

**A. Introduction**

Darwin was important because he taught the world how to classify people. For a photograph of Darwin, see p. 884 in the seventh edition of Chambers.<sup>1</sup> Darwin wanted to classify people as part of the animal world. Those who saw what he did, in turn, wanted to classify people as part of the human world. The whole lesson, then is about thought. The reason for studying Darwin is **to evaluate the intellectual life within historical context.**

**B. Background**

By 1859, the scientific community knew a record of hundreds of thousands of years of organic life on earth. This record told of the rise, adaptation, and sometimes the failure to adapt of thousands of different forms of plants and animals. Such an interpretation of life contradicted an important part of the commonly accepted theory in the Book of Genesis. Although there are serious problems with the theory of evolution,<sup>2</sup> laboratory-based scientists felt compelled by the record to give up that Biblical explanation for the differentiation of the species. (Members of a species are those organisms that are able to reproduce themselves.)

So far, as the theology is concerned: First, the Bible is a book about God--a book of theology, not geology, paleontology, or biology. Second, the story of creation shows things as already having age when they were created. When this is recognized, God not only created the universe, but he also created an apparent record to go with that universe, which the laboratory-based scientists studied.

**C. Natural Selection**

Darwin's contribution was to tell the world how organisms evolved. In the struggle for existence, those members of a species with the more necessary attributes survived, until eventually a new species evolved through this process of natural selection. Man as a breeder of plants and animals had long made use of this process. Darwin explained what was happening.

Darwin thought characteristics were inherited on a strictly biological basis and that acquired characteristics such as an amputated leg or an appreciation of fine art could not be transmitted through biological inheritance. In 1859, Darwin published The Origin of the Species in which he put forth his ideas. His work has stood the test of time and today is still accepted in most of its larger outlines. Moderns differ from Darwin principally in considering the rare mutations as found, for example, in children suffering from birth defects, as more important for developing a new species than the numerous tiny variations found within the species.

**D. Repercussions**

Herbert Spencer was one of those responsible for misinterpreting Darwin relative to humans. Darwin was concerned with competition among the species, such as dogs, cats, and mice. Spencer and other Social Darwinists applied Darwin within the human species in their concern about which humans would survive. In his Principles of Ethics (1891), Spencer indicated that the softer emotions associated with love prompted by higher religions were also in accord with

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evolution. Spencer said mutual extermination might be the law for tigers (Darwin never said anything like that) but not for human beings.

The solution to the problem of choosing those humans to survive was by deliberate mating. How to do this without offending the dignity of people has yet to be come upon. The horror of the gas chambers in Nazi Germany reminds Western civilization of some of the experiments along this line.

The most common way out of this eugenic dilemma lay in the notion that the struggle for existence really involves groups as tribes, "races," territorial states. In the Social Darwinist sense, the ultimate form of this struggle was war, with the winning group, the more fit group, surviving. In this way, the English imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, held that a world peopled with Anglo-Saxons would be the best.

Some Social Darwinists applied their theories to a new form of caste organization, "elitism," by which people should everywhere band together against the dull, average man. Nietzsche (1844-1900) was, perhaps, the leader of this strain of thought. The folly of his thinking is illustrated by the fact that he disliked Darwin as a grubbing Englishman. Nietzsche based his thought on Darwin.

In the United States, racism was helped by Darwinian anthropologists and biologists. The U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 and other U.S. immigration quota laws also reflected this by selectively excluding some people from the country based on race. Later those anthropologists opposed to racism won out.

### ***E. Conclusion***

This lesson has helped the student evaluate the intellectual life, showing how some of the great insights of modern times have had both sound and unsound effects. The intellectual life is designed to help humans interpret the meaning of their own existence, and, hence, their own identities. By studying the Introduction, Background, Natural Selection, Repercussions, and this Conclusion, and reading, and thinking, students have been able to meet the course goal for this topic, which includes preparing a thought.

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**Supplement*****F. Repercussions (continued)***

A certain amount of religious irony is associated with the Darwinian revolution. A study on Canada<sup>3</sup> has examined Christian liberals who believed that faith would be revitalized "by translating Christianity into a message of social reform and good citizenship." In this way, an essentially religious purpose became a sort of blueprint for a social security system that would make the church all but obsolete. United Way, welfare, and similar public programs have taken over what the church used to do.

In Canada, perhaps, "the church is all but obsolete," but the observations of Dr. Jirran on Todds Lane indicate that the church is alive and well on the Peninsula. For Dr. Jirran the sense of things is that it is the church that remains the support of public programs. This support for the public approach delivers better service to the poor and spreads the cost of that service more evenly than if the church alone were involved.

Concepts of evolution entered the United States in a convoluted, sometimes misunderstood way. In 1900, evolutionary scientists were still far apart in their understanding. The South was not uniformly anti-evolutionist. The Scopes trial of 1925 came just before a crescendo of anti-evolution statutes in at least a dozen states.<sup>4</sup>

Protestant fundamentalism avoided the creationism controversy by focusing on personal, experiential salvation. Evangelical Protestantism is inappropriately charged with active anti-evolution sentiment. Protestant evangelicals had other things to do than to enter the combat lists of Darwinism.<sup>5</sup>

Vocabulary for an earth/flood geology joined to Darwinism developed slowly. "Creationism" was a rare indistinct term before the 1960s. In the 1970s, Adventist religious beliefs established "scientific creationism" to deal with the general understanding of naturalists. Adventists are among the most educated religious people.<sup>6</sup>

***F. Species<sup>7</sup>***

The definition used in the formal lecture is a working definition, rather than a technical definition. Dr. Roy A. Hyle, of the Thomas Nelson Community College teaching faculty, suggests the following: a temporary assembly in time of organisms which share a common gene pool. An even more technical definition is:

the lowest (taxonomic) grouping of animals or plants that, at least potentially, forms an interbreeding array of populations unable to breed freely with other sorts of animals and plants The species is the only natural unit (taxon) of classification. It is usually recognized on the basis of morphological characters (a morphospecies), but

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different species can be morphologically identical (sibling species), for example *Drosophila pseudoobscura* and *D. persimilis* [fruit flies] exhibit behavioral differences leading to reproductive isolation.<sup>8</sup>

The point is that someone with a vasectomy or a tubular ligation does not, thereby lose membership in the human species. The notion of "either actually or potentially able" is assumed in the "able to" of the working definition. Hybrids, for example mules (which cannot reproduce), are not a species. Someone with the esoteric knowledge of a Dr. Hyle can cite rare instances of hybrids which can reproduce, but only in a short-term technical sense of reproduction. In broad generality, however, Dr. Jirran's working definition of a species as those organisms that are able to reproduce themselves is sufficient for understanding the significance of Darwin.

### **G. Women**

The Book of Genesis maintained that men and women were fundamentally equal in the sight of God. That fundamental equality was the essential meaning behind the explanation that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. This fact is not to deny that the Book of Genesis, and the whole Bible with it, has a pro-male and anti-female bias.<sup>9</sup> Interested students may want to consult the [Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion](#).<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle maintained that women, like boys, were inferior for not maturing into full manhood. The theory of evolution seems to assume this same status of inferiority for women. Feminist historians are going about the task of bringing contemporary scholarship to bear. For example, we need to understand better why women often devoted gains realized through household technology to more elaborate housekeeping, rather than leisure.<sup>11</sup>

### **H. Homo Sapiens**

Between 1844 and 1944, thinkers were ill inclined to presuppose that humans came because of the chance outcome of processes of random variation, struggle for existence, or survival of the fittest. One group thought that Homo sapiens descended from an ape-like progenitor; another group pushed the direct lineage as far back as two million years ago, at the beginning of the age of the glaciers, that is during the late Pliocene or early Pleistocene geologic periods, sometimes known as the Old Stone Age or Paleolithic period.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Java man and the Neanderthals rested on the side branches of direct lineage.

A third group maintained that *Homo sapiens* and the Neanderthals lived side-by-side for a while. A fourth group rejected the notion of an ape-like ancestor and substituted a mouse-like ancestor developing parallel strains for both. A fifth group derived different kinds of peoples from different animals, such as the Black races from African apes and the Mongols from orangutans. Such theories were neo-Lamarckian and largely anti-Darwinian. During the 1940s, the academic community rejected all of the above. The idea that won out emphasized random variation, progressive adaptation through natural selection, and consequent branching evolution with no foreordained direction.

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Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 883-887

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. Some of these disagreements are set forth above and others in the following comments.

Page Column

Paragraph  
Line

883 2 3 11-end ...the cruel conflict for food...

Malthus presented food as one of four necessities that compete for land. The other three were fuel, fiber, and building materials.<sup>13</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Page 874 in the fourth edition of Chambers For a photograph of Darwin, see p. 1018 in the fifth edition of Chambers; p. 815 in the sixth edition.

<sup>2</sup> See Larry Azar, "Biologists, Help!" Bio Science, Vol. 28, No. 11 (Nov. 1978), pp. 712-715.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ross McCormack, review of Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada, in The American Historical Review, 91 (December 1986): 1298-9.

<sup>4</sup> George E. Webb, review of Ronald L. Numbers, Darwinism Comes to America, The American Historical Review, Vol. 108, No. 1 (February 2003), page 1317.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Webb, review of Ronald L. Numbers, Darwinism Comes to America, The American Historical Review, Vol. 108, No. 1 (February 2003), page 1317.

<sup>6</sup> George E. Webb, review of Ronald L. Numbers, Darwinism Comes to America, The American Historical Review, Vol. 108, No. 1 (February 2003), page 1317.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Jirran thanks Dr. Roy A. Hyle, of the Thomas Nelson Community College Biology Department for reviewing this lecture for scientific accuracy. Responsibility for any errors remaining in the lecture belong to Dr. Jirran.

<sup>8</sup> W. B. Hale and J. P. Margham, The HarperCollins Dictionary of Biology (New York, HarperPerennial: A Division of HarperCollinsPublishers, 1991), page 498.

<sup>9</sup> See Religion and Intellectual Life: The Journal of Associates for Religion & Intellectual Life, Vol. III, No. 2 (Winter 1986), passim.

<sup>10</sup> Mentioned by Pamela Schaeffer, "Perspectives: Scholarship, what future?" National Catholic Reporter (December 18, 1998), page 28, column 2.

<sup>11</sup> See Faye E. Dudden, review of Ruth Schwartz Cowan, More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave, The American Historical Review, 90 (February 1985), page 235. For more recent studies see "Women gained little, study finds," The Columbus Dispatch, 18 April, 1986, p. 8A, col. 1-3 reporting on Victor R. Fuchs in the April 18 issue of Science. The point of the Fuchs article is that women have not improved their economic lot since 1959. The same issue of the Dispatch reports similar observations made before the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families. Senator Moynihan has a recently published similar book, whose review I have just read, but am unable to locate 4/20/86.

<sup>12</sup> Judith S. Levey and Agnes Greenhall, editors, The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, (New York: Avon Books, 1983), 324-325 and 810

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, "AHR Forum: Asia and Europe in the World Economy: Political Economy and Ecology on the Eve of Industrialization: Europe, China, and the Global Conjuncture," The American Historical Review, Vol. 107, No. 2 (April 2002), page 433.