavily by Haeckel’s Monism. Consideration should also have been given to personalities like the anti-Semitic publicist Raoul H. Francé, a very prominent member of the Monist League and an individual who contributed to the birth of National Socialist ideology. Attention likewise should include the
scholarly literature on Social Darwinism which is hardly mentioned by Richards and dispatched as much as possible to oblivion. All these relevant sources are not to be found in Richards’ biography. Richards has no need for them; he knows beforehand what he wants to say and wishes not to be bothered by any sources that might conflict with his preferred a priori assumptions about Haeckel.

Richards attributes contemporary attacks against Haeckel to ‘unwarranted’ ‘methodological, epistemological, and historiographical assumptions.’\(^{47}\) But this criticism should be leveled against Richards himself. In fact, the methodological deficiencies that Richards alludes to should be placed at his own doorstep because of his highly problematic use of historical analysis that is demonstrated in the final section of his book.

**Richards’ ‘Moral Grammar’ as Moral Hazard**

Richards concludes his book with the reprinting of an essay – ‘The Moral Grammar of Narratives in the History of Biology – the Case of Haeckel and Nazi Biology’ – that was originally delivered a few years ago [Ryerson Lecture, April 12, 2005] as a lecture at the University of Chicago and then published as an article in a collection of studies on the philosophy of Darwinism.\(^{48}\) It now makes its reappearance in this forum

\(^{47}\) Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 278.

and Richards attaches great importance to it, believing it to provide a foundation for his belief that the connection between Haeckel and National Socialism is a hypothesis that stems from manipulated historical sources, and not at all a reflection of historical reality in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. Haeckel, he argues, has to be evaluated not in absolute moral terms, but in regard to the ethical context of his own times.

However, as has been pointed out in our first rejoinder, Richards is unable to show that moral consciousness was substantially different a little over a century ago in Germany, a country situated at the very heart of European civilization; there were no fundamentally different moral standards in operation at the time that could be taken to be essentially at odds with our own values. Richards unjustifiably confuses remote historical times with the contemporary world which certainly would include the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period when Haeckel was politically and scientifically active.

In this essay Richards undertakes a historiographical excursion that challenges the sensibilities of even hardened readers, decrying the writing of history in general as an exercise in manipulation as far back as Herodotus and Thucydides, and eventually ending up with a denunciation of historians like myself who, by linking Haeckel with National Socialism, have ‘caus[ed] sputtering convulsions,’\(^49\) because of the accepted axioms of historical analysis. Richards pleads for objectivity in recounting the past.

\(^49\) Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 506.
and for evaluating Haeckel in terms of his own times, and then immediately and contradictorily, abandons detachment and impartiality by a wholesale disposal of relevant material and by providing an account of Haeckel’s relationship with National Socialism that amounts to disinformation. By the end of the process the reader is left abandoned to the realm of historical fiction. After studying Richard’s text it is apparent that it is not, as he argues, historians in general who are disoriented or manipulative but rather Richards himself who is totally off key in his calculated and hagiographical flaunting of imprudent commentary.

What Richards overlooks because he never seems to measure what he categorically states against what Haeckel actually wrote, is that Haeckel and his followers had a lot to say about ethics and morality. They were not passive onlookers at the society they lived in, as Richards seems to suggest, but they constantly talked and wrote about the need to break down conventional religious standards in the light of the discoveries of evolutionary science. The Monists celebrated the defeat of Judeo-Christian ethics in the name of the struggle for existence and the demands of evolution, a discussion that would figure so poignantly in the writings of Nietzsche and the cultural tragedy he felt coming with the death of God. By neglecting to point this out, Richards succeeds in casting Haeckel and the Monists in ahistorical terms as purveyors of conventional morality. Haeckel, however, was constantly at war with the traditional beliefs of European civilization, hoping to revolutionize the very ethical basis of
society, and this represents a disturbing moral reality that does not enter into any of Richards’ calculations about the need for the historian to evaluate individuals in terms of their own society.\(^{50}\) If Haeckel himself, in other words, called for a moral reconstitution of society along evolutionary lines, it should be appropriate for historians to examine this kind of subject matter, and not to regard such explorations as inappropriate, as Richards believes.\(^{51}\)

Richards accuses historians who criticize Haeckel of distorting evidence by cutting quotations. Of course no examples are provided by Richards. ‘The historian can orchestrate outrage -- as some dealing with Haeckel have -- by cutting quotations into certain vicious shapes selecting those that appear damning while neglecting those that might be exculpating.’\(^{52}\) But this is an unfounded accusation because as we have

\(^{50}\) Richards’ summary of Haeckel’s ethics as a later day scientific defense of conventional Christian morality, suggesting that Haeckel supported the Golden Rule, and that he rejected Nietzschean ideas of a ‘superior morality’ as well as Max Stirner’s ethics of pure egoism is based upon a literal and naïve reading of *The Riddle of the Universe*. Haeckel liked to posture as a cultivated and refined intellectual, but there is enough evidence to show that he supported in actuality a very tough Social Darwinian view of the world. As Haeckel wrote in a different section of *The Riddle of the Universe*: ‘The Struggle for Life [is the] powerful natural force which has exerted supreme control over the entire course of organic evolution for millions of years.’ For Haeckel, such laws also applied literally to the workings of society. Only the conceit of man allows him to disingenuously separate society from the necessities of evolution and nature. ‘Do we find,’ Haeckel observed, ‘a different state of things in the history of peoples, which man, in his anthropocentric presumption, loves to call “the history of the world”? Do we find every phase of it a lofty moral principle or a wise ruler, guiding the destinies of nations?’ On this radically Social Darwinian point, Haeckel is absolutely clear and unambiguous. ‘There can be but one answer in the present advanced stage of natural and human history: No. The fate of those branches of the human family, those nations and races which struggle for existence and progress for thousands of years, is determined by the same “eternal laws of iron” as the history of the whole organic world which has peopled the earth for millions of years.’ Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, London: Watts, 1931, 221 [1899].

\(^{51}\) Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 492.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 500.
seen many times, it is Richards himself who is doing all the ‘cutting’ of relevant sources. Richards, for example, earlier in his text, discusses a book that Haeckel wrote during the First World War, *Eternity* 1915], where all the National Socialist like statements are excised by Richards and Haeckel is misleadingly presented as simply a tragic world weary figure, a detached victim of the war and not a bitter politically motivated extreme nationalist lamenting the defeat of the German Empire and fuming about the racial catastrophe occasioned by the introduction of African troops onto the continent of Europe by the Allied armies. After the armistice in November 1918, Haeckel complained in a letter written to a soldier at the front that he ‘feared that the greatly longed for peace will result in a full reversal of modern culture. Our laughing heirs will apparently be the yellow Mongolians.’

Over the course of the essay Richards repeats many of the charges that appear earlier in his book and there is no point in going over them again, except to reiterate that it is not correct to clear Haeckel of anti-Semitism or to maintain that since Haeckel died before the actual coming to power of the Nazis, he cannot in anyway be linked with them, or that he simply reflected the standard racism of the time, which leaves out of course Haeckel’s attachment to the mythology of the Aryan race which was not typical of all nineteenth century biology.

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53 Haeckel, *Eternity*, 166 and passim.
However, one or two points that Richards makes should be elaborated upon here because they are especially erroneous and historiographically damaging. Richards rejects my evaluation, along with other historians, of Haeckel and the Nazis, because he claims we advance a ‘mono-causal’ theory. ‘I have objected,’ Richard writes, ‘to the ways in which these historians have attempted to link Haeckel with the rise of the Nazis and the actions of Hitler in particular. They have not, for instance, properly weighed the significance of the main other causal lines that led to the doctrines of National Socialism – the social, political, cultural, and psychological strands that many other historians have emphasized.’\textsuperscript{55}

But this criticism of Richards is invalid and is apparently advanced to deflect attention away from Haeckel. It is not that there has been a failure to take into consideration additional contributing factors in the rise of National Socialism, but rather that the more conventional explanations of the past have, on the whole, not been successful and have fallen frequently by the wayside after the growing discovery of new information. The explanations for the rise of National Socialism and Fascism apart from emphasis on Haeckel have had a tendency to break down and this has occurred many times. On the other hand, the connection of Haeckel, National Socialism, and Science continually yields more meaningful theoretical results and over recent years the latest scholarly material is

\textsuperscript{55} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 507-508.
generally in agreement with what I have been urging.\textsuperscript{56} The fact that Richards does not seem to be au courant with this literature is a shortcoming for which he alone is responsible. Nothing prevents Richards from developing a chronology of his own about the evolution of National Socialism and Fascism, but so far nothing along those lines has been forthcoming.

In the very last paragraph of his book Richards reveals how little he grasps about the connection that has been suggested between Haeckel and Nazism. Richards suggests that in the end the Nazis borrowed just a few lines from the eugenic literature of Monism and nothing more; and that, in fact, Haeckel was completely rejected by the Nazis.\textsuperscript{57} In other words, the substance of Nazism has nothing to do with Haeckel’s Monist program. Such statements bear literally no relation to a much more complex historical truth and Richards should be urged to reread what I have written.

\textsuperscript{56} Though it would have appeared too late for Richards to have cited it, the catalogue for the remarkable exhibition last summer [2008] at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts demonstrated the critical role that Haeckel and Monism played in the elaboration of twentieth century totalitarian art. Following Richards’ summary of the thought of Haeckel, such an exhibition must be inconceivable. See Jean Clair (ed.), \textit{The 1930s: The Making of the’ New Man,} Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2008.

\textsuperscript{57} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 453: ‘Yet Haeckel, I believe, would have rejected the vulgar and dogma-driven Nazis, just as they rejected him.’ As we have noted, many Nazis especially in the scientific and SS community, did not reject him, but instead enthusiastically embraced his racial and eugenic ideas and programs.

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