

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

## NATURALISTIC OUTLOOK

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## Abstract

*The ascendance of naturalism over supernaturalism in American intellectual circles is traced. The effect of the acceptance of the evolutionary hypothesis in American literature, economics and sociology is reviewed.*

## Introduction

A new wave of ideas swept over America in the latter part of the 19th century. They were not entirely new ideas—there are few enough of those, in any case—, but many of them were certainly given new twists. The one idea which entranced, gripped, and served as a kind of illumination for, many intellectuals was the idea of evolution. Not simply biological evolution—though that was central—but evolution applied in every direction, for many thinkers came to see everything through evolutionary lenses, so to speak. Undoubtedly, some thinkers were questing for a natural explanation for the world and all that in it is, and evolutionary ideas and theories appeared to provide an answer for them.

Once again, the formulations of these ideas were done mostly in Western Europe and were taken up in America afterward. Not only were these ideas naturalistic in character but they were also generally opposed to supernatural and older philosophical and metaphysical ideas. Science, or *scientism*, was replacing philosophy, man replacing God at the center in men's minds, and history replacing metaphysics. Romanticism, by exalting feeling and insight, tended to downgrade reason. As reasoned philosophy lost its disciplinary hold on thinking, thinkers turned more and more to explanations with a single idea at the base (ideology). This tendency was further reinforced by the increasingly monistic character of thought. Monism is the belief that there is only a single level of reality, that it is material or physical, for example. This is in contrast with earlier views of reality that it is dual or multiple, i.e., physical and metaphysical or material, mental, and spiritual. Thus, philosophers had usually provided much more complex explanations of reality. But with the breakdown in philosophy and the tendency toward monism, such systems of thought as appeared were often based upon a single idea.

The 19th century has sometimes been referred to as an Age of Ideology. Certainly, many ideas and doctrines were brought forth in Europe in that century, and some of them have had a powerful impact on the world in the 20th century. An ideology may be defined as a system or doctrine based on a single root idea. They quite often have an "ism" suffix, as in socialism, though it has become so common to use this suffix on words that they do not always signify an ideology. The appearance of some of these "isms" is indicated by this description in an European history:

So far as is known the word 'liberalism' first appeared in the English language in 1819, 'radicalism' in 1820, 'socialism' in 1832, 'conservatism' in

1835. The 1830's first saw 'individualism,' 'Constitutionalism,' 'humanitarianism,' and 'monarchism.' 'Nationalism' and 'communism' date from the 1840's. Not until the 1850's did the English-speaking world use the word 'capitalism' . . . (Palmer and Colton, 1958, p. 431).

Such words and systems continued to pour forth in the ensuing years, such words as "Darwinism" and "Marxism." And, as the historians say, "Without the 'isms' created in the thirty-odd years after the Peace of Vienna it is impossible to understand or even talk about the history of the world . . ." (Palmer and Colton, 1958, p. 431).

From the mid-19th century onward there was, if anything, more of an ideological bent to the thought systems that were brought forth. Moreover, the idea of evolution became a galvanizing agent for a variety of ideologies, giving them a thrust and vigor they did not have before that.

## Theories of Evolution

Evolution was in the intellectual wind for most of the 19th century. This was so while the idea of biological evolution was still only a quaint theory which some person here or there had advanced. Romanticism provided the setting by shifting the focus of thought from the enduring features of things (their natures) toward that in which they were unique, different, and individual. It emphasized change and growth. Undoubtedly, too, such developments as rapid population growth and increasing technological change reinforced the sense of a prevalent growth and change. In any case, thinkers began casting about for explanations of change, seeking for the laws of development and change, and even for methods of predicting the course of changes to come.

The German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel developed a full-fledged theory of how change takes place. The method is called the dialectic. Change, Hegel held, results from the ideas that men hold. These change dialectically, that is, out of the contest between two conflicting ideas. First, there is the thesis (the proposition, idea, or theory), then its opposite, the antithesis. Out of the contest over these, there comes the synthesis, the resolution of these opposing views which contains elements of both of them. The synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis, and the process goes on and on, not around in a circle, however, but upward in progressive improvement. Hegel was the major German philosopher of the first half of the 19th century, and, when German philosophy became an influence on America in the second half, he had followers in this country.

The French sociologist Auguste Comte set forth a scheme that attempted to explain the development of mind and society through three successive stages. The

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first stage he called theological, when thinkers explained things in terms of religion. The second stage was metaphysical, when explanations were in terms of abstractions, and the third—final and highest—stage was the scientific, by which he seems to have meant mainly the factual stage. The scientific stage he also referred to as the Positive stage, and, in connection with it, he set forth what might be loosely called a religion or Positivism. It might better be called a religion of the worship of humanity or *humanis*, to use one of his words, for he said:

Towards Humanity, who is for us the only true Great Being, we, the conscious elements of whom she is composed, shall henceforth direct every aspect of our life, individual and collective. Our thoughts will be devoted to the knowledge of Humanity, our affections to her love, our actions to her service. (van Baumer, 1967, p. 491)

Although these ideas were important ingredients in the New (secular) Humanism which arose, the central point here is that he was explaining change in terms of successive stages of development.

But it was Herbert Spencer, the English synthetic philosopher of the mid-19th century, who set forth a scheme of universal evolution for the English speaking world. Everything is undergoing change, Spencer held not simply random change, but change which is moving in the direction of fulfillment and perfection. All this was supposed to be occurring according to the law of change and progress. He described the mode of the change in this way:

Evolution . . . is a change from a less coherent to a more coherent form. This is the universal process through which sensible existences, individually and as a whole, pass during the ascending halves of their histories. (Schoenwald, 1965, p. 151).

The end toward which this "universal process" moves, according to Spencer, is progress:

Progress, therefore, is not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation; and provided the human race continues . . ., those modifications must end in completeness . . . (van Baumer, 1967, p. 505).

Spencer focused entirely upon the changing, ignoring the enduring and reducing the eternal to a remote Unknowable. Even so, his works enjoyed a wider circulation and greater popularity than had those of any thinker of his depth before him. He wrote many volumes, and the sales of his books in America from the early 1860s to 1903 amounted to 368,755 copies. Henry Holt, the publisher, said, "Probably no other philosopher ever had such a vogue as Spencer had from 1870 to 1890." (Hofstadter, 1959, p. 34). At least one general theory of evolution had been thoroughly publicized.

### Biological Evolution

It was Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution, however, presented in his book, *The Origin of*

*Species*, which set the intellectual world afire after 1859. Up to that time, "the development theory," as it was then called, had not made great headway, though it was widely known. Even Spencer's great vogue came mostly after the publication of *The Origin of Species*.

Charles Darwin was hardly the first person to propose that species of plants and animals had evolved and new ones emerged in the course of time. Indeed, the idea had been advanced among the ancient Greeks, but was generally rejected during the classic age of Greek thought. It was revived in the late 18th century by French thinkers, most notably by Jean Baptiste Lamarck. Lamarck believed that higher and more complex forms of life had developed from simpler forms by natural processes. He thought this might come about through the inheritance of acquired characteristics. However, this theory was never widely accepted. Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, also studied animal life extensively and advanced the idea that all the higher forms of life could have developed from a single simple beginning.

Herbert Spencer, too, put forth the idea that new species arise naturally by way of development, several years before Darwin did. Indeed, Spencer sent Darwin a copy of one of his books dealing with the subject, to which Darwin replied:

Your remarks on the general argument of the so-called development theory seem to me admirable. I am at present preparing an Abstract . . . on the change of the species; but I treat the subject as a naturalist, and not from a general point of view, otherwise, in my opinion, your argument could not have been improved on, and might have been quoted by me with great advantage. (Schoenwald, 1965, p. 121).

Moreover, another Englishman, Alfred Russell Wallace, arrived at virtually the same conclusions as Charles Darwin before *The Origin of Species* was published. In 1858, he sent a paper to Darwin which explained his theory. Darwin was astounded. "I never saw a more striking coincidence," he wrote Sir Charles Lyell, "if Wallace had my Ms. sketch written out in 1842, he could not have made a better short abstract! Even his terms now stand as heads to my chapters . . ." (Irvine, 1955, p. 42). Darwin got up a short abstract of his ideas so that they could be presented alongside those of Wallace.

In any case, Darwin's *Origin of Species* made the great impact for evolution. Indeed, the concept of evolution became more or less synonymous with Darwinism after the publication of his book. Theories of biological evolution had generally been rejected or ignored before Darwin's work was published. Thereafter, it soon became the dominant theory and bade fair to replace all others. Three decades after Darwin's work appeared, Alfred Russell Wallace declared, with not any great exaggeration:

The whole scientific and literary world, even the whole educated public, accepts as a matter of common knowledge, the origin of the species from other allied species by the ordinary process of natural birth. [Moreover, he continued,] . . . we claim for Darwin that he is the Newton of natural history, and that . . . Darwin, by his discovery of the

law of natural selection . . . [has] not only thrown a flood of light on the process of development of the whole organic world, but also established a firm foundation for all future study of nature. [Brackets added.] (van Baumer, 1967, p. 533)

Darwin focused his attention almost from the outset of his studies upon varieties of plants and animals within species. He came to believe that some varieties developed away from the original species over long periods of time until eventually they emerged as a new species. The process of development of superior varieties or breeds had long been well known among animal breeders. They select the hardier specimens, or those with the most desired characteristics, generation after generation, and thus are able to develop distinct breeds (as in horses, cows, and other domestic animals). If this process were carried on long enough, Darwin thought, perhaps tens or hundreds of thousands of years, a new species could emerge. But human selection could hardly account for the process by which species had originated; it had to occur in nature if all plants and animals (including man) had developed in this fashion.

The key Darwin hit upon was *natural selection*. He borrowed the idea of *struggle for survival* from Malthus, and the idea of *survival of the fittest* from Spencer. Darwin noted, as have others, that plants and animals reproduce in prodigious quantities; they multiply much more rapidly than does the means for their survival. In consequence, a struggle for survival goes on in nature, especially among those of the same species. Variations, which become the basis of varieties, enable some to survive while others die out. These "fittest" which survive in the struggle for life develop along paths which may eventually lead to new species, Darwin held. He also believed that *sexual selection* might have played a role, at least among the higher animals. (Thus, if gentlemen do indeed prefer blondes, blonde would presumably become the dominant hair trait.)

If Darwin had contented himself with merely stating his theory, or more correctly, hypothesis, it might have fared little better than others which had preceded it. But he did much more than that. He did present his hypothesis, indeed, gave it first place in the book. He considered it important, too, that he gave much thought to the objections that would be raised and dealt with them at some length. Beyond that, however, and probably much more important for the acceptance of his hypothesis as a valid theory, he summarized a vast amount of material which he submitted as evidence for his case. This gave to the work as a whole the appearance of scientific (or factual) support, something which greatly impressed many of his contemporaries. Indeed, Darwin had been collecting geologic, botanic, and zoological evidence for 25 years before he published the *Origin*. His five-year voyage on the *Beagle* enabled him to collect a vast assortment of information from other places in the world. After returning to England, he spent many more years collecting and studying all sorts of anecdotes, specimens, plants and domestic and wild animals. In his book, he brought this tremendous array of information to bear, or arranged it in such a way that it gave support to, his thesis on natural selection and biological evolution. Darwin had a well-established reputation as a

careful observer and faithful reporter before he published his most impressive work. When he assembled this information behind such a broad and comprehensive thesis as biological evolution, he accomplished a *tour de force*. It commanded attention.

Darwin did not leave it entirely to chance, however, that his book would have an impact. Many books are published; few change men's minds to any extent. Not only had he already established a reputation as a naturalist by publishing books and articles, but he also cultivated others in the field to bring them around gradually toward his view for years before he published the *Origin*. He corresponded with and conversed much with Sir Charles Lyell, who was a leader in his field. He corresponded with Asa Gray at Harvard, who became his champion in America. Above all, he had almost persuaded T. H. Huxley before his book appeared, and afterward Huxley became a one-man publicity manager for Darwin's explanation (though he harbored some misgivings about the mutability of the species). Most likely, Huxley was more concerned with seeing to it that a natural explanation get a fair hearing than with Darwin's particular hypothesis, but he served Darwin well nonetheless.

Darwin believed that he had hit upon an explanation, and a grand one at that, for the development of all life forms. He described it this way:

thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers . . . that . . . from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (Irvine, 1955, p. 96)

If there had been any doubt that Darwin believed that man evolved from lower animals, he removed it with the publication of *The Descent of Man* in 1871. In this exceedingly long treatise, Darwin maintained that man had evolved from some ancestor of the ape, or at least that man had common ancestors with these creatures. He attempted to explain how consciousness, conscience, moral sentiments, and man's more or less peculiar features might have evolved. Much attention was devoted to describing attributes in lower animals which bear resemblance to those much more highly developed in man. Ultimately, he maintained, the differences between man and the lower animals are differences of degree, not of kind.

### Critique of Darwinian Evolution

Almost from the beginning, the belief in the natural origin of the species—and, more broadly, of the natural development of all things—has been a kind of faith. The faith can be called Darwinism, naturalism, or evolutionism, or something on that order. It is an essential ingredient in the faith that is nowadays often referred to as secular humanism.

Evolutionism is held to as a faith, however, not because names have been applied to the believers but because they exhibit an attitude of faith toward it rather than submitting it to logical and evidential tests. To demonstrate that this is the case, it may be helpful to apply some of these tests to it here.

The theory of natural evolution of the species is fraught with difficulties. In the first place, despite the claims made for its scientific validity, it is basically an historical proposition, not scientific validity, it deals with events and developments that are supposed to have taken place in the course of time. Very precisely, it is natural history, not human history, such as we ordinarily encounter. Even so, the rules of evidence that apply in history generally are the ones that basically apply to it. Moreover, the crucial events alleged—namely, that new species emerged naturally—are hypothetical. There are no witnesses to the events, and such evidence as there is that they ever occurred is negative. There is evidence, of sorts, that some species appeared later in time than others, but it is negative, i.e., no remains have been found of particular species in earlier deposits of remains. The absence of evidence does not prove anything. If the crucial events had been proved, then Darwin's explanation might be correctly described as a theory of evolution. As matters have stood, since the crucial events are hypothetical, Darwin's explanation is at best a theory to explain a hypothesis. Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis can be stated this way: *If* new species occurred in the process of natural development, the process *might* have taken place much as Darwin imagined it.

The scientific difficulties with the Darwinian hypothesis are, if anything, even greater than the historical ones. One of the most striking facts in nature is the tenacious persistence of species. A species is most readily distinguished from other species by the fact that males and females within it may mate and produce potent offspring. Simply stated, like begets like, and offspring do likewise in an apparently endless chain. Under man's guidance there has been some breeding across the apparent line between species. The offspring are hybrids, which are either sterile or unpredictable. The classic example of a hybrid is the mule. The mule is the predictable result of breeding a donkey and a horse. But the mule is sterile, i.e., cannot normally produce offspring. Every mule is the end of the line, normally.

Darwin tried to get around these various difficulties by positing the development of new species which diverged farther and farther from the parent species over a vast span of time. In short, the change would occur so gradually that the emergence of a new species would involve only infinitesimal changes over hundreds of years, say. Looked at in this way, there never would be anything which an historian might call an event in the emergence of a new species. That sort of disposes of one problem, but it gave rise to another. Namely, there would need to be numerous gradations of beings in the gaps between species. To get from monkey to man, for example, proof would require evidence of creatures who became more and more manlike and less and less monkeylike. Darwin was quite aware that he did not have these, so to get around the difficulty he posited "missing links," beings which *must* have existed at one time because they are necessary to the proof of his theory. Contrary to what has been widely believed, there is not simply one "missing link" but innumerable ones that would fill in all the gaps between species.

The mountainous evidence accumulated by Darwin provided abundant proofs of the development of varieties, strains, and breeds *within* species. That is, he proved many times over what nobody much doubted in the first place. Domestic plants and animals have long been subject to selective planting and breeding to produce plants and animals with the desired characteristics. It may be, too, that Darwin's (and later accumulations) points to a natural process whereby hardy varieties are developed and sustained. That is, it may be that Darwin contributed to our understanding of an evolution *within* species. But he did not prove the evolution of the species, nor establish as fact the method by which it occurred. Those who believe this take it on faith, not because it has been shown to be true. Undoubtedly, those who believe that God created man in His image, that He created the other species and gave man dominion over them, accept this on faith also. The latter are aware of and avow their faith; the former conceal theirs under a scientific gloss.

### The Impact of Evolution

Darwinism sent shock waves into all areas of thought, shock waves which have not yet spent themselves. Darwinism was brought forth in a framework in which the idea of evolution as a natural explanation of all sorts of developments was gaining sway. When its claims were accepted, they provided confirmation of evolution in a most vital area.

Both Darwinism and the general idea of evolution had as great an impact upon the United States as upon England, if not greater. The popularity of Spencer has already been noted. His leading disciple in America was William Graham Sumner, but there were many others. The contacts between Darwin and Asa Gray at Harvard have already been noted, and Gray became a leading exponent of Darwin's ideas in the United States. Louis Agassiz, also of Harvard, was a vigorous opponent of Darwin's theories, but the theory of biological evolution gained ground rapidly in this country nonetheless. John Fiske, historian and philosopher, made evolution much more congenial for theists by describing it as being the way God works in the world. Far from being overwhelmed by any notion of man as simply a littler higher animal, Fiske declared that "the whole creation has been groaning and travailing together in order to bring forth that last consummate specimen of God's handiwork, the Human Soul." (Commager, 1954, p. 85). But if Darwinism was to serve as the basis of philosophy or ideology, which it certainly did, there were other directions in which it could and was pointed.

The most general impact of the idea of evolution was to focus attention on the changing and mutable features of reality and to downgrade or ignore the enduring, the fixed, and the eternal. Indeed, to a thoroughgoing evolutionist it often seemed as if there were no fixed or enduring features to reality. Looked at broadly, all was in a state of flux, alteration, adaptation, and adjustment. Everything seemed to be relative to time and place and to everything else. The idea of *relativism* was given great impetus by Darwinism, and early in the 20th century Albert Einstein made public his general theory of relativity, bringing the whole universe under its rule. Fixed points and enduring laws tended to recede into the background or fade out of mind.

God was, for Herbert Spencer, the Unknowable, but for many contemporary intellects, He was most apt to be the Unknown. As a youth, Charles Darwin had begun studies which would lead to a career in the church, but he abandoned that for science. In the course of his life, he drifted away from earlier religious beliefs, though he usually took pains to avoid religious controversy. Not so, T. H. Huxley, an agnostic—a word which he invented to indicate that he did not know whether or not there is a God—, for he tangled with the clergy whenever the occasion arose in his career. Adam Sedgwick, a geologist, declared of Darwin's theory of natural selection that it was a "dish of rank materialism cleverly cooked and served up merely to make us independent of a Creator." (Barzun, 1958, p. 37). Undoubtedly, Darwinism caught on because it offered a natural explanation, and, while it might not dispose of the need for some sort of Beginner, if not Creator, it certainly required no more than a most remote God.

Indeed, the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, proclaimed that God is dead. His meaning, we may suppose, is that the belief in God is no longer supportable. If that were the case, it certainly portended great changes to come, for without God, much would surely be different. But

the event itself is far too great [Nietzsche said,] . . . for even the report of it to have reached . . . many people . . ., to say nothing of their capacity for knowing what is really involved and what must all collapse, now that this belief has been undermined . . . [He foresaw a] prolonged excess and continuation of demolition, ruin and overthrow which is now impending . . . [Brackets added]. (Weber, 1959, p. 672)

The whole system of morality would collapse, he thought, and much that had restrained men in times past. "Man has one terrible and fundamental wish," Nietzsche declared; "he desires power, and this impulse, which is called freedom, must be the longest restrained." (Black, 1964, p. 472). While Nietzsche professed to greet the coming era without God as a new and "rosy" dawn, he did correctly foresee the destruction that might follow when the will to power was released from restraints and exercised by tyrants, as has been the case in many lands in the 20th century.

Strangely, man without God cannot acquire knowledge. He can acquire reams upon reams of more or less factual information, of course, as men have busied themselves at doing ever more vigorously since the latter part of the 19th century (and devised ever more effective means to spread it), but it does not add up to knowledge or truth. Without God, we lack a first and final premise for knowledge, a Knower in whose information is knowledge, a fixed point from which to proceed to get knowledge. That is the ultimate source of the relativism of this age, of which evolutionist relativism is a reflex. None of this is meant to suggest that men have ceased entirely to believe in God generally since that time. That is hardly the case universally. What has happened, however, is that belief in God has become increasingly unsprung from intellectual endeavor, resulting in deep wounds both to religious belief and to intellectual endeavor.

One other general impact of evolution and Darwinism needs to be discussed before turning to some particular applications of them. The thrust of this revolution in thought was for history to replace philosophy (and theology). To put it another way, the study of virtually everything tended to become a study of its history. (Notable exceptions were chemistry, physics, and mathematics, though there have been strenuous efforts to place mathematics and physics into a relativistic framework, e.g., the "new mathematics.") Thus, philosophy tended to become the history of philosophy, literature the history of literature, political science the history of political development, biology the history of the evolution of plants and animals, theology the history of religions, economics the history of economic institutions, and so on. The focus everywhere tended to be on how things had evolved, whether the subject was animals, monotheism, or government.

The quest was on, too, for the "laws" of historical development or evolution. A major shift occurred in the meaning and significance of natural law, so far as thinkers continued to believe in it at all. At the time of the founding of the United States, people had usually thought of natural law as principles of regularity imbedded in things; they were metaphysical, that is, underlying the physical. These laws were conceived of as the framework within which actions and events occur, potentialities until someone or something had acted. Thus, natural laws determined effects, but were not causes. In the historical framework which had come to prevail in intellectual circles in the latter part of the 19th century, metaphysics had been largely abandoned. Natural laws were now thought of as forces, causes, if you will, which explained the course of development. Natural-law-as-force was the cause of things happening, not the result of human and other behavior. Thus, thinkers spoke of the forces which produced change. The evolution of all things came to be widely thought of as the result of natural forces at work in the world.

Man, too, was in this forceful stream of causation of natural development. It could hardly be otherwise for those who believed in evolution as a natural process and in man as a product of natural evolution. It was an easy step from this to the belief that human behavior was *determined* by these causative forces. The mind and will were not free; they were in a stream of causation which determined them. Thus, thinkers and writers cast about and came up with theories of determinism. Biological determinism lay ready at hand as an explanation for how behavior was determined. Those who emphasized this would focus upon heredity as a primal cause of human behavior and development. After all, heredity must surely be the main causative factor in biological evolution. Ominous racial theories grew out of these beliefs. But environment also was often conceived as playing a large role, and environmentalism was another determinism that gained currency. John B. Watson, an American psychologist, developed a thoroughgoing mechanical view of the role of the environment with his stimulus and response theory. Deterministic theories tended not only to cut away any belief in the freedom of action or choice of man but also any personal responsibility for acts.

Probably, the other most prominent determinism was economic determinism. Karl Marx was the most vigorous proponent of this view. He held that control over the instruments of production determined social organization, and that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." Hillquit, 1909, p. 63).

It should be noted, too, that as more and more things came to be viewed historically, what had been thought of as history lost much of its meaning. History becomes largely the story of how things got to be the way they are, plus some attempt to discover trends that would show the way they were going. Some historians boldly proclaimed in the early 20th century that there were no lessons to be learned from history. Historian J. H. Robinson (1912, pp. 17-8) said:

It is true that it has long been held that certain lessons could be derived from the past . . . But there is a growing suspicion . . . that this type of usefulness is purely illusory . . . Their value rests on the assumption that conditions remain sufficiently uniform to give precedents a perpetual value, while, as a matter of fact, conditions . . . are so rapidly altering that for the most part it would be dangerous indeed to attempt to apply past experience to the solution of current problems.

H. E. Barnes (1925, p. 589) thought the very idea of seeking truth from the past was hilarious:

Not even a Texas Methodist Kleagle, [he argued] would think of taking his car to Moses, Joshua, Luther, or George Washington to have the carburetor adjusted or the valves ground, yet we assure ourselves . . . that we ought to continue to attempt to solve our contemporary problems of society, politics and conduct on the basis of . . . information which in many cases far antedates Moses. [Brackets added.]

If all is indeed changing, as many evolutionists came to believe, if there is only history, the ironic truth seems to be that history does not matter much.

#### Naturalism in Literature

The 19th century was the age of the novel in literature. Poetry had been revived considerably during the surge of romanticism in the first half of the 19th century, but it succumbed once more to the prosaic character of the times after the Civil War. Walt Whitman lived for many years after the war, but he no longer brought forth thunderous poetry to match his earlier *Leaves of Grass*. Newspapers increased in number and even more impressively in circulation between the Civil War and World War I, but the journalistic mode had not yet come to dominate as a literary form. The essay was an important means of expression, and there were a number of quality magazines of opinion and information, such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. By the 1890s popular magazines, such as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's*, were making an impact with their stories and articles.

But the novel had come into its own as the most important vehicle of literary expression. It focused on the individual, gave scope for the full development of

the rise and fall of individuals, in an era when individualism was highly prized as a way of life by Americans. All sorts of novels were published, ranging from romances, to poor-boy-makes-good-in-the-big-city stories of Horatio Alger, to utopian scenarios, to realistic ones which depicted the details of life and living with great exactness. Some of the most enduring of the literature produced during the period is often described as "local color." This refers to short stories and novels mainly which are based on some particular locale in the country and try to capture its particular flavor and character. Edward Eggleston, who wrote about life in the Midwest, explained what moved him to do local color for his region this way:

It used to be a matter of no little jealousy with us . . . that the manners, customs, thoughts, and feelings of New England country people filled so large a place in books, while our life, not less interesting, not less romantic . . . had no place in literature. It was as though we were shut out of society. (Williams, Current and Freidel, 1959, p. 80).

His best known book was *A Hoosier Schoolmaster*. George Washington Cable wrote stories of Louisiana, Sarah Orne Jewett of New England, and Joel Chandler Harris captured the flavor of Black stories and dialect in Georgia in his account of *Uncle Remus*.

Mark Twain (born Samuel Clemens) was much too versatile in his writings to place him in a single category. He was a humorist, a satirist, a writer of local color, and an accomplished teller of tall tales in the American vein. In *Roughing It*, he described life on the frontier, and *Innocents Abroad* captured the contrast between European and American ways. But he endeared himself to generations, especially of the young, with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Once read, who can ever forget Tom's attending his own funeral, or beguiling other boys into whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence, or Nigger Jim and Huck on their journey down the Mississippi? Henry James was the studied master of the realistic novel, and William Dean Howells was the leading literary critic of the period.

It is the naturalistic writers, however, that fit most nearly into the theme of this chapter. It might be supposed that naturalism in literature is closely akin to realism, but that is only the case, if at all, in a perverse sort of way. The naturalists tended to conceive of man as a part of nature, devoid of heroism, idealism, and having only a veneer of civilization. "Animalism" might capture the thrust of naturalism better, for naturalistic writers focused on man as a barely tamed animal. They could fully exploit by way of imaginative novels some of the conclusions that seemed to follow from the theory of evolution and Darwinism. Some had read or studied the evolutionists and were quite carried away with the ideas. "To give up Spencer," Jack London had one of his characters say, "would be equivalent to a navigator throwing the compass and chronometer overboard." (Cowley, 1956, p. 304). Theodore Dreiser read Huxley and Spencer, and they had a fateful impact on his writing. Until he had read Huxley, he said, he had at least a lingering belief in Christianity, but afterward he concluded that the Old and New Testaments were "not compendiums of revealed truth

but mere records of religious experiences, and very erroneous ones at that . . .” From Spencer, Dreiser discovered all:

I deemed substantial—man’s place in nature, his importance in the universe, this too, too, solid earth, man’s very identity save as an infinitesimal speck of energy or a “suspended equation’ drawn or blown here and there by larger forces in which he moved quite unconsciously as an atom . . . (Cowley, 1956, p. 303).

But wherever they picked up the ideas, whether by reading original evolutionists or getting their ideas second or third hand, the novelists embodied them in the stories of their characters. For Jack London, who wrote such novels as *The Sea Wolf*, *The Call of the Wild*, and *White Fang*, man was apt to revert at any time to his animal nature:

Civilization has spread a veneer over the surface of the soft shelled animal known as man. It is a very thin veneer . . . Starve him, let him miss six meals, and see gape through the veneer the hungry maw of the animal beneath . . . Touch his silly vanity, which he exalts into high-sounding pride, call him a liar, and behold the red animal in him that makes a hand clutching that is quick like the tensing of a tiger’s claw, or an eagle’s talon, incarnate with the desire to rip and destroy. (Commager, 1954, pp. 110-1).

Frank Norris, the author of *The Octopus* and *The Pit* described one of his characters as afflicted by a “foul stream of hereditary evil.” The greater emphasis, however, was usually on the role of the environment in shaping men’s lives. Stephen Crane, author of *Maggie*, *A Girl of the Streets*, said that the novel shows “that environment is a tremendous thing and often shapes lives regardlessly.” (Cowley, 1956, p. 315). Theodore Dreiser, in a spate of novels from *Sister Carrie* to *An American Tragedy*, depicted characters caught in the grip of forces which they could not withstand or overcome.

Naturalistic novelists could and did give impact to the idea that man’s behavior is determined by forces—instinctual, hereditary, environmental, and social—beyond his control. They could give imaginary flesh and blood to a dubious theory. Moreover, if man’s behavior is determined in this way, he is not responsible for it or to blame for the consequences of his acts. This was a powerful idea, corrosive both to morality and to traditional ways of apportioning responsibility. It pointed, too, toward the conclusion that the individual acting alone was powerless to deal with life and thus gave impetus to collectivism in the 20th century.

### Conservative Darwinism

Professor Richard Hofstadter called his book on the social and economic application of evolutionary ideas *Social Darwinism in America*. The term “Social Darwinism” has been widely used, following his lead, to applications in more than one direction. As historian Eric Goldman has pointed out, it is somewhat less confusing to refer to one application as “Conservative Darwinism.” While it is somewhat doubtful that any thoroughgoing application of evolution would be espe-

cially conservative, the distinction that he makes is an important one, and will be followed here.

In any case, the initial impact of evolutionary ideas only served to reinforce some of the prevailing ideas, and that could be called conservative. They gave added support to an already widely accepted belief in progress. If the fittest survive in the struggle, then here is a clear case both for believing that the latest is the best and that free competition among individuals is the way to achieve it. Moreover, Spencer and his disciples generally believed in free enterprise and opposed government regulation or intervention in the economy. For example, Spencer (1865, p. 334) said:

Fortunately it is now needless to enforce the doctrine of commercial freedom by any considerations of policy. After making continual attempts to improve upon the laws of trade, from the time of Solon downwards, men are at length beginning to see that such attempts are worse than useless. Political economy has shown us in this matter—what indeed it is its chief mission to show—that our wisest plan is to let things take their own course.

More broadly, it could be argued that any attempt to change the course of development by human activity would be to short circuit the benevolent process of progress.

The Spencerian idea of the survival of the fittest (incorporated into Darwin’s biological evolution as well) suited well the outlook of many successful businessmen. James J. Hill proclaimed that the “fortunes of railroad companies are determined by the law of the survival of the fittest.” (Hofstadter, 1959, p. 45).

John D. Rockefeller seconded these views enthusiastically:

The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest . . . [In the process, many small businesses fall by the way. But that, Rockefeller thought, is the way of natural development.] The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God. [Brackets added.] (Hofstadter, 1959, p. 45).

Andrew Carnegie said that as a result of reading Darwin and Spencer, the “light came as in a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I found the truth of evolution.” And the truth, he thought, was that in a natural order progress took place onward and onward toward perfection. As for those who found fault with this struggle for survival, he had these words of counsel:

It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may sometimes be hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest. (Hofstadter, 1959, pp. 45-6).

William Graham Sumner put it bluntly when he said: “The millionaires are a product of natural selection, acting on the whole body of men to pick out those who can meet the requirement of certain work to be done

. . ." (Hofstadter, 1959, p. 46). The above views are sometimes referred to as "rugged individualism."

Most important, this concept of a natural order of the survival of the fittest which produced progress was a weighty argument against any reformist or revolutionary effort to change the political and economic system. Talk of reform, utopian visions, and socialist ideas were widespread in the last two or three decades of the 19th century. Conservative Darwinism provided a forceful argument against these. Of the people who presented such notions, Sumner (1954, p. 73) said:

These persons, vexed with the intricacies of social problems and revolting against the facts of the social order, take upon themselves the task of inventing a new and better world. They brush away all which troubles us men and create a world free from annoying limitations and conditions—in their imagination.

Such visions ignore the stage of civilization and the course of evolution, Sumner thought. Evolution had brought man to the industrial stage, he held; everyone is within this framework and unable to alter it. In Sumner's own vigorous words (1954, p. 94):

It controls us all because we are all in it. It creates the conditions of our existence, sets the limits of our social activity, regulates the bonds of our social relations, determines our conceptions of good and evil, suggests our life-philosophy . . .

In short, "the industrial organization" exercises an "all pervading control over human life." In an even more dramatic mood, Sumner (1954, p. 104) maintained that:

The great stream of time and earthly things will sweep on just the same in spite of us . . . It is only in imagination that we stand by and look at and criticize it and plan to change it. Every one of us is a child of his age and cannot get out of it. He is in the stream and swept along with it.

Such ideas had a considerable impact. Henry George, a man with a determined reformist bent himself, listened to a friend decry the ills besetting New York City in his day. George asked the man what he proposed to do about it. "Nothing," he replied, "you and I can do nothing at all . . . Perhaps in four or five thousand years evolution may have carried men beyond this state of things." (Goldman, 1956, p. 66).

Even so, Conservative Darwinism, if that is the right phrase for it, was a shortlived philosophy, so far as much popular following was concerned. There may have been some elements of truth in it, but Spencer and Sumner's evolutionary ideas provided highly unstable grounds for the defense of free enterprise, individual liberty, or American institutions. It attempted to ground the defense in a changing rather than an enduring order. Moreover, Sumner's view was so thoroughly deterministic that it did not appear to leave room for any significant human freedom. As for his defense of private property—which he believed was an invaluable institution—he thought that it "may give way at a future time to some other institution which will grow up by imperceptible stages out of the efforts of men to contend successfully with existing evils . . ." (Sumner, 1954, p. 82). In addition, Sumner repudiated

the natural rights doctrine which undergirds the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. "There are," he said, "no rights against Nature except to get out of her whatever we can, which is only the fact of the struggle for existence stated over again." (Hofstadter, 1959, p. 59)

### Reform Darwinism

In any case, reformers did not wait long to claim Darwinism, the idea of evolution, and the idea of progress through gradual development, for their own. The idea of stages of development had been advanced by Saint Simon and Comte, reform-minded men, even before Spencer's or Darwin's ideas had made their impact. In that context, Darwinism has only served to cut the ground from under another very important fixity—that of the species. Reformers wanted to make fundamental changes, and the focus upon change turned out to be grist for their mill.

The American who is most often credited with having shifted the evolutionary argument in the direction of reform was an obscure sociologist by the name of Lester Frank Ward. Ward maintained that a new stage in evolution had been emerging for a long time. What made this stage possible, he claimed, was the appearance and development of the mind of man in the course of evolution. (The mind was to be greatly aided now, he thought, by the development of a science of sociology.) It was, Ward said, the "advent with man of the thinking, knowing, foreseeing, calculating, designing, inventing and constructing faculty, which is wanting in lower creatures . . ." This development repealed "the law of nature and enacted in its stead the psychological law, or law of mind." (Commager, 1954, p. 206).

This development having occurred, or so Ward alleged, it had now become possible to take over the development and direction of society. In the past, the development of society had occurred more or less naturally, without any clear line of control or planning. But now it could be taken over and directed. By whom? Undoubtedly, Ward would have nominated sociologists to do the social planning, or "social invention," as he sometimes called it. There should be no doubt, however, that what he had in mind was for government to control the process of social development. He wanted to set about "the improvement of social conditions through cold calculation . . ." The aim should be not "merely to alleviate present suffering," but "to create conditions under which no suffering can exist." (Ward, 1920a, p. 468). This would be accomplished through legislation. "Legislation," Ward said, "is nothing else but social invention. It is an effort so to control the forces of a state as to secure the greatest benefits to its people." (1920b, p. 36). He admitted that governments had usually made a mess with their interventions in the past, but that was due, he thought, to the ignorance of those who made the laws. The science of sociology would change all this:

Before progressive legislation can become a success, every legislature must become . . . a laboratory of philosophical research into the laws of society and of human nature. No legislator is qualified to propose or vote on measures . . . until he masters all that is known of the science of society. Every true legislator must be a sociologist . . . (Ward, 1920b, p. 37).



Ward was at least somewhat aware that massive government efforts to alter the ways of people would meet with resistance. This was where "social invention" would come in, he thought. "Social invention consists in making such adjustments as will induce men to act in the manner most advantageous to society." He hoped that most of those who opposed these changes would not

require to have their liberty restricted, since they, too, have wants, and the social inventor should devise means by which such wants shall be spontaneously satisfied through . . . socially beneficial action. (Ward, 1909, pp. 569-70).

The greatest social problem, he declared, was redistribution of goods, and he proposed to solve this problem collectively by the use of government. (Not to put too fine a point on it, he proposed to use the force of government to take goods from those who owned them and distribute them to others.)

This is an exclusively social problem, [Ward (1909, p. 571) said,] and can only be solved by social action. It is today the most important of all social problems, because its complete solution would accomplish nothing less than the abolition of poverty and want from society. Brackets added.

The most important point here, however, is that Ward turned the argument of Darwinians against reform and revolution into an evolutionary argument for reform. He began the process by reformers of laying claim to the latest stage of evolution as being favorable to reform, and progressive as well. He did not prove, of course, that such government-initiated reforms as he favored would achieve the results that he sought, or even that some new stage in evolution had taken place. But his position set the stage for the

gradualist movement toward socialism in America, and he made it appear that all this would be progressive.

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## PANORAMA OF SCIENCE

### The Geographical Distribution of Animals and Plants

#### Introduction

John C. Willis' propounded a theory some years ago on the geographical distribution of plants, in which he claimed that the geological age of any genus of plants is directly proportional to the area of the accumulated geographical ranges of the first 10 members of the genus. In the early 1940's, seminars in genetics and botany, held in various parts of the country, enthusiastically espoused the claims of the theory. There were some prominent dissenters, however, including C. A. Arnold, professor of Paleobotany at the University of Michigan and author of a textbook in that field. They claimed that Willis was an armchair scientist who did not substantiate his views with sufficient research in the field. Interest in the theory, significantly, has diminished remarkably with the passing of time.

\*This theory was discussed in the Genetics Seminar at the University of Michigan in the spring of 1941. The seminar was presided over by J. T. Baldwin, visiting professor of genetics from William and Mary College. One of the graduate students reported on a genetics seminar, at another university, in which the theory was given considerable emphasis.

More recently, this question was brought to my attention in an interview that Don Chittick and I had with a seminary student who had been unsettled by the evolutionist teaching his professors had been giving. He had a long list of questions that we answered to his satisfaction, one of which was, "Are there any species found both in North America and Europe?" On further consideration of the question of biogeography it appears that the subject of geographical distribution should be re-investigated, although from a different angle. There is a dearth of published material in this field and yet such data can produce information of significance in the proper understanding of species distribution.

For many years it has been speculated that a land bridge once existed across the Bering Strait, where Alaska and Siberia are but a few miles apart. Soundings shown on contour maps reveal the shallowness of the waters here, in some places as little as 20' in depth. Strong evidence for this land bridge has recently appeared in the translation of Indian pictographs found in central Indiana about 160 years ago, written by the Leni-Lenape (Delaware) Indians. On translation, they revealed scenes parallel with Genesis, describing the creation of the world, the heavenly