

**BOOK REVIEW**  
of  
Benjamin Wiker,  
*Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists*,  
InterVarsity Press, 2002.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Dr. Benjamin Wiker is a Fellow at the Discovery Institute and lecturer in theology and science at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Steubenville, Ohio. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles appearing in the *New Oxford Review*, *Crisis*, and the *National Catholic Register*. This book is endorsed by J.P. Moreland, Phillip Johnson, Nancy Pearcey, Jonathan Wells, and Michael Behe. The forward is written by William Dembski, in which he states: "Several authors have attempted to get at the roots of the current culture war. James Davison Hunter has traced its sociological roots. Robert Bork has traced its political roots. Phillip Johnson has traced its Darwinian roots. But none of them has traced the historical roots of the culture war back to its metaphysical foundation. Ben Wiker does that brilliantly in the present book. . . . If you really want to understand why our culture is in its current state, you must read this book."

The book has nine chapters: 1. It All Started with Epicurus, 2. Lucretius, the First Darwinian, 3. Christianity Versus Epicureanism, 4. The Fall and Rise of Epicureanism, 5. Newtonianism: The New Face of Epicurean Materialism, 6. The Moral Revolution of Materialism, 7. The Taming of Christianity, or Scripture Declawed, 8. Epicureanism Becomes Darwinism, and 9. How We Became Hedonists. The Introduction, which precedes Chapter 1, is 16 pages long. And the Conclusion, which follows Chapter 9, is 33 pages long. Reading only the Introduction and the Conclusion quite well presents Wiker's main points.

What Wiker stresses throughout the book is that ideas have consequences. He introduces in the Introduction what he calls "the great law of uniformity." This "law" is as follows: "Every distinct view of the universe, every theory about nature, necessarily entails a view of morality; every distinct view of morality, every theory about human nature, necessarily entails a cosmology to support it." At first this may seem to be simplistic common sense, but Wiker refers back to this "law" several times in the book, and it then perhaps takes on more significance. At least logically he makes his point very well. Unfortunately, human beings are notoriously inconsistent. Many people can seemingly hold to a materialistic view of the origin of the universe and also have a high sense of personal morality. But Wiker, being an intelligent, educated, and thoughtful person spends little time on such personal inconsistencies. It would be like trying to carry on a conversation with someone who knows next to nothing about the subject of the conversation: little headway can be made, and probably neither party will benefit from further discussion. However, in spite of inconsistencies, not everyone is inconsistent (at least not in all things), and even those who may not be able to articulate a position may intuitively perceive the implications of a particular point of view. And, whether we perceive the implications or not, in many cases influential people will, and they will influence the society for good or ill, and many others will be just carried along.

From an historical perspective, Wiker illustrates the above "law" by tracing philosophical materialism as far back as he was able to do. He identifies Epicurus (341 – 271 B.C.) as the first philosophical materialist. The interesting thing is that Epicurus openly developed his materialistic science for religious reasons. He found thoughts of God (or gods) observing and passing judgment on his thoughts and conduct disturbing to him (see Romans 1). He also found thoughts about an afterlife and a final judgment equally disturbing. He needed a science, or a cosmology, to support his desire for atheism, in order to avoid troubling thoughts. From thence came his materialism.

During the early centuries of Christianity, Epicureanism, which had a following in the Roman world, was openly challenged by Christians, and in time, especially after the Roman world embraced Christianity, it was defeated. Throughout the middle ages Epicureanism was not well known. However, during the Renaissance there was a revival of interest in Greek thought, and books on Epicureanism were translated into Western languages, and Epicureanism was embraced anew. To add to the mix, Machiavelli (1469 – 1527), held by some to be the father of modernity, through his book *The Prince* as well as other publications, advocated the very modern idea of the art of duplicity: presenting a moral and religious exterior while being as ruthless as necessary to achieve power and control. Ever since, materialists, unlike Epicurus, feel perfectly free to outwardly claim adherence to moral principles and religion, if that's what is necessary to win votes or claim open-mindedness. Wiker is not the least apologetic. On page 148 he states: "I can imagine that by this time, our own contemporary materialists, if they should be reading the present work, are howling in protest that I would trace their ancestry to Machiavelli, thereby creating the implicit charge that contemporary materialists agree with Machiavelli on these points. Allow me to be blunt and make the charge explicit."

There is much more in this book, but hopefully the above gives some sense of the content. It is indeed refreshing to see the Church of Jesus Christ reclaim the high intellectual ground that it forfeited over a hundred years ago to the onslaught of Darwinism and materialistic science. This book by Wiker is one more example of the renewed courage of the Church, and can only serve as a promise of even better things to come. It would also suggest that we must listen to the spoken word and read the written word very critically, for not only are many inconsistent, but many are also Epicurean and Machiavellian.