

STEFAN LORENZ SORGNER
Fridrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
Deutschland

DARWIN'S INFLUENCE IN GERMANY

Summary: In this article, I wish to give a short overview over Darwin's influence in Germany. The article is divided into four parts. In the first, I briefly deal with Darwin's relationship to Social Darwinism and in particular to Hitler and the Third Reich, as many people still tend to see a strong link between these two movements. I show that Darwin should not be regarded as connected to the cruelties of the Third Reich. However, there is a relationship between Ernst Haeckel, the main defender of Darwin's theory of evolution in Germany, and some aspects of Third Reich politics. This connection brings us to the second part of the article in which I briefly mention Darwin's influence on two major German zoologists, August Weismann, and Ernst Haeckel. In the third part, I focus on the influence Darwin has had on the ideas of German philosophers, and philosophical anthropologists. David Friedrich Strauss, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, Ernst Cassirer, Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen, and Vittorio Hösle have to be mentioned in this respect. In the fourth and last part, I conclude the article with some brief remarks on how Darwin is seen in Germany today. So let us with part one.

Key Words: Darwin, Haeckel, Social Darwinism, Third Reich

1. DARWIN, SOCIAL DARWINISM, AND THE THIRD REICH

When the name 'Darwin' comes up in discussions in Germany, it still happens that people mention Social Darwinism, and Darwin's influence on Hitler and the Third Reich. Therefore, there is the necessity of making two brief remarks about this issue.

Firstly, it has to be said that Hitler, like Darwin, saw himself as a defender of the 'will of nature'. However, Hitler links the concept of the 'will of nature' with a particular people, and infers from this the necessity of aggressive behaviour towards inferior races ('Aryans' versus 'Jews'). Such an element cannot be found within Darwin's theory [ed. Gadamer (1972): P. 342].

Secondly, it needs to be said that Darwin does not promote measures against con-traselection [ed. Engel (1995): P. 335]. Contraselection takes place within a civilization when the struggle for existence cannot be active in an appropriate manner, as inferior, weak, and lazy people are supported and are taken care of, and such circumstances are

supposed to lead to the transmission of weak hereditary dispositions [ed. Engel (1995): P. 334]. Of course, it is a matter of dispute whether there is such a phenomenon as contraselection or not. Measures against contraselection were demanded by Ernst Haeckel, further promoted from some race hygienists (Rassenhygieniker) and later on carried out by Hitler and the national socialists [ed. Engel (1995): P. 336 & 339]. I say more about this in the section on Haeckel. At this point, it has to be stressed that, firstly, contraselection cannot follow from Darwin's theory of selection as the individuals who win the struggle for existence within his theory are per definitionem the most suitable whatever the cultural conditions are [ed. Engel (1995): P. 335], and, secondly, Darwin never demanded that one should refrain from helping the weaker [Hösle (1999): P. 122].

Given the above comparison between Darwin's and Hitler's ideas, we must conclude that Darwin should not be seen as an intellectual precursor of the German national socialist movement. We can now come to the second part.

2. DARWIN & TWO MAJOR GERMAN ZOOLOGISTS

The first zoologist I deal with here is August Weismann (17.1.1834-5.11.1914). At the 100th anniversary of Darwin's birthday Weismann pointed out the importance of Charles Darwin by stressing that before Darwin zoology, botany, and anthropology existed as separate sciences, but with Darwin's theory of evolution a connection between these various sciences was established [ed. Bayerts (1993): P. 12]. Weismann is regarded as the first proper Darwinist [Hösle (1999): P. 71], and as the founder of Neodarwinism [Wuketits (1995): P. 169], although originally he believed in Lamarck's theory of the transmission of acquired traits. What is significant for Neodarwinism is that it combines our knowledge of genetics with Darwin's theory of selection [Wuketits (1995): P. 55]. Weismann combines the theory of cells, embryology, and genetics with another, and interprets the result by means of the theory of selection [Wuketits (1995): P. 56]. He transfers the principle of natural selection from the macroscopic to the cellular perspective which implies that the cellular plasma (Zellplasma) is transmitted from generation to generation, and thereby becomes potentially immortal. The cellular plasma is also the basis for the soma or bodily plasma. Today we would use the expressions 'genotype' and 'phenotype'. To clarify this position a bit further we could say that for the Neodarwinists the genotype is the basis for transmission and the phenotype follows from it, whereas for a Lamarckian the phenotype is the basis and the genotype develops from this [Wuketits (1995): P. 56]. In addition, I wish to make clear that it was important for Weismann to stress that given the theory of selection, it does not follow that the beastly tendencies should govern human beings, but that for human beings it is particularly mind or spirit which matters, rather than the body [Hösle (1999): P. 160].

The next scientist we discuss is the zoologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel (16.2.1834-9.8.1919). I have already alluded to some of his ideas in the first part of this article, and I return to them later in this section. Before comparing Haeckel's ideas to Darwin's I need to point out that in 1863 Haeckel wrote a letter to Darwin informing him that he wished to dedicate his life to Darwin's theory of evolution, which he did by

taking the theory of descent and the principle of selection for granted, and then applying these theories to the various areas of biology [ed. Engel (1995): P. 327].

Firstly, I wish to mention that Haeckel clearly expressed that none of the living great apes is the ancestor of the human race, as they died out long ago [Hemleben (1968): P. 120]. Today we believe that the last common ancestor of human beings and great apes lived about a couple of million years ago [Wuketits (1995): P. 12]. It seems to me that even today many people believe that the living apes are actually our ancestors. Haeckel clearly recognised this problem of understanding. Secondly, Haeckel managed to relate phylogenesis and ontogenesis to one another. According to him the ontogenesis is a short and fast repetition of the phylogenesis which means that an embryo passes through the various phases of our ancestors via fishes to higher mammals [ed. Engel (1995): P. 328]. One can find this relationship between ontogenesis and phylogenesis already within Darwin's works, yet it comes out clearly for the first time in the writings of Fritz Müller (1822-1897), Johann Friedrich Meckel (1781-1833) and in particular Ernst Haeckel [Hösle (1999): P. 42-43].

All of Haeckel's above mentioned observations were very perceptive, yet it also has to be noted that he and some other German scientists like Carl Vogt, or Fritz Müller were far more extreme and axiomatic than Darwin [ed. Engel (1995): P. 18]. For example Haeckel naively and loudly expressed his opinion: "There is no God, and no immortality". Darwin, on the other hand, regarded himself as a theist, and he tried to explain this belief by putting forward his opinion that it is utterly incomprehensible that our wonderful universe with all its past and future could have come into existence without God [Hemleben (1968): P. 150-151]. Considering this aspect of Haeckel's personality, we can now return to the topic of the first part where Haeckel was already mentioned. According to Haeckel, it is the most important task of practical philosophers of his times to develop and bring about a new ethics [ed. Engel (1995): P. 332]. The only ethics that he was able to regard as consistent with Darwinism was neither democratic nor socialist, but aristocratic [ed. Gadamer (1972): P. 344-345]. Given this belief, it makes it easier to understand why Haeckel was in favour of measures against contraselection such as recruiting ill people for the military, the death penalty for criminals, or murder of ill and weak children [ed. Engel (1995): P. 335]. Twenty years later his ideas with respect to contraselection were taken up again by race hygienists (Rassenhygienikern) such as Wilhelm Schallmyer (1857-1919) who wrote the first book dealing with the hygiene of a race in 1891, and Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940) who in 1895 created the notion 'hygiene of a race' (Rassenhygiene). Both refer directly to Haeckel [ed. Engel (1995): P. 336]. In numerous publications after 1933 Haeckel is seen as a thinker closely related to National Socialism, his demands concerning eugenics were praised, and indirectly via the race hygienists he influenced the ideology of the national socialist. One can even find related ideas in Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' [ed. Engel (1995): P. 339].

To make the orientation easier for someone interested in the German Darwin reception within the fields of biology and anthropology I mention the most important German biologists and anthropologists who were significantly influenced by Darwin in this section. The most notable German biologists in the 19th century besides the one already mentioned were Nägeli, Hermann und Fritz Müller. For the 20th century E. Baur, Ren-

sch, Timofeef-Ressovsky, Zimmermann, and Schindewolf have to be mentioned. The most important German anthropologists in the 19th century were Rudolph Wagner, Carl Vogt, Hermann Schaaffhausen, Karl Ernst von Baer, Robert Hartmann and Gustav Schwalbe. Extremely critical of Darwin were Rudolf Virchow and Johannes Ranke. Concerning 20th century anthropologists who were significantly influenced by Darwin Hermann Klaatsch, Gerhard Heberer, Winfried Henke, Hartmut Rothe, and Schenk have to be mentioned. In addition, one should not forget the Social Darwinists Alfred Ploetz, Wilhelm Schallmeyer, and Otto Ammon. After having shown Darwin's influence on two major German zoologists, and having mentioned the most important 19th and 20th century German biologists, and anthropologists who were significantly influenced by Darwin, I can now come to part three in which the relationship between Darwin's theory of evolution and the ideas of German philosophers, and philosophical anthropologists is being dealt with.

3. DARWIN, PHILOSOPHERS, AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Within this section I progress in chronological order starting with the earliest thinkers influenced by Darwin, and ending with the last notable thinker. It has to be noted that most of the thinkers listed were active during the first half of the 20th century.

The first thinker I wish to mention is the theologian David Friedrich Strauss (27.1.1808-8.2.1874). He is the author of the famous book 'The Life of Jesus' which was very influential especially in the 19th century. David Friedrich Strauss "admitted that Darwin's theory was irresistible to those who thirsted for 'truth and freedom'" [Himmelfarb (1962): P. 388]:\

"Vainly did we philosophers and critical theologians over and over decree the extermination of miracles; our ineffectual sentence died away, because we could neither dispense with miraculous agency, nor point to any natural force able to supply it, where it has hitherto seemed most indispensable. Darwin has demonstrated this force, this process of nature; he has opened the door by which a happier coming race will cast out miracles, never to return. Every one who knows what miracles imply will praise him, in consequence, as one of the greatest benefactors of the human race." [Strauss (1873): P. 205]

More famous and influential than Strauss are the next two thinkers, namely Karl Marx (5.5.1818-14.3.1883) and Friedrich Engels (28.11.1820-5.8.1895). The following story has often been told when the relationship between Darwin and Marx was discussed. "And when Marx proposed to dedicate to him [Darwin; note by the author] *Das Kapital*, he firmly refused the honour, explaining that it would pain certain members of his family if he were associated with so atheistic a book." [Himmelfarb (1962): P. 383] However, in recent times doubt has been shed on the truth of this story. Bowler for example said: "It is perhaps worth noting that the once popular story that Karl Marx of-

ferred to dedicate a volume of *Capital* to Darwin is based on a misinterpretation of the relevant correspondence.” [Bowler (1990): P. 206]

What is certain is that both Engels as well as Marx had been deeply impressed by Darwin’s theory of evolution, as the topic comes up very often in their correspondence, and both Engels as well as Marx are usually full of praise for it. Engels once wrote that Marx theory of history can be compared to Darwin’s theory of evolution, whereby it has to be assumed that he was referring to the scientific value of both theories [Howard (1996): P. 144]. In another letter which Engels wrote to Marx in November 1859, he praised Darwin for destroying the then still very strong teleological world view. Here he was referring to the principle of selection which is indeed consistent with a mechanistic description of the world [Hemleben (1968): P. 122]. In December 1860 Marx says in a letter to Engels that although Darwin’s works are very English he regards them as containing the basis for their own work [Hemleben (1968): P. 122]. Of particular interest has to be Engel’s letter to the Russian journalist Lawrow from 12.11.1875 who was a strong opponent of Darwinism. In this letter Engels makes clear that he accepts Darwin’s theory of evolution, although he has doubts with respect to his methodology. For Engel it was not possible to base all activity within this world on the ‘struggle for existence’, and he compared Darwin’s theory in this respect to the positions of Hobbes and Malthus. Engel’s believes that all worldviews containing the idea of the ‘struggle for existence’ theory must have come about by means of the following mistake. The respective thinkers must have observed the realm of plants and animals, and expanded the observed forces to the human world. This, however, cannot be done, according to Engels, as human beings have developed the capacity to produce things, and this capacity cannot be found anywhere else in nature except in human beings. Therefore, it cannot be justified to apply observations of the realm of plants and animals to the human world. This seems to have been Engel’s main point of criticism [ed. Gadamer (1972): P. 343-344].

After having dealt with the relationship of Marx and Engels to Darwin, I now come the most important philosopher of the second half of the 19th century in Germany: Friedrich Nietzsche (15.10.1844-25.8.1900). Birx correctly pointed out that “The scientist Charles Darwin had awakened the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche from his dogmatic slumber by the realization that, throughout organic history, no species is immutable (including our own).” [Birx (2000): P. 24] In addition, he also explains: “As with Thomas Huxley, Ernst Haeckel and Darwin himself, Nietzsche taught the historical continuity between human beings and other animals (especially the chimpanzees).” [Birx (2000): P. 24]. However, Nietzsche was not unconditionally affirmative of Darwin. Nietzsche’s most important criticism was, like Engel’s, directed towards Darwin’s ‘struggle for existence’ theory. He did put forward many types of arguments against the theory of the ‘struggle for existence’, and he also explains why he regards the aspect of power as more important than the aspect of pure existence. One of the better arguments can be found in an aphorism which is entitled “Against Darwinism”. Here Nietzsche points out that Darwin overestimates the outer situation, and forgets to take the inner form giving force into consideration [Nietzsche (1964): P. 435; WP 647]. This creative force leads to the feeling of becoming stronger which again is what human beings are after [Nietzsche (1964): P. 436; WP 649]. This is one of the reasons why Nietzsche does not regard

the 'struggle for existence' but the 'will to power' [Sorgner (1999) P. 34-59] as the basis of all human actions. Finally, concerning the relationship between Darwin and Nietzsche I wish to mention that Nietzsche did read much by Darwin himself, but a lot of secondary literature about him [ed. Ottmann (2000): P. 212-213].

Georg Simmel (1.3.1858-26.9.1918) is the next thinker with whom I am concerned. He is a philosopher and one of the founders of sociology, and besides many other subjects, he also dealt with evolutionary epistemology. This theory of knowledge considers that human beings are the result of a long natural process of evolution, since it regards this fact to be relevant for our way of understanding and getting to know the world. Through Simmel, and the Austrian ethnologist Konrad Lorenz who was heavily influenced by Darwin, the idea of an evolutionary epistemology was transmitted to the present in which it has become an influential stream of philosophy which is the subject of intense philosophical debates [ed. Bayerts (1993): P. 8].

Another philosopher of culture deeply indebted to Darwin's ideas is Ernst Cassirer (28.7.1874-15.5.1945). This Neo-Kantian philosopher has often referred to the role of 19th century biology with respect to the breakthrough of historical thinking within the field which is concerned with knowledge of nature. The 17th century was dominated by a mathematical ideal of the natural sciences. However, in the 19th century the historical approach became more and more important, according to Cassirer. Especially because of Darwin's theory the historical approach to knowledge of nature has been able to reach a new level of importance, and it became obvious that scientific and historical thinking do not have to be contradictory but can complement one another to attain a useful symbiosis of these two streams of thinking [ed. Engels (1999): P. 8-9].

The catholic Nietzsche, and founder of philosophical anthropology Max Scheler (22.8.1874-19.5.1928) is the thinker with whom I deal with next. He studied with Ernst Haeckel in Jena who influenced him significantly with respect to Darwin's theory of evolution [Henckmann (1998): P. 17]. Within his mature philosophy he accepts that with respect to their 'physis' human beings are constructed according to the same fundamental plan as animals. However, with respect to the mind there is an enormous difference between men and animals. Yet, it is not the case that that animals do not have a mind, according to Scheler, but they have it to a much lower degree. This difference alone would not grant human beings a special status in the world. It is because of something else that men have such a special status which I explain soon [Howard (1996): P. 106].

From the above remarks alone, one can see that Scheler's thought is closely linked to the sciences. Yet, he is not the only one who was so strongly influenced by the natural sciences. According to him, all educated Europeans think within the tradition of the following three cultures when they are asked what comes to mind when they think about human beings: the Jewish-Christian tradition, the Ancient Greek cultural realm, and the field of modern natural sciences, and here in particular the theory of evolution and genetic psychology. However, these three realms exist parallel to one another within our civilisation without there being a link between them. Scheler tries to find a solution to this problem, and Cassirer in 1944 takes up the same problem, but without accepting Scheler's solution [ed. Engels (1999): P. 15-16]. Scheler's solution goes as follows. According to him, given the theory of evolution which Scheler accepts, human beings

(men as *homo naturalis*) cannot have a special status within nature as mentioned before. He develops a model where the organic realm is separated into various stages, yet this cannot justify that men have a special status, as human beings and animals do form a strict continuum. However, Scheler thinks that there is something which separates us from the natural realm. Here the notion of "Weltoffenheit" (openness to the world) comes in. By this notion he means our ability to be relatively free from our instincts and forces, and therewith our ability to choose for ourselves which type of life we wish to live. In this way he introduces a dualism within his philosophy which was rejected by the later philosophical anthropologists Plessner and Gehlen [ed. Engels (199): P. 16-18].

Some very perceptive remarks with respect to Darwin's theory of evolution can also be found in Nicolai Hartmann's works (20.2.1882-9.10.1950). Darwin has often been criticized on the grounds that the principle of selection is a tautology, and cannot therefore be regarded as a scientific theory, as it cannot be falsified. For many people, this was reason enough to doubt that principle. However, Nicolai Hartmann thinks that the obviousness of this principle does not show that it is invalid or that it therefore has to be doubted but he regards this fact to be a confirmation of this principle. For him the plausibility of this principle reveals its status as a priori knowledge. Before Hartmann, Spencer already stressed the a priori status of the principle of selection [ed. Gadamer (1972): P. 333-334].

After these brief remarks on Hartmann, we can come back to the philosophical anthropologists again, and so we reach Helmuth Plessner (4.9.1892-12.6.1985). Although he agrees with Darwin in many points, like the one that there is only a very small difference between men and animals [Haucke (2000): P. 111], but not a substantial difference, only a gradual one, he is very critical of Darwin as well. For example he does not accept that at the basis of all actions lies the 'struggle for existence' [Haucke (2000): P. 88]. It also needs to be mentioned that Plessner grants the principle of selection also an a priori status [Haucke (2000): P. 89].

The last, and to my mind the most important philosophical anthropologist who was influenced by Darwin is Arnold Gehlen (29.1.1904-30.1.1976). There are quite a few similarities in their theories. Darwin regarded the biological weakness of human beings as, most probably, their greatest strength, as it brought about that men work together, and form communities, and it enabled men to adapt themselves to the various possible situations [Kardiner (1974): P. 23], and to develop great spiritual capacities [Hösle (1999): P. 119]. Gehlen refers to the same phenomenon with the expression 'Mängelwesen' ('defective creature') [Hösle (1999): P. 119] whereby he alludes to Nietzsche who in the "Gay Science" § 14 described human beings as 'wayward animals'. Human beings need culture, and, as Gehlen says, institutions in order to be capable of living well, as they are lacking the appropriate instincts [ed. Engels (1999): P. 19-20]. Like Darwin, Gehlen held that there is only a gradual difference between men and animals [Thies (2000): P. 46]. However, he neither attributed to the 'struggle for existence' a lot of importance, nor granted any relevance to the principle of selection [Thies (2000): P. 16].

The last great philosopher who has dealt with Darwin is Vittorio Hösle (25.6.1960-). Together with the biologist Christian Illies he wrote the very philosophical, and clear introductory book which is entitled „Darwin“ [Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder,

1999]. However, within his own understanding of history, he is much closer to Hegel than to Darwin [Arndt (2000): P. 304].

4. DARWIN IN GERMANY TODAY

In the last part of this article, I give a short impression of how Darwin is thought about in Germany today. I must say that the attitude towards Darwin in Germany today is still ambiguous. The following two aspects have to be stressed. On the one hand there is the bad Darwin who is related to Social Darwinism, and eugenics, and on the other hand, there is the good Darwin who is the great observer of nature, clear writer, and role model for any natural scientist. Two recently published articles represent good examples for each of these attitudes. Firstly, there is the article with the title 'Reine Rasse' ('Pure Race') which came out in "Der Spiegel" (29/2001) [Franke (2001): P: 128-146]. Secondly, there is the article 'Mit Darwins Augen' ('With Darwin's Eyes') which was published by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Samstag, 23. Juni 2001, Nummer 143, 1) [Grünbein (2001): P. 1].

The first article 'Reine Rasse' deals with the questions of gene diagnosis, cloning, and euthanasia. It was mainly inspired by the fact that just before Easter the Dutch parliament passed a law which legalised active mercy killing or euthanasia which brought about a massive, and emotionally charged discussion in Germany. Within this article Darwin was mentioned as someone who realised the problem of a surplus population, but accepted that nothing can be done about it. However, it was also said that many of his followers have taken a different view, and it was implicitly expressed that the danger of a different solution to Darwin's was clearly contained within Darwin's ideas, as he himself had realised the problem of a surplus population. Although the author could have given a much worse description of Darwin, here one can still find the picture of the rather bad Darwin [Franke (2001): P: 128-146].

In the second article 'Mit Darwins Augen' by Durs Grünbein, a famous German writer, however, Darwin was portrayed as the role model of a natural scientist. His ability to express the results of his research to the public was praised, and positively compared to the capacities of the present generation of natural scientists. It was made clear that he had the calmness, the perseverance, the patience, and just the right eye for being a clear, and rigorous observer of nature from whom all natural scientists could learn something [Grünbein (2001): P. 1].

I think it is fair to say that although one can still find the good and the bad Darwin within German contemporary culture, it seems to me that the positive aspects dominate. However, what must be considered is that even in Germany one finds creationists with posts at good universities again, like Siegfried Scherer, who is the director of the institute of microbiology at the Technischen Universität München [Evers (2001): P. 146]. This fact can make one wonder whether creationism will become more influential again? Yet, the plausibility of Darwin's theory of evolution should be strong enough to withstand the Neo-creationist movement.

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ŠTEFAN LORENC ZORGNER
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
Deutschland

DARVINOV UTICAJ U NEMAČKOJ

Apstrakt: U ovom članku želim da pružim kratak pregled Darwinovog uticaja u Nemačkoj. Članak je podeljen u četiri dela. U prvom delu sažeto se bavim Darwinovim odnosom sa socijalnim darvinizmom, posebno sa Hitlerom i Trećim rajhom, budući da su mnogi skloni da vide strogu povezanost između ta dva pokreta. Pokazujem da Darvina ne bi trebalo posmatrati u vezi sa užasima Trećeg rajha. Međutim, postoji izvestan odnos između Ernsta Hekela, glavnog branio- ca Darwinove teorije evolucije U Nemačkoj i nekih aspekata politike Trećeg rajha. Ta veza vodi nas ka drugom delu članka u kojem ukratko pominjem Darwinov uticaj na dva najvažnija nemač- ka zoologa, Augusta Vajsmann i Ernsta Hekela. U trećem delu fokusiram se na Darwinov uticaj na ideje nemačkih filozofa i filozofskih antropologa. U tom pogledu valja pomenuti Davida Fri- driha Štrausa, Karla Marksa, Fridriha Engelsa, Fridriha Ničea, Georga Zimela, Ernsta Kasirera, Maksa Šelera, Nikolaja Hartmana, Helmuta Plesnera, Arnolda Gelena i Vitoria Heslea. U četvr- tom i poslednjem delu članak zaključujem sa kratkim zapažanjima o tome, kako je Darwin viđen u Nemačkoj danas.

Ključne reči: Darwin, Hekel, socijalni darvinizam, Treći rajh