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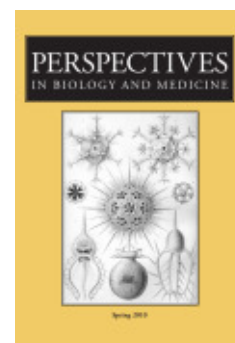
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A Spectre Haunts Evolution: Haeckel, Heidegger, and the All-Too-Human History of Biology

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Essay Review

A SPECTRE HAUNTS EVOLUTION

*Haeckel, Heidegger, and the all-too-human history of biology**

MATTHEW DAY

ABSTRACT Since *The Meaning of Evolution* (1992), Robert J. Richards has argued that modern evolutionary theory is rooted in late 18th-century Romantic science. The publication of *The Tragic Sense of Life* (2009) provides a fitting occasion to evaluate how this perspective revises the standard history of biological thought. This essay focuses on three aspects of Richards's attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of German *Naturphilosophie*: (1) the identification of Romantic strains in Charles Darwin's portrait of evolutionary history; (2) the demonstration that any attempt to treat Ernst Haeckel as a "pseudo-Darwinian" inevitably renders Darwin himself a "pseudo-Darwinian"; and (3) the denial of Haeckel's alleged responsibility for the rise of Nazi racial hygiene. This article examines Richards's case for clearing Haeckel's name, as well as the subsequent (slanderous) charge from Daniel Gasman that Richards is guilty of whitewashing the Haeckelian roots of the Holocaust.

THE ADVANCE PRESS for the English translation of Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* (2009) announced that, once and for all, the intrinsic link between Martin Heidegger's philosophical ambition and his Nazi politics would be established. The central claim of Faye's book is

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that we commit a historically dubious and morally repugnant category mistake when we read Heidegger as a *philosopher* in conversation with Plato or Kant. He was instead an inherently anti-modern, anti-liberal, and anti-Semitic *propagandist* who is best compared to Goebbels or Göring. “In the work of Martin Heidegger, the very principles of philosophy are abolished,” we are told: “all those qualities essential to man, and that it is philosophy’s vocation to cultivate and reinforce, are eradicated to make room for the exaltation of the ‘hard race’” (Faye 2009, p. 316). From this vantage point, *Sein und Zeit* (1927) is the sort of book that *Mein Kampf* (1925) might have been if Hitler had received a university education and happened to fall in love with the pre-Socratics.

This much, at least, is clear. Heidegger was a daring exegete of the Western philosophical tradition and a brilliant thinker in his own right. Heidegger was also an unapologetic Nazi. As Rector of the University of Freiburg, he advised the students: “Let not propositions and ‘ideas’ be the rules of your Being. The Führer alone is the present and the future German reality and its law” (Heidegger 1988, p. 102). Throughout the 1930s, he pictured himself as the philosophical conscience of Hitler’s revolution. When asked by Herbert Marcuse in 1948 to say something—*anything*—about the Holocaust, Heidegger compared the post-war Soviet crackdown on East German dissidents with the systematic extermination of European Jewry. In Heidegger’s estimation, the only salient difference between the two events was that “everything that has happened since 1945 is public-knowledge worldwide, while the bloody terror of the Nazis was kept a secret from the German people” (qtd. in Sheehan 1988, p. 42). Twenty years later, Heidegger submitted that the industrialization of agriculture was “in essence, the same as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and execution camps” (qtd. in Lang 1997, p. 7; cf. de Fontenay 1997). His final interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1976 is stuffed with bad faith and self-pity as he rehearses the slights he has endured. These insults included being the oldest member of the Freiburg faculty to be conscripted into the *Volkssturm* (people’s militia), having state spies audit his lecture courses, and his exclusion from a 1937 Parisian conference on Descartes (Heidegger 1993). He was *that* kind of a man.

Despite Heidegger’s attempts to conceal or disguise historically inconvenient biographical details, these facts have never been secrets. Nevertheless, ever since Victor Fariás reminded everyone in *Heidegger and Nazism* (1987 [1991]) that the “sage of the Black Forest” was a nasty and pathetic human being, the intensity of *l’affaire Heidegger* seems to have redoubled every couple of years. Yet, in spite of all the academic passions and their spirited scholarly expression, the fundamental interpretive problem remains. “That Heidegger was a lifelong Nazi, not merely in a marginal or transient sense, is now entirely plain to all who care to read the record,” Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (1992) estimate: “But *what* that means, both in assessing *his* life and work and regarding what it exposes in *our* self-understanding, is still very much open to debate” (p. 1). As every good historian or lawyer knows, the bare facts never speak for themselves.

I have retraced the outlines of the Heidegger affair because evolutionary theory is haunted by its own Teutonic ghosts. In the completely disgraceful *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008), Ben Stein lays the ultimate responsibility for the Holocaust on Darwin's doorstep. Richard Weikart makes the case in *From Darwin to Hitler* (2004) that "no matter how crooked the road was from Darwin to Hitler, clearly Darwinism and eugenics smoothed the path for Nazi ideology, especially for the Nazi stress on expansion, war, racial struggle, and racial extermination" (p. 6). Daniel Gasman has argued for more than a quarter century that Ernst Haeckel—Darwin's dashing German apostle—is the historical tie that binds the naturalist's cluttered study at Down House to the crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Yet, anxieties about the relationship between German political violence and Darwinism predate the Holocaust. In *The Science of Power* (1918), Benjamin Kidd asserted that the German military class constituted an inherent threat to international peace because it had embraced "the elementals of the atavistic creed of omnipotent force—biological necessity it had become in the German military textbooks—into which it had rendered the thesis which Darwin had given to it fifty years prior" (p. 33). Shortly after William Jennings Bryan finished Kidd's book, he launched his anti-Darwinian campaign.

In general, defenders of modern evolutionary theory have tried to protect Darwin and his brainchild by either minimizing his dependence on 19th-century German biological thought or depicting Haeckel as a nefarious charlatan who wasn't *really* Darwinian. Peter Bowler (1988, 1996) has called Haeckel a "pseudo-Darwinian" who soft-peddled core Darwinian principles like adaptation and natural selection and clung to the benighted Romantic morphological tradition. Michael Ruse (2001) measures his words a bit more carefully and judges that by the time Haeckel and his fellow "German evolutionists had finished converting the Englishman's ideas to their own purposes, the doctrine bore little resemblance to anything to be found in either *Origin of Species* or *Descent of Man*" (p. 81). The late Stephen Jay Gould often went out of his way to defame the German *Darwin-Mann*. As far as Gould was concerned, Haeckel was an unprincipled, self-promoting fraud with an annoying penchant for inventing neologisms. More troubling still, Haeckel's "Darwinism" was a false bill of goods. Where Darwin's scientific conscience, philosophical restraint, and moral scruples had all conspired to produce a vision of nature that explicitly rejected suspect notions of Progress, Haeckel assembled a toxic mixture of bad ideas and metaphysical bombast to make Progress the whole point of evolution. Portraits of natural progress inevitably yield fantasies about natural hierarchies, Gould asserted, and it was on this basis that Haeckel invoked the biogenetic law of recapitulation to "affirm the racial superiority of white northern Europeans" (Gould 1977a, p. 217). One might say that for both Gasman and Gould, Haeckel is to evolutionary biology what Heidegger is to philosophy.

Robert J. Richards, the Morris Fishbein Professor of the History of Science and Medicine at the University of Chicago, has spent the past 15 years quietly

and systematically gutting these defensive strategies. In many ways, *The Tragic Sense of Life* (2009) represents the final installment of an impressive and peerless trilogy. In order to highlight Richards's specific interest in Haeckel and explain its significance for the history of biology, I would like to discuss this book alongside its companions, *The Meaning of Evolution* (1992) and *The Romantic Conception of Life* (2002). According to Richards, not only was Darwin more *German* than previously imagined. Haeckel was more *Darwinian* than his cultured critics would care to admit. More crucially, Haeckel wasn't the kind of biological theorist that stirred the dark hearts of men like Heidegger. If Richards is right, the history of modern evolutionary theory—not to mention its role in 20th-century politics—will need to be rewritten.

HOW GERMAN WAS DARWIN?

At first blush, this looks like an absurd Python-esque riddle. Janet Browne's two-volume biography of Darwin (1996–2003) demonstrates that Darwin was the quintessential 19th-century English gentleman. From his participation in British colonialism on board the *HMS Beagle*, to his choice of Emma Wedgwood as his wife, to his self-fashioning as country squire, nearly every aspect of his life was saturated with *Englishness* (Browne 2009). Karl Marx was amused by just how English Darwin's vision of the natural world tended to be. Echoing Marx's judgment, Michael Ruse (2004) is convinced that evolution by means of natural selection "is a British theory by a British scientist" (p. 13). The British were quick to claim Darwin's scientific achievement as their own. Adrian Desmond and James Moore (1991) sense that the decision to bury him at Westminster Abbey "gave tangible expression to the public feeling that Darwin, in his life and work, symbolized English success in conquering nature and civilizing the globe" (p. 675). At this point, the temptation is to say that if it looks like an Englishman, walks like an Englishman, and talks like an Englishman, it probably is an Englishman.

Yet, in spite of all this, Richards (2002) claims that Darwin's account of the natural world is "expressive of the kind of Romanticism cultivated originally in Germany and imported to England under various guises" (p. 540). To justify this improbable-looking thesis, Richards draws our attention to two crucial features of Darwin's theorizing.

First, Richards maintains that Darwin's account of evolutionary transmutation amends but does not reject the teleological model of transformation advanced by German "transcendental" morphology. For Romantic *Naturphilosophes* like Friedrich von Schelling and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, the stages of embryological development and their purposeful arrangement revealed something fundamental about the natural world: individual organisms were empirical realizations of, and physiological variations upon, a non-empirical rational ideal or *Bauplan*. As Schelling expressed this view in *First Outline for a System of Nature*

(2004): “All organisms, as different as they may be, are surely, in terms of their physical origin, only various stages of development of one and the same organism” (p. 49). Richards submits that Darwin adopted this embryological model of species diversification and adapted it to his own purposes by making the Romantics’ transcendental archetype into a real historical ancestor. He asks us to reconsider Darwin’s strategic appeal to embryological homologies as evidence for common ancestry in this context, and notes: “The pith of his theory, then, was simply that the generalized set of characters that determined a type—whether the type constituted the genus, family, order, or class—was originally embodied in a population of real creatures, which therefore would share common, that is, archetypal, features with their descendents” (Richards 1992, p. 165). When we consider Darwin in this historical light, the rhetorical pirouette that closes *Origin of Species* takes on new Romantic significance: “There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one” (Darwin 1859, p. 490). The aesthetic sublimity of a single form of life elaborated into countless variations—Schelling could have hardly asked for more.

The second feature that Richards points to is the absolutely central role that recapitulation played in Darwin’s theorizing. His thesis is that by virtue of accepting the embryological model of species transmutation, Darwin had no choice but to embrace the *Naturphilosophie* intuition that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. In *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, Gould (1977b) expresses the consensus view that recapitulation theory represents the “speculative excesses of *Naturphilosophie*” (Gould 1977b, p. 429 fn. 16). That is to say, from a contemporary perspective, recapitulation hypotheses were dead ends for serious empirical research.

The Romantic Conception of Life turns this common historical judgment on its head. As Richards tells the story, the late 18th-century Romantic category of *Bildung*—which can be variously translated as “development,” “education,” “formation,” “cultivation,” or “shape”—was the foundation for various models of dynamic evolutionary history. Rather than stalling empirical enquiry, he judges that “the concept of development, of *Bildung*, helped channel biological research” (p. 13). Although the engine driving Romantic evolution might appear to be unforgivably metaphysical to our eyes, the notion of a *Bildungskraft* (developmental force), *Lebenskraft* (life force), or *Reproduktionskraft* (reproductive force) regulating the stages of embryonic growth, as well as the emergence of new species, produced extremely familiar-looking accounts of natural history. On this point, Richards helpfully summarizes Schelling’s *dynamische Evolution* as the view that “the species was preformed in the archetypal ideal, but yet was dynamically realized in time through gradual transformation of form. Thus there would be real historical metamorphosis, a temporal development and alteration” (p. 298). If that sounds like something you’ve heard before, he believes it should. When considered against this backdrop it is a very short trip from Schelling’s natural his-

tory of aesthetic realization to the celebrated Darwinian claim that “from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved” (Darwin 1859, p. 490).

However, Richards believes it is important to note that Darwin did not begrudgingly endorse the principle of recapitulation. Darwin’s hope was that the embryological evidence would allow us to fill in the gaps of the woefully incomplete fossil record and thereby reconstruct the entire phylogenetic history of life. For Darwin, the embryo was “a sort of picture, preserved by nature, of the ancient and less modified condition of each animal” (Darwin 1859, p. 338). Or, more generally: “As the embryonic state of each species or group of species partially shows us the structure of their less modified ancient progenitors, we can clearly see why ancient and extinct forms of life should resemble the embryos of their descendants—our existing species. Agassiz believes this to be a law of nature; but I am bound to confess that I only hope to see the law hereafter proved true” (p. 449). For anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear, Darwin’s commitment to embryological recapitulation is impossible to ignore.

When we combine these two features of Darwin’s evolutionary thought, Richards thinks there is one unavoidable conclusion: tales regarding the distortion or betrayal of Darwin’s theory as it was translated into German *Entwicklungstheorie* (evolutionary theory, or developmental theory) are quaint historical myths. Simply put, there was nothing to Germanize, because Darwin’s model of natural history was already German before it crossed the English Channel. “The central and diverting blooms of Darwin’s theory of evolution opened from ideas initially cultivated in Romantic *Naturphilosophie*,” Richards (2002) writes: “But these intricate parts of the composition could not have taken their form if the very root of his theory, his idea of nature, did not also draw from that quite fertile soil” (p. 533). Any effort to argue otherwise is an exercise in scientific ideology rather than the history of science (Bowler 1993a, 1993b; Richards 1993).

HOW DARWINIAN WAS HAECKEL?

Heidegger began his 1924 lecture course on the basic concepts of Aristotelian philosophy by summarizing the biographical details relevant for reading the ancient philosopher: “Regarding the personality of a philosopher, our only interest is that he was born at certain time, that he worked, and that he died” (Heidegger 2009, p. 4). Heidegger’s categorical rejection of biographical detail is more than just a little ironic. After all, this is the same man who would spend the last 30 years of his life trying to obscure the extent of his involvement with the National Socialist state. Richards sails the opposite tack. Although biography played a role in his magisterial *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind* (1987), Richards began moving the culturally embedded and physiologically embodied life of the mind to center stage in *The Romantic Conception of Life*. In his words, it is all too easy to forget that the intellectual achievements of

Herder, Schelling, and Goethe “arose in lives whose contours had spread out like a coastal shelf, with submerged hopes, fears, and desires” (Richards 2002, p. 512).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Immanuel Kant argued that within every act of consciousness there is an implicit reference to the ground of consciousness itself: a transcendental subject or *Ich denke* that is responsible for the unity of conscious experience. “The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all,” we learn in the first *Critique*. Yet, because this transcendental ego makes my experience of the world possible, Kant believed it necessarily exists outside the realm of empirical phenomena. As an intellectual historian, Richards is keenly aware that alongside every thought there is an “I think” that makes it possible. However, in place of Kant’s ethereal transcendental ego, he sets his sights on the all-too-human *Ich denke*. Because of this historiographical commitment to flesh and blood, it only makes sense that Richards’s bid to rehabilitate 19th-century Romantic science culminates in a sweeping intellectual biography of Ernst Haeckel.

The Haeckel that we meet in *The Tragic Sense of Life* is intrepid, imaginative, magnetic, prolific, and, above all else, brilliant. He climbed every mountain he could. His drawings of the radiolaria capture the pellucid, geometric beauty of his microscopic subjects. He was amused by the stolid ceremonies of academic life and described the public defense of his *Habilitationsschrift* as a “swindle.” At the same time, he was disheartened by the existential lethargy of his colleagues and dismayed by the thought of becoming “a repressed professor . . . in Jena or Freiburg or Tübingen or Königsburg or in some other small, petty university” (qtd. in Richards 2008, p. 63). In the 1870s alone, he somehow managed to publish: a three-volume study on calcareous sponges (*Kalkschwämme* [1872]); the first edition of *Anthropogenie* (1874), as well as the second and third; six revised editions of *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*; two volumes of collected essays (1877–78); and the two-volume *System der Medusen* (1879). *Die Welträthsel*, his *fin-de-siècle* reflections on the social and philosophical significance of evolution, sold at least 400,000 copies between 1899 and 1914—and that figure only includes sales in Germany. In other words, Haeckel appears to have been the sort of person we’d all like to be.

However, *The Tragic Sense of Life* is not facile hagiography. It systematically probes the tragedies and failures of Haeckel’s life to make sense of the combative version of evolutionary theory that he championed. Richards’s thesis is that Haeckel—and the history of evolutionary thought itself—would have travelled a different historical trajectory if his first wife, Anna Sethe Haeckel (1835–1864), had not died after only a year and a half of marriage. Richards patiently sifts through a lifetime of Haeckel’s correspondence to reveal a man who never recovered from this wound. Thirty-five years after her death, for example, Haeckel sits at his desk and writes: “Thursday, 16 February is my sixty-fifth birthday, for me the saddest anniversary of the year, since on this same day in 1864 I lost my

most beloved and irreplaceable wife. On this sad day, I am lost” (qtd. in Richards 2008, p. 107). Richards asserts that Haeckel’s evolutionary campaign represents a sort of reaction formation to his loss. As he puts it: “Through this acid mist, Haeckel resolved to devote himself single-mindedly to a cause that might transcend individual frailty. He would incessantly push the Darwinian ideal and oppose it to those who refused to look at life, to look at death face on: his own scientifically orthodox colleagues, who were mired in a useless past; and the religiously orthodox, who promised a deceptive future” (p. 108). Much like his English hero, Haeckel’s adult life was spent in the grey shadows of mourning.

If Haeckel saw Darwin’s theory of evolution as a cultural weapon, what does this mean for his reputation as a pseudo-Darwinian? Surely this is conclusive proof that Darwin’s fledgling and upright science had mutated into a metaphysical *darwinistischen Weltanschauung*.

As we have already seen, Richards believes that Darwin’s theory of descent with modification has been thoroughly misread in order to make it fit the contours of neo-Darwinian theory. “Darwin was indeed the architect of the theory that has been reconstructed as neo-Darwinism,” he concludes *The Meaning of Evolution*: “But the architect was our ancestor, who dwelt happily enough in the nineteenth century” (Richards 1992, p. 180). Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Richards sees Haeckel’s evolutionary theorizing as virtually indistinguishable from Darwin’s. As his proof text, Richards reminds us that in 1864 Darwin himself wrote to Haeckel and pronounced: “I am delighted that so distinguished a naturalist should confirm & expound my views; and I can clearly see that you are one of the few who clearly understands Natural Selection” (qtd. in Richards 2008, p. 2). If Haeckel doesn’t count as a real Darwinian, then Darwin doesn’t either. The single best sentence of *Tragic Sense of Life* shows up when Richards evaluates Gould’s attempts to differentiate Darwin from Haeckel on theoretical matters: “his effort to show a distinction between Haeckel’s conception of recapitulation and Darwin’s was like cracking granite with a baseball bat—if you had enough bats and time, you might get somewhere. Gould had neither” (Richards 2002, p. 450). In fact, Richards suggests—with a note of seditious delight—that contemporary worries about Haeckel’s Darwinian credentials may get the question backwards in some ways. Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871) might be described as a work of *Haeckelian* theory, he submits, since “most of his [Darwin’s] ideas had about human evolution had been antecedently confirmed by Haeckel” (Richards 2008, p. 72). Only a scholar who knows the terrain would be willing to propose something so heretical and electrifying.

**HAECKEL, HEIDEGGER, AND THE TWISTED ROAD
TO AUSCHWITZ**

There is, nevertheless, a potentially serious problem lurking in the background. If Darwin is more German than historians have allowed—and Haeckel more Darwinian than they care to admit—this would seem to confirm the Gasman-Weikart thesis regarding a direct line of influence that begins with Darwin, connects with Haeckel, and ends with Hitler. Richards recognizes this, and throughout *Tragic Sense of Life* he assembles a closely researched case for dismissing the accusation that Haeckelian evolutionary thought was a precondition for the *völkische Bewegung* (people's movement). As a matter of fact, Richards has even suggested that the historical record demonstrates that “if anything, he [Haeckel] should be presumed a philo-Semite, which is how both friends and enemies so regarded him” (Richards 2009b). This assertion, as I shall argue below, is probably stronger than it needs to be. In response to the bid to repair Haeckel's reputation, Daniel Gasman (2009) has charged that *Tragic Sense of Life* is a work of “historical fiction,” an “anti-Semitic tract” that artfully conceals its “variations on the theme of Holocaust denial.” These are incredibly serious charges, and they must be taken seriously.

As I see it, the fundamental question is this: as he worked out the philosophical, scientific, and social meaning of evolution, did Haeckel facilitate the Nazis' determination to oversee *die Vernichtung der jüdische Rasse in Europa* (the annihilation of the Jews in Europe; Hitler 1939)? Gasman (2004) is convinced that he

decisively contributed scientific authority to the cause of racism. By bringing biology to its support, in works that were widely read and credited, he succeeded in investing the ideas of racial nationalism with academic respectability and scientific assurance. It was Haeckel, in other words, who was largely responsible for forging the bonds between academic science and racism in Germany in the later decades of the nineteenth century. (p. 40).

In general, the scholarly reception of this thesis—and its most recent iteration in Gasman's *Haeckel's Monism and the Birth of Fascism* (1998)—has not been particularly sympathetic. Writing in the *American Historical Review*, Alexander de Grand (2000) finds that “Gasman adds another perspective on the origins of fascism but fails to deliver the skeleton key that he claims to have discovered to unlock its puzzle” (p. 884). Olaf Briedbach's (2000) review for *Isis* judges that Gasman's historical case is far too simple on several key points: “his perspective is too narrow, for he neglects the cultural background of the scientific context that he is trying to reconstruct. Accordingly, he fails to convey the complexity of the impact of the monistic movement on European culture” (p. 602). The most withering criticisms emerge from the *English Historical Review*, where Roger Griffin (2001) takes Gasman's Haeckel-centrism to reveal that “he has not grasped the elementary point that the ‘birth of fascism’ cannot be explained solely in terms of the

history of ideas: movements and events are born of the conjoining of ideological forces with material or ‘structural’ conditions” (p. 685). Along similar lines, many have argued that the historical causes of the Holocaust come into view only when we abandon the notion that a few bad people and a few bad ideas were ultimately responsible. Richard Rubenstein points out in *The Cunning of History* (1975) that—given the ways in which technological innovation, the capitalist imperative of economic efficiency, and principles of bureaucratic management collectively paved the twisted road to Auschwitz-Birkenau—we must be prepared to regard the Holocaust “as the expression of some of the most profound tendencies of Western civilization in the twentieth century” (p. 21; see also Gutman and Berenbaum 1994).

What does the historical balance sheet indicate? Despite Haeckel’s exceptional talents, his views on the *Judefrage* seem utterly commonplace for a late-19th/early 20th-century German. In the wildly popular *Welträthsel* (1899 [1903]), for example, Haeckel set out to *entmythologisieren* (“demythologize”) the histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Bultmann 1958). More often than not, Haeckel’s target was the Catholic Church and its influence over the modern German nation-state. His argument is that enlightened government is guided by the biological and anthropological sciences rather than by petty class interests or traditional religious doctrine. As far as Haeckel was concerned, the struggle between the church and science would continue until *einer der beiden ringenden Kämpfer bewältigt am Boden liegt* (one of the two contending warriors lies defeated on the ground; Haeckel 1903, p. 134). The battle for influence over modern political life was a fight to the death.

In the midst of this paean to scientific reason, Haeckel tries his hand at Higher Criticism. Setting his sights on the “pure myth” of the virgin birth, he makes an unexpected interpretive move. Appealing to evidence drawn from the “apocryphal gospels,” Haeckel argues that neither God nor Joseph the carpenter was the true father of Jesus. Jesus was in fact the son of a Roman soldier named “Pandra,” “Pantera,” or “Panthera.” It is unclear where Haeckel is gathering his information, but this assertion appears in a variety of sources. In the third century, Origen reproduced the claim in *Contra Celsum* (ca. 248), only to dismiss it as a deliberate, malicious lie. It also shows up in the medieval rabbinic counter-gospel *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* (“The Life of Jesus” or “The Generations of Jesus”; cf. Van Voorst 2000). In a passage worth quoting at length, we read:

The information from the ancient Apocryphal Gospels, that the Roman soldier “Pandra” or “Pantheras” was the true father of Christ, seems even more plausible when one critically considers the person of Christ from a strictly anthropological point of view. Normally he is looked at as a pure Jew. Only, the traits which distinguish his high and noble personality, and express his “Religion of Love,” are definitely not Semitic. Rather they appear to be the main features of the higher Aryan race and, above all else, its noblest branch—the Hellenistic one. (Haeckel 1903, p. 132; my translation)

That is to say, the morally salient and historically important parts of Jesus' message spring from a Hellenistic rather than a Jewish source. In Richards's account, this is simply one gambit in Haeckel's larger anti-Christian crusade: "The Son of God and founder of Christianity, Haeckel concludes, was really a bastard" (Richards 2009a). I'm not convinced the story is all that simple, however. At the end of the 19th century, there was a concentrated effort by many European scholars to downplay the Jewish origins of Christianity. In *The Invention of World Religions* (2005), for example, Tomoko Masuzawa shows that late-19th-century intellectuals reimagined Christianity "as something more universal than national or ethnic, or—to say roughly the same thing—more broadly Hellenistic and Aryan than Hebraic and Semitic" (p. 191). In this way, the specific mode of Haeckel's war against religion resembles what German theologians like Max Maurenbrecher or Albert Kalthoff were saying about a Christian God "who ignores the limitations of the Jewish national God, and becomes identical with the worldwide God of Greek philosophy" (Kalthoff 1904, p. 89; cf. Heschel 2008).

Like many Western Europeans, Haeckel was also wary of the *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jews) who were fleeing the pogroms of Tsarist Russia. In an 1894 interview with Hermann Bahr, he bemoaned "the antisemitic [sic] smear campaign that everyone must lament and condemn," but acknowledged that the modern nation-state did make a milder form of anti-Semitism necessary:

It becomes intelligible that one would no longer tolerate within the people the alien aspects of the Jews, that one would take away the specifically Jewish character away from them and acculturate them to German mores and customs, until they resemble in every particular the people among whom and with whom they live. That is the legitimate meaning of antisemitism [sic], that the Jews abandon their peculiarities and fuse with us completely—anyone who thinks and feels in a national way must demand that of them. (qtd. in di Gregario 2005, p. 212)

In many respects, this is little more than an echo of the Napoleonic principle that while *Jews as Frenchmen* would receive their full rights, *Jews as Jews* would receive nothing. As Richards glosses this sentiment: "Jewish immigrants from the east, particularly Russia, did, he observed, fail to adopt the prevailing customs in Germany and thus provoked distrust and dislike; their behavior, he thought, justified protective restrictions on immigration, thought not because they were Jews but because they could not be assimilated." (Richards 2008, p. 274). It is worth noting that any number of assimilated Western European Jews would have agreed with Haeckel on this point. Herbert Marcuse viewed the *Ostjuden* as a disaster: "they constantly create new barriers, bring in old ghetto air, and are the greatest danger to the prosperity and harmony of the nations" (qtd. in Aschheim 1982, p. 50). In an 1892 letter to Emil Fluss, Sigmund Freud venomously recounted his encounter with an *Ostjuden* family on a train back to Vienna:

This being my unlucky day, I ended up in the company of a most venerable old Jew and his correspondingly old Jewish wife with their melancholy, languishing little daughter and impudent “promising” son. Now this Jew talked the same way as I had heard thousands of others talk before, even in Freiburg. His face seemed familiar—he was typical. So was the boy with whom he discussed religion. He was cut from the cloth which fate makes swindlers when the time is ripe: cunning, mendacious, kept by his adoring relatives in the belief that he is a great talent, unprincipled and without character. A cook from Bohemia with the most perfect pug-face I have ever seen put the lid on it. I have had enough of this lot. In the course of this conversation I learned that Madame Jewess and family hailed from Meseritsch: the proper compost-heap for this sort of weed. (Freud 1969, p. 420; cf. Gilman 1995; Gresser 1994)

Peter Gay (1988) observes in his biography of Freud that “A professional Jew-baiter could hardly have expressed it more forcefully” (p. 19). There was, of course, one crucial difference between Freud or Marcuse and a Brown Shirt provocateur: the German project to exterminate European Jewry envisioned something that Jewish self-hatred had never considered possible.

So, what are we to conclude? Although Richards emphasizes that materialistic monism was “philosophically rejected completely by the völkish-biological view of National Socialism,” this does not secure his case for Haeckel’s philo-Semitism (Richards 2009, pp. 446, 508 fn. 27). After all, Heidegger himself was denounced in 1934 in the Nazi periodical *Völk im Werden* as a philosopher whose “philosophy is downright atheism and metaphysical nihilism of the kind that used to be represented in our country mainly by Jewish literati—in other words, an enzyme of decomposition and dissolution for the German people” (qtd. in Safranski 1998, p. 268). When we add all the evidence together, I think it is probably too much to call Haeckel a “philo-Semite.” At the same time, however, there are no compelling historical reasons for thinking that Haeckel’s anti-Semitism was either unique or uniquely responsible for German anxieties about *rassische Überfremdung* (genetic pollution through non-Germans)—much less the Nazi regime of *Rassenhygiene* designed to eliminate this threat (cf. Ehrenreich 2007). Whatever his faults may have been, Haeckel was no Heidegger. Thus, while *Tragic Sense of Life* may be accused of being a bit too generous with its subject, to charge Richards with anything that remotely resembles a denial of the Holocaust is libelous.

CONCLUSION

In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1974), Ludwig Wittgenstein judged that the best kind of philosophy “leaves everything as it is” (§124). While this may be the sign of good philosophy, it is the mark of terrible history. As a reader, I find that the best historians are the ones who operatically change everything. Whether it is Gibbon’s history of a crumbling Roman empire, Foucault’s history of madness

or, yes, Heidegger's history of being, a great historical imagination allows us to see the world and ourselves in a novel way. By this or any other standard, the trilogy of *The Meaning of Evolution*, *The Romantic Conception of Nature*, and *The Tragic Sense of Life* is great history. Indeed, if one allows these books to rearrange the mind's furniture, most of what has been written about the emergence and consequences of evolutionary thought begins to look like anti-history. Richards has achieved something that very few scholars can legitimately claim: he has given us a new past.

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