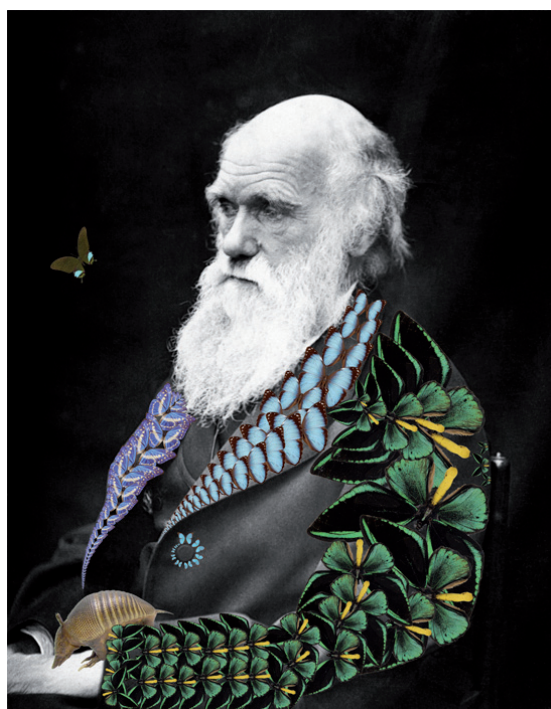


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# Darwin, Evolution, Evolutionisms

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## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND SOCIAL DARWINISM IN NAZI GERMANY: FORMATION OF A SOCIETY BASED ON THE MYTH OF BLOOD AND SUPERIORITY OF THE ARYAN RACE

### Introduction

The book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection...*, published in 1859, opposed its author, Charles Darwin, to those who opposed his ideas. By defending natural selection and evolution, the new theory shocked with the pre-existing vision according to which God was the creator of all living beings, including the human being. However, Darwin's ideas were assimilated, incorporated and even forged. The importance of Darwinism in the mentalities at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is evident in their application to all areas of knowledge and in the birth of new disciplines. Such is the case of social Darwinism.

Historians saw in social Darwinism the renovation of a nationalist, racist and militarist German ideology (Weindling, 1993: 26). Ernst Heinrich Haeckel was important for the discussion between politics and Darwinism. The most important discoveries related to this issue were done in a strong patriotic environment and the belief in evolution as a natural philosophy (*Idem*: 40-41). Haeckel sought to make the connection between biology and its possible application in the organization of society. According to him, if experimental biology was capable of giving data relative to concepts such as order, hierarchy or control, it was normal to state that each citizen was a cell in the midst of social organization (*Idem*: 43). As in any political system governed by a central government, organs of the human body would be under the domain of the brain. This justified the importance of biology as a social science which, according to Haeckel, was not an autonomous science but an extension of history and archaeology (*Idem*: 42). This version was used by nationalist ideologists that saw the sustainability of their own theories in it. Being the brain the strongest and the organs the weakest, it would be necessary for one of them to subdue and dominate the other. In the words of Rudolf Hess, "... le national-socialisme n'est rien d'autre que de la biologie appliquée." (*apud* Hannoun, 1997: 24). Thus, let us see how it was applied to Nazi education and science.

### Race as an ideological matrix

The concept of race was never used by Darwin with the intent of classifying men, having nevertheless been attributed to him. This new concept was based on biological

differences as well as psychological and/or cultural, real or imaginary differences. Physical anthropology had here an important role and, as such, the recognition on behalf of the Nazi regime, hostile to any science considered “useless”. To educate ideologically became the *leitmotiv* of the Nazi educational policy. If the question of race was inscribed in the historical transformation of the West looking to dominate all the people on Earth, at a biological and anthropological level, it was necessary to apply the concept to science. However, the first Darwinist anthropologists refused to classify racial types, also condemning the racial theories of Aryan character. To insert the concept of race in scientific discourse, biology transferred ideas such as “good education” and “pure blood”, originally limited to an aristocratic and moralist milieu, to anthropology. Biology and anthropology attempted to eliminate the concept of individuality, creating biological sub-species or races. Physical anthropology was taught to medicine students as a subject for the knowledge of human anatomy and the concepts of race occupied their place in the midst of medical thought.

Having the concept of race been validated scientifically, the study of its components did not take long. In his essay “*Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*”, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau defined race as a moving force of History. However, he was merely systematizing the ideas of his time and its political elites. According to him, the “degenerate” man, also defined as man of decadence, had not preserved the same race and the same blood of his ancestors (n/d: 24), being condemned to one of two fates: to be a conqueror or to be conquered (*Idem*: 29). The vision of the world defended by Gobineau served as an answer to the imperialism and to the expansionism of European empires, among them Nazi Germany. The scientification of the concept of race opened the doors to racism as a policy of the State. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, considered one of the European fathers of racism, stated that: “Nothing transmits more conviction than the consciousness of possessing a Race [because it] elevates man above himself...” (*apud* Bruchfeld & Levine, 2000: 4), to which Adolf Hitler, leader of NSDAP, would respond in the epilogue of his *Mein Kampf* by arguing that: “A State that in a period of contamination of races protects zealously the conservation of the best elements of its own will one day become the lord of the world.” (1998: 549).

More than accept the existence of human races, in which some would be pure, superior to the others and holders of the historical and political right of becoming hegemonic, it was necessary to justify such affirmation. The racist starts from biological differentiation and uses biology as a justification for his actions. The importance given by Darwinism to this science reinforced its power, moreover that its assumptions were already largely accepted. Haeckel stated in his “*Prinzipien der Generellen Morphologie der Organismen*” that “... the differences between the highest and lowest humans were greater than those between the lowest humans and the highest animals.” (*apud* Weindling, 1993: 55). Despite not being a supporter of violence through expansionist militarism, his social Darwinism defended a growth of the progress through a competitive selection in culture, economy and politics, thus guaranteeing constant human progress (*Idem*: 56). If the term selection was not used by Haeckel with a racist intent, his work reflects the Nazi racial policy. If in certain cases it was about eliminating human beings of pure blood through eugenic measures; the same happened regarding the enemy. Himmler, when discussing with foreign volunteers of SS, declared that: “When we are fighting, you should all know that killing a man is no more than as killing a chicken to us.” (*apud* Hassel, s/d: 215).

## National socialist education and ideology

Nazi naturalism is related to the belief in the need of nature's kingdom, an idea defended by Hitler himself. E. Kriek defended that each individual had in himself his true Aryan nature, fixed in his blood (Hannoun, 1997: 18). Being innate, this nature was, however, hidden. The main objective of the educational process was the promotion of this profound nature, helping it to express itself so that each young German could become a full member of his race, with all the rights he deserves as such. The essence of each individual corresponded to his people (*Völk*) and was apprehended through the conjugation of historical, geographical and biological factors (*Idem*: 19). According to G.-S. Stent ("*Morality as a Biological Phenomenon*"), National Socialism had in social biology its orientation. This gave the party what it needed. *Völkisch* naturalism is divided in two main branches: nationalism and social biologism. If the first refers to Germanic culture, the second recovers the question of blood. The theory of *Blut und Boden*, developed in the work "*Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*" by Walther Darré, Nazi minister of Agriculture and *Reichsbauernführer*, identified German blood to Nordic ground, defending that Germans were both warriors and farmers. Being a colonizing race by excellence, there would be no barrier between both social groups. According to him, the death of a German rural dweller meant the death of the German people and it was necessary to form a new nobility based on race and the colonization of new lands (to be conquered). Feelings, beliefs and actions were the result of biological and social factors, namely, blood and land (Woody: 1940: 47).

The Nazi educational system had as purpose the externalisation of the feeling of belonging to a superior race as one of its objectives. Education transformed into training (*Schulung*) and the selection became *Selektion* in the most pure Darwinist-social sense (Robinsohn, 1966: 227). Education should be linked to blood and land, being school only a part of the educational progress. Real character would be achieved by organizing the youth, their physical training and a heroic realism (Kandel: 1935: 158). This was the condition to develop the expansionist militarism at a European and world level. As a hierarchy, Nazi education was composed by the training of the body, character and intelligence, being evident some anti-intellectualism. Physical education aimed at the anatomical-physiological adaptation of the individual to his environment (Hannoun: 1997, 30) and, as a result of its role in preparing for military service, the curricular time dedicated to such training increased strongly with the Nazi education policy. On the other hand, the education of will (or character) gave them the ability to make decisions. In a letter to professor Eckhardt in 1938, Himmler stated that: "The methods of intellectual education do not interest me. Knowledge rots youth but, if we submit it to harsh challenges, it learns to overcome fear and death." (*apud* Hassel, s/d: 175). For Hitler, the concept of physical health was connected to the racial philosophy of Nazism and contributed to the preservation of race (Lewin, 1946: 456). During education, obedience to the group was instilled in the individual. The reason was the fulfillment of a common ideal that corresponded to its culture and to the demands of his race. Quoting Heidegger, "... *l'insertion sociale völkisch réclame de l'individu allemand sa fusion corps et âme dans le creuset de sa race. Il n'a pas d'aspirations, pas d'attentes, de besoins, de pensées, de destins autres que ceux de son groupe (Völk)*" (*apud* Hannoun: 39). This is what was intended with the creation of

the *Hitlerjugend* and the *Bund deutscher Mädel*, among others. Education transformed itself into a means used by the regime to create a people of lords, conscientious of their superiority.

## Science and politics

The year of 1933 was a turning point in German science. Racial laws authorizing the expulsion of scientists of Hebraic origin and their defenders were a rude blow to German science. Doctors and biologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Nazi Germany, produced an ideology as a substitute of philosophy (Müller-Hill: 1989: 10). Science was allied to higher education by the role played by academics in various investigation projects. Subordinated to the State and politics, science oscillated between radical denial and secret acceptance. The Nazi program for science is clearly visible in the words of *Reichsminister* Franck, leader of German jurists, when at a conference in Tübingen, he stated that the ideas of Hitler contained “the final truths” of any scientific knowledge, having all the results to coincide with the prerequisites of Nazism. Franck went further by accepting the program of the Nazi party as the only base of scientific investigation (Olf-Nathan, 1993: 17-18).

Regarding the “science of death” (Müller-Hill, 1989), this was more than a mere solution to the Jewish issue. The application of eugenic measures on mental patients and the selection of fittest individuals are a good example of it. The adoration of blood was reflected in the promulgation of various laws, among which the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour” and the “Jewish Status”. These were victories for the ideology and the policy of the State, as well as for Nazi science in general and some subjects in particular (i.e. Social Anthropology, Eugenism, Biology and Racial Hygiene...). In a speech made at the Faculty of Theology of Berlin, Professor Fisher thanked the Führer for the possibility given to scientists who studied heredity to put at the nation’s service the results of their investigation as it happened with the Nurnberg Laws. In his *Erbatz*, dated from 1940, Professor Verschuer defended the necessity of distinguishing the individuals that should be eliminated from those that should be promoted through the creation of biological-hereditary files, the only way to protect the hereditary legacy and race (Müller-Hill, 1989: 25). It is still possible to see that the various sciences at the service of ideology developed uncountable projects together, as the one which gathered in 1935 the Psychology of Professor Rieffert, the Anthropology of Professor Fisher and Racial Studies of Professor Günther.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to demonstrate, very briefly, implications that the radical interpretation of Darwinist assumptions had in forming a society based on the myth of pure blood and superiority of race. Nazi Germany found in racial theories and in their application to education and science their ideological base. After applying the concept of race to science, nothing else stopped a racist and racialist regime of imposing itself as a State of Law, respectful of natural law. Selection of individuals

would be something natural, reflecting in human societies what already happened in nature. Darwinism found in Nazi Germany the paradigm of a State in which natural racial selection was taken to the extreme. The consequences are well known today. The distinction between *Übermensch* and *Untermensch* and the necessity to preserve the Aryan race led to the mass extermination of members of “inferior” races. The Holocaust is, maybe, the darkest side of social Darwinism applied to a State’s policy based on the myth of blood. Alfred Rosenberg, ideologist of Nazism, stated in “*Der Mythos des XX Jahrhunderts*” that, under the swastika sign, the myth of blood would give origin to a worldwide revolution. The awakening of the soul of blood would mark the end of an era of racial chaos. This position summarises in a clear way what Nazism looked for in the twelve years in which Hitler governed Germany. Education, science and also social Darwinist theories constituted only valid instruments in the eternal search of a people of lords made of racially pure men.

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