

# Was Hitler a Darwinian?

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The Darwinian underpinnings of Nazi racial ideology are patently obvious. Hitler's chapter on "Nation and Race" in *Mein Kampf* discusses the racial struggle for existence in clear Darwinian terms.

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Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 2.

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## 1. *Introduction*

Several scholars and many religiously conservative thinkers have recently charged that Hitler's ideas about race and racial struggle derived from the theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), either directly or through intermediate sources. So, for example, the historian Richard Weikart, in his book *From Darwin to Hitler* (2004), maintains: "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

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Weikart, "Was It Immoral for "Expelled" to Connect Darwinism and Nazi Racism?" (<http://www.discovery.org/a/5069>.)

stress on expansion, war, racial struggle, and racial extermination.”<sup>2</sup> In a subsequent book, *Hitler’s Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* (2009), Weikart argues that Darwin’s “evolutionary ethics drove him [Hitler] to engage in behavior that the rest of us consider abominable.”<sup>3</sup> Other critics have also attempted to forge a strong link between Darwin’s theory and Hitler’s biological notions. In the 2008 film “Expelled,” a documentary defense of Intelligent Design, the Princeton trained philosopher David Berlinski, in conversation with Weikart, confidently asserts: “If you open *Mein Kampf* and read it, especially if you can read it in German, the correspondence between Darwinian ideas and Nazi ideas just leaps from the page.”<sup>4</sup> John Gray, former professor at the London School of Economics, does allow that Hitler’s Darwinism was “vulgar.”<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt also appears to have endorsed the connection when she declared: “Underlying the Nazis’ belief in race laws as the expression of the law of nature in man, is Darwin’s idea of man as the product of a natural development which does not necessarily stop with the present species of human being.”<sup>6</sup> Put “Darwin” and “Hitler” in a search engine and several million hits will be returned, most from religiously and politically conservative websites, articles, and books.

With the exception of the aforementioned, most scholars of Hitler’s reign don’t argue for a strong link between Darwin’s biology and Hitler’s racism, but they will often deploy the vague concept of “social Darwinism” when characterizing Hitler’s racial ideology.<sup>7</sup> The very name of the concept—whatever its content—does suggest a link

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Weikart, *Hitler’s Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed” (2008), a documentary film directed by Nathan Frankowski and hosted by Ben Stein. The line by Berlinski comes sixty-four minutes into the film.

<sup>5</sup> John Gray, “The Atheist Delusion,” *The Guardian* (15 March 2008): 4.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, [1948] 1994), p. 463.

<sup>7</sup> Here are just a few of the more recent scholars who have described Hitler as a “social Darwinist”: Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston. (New York: New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), pp. 54-56; Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 277-78; David Welch, *Hitler* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998 ) pp. 13-15; Frank McDonough, *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party* (London:

with evolutionary theory and particularly Darwin's version of that theory. The supposed connection between Darwin's conceptions and Hitler's is often traced via the biological ideas of the English scientist's German disciple and friend, Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919).

In his book *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (1971), Daniel Gasman claimed: "Haeckel . . . was largely responsible for forging the bonds between academic science and racism in Germany in the later decades of the nineteenth century."<sup>8</sup> In a later book, Gasman urged that Haeckel had virtually begun the work of the Nazis: "For Haeckel, the Jews were the original source of the decadence and morbidity of the modern world and he sought their immediate exclusion from contemporary life and society."<sup>9</sup> Gasman's judgment received the imprimatur of Stephen Jay Gould, who concluded in his *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (1977):

But as Gasman argues, Haeckel's greatest influence was, ultimately, in another tragic direction—National Socialism. His evolutionary racism; his call to the German people for racial purity and unflinching devotion to a "just" state; his belief that harsh, inexorable laws of evolution ruled human civilization and nature alike, conferring upon favored races the right to dominate others; the irrational mysticism that had always stood in strange communion with his grave words about objective science—all contributed to the rise of Nazism.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars like Gasman, Gould, Peter Bowler, Larry Arnhart—as well as a host of others—attempt to distinguish Haeckel's views from Darwin's, so as to exonerate the latter while sacrificing the former to the presumption of a strong causal connection with

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Pearson/Longman, 2003), p. 5; Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 34-37; and Stephen Lee, *Hitler and Nazi Germany* (London: Rutledge, 2010), p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League* (New York: Science History Publications, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel's Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 77-78.

Hitler's anti-Semitism.<sup>11</sup> I don't believe this effort to disengage Darwin from Haeckel can be easily accomplished, since on central matters—descent of species, struggle for existence, natural selection, inheritance of acquired characters, recapitulation theory, progressivism, hierarchy of races—no essential differences between master and disciple exist.<sup>12</sup> So if Hitler endorsed Haeckel's evolutionary ideas, he thereby also endorsed Darwin's.

## 2. The Issues regarding a Supposed Conceptually Causal Connection

Those critics who have urged a conceptually causal connection between Darwin's or Haeckel's biology and Hitler's racial beliefs—Weikart, Berlinski, and a myriad of religiously and politically constricted thinkers—apparently intend to undermine the validity of Darwinian evolutionary theory and by regressive implication morally indict Darwin and Darwinians like Ernst Haeckel. More reputable scholars—Gould, Arnhart, Bowler, and numerous others—are willing to offer up Haeckel to save Darwin by claiming significant differences between their views, a claim, as I've suggested, that cannot be sustained. The arguments arrayed against Darwin and Haeckel have power, no doubt. Whether they should have power is the question I would like to investigate.

Two salient issues arise out of the allegations of a connection between Darwinian theory and Hitler's racial conceptions: first, the factual truth of the claimed causal connections; and second, the epistemic and moral logic that draws implications from the supposed connections. The factual question can be considered at four levels. These distinctions may seem tedious to the impatient; but they are necessary, since the factual claim is often settled by even talented scholars through the deployment of a few vague observations. First, there is the epistemological problem of the very meaning of the assertion of causal connections among ideas. This issue falls under the rubric of

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 83-84; and Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Conservatism* (Charlottesville, Va.: Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> I have shown the essential identity of Darwin's and Haeckel's evolutionary theories at some length in Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 135-62.

*influence*, that is, one individual's ideas influencing or having causal impact on those of another. A host of acute epistemological problems attend the conception of influence (ideas, after all, are not like billiard balls), but I will bracket them in this discussion and simply assume that influence is real and causally potent. The second level of the factual question is: Did Hitler embrace Darwinian theory? Third, did any supposed endorsement actually lead to his racial policies, especially concerning the treatment of Jews? Finally, we should consider the beliefs and attitudes of those scientists working directly under the authority of the Nazi party: Did they adopt Darwinian theory and on that basis urge the inferiority of Jews and recommend eugenic measures? I will consider each of these latter three levels of the factual question in turn.

There is a kind of pseudo-historical game that can be played with causal influence, a distraction that will vitiate a serious attempt to deal with the second and third levels of the factual question. Instead of tracing out a reputed serious engagement of Hitler with Darwin's ideas and making an effort to determine how those ideas might have actually motivated him, one could play something like "six degrees of Charles Darwin." That is, one could catch Hitler using, say, a certain phrase he picked up from someone whom he read, who in turn read someone else who used the phrase, who found it in a journal article that mentioned someone quoting Darwin, etc. Virtually any remarks made by Hitler could thus be traced back to Darwin—or to Aristotle or to Christ. The real issue would be whether the phrase had Darwinian ideas behind it and whether such usage by Hitler motivated his actions.

Attendant on the factual question is that of the meaning of "Social Darwinism" when applied to Hitler and other Nazis. The term is maddenly opaque, but we can discriminate several different notes that conventionally fall under the conception and then decide which of those notes apply to the Nazis, Hitler in particular.

The strategy of those attempting to show a causal link between Darwin's theory and Hitlerian ideas about race runs, I believe, like this: the causal relation proceeding from Darwin to future Nazi malevolence justifies regressive epistemic and moral judgments running from future to past, thus indicting Darwin and individuals like Haeckel with moral responsibility for the crimes of Hitler and his minions and thereby

undermining evolutionary theory. Now the validity of this kind of moral logic might be dealt with straightaway: even if Hitler had the *Origin of Species* as his bedtime reading and clearly derived inspiration from it, this would have no bearing on the truth of Darwin's theory or directly on the moral character of Darwin and other Darwinians. Mendelian genetics became ubiquitous as a scientific foundation for Nazi eugenic policy (and American eugenic proposals as well), though none of the critics question the basic validity of that genetic theory or impugn Mendel's moral integrity. Presumably Hitler and other party officials recognized chemistry as a science and utilized its principles to exterminate efficiently millions of people. But this hardly precludes the truth of chemical theory or morally taints all chemists. It can only be rampant ideological confusion to maintain that the alleged connection between Hitler's ideas and those of Darwin and Haeckel, *ipso facto*, nullifies the truth of evolutionary theory or renders these evolutionists, both long dead before the rise of the Nazis, morally responsible for the Holocaust.

Had Hitler and leading Nazi biologists adopted Darwinian theory, exactly what feature of the theory would supposedly have induced them to engage in morally despicable acts? Weikart, for one, asserts it's Darwinian materialism that "undercut Judeo-Christian ethics and the right to life."<sup>13</sup> This charge has three salient problems. First, strictly speaking, Darwin was not a materialist; when the *Origin* was published he was a theist.<sup>14</sup> The leading Darwinian in Germany in the late nineteenth century, Ernst Haeckel, rejected the charge of materialism; he was a convinced Goethean monist (i.e., all organisms had a material side and a mental side). But it's true, Darwin and Haeckel were perceived as materialists by later critics—and by historians like Weikart. Second, as I'll indicate in a moment, Darwin's own moral theory certainly did not abandon Judeo-Christian precepts. Nor did Haeckel's. Haeckel was quite clear. He accepted the usual moral canon: "Doubtless, human culture today owes the greater part of its perfection to

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Weikart, "Darwinism and Death: Devaluing Human Life in Germany 1859-1920," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002), pp. 323-344 (quotation from p. 343).

<sup>14</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809-1882*, ed. Nora Barlow (New York: Norton 1969), pp. 92-3. Only in the mid 1860s does Darwin's theism slip away; he constructed his theory as a theist.

the spread and ennobling effect of Christian ethics.”<sup>15</sup> Haeckel, like Darwin, rather thought that Christian precepts had a source other than Divine command; those norms derived from the altruism bred in the bone by natural selection.<sup>16</sup> But the chief reason why presumptive Darwinian materialism cannot be the source of the unique malignity of Hitler and leading Nazi biologists is simple: they were not materialists. As I will show below, Hitler’s gauzy mystical attitude about *Deutschtum* was hardly materialistic; moreover, leading Nazi biologists rejected Darwin and Haeckel precisely because they thought the theories of these two scientists were materialistic while *volkisch* biology was not. In the first instance, it is crushingly naïve to believe an extremely abstract metaphysical position alone can produce morally deleterious or virtuous behavior. In this instance, though, whether abstract ethereal belief or not, Darwinian materialism cannot be the root of any malign influence perpetrated on the Nazis. Below I will describe the character of the more rarified metaphysics of Nazi scientists. Another consideration further attenuates the gossamer logic of the arguments mounted by Weikart, Berlinski, Gasman, Gould, and members of the Intelligent Design crowd: namely that their exclusive focus on the supposed Darwin-Hitler or Haeckel-Hitler connection reduces the complex motivations of the Nazi leaders to linear simplicity. These critics ignore the economic, political, and social forces operative in Germany in the 1930s; and they give no due weight to the deeply rooted anti-Semitism that ran back to Luther and Medieval Christianity and forward to the religious and political sentiments

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<sup>15</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *Der Monismus als Band zwischen Religion und Wissenschaft* (Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1892), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> I have discussed Haeckel’s ethical position in *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 352-54,

rife at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The names of those who prepared the ground before Hitler entered the scene go unmentioned: the court preacher and founder of the Christian Socialist Party, Adolf Stöcker (1835-1909), who thought the Jews threatened the life-spirit of Germany;<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Marr (1819-1904), founder of the League of Anti-Semitism, who maintained that the Jews were in a cultural “struggle for

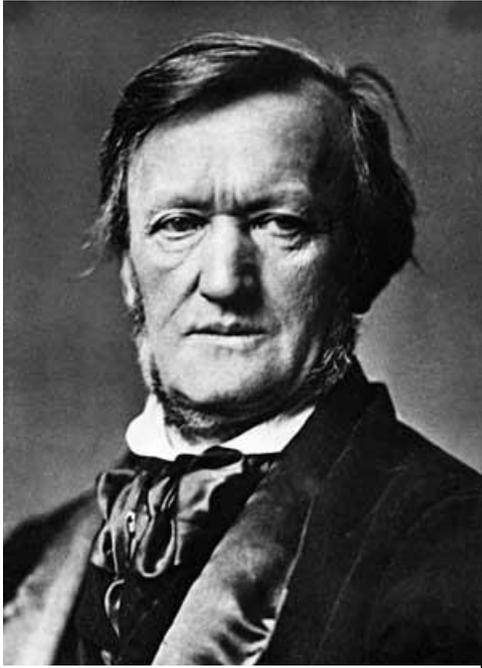


Figure 1: Richard Wagner (1871). Photo by Franz Hanfstaengl.

existence” with the spirit of Germanism, taking over the press, the arts, and industrial production;<sup>19</sup> or the widely-read historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), who salted his historical fields with animadversions about alien Jewish influences on German life and provided the Nazi’s with the bywords: “the Jews are our misfortune.”<sup>20</sup> Then there was the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883), whose music Hitler adored, even as a young man attending countless performances of *The Flying Dutchman*, *Parsifal*, *Lohengrin*, and the Ring cycle, and as rising political leader visiting the maestro’s home in Bayreuth at the invitation of the Wagner family. In 1850 Wagner composed a small pamphlet, which he reissued and expanded in

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Evans discusses this mix of religious and political anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century in his *The Coming of the Third Reich*, pp. 22-34.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Adolf Stöcker, *Das modern Judenthum in Deutschland besonders in Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag von Wiegandt und Grieben, 1880), p. 4: “the entire misery of Germany, I should have mentioned, comes from the Jews.”

<sup>19</sup> See Wilhelm Marr’s *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum, vom nicht confessionellen Standpunkt aus betrachtet*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bern: Rudolph Costenoble, 1879). He held that “the degradation of the German state to the advantage of Jewish interests is a goal pursued everywhere. The daily press is chiefly in Jewish hands and they have made a speculative and industrial matter out of journalism, a business forming public opinion— theater criticism, art criticism are three-quarters in Jewish hands. . . There is no ‘struggle for existence,’ except that Judaism gathers its advantage” (pp. 24 and 27).

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Ein Wort über unser Judenthum* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1880), p. 4: “. . . ertönt es heute wie aus einem Munde: “die Juden sind unser Unglück!”

1869, entitled *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Jewishness in music).<sup>21</sup> He wished “to explain the involuntary revulsion we have for the personality and nature of the Jews and to justify this instinctive repugnance, which we clearly recognize and which is stronger and more overwhelming than our conscious effort to rid ourselves of it.”<sup>22</sup> These are only a few of the intellectuals—or near-intellectuals—who expressed unreflective to more consciously aggressive anti-Semitic attitudes at the turn of the century; their malign depictions and vicious rants cascaded through German intellectual society in the early years of the twentieth century. Of course, these attitudes were not confined to Germany, but invaded distant shores as well. The new American ambassador to Germany in 1933, William E. Dodd (1869-1940), former chair of the history department at my university, could, for example, discount the outrageous attacks on Jews in Berlin by SA troops with the causal remark to a Nazi official that “we have had difficulty now and then in the United States with Jews who had gotten too much of a hold on certain departments of intellectual and business life.”<sup>23</sup> Dodd finally did come to appreciate that the Nazi treatment of Jews went beyond the bounds of “civilized” ante-Semitism, and he became an early voice of warning about the intentions of Hitler’s government. The disposition of Dodd and the others I have just mentioned were innocent of any concern with Darwin’s theory. Finally, one needs consider the politicians, especially in Vienna, who used anti-Semitism in opportunistic ways. I will examine the views of these latter more particularly below, since Hitler himself ascribed his racial attitudes to this source. The critics of Darwin and Haeckel have in their indictments neglected the various complex social and cultural forces that fueled the anti-Semitic obsessions of Hitler and his henchmen. The critics have sought, rather, to discover a unique key to Nazi evil.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Leipzig: Weber, 1869).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Erik Larson, *In the Garden of Beasts* (New York: Crown Books, 2011), p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Despite the caveats I’ve offered about the easy slide from causal influence to epistemic and moral indictment, I don’t want to deny that under certain well-defined circumstances one might justify, for instance, a morally negative assessment based on a relationship of conceptual influence. I have analyzed those circumstances in Robert J. Richards, “The Moral Grammar of Narratives in History of

The presumption that a factual connection between Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* morally indicts Darwin and somehow undermines evolutionary theory rests, quite obviously, on defective moral and epistemic logic—rather, on no logic at all. Nonetheless, I will put aside this logical consideration for the moment to investigate the supposed factual linkage.

### 3. Darwinian Theory and Racial Hierarchy

The first factual issue to tackle is: Did Hitler embrace Darwinian theory? The question, however, needs to be made more exact: What features of Darwin's theory did he embrace, if any? Concerning the theory, especially as applied to human beings, we can discriminate three central components: 1) that human groups can be arranged in a racial hierarchy from less advanced to more advanced; 2) that species have undergone descent with modification over vast stretches of time and that human beings descended from ape-like ancestors; and 3) that natural selection is the principal device to explain species transitions. Now the questions become: Did Hitler adopt any of these positions, and were they derived ultimately from Darwin? And did these ideas cause him to adopt or favor racist and specifically anti-Semitic views characteristic of Nazi biology? Of course, a positive answer to this latter question is essential to complete the causal connection between Darwinian theory and Hitler's lethal racial attitudes.

The first component of Darwinian theory to consider is that of racial hierarchy. Gould has argued that Darwin's theory was not progressivist, and therefore it did not situate species and races, particularly the human races, in any hierarchical scheme. He maintained, for example, that "an explicit denial of innate progression is the most characteristic feature separating Darwin's theory of natural selection from other nineteenth century evolutionary theories."<sup>25</sup> Lamarck, by contrast, had postulated an

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Biology—the Case of Haeckel and Nazi Biology," *Cambridge Companion to the Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Michael Ruse and David Hull (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 429-52.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, "Eternal Metaphors of Palaeontology," *Patterns of Evolution as Illustrated in the Fossil Record*, ed. A. Hallan (New York: Elsevier, 1977), pp. 1-26 (quotation from p. 13). Gould subsequently tried to distinguish between what Darwin's theory demands and what his cultural dispositions might have led him to assert—as if Darwin's theory were not embedded in the words of his books. See Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New

internal, quasi-hydraulic mechanism, that produced progressively more complex species over time. And Haeckel, quite graphically, arranged the human groups in a hierarchical scheme. Though other scholars have followed Gould's lead,<sup>26</sup> it's quite clear that Darwin thought of natural selection as a kind of external force that would generally produce, over vast stretches of time, more progressively developed organisms. In the penultimate paragraph of the *Origin of Species*, he explicitly stated his view: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection."<sup>27</sup> Even before he formulated his theory, however, Darwin was disposed to regard certain races as morally and intellectually inferior, as for example, the Fuegian Indians he encountered on the *Beagle* voyage. His later theoretical formulations and his own cultural assumptions surely reinforced each other. In the *Descent of Man*, Darwin described the races as forming an obvious hierarchy of intelligence and moral capacity, from savage to civilized, with the "intellectual and social faculties" of the lower races comparable to those that must have characterized ancient European man.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, he ventured that "the grade of their civilisation seems to be a most important element in the success of competing nations,"<sup>29</sup> which explained for him the extermination of the Tasmanians and the severe decline in population of the Australians, Hawaiians, and Maoris. Those groups succumbed in the struggle with more advanced peoples.<sup>30</sup> So, despite some scholars' views to the contrary, it's clear that

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York: Morton, 1989), pp. 257-58. I have discussed Darwin's progressivism vis-à-vis the assertions of Gould, Peter Bowler, and Michael Ruse. See Robert J. Richards, "The Epistemology of Historical Interpretation," in *Biology and Epistemology*, eds. Richard Creath and Jane Maienschein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 64-90.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Peter Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: Murray, 1859), p. 489.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871), 1: 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>30</sup> In the second edition of the *Descent*, Darwin described the extinction of the Tasmanians and the decline of the other "primitive" races of the South Pacific. See, Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, with an introduction by James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin Group, [1879] 2004), pp. 211-22.

Darwin's progressivist theory entailed a hierarchy of the human races. His opposition to slavery, which was deeply felt, did not mitigate his racial evaluations.<sup>31</sup>

Darwin's racialism never included Jews. His few scattered references to Jews contain nothing derogatory. Of some interest, though, he did observe that Jews and Aryans were quite similar in features, due, he supposed, to "the Aryan branches having largely crossed during their wide diffusion by various indigenous tribes."<sup>32</sup> This is in some contrast with Hitler, for whom the Jews and Aryans were pure (i.e., unmixed) races—a matter discussed below. Haeckel, however, does include Jews in his hierarchical scheme.

In the first edition of his *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (Natural history of creation, 1868), Haeckel represented in a tree-diagram nine species of human beings, along with their various races, all stemming from the *Affenmensch*, or ape-man. The vertical axis of the diagram was meant to suggest progressive development in intelligence and moral character (see fig. 2); it showed Australians, Hottentots, and Papuans at the lowest branches, with Caucasians occupying the highest. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the German and Mediterranean races of the Caucasian species (upper right in the diagram) are leading the other groups—except, that is, for the Berbers and the Jews, two other branches of the same species. Haeckel located the Jews at the same evolutionary level as the Germans and other Europeans—hardly the kind of judgment expected of a supposed anti-Semite.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Adrian Desmond and James Moore maintain that Darwin's anti-slavery attitude led him to postulate species descent from a common ancestor, and thus establish the brotherhood of man. I am not convinced by the thesis; but even if true, this does not contradict his notion of racial hierarchy. Christian slave-holders in the American South likewise assumed common ancestry for human beings. See their *Darwin's Sacred Cause* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), and Robert J. Richards, "The Descent of Man: Review of *Darwin's Sacred Cause*," *American Scientist* 97 (September-October, 2009): 415-17.

<sup>32</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man* (1871), 1: 240.

<sup>33</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1868), p. 519. In subsequent editions, Haeckel added more species and changed the location of the races in the hierarchy. In the second edition, for instance, Jews are located just a bit below the level of the Germans, but still remain far ahead of most of the other races.

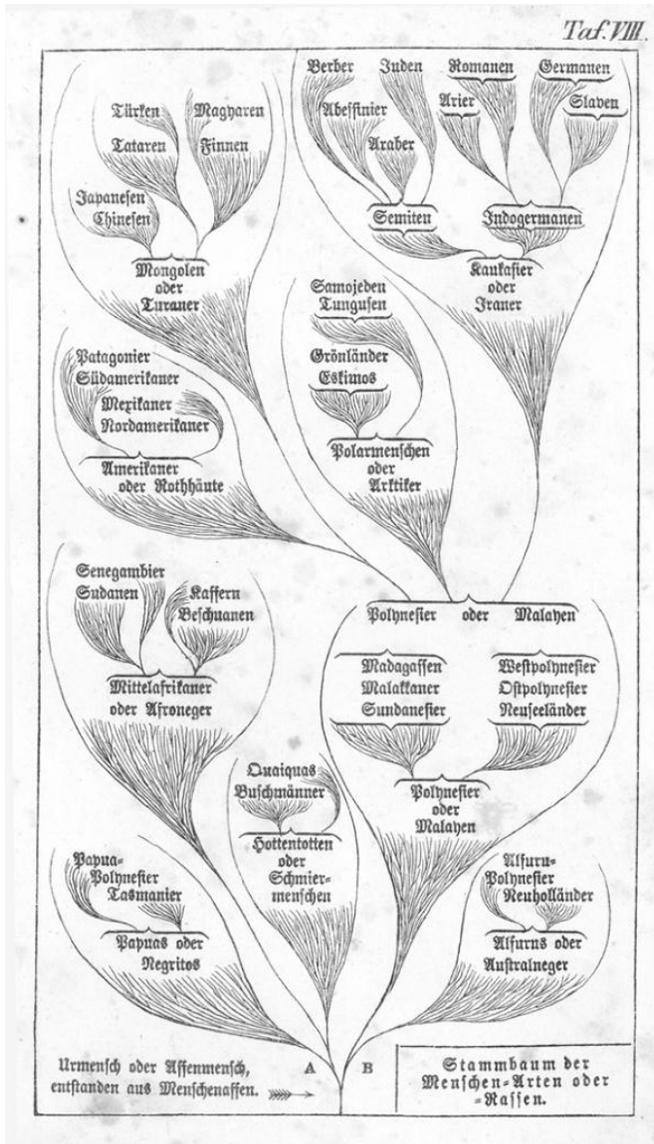


Figure 2: Stem-Tree of Human Species. From Ernst Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (1868).

Haeckel spoke directly to the question of anti-Semitism. He, along with some forty other European intellectuals and artists, was interviewed in the early 1890s about the phenomenon of anti-Semitism by Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), a journalist and avant-garde playwright. Haeckel mentioned that some of his students were anti-Semites but he explicitly disavowed that prejudice. He did acknowledge that some nations, including Germany, were judicious in barring the immigration of Slavic Jews since they would not adopt the customs of their new countries but remained stubbornly unassimilated. He yet celebrated the *gebildeten Juden* of Germany. He is quoted by Bahr as proclaiming:

I hold these refined and noble Jews to be important elements in German

culture. One should not forget that they have always stood bravely for enlightenment and freedom against the forces of reaction, inexhaustible opponents, as often as needed, against the obscurantists [Dunkelmänner]. And now in the dangers of these perilous times, when

Papism again rears up mightily everywhere, we cannot do without their tried and true courage.<sup>34</sup>

As is suggested by this quotation, Haeckel's long-term opponent was the Catholic Church, for which he had a mixture of disdain and, at least for its black-robed troops, the Jesuits, some grudging admiration.<sup>35</sup>

So neither Darwin nor the leading German Darwinian, Ernst Haeckel, can be accused of anti-Semitism, certainly not the kind of racism that fueled Hitler's animus and stoked the fires of the Holocaust. The belief in a racial hierarchy, assumed by both Darwin and Haeckel, needs to be put in a larger historical context. The common presumption of higher and lower races antedates Darwin's work by many generations and cannot be uniquely attributed to Darwinian theory.

The pre-evolutionary naturalists Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), and Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869)—all of whose works directed subsequent thought about the distinction of human races—ranked those races in a hierarchy, with Europeans, not surprisingly, in the top position.<sup>36</sup> For example, Linnaeus placed the genus *Homo* within the order Primates (which included monkeys, bats, and sloths) and distinguished two species: *Homo sapiens* and *Homo troglodytes* (anthropoid apes). He divided *Homo sapiens* (wise man) into four varieties: American (copper-colored, choleric, regulated by custom), Asiatic (sooty, melancholic, and governed by opinions), African (black, phlegmatic, and governed by caprice), and European (fair, sanguine, and governed by laws). Linnaeus

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<sup>34</sup> Haeckel as quoted by Hermann Bahr, "Ernst Haeckel," in *Der Antisemitismus: Ein international Interview* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1894), pp. 62-69 (quotation from p. 69).

<sup>35</sup> I have explored the question of Haeckel's supposed anti-Semitism in greater detail in "Ernst Haeckel's Alleged Anti-Semitism and Contributions to Nazi Biology," *Biological Theory* 2 (Winter, 2007): 97-103.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema naturae per regna tria naturae, secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis*. 3 vols. (Halle: Curt, 1760-1770), 1:20-24; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa liber*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht, 1795); and Georges Cuvier, *Le Règne animal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 5 vols. (Paris: Deterville Libraire, 1829-30), 1: 80. I have discussed these and other hierarchical schemes in Robert J. Richards, "Race," *Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. John Heilbron (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2001): pp. 697-98.

conceived such differences as expressive of divine intent.<sup>37</sup> Carl Gustav Carus affirmed a comparable hierarchy, though he declared that the races of mankind could not be classified with animals as had Linnaeus. Because of their mental character, humans formed a kingdom of their own with four distinct races, each endowed with different abilities: “the people of the day” (Europeans, Caucasians, Hindus), “the people of the night” (Aethiopians—South Africans, Papuans, Australians), “the people of the eastern twilight” (Asians—Mongols and Malays), and “the people of the western twilight” (North and South American Indians).<sup>38</sup> The original lands of these peoples—their climate and geography—wrought effects on their anatomy, especially on skull sizes and brain formation, rendering them with different capacities for cultural attainment. The people of the day had achieved the highest development in the appreciation of beauty, truth, and goodness.<sup>39</sup> Though each of the groups could be located in an ascending hierarchy, human mentality remained distinctly separated from the capacities of brutes, which meant, in Carus’s terms, they certainly did not derive from any ape forbearer, as suggested by Lamarck.<sup>40</sup> These racial categories of leading naturalists, established long before the appearance of Darwin’s work, were mutually reinforcing of common prejudices. But the point to be made is simply that assumptions of racial hierarchy, ubiquitous in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, did not originate in Darwinian evolutionary theory; they were commonplaces in scientific literature since at least the eighteenth century. Darwin and Haeckel, like most other naturalists of the period,

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<sup>37</sup> Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema naturae per regna tria naturae, secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis*, 3 vols. (Halle: Curt, 1760-1770), 1: 20-24.

<sup>38</sup> Carus essentially reproduced the categories of Blumenbach’s *De generis humani varietate nativa*

<sup>39</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *System der Physiologie für Naturforscher und Aerzte*, 2 vols. (Dresden: Gerhard Fleischer, 1838), 1: 124.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 112: “Finally and chiefly it must not be thought that man has arisen from an animal (an ape, for instance, with which one sometimes classifies human beings) that has progressively developed and so has become man.” Carus further refined his discussion in a work occasioned by the hundredth birthday of that great genius of the people of the day, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Denkschrift zum hundertjährigen Geburtsfeste Goethe’s. Ueber ungleiche Befähigung der verschiedenen Menschheitstämme für höhere geistige Entwicklung* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1849). Carus used the American Samuel Morton’s measurement of skull sizes as one index of different intellectual capacities (p. 19).

simply accepted the hierarchy and gave it an account in terms of their theoretical system.

#### 4. The Racial Ideology of Gobineau and Chamberlain

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two of the most influential proponents of the theory of racial hierarchy were Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927). Gobineau's four-volume *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the inequality of the human races, 1853-1855) was translated into several languages and went through five German editions from 1895 to 1940 and served as the intellectual rationale for the anti-Semitic Gobineau societies that spread through Germany at the turn of the century.<sup>41</sup> Chamberlain's *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The foundations of the nineteenth century) flooded Germany with an amazing thirty editions from 1899 to 1944. Chamberlain was inspired by Gobineau's analysis of race and became a member of the elite Gobineau society, along with other members of the cult of Richard Wagner.<sup>42</sup> The books of Gobineau and Chamberlain helped to articulate and give form to the racial views of Hitler and his chief party philosopher, Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946). For that reason, I will linger over the works of these two harbingers of the Nazi movement.

Arthur, Count de Gobineau was born of a royalist family in 1816. His father joined the anti-revolutionary forces during the Directorate and



Figure 3: Arthur Comte de Gobineau.

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<sup>41</sup> I have used the second German edition in this analysis: Joseph Arthur Grafen Gobineau, *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen*, trans. Ludwig Schemann, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1902-1904).

<sup>42</sup> Paul Weindling provides a trenchant account of the Gobineau Society, with its elitist and non-scientific membership. See his richly nuanced *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 106-109.

was later imprisoned by Napoleon's regime.<sup>43</sup> Through his early adulthood he mourned the passing of the aristocratic order and expressed in several novels, poems, and plays of the 1840s his distaste for the materialistic and crass attitudes of the rising bourgeoisie. His odd friendship with Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859)—with whom he had a considerable correspondence over religion, morals, and democracy—brought him into the troubled government of the Second Republic in 1849; and after the coup of Louis Napoleon in 1851, he advanced to several diplomatic posts during the regime of the Second Empire (1851-1871). His diplomatic work allowed him sufficient leisure time to cultivate a knowledge of Persian, Greek, and south Asian languages and civilizations, which reinforced his sentiments about a golden age of aristocratic order. He elevated his class prejudices to something quite grand: he argued that modern nations had lost the vitality characterizing ancient civilizations and that the European nations, as well as the United States, faced inevitable decline, the French Revolution being an unmistakable sign of the end. When he learned of Darwin's evolutionary theory he quite disdainfully dismissed it, thinking its anemic progressivism a distortion of his own rigorously grounded empirical study; certainly the time was near, he believed, when Haeckel's phantasms of ape-men would evanesce.<sup>44</sup> He was assured of the decline of human societies—so palpable before his eyes during the years of political turmoil throughout Europe—and proposed a very simple formula to explain it: race mixing.

Gobineau indicated that he was moved to write his *Essay* because of the views of James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), who argued for the essential unity of mankind and the common capacities of the various human races.<sup>45</sup> Gobineau wished to demonstrate, on the contrary, that while we might have to give notional assent to the Biblical story of common origin, the fundamental traits of the white, yellow, and black races were manifestly different and that their various branches displayed intrinsically diverse endowments. To support this contention, he spun out, over four substantial

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<sup>43</sup> For Gobineau's family background and political orientation, I have relied on Michael Biddiss's *Father of Racist Ideology: the social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970).

<sup>44</sup> Gobineau, *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenracer*, 1: xxxi-xxxiii

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 1: xxviii-xxix.

volumes, a conjectural anthropology whose conclusions, he ceaselessly claimed, had the iron grip of natural law. The beginning of his story, he allowed, did have a bit of mythical aura about it. The Adamite generation, knowledge about which trailed off into fable, begot the white race—about this the Bible seemed certain, while the origins of the yellow and black races went unmentioned in the sacred texts.<sup>46</sup> So we might assume that each of these races had independent roots, since each displayed markedly different traits.<sup>47</sup> The whites were the most beautiful, intelligent, orderly, and physically powerful; they were lovers of liberty and aggressively pursued it. They played the dominate role in any civilization that had attained a significant culture. The yellow race was rather lazy, uninventive, though given to a narrow kind of utility. The black race was intense, willful, and with a dull intellect; no civilization ever arose out of the pure black race. Each of the three races had braches with somewhat different characters. So, for instance, the



Figure 4: Illustration (1924) by Maurice Becque, in Gobineau's *Nouvelles asiatiques*.

white race comprised the Assyrian, Celtic, Iberian, Semitic, and Aryan stocks. These stocks had intermingled to produce some of the great civilizations of the past—Gobineau discriminated some ten such ancient civilizations.<sup>48</sup> The Greek civilization, for example, arose from the Aryan stock with a tincture of the Semitic. High attainment in culture, science, and the arts had

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1: 157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1: 278-81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1: 287-90.

only existed, however, where there was a large admixture of the Aryan. Even the Chinese, in his estimation, derived from an Aryan colony from India. Had these branches of the white race remained pure, their various ancient civilizations would still be flourishing. But racial mixing caused an inevitable degradation of their character.

Gobineau postulated two contrary forces operative on the races of mankind: revulsion for race mixing, especially powerful among the black groups, and a contrary impulse to intermarriage, which oddly was characteristic of those peoples capable of great development.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the impulse to mate with conquered peoples, the pure strains of the higher stocks had become alloyed with the other strains, the white race being constantly diluted with the blood of the inferior races, while the later enjoyed a boost from white blood. Contemporary societies, according to Gobineau, might have more or less strong remnants of the hereditary traits of their forbearers, but they were increasingly washed over as the streams of humanity ebbed and flowed. The modern European nations thus lost their purity, especially as the white component had been sullied in the byways of congress with the yellow and black races. So even the modern Germans, who still retained the greatest measure of Aryan blood and yet carried the fire of modern culture and science—even the Germans had begun to decline and would continue to do so as the tributaries of hybrid stocks increasingly muddied the swifter currents of pure blood.

Despite Gobineau's theories of race and his influence in Germany, he was no egregious anti-Semite, at least not of the sort that so readily adopted his views. He regarded the Jews as a branch of the Semites, the latter being a white group that originally extended from the Caucasus Mountains down through the lands of the Assyrians to the Phoenician coast. The Hebrews, as he preferred to call the Jews, retained their racial purity up to the time of the reign of King David, a period when so many other, less worthy peoples, were brought into the kingdom: "The mixing thus pressed through all the pores of Israel's limbs." As a consequence, "the Jews were marred through mating with blacks, as well as with the Hamites and Semites in whose

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1:38.

midst they were living.”<sup>50</sup> In short, the Jews fared no better and no worse than other groups of originally pure stocks; like them, they enjoyed for a while the advantages of a homogeneous population, and then slipped silently down the racial slope into their current mongrel state.

The theme of cultural degradation due to race mixing echoed through the decades after the publication of Gobineau’s treatise. Richard Wagner, who became a friend and correspondent of Gobineau, anticipated the dangers of racial decline, though, like the poet Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), believed that art might reverse the decline, at least for the German people. Americans also heard the unhappy knell. Madison Grant (1865-1937), a New York lawyer, with biological and anthropological acumen on a level below that even of his French predecessor, pressed the same concerns in a comparably conjectural study, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), the German edition of which was found in Hitler’s library.<sup>51</sup> Grant thought the superior Nordic race—the true descendent of the Aryan speaking peoples—to be endangered by cross-breeding. He determined that the bad seed flowed from the two lower stocks of the Caucasian group—the Alpine race (Eastern Europeans and Slavs) and the Mediterranean race (stemming from the southern areas of Asia minor and along the coasts of the inland sea), thus the swarthy Poles, Czechs, and Russians and the even more swarthy Spaniards, Italians, and Greeks. Unmistakable signs indicated the decline of the American civilization: simplified spelling and incorrect grammar told the story, for Grant, of decay from Nordic standards.<sup>52</sup> Even more alarming, the Polish Jews swarming in New York City, the *cloaca gentium*—in terms borrowed from Chamberlain—the Jews wore the Nordic’s clothes and stole his women, thus genetically

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 2: 92-3.

<sup>51</sup> Madison Grant, *the Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916). Hitler’s library contained the translation *Der Untergang der großen Rasse*, trans. Rudolf Polland (Munich: Lebmanns Verlag, 1925). See Timothy Ryback, *Hitler’s Private Library* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 97. Since Hitler’s copy does not contain any markings and he doesn’t mention Grant by name, it’s uncertain whether he actually read the book. Further, the first volume of *Mein Kampf* was finished in early 1925, and the translation of Grant came out in summer of 1925.

<sup>52</sup> Grant, *Passing of the Great Race.*, p. 6.

obliterating his commanding stature, blue eyes, blond hair, and Teutonic moral bearing.<sup>53</sup> (There would appear to be no accounting for Nordic women's taste in men.) The German nation fared little better; through miscegenation it had suffered a large decline in the number of pure Teutons.<sup>54</sup> Grant played in syncopated harmony the American version of Gobineau's tune. But the most influential orchestrator of this theme at the turn of the century, done in Wagnerian style, was Houston Stewart Chamberlain.

Chamberlain, born in 1855, descended from the lesser British aristocracy and from money on both sides of his family.<sup>55</sup> His father, mostly absent from his life, fought in the Crimean War, serving as an admiral of the British fleet. After his mother suddenly died, he and his two brothers were shipped off to Versailles to live with a grandmother and aunt. In 1866, to reintroduce him to his native heritage, his father enrolled the ten-year old, French-speaking lad in an English school; but ill health kept him there only for a few years. The boy returned to France where his schooling was taken over by a German tutor, who instilled a love of the language and culture of Germany. After three years his tutor took up a post back in his native land; and Chamberlain, now thirteen, saw to his own education, reading promiscuously in the literature of Germany, France, and England, and cultivating an interest in the solitary science of botany. His father died in 1878, leaving him with a decent income and freedom to marry a woman whom he had met when a teenager of sixteen and she twenty-six. The nuptials occurred three years later. He now worried about a formal education. His self-tutelage was sufficient to win him a place in the natural science faculty at the University of Geneva, from which he graduated with distinction in 1881. While at Geneva he came under the autocratic sway of Karl Vogt (1817-1895), whom he thought too influenced by the experience of the revolutions of 1848. Vogt was an evolutionist, though according to Chamberlain's

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 81. The quite expressive phrase "cloaca gentium"—sewer of the races—appears to have come from Chamberlain, who used it to refer to Rome. See Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Munich: Bruckmann, 1899), 1: 286.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>55</sup> For the details of Chamberlain's life, I have relied on the fine biography by Geoffrey Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

reckoning, he was mistrustful of Darwinism and Haeckelianism.<sup>56</sup> The young student sought to pursue a doctoral thesis in plant physiology at Geneva, but interrupted his study after two years due to a free-floating nervous indisposition. His attempt at a stock brokerage business met quiet failure; yet with the aid of additional funds from his aunt, he continued private study, especially in German philosophy and literature. Kant and Goethe became his loadstars. Then he discovered Richard Wagner, and his glittering firmament became fixed.

Shortly after he was married in 1878, Chamberlain and his wife Anna attended the premier of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Munich, an event that ignited what would become an ever growing passion for the numinous music and deranged doctrines of the great composer. In 1882, the couple visited the consecrated ground of Bayreuth, where they heard *Parsifal* three times. He wrote his aunt that the “overwhelming beauty” simply stunned him (*mich einfach verstummen machte*).<sup>57</sup> Not only the aesthetic power of the music transfixed him; his fervent Christianity became alloyed with the mystical theology fueling the Wagnerian legends of questing knights and battling gods. He enrolled as a member of the Wagner Society (*Wagner-Verein*), formed after the composer’s death in 1882, and helped found a new French journal devoted to the art of the composer. His many articles for the journal drew him closer to Cosima Wagner, second wife of the maestro, daughter of Franz Liszt, and titular head of the inner circle of the cult, which fed on the racial theories of Gobineau, now growing into Teutonic glorification and pernicious anti-Semitism. The measure of Chamberlain’s devotion, not simply to the music but to the mystical association of Wagner with the German spirit, can be taken by the extent of his labors: four books and dozens of articles on the man and his music during the short period between 1892 and 1900.<sup>58</sup> The more significant

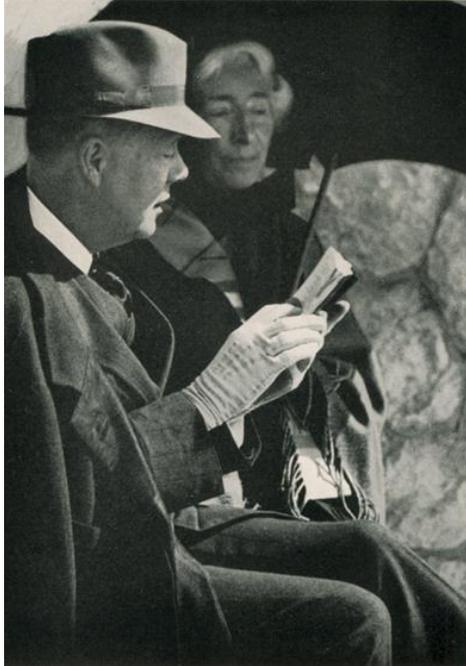
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<sup>56</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Lebenswege meines Denkens* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1919), p. 93.

<sup>57</sup> Chamberlain to Harriett Chamberlain (31 July 1882), in *Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Brief, 1882-1924, und Briefwechsel mit Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 2 vols., ed. Paul Pretzsch (Munich: Bruckmann, 1928), 1: 1.

<sup>58</sup> Chamberlain’s books on Wagner are: *Das Drama Richard Wagner's. Eine Anregung* (Vienna: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1892); *Richard Wagner. Echte Briefe an Ferdinand Praeger* (Bayreuth: Grau'sche Buchhandlung, 1894); *Richard Wagner* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1896); *Parsifal-Märchen* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1900). Each of these went through multiple editions and translations.

measure, perhaps, was the kindling of his admiration for, if not burning love of, Wagner's youngest daughter, Eva, whom he married in 1908 following an expensive divorce from his first wife.



**Figure 5: Cosima Wagner and her son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, 1918.**

After moving from Dresden to Vienna in 1889—and still relying on the financial kindness of his aunt—Chamberlain renewed his intention to finish a doctorate in plant physiology. He started attending lectures at the university, especially those of the botanist Julius Wiesner (1838–1916), with whom he became quite friendly. With the encouragement of Wiesner, he resurrected extensive measurement experiments he had originally conducted in Geneva on the movement of fluids in plants. Since his nervous condition precluded further experimental work, he now put his original findings into a broad historical and philosophical context, arguing that no adequate mechanistic account could be given of the rise of sap in plants and its resistance to falling

back.<sup>59</sup> We must assume that vital forces are at work. Whether these forces operated extrinsically to the molecular structure or internally to it, the evidence confirmed their presence: mechanical forces alone could not lift the sap in trees the 150 or 200 feet of their height.<sup>60</sup> Despite an insatiable mania for publishing (his *Schreibdämon*, as he called it), the writing of the dissertation was desultory, finally appearing in 1897, though not submitted for a degree. Immediately on its publication, he began the composition of his master work, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, which would eventually flood Germany with a rich farrago of Goethean sentiment, Kantian epistemology,

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<sup>59</sup> Chamberlain, *Lebenswege meines Denkens* pp. 119-20.

<sup>60</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Recherches sur la Sève Ascendante* (Neuchatel: Attinger Freres, 1897), pp. 6-8.

Wagnerian mysticism, and Aryan anti-Semitism. The medley echoed through the German reading public for almost half a century.

While Gobineau maintained that the races were originally pure but tended to degenerate over time because of miscegenation, Chamberlain contended that purity of race was an achievement over long periods of time; though once achieved, it could be endangered by race mixing.<sup>61</sup> His notion of race was quite loose, insofar as the Greeks, Romans, Iranians, Chinese, English, French, Jews, Aryans (or Germans) all formed in his estimation distinct races. His test of race was the direct, intuitive experience of the other, rather than some craniometric measures. He was quite vague about the origins of human beings, simply observing that as far as history testified human beings have always existed.<sup>62</sup> He dismissed as a “pseudo-scientific phantasy” Haeckel’s argument that the human races descended from ape-like forbearers.<sup>63</sup>

The two principal races that achieved purity and retained it were the Aryan and the Jewish. The Aryans, which in their more recent incarnation he referred to as Germans, were the bears of culture, science, and the arts. These mental accomplishments flowed from blood, he argued (or really simply stipulated). Chamberlain, in a wonderful piece of quasi-idealistic morphology, described the German as having an ideal type: “great, heavenly radiant eyes, golden hair, the body of a giant, harmonious musculature, a long skull [and]. . . high countenance.”<sup>64</sup> All of this, notwithstanding, individual Germans might be dark-haired, brown-eyed, and small of stature. (One had to see the blond giant standing behind the form, for example, of the puny chicken-farmer with dark receding hair—Heinrich Himmler.) Against the blond giant stood the threatening Jew. Chamberlain devoted one-hundred-thirty five continuous pages to dissecting the Jewish type, the physiology and the character. So distinct were the racial traits that one could be certain that Christ was not a Jew, a view

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<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen*, 1: 266-67.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122n.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 496.

that Hitler took over from Chamberlain.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the *Foundations*, this Anglo-German would vacillate between referring to the Jews as a pure race, meaning relatively permanent, but also of a “mongrel character” (*Bastardcharakter*).<sup>66</sup> That character displayed the typical attitudes his fellows had come to associate with Jews: materialistic, legalistic, limited in imagination, intolerant, fanatical, and with a tendency toward utopian economic schemes, as found, for instance, in Marxism.<sup>67</sup> The Jews’ very “existence is a sin (*Sünde*); their existence is a transgression against the holy laws of life.”<sup>68</sup> Thus any mating between Jew and Aryan could only corrupt the nobility of the latter: the Jewish character “is much too foreign, firm, and strong to be refreshed and ennobled by German blood.”<sup>69</sup> This could only mean a struggle between the Aryans and the Jews, a struggle of life and death (*ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod*).<sup>70</sup>

Chamberlain used the trope of racial struggle frequently in the *Foundations*. Indeed, the phrase usually identified with Darwinian theory, “struggle for existence” (*Kampf ums Dasein*), appears eight times in the *Foundations*. The single word “struggle” (*Kampf*) turns up one-hundred-twelve times. But these terms were not markers of Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Chamberlain rejected Darwin’s conception completely, comparing it to the old, discredited “phlogiston theory.”<sup>71</sup> But not only did he dismiss Darwin’s main explanatory device, he simply rejected transmutation of species altogether. It was an idea already refuted in advance by Kant.<sup>72</sup> However, its influence continued perniciously to affect all it touched. He wrote Cosima Wagner at

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<sup>65</sup> Chamberlain goes through some conceptual contortions to reach this conclusion. See *ibid.*, pp. 217-20. Hitler adopted the same theory, namely that “Christ was certainly not a Jew, but a Galilean of Aryan descent.” See Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier, 1941-1944*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Albrecht Knaus, 1980), (21 October 1941) p. 96. This latter volume recovers Hitler’s so-called “table-talk,” stenographic recordings ordered by Martin Bormann of the Leader’s conversations.

<sup>66</sup> Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen*, 1: 372.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 531.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 805.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 25.

the time of the composition of the *Foundations*: “this hair-raising absurdity poisons not only natural science but the whole of human thought: Darwinism rules everywhere, corrupting history and religion; it leads to social idiocy; it degrades judgment about men and things.”<sup>73</sup>

In a letter of advice to a young student, Chamberlain contended that while some of Darwin’s observations might be empirically helpful, his theory “is simply poetry [einfach eine Dichtung]; it is unproven and unprovable.” Anyone with the least tincture of metaphysics would understand the impossibility of solving the world puzzles by evolution.<sup>74</sup> The main difficulty—as he detailed in manuscripts composed at the time of the *Foundations*—has to do with the integrity of form. Taking his cue from Georges Cuvier, Goethe, and Kant, Chamberlain argued that our direct, intuitive experience revealed only two archetypal forms in the plant world and eight in the animal world (e.g., radiate animals, articulate animals, vertebrate animals, etc.) governed by laws of formation (*Bildungsgesetze*). These fundamental forms simply could not pass into one another; otherwise we would have the ape being a cousin of the tree it was climbing. Moreover, animal forms exhibited an integral correlation of their constituent parts, constrained within certain limits of variability, such that any radical change of a part would collapse the harmony of the whole; and radical changes in an animal’s form would fatally disrupt its relation to other animals. Thus transmutation of forms, as Lamarck, Darwin, or Weismann conceived it, would be impossible.<sup>75</sup> Chamberlain’s racism and conception of struggle of races owed no theoretical debt to Darwin, Haeckel,

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<sup>73</sup> Chamberlain to Cosima Wagner (9 March 1896), in *Cosima Wagner und Houston Stewart Chamberlain im Briefwechsel 1888-1908*, ed. Paul Pretzsch (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1934), p. 478.

<sup>74</sup> Chamberlain to Karl Horst (31 October 1895), in *Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Briefe, 1882-1924 und Briefwechsel mit Kaiser Wilhelm II*, ed. Paul Pretzsch, 2 vols. (Munich: Bruckmann, 1928), 1: 26-27. The phrase “world puzzles” was obviously an oblique reference to Haeckel’s book *Welträtsel*.

<sup>75</sup> These are the conclusions Chamberlain drew in two manuscripts from the years 1896 and 1900. They were published by his friend Jakob von Uexküll shortly after his death. See Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Natur und Leben*, ed. J. von Uexküll (Munich: Bruckmann, 1928), pp. 102-168.

Weismann or any other of the Darwinians, rather chiefly to Gobineau, Kant, Goethe, and Wagner—insofar as responsibility might be thought transitive.<sup>76</sup>

## 5. Chamberlain and Hitler

Hitler's racial infections derived from many sources—particularly the seething political pool he threw himself into while in Vienna as a young, aspiring art student and feckless vagabond. But in *Mein Kampf*, no placid reservoir of ideas, he yet seems to have deployed slightly less agitated concepts to structure his considerations of race; his promiscuous mind culled these ideas from many sources, but one in particular stands out—those theories and conceptions of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and not by accident.

Hitler likely first encountered Chamberlain's *Foundations* sometime between 1919 and 1921, when he read the work at the National Socialist Institute Library in Munich.<sup>77</sup> He met the man himself shortly thereafter in Bayreuth. Chamberlain moved to Bayreuth after his marriage to Eva Wagner in 1909, and there he served to help reorganize the finances of the *Festspiele* and edit the *Bayreuther Blätter*, which carried articles on the art of the master interlaced with observations on the perfidy of Jews. As the leader of the growing German Workers Party, Hitler travel to Bayreuth in late September, 1923, to attend a political rally. While in the city, he was invited by the Wagner family to visit and worship at Wahnfried, the maestro's home and shrine. Chamberlain spoke extensively with the man over two days and was so impressed that he wrote the lederhosed politician an amazingly fulsome letter, which Hitler never forgot. The long letter of October 7, read in part:

You are certainly not as you have been described to me, namely as a fanatic [*Fanatiker*]; rather I would call you the very opposite of a fanatic. A

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<sup>76</sup> In matters of morphology, Chamberlain said his masters were Goethe and Kant. See Chamberlain, *Lebenswege meines Denkens*, p. 122.

<sup>77</sup> Timothy Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 50

fanatic overheats the head, while you warm the heart. The fanatic wishes to smother you in words; you want to convince, only convince. . . My faith in Germanness [Deutschtum] has never wavered for a moment. But my hopes—I will confess—had ebbed. With one blow, you have transformed the core of my soul. That Germany in the hour of her greatest need has given birth to a Hitler, that shows her vital essence.<sup>78</sup>



**Figure 6: Hitler flanked by Winifred and Sigfried Wagner, son of Richard Wagner, 1933**

On the occasion of Hitler's thirty-fifth birthday, celebrated the next year in prison, Chamberlain published an open letter, in which he extolled this man, so different from other politicians, a man who "loves his German people with a burning passion." "In this feeling," he professed, "we have the central point of his whole politics, his economics, his opposition to the Jews, his battle against the corruption of values, etc."<sup>79</sup>

After his release from jail, Hitler visited Chamberlain on several occasions and mourned him at his funeral.<sup>80</sup> In the depths of the World War II, Hitler recalled with extreme gratitude visiting Bayreuth for the first time and meeting Chamberlain. In conversations stenographically recorded—his so-called "Table Talk"—he mentioned that "Chamberlain's letter came while I was in jail. I was on familiar terms with them [Chamberlain and the Wagner family]; I love these people and Wahnfried."<sup>81</sup> It was

<sup>78</sup> Chamberlain to Adolf Hitler (7 October 1923), in *Briefe, 1882-1924*, 2: pp. 124-25.

<sup>79</sup> The letter was originally published in *Deutsche Presse*, nos. 65-66 (April 20-21, 1924), p. 1; reprinted in *Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Auswahl aus seinen Werken*, ed. Hardy Schmidt (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1935), p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> Hitler visited Chamberlain several more times in Bayreuth, in spring and summer, 1925 and again in November, and in May 1926, when the old man was in very poor health. Chamberlain died on January 9, 1927. Hitler attended the funeral services representing the Workers Party.

<sup>81</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier*, p. 224. It's unclear which of the two letters Hitler is referring to, the personal letter or the open letter published while he was in Landsberg prison.

while in jail, comforted as he was by Chamberlain's recognition, that he composed the first volume of *Mein Kampf*.

## 6. *Mein Kampf*



Figure 7: Hitler in 1923

In early November, 1923, Hitler, leading the German Workers Party and its quasi-military wing, the S.A. (*Sturm Abteilung*), attempted to overthrow the Munich municipal government, hoping thereby to galvanize the masses and march on Berlin. This so-called “Beer Hall Putsch” failed miserably; and the following spring, Hitler and his deputy Rudolf Hess, along with other conspirators, were sentenced to five years in jail. Because of sympathy for Hitler's effort to “save the nation,” he and Hess were confined to a very minimum security compound, Landsberg Prison. During his stay, Hitler was allowed unlimited visitors, any number of books, and his faithful dog. He famously called this time in jail his “higher education at state expense.”<sup>82</sup> While in jail he was visited often

by Alfred Rosenberg, who had become party chairman in leader's absence. Rosenberg at this time was completing his *Myth of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, a book he regarded as a sequel to Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>83</sup> Presumably Rosenberg and Hitler spoke of mutual concerns, since both were authoring books with similar political and racial themes. Hitler began the composition of *Mein Kampf* in July, 1924, and it quickly became inflated into two large volumes by the next year. He initially wanted to call it *A Four and a Half Year Battle Against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice*, but finally shortened the title simply to *My Battle—Mein Kampf*. The book brewed

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted by Ryback in *Hitler's Private Library*, p. 67. The some twelve hundred volumes of Hitler's libraries, recovered by American Forces after the war, now reside in the Library of Congress; eighty others are in Brown's Library, souvenirs of a returning soldier.

<sup>83</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1930).

together a mélange of: autobiographical sketches; a theory of race; a declaration of the need to expand the land of the Germans, principally to the east; foreign policy exhortations to restore the honor and power of the nation; and, flavoring the stew throughout, the bitter vitriol of scorn for those who destroyed the means to win the last war and who connived to push the nation into collapse after the war—the Jews, capitalists, and Bolsheviks. The first volume of *Mein Kampf* appeared in summer of 1925, sometime after Hitler's parole the previous December; he served only about seven months of his sentence. The second volume was finished in 1925, and published the next year.<sup>84</sup>

Quite a few conservative critics, whom I've cited at the beginning of this essay, have contended that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* expresses a racial theory that virtually comes straight from the pages of Darwin's *Origin of Species*—or at least from those pages as reauthored by Ernst Haeckel. Yet neither Darwin's nor Haeckel's name appears in Hitler's book—quite surprising if the debt to these individuals is supposed to be profound. Indeed, the only name carrying any scientific weight that Hitler cites in *Mein Kampf* is that of Houston Stuart Chamberlain, his supporter and an avowed anti-Darwinian.<sup>85</sup> Maybe, though, the debt is silent. But nowhere does Hitler even use the terms “Evolutionslehre,” “Abstammungslehre,” “Deszendenz-Theorie,” or any word that obviously refers to evolutionary theory. If Hitler's racial views stemmed from Darwinian theory, without perhaps naming it, one would at least expect some term in general use for evolutionary theory to be found in the book—but not so. Admittedly, if you read Weikart's two books—*From Darwin to Hitler* and *Hitler's Ethic*—you will see several translated passages from Hitler that have the word “evolution”; and Weikart relentlessly refers to him as an evolutionist. But Weikart has played a sly trick. He generally translates the common German term “Entwicklung” as “evolution,” though the usual meaning and ordinary translation would be “development.” The term had been used for evolution in earlier German literature, just as “development” had been similarly

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<sup>84</sup> I have used the 1943 edition of *Mein Kampf*, which prints both volumes of the book as one: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Verlag Franz Eher Nachf., 1943).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

employed in English literature. By the end of the nineteenth century the term as meaning evolution had declined in use both in Germany and England, though in German “Entwicklungslehre” would still be used to mean the theory of evolution; but that term never appears in Hitler’s book. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler used “Entwicklung” in ways that make it obvious he did not mean biological evolution, for example, when he talked about “industrial development” (industrielle Entwicklung).<sup>86</sup> There are only two instances—though not in *Mein Kampf*—in which Hitler clearly mentions the theory of evolution. I will consider those usages below.

Perhaps, however, Hitler’s racial theory was yet indebted to Darwin’s ideas, but without any verbal signposts. In section 2 of this essay, I indicated three essential features of Darwin’s theory that anyone adopting the theory would necessarily embrace: 1) that the races are hierarchically ordered; 2) that species have descended from earlier species with modification; and 3) that such transmutation was, for the most part, under the aegis of natural selection. When Weikart, Berlinski, and many others read Hitler’s book, they claim that Darwinian ideas leap out at them. But just what are those ideas? Though both Hitler and Darwin believed in a hierarchy of races, that’s hardly a reliable indicator that the German leader embraced concepts of evolutionary biology: as I’ve indicated in section 3, naturalists from Linnaeus in the mid-eighteenth century to individuals like Gobineau in the mid-nineteenth—all writing prior to Darwin’s *Origin*—adopted hierarchical schemes as part of their scientific purview—and, of course, popular prejudice made racial scaling ubiquitous. More proximately, assumptions of racial hierarchy structured Chamberlain’s conceptions—conceptions that owed no debt to Darwinism; and these conceptions clearly made their impact on Hitler. Thus there were a myriad of sources of a non-Darwinian or anti-Darwinian character that might have stimulated Hitler to formalize his ideas of racial hierarchy. But if we go to the heart of the matter—the descent of species over time—we find nothing in *Mein Kampf* that remotely resembles any such notion. Quite the contrary. First consider evidence from outside the book.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

In Hitler's so-called "Table Talk"—stenographic notes of his conversations between 1941 and 1944, ordered by Martin Bormann—the German leader was recorded as positively rejecting any notion of the descent of human beings from lower animals. In the late evening of January 25-26, 1942, he remarked that he had read a book about human origins and that he used to think a lot about the question. He was particularly impressed that the ancient Greeks and Egyptians cultivated ideas of beauty comparable to our own, which could not have been the case were these peoples quite different from us. He asked:

Whence have we the right to believe that man was not from the very beginning [Uranfängen] what he is today? A glance at nature informs us that in the realm of plants and animals alterations and further formation occur, but nothing indicates that development [Entwicklung] within a species [Gattung] has occurred of a considerable leap of the sort that man would have to have made to transform him from an ape-like condition to his present state.<sup>87</sup>

Could any statement be more explicit? Hitler simply rejected the cardinal feature of Darwin's theory as applied to human beings. How could Darwin's conception have been responsible for Hitler's racial theory regarding human beings when that conception was completely rejected by the latter?

It is not certain to what book on human origins Hitler might have been referring in the conversation during that late January evening. But after his rejection of descent theory, he immediately discussed the "world-ice theory" (Welteislehre) of Hanns Hörbiger (1860-1931). Hörbiger was an engineer and amateur astronomer who, in his book *Glazial-Kosmogonie* (1913), concocted a theory—which came to him in a vision—

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<sup>87</sup> Hitler, *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier*, (25-26 January 1942) p. 232. Hitler's German is an inelegant tangle, even granted the "Table Talk" records spontaneous conversations. Here's the original: "Woher nehmen wir das Recht, zu glauben, der Mensch sei nicht von Uranfängen das gewesen, was er heut' ist? Der Blick in die Natur lehrt uns, daß im Bereich der Pflanzen und Tiere Veränderungen und Weiterbildungen vorkommen, aber nigrends zeigt sich innerhalb einer Gattung eine Entwicklung von der Weite des Sprunges, den der Mensch gemacht haben müßte, sollte er sich aus einem affenartigen Zustand zu dem, was er ist, fortgebildet haben!"

whereby an icy, dead star fell into a larger one, resulting in the creation of several planetary systems, of which ours was one. The earth, so the theory went, had a number of icy moons that periodically crashed into it causing a series of catastrophes. About ten thousand years ago, another moon spiraled into the earth causing the last global ice-age.<sup>88</sup> As these ideas were elaborated by other catastrophists, they included beliefs that an original Aryan civilization existed before ours and that after the impact of that last icy moon, the saved remnants retreated to the high plateaus of Tibet. When things warmed up, these individuals came down from the mountains and eventually reestablish culture. SS chief Heinrich Himmler even sent a research team to Tibet to recover the remains of that Aryan civilization.<sup>89</sup> Karl Rode, professor of geology and paleontology at Breslau, urged that world-ice theory was not merely a cosmological hypothesis but an urgermanic “world view” (*Welt-Anschauung*) complementary to that of National Socialism.<sup>90</sup> Hitler, for his part, contended that world-ice theory was the only assumption that made sense of the sophistication of Greek and Egyptian civilizations, and he even planned a museum that would celebrate Hörbiger, along with Ptolemy and Kepler.<sup>91</sup> While the world-ice theory, with its multitude of catastrophes, made sense to the German Leader, it certainly would not have made any sense to Darwin or Haeckel, who proposed gradualistic changes in the earth’s geology and organic life such that human beings progressively evolved from ape-like predecessors and slowly achieved greater intelligence and more elaborate culture. Clearly, Hitler simply rejected an essential components of Darwinian theory.

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<sup>88</sup> Hanns Hörbiger and Philipp Fauth, *Glazial-Kosmogonie* (Leipzig: R. Voigtländers Verlag, 1913).

<sup>89</sup> See Christopher Hale, *Himmler’s Crusade: The Nazi Expedition to Find the Origins of the Aryan Race* (New York: Wiley, 2003), pp. 117-19.

<sup>90</sup> Karl Rode, “Welt=Anschauung!” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Wissenschaft* 2 (1936-1937): 222-231. See also Christina Wessely, “Welteis. Die ‘Astronomie des Unsichtbaren’ um 1900,” in *Pseudowissenschaft. Konzepte von Nicht/Wissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, eds. D. Rupnow, V. Lipphardt, J. Thiel, C. Wessely (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), pp. 155-85. Wessely shows that though Hörbiger had little success in convincing the leading astronomers and geologists of his theory after the First World War, yet several popular societies (die Welteis-Vereine) in Germany and Austria spread the word through evening lectures and an enormous number of books. Newspapers and illustrated magazines also informed a curious public. She observes that Heinrich Himmler in particular lent the theory support.

<sup>91</sup> Hitler, *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier*, (25-26 January 1942), p. 232.

But wait a while. Weikart insists that the above passage from Hitler's "Table Talk" is uncharacteristic. He cites instead a passage from Hitler's speech in 1933 at Nuremberg, where Hitler asserted: "The gulf between the lowest creature which can still be styled man and our highest races is greater than that between the lowest type of man and the highest ape." Thus, Weikart proposes Hitler had essentially erased the "biblical distinction between man and other creatures."<sup>92</sup> Weikart suggests that this lonely remark from Nuremberg, with its supposed eradication of the distinction between man and beast, indicates the German Leader's acceptance of evolution. Well, not quite. That Hitler thought the races formed a hierarchy is hardly news; it carries no suggestion of a belief in transmutation, as I have already indicated. Moreover, any slave-holding Christian in the American South could have made an observation similar to Hitler's. Hitler's remark seems a paraphrase of the anti-Darwinian Gobineau, who had repeated the common prejudice: "The black variety [i.e., race of human beings] is the lowest and stands on the bottom rung of the ladder. The character of an animal, which is impressed on the form of their pelvis, distinguishes them from the moment of birth to their maturity. Mentally they never move beyond the narrowest circle."<sup>93</sup> Though Gobineau likened the black race to lower animals, he regarded them nonetheless as human beings; Gobineau, as I've indicated, completely rejected Haeckel's ape-man hypothesis. Hitler's differential evaluation of the races hardly erases the distinction between human beings and lower animals.

The only other time, at least that I'm aware, where Hitler clearly refers to evolution comes in his "Table Talk" in October, 1941, when excoriating the Church for what he took as its opposition to science. He remarked that the schools allowed the absurdity of having religious instruction in which Biblical creation was taught during one class and then in the next a natural science lesson would substitute the theory of evolution (*Entwicklungstheorie vertreten wird*) for the Mosaic story. Hitler added that as a child he was confronted with similar contradictions between science and religion. He contended that while it was not incorrect to regard God as creator of the lightning

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<sup>92</sup> Weikart, *Hitler's Ethic*, p. 47.

<sup>93</sup> Gobineau, *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen*, 1: 278.

bolt, one should not take that literally; rather it would be more profoundly pious (tiefinnerlich fromm sein) to find God in everything (im Gesamten).<sup>94</sup> That Hitler was aware of evolutionary theory, of course is true; since, after all, he explicitly rejected human evolution some weeks later in January of 1942. The racial worries saturating *Mein Kampf* rather point in a direction opposite to that of transmutation of species.

Hitler's overriding racial concern in *Mein Kampf* was racial purity. He maintained that a general drive toward racial homogeneity, toward "racial purity" ("allgemein gültigen Triebes zur Rassenreinheit") characterized all living organisms.<sup>95</sup> This drive was exemplified by the uniformity and stability of species:

The consequence of this racial purity [Rassenreinheit], which is characteristic of all animals in nature, is not only a sharp separation of the particular races externally, but also in their uniformity of the essence of the very type itself. The fox is always a fox, the goose a goose, the tiger a tiger, and so on...<sup>96</sup>

But of course for a Darwinian, there is no "essence of the very type"; the fox was not always a fox, the goose not always a goose, and in future they would not remain fixed in their types. Fixity of type is the very antithesis of a theory that contends species are not fixed but vary and are transformed into other species over time. Darwin's principle of diversity, which he regarded as important as natural selection, maintains that there is a general tendency of varieties and species to diversify, that is, to become heterogeneous as opposed to maintaining homogeneity.<sup>97</sup> Weikart's claim that Hitler "believed that humans were subject to immutable evolutionary laws" simply cannot be true.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Hitler, *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier*, (24 October 1941), p. 103.

<sup>95</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 312.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> See my "Darwin's Principle of Divergence and Why Fodor was almost Right," in this volume.

<sup>98</sup> Weikart, *Hitler's Ethic*, p. 3.

Racial purity became endangered by race-mixing, especially sully the higher Aryan type with the lower Jewish. Reflecting the warnings of Gobineau and Chamberlain, Hitler specified the extreme danger of miscegenation for the race of higher culture:

Historical experience offers numerous examples. It shows in awful clarity that with every mingling of blood of Aryans with lower peoples, the resulting consequence is the end of the culture bearers.<sup>99</sup>

This aspect of Hitler's argument needs to be emphasized. The Aryans, Hitler maintained, were the original bearers of culture—the gospel according to Gobineau and Chamberlain—and they propagated art and science to the rest of the world. The pure blood of the Aryans could not be improved upon, only degraded by race mixing. In a line reflecting Chamberlain's assertion that the Jew's very existence was a "sin," Hitler declared that such racial mixing would be "a sin against the Will of the eternal Creator."<sup>100</sup> Not, it must be noted, a sin against the theory of Charles Darwin.

Hitler, however, rooted his warnings against miscegenation in something more primitive than a fear of cultural degradation; his threats roused the sexual terror of the lurking Jew, "the dark parasite of the people, intentionally violating our innocent, young blond girls and destroying something that cannot be replaced in this world." Protestants and Catholics instead of fighting one another should unite against the desecration of female purity: "since God's Will gave human beings their form, their nature, and their capacities, he who destroys His work declares war on the creation of the Lord, on the Divine Will [göttlichen Wollen]."<sup>101</sup> The invocation of Divine Will runs explicitly counter to any assumptions of a gradual formation of humanity raised from lower, animal stock.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 630.

## 7. Struggle for Existence

Most authors who try to connect Darwin with Hitler focus on Hitler's idea of "struggle," as if this implied Darwin's principle of "struggle for existence," that is, natural selection. The very title of Hitler's book, *My Struggle* (or *Battle, War*) hardly resonates of Darwinian usage—especially when one considers the title he originally planned: *A Four and a Half Year Battle [Kampf] Against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice*. Darwin's principle of natural selection was, of course, used to explain the transmutation of species. But if someone like Hitler denies the transmutation and descent of species, then no matter what language he employs, the concept behind the language cannot be that of natural selection. But let me set aside for the moment this crucial objection to Hitler's supposed employment of Darwin's device and examine the role of "struggle" in *Mein Kampf* and in his so-called *Zweites Buch* (Second book).

The phrase used in the German translation of the *Origin of Species* for "struggle for existence" is "Kampf um's Dasein."<sup>102</sup> Hitler uses that phrase, or one close to it, twice in *Mein Kampf*. Those two instances—in an almost 800 page book—do have a Darwinian ring. Both come in a context in which Hitler is worried about the apparent reduction in births in Germany due to lack of land. He deployed the terms in an effort to justify annexing "unused" land to the east (e.g., Poland, Ukraine). His convoluted argument runs like this: if Germans stay within their own borders, then restraint on propagation will be necessary, and compassion will require that even the weak will be preserved; moreover, barbarians lacking culture but strong in determination will take the unused land; hence Germans, the bearers of culture, ought to appropriate the area needed for living (*Lebensraum*). Hitler's argument makes little sense from a Darwinian perspective. If living conditions became restricted within closed borders, it would be the

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<sup>102</sup> Heinrich Georg Bronn was the first translator of Darwin's *Origin: Über die Entstehung der Arten im Thier- und Pflanzen-Reich durch natürliche Züchtung, oder Erhaltung der vervollkommneten Rassen im Kampfe um's Daseyn*, trans. H. Bronn (Stuttgart: E. Schweizerbart'sche Verlagshandlung und Druckerei, 1860). The translation was slightly revised by Julius Victor Carus, who translated the fourth English and subsequent editions of the *Origin: Über die Entstehung der Arten durch natürlichen Zuchtwahl oder die Erhaltung der begünstigten Rassen im Kampfe um's Dasein*, trans. J. Victor Carus (Stuttgart: E. Schweizerbart'sche Verlagshandlung und Druckerei, 1867). The Carus editions would have been standard in the early twentieth century.

more fit who would survive; while if conditions became relaxed by moving into an unoccupied and fruitful land, then the fit and the less fit (by some measure) ought to have fairly equal chances. Hence, from a Darwinian point of view the conclusion ought to be just the opposite to that which Hitler drew. Be that as it may, Hitler did argue that maintaining current borders allowed the weaker to survive “in place of the natural struggle for existence, which lets live only the strongest and healthiest.”<sup>103</sup> He further observed that the Jews may have convinced the cultured Germans that mankind could play a trick on nature by developing land within Germany’s borders, so that this will “make the hard, embittered struggle for existence [unerbittlichen Kampf ums Dasein] superfluous.”<sup>104</sup> His fundamental view is that “mankind becomes great through eternal struggle—in eternal peace men come to nothing.”<sup>105</sup>

Struggle, battle [Kampf] formed the leitmotif of Hitler’s considerations of human development, especially his own, from his strife-ridden efforts at forming a political movement to the anticipated battle to restore the German nation to world-historical standing. Like Wotan, he struggled against malicious dwarfs and thundering giants to obtain the ring of power, and for a brief historical moment, he succeeded. He even projected this struggle on to nature herself. In his never published, so-called *Second Book* [Zweites Buch], he set out a brief prologue to his formulation of the National Socialist Party’s foreign policy, a policy that outlined a political contest to restore German territory lost during the war, to expand the boundaries of the nation eastward, and even to recruit Italy and England as allies. In the prologue’s brief creation myth, Hitler depicted the very forces of nature as struggling with each other to bring forth the earth: “The battle [Kampf] of natural forces with each other, the construction of a habitable surface of this planet, the separation of water and land, the formation of the mountains, the planes, and the seas.”<sup>106</sup> One can almost hear the Wagnerian

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<sup>103</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 145: “. . . tritt an Stelle des natürlichen Kampfes um das Dasein, der nur den Allerstärksten und Gesundesten am Leben läßt . . .”

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitlers Zweites Buch* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), p. 46. Hitler dictated this statement of foreign policy in summer of 1928; the publisher recommended against publishing since it

thunderbolts crashing. But immediately another distinctively German motif comes into play: human development became possible only after man began reflecting on his own history:

World history [Weltgeschichte] in the period before the appearance of human beings was a representation of geological events. . . . Later, with the appearance of organic life, the interests of human beings became focused on the development and destruction of the many thousands of forms. And rather late man finally became visible to himself, and thus under the concept of world history [Weltgeschichte], he came to understand principally the history of his own becoming [seines eigenen Werdens], that is the representation of his own development [seiner eigenen Entwicklung zu verstehen]. This development is marked by an eternal struggle of men against animals and against other men. From the invisible chaos of individuals endless structures, tribes, groups, peoples, and states finally arise, while the representation of their rise and fall is the depiction of an eternal struggle for life [eines ewigen Lebenskampfes]. If politics is history as it unfolds . . . then politics is in truth the continuation of the life struggle [Lebenskampfes] of a people.<sup>107</sup>

In this introductory passage to his *Second Book*, Hitler composed a libretto of second-hand Hegelian historicism accompanied by Wagnerian cries of incessant battle, of the unfolding of world history led by a Teutonic knight. Undoubtedly, as Alan Bullock has suggested, Hitler identified with one of Hegel's "world-historical individuals"—an Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon—by whom the "will of the World-Spirit [Weltgeist]" was enacted.<sup>108</sup> In Hegel's view, man became gradually visible to himself only after he reflected on his historical character and slowly came to appreciate the evolution of world history [Weltgeschichte] according, as he put it, to "the principle of development [Das

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would compete with the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, which at the time was not selling well. The manuscript was later recovered in 1958 from a U.S. Army deposit of confiscated papers.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>108</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, abridged ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), p. 215.

Prinzip der Entwicklung].”<sup>109</sup> For Hegel as well as for Hitler, historical development entailed the unfolding of an ultimately rational process, in which, according to Hegel, the “spirit is in a hard, ceaseless struggle [unendlicher Kampf] with itself.”<sup>110</sup> With a world historical figure like a Napoleon—or a Hitler—an inexorable destiny “develops,” or evolves. Hegel, I presume it will be conceded, was no Darwinian.

Though Hegel emphasized the struggle that characterized world-historical events, Hitler’s vision trembled with the fury of gods in constant battle, a vision that bears only superficial resemblance to Darwin’s conception. Before facile claims about a supposed identity are made, one needs examine the deeper sources of Hitler’s argument and its goal. His general conception that humanity develops culturally through struggle and that racial mixing causes degeneration—these ideas replicate those of Chamberlain, who likewise signaled his reader that “the idea of struggle governs my presentation [in the *Grundlagen*].”<sup>111</sup> Chamberlain accepted Gobineau’s contention that miscegenation caused cultural decline, but insisted that such decline was not inevitable; one could struggle against degeneration and keep the Aryan folk, the bears of culture, pure. But the fight had to be constantly renewed. “The struggle in which the weaker human material is eradicated [zu Grunde geht],” Chamberlain argued, “steels the stronger; moreover the struggle for life [Kampf ums Leben] strengthens the stronger by eliminating the weaker elements.”<sup>112</sup> Hitler clearly echoed Chamberlain’s observation that a peaceful land sows only cultural mediocrity; such a land, according to Chamberlain, “knows nothing of the social questions, of the bitter struggle for existence [vom bitteren Kampf ums Dasein].”<sup>113</sup> Hitler is thus not recycling Darwin, rather aping

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<sup>109</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, vol. 12 of *Werke*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Michel, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 75: “The principle of *development* [Das Prinzip der *Entwicklung*] contains this as well, that an inner purpose [Bestimmung], a fundamental, intrinsic condition, establishes its own existence. This formal purpose is essentially the spirit that has world-history as its theater, its possession, and the field of its realization.” It’s hard to know whether Hitler read the *Vorlesungen* (Lectures) directly or derived the gist of Hegel’s conception of history from some other source. The ultimate source, though, is unmistakable.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>111</sup> Chamberlain, *Grundlagen*, 2:536.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:277-78.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:44.

Chamberlain, who thought Darwin's natural selection theory comparable to the ridiculous and discarded phlogiston theory of a previous age.<sup>114</sup> Neither Chamberlain nor Hitler conceived the goal of struggle to be the biological transformation of the German race into something different. Rather they thought means had to be taken to preserve the pure blood of the race and to realize, through struggle, the potential of the Teutons, who "alone have the ability for higher culture."<sup>115</sup> The explicit purpose of the volkish state, according to Hitler was "the preservation of the racial element that supplies culture."<sup>116</sup> Thus, not transformation but preservation of the ancient race of the Germans.

It might be thought that I am simply quibbling about technicalities. Hitler after all used a phrase of Darwinian provenance, which thus shows the ultimate source of his ideas. But we are talking about ideas, not mere words; and the ideas that Hitler deploys are not Darwin's. If words alone are to be the criterion, one might just as easily ascribe his enthusiasm for struggle to Christianity, the greatness of which he explicitly identified with its constant struggle against other religions and its efforts to extirpate them.<sup>117</sup>

## **8. The Political Source of Hitler's Anti-Semitism**

An obviously crucial question, concerning the supposed influence of Darwin on Hitler, is whether Darwinian concepts actually caused Hitler to adopt his racial ideas, especially his virulent anti-Semitism. I've already suggested the impact of Gobineau and Chamberlain (with a tincture of Hegel), but Hitler came to these more theoretical works with his anti-Semitism already in flower. Whence the beginnings of his anti-Semitism?

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 2:805.

<sup>115</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 431:

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 434.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 385 and 506.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler is perfectly explicit about the sources of his anti-Jewish attitudes. He identifies two political figures who turned him from an individual hardly aware of Jews into a passionate anti-Semite: Karl Lueger (1844-1910), the mayor of Vienna (1897-1910) and newspaper baron; and Georg Schönerer (1842-1921), member of the Austrian parliament and leader of the Pan German Party, which sought to unite the German speaking lands in a political confederation. Both were large presences in Vienna when Hitler as an 18-year old art student arrived there from Linz in 1908. He claimed that prior to coming to the city he had little experience of Jews, thinking them merely Germans.<sup>118</sup> Vienna was awash in anti-Semitic pamphlets and broadsides, which he said were so exaggerated that he could hardly believe them. But Lueger and Schönerer made clear what was at stake in the Jewish question.



Figure 8: Karl Lueger, Mayor of Vienna (1897-1910).

The Catholic Lueger was quite anti-Semitic, mostly it seems for political advantage. When challenged on one occasion that his dinner companions were Jewish, he famously proclaimed: “I decide who’s a Yid.”<sup>119</sup> Opportunistic perhaps, but his newspaper, the *Volksblatt*, was so vehemently anti-Semitic that the Archbishop of Vienna denounced it. Lueger’s party shared both name and outlook with those of the Protestant Court Preacher and deeply anti-Semitic Adolf Stöcker. Hitler explicitly said that it was Lueger and his Christian Social Party that caused his “opinions regarding

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Evens, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), p. 43

anti-Semitism to undergo a slow change in the course of time.” “It was,” he said, “my most serious change of opinion.”<sup>120</sup>



**Figure 9: Georg von Schönerer, member of the Austrian Parliament and Leader of the Pan German League.**

Schönerer was even more anti-Semitic than Lueger, but, at least, from deep conviction rather than political opportunism. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler compared Schönerer to Lueger: “At the time, Schönerer seemed to me the better and more fundamental thinker in regard to the principal problems.”<sup>121</sup> One of the strong attractive features of Schönerer, at least was a leader of the Pan German league, which sought a union of all German-speaking territories, a goal that Hitler embraced as a young man. But, as he recalled, he finally determined that Lueger was the sounder theorist of the two.<sup>121</sup> Hitler scholars Richard Evans and Ian Kershaw concur with Hitler’s own estimate that these two politicians were the most significant in forming his attitudes about Jews and the need for a racially

homogeneous German land.<sup>122</sup> So by Hitler’s own admission, these political figures, not Darwin, were pivotal in forming his anti-Semitic attitudes. Thus neither Hitler’s conception of race was Darwinian nor was Darwinism the source of his anti-Semitism. The motivation and origin of his views were political, not scientific, and certainly not Darwinian.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 59.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>122</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, pp. 164-65; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*, 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 2000), 1: 31-36. It may be that Hitler did have some knowledge of Jews while in Linz, but his attitude seemed to concretize bathed in the acidic opinions of Lueger and Schönerer.

<sup>123</sup> Boyer is quite clear that Lueger’s anti-Semitism had nothing to do with race but with political advantage. See John W. Boyer, *Karl Lueger (1844-1910), Christlichsoziale Politik als Beruf* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), p. 208.

## 9. Ethics and Social Darwinism

Though Hitler's conception of race was non-Darwinian, perhaps, somehow, his ethical views derived from Darwin, as Weikart's *Hitler's Ethic* urges. What was Darwin's ethical theory? That's not hard to determine, since he set it out explicitly in the *Descent of Man*. Darwin argued that human ethical behavior was rooted in social instincts of parental care, cooperation, and acting for the community welfare. These, as he formulated them, were altruistic instincts. Once proto-humans had developed sufficient intelligence and memory to appreciate unrequited social instincts and once they began to speak and thereby could codify rules of behavior, then a distinctively human conscience would emerge in the group. Those early proto-human clans that had more altruists, members who cooperated in providing for the general welfare and in food gathering and defense—those clans would have the advantage over those with no or few altruists and would come to supplant them. Darwin further envisioned that while the concern of early humans would be their immediate communities, through the development of culture and science, humans would come to view all men as their brothers, recognizing that the distinctions of skin color, head-shape, and other racial traits were only superficial markers of a common humanity.<sup>124</sup> Darwin's conception of the widening circle of moral concern has nothing in common with Hitler's virulent hostility to races other than the Aryan. Moreover, since Darwin's theory is based on the emergence of human groups from lower animals, it could have nothing in common with Hitler's assumption of the permanency of races.

Any number of scholars who have written on the political and intellectual state of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s have described Hitler as advocating "social Darwinism."<sup>125</sup> The term is quite vague. Indeed, it is often remarked that while Herbert

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<sup>124</sup> These ideas are worked out in the *Descent of Man*, 1: chaps. 3 and 5. I have discussed Darwin's ethical theory and its sources in Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 185-242.

<sup>125</sup> I have mentioned those recent scholars who casually employ the term "social Darwinism" in note 7, above. Diane Paul provides a succinct but penetrating analysis of the historical phenomenon of "social Darwinism" in her "Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, eds. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 219-45.

Spencer might be a social Darwinist, Darwin himself was not. I believe one can discriminate some six traits that scholars usually have in mind when referring to “social Darwinism”:

1. the races of humans form a hierarchy from lower to higher, the criteria being intelligence, morality, and cultural values;
2. laws of nature apply equally to animals and men;
3. there is a struggle among human groups;
4. knowing the laws of nature, humans can control the struggle to the advantage of the superior races;
5. the superior race is morally permitted to police its own group, eliminating the physically or intellectually inferior, and promoting those of sound hereditary features.
6. the superior race may restrict the behavior of the lower races, even exterminating them.

I do not wish to suggest that all of these notes must be present to designate an individual a social Darwinist, but I do assume that for the appellation to be meaningful, most of the notes should characterize the views of the person in question. I have not included the idea of transmutation of species, certainly a necessary feature of anyone who is also to be called a Darwinian. These six traits usually characterize most eugenicists working in the first part of the twentieth century. And they do seem to capture Hitler’s racism. Were they embraced by Darwin?

Before answering that last question, we might reflect that, after a fashion, these traits (without transmutation) could be applied to Aristotle, who did not have moral qualms about slavery and who assumed the natural superiority of some groups of people. Likewise many American slave-holders in the South would likely sign on to those propositions. Darwin did adopt propositions one to four, but rejected five and six. When he was confronted with the idea that it would be of long-term benefit to a society

to prevent the weak in mind and body from marrying and propagating their kind, he demurred: “We must bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind.”<sup>126</sup> The attempt to check our sympathies for the poor and wretched of the earth would, Darwin averred, cause “deterioration in the noblest part of our natures.”<sup>127</sup> Of course, Hitler certainly followed all of the precepts, including five and six—though not transmutation. So while convention might sanction calling Hitler a social Darwinian, that same convention could not be applied to Darwin himself. Thus the name “social Darwinian” is quite misleading and itself should imply no connection with the ethical theory of Charles Darwin.

Hitler rejected the transmutation of species, rather holding to the older notion of fixity of type; he deployed notions of struggle between races, but derived the idea from non-Darwinian sources; and if he were to be called a social Darwinian, that same designation with its intended meaning could not also describe Darwin’s views. There is consequently no reasonable evidence that would link Hitler’s racial dogmas to Darwin’s theory. Despite this conclusion, maybe that while Hitler did not personally derive ideas from Darwin, he fostered a scientific regime that elevated Darwinism and Haeckelianism to the chief arbiters in questions of race.

### **10. Was the Biological Community under Hitler Darwinian?**

The answer to the question of whether the biological community during the Nazi period was Darwinian is complicated by this salient fact: many extremely good scientists remained in Germany during the Nazi period and practiced science at a very high level. One only has to mention the names of Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) and Werner von Braun (1912-1977) to recognize that, despite their politics, they were extraordinary scientists. In biology likewise, some exceedingly good biologists of different theoretical orientations could be found in the universities and research institutes of Nazi Germany. For instance, the Nobel Prize winner (1969) Max Delbrück

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<sup>126</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1: 169.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69.

(1906-1981) worked in bio-physics in Berlin during the early part of Hitler's regime, before getting a fellowship in the U.S. in 1937; and his great colleague Nikolai Vladimirovic Timoféeff-Ressovsky (1900-1981) continued as director of the genetics division of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research through the end of the war.<sup>128</sup> Many topflight biologists, some of whom were Darwinians, remained in Germany while Hitler was in power; and, of course, there were many others connected with the regime who were non-Darwinians and, by any standards, quite awful. During the 1930s and 1940s, biology underwent a significant transition as Mendelian genetics and Darwinian evolutionary theory were joined in the synthetic theory that now serves as the foundation of modern biological science. Several German biologists of the period contributed to this development. So, without question, Darwinian evolutionary biologists worked in Germany during the Hitler period. The pertinent question, though, is whether the National Socialist Party gave special accord to Darwinian science. In 1940, the year he took up a professorship at Königsberg, Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989), good Darwinian that he was, complained that there were many "in the schools of National-Socialistic Greater Germany who in fact still reject evolutionary thought and descent theory [Entwicklungsgedanken und Abstammungslehre] as such."<sup>129</sup> Lorenz's complaint ought to suggest that Darwinism had no official mandate in the educational system. Even more compelling evidence can be drawn from an examination of a leading scientific journal of the period that was also an official organ of the Nazi Party, *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Naturwissenschaft* (Journal for all of natural science), which published from 1935 to 1944. From its third year, the journal carried the subtitle: "Organ of the natural science's professional division of the Reich's student leadership."

The *Zeitschrift* published articles principally in the physical sciences and biology, along with essays on philosophical treatments of those sciences. It sought to purge scientific activity of Jewish influences and establish Aryan science free from alien

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<sup>128</sup> For an account of T-F's career, see Vadim Ratner, "Nikolay Vladimirovich Timofeeff-Ressovsky (1900-1981): Twin of the Century of Genetics," *Genetics* 158 (2001): 933-39.

<sup>129</sup> Konrad Lorenz, "Nochmals: Systematik und Entwicklungsgedanken im Unterricht," *Der Biologe* 9 (1940): 24-36; quotation from p. 24.

taint.<sup>130</sup> On one marked occasion in the journal's pages, Werner Heisenberg had to defend modern physics—particularly relativity theory and quantum theory—from charges that it was incompatible with National Socialism.<sup>131</sup> The journal published in all the areas of biology, but with particular concern to show their relationship to the ideology of National Socialism.

The tone and attitude of the journal were established in the first article of the first volume (1935) by a philosopher from Kiel, Kurt Hildebrandt (1881-1966), who was also an editor.<sup>132</sup> In "Positivismus und Natur," Hildebrandt responded to an article published by the quantum physicist Pascual Jordan (1902-1980), who claimed that positivism was the method of all science. Jordan argued that both the subjective world of consciousness and the objective world of nature could both be derived from neutral experience without any appeal to metaphysics.<sup>133</sup> Hildebrandt objected that this really reduced consciousness to mechanism. It failed to recognize that natural phenomena depended on a creative spirit, of the sort suggested by both Goethe and Nietzsche. "What is called positivism today, worse than any older philosophy that went under that

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<sup>130</sup> When the journal became an official party organ in 1937, a new editorial indicated that the journal took as its task "the cultivation of scientific content insofar as it reflects an essential German nature." See [editorial], *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 3 (1937-1938): 1.

<sup>131</sup> Werner Heisenberg, "Die Bewertung der modernen theoretischen Physik," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 9 (1943): 201-12. He rejected the idea of the incompatibility of modern physics and National Socialism on pp. 210-11. Heisenberg notes that his essay was written in 1940, which was about the time of a fight to fill the chair held by the retiring physicist at Munich Arnold Sommerfeld. Heisenberg and other students of Sommerfeld tried to prevent the group supporting *Deutsche Physik*—which was quite anti-Semitic and hostile to relativity and quantum mechanics—from advancing their candidate to the chair. Heisenberg, the heir apparent—having won the Nobel Prize in 1932—yet lost the fight. Nonetheless his stature grew as the possibility of a nuclear weapon was considered. In 1943, when his paper was published, he had been appointed to the chair of theoretical physics at the University of Berlin and made a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>132</sup> Kurt Hildebrandt, "Positivismus und Natur," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 1 (1935/1936): 1-22. Martin Heidegger was one of the associate editors (Mitarbeiter) of the journal.

<sup>133</sup> See Pascual Jordan, "Über den positivistischen Begriff der Wirklichkeit," *Die Naturwissenschaften* 22 (20 July 1934): 33-39. Jordan contended that experience alone was the foundation for science and that it united the subjective world and the objective world. Not only did Hildebrandt reject the analysis, but so did many members of the Vienna Circle, particularly Otto Neurath. See the discussion of this dispute within the movement of logical positivism by Suzanne Gieser, in her *The Innermost Kernel: Depth Psychology and Quantum Physics*, Wolfgang Pauli's Dialogue with C. G. Jung (New York: Springer, 2005), especially pp. 50-102.

name, denies actual spiritual experience.”<sup>134</sup> This is shown, he thought, especially in the opposition of French rationalism and English empiricism to the notion of “creative spirit” (schöpferische Geist).

German nature-philosophy found in Leibniz, Herder, and Goethe showed the correct way to overcome this opposition by proposing a union of spirit and matter, which as a world view is most graphically expressed by the term “pantheism.” In respect of creative nature as development, Leibniz already had a theory of species descent (Abstammungstheorie).<sup>135</sup>

Hildebrandt thus thought that English biology of the nineteenth century was inadequately grounded, but now “exact biology has dealt Darwin’s mechanization a deathblow (Todesstoß).” He claimed that the new theory of inheritance, “which had long been suppressed by Darwinism, has had unexpected success.” Darwinism, according to Hildebrandt, had to be rejected:

the creative unfolding of species, the origin of species from the amoeba to man, cannot be explained by this mechanistic theory. Rather exact research on heritability has clearly destroyed the mechanistic framework of Darwinian theory.<sup>136</sup>

What exactly Hildebrandt meant by “creative spirit,” “creative force,” and the like, or the new research in genetics—this is not at all clear in his essay. In a footnote to the passage I’ve just quoted he added: “This is not a reference to vitalism. Goethe and Schelling were not vitalists, but monists, since they recognized the same creative power in the universe as in living individuals; they were the opponents of empiricism and materialism, which agree with conventional belief in God.”<sup>137</sup> By the new theory of inheritance he likely meant that associated with Hugo de Vries’s (1848-1935) mutation theory, which supposed that macro mutations, not Darwinian gradualism, led to the

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<sup>134</sup> Hildebrandt, “Positivismus und Natur,” p. 20.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

appearance of new species.<sup>138</sup> But Hildebrandt also suggested, despite disavowals, that there was a definite sort of *élan vital* behind such transitions. Volume four of the *Zeitschrift* carried a long article by Hans Driesch (1867-1941), who also supposed that biological species change could not be explained by any Darwinian or Haeckelian mechanistic process but required the postulation of a vital entelechy of the sort conceived by Aristotle.<sup>139</sup> All of this, of course, is quite antithetic to Darwinism.

When the *Zeitschrift* became an official organ of the National Socialist Party, it did not change its orientation, nor did Hildebrandt. In volume three (1937/38), he proclaimed:

Our modern theory of inheritance has not supported this hypothesis [of descent], but endangers the foundational assumptions of Darwin and Haeckel. Mendelian research rests on the assumption of an unchanging species and mutation-theory has, indeed, several disadvantages, but does not attempt to explain or demonstrate the origin of a higher species.<sup>140</sup>

He darkly hinted that “real transmutation theory cuts across, if ever so carefully, the border to metaphysics.”<sup>141</sup>

One of the new editors of the *Zeitschrift* after the political *Gleichschaltung* (takeover) by the Nazi party, the botanist Ernst Bergdolt (1902-1948), contended that the Darwinian selection principle was typical of the kind of passive environmentalist theory declaimed by Jewish liberals.<sup>142</sup> In a dispute between a Darwinian and an anti-

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<sup>138</sup> That he had de Vries's theory in mind seems fairly clear from a subsequent article of his in the journal: Kurt Hildebrandt, “Die Bedeutung der Abstammungslehre für die Weltanschauung,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 3 (1937/1938): 15-34.

<sup>139</sup> Hans Driesch, “Der Weg der Theoretischen Biologie,” *Zeitschrift für gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 4 (1938/1939): 209-32.

<sup>140</sup> Kurt Hildebrandt, “Die Bedeutung der Amstammungslehre, p. 22.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ernst Bergdolt, “Zur Frage der Rassenentstehung beim Menschen,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 3 (1937/1938): 109-113.

Darwinian anthropologist, Bergdolt lent his editorial support to the latter.<sup>143</sup> The Darwinian, Christian von Krogh (1909-1992) of Munich, argued that Haeckel's scheme of human descent from ape-like forbearers had evidence on its side,<sup>144</sup> while the anti-Darwinian, Max Westenhöfer (1871-1957) of Berlin, drew from comparative anatomy the opposite conclusion. Westenhöfer, as a student of Rudolf Virchow, declared that "from numerous comparative-morphological investigations during the last 20 years, I came, almost against my will, to a critical rejection of the Darwin-Haeckel doctrine and was forced to construct a new theory of the heritage of mankind."<sup>145</sup> Westenhöfer adopted a version of de Vries's mutation theory to explain human development through a lineage independent of the ape-man hypothesis.

Writing in the *Zeitschrift* after it became an Party organ in 1937, Günther Hecht (1902-1945), an official of the Party's Department of Race Politics (*Rassenpolitischen Amt der NSDAP*) and member of the Zoological Institute in Berlin, explicitly rejected the idea (grundsätzlich abgelehnt) that the materialistic theories of Darwin and especially Haeckel had anything to do with the "völkisch-biological position of National Socialism."<sup>146</sup> This rejection had already been sealed two years earlier when the Saxon ministries of libraries and bookstores banned all material inappropriate for "National-Socialist formation and education in the Third Reich." Among the works to be expunged were those by "traitors," such as Albert Einstein; those by "liberal democrats," such as Heinrich Mann; literature by "all Jewish authors no matter what their sphere"; and materials by individuals advocating "the superficial scientific enlightenment of a primitive Darwinism and monism," such as Ernst Haeckel.<sup>147</sup> It is quite clear that Darwinian

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<sup>143</sup> Ernst Bergdolt, "Abschließende Bemerkungen zu dem Thema 'Das Problem der Menschenwerdung,'" *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 6 (1940): 185-88.

<sup>144</sup> Christian von Krogh, "Das 'Problem' Menschenwerdung," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 6 (1940): 105-12.

<sup>145</sup> Max Westenhöfer, "Kritische Bemerkung zu neueren Arbeiten über die Menschenwerdung und Artbildung," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 6 (1940): 41-62; quotation from p. 41.

<sup>146</sup> Günther Hecht, "Biologie und Nationalsozialismus," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* 3 (1937-1938): 280-90; quotation from p. 285.

<sup>147</sup> "Richtlinien für die Bestandsprüfung in den Volksbüchereien Sachsens," *Die Bücherei* 2 (1935): 279-80.

evolutionary theory held no special place within the community of biologists supportive of National Socialism. Rather, biologists and philosophers most closely identified with the goals of the Nazi party and officials in that party utterly rejected Darwinian theory, especially as advanced by Darwin's disciple Ernst Haeckel.

Weikart and others have found the poison within the tempting apple of Darwinian theory to be its materialism, the feature that, according to Weikart, led to the pernicious morality of Hitler and his Nazi biologists. But leading Nazi biological theorists, as has just been shown, not only rejected Darwinism but they did so precisely because of its supposed materialism. Could there be anything left of the claim that Hitler derived his racial attitudes from Darwinian theory?

## 11. Conclusion

Countless conservative religious and political tracts have attempted to undermine Darwinian evolutionary theory by arguing that it had been endorsed by Hitler and led to the biological ideas responsible for the crimes of the Nazis. These dogmatically driven accounts have been abetted by more reputable scholars who have written books with titles like *From Darwin to Hitler*. Ernst Haeckel, Darwin's great German disciple, is presumed to have virtually packed his sidecar with Darwinian theory and monistic philosophy and delivered their toxic message directly to Berchtesgaden—or at least, individuals like Daniel Gasman, Stephen Jay Gould, and Larry Arnhardt have so argued. Many more scholars are ready to apply the casual, but nonetheless, telling sobriquet to Hitler of “social Darwinian.” In this essay I have maintained these assumptions simply cannot be sustained after a careful examination of the evidence.

To be considered a Darwinian at least three propositions would have to be endorsed: that the human races exhibit a hierarchy of more advanced and less advanced peoples; that the transmutation of species has occurred over long stretches of time and that human beings have descended from ape-like ancestors; and that natural selection—as Darwin understood it—is the principle means by which transmutation occurs. Hitler and the Nazi biologists I have considered certainly claimed

a hierarchy of races, but that idea far antedated the publication of Darwin's theory and was hardly unique to it. There is no evidence linking Hitler's presumption of such a hierarchy and Darwin's conception. Moreover, Hitler explicitly denied the descent of species, utterly rejecting the idea that Aryan man descended from ape-like predecessors. And most of the Nazi scientists I have cited likewise opposed that aspect of Darwin's theory. Hitler did speak of the "struggle for existence," but likely derived that language from his friend and supporter Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an avowed anti-Darwinian. Moreover, by Hitler's own testimony, his anti-Semitism had political, not scientific or biological roots; there is no evidence that he had any special feeling for these scientific questions. And in any case, remote and abstract scientific conceptions can hardly provide the motivation for extreme political acts and desperate measures. Among Nazi biologists, at least those publishing in an official organ of the Party, Mendelian genetics and de Vriesian mutation theory were favored, both vying at the beginning of the twentieth century to replace Darwinian theory. Moreover, the perceived mechanistic character of Darwinism stood in opposition to the more vitalistic conceptions of Nazi biologists and that of Hitler—or at least vitalism accords with the drift of his thought about race. Finally, though his own religious views remain uncertain, Hitler often enough claimed religious justification for racial attitudes, assuming thereby the kind of theism usually pitted against Darwinian theory.

If "Social Darwinian" is a concept with definite meaning, it would have to refer to individuals who apply evolutionary theory to human beings in social settings. There is little difficulty, then, in denominating Herbert Spencer or Ernst Haeckel a social Darwinian. With that understanding, Darwin himself also would have to be so called. But how could one possibly ascribe that term to Hitler, who rejected evolutionary theory? Only in the very loosest sense, when the phrase has no relationship to the theory of Charles Darwin, might it be used for Hitler.

In order to sustain the thesis that Hitler was a Darwinian one would have to ignore all the explicit statements of Hitler rejecting any theory like Darwin's and draw fanciful implications from vague words, errant phrases, and ambiguous sentences, neglecting altogether more straight-forward, contextual interpretations of such

utterances. Only the ideologically blinded would still try to sustain the thesis in the face of the contrary, manifest evidence. Yet, as I suggested at the beginning of this essay, there is an obvious sense in which my own claims must be moot. Even if Hitler could recite the *Origin of Species* by heart and referred to Darwin as his scientific hero, that would not have the slightest bearing on the validity of Darwinian theory or the moral standing of its author. The only reasonable answer to the question that gives this essay its title is a very loud and unequivocal No!

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