

WAY TO SHILOH

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Look what man can do when he really puts his mind to it.



Questions of colour and class

In many instances, the influence of Darwin's teaching has been downright malign. Racism is an obvious example. The latter part of Origin's full title - The Preservation of Favoured Species in the Struggle for Life- pointed in this direction and in The Descent of Man Darwin argued that natural selection would eventually eliminate what he called 'the savage races' in favour of 'the civilized races of men'. Herbert Spencer's phrase, 'the survival of the fittest', was an integral part of his Darwinian socialism, which said that 'superior races' would properly rule 'inferior' ones and that the strong were under no obligation to help the weak. Thomas Huxley, Darwin's most powerful advocate, stated, 'No rational man, cognisant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man.' Racism existed long before Darwin, but his evolutionary ideas appeared to give it scientific plausibility, leading Henry Morris to conclude, 'Darwin's notion that the various races were at different evolutionary distances from the apes, with Negroes at the bottom and Caucasians at the top... was almost universal among the evolutionary atheists of the nineteenth century.'

Racism led naturally to imperialism. As Gertrude Himmelfarb puts it, 'Social Darwinism has often been understood in this sense: as a philosophy, exalting competition, power and violence over convention, ethics and religion. Thus it has become a portmanteau of nationalism, imperialism, militarism and dictatorship, of the cults of the hero, the superman and the master race.' It is not difficult to see the link here. If the evolutionary myth is taken on board, why should it be wrong for the more powerful or more intelligent among us to dominate or manipulate the less powerful or intelligent for whatever purposes they choose to call 'worthy' or 'good'?

The weakest to the wall

Eugenics (the production of superior offspring by the improvement of inherited qualities) and euthanasia (the killing of the incurable) are other offshoots of evolutionary thinking. The word 'eugenics' was coined by Francis Galton, Darwin's first cousin, whose stated aim was to upgrade the

human race by giving 'the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable' As Hitler was coming to power in Germany, Galton's ideas fitted in with the Hihrer's need to produce an Aryan super-race to spearhead the coming world conquest by the Third Reich. Human stud-farms were set up during the 1930s in an attempt to breed from a few thousand suitable specimens the nucleus of a master nation. Hand in glove with this, a policy of imposed sterilization was introduced which led to at least two million people being forcibly sterilized between 1927 and 1933.

Galton's ideas, driven by the doctrine of evolution, were carried on with devastating effect by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel, one of Darwin's most enthusiastic disciples, who faithfully reproduced his master's dogma: 'The history of selection teaches that in human life, as in animal and plant life everywhere, and at all times, only a small and chosen minority exist and flourish, while the enormous majority starve and perish miserably and more or less prematurely. Euthanasia was the chosen way to put the doctrine into practice and give nature a helping hand. As well as advocating 'the destruction of abnormal new-born children', arguing that this 'cannot be rationally classed as murder', Haeckel went on to draw attention to the fact that 'Hundreds of thousands of incurables - lunatics, lepers, people with cancer, etc, are artificially kept alive... without the slightest profit to themselves or the general body' and to suggest that 'the redemption from this evil should be accomplished by a dose of some painless and rapid poison'. As a result, prussic acid gas was used in the late 1930s to end the lives of thousands of innocent people deemed to belong to 'worthless race types'.

Holocaust

There is conclusive evidence that evolution was a major factor in the philosophy of those who steered Nazism to its destructive destiny. Arthur Keith had no doubts about this: 'To see evolutionary measures and tribal morality being applied rigorously to the affairs of a great modern nation, we must turn again to Germany of 1942. We see Hitler devoutly convinced that evolution produces the only real basis for a national policy. Later he added, 'The German Fuhrer, as I have consistently maintained, is an evolutionist; he has consciously sought to make the practices of Germany conform to the theory of evolution. ' Hitler confirmed this: 'He who would live must fight, and he who does not wish to fight in this world where permanent struggle is the law of life has not the right to exist.' All the Nazi leaders were committed evolutionists, with Heinrich Himmler, head of the secret police, the ruthless Gestapo, claiming that 'The law of nature must take its course in the survival of the fittest.' Darwin would have been horrified to see his ideas used as a justification for calculated brutality, but in Hitler's mind evolutionary thinking provided scientific justification for even the most appalling of his actions. As Purdue University biologist (and evolutionist) Edward Simon admits, 'I don't claim that Darwin and his theory of evolution brought on the holocaust, but I cannot deny that the theory of evolution, and the atheism it engendered, led to the moral climate that made a holocaust possible.'

The red menace

As you can see from the communism article, even Hitler's sickening record of suppression and slaughter was outdone by the savagery of those who assumed the leadership of Marxism - and these too were fuelled by evolutionary philosophy. Darwin's insistence that man is part of nature greatly influenced Marx in the development and application of his ideas. It explained away the need for a divine Creator, gave a scientific basis for his materialism and provided a parallel for his scenario of human development. At one stage Marx wrote, 'The Origin of Species serves me well as a basis in natural science for the struggle in history,' and after reading another of Darwin's works he told Engels, 'Although it is developed in a crude English way, this is the book that contains the natural history foundation for our viewpoint.' Engels was equally enthusiastic, telling Marx, 'Darwin, whom I am reading, is splendid.' In the course of his eulogy at Marx's funeral Engels declared, 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history.'

The affinity Marx felt between his own ideas and those of Darwin is reflected in his frequent attendance, during his residence in London, at Thomas Huxley's lectures on Darwinianism and in the fact that he sent Darwin a copy of Das Kapital soon after its publication. Six years later he wrote to Darwin asking if he might dedicate his next book to him but, presumably taken aback by Marx's direct denial of God, Darwin declined, explaining that it would pain certain members of his family if he were associated with such an atheistic presentation. The damage, however, had already been done.