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The End of Darwinism

by David A. Noebel

“The LORD’s works are great, studied by all who delight in them.”—Psalm 111:2

“Last week in Nice, France, I was privileged to participate, along with 30 scholars, mostly scientists and mathematicians, in a conference on the question of whether the universe was designed, or at least fine-tuned, to make life, especially intelligent life. . . . It appears the universe is designed for biogenesis and human life” (Dennis Prager, *The Washington Times*, June 24, 2013, p.30).

The following 13 arguments posited favoring Darwin’s theory of evolution are then followed by the scientific evidence against each one. A finely tuned universe that includes human life is totally contrary to Darwin’s theory of chance, natural selection, and mutation. Dennis Prager is correct—“The evidence for design is so compelling that the only way around it is to suggest that our universe is only one of an infinite number of universes.” Only atheists who insist on “science and reason” could accept such an unscientific and irrational view.

I. “Darwinism is deeply indebted to comparative anatomy and embryology” (Norman Macbeth, *Darwin Retried: An Appeal to Reason*, The Harvard Common Press, 1971, p. 10). “Recapitulation in some sense is a logical consequence of Darwinian evolution” (Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, Regnery Publishing, 2000, p. 89).

“Ernst Haeckel. . . propounded what is known as the biogenetic law, which declared that the growth of the embryo was a recapitulation of the history of the species. The implication was that embryology would provide us with the lines of descent that are so conspicuously missing among adult forms” (Macbeth, p.12).

“In the thirteenth chapter of his *Origin*, Darwin presented this notion as a principle by saying, ‘The community in the embryonic structure reveals community of descent.’ (Darwin 1859, p. 449). By this he was emphasizing the importance of the embryological evidence as support for his theory of the inheritance of slight modifications by descent” (Ian T. Taylor, *In The Minds of Men*, p. 275).

“In *Descent of Man*, Darwin extended the inference to humans: ‘The [human] embryo itself at a very early period can hardly be distinguished from that of other members of the vertebrate kingdom.’ Since humans and other vertebrates ‘pass through the same early stages of development. . . we ought frankly to admit their community of descent’” (Wells, p. 82).

“British embryologist Gavin de Beer published three editions of a book on embryology and evolution in which he criticized Haeckel’s biogenetic law. ‘Recapitulation. . . does not take place’” (Wells, p. 89).

“In the March 2000 issue of *Natural History* magazine, Stephen Jay Gould responded to Michael Behe, a biologist who had criticized Haeckel’s embryos in the August 13, 1999, *New York Times*. Gould acknowledged that Haeckel faked his drawings. ‘To cut to the quick of this drama. . . . Haeckel, in a procedure that can only be called fraudulent—simply copied the same figure over and over again’” (Wells, p. 108).

For a detailed study of why Haeckel’s biogenetic law does not scientifically prove Darwin’s theory of evolution, see Wells, chapter 5, entitled “Haeckel’s Embryos.” It should also be noted that Gould wrote “a major book on the subject in 1977, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*” (Wells, p. 108). Unfortunately, Haeckel’s “law” and his fake embryo drawings are still found in biology textbooks today.

II. “Since 1859 the phenomenon of homology has been traditionally cited by evolutionary biologists as providing one of the most powerful lines of evidence for the concept of organic evolution” (Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, p. 143). “What can be more curious than that the hand of a man, formed for grasping, that of a mole for digging, the leg of the horse, the paddle of the porpoise, and the wing of the bat should all be constructed on the same pattern, and should include similar bones, in the same relative position. . . but is it not powerfully suggestive of true relationship, of inheritance from a common ancestor?” (Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, cited in Denton, p. 143). “The phenomenon of homology has remained the mainstay of the argument for evolution right down to the present day” (Denton, p. 144).

“It appears then that Darwin’s usage of the term ‘homology,’ which he defines in *Origin* as that ‘relationship between parts which results from their development from corresponding embryonic parts,’ is as Gavin De Beer emphasizes, just what homology is not.”

“The concept of homology is absolutely fundamental to what we are talking about when we speak of evolution—yet in truth we cannot explain it at all in terms of present day biological theory” (Sir Alister Hardy, *The Living Stream*, cited in Denton, p. 151).

“The evolutionary interpretation of homology is clouded even further by the uncomfortable fact that there are many cases of ‘homologous-like’ resemblance which cannot by any stretch of the imagination be explained by descent from a common ancestor” (Denton, p. 151).

“The failure of homology to substantiate evolutionary claims has not been as widely publicized as have the problems in paleontology. Nonetheless, it fits into the general theme that advances in knowledge are not making it easier to reduce nature to the Darwinian Paradigm” (Denton, p. 154).

For a detailed study in this area of homology, see Michael Denton’s chapter in *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, chapter seven “The Failure of Homology.”

III. “The experience of breeders was of deep interest to Darwin. He bred pigeons himself. He was familiar with the great improvements that had been made in many plants and domestic animals. Change was occurring before his eyes” (Macbeth, p. 29). “Domestic breeders modify existing stocks by selecting only certain variants for breeding. Darwin argued that an analogous process operated in the wild” (Wells, p. 31, 32).

“But there was a difficulty. The observed changes

were small. The breeders could improve a sheep’s wool or create a larger rose, but they never even tried to make big changes, such as adding wings to a horse” (Macbeth, p. 29).

“The changes that Darwin observed in the breeding pens were all micro” (Macbeth, p. 30).

“The first difficulty is that no one has ever seen a macro change take place, whether in the breeding pens or among the fossils” (Macbeth, p. 31).

“The next difficulty is the lack of transitions. If we join Darwin in assuming that macro changes must have been accomplished by small steps, so that gaps were at one time filled, then what has happened to all the intermediate forms?” (Macbeth, p. 32).

“Genetic homeostasis [plants and animals balk at being bred too far in any direction] makes even micro changes look difficult, and seems to be a fatal obstacle to macroevolution” (Macbeth, p. 35).

Professor Deevey of Yale: “Some remarkable things have been done by cross breeding and selection inside the species barrier, or within a larger circle of closely related species, such as the wheats. But wheat is still wheat, and not, for instance, grapefruit; and we can no more grow wings on pigs than hens can make cylindrical eggs” (Macbeth, p. 36).

Luther Burbank: “There is a law. . . of the Reversion to the Average. I know from my experience that I can develop a plum half an inch long or one 2 ½ inches long, with every possible length in between, but I am willing to admit that it is hopeless to try to get a plum the size of a small pea, or one as big as a grapefruit” (Macbeth, p. 36).

“One of Darwin’s main props has collapsed” (Macbeth, p. 34).

“A 1999 booklet published by the National Academy describes Darwin’s finches as ‘a particularly compelling example of the origin of species.’ The booklet goes on to explain how the Grants and their colleagues showed ‘that a single year of drought on the islands can drive evolutionary changes in the finches,’ and that ‘if droughts occur about once every 10 years on the islands, a new species of finch might arise in only about 200 years.’ That’s it. Rather than confuse the reader by mentioning that selection was reversed after the drought, producing no long-term evolutionary change, the booklet simply omits this awkward fact” (Wells, p. 174, 175).

IV. “Darwin never tried to define natural selection in a rigid way, but it is fairly clear that for him it was not a complex concept. It amounted to little more than the fact that, for various reasons, among all the individuals

produced in nature some die soon and some die late. Thus natural selection, for Darwin, was differential mortality. In the course of time there has been a slow change in this view, so that now it is customary to say that natural selection is differential reproduction. This in turn may be equated with reproductive success, or leaving the most offspring” (Macbeth, p. 40).

“Darwin was convinced that in the course of evolution ‘Natural Selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means of modification,’ but he had no direct evidence of natural selection” (Wells, p. 137).

“In Charles Darwin’s view, the process of evolution by natural selection excluded design results. Darwin did not exclude design entirely, since the laws of nature—including the law of natural selection—might have been supernaturally designed” (Wells, p. 202).

“How does Richard Dawkins know that design in living things is only apparent? Because, he says, natural selection explains all the adaptive features of living things, and natural selection is undirected. ‘Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. . . . It is the blind watchmaker” (Wells, p. 202).

“The operations of natural selection, real or imagined, are not accessible to the human eye” (Macbeth, p. 42).

“Darwin himself said: ‘. . . natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing. . . every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working . . . at the improvement of each organic being” (Macbeth, p.46).

“Thus we have as Question: Why do some [species] multiply, while others remain stable, dwindle, or die out? To which is offered as Answer: Because some multiply, while others remain stable, dwindle, or die out. The two sides of the equation are the same. We have a tautology. The definition is meaningless. I regard this as a major discovery, a sort of lethal gene in the body of the central Darwinian doctrine; but I am not the first discoverer. It was formulated at least as early as 1959 by Professor C.H. Waddington of Edinburgh, a reputable member of the synthetic school [a merging of natural selection with Mendelian genetics]. Waddington’s statement: ‘Natural selection. . . turns out on closer inspection to be a tautology, a statement of an inevitable although previously unrecognized relation. It states that the fittest individuals in a population (defined as those which leave most offspring) will leave most offspring. Once the statement is made its truth is apparent.’” (Macbeth, p. 47).

“If the reader is surprised to find natural selection disintegrating under scrutiny, I was no less so. But when we reflect upon the matter, is it so surprising? The biologists have innocently confessed that natural selection is a metaphor, and every experienced person knows that it is dangerous to work with metaphors. As the road to hell is paved with good intentions, so the road to confusion is paved with good metaphors. Perhaps the sober investigators should not have staked so much on a poetic device” (Macbeth, p. 50).

V. “Darwin did not invent the struggle for existence. As Loren Eiseley points out, it is an ‘obvious and self-evident fact,’ and it had been mentioned by naturalists several times before Darwin was born” (Macbeth, p.56).

“When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply” (Macbeth, p. 56; Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle For Life*, 1859, p. 78-79).

“Garrett Hardin. . . refuses to depart from the early position [nature red in tooth and claw]. . . . In his eyes, no activity of man—not even painting, sculpture, music, or writing—is without its competitive aspect. Nor does he regard this as a personal idiosyncrasy; he asserts that it is biology. ‘It is a basic axiom of biology that the struggle for existence cannot be suppressed; it can only be altered in the form it takes” (Macbeth, p. 59).

Sir Julian Huxley: “The struggle for existence merely signifies that a portion of each generation is bound to die before it can reproduce itself” (Macbeth, p. 58).

“It is, however, obvious and self-evident that the fraternity [from Harvard, Yale, and the University of California] is no longer solidly in favor of the doctrine of the struggle for existence as propounded by Darwin” (Macbeth, p. 59). Yet, Darwin’s very book was subtitled: *The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*, 1859.

“Nature, in her usual ambiguous way, offers examples of strife and other examples of cooperation, and she is not consistent enough to yield a firm basis for a theory” (Macbeth, p. 60).

VI. “The phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ was not coined by Darwin. He took it over from Herbert Spencer, apparently considering it an improvement on his own natural selection. It immediately became an integral part of clas-

sical Darwinism, much to the embarrassment of modern adherents” (Macbeth, p.62).

“Survival of the fittest has suffered the same blight as its companion shibboleth, struggle-for-existence. It is politically unacceptable. It smells of Hitler [Stalin and Mussolini as well], of the laissez-faire economists, of savage competition and devil take the hindmost” (Macbeth, p. 62).

“The late J.B.S. Haldane, despite his Marxist leanings . . . said ‘the phrase, “survival of the fittest,” is something of a tautology” (Macbeth, p. 63).

“So much for the concept of survival of the fittest” (Macbeth, p. 65).

VII. “Biologists for the most part look and talk like prosaic men, but many of them became biologists because they were fascinated by the wonders of nature, especially the extraordinary complexities, adjustments, and inventions that are commonly spoken of as ‘adaptations” (Macbeth, p.68).

“For one reason or another, there has been a tendency to equate adaptation with fitness and survival (which have already been equated with each other). . . . This is the same problem that we encounter in survival-of-the-fittest, where we fall into circular reasoning by saying that we survive because we are fit and are fit because we survive” (Macbeth, p. 69).

“Now let us look at the ancient contention as to the significance of adaptations. . . . When Darwin came forward with a theory that excluded the Creator, he was immediately challenged to explain these achievements [adaptations] by his method of slow step-by-step changes. He wrestled manfully with this task, especially with the problem of the human eye. . . . But not even his warmest admirers would say that he had met the challenge. Nor have his followers. Goldschmidt (a purely scientific critic with no religious motives) was able to say in 1940 that the eye and sixteen other important features remained unexplained on the strict Darwinian view of accumulation and selection of small mutations” (Macbeth, p. 74).

“The evolution of the eye in man (and in all the vertebrates) is a major mystery; and that, small as it is, the eye is an enormously complex structure of retina, cornea,

rods and cones, visual purple, muscles, nerves, and fluids. Supporters of natural selection tend to play down this complexity, while opponents emphasize it” (Macbeth, p. 74).

“I stumbled on this case [sea slugs and Coelenterates] while reading in quite a different field. Inquiring among biologists, I discovered that there are many similar cases, but they seldom appear in the standard literature. They are interesting, highly relevant, and well known, but they are the special stock in trade of the anti-Darwinists. These heretics delight in flaunting such cases in the face of the evolutionists and demanding explanations on the usual step-by-step utilitarian lines. Since nobody really pretends to know how such things came about, the usual response is silence” (Macbeth, p. 102).

VIII. “Darwin was keenly interested in sexual selection” (Macbeth, p. 82).

“The term seems to have included, in his mind, cases where females exercised some sort of choice after a display or contest among the males, as well as cases where the males fought among themselves and the female was absent or passive” (Macbeth, p. 82).

“But even in this modest role it has been a disappointment” (Macbeth, p. 82).

“In many species the males go through elaborate dances and displays which, to our anthropomorphic minds, can only be competitions for the favor of the hens; but when we observe carefully, we find that the hens are absent, not watching, or busy pecking at food. In other cases gorgeous feathers are displayed to hens who seem to be color-blind. There are even species where the hens mate with the defeated cocks as readily as with the victors. The hens do not seem to be anthropomorphic” (Macbeth, p. 83).

“Robert Ardrey shows at great length that fighting among animals of the same species is generally concerned with territory rather than with females” (Macbeth, p. 83).

“Even if there is such a process as sexual selection (which is arguable) and even if it produces the structure and behavior in question (which is very doubtful), what it has really brought forth is a monumental challenge to natural selection, the keystone of the whole Darwinian theory. In the peacock and the Argus pheasant, we have

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conspicuous and appetizing animals that cannot run, fly, fight, or hide. . . . By all reasonable standards natural selection should never have allowed such animals to come into existence. But they have not only come into existence, they have stayed there and have not become extinct. Have the birds, through their patterns of sexual choice, established a system in which the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the strong? If so, they have shaken the whole structure of Darwinism” (Macbeth, p. 85).

“A prime example of this academic censorship is the case of British biologist Warwick Collins. In 1976 Collins was studying biology at Sussex University under the eminent Darwinist Professor John Maynard Smith. Collins wrote a paper on sexual selection as an anomaly in Darwinian theory. Dr. John Thoday, professor of genetics at Cambridge, invited Collins to present an expanded version of his paper to an international conference of population geneticists—an honor for the young undergraduate. Collins says, ‘In the paper I tried to extend further my doubts about the assumptions in Darwinian evolutionary theory. Out of courtesy I circulated the expanded paper to my distinguished tutor prior to the conference. Before I was due to take the stand, Professor Maynard Smith stood up in front of the conference and roundly denounced the premises of my paper.’ After the conference Maynard Smith told Collins that ‘he would use his considerable influence to block publication of any further papers of [Collin’s] which questioned the fundamental premises of Darwinian theory.’ Collins has, indeed, found it impossible to have any further papers published up to as recently as 1994, when a paper he submitted to *Nature* was rejected without reason. Not surprisingly, Collins has left the field of biology” (Richard Milton, *Shattering the Myths of Darwinism*, p. 263, 4).

IX. “Darwin, thinking of evolution as the accumulation of myriads of small changes, needed a great deal of time to bring the plants and animals to their present complexity and diversity. This led him to support vigorously the geological opinions of his slightly older contemporary, Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875).

Lyell’s view, known as ‘uniformitarianism,’ was that the visible features of the earth had been produced by the action, at more or less the present scale and tempo, of the agencies we still see at work—wind, weather, water, ice, volcanoes, and earthquakes” (Macbeth, p. 109).

“Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky. . . disappeared into the library for several years and compiled a book called *Earth in Upheaval* (Doubleday, 1955). Here he marshals the original field reports on a large number of phenomena

that point inexorably to catastrophes and (as a byproduct, since he was looking for events rather than dates) to fairly recent dates for the catastrophes. The impact of the details and of the number of phenomena (close to forty) is shattering” (Macbeth, p. 111).

“The topics in the book [*Earth in Upheaval*] are discussed on the basis of reports by orthodox and reputable scientists, with Velikovsky merely acting as master of ceremonies. . . including: “Lava Beds of the Columbia Plateau,” “The Harras of Arabia,” “Youthfulness of Mountain Chains,” “Klimasturz,” “Wandering of the Poles,” “The Frozen Mammoths” (Macbeth, p. 111-115).

“Sir Charles Lyell knew about the mammoths and saw that they endangered his theory. . . . Darwin also knew the story, and confessed that he saw no solution to it. . . . In the latest entry in my files, George Gaylord Simpson does not discuss the mammoths directly, but criticizes the errors of two recent authors and then blasts the doctrine of uniformitarianism in a way that must have been highly agreeable to Velikovsky” (Macbeth, p. 115). For a summary of Velikovsky’s writings see C.J. Ransom, *The Age of Velikovsky*, A Delta Book, 1976 and A. DeGrazia, *The Velikovsky Affair*, University Books, 1966.

“The third indicator of historical catastrophes is that of extinction on a huge scale. A common rock in the geological record is the Old Red Sandstone. The northern half of Scotland from Loch Ness to the Orkneys exposes this rock formation in myriad sites to a total depth of more than 8,000 feet (twice the height of Ben Nevis). In an area 100 miles across, the Old Red Sandstone contains the fossils of billions of fish, contorted and contracted as though in convulsion and resulting apparently from some catastrophic event” (Richard Milton, p.90).

“Describing the fossil fauna in his 1841 study, “The Old Red Sandstone,” Hugh Miller wrote, ‘Some terrible catastrophe involved in sudden destruction of the fish of an area at least a hundred miles from boundary to boundary, perhaps much more. The same platform in Orkney as at Cromarty is strewn thick with remains, which exhibit unequivocally the marks of violent death. . . . all these fish must have died suddenly’ (Richard Milton, p. 90).

“The wealth of specific cases pointing toward catastrophes makes it impossible for me to accept the uniformitarian theory” (Macbeth, p. 116).

“But a change may be impending. *Newsweek* for 13 December 1963 reported that ‘. . . many geologists at the recent meeting of the American Geological Society were advising the rehabilitation of catastrophism’ (Macbeth, p. 116).

“In 1999, a Chinese paleontologist who is an acknowl-

with another universe is impossible.

Therefore, only one conclusion can be drawn: The fact that atheists have resorted to the multiverse argument constitutes a tacit admission that they have lost the argument about design in this universe. The evidence in this universe for design—or, if you will, the fine-tuning that cannot be explained by chance or by “enough time”—is so compelling that the only way around it is to suggest that our universe is only one of an infinite number of universes.

Honest atheists—scientists and lay people—must now acknowledge that science itself argues overwhelmingly for a Designing Intelligence. And honest believers must acknowledge that the existence of a Designing Intelligence is not necessarily the same as the existence of benevolent God.

To posit the existence of a Creator requires only reason. To posit the existence of a good God requires faith.

Dennis Prager’s latest book, *Still the Best Hope: Why the World Needs American Values to Triumph*, was published April 24 by Harper Collins. He is a nationally syndicated radio show host and creator of PragerUniversity.Com.

—*The Washington Times*, June 24, 2013, p. 30

Reign of Evil

by Arnold Ohlert

It is no accident that the death of Hugo Chavez, while mourned by the usual suspects on the left, was celebrated by thousands of his fellow countrymen. In the Doral section of Miami, FL, home to the largest enclave of Venezuelans living in America, the strongman’s demise was met with unrestrained joy. Daniela Calzadilla, who moved from Caracas five years ago, due to the skyrocketing crime rate and dwindling career opportunities, expressed a common refrain. “We hope this is the path to return our democracy and that hopefully we can have the same country we once had,” she said. Mary LaBarca put it even simpler. “We are not celebrating someone’s death,” she said. “We are celebrating freedom.”

Hugo Chavez was born July 28, 1954. Raised largely by his grandmother in the western state of Barinas, Chavez began nurturing his fascination with Marxism at an early age, boosted by Castro’s revolution in Cuba in 1959. His education led him to despise “imperialist” America, even as he idolized Castro and 19th century South American liberator Simón Bolívar. He eventually joined the army,

after failing to fulfill his dream of becoming a major league baseball player.

In 1992, after rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, Chavez led an unsuccessful coup against then President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Scores of civilians and soldiers were killed, but Chavez won a large populist following as a result. He was jailed, but then released two years later by then President Rafael Caldera. Four years later, Chavez was elected president with 57 percent of the vote. Chavez changed the nation’s name to the “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” and often appeared in front of huge paintings of Bolívar. The message was clear: Venezuelans were invited to think of him as the second coming of a historical hero.

Yet shortly after he won the vote, a lawyer from Barinas told *Newsweek* magazine what had really occurred. “Venezuelans are dreaming of a savior, but Chavez is a dictator. People don’t know what they are getting.” After his inauguration in 1999, Chavez rewrote the nation’s constitution, precipitating a special presidential election in 2000, giving him a six year term.

1999 was the year he also began traveling around the world, ingratiating himself to a number of America’s enemies. While in Communist China, Chavez put his cards on the table. “I have been very Maoist all of my life,” he declared at the time. He was also successful in getting OPEC to pump up oil prices.

Steadily, Chavez’s “democratic” revolution began to resemble the dictatorship his regime inevitably became. The legislative and judicial branches of the Venezuelan government were subordinated to his authoritarian rule. He stacked his government with military officers, emulating the juntas that ruled Peru and Panama in the 1970s. The constitution became increasingly irrelevant, a reality most recently emphasized when Chavez’s absence still allowed him to win inauguration last January. That absence should have triggered certain procedures, but they were completely ignored. Chavez also politicized Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the state-owned oil company, whose output has declined by almost half from 2000 to 2011.

This combination of factors, as well as Chavez’s interminable rants (one went on for almost ten hours), polarized the nation to the point where Chavez was himself ousted in a short-lived coup in 2002. Yet his populist supporters, angered by TV images of the nation’s former elite reveling in victory, restored him to power two days later.

Chavez was hardened by the coup attempt, which he blamed on George W. Bush. His hatred of America and capitalism drove him into alliances with other Latin American leftists, with whom he formed the Bolivarian

Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), an effort to counterbalance American “hegemony.” That counterbalance also included tactical support for the communist Columbian terror group, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He formed alliances with Libya, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and former members of his military alleged he supported Al Qaeda as well.

Chavez forged more dubious alliances during a 2006 trip. They included Belarus dictator Alexander Lukashenko, Vladimir Putin, who sold Chavez \$3 billion worth of military hardware, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who awarded him Iran’s highest state honor, the Islamic Republic Medal, for supporting Tehran’s nuclear ambitions. In the same year, he referred to Israel as one of America’s “imperialistic instruments,” and President Bush as “the Devil,” an “extremist,” an aspiring “world dictator,” and the “spokesman of imperialism.” This year it was revealed that Chavez was keeping Venezuelan Jews under surveillance because he considered them a “fifth column.”

Chavez’s ongoing relationship with Iran was despicable. He acted as their banker in order to help them avoid sanctions, and allowed them to open factories in remote locations, likely to pursue weapons production. According to the Israelis, he was also supplying them with uranium.

Unsurprisingly, Venezuela increasingly began to resemble some of the authoritarian states Chavez admired. The Heritage Foundation’s 2013 Index of Economic Freedom ranked the nation as one of the most repressed in the world. Only Zimbabwe, North Korea, and Cuba ranked lower. Chavez’s government also seized TV stations, numerous banks, the assets of 60 oil service companies, 32 sugar plantations, and foreign-owned cement plants, that refused to be nationalized. All privately held oil production was effectively nationalized in 2007 as well.

Crime soared. Caracas became one of the most dangerous cities in the world, and Venezuela’s 2009 murder rate topped that of war-torn Iraq, and Mexico’s cartel-inspired carnage. By 2012, Venezuela’s national murder rate was one of the highest in the world. Chronic food shortages and power outages as well as mounting debt—leading to a 33 percent currency devaluation last month, Venezuela’s fifth in a decade—has turned the nation into one of the

Western Hemisphere’s worst economic basket cases.

None of this should surprise. A year after he won reelection in 2006, Chavez held a constitutional referendum whose chief purpose was the elimination of presidential term-limits. When voters defeated it, he repeated the process a year later and succeeded in eliminating them. He won another term in 2012, after lying and declaring himself cancer free. Two months later, he went back to Cuba. He was never heard from again.

Chavez characterized his repressive regime as “21st-century socialism.” In reality, it bore a striking resemblance to the repressive regime of Fidel Castro, a man he idolized, and whose nation he kept propped up with cheap oil in return for the training of his private army of enforcers, known as the Bolivarian Circles. Chavez’s regime, in turn, has been largely propped up by China, which has subsidized Venezuela with \$36 billion in loans that are being repaid in oil, not cash. And as of last September, the state-run oil company in a nation sitting on some of the largest oil reserves in the world is now paying its debt by issuing bonds—aka IOUs.

Thus, despite his bravado, his charisma, and a host of other dubious qualities that endeared him to leftists, Hugo Chavez was little more than a self-aggrandizing authoritarian thug. His grandiose schemes did little to alleviate the country’s economic woes. Yet he leaves behind a hand-picked successor in Vice President Nicolas Maduro, and enough of a political apparatus that the constitutionally mandated election required to take place in 30 days will likely be nothing more than a formality, officially instating Maduro as president.

Henrique Capriles, a charismatic opposition candidate who lost the October election to Chavez, may mount a challenge, but it is unrealistic to expect him to coordinate a viable election campaign in the space of a month in a nation where “Chavistas” have all but eliminated opposition media.

Chavez is dead. Sadly, the authoritarianism he nurtured will likely live on.

—FrontPage Magazine, March 7, 2013

The Schwarz Report Bookshelf

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