

Social darwinism
impact anti semitism
history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ I was a young man with uninformed ideas. I threw out queries, suggestions, wondering all the time over everything; and to my astonishment, the ideas (of evolution) took like wildfire. People made a religion of them.” -Charles Darwin. 1 Within a quarter of a century of the creation of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and the publication of his book, *The Origin of Species*, European’s and American’s had already begun to investigate the social and psychological propositions of Darwinism. There emerged a wide range of literature dedicated to discovering these propositions in social and psychological, class, race, gender, religion and morality, war and peace, and crime and destruction contexts. 2 By the late 19th century, Germany was conquered by revolution and modification in how men viewed the theory of race. Ultimately, German struggle for Nationalism, which led to a desire for a strengthened populace, allowed for the growth of “ scientific” theories to promote a dominant Aryan nation. This was best seen in the introduction of Social Darwinism and theories of biological determinism. Although these new theories brought on conflict, the social ideas of race were not restricted to the nineteenth century, this era initiated many of the new formations and fallacies regarding race and religion. The scientific mask over the theory of Social Darwinism, made anti-Semitism acceptable in German society. This theory of race was not only an empty dogma of discrimination, lacking all scientific sources, but it became a brutal and illicit theory from which a socio-political outlook of the world appeared and which later provided the basis of the Nazi ideology.

During the mid-nineteenth century significant discoveries were made in the areas of chemistry, physics, and biology. Some of these had instantaneous

realistic relevance to the lives of the general population. Others produced a panorama of disagreement unheard of since the scientific revolution. While social, political, and economic ideas were shifting in the second half of the nineteenth century, so was scientific views. The originator of this change was Darwin. His indications had an extensive influence on many features of civilization. His perception of evolution was obviously radical, but his ideas did not come out in a vacuum. For over half a century, new thoughts had been growing in botany, biology, and geology. 3 The new utilizing of sciences was exciting and thrived in Europe. The people believed in everything that science had to say, nothing was questioned. That is why most "scientific" theories were accepted and exploited in society. Unlike today, science was not queried in the nineteenth century. Because of this, theories of race were taken on in order to strengthen the population. It was therefore believed that to achieve progress of humanity, they would need to get rid of the struggle for existence between peoples. The solution- extermination of all races that aren't the "fittest". 4

Due to Germany's desire for a united nation and an advanced general population, the civilizations living in Germany boosted the promotion and development of many scientific theories and ideas. These ideologies were not questioned because of the need for nationalism. Nationalism is the admired attitude that places the existence and security of the nation-state highest on the scale of political priorities. Nationalist sentiments were running passionately in the nineteenth century. The industrial white societies of Europe and North America used social Darwinism to declare racial supremacy over the people of the non developed countries, using this

criterion, Europeans believed themselves to be “ the fittest” and therefore fated to “ survive” and rule. 5

When Darwin publicized his Origin of Species in 1859, it received instant approval. His Descent of Man ensued in 1871. Darwin associated his theory of evolution, his doctrines of natural selection, and survival in life, mainly to plants and animals. Despite this, he did indeed examine his principles in relation to man, thus preceding what is later to be identified as Social Darwinism. 6 Social Darwinism, which developed after Darwin, applied the theory of natural selection to social, political, and economic issues. In its simplest form, Social Darwinism follows the mantra of “ survival of the fittest,” comprised of human matters. Many German interpreters turned Darwin’s initial, socially innocuous philosophy to be increasingly drastic and intense. 7 Ethnic groups within Germany came to be considered as “ biological organisms”, so that it was valid to claim, under Darwinistic ideology, that a stronger nation naturally had the justification to control, or even annihilate weaker nations in a universal struggle for survival. It was therefore decided that the best thing to do was to help nature along by selecting the fittest, and letting the others die out. 8 “ By the end of the nineteenth century, racial thought had transformed the struggles for the survival of the fittest into a racial imperative”. 9

Darwin’s theories had substantial affect beyond the empire of science and religion. The appliances of Darwin’s concepts to human society, called social Darwinism, were extended by an advocate of his theories named Herbert Spencer. He was the one who applied Darwin’s original ideas to society, politics, and economics. Spencer assumed the idea of survival of the fittest <https://assignbuster.com/social-darwinism-impact-anti-semitism-history-essay/>

and that, as in the plant in the animal world, in the human world, the most competent progresses to the top. He also thinks that governments should not hinder in this natural social system. Businesses should be allowed to crash, people should be left to go hungry, and illness and death should be free to plague the weak. The standard of competition would guarantee that the ablest would surface as winners in the economic and social struggle. Spencer's ideas were prevalent in the free enterprise and distinctive society of the United States. In fact, the aggressive industrial rivalry of the late nineteenth century was acceptable because of his theory. 10

The overall impact that Social Darwinism had on anti-Semitism came on later when Nazi ideology began. During the late 19th century, most "scientific" theories were racial. Only afterwards were these theories applied to religious groups in Europe. 11 The progression of the theory that Darwin created evolved into senseless motives to discriminate against races and religions that weren't Aryan. The term Aryan came to be used as the expression for the Indo-European language group, and by expansion, the speakers of those languages. In the 19th century, "language" was still contemplated as an asset of "ethnicity", and thus the speakers of the Indo-European languages came to be the "Aryan race". Anyone who was not of the Aryan race was to be shunned and eventually eliminated (when Hitler came to power). 12

Overall, the large impact that social Darwinism had on anti-Semitism is considerable as the original theory was not meant to be applied to the human race. Regardless of the fact that Darwin had thought about applying his theories to humans, it is obvious that he did not intend for it to be put into practice. Through the start of Nationalism, and the popularity of science <https://assignbuster.com/social-darwinism-impact-anti-semitism-history-essay/>

in Germany, Darwinism was taken to a further step, and assisted racism and discrimination to grow throughout Europe. The idea of natural selection and survival of the fittest was furthered to a point where it became the basis of Nazi ideology, and ultimately resulted in the death of 6 million innocent people. 13

END NOTES

Bill Keith, *Scopes II, the Great Debate: Creation vs. Evolution* (Shreveport, La.: Huntington House, 1984), 47.

Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 61.

Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 112-115.

Richard Weikart, *Progress through Racial Extermination: Social Darwinism, Eugenics, and Pacifism in Germany, 1860-1918* (*German Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, May 2003), 273-278

Richard J. Evans, *Rereading German History: from Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996* (London: Routledge, 1997), 120-123.

Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008), 13-18.

Horst Von Maltitz, *The Evolution of Hitler's Germany; the Ideology, the Personality, the Moment* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 26-28.

Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 123-128.

George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 106.

Joseph R. Llobera, *The Making of Totalitarian Thought* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 76-80.

G. N Cantor and Marc Swetlitz, *Jewish Tradition and the Challenge of Darwinism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 102-105.

Horst Von Maltitz, *The Evolution of Hitler's Germany; the Ideology, the Personality, the Moment* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 30-32.

Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 136-141.