

interest in Clausewitz lies in the post-Vietnam reform movement in the U.S. Army. The aims of this movement, the enormous impetus given to the elevation of “operational art” in the 1970s and beyond, might have strengthened this context and replaced the shallow and unconvincing potted history that Sumida claims “validates Clausewitz’s position” (191). He takes for granted the transformation of American military thinking over nearly forty years.

If operational art is to be exercised successfully—and not just on the conventional battlefield—then an understanding of the role of the commander is crucial. Sumida very properly draws our attention to the numerous wise passages in which Clausewitz discusses the character of his duties—based, in part, on his own observations of decision making during the Napoleonic Wars. Sumida claims that Clausewitz aimed at a “subjective form of historical re-enactment” (94, 189) based on intuition, but it is difficult to see how this can be taught. By comparison with Sumida’s earlier trenchancy, some of the later parts of the book are disappointingly descriptive, especially in regard to the defensive. Is it invariably the case that the defender holds the initiative? Was Clausewitz too heavily influenced by his experience in Russia in 1812–13? Perhaps, too, Sumida might have accentuated at greater length the degree to which Clausewitz’s defensive concept requires offensive action.

Novel approaches usually provoke dissent as well as acceptance. This book demands a wide readership, for it exhibits the intellectual adventurousness that is the hallmark of Sumida’s scholarship. He has made a striking contribution to the history of military thought discharged, on the whole, with commendable brevity.

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The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle Over Evolutionary

Thought. By *Robert J. Richards.*

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As Imperial Germany’s most ardent promoter of Darwinism, Ernst Haeckel was no stranger to polemics in the decades leading up to the First World War, and controversy has continued to swirl around him in historical scholarship right up to the present day. Indeed, a casual survey of publications turns up no less than seven book-length studies on him since 2005 alone. Much of the debate hinges on Haeckel’s avowedly progressive spin on the struggle for survival—which in his eyes led inevitably to evolution from “lower” to “higher” races and species—and on the graphic means used to convey his message to a popular audience. Elaborately drawn “stem trees” illustrating clear lines of descent have drawn fire from scholars, not only for their “non-Darwinian” teleological bent but also for the racial hierarchies they depict, which in hindsight appear all too close to the crass propaganda of Nazi pseudoscience. Haeckel’s deployment of altered and misidentified images as “evidence” had in fact already rendered him vulnerable to accusations of fraud from contemporaries, some of whom also worried that his attacks on religion (especially Catholicism) went far beyond the boundaries of science, while the materialistic monism he promoted seemed to many then as now a willful reversion to the follies of Romanticism. Small wonder, then, that Haeckel found a prominent place in the pantheon of mystics, misfits, and hacks historians assembled as they pieced together narratives of the German *Sonderweg* and the intellectual roots of Nazi barbarism after 1945.

It is precisely this view that Robert Richards seeks to dispel in *The Tragic Sense of Life*. Behind the caricature of charlatan and fraud etched in the popular imagination by decades of controversy, Richards discerns the heroic portrait of a brilliant and highly accomplished scientist driven by his own passionate nature and deep personal tragedy to provoke the uproar that engulfed his career. "Had Haeckel not lived, evolutionary theory would have turned a less strident face to the general public," Richards acknowledges. "My thesis is even more specific, namely: had Haeckel not suffered the tragic events that caused him to dismiss orthodox religion and to advance a militant monistic philosophy, his own version of Darwinian theory would have lost its markedly hostile features and these features would not have bled over to the face turned toward the public" (15–16). The tragic event referred to was the death of Haeckel's first wife, Anna, whose loss both destroyed his last vestiges of spiritual belief and compelled him to seek consolation through discovery of "the eternal feminine" in the transmutation of species (134). Torn between the despair of reason and longing for eternal love, Haeckel conceived the *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*, his first major work in defense of Darwinism, as an expression of his anguished commitment to both: "Anna would come to dwell in the pages of the *Generelle Morphologie*, in the revelation of the morphological transformations of the individual, in the reproductive cycles that mirrored phylogenetic development, in the metamorphosis of spirit into matter and man into God. She would be there, too, as the source of anguish at the evanescence of the individual and of anger at the failure of naturalists and other researchers to recognize the transforming truth of evolution" (114).

Highlighting this volatile blend of science and Romantic passion, Richards strikes a chord familiar to intellectual historians of the *Sonderweg*. Yet far from viewing it as an aberration, he instead argues that "Haeckel himself represents . . . the authentic Darwinian strain of interpretation" and sharply criticizes scholars who have failed to penetrate the clouds of acrimony churned up by nineteenth-century debates in order to see the truth. "Why, in the present period, has [Haeckel] been so maligned, not simply by conservative religious critics . . . but by historians and scientists of considerable standing?" Richards complains. "The puzzle deepens insofar as Haeckel's evolutionary views were hardly different from those of Darwin, whose virtues contemporary scholars, including this historian, have apotheosized" (440). Arguing against Peter Bowler and Stephen Jay Gould, Richards here makes a compelling case for strong affinities between Darwin and Haeckel, not only rehearsing arguments about common influences from *The Romantic Sense of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, 2002) but also discussing Darwin's positive responses to Haeckel's "biogenetic law," his use of tree diagrams, and even his views on heredity, adaptation, and the hierarchies of human cultural evolution. Haeckel's evolutionary views clearly cannot be dismissed as a "non-Darwinian revolution" (as Bowler himself acknowledges), and Richards's findings here are quite in line with recent scholarship in the field.

Considerably more difficult to address are the perennial accusations of fraud. Richards returns to this problem repeatedly throughout the book, arguing that Haeckel's (unattributed) borrowing of images, alteration to suit his arguments, outright "invention," and perhaps most notoriously his use of the same woodcut to represent the same stage of embryonic development in a dog, a chicken, and a turtle were not out of line with common practice at the time, especially in popular scientific treatises. Richards defends Haeckel on epistemological grounds, agreeing with the latter's assertion that scientists always "represent the object to be illustrated in their diagrams, not as they

actually *see* it but as they *think* it” (302). Finally, he argues that verdicts of fraud or moral culpability require proof of intent, devoting a twenty-three-page appendix to the problem. “I do not believe . . . there is compelling evidence that Haeckel *intentionally* distorted his illustrations in a malfeasant way,” Richards writes; “scientists are often *subconsciously* carried along by their hopes and desires to see certain patterns in that data” (338). Yet despite these excuses, and for all the emphasis on Haeckel’s removal of suspect images from later editions and the nasty academic politics behind his accusers, Richards is forced to admit that “Haeckel often acted injudiciously—perhaps recklessly—in deploying his images.” In the end, one is hard pressed to share Richards’s outrage over the impact of the scandal on Haeckel’s reputation: “Rumors of these charges have, since the 1870s and up to the present day, grown in phantasmagoric ways so as to obscure the accomplishments of an undeniable genius” (332).

Undermining such arguments is a passionate defensiveness, bordering at times on apologetics, which deprives them of the critical distance that might have rendered Richards’s portrait of Haeckel more compelling. In a fascinating discussion of the shifting positions of non-European races through various editions of *The Natural History of Creation*, for instance, Richards surmises that the Amerindians, once near the top of Haeckel’s stem trees, “may have been sacrificed to Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show, which played for a year and a half . . . in England” (248). While admitting that there was “something slightly risible about accelerating and decelerating human groups as if they were toy horses in an imaginary derby,” Richards admonishes the reader not to be too harsh in judging: “one must keep in mind that he regarded all of his *Stammbäume* . . . as hypotheses, amendable when the evidentiary patterns changed” (250). But if Buffalo Bill could seriously alter “evidentiary patterns” in the mind of a man being portrayed as a diligent and accomplished scientist, indeed a misunderstood genius, is one not entitled to a certain critical skepticism? Richards’s critical distance also wavers elsewhere, particularly when it comes to explaining Haeckel’s anti-Catholicism, aroused as it was by “the cloying oils of southern religious sentiment” (55), or to defending him from opponents wielding the “antique weapons of a creaking theology” (278). Echoing the language of the administration’s effort to suppress Catholicism in Germany during the Liberal era, such phrases seem all the more disturbing in that Richards, who attributes Haeckel’s aversion largely to anguish over Anna’s death, makes only passing reference to the *Kulturkampf* late in the book.

“The good historian will find in his or her own character something of the features of the individuals about whom he or she writes. That is a necessary source for understanding the actions of his subjects,” Richards observes in the final paragraph (512). Taking inspiration (and the title of his work) from Miguel de Unamuno, the author seeks to revise our understanding of Haeckel by “reach[ing] down to the inmost feelings of his being” in order to write what Unamuno called the “inner biography that explains for us most things” (9–11). Yet this focus on passions, motives, and intentions can also obscure the historical context—as in the case of the *Kulturkampf*—producing an intense personal identification that diminishes understanding for motives and intentions of others. As a result, Richards succeeds only partially in his revised portrait of Haeckel. Certainly revision is called for, but it requires a more inclusive, less defensive perspective on the larger cast of characters, especially Haeckel’s opponents, who were part of the picture too.

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