

# THE MENACE OF THE DARWINIAN REVOLUTION

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**Charles Darwin**

*Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859)*

## **Ch. 3 [Natural Selection]**

. . . it may be asked, how is it that varieties, which I have called incipient species, become ultimately converted into good and distinct species, which in most cases obviously differ from each other far more than do the varieties of the same species? How do those groups of species, which constitute what are called distinct genera and which differ from each other more than do the species of the same genus, arise? All these results, as we shall more fully see in the next chapter, follow from the struggle for life. Owing to this struggle, variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term natural selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection. But the expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer, of the Survival of the Fittest, is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient. We have seen that man by selection can certainly produce great results, and can adapt organic beings to his own uses, through the accumulation of slight but useful variations, given to him by the hand of Nature. But Natural Selection, we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art.

## **Ch. 4 [Natural Selection, more]**

Can it then be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should occur in the course of many successive generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest. Variations neither useful nor injurious would not be affected by natural selection, and would be left either a fluctuating element, as perhaps we see in certain polymorphic species, or would ultimately become fixed, owing to the nature of the organism and the nature of the conditions. . .

It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, **WHENEVER AND WHEREVER OPPORTUNITY OFFERS**, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the long lapse of ages, and then so imperfect is our view into long-past geological ages that we see only that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were. . .

The mere lapse of time does nothing, either for or against natural selection. I state this because it has been erroneously asserted that the element of time has been assumed by me to play an all-important part in modifying species, as if all the forms of life were necessarily undergoing change through some innate law. Lapse of time is only so far important, and its importance in this respect is great, that it gives a better chance of beneficial variations arising and of their being selected, accumulated, and fixed. It likewise tends to increase the direct action of the physical conditions of life, in relation to the constitution of each organism. . .

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**Walter Bagehot**

*Physics and Politics: Or Thoughts on the Application of 'Natural Selection' to Political Society (1872)*

## **Chapter II: The Use of Conflict (excerpts)**

1. Three laws, or approximate laws, may, I think, be laid down, with only one of which I can deal in this paper, but all three of which it will be best to state, that it may be seen what I am aiming at.

**First.** In every particular state of the world, those nations which are strongest tend to prevail over the others; and in certain marked peculiarities the strongest tend to be the best.

**Secondly.** Within every particular nation the type or types of character then and there most attractive tend to prevail; and, the most attractive, though with exceptions, is what we call the best character.

**Thirdly.** Neither of these competitions is in most historic conditions intensified by extrinsic forces, but in some conditions, such as those now prevailing in the most influential part of the world, both are so intensified.

These are the sort of doctrines with which, under the name of 'natural selection' in physical science, we have become familiar; and as every great scientific conception tends to advance its boundaries and to be of use in solving problems not thought of when it was started, so here, what was put forward for mere animal history may, with a change of form, but an identical essence, be applied to human history. At first some objection was raised to the principle of 'natural selection' in physical science upon religious grounds; it was to be expected that so active an idea and so large a shifting of thought would seem to imperil much which men valued. But in this, as in other cases, the objection is, I think, passing away; the new principle is more and more seen to be fatal to mere outworks of religion, not to religion itself. At all events, to the sort of application here made of it, which only amounts to searching out and following up an analogy suggested by it, there is plainly no objection. Everyone now admits that human history is guided by certain laws, and all that is here aimed at is to indicate, in a more or less distinct way, an infinitesimally small portion of such laws. . .

**2.** The strongest nation has always been conquering the weaker; sometimes even subduing it, but always prevailing over it. Every intellectual gain, so to speak, that a nation possessed was in the earliest times made use of— was *invested* and taken out—in war; all else perished. Each nation tried constantly to be the stronger, and so made or copied the best weapons; by conscious and unconscious imitation each nation formed a type of character suitable to war and conquest. Conquest improved mankind by the intermixture of strengths; the armed truce, which was then called peace, improved them by the competition of training and the consequent creation of new power. Since the **long-headed men** first drove the **short-headed men** out of the best land in Europe, all European history has been the history of the superposition of the more military races over the less military of the efforts, sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful, of each race to get more military; and so the art of war has constantly improved. But why is one nation stronger than another?

In the answer to that, I believe, lies the key to the principal progress of early civilization, and to some of the progress of all civilization. The answer is that there are very many advantages— some small and some great— every one of which tends to make the nation which has it superior to the nation which has it not; that many of these advantages can be imparted to subjugated races, or imitated by competing races; and that, though some of these advantages may be perishable or inimitable, yet, on the whole, the energy of civilization grows by the coalescence of strengths and by the competition of strengths . . .

Carlyle said, in his graphic way, 'The ultimate question between every two human beings is, "Can I kill thee, or canst thou kill me?"' History is strewn with the wrecks of nations which have gained a little progressiveness at the cost of a great deal of hard manliness, and have thus prepared themselves for destruction as soon as the movements of the world gave a chance for it.

## Sigmund Freud I

### A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-analysis (1917) [excerpts]

[1] The universal narcissism of men, their self-love, has up to the present suffered three severe blows from the researches of science.

(a) In the early stages of his researches, man believed at first that his dwelling-place, the earth, was the stationary centre of the universe, with the sun, moon and planets circling round it.

In this he was naïvely following the dictates of his sense-perceptions, for he felt no movement of the earth, and wherever he had an unimpeded view he found himself in the centre of a circle that enclosed the external world. The central position of the earth, moreover, was a token to him of the dominating part played by it in the universe and appeared to fit in very well with his inclination to regard himself as lord of the world.

[2] The destruction of this narcissistic illusion is associated in our minds with the name and work of Copernicus in the sixteenth century. But long before his day the Pythagoreans had already cast doubts on the privileged position of the earth, and in the third century B.C. Aristarchus of Samos had declared that the earth was much smaller than the sun and moved round that celestial body. Even the great discovery of Copernicus, therefore, had already been made before him. When this discovery achieved general recognition, the self-love of mankind suffered its first blow, the cosmological one. The second blow was more painful.

(b) In the course of the development of civilization man acquired a dominating position over his fellow-creatures in the animal kingdom. Not content with this supremacy, however, he began to place a gulf between his nature and theirs. He denied the possession of reason to them, and to himself he attributed an immortal soul, and made claims to a divine descent which permitted him to break the bond of community between him and the animal kingdom. . .

[3] We all know that little more than half a century ago the researches of Charles Darwin and his collaborators and forerunners put an end to this presumption on the part of man. Man is not a being different from animals or superior to them; he himself is of animal descent, being more closely related to some species and more distantly to others. The acquisitions he has subsequently made have not succeeded in effacing the evidences, both in his physical structure and in his mental dispositions, of his parity with them. This was the second, the biological blow to human narcissism.

(c) The third blow, which is psychological in nature, is probably the most wounding. Although thus humbled in his external relations, man feels himself to be supreme within his own mind. Somewhere in the core of his ego he has developed an organ of observation to keep a watch on his impulses and actions and see whether they harmonize with its demands. If they do not, they are ruthlessly inhibited and withdrawn. His internal perception, consciousness, gives the ego news of all the important occurrences in the mind's working, and the will, directed by these reports, carries out what the ego orders and modifies anything that seeks to accomplish itself spontaneously. . .

## Sigmund Freud II

### The Masses and Their Tastes

From *The Future of an Illusion* (1927)

[1] It is just as impossible to do without control of the masses by a minority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilization. For the masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciation, and they are not to be convinced by argument of its inevitability; and the individual composing the masses support one another in giving free rein to their indiscipline. It is only through the influence of individuals who can set an example and whom the masses recognize as their leaders that they can be induced to perform the work and undergo the renunciations on which the existence of civilization depends. All is well if these leaders are persons who possess superior insight into the necessities of life and who have risen to the height of mastering their own instinctual wishes. But there is a danger that in order not to lose their influence they may give way to the masses more than it gives way to them, and it therefore seems necessary that they shall be independent of the masses by having means to power at their disposal. To put it briefly, there are two widespread human characteristics which are responsible for the fact that the regulations of civilization can only be maintained by a certain degree of coercion—namely, that men are not spontaneously fond of work and that arguments are of no avail against their passions. [from Ch.1]

[2] For the sake of a uniform terminology we will describe the fact that an instinct cannot be satisfied ‘frustration,’ the regulation by which this frustration is established as a ‘prohibition’ and the condition which is produced by the prohibition as a ‘privation.’ The former are the earliest; with the prohibitions that established them, civilization—who knows how many thousands of years ago?—began to detach man from his primordial animal condition. We have found to our surprise that these privations are still operative and still form the kernel of hostility to civilization. The instinctual wishes that suffer under them are

born afresh with every child; there is a class of people, the neurotics, who already react to these frustrations with asocial behaviour. Among these instinctual wishes are those of **incest**, **cannibalism** and **lust for killing**. [from Ch.2]

### Sigmund Freud III

#### Primordial Savagery of Human Nature

From *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (1930) Chapter 5

[1] . . . The clue [to the realities of civilization] may be supplied by one of the ideal demands, as we have called them, of civilized society. It runs: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' It is known throughout the world and is undoubtedly older than Christianity, which puts it forward as its proudest claim. Yet it is certainly not very old; even in historical times it was still strange to mankind. Let us adopt a naive attitude towards it, as though we were hearing it for the first time; we shall be unable then to suppress a feeling of surprise and bewilderment. What good will it do us? But, above all, how shall we achieve it? How can it be possible? My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection. It imposes duties on me for whose fulfillment I must be ready to make sacrifices. If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way.

[2] On closer inspection, I find still further difficulties. Not merely is this stranger in general unworthy of my love; I must honestly confess that he has more claim to my hostility, and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me. If it will do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me. Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power; and the more secure he feels and the more helpless I am, the more certainly I can expect him to behave like this to me.

[3] The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus* [Man is a wolf to man] . . .

### THE PREDATORY TRANSITION FROM APE TO MAN [excerpt]

by Raymond A. Dart

*International Anthropological and Linguistic Review*, v. 1, no.4, 1953

#### The carnivorous habit in mankind

1. The loathsome cruelty of mankind to man forms one of his inescapable characteristics and differentiative features; and it is explicable only in terms of his carnivorous, and cannibalistic origin. The blood-bespattered, slaughter-gutted archives of human history from the earliest Egyptian and Sumerian records to the most recent atrocities of the Second World War accord with early universal cannibalism, with animal and human sacrificial practices of their substitutes in formalized religions and with the world-wide scalping, head-hunting, body-mutilating and necrophilic practices of mankind in proclaiming this common bloodlust differentiator, this predaceous habit, this mark of Cain that separates man dietetically from his anthropoidal relatives and allies him rather with the deadliest of Carnivora.

Darwin (*Descent of Man*, 1871, p. 146) recognised this sinister aspect of human evolution to a degree when he said:

"The same high mental aculties which first led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism and ultimately in monotheism, would infallibly lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remained poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs. Many of these are terrible to think of--such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving god; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, etc.,--yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they show us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason. to science and to our accumulated knowledge".

2. Yet, although he cited Roman gladiatorial shows, scalping, head-hunting, infanticide, slavery, love of inflicting torture and indifference to suffering, as indications of a low-state of moral sense amongst civilized and primitive peoples, Darwin did not deduce from those observations, that man had arisen from a predaceous anthropoid stock. Still, whether cognizant of the wider implications of his comments or not, he made this statement (op. cit., p. 78) "If it be an advantage to man to stand firmly on his feet and to have his head and arms free, of which, from his pre-eminent success in the battle of life, there can be no doubt, then I can see no reason why it should not have been advantageous to the progenitors of man to have become more and more erect or bipedal. They would thus have been better able to defend themselves with stones and clubs, to attack their prey, or otherwise obtain food".

Thus Darwin dared to picture not merely early men but also their progenitors as hunters.' What is 'prey'? According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (3d ed., 1934) it is "animal hunted or killed by carnivorous animal for food". The predaceous habit is therefore 'living by preying', i.e. hunting down and killing animals for food. On this thesis man's predecessors differed from living apes in being confirmed killers: carnivorous creatures, that seized living quarries by violence, battered them to death, tore apart their broken bodies, dismembered them limb from limb, slaking their ravenous thirst with the hot blood of victims and greedily devouring livid writhing flesh. Further, if Darwin's reasoning was correct, man's erect posture is the concrete expression of signal success in this type of life. It emerged through and was consolidated by the defensive and offensive stone-throwing and club-swinging technique necessitated by attacking and killing prey from the standing position. . .

3. This purposive industrial specialization of the hands in accurate hitting & throwing, as I pointed out (1949b), was the only persistent stimulus capable of transferring the body weight from the clambering knuckles . . . Man makes such persistent use of his hands and his whole torsional bodily strength in the erect posture that he can use his fists deftly and accurately as weapons, either open as in slapping and cuffing, or closed as in boxing and pounding. He is the only fistful creature on earth.

### **Robert Ardrey**

#### **Excerpts from *African Genesis* (1961)**

1. Man had emerged from the anthropoid background for one reason only: because he was a killer. Long ago, perhaps many millions of years ago, a line of killer apes branched off from the non-aggressive primate background. For reasons of environmental necessity, the line adopted the predatory way. For reasons of predatory necessity the line advanced. We learned to stand erect in the first place as a necessity of the hunting life. We learned to run in our pursuit of game across the yellowing African savannah. Our hands freed for the mauling and the hauling, we had no further use for a snout; and so it retreated. And lacking fighting teeth or claws, we took recourse by necessity to the weapon.

A rock, a stick, a heavy bone-to our ancestral killer ape it meant the margin of survival. But the use of the weapon meant new and multiplying demands on the nervous system for the co-ordination of muscle and touch and sight. And so at last came the enlarged brain; so at last came man. (p.29)

2. ...the predatory transition [from ape to man] and the weapons fixation explained for Raymond Dart man's bloody history, his eternal aggression, his irrational, self-destroying inexorable pursuit of death for death's sake. (p.31)

...that remarkable killer, *Australopithecus africanus*, the last animal before man...our last direct ancestor in the animal world... Man is a predator with an instinct to kill and a genetic cultural affinity for the weapon. (p.166)

3. One recollected the ease with which Adolf Hitler had brought about in a generation of German youth his education for death. Had he in truth induced a learned response? Or had he simply released an instinct? (p.203)

### **"Four Legs Good, Two Legs Bad": Man's Place (if Any) in Nature**

**by Matt Cartmill**

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1. From the Renaissance down to the middle of the nineteenth century, European thinkers had generally agreed that to be human was to be something special and splendid. Swift, Voltaire, and other satirists of the 1700s had lacerated human pretensions, and

Romanticism and Darwinism had erased the boundaries between man and the other animals; but the humanistic tradition of self-satisfaction had survived almost unscathed. "No one," wrote Darwin's staunch supporter T.H. Huxley,

"is more strongly convinced than I am of the vastness of the gulf between . . . man and the brutes ... for, he alone possesses the marvelous endowment of intelligible and rational speech [and] ... stands raised upon it as on a mountain top, far above the level of his humble fellows, and transfigured from his grosser nature by reflecting, here and there, a ray from the infinite source of truth."

This gorgeous complacency, which had already begun to fray badly in the late 1800s, unraveled completely during the early twentieth century. The two most powerful unravelers were probably Freudian psychoanalysis and the First World War. The picture of *Homo sapiens* that evolved in Freud's work from 1900 on implies that to be human is to be mentally ill. Concurring with Schopenhauer's notion that intelligence is in some sense innately bent on self-annihilation, Freud fretted repeatedly over the impending extinction of mankind. At first, he thought this might happen because we were getting too civilized and repressed to bother with having babies. Near the end of his life, he decided that there was what he called a "human instinct of aggression and self-destruction" and that the awful gadgetry available for gratifying that instinct made it impossible to feel any confidence in the future of the human race.

2. Whether or not you believed in Freud's "death instinct," his writings tore great chunks out of the human self-image underlying the Darwinian origin myth. No one could read Freud and still share Huxley's warm feelings about the marvelous endowment of rational speech. And during the years between the two world wars, everybody read Freud. "Freud in combination with Darwin suffice to give us our philosophical vision," wrote Huxley's grandson Julian. "Man is the only organism normally and inevitably subject to psychological conflict."

The demolition job begun by Freud was effectively completed by the mass homicidal stupidity of World War I. Although the faith of Andrew Carnegie lingered on among the lesser Babbitts of the 1920s, the more sensitive or more pessimistic in Europe and America thought back to the trenches, studied the rows of crosses on the abandoned battlefields, and concluded that progress was not, after all, an inevitable result of "the competition of tribe with tribe" . . .

3. Optimism about man's future had been revived somewhat in the 1930s by all the utopian schemes of the social engineers. A cheerful confidence in the inevitability of progress persists in Marxist-Leninist nations today, at least in the state ideology. But in the West, little of that optimism survived World War II. Most Westerners who contemplated what the war had left behind at Hiroshima and Auschwitz found it hard to keep smiling. The systematic mass murder of European Jewry made it clear that entire civilizations of the highest cultural and scientific attainments could in the course of a few years go rabidly mad; and the invention of nuclear weapons insured that insane nations of the near future would command the means to destroy life on Earth. It was impossible, in the face of those facts, to sustain the sunny faith that all would be well once we had universal literacy, One Big Union, and hygienic plumbing. As the implications of atom bombs and death camps sank in, the pessimism that had been epidemic among intellectuals in the twenties came roaring back with a vengeance. At its purest and simplest, it took the form of a stream of human self-loathing flowing from an almost Calvinistic perception of *Homo sapiens* as an innately depraved animal, an evolutionary mistake whose devilish intelligence and perverse carnivorous instincts drive him to kill, kill, kill like a crazy weasel trapped in a henhouse.

Similar, if less fiercely expressed, feelings of despair were put forward by a lot of writers in the postwar years. Scientists and naturalists flocked to predict the imminent collapse of the human regime unless we could somehow bring our destructive impulses and technology under control. "Why are we so pessimistic?" asked the ecologist Marston Bates in 1960. "Chiefly, I suspect, because we have come more and more to doubt our ability to act rationally. . . . It looks as though, as a part of nature, we have become a disease of nature—perhaps a fatal disease." During the 1950s, that same gloomy perception finally made its way into paleoanthropological theory.