

Darwin and Evolution

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From: Michel Albrand <malbrand@pratique.fr>

I came across this news item from AFP agency (Agence France Presse) and thought it may be of some relevance to readers of the h-ideas list.

>>AFP news item dated January 18th 1996 - REF : FRAQ12S4GA
>>0382FRA/AFP-LH15
>> PARIS, January 18th (AFP) - A great "Dictionary of Darwinism and
>> of Evolution"... .. This titanesque result, with no antecedent in
>> the matter, has taken ten years work to 150 international
>> specialists in the biological sciences and human studies, under
>> the direction of Patrick Tort. While striving to restore in its
>> entirety the logics of evolution, its original concepts and modern
>> versions, this encyclopaedic dictionary initiates a historical
>> investigation of all national Darwinisms."

Among the Editor's statements, I picked this one because of its unusual straightforwardness:

>This historical and critical synthesis of Darwinism and evolutionary
>theory has been conducted in order to combat the endless distortions
>of Darwin's ideas. Henceforth, the demonstration has been made that:
> - Darwin is not the father of modern anti-equalitarian theories, -
> Darwin is the founder neither of negative eugenics nor of dogmas of
> elimination,
> - Darwin is not the justifier of Victorian Imperialism,
> - Darwin is not responsible for "Social Darwinism".

More information can be obtained on the Web, in six languages, at:

<http://www.planete.net/~ptort/darwin/index.html>

(French)

<http://www.planete.net/~ptort/darwin/evolengl.html> (English)

Michel Albrand

Date: Tue, 27 Feb 1996 13:47:25 -0800 (PST) From: Richard Weikart <rweikart@toto.csustan.edu>

Since my research focuses on social Darwinism, I was very interested in the announcement of Patrick Tort's *Dictionary of Darwinism and of Evolution*. In my research I once ran across a rather interesting passage that might be of some interest to intellectual historians: "Man, like every other

animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher he must remain subject to a severe struggle. Otherwise he would soon sink into indolence, and the more highly gifted men would not be more successful in the battle of life than the less gifted. Hence our natural rate of increase, though leading to many and obvious evils, must not be greatly diminished by any means. There should be open competition for all men; and the most able should not be prevented by laws or customs from succeeding best and rearing the largest number of offspring." This kind of social Darwinist statement has often been considered a distortion of Darwin's own position, but in fact it did reflect his position. How do I know? The above quotation is from the conclusion to Darwin's *Descent of Man*.

It is, of course, true that many distorted Darwin's views, but Darwin's own work reflected laissez-faire economic views and propagated racial inequality (he claimed "savages" were inferior mentally and morally).

Those interested in this topic might also consult "A Recently Discovered Darwin Letter on Social Darwinism" in the Dec. 1995 issue of *Isis*.

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Date: Wed, 28 Feb 1996 21:40:12 -0500 (EST) From: Nicholas Clifford
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Richard Weikart has suggested that Darwin might not have been entirely free from Social Darwinism. Here's another quotation that bears this out, in a letter to Wallace (quoted on p. 343 of Himmelfarb's biography):

I could show fight on natural selection having done and doing more for the progress of civilization than you seem inclined to admit. Remember what risk the nations of Europe ran, not so many centuries ago of being overwhelmed by the Turks, and how ridiculous such an idea now is! The more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence. Looking to the world at no very distant date, what an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world. (July 3, 1881).

It seems to be no more surprising that Darwin, very much a man of his time, could be an occasional social Darwinist than that Marx and Engels, also men of their time, could be occasional "vulgar Marxists."

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Date: Wed, 06 Mar 1996 10:59:34 -0500 (EST) From: PCROCE@suvax1.stetson.edu

I appreciated Nick Clifford's message and Richard Weikart's brief essay and Darwin letter in *_Isis_*. However, I could not find the Darwin to Wallace letter in *Himmelfarb* on p. 343. I am using the Norton 1968 printing. Did I miss something?

Paul

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Date: Thu, 7 Mar 1996 06:39:43 -0500 (EST) From: Nicholas Clifford
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On Wed, 6 Mar 1996 Paul Croce wrote:

> . . . I could not find the Darwin to Wallace letter in *Himmelfarb*
> on p. 343. I am using the Norton 1968 printing. Did
> I miss something?

My page reference comes from the 1959 Chatto and Windus edition, and unless Norton has changed chapters as well as pages, it is footnote #9 in Chapter xix, "Darwinism, Politics, and Society."

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