

## Comments to Steve Fuller

Anna Rotkirch & J.P. Roos

**Steven Fuller has clearly read an incomplete version of our argument and does not address its main question, namely the acceptability of ID as a scientific theory. We nevertheless welcome the occasion to reply, especially as he again expounds the same mistake concerning Westermarck that he made in his Westermarck memorial lecture (see *Roos 2003*).**

In our view, Westermarck remains a very relevant author, but some of his concepts have changed their meaning and must be “retranslated”. Thus, Fuller is wrong in claiming that Westermarck, as well as Darwin, expounded an absolutely relativist universal doctrine. The “ethical relativity” discussed by Westermarck was anything but relativist.

Westermarck argued against the possibility of having absolutely true moral theories based on fundamental moral concepts (utilitarianism, Kantianism etc.). To these he counterposed an empirical Darwinist (and Smithian) theory of human emotions as a basis of moral judgments. For him, these emotions could be analyzed and explained scientifically and connected to moral rules and this is what he proposed to do (*Westermarck 1932, 60*).

This same project is nowadays undertaken under the name of evolutionary psychology and human evolutionary theory more generally. Ethical relativity in Westermarck’s sense simply meant that there could be no absolute, objective measuring stock of moral conduct. However, the explanations why people act morally could be tested and shown to be true or false, universal or relative. Westermarck’s objective basis was human nature, in the sense of the existence of universal dispositions for certain emotional and behavioral patterns. His most famous example is the Westermarck effect: an emotional reaction which causes avoidance of incestuous behavior, independently of any moral concepts encouraging the avoidance of incest.

Fuller thinks in a completely different, highly moralistic (“meta-relativist”) vein. For him, the consequences of scientific theories are most important. If Darwinism - or any theory - leads to morally wrong conclusions, it must be rejected. If ID leads to morally better results, it should be accepted. Here he also shows that he does not understand the theory of evolution. Darwinism does neither lead to any moral relativism or absolute egalitarianism of living forms, nor - as is more often claimed by sociologists - to absolute inegalitarianism in the form of “the survival of the fittest” as a moral doctrine (and from this to racism, and fascism and worse).

Darwin’s theory was valid even in Westermarck’s times, before the mechanisms by which natural selection works, were explained. His political or religious views have no relevance for the basics of evolutionary theory (for instance, Darwin accepted the possibility of a Creator, who put the principles of evolution to work). ID does not become a valid theory even if the supposedly problematic phenomena it poses against evolution were true (which they are not). Darwin’s theory would then have to be corrected, but there are several other more plausible alternatives than intelligent design.

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Fuller’s kind of moralistic thinking is unfortunately very common in social sciences, especially in the extreme right or left. Science is a social construction, and it is better to have morally good than morally bad constructions, regardless of whether the construction is scientifically good or bad. For people like Fuller, scientific, rational argumentation will not do. Instead, believers in paranormality are OK, if they serve a good end. This is exactly what we criticize in our article: even though Fuller has an academically acknowledged position, his views are no longer scientific.

He uses his credentials to extra-scientific, ideological ends. He evaluates theories and researchers on the basis of their possible consequences, not on the basis of the quality of their work. And he even gets the consequences wrong, at least in the case of Darwin and Westermarck.

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Finally, a short comment to Fuller's comment to our reply to Huotari: it is of course irrelevant how Fuller would have judged our applications (although he has to our knowledge not done so as this information is available to applicants). We just find it problematic that he is used as an academic referee. In Finland or elsewhere.

Fuller's comparison about Holocaust and ID is, once again, sophisticated but devoid of common sense. It is certainly "epistemologically interesting" to note that just as there are - and should be - several compatible explanations for the Holocaust, there can be several theoretical explanations for evolution. An adequate analogy to this could be the debates concerning the units and levels of selection in evolution. But we cannot compare the role of Hitler to speculations about a Designer. A real analogy to ID would be a "competing" theory claiming that Hitler was programmed by extra-terrestrials.

Fuller actually appears to believe that Darwinism and ID are comparable theories of the same phenomenon, one just a little more one-sided than the other. This is simply not so. The "theory" of intelligent design is not a theory, it is a dogma disguised as something else. On the other hand, Darwinism is more than a theory: it is a confirmed and causal explanation of the evolution of life. ID and Darwinism are not competing theories. That a renowned sociologist of science cannot see this difference, is almost too unbelievable to be true.

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J. P. Roos (2003): Westermarck-muistoluento uusiksi? *Sociologia* 3, 234  
Edward Westermarck (1932): *Ethical Relativity*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York