

SOCIAL DARWINISM

Social Darwinism

- **Social Darwinism** is a name given to various theories of which claim to apply biological concepts of [natural selection](#) and [survival of the fittest](#) to sociology and politics.
- The term Darwinism had been coined by [Thomas Henry Huxley](#) in his April 1860 review of "On the Origin of Species
- and by the 1870s it was used to describe a range of concepts of evolutionism or development, without any specific commitment to Charles Darwin's own theory.

- The first use of the phrase "social Darwinism" was in Joseph Fisher's 1877 article on
- ***The History of Landholding in Ireland*** which was published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

Social Darwinists

- In *The Social Organism* (1860), Spencer compares society to a living organism and argues that, just as biological organisms evolve through natural selection, society evolves and increases in complexity through analogous processes

- **Social Darwinism is an ideology of society that seeks to apply biological concepts of Darwinism or of evolutionary theory to sociology and politics, often under the assumption that conflict between groups in society leads to social progress, as superior groups out-compete inferior ones.**

Social Darwinism-

- . Social Darwinism- A harsh theory adopted by wealthy industrialists stating that individuals who are victims of poverty or are struggling in the society are in that position due to their own "unfitness," weakness, and actions
- The theory was based on the theory of natural selection and laws of evolution of Charles Darwin. Darwin's theories stated that species evolve through the process of natural selection.
- Only the best and "fittest" animals survive the tough competition of resources. The "unfit" and weak animals die out, and that specie vanishes.

- With this, according to Darwin, the species are said to have evolved.
- The wealthy businessmen used this theory in the sense of humans and society.
- [Herbert Spencer](#), an English social philosopher and promoter of Social Darwinism, stated that Darwin's theory of natural selection should be used in the industries of business and marketplace.

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- **Survival of the Fittest**
- The theory of Social Darwinism can be summed up in the phrase, "Survival of the Fittest." At least that's how the wealthy industrialists made it sound like.
- They stated that all the individuals in the society who were the target of poverty, instability, and problems were in that place due to their own weakness and actions.
- They were "unfit" for the society around them.

- When the industrialists mentioned individuals, they were mainly talking about the unemployed and poor people in the North, and poor African Americans in the South.
- The industrialists stated that labor unions, protests, reform movements, or any type of resistance from these people could never prevail.
- They couldn't go against the natural law. There was no solution, based on Social Darwinism, for these people.
- They were "misfits" and there was no way that they could compete with the "fitter" people.

- [William Graham Sumner](#), an American Darwinist, believed that helping the poor and lower class people was simply going against the laws of nature, and that this would only maintain the "misfit" population.
- Going along with the conservative trend that was appearing in the South, the framers of Social Darwinism opposed the intervention of the government in social and economic lives of the people.

- They were, of course, mainly referring to themselves since any restriction or limitation law from the Congress could function as a speed bump for the wealthy businessmen and industrialists.
- This anti- intervention philosophy became known as Laissez Faire. The Industrialists, however, supported any kind of government assistance, such as tariffs and grants, to the industry and business.
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Herbert Spencer

- Herbert Spencer, the father of Social Darwinism as an ethical theory, was thinking in terms of elitist, "might makes right" sorts of views long before Darwin published his theory.
- However, Spencer quickly adapted Darwinian ideas to his own ethical theories.
- The concept of adaptation allowed him to claim that the rich and powerful were better adapted to the social and economic climate of the time, and the concept of natural selection allowed him to argue that it was natural, normal, and proper for the strong to thrive at the expense of the weak.
- After all, he claimed, that is exactly what goes on in nature every day.
- However, Spencer did not just present his theories as placing humans on a parallel with nature.
- Not only was survival of the fittest natural, but it was also morally correct.
- Indeed, some extreme Social Darwinists argued that it was morally incorrect to assist those weaker than oneself, since that would be promoting the survival and possible reproduction of someone who was fundamentally unfit.

WHAT IS SOCIAL DARWINISM?

- In 1859, English naturalist and geologist, Charles Darwin, published his theory of evolution and natural selection in the work, *On The Origin of Species*.
- This theory argued that all species of life have descended over time from common ancestors and further explained that this evolution resulted from a process that he called natural selection, in which a species will either adapt to changes in their environments and survive as a species, or a species will fail to adapt to environmental changes and eventually go extinct.

- In the 1860s and 1870s, as word of Darwin's theory of natural selection spread in the Western world, some philosophers and scientists made new interpretations of his ideas. One of these philosophers and scientists was fellow Englishman Herbert Spencer. Herbert Spencer promoted the theory of Social Darwinism.

- Social Darwinism is an application of the theory of natural selection to social, political, and economic issues. In its simplest form, Social Darwinism follows the basic idea of “the strong survive.” Social Darwinism, in the hands of Westerners, was used to promote the idea that the white European race was superior to others, and therefore, destined to rule over them.
- In the mind of a Social Darwinist, “Some groups of people survive and compete better than others. The struggle leads to human progress. Some groups advance human progress more than others.” At the time that Spencer began to promote Social Darwinism, the technology, economy, and government of the “White European” was viewed by Westerners as far advanced in comparison to that of other cultures around the world.

- Looking at this apparent advantage, as well as the economic and military structures of the West, some argued that natural selection was playing out and that the race more suited to survival was indeed surviving. At its worst, the implications of Social Darwinism were used later as scientific justification for the Holocaust. The fascist Nazi Party claimed that the murder of Jews in World War II was an example of cleaning out the inferior genetics. Many philosophers noted evolutionary echoes in Hitler's march to exterminate an entire race of people. Various other dictators and criminals have claimed the cause of Social Darwinism in carrying out their acts.

- Even without such actions, Social Darwinism has proven to be a false and dangerous interpretation of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. Scientists and evolutionists maintain that this Social Darwinist interpretation is only loosely based on Darwin's theory of natural selection.
- They will admit to an obvious parallel between Darwin's theory of natural selection and Spencer's beliefs. In nature, the strong survive and those best suited to survival will out-live the weak.

- According to Social Darwinism, those societies with strength (economic, physical, technological) flourish and those without are destined to be conquered and controlled, or perhaps go extinct.
- 1. How did Herbert Spencer “hijack” Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and natural selection?
- 2. How might Western imperialists have made use of Social Darwinism?
- 3. By 1900, what could Westerners who believed in Social Darwinism use as evidence to prove that they were superior to non Westerners?

- Thank u