

Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Human Genome Editing

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What is Social Darwinism:

One of many definitions


A theory arising in the late nineteenth century that the laws of evolution, which Charles **Darwin** had observed in nature, also apply to society. **Social Darwinists** argued that **social** progress resulted from conflicts in which the fittest or best adapted individuals, or entire societies, would prevail.

Requires both a misunderstanding of Darwinism and a naked-in-tooth-and-claw attitude



Social Darwinism: Herbert Spenser (1820-1903)

- societies evolve from lower (barbarian) to higher (civilized) forms
- "natural selection": most capable surviving, least capable dying out
- wrong to interfere with this process



9/7/00

SOC 2100 Dr. Arunas Juska

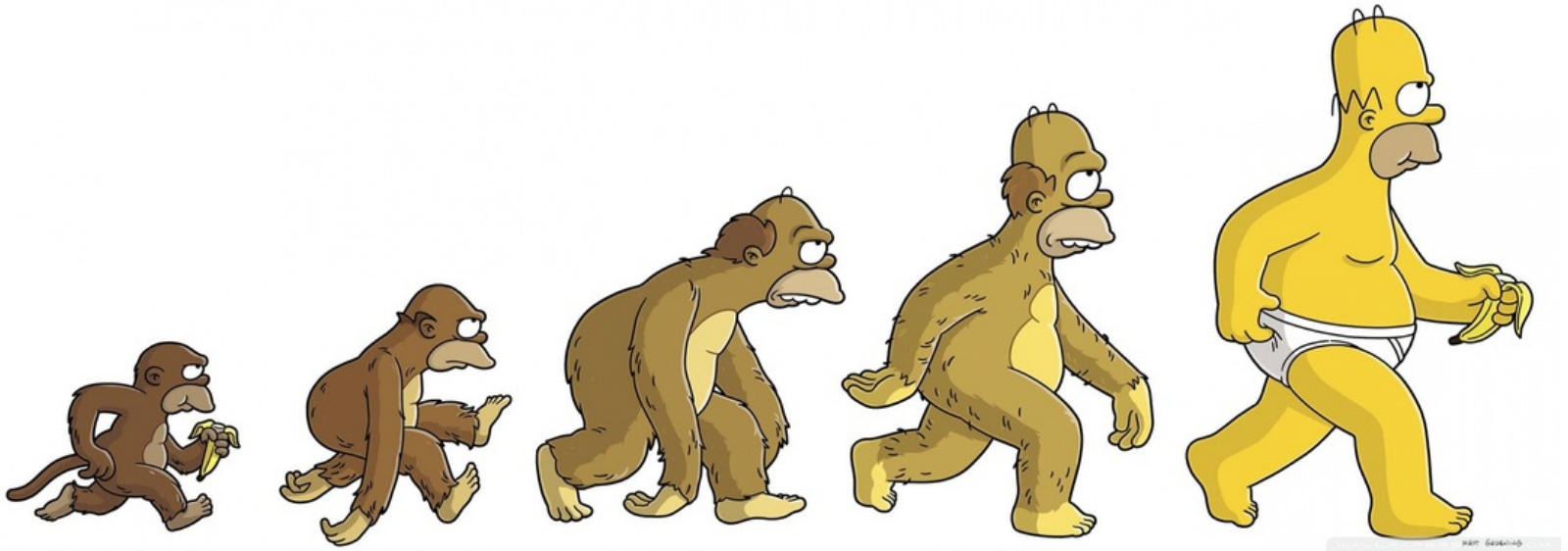
Implications of Social Darwinism

If individuals, groups or societies are less successful, then it is because they are less fit.

Less fit individuals are a lost cause, so don't waste time or resources on assisting them in any way.

Justifies racism, elitism (e.g., aristocracies), sexism and the status quo.

But what is Darwinian evolution?



Natural selection very slowly improves fitness for the current environment. There is no “better or worse” outcome, beyond the current fitness, to evolution.

Social Darwinism is nonsense



The survival and reproductive potential of any individual is based far more on chance than on selection. But chance is random, and selection is directional (for the current environment).

It is one of those hilarious quirks of human behavior that many of the individuals who are most opposed to the theory of human evolution by Darwinian natural selection are also big fans of social Darwinism.

Social Darwinism has been discredited repeatedly, so why is it still a prevailing opinion that justifies racism, sexism and the wealth gap?

Justifies the status quo, thus promoted by the powerful.

Is a secular version of the “if God loves you, then you will be doing better”.

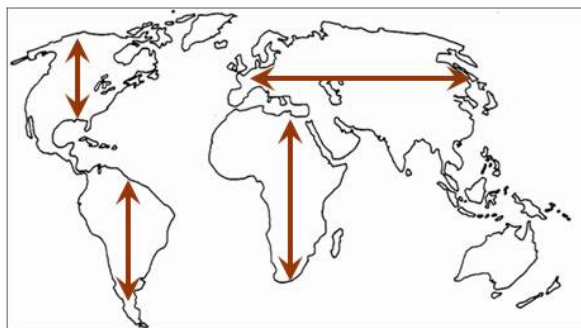
Helps allay any guilt that the ”haves” might have vis-à-vis the “have nots”.

For a contrast see, “Guns, Germs and Steel” by Jared Diamond

Success may be the luck of where you were born

Guns, Germs, Steel: Transmission

- Agriculture and other ideas also spread faster in Euroasia because it's major axis is East-West, along a similar latitude, meaning a similar climate, so crops, animals and ideas could move more easily across Euroasia than through the Americas or Africa where the major axis is North-South.
- Hard to test this idea!



Anthropocentrism, an ancient variant of Social Darwinism, argues that humans are unique in every way, and are the center of all meaning in the universe

Instances of anger at scientists have traditionally come when humans are removed from the center of all meaning.

Galileo and the sun-centric solar system

Darwin, natural selection and human evolution (contrast with Alfred Russell Wallace)

Literal interpretations of holy books and the Big Bang Theory

Animal cognition, animal language and animal rights

Also see: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-ten-most-disturbing-scientific-discoveries-214212/>

Eugenics: The active arm of Social Darwinism

**Eugenics Goals: A “Better” Human and a
“Better” Human Society**

**Eugenics Tools: Decreasing “unwanted”
births (sterilization, imprisonment, execution)
& Increasing “desirable” births**

Eugenics: Has early roots, including Plato, and many ancient societies

Spartans and early Romans, were required to execute any “imperfect” babies

Samnites selected the ten most fit young men and ten most fit young women, and required them to marry

The term Eugenics was coined by one of its most avid proponents, Sir Francis Galton

Francis Galton (1822-1911)

Half-cousin of Charles Darwin

Polymath, expert in many subjects

Explorer (Namibia), >340 Publications

Coined “nature versus nurture”

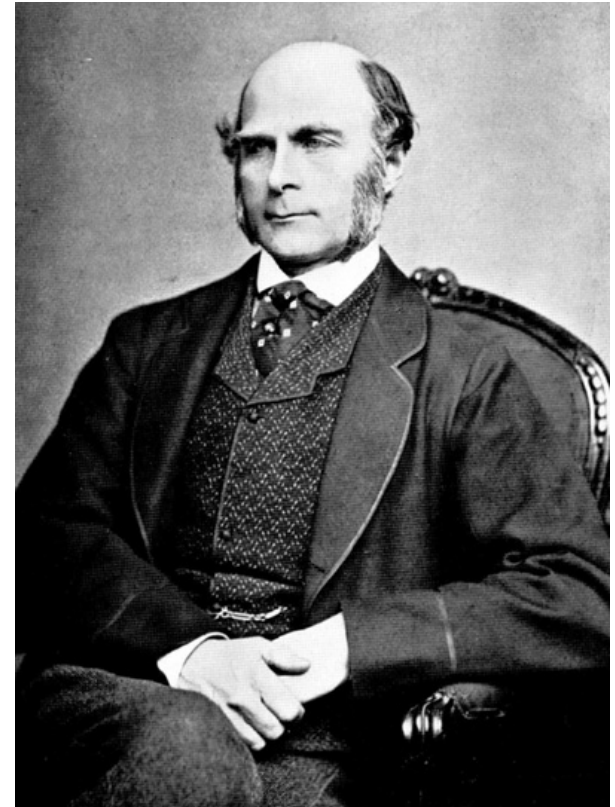
First weather map

First questionnaires

Described “regression toward the mean”

**Founded psychometrics and
differential psychology**

“Africa for the Chinese”



The appropriateness of eugenics was the majority opinion in the Western world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

For example, forced sterilization laws were on the books in 31 US states and DC

Julian Huxley, G.B. Shaw, Teddy Roosevelt, Margaret Sanger, Hellen Keller were proponents

Early opponents were T. H. Morgan and J. B. S. Haldane, as was G. K. Chesterton

Eugenics was the central social project of Hitler and the Nazis

The abominations of the Holocaust largely silenced eugenics after WWII

How does human germline editing different from classic eugenics?

Why is germline editing potentially useful? Are there alternatives?

Who will access this technology?

Will it be regulated and, if so, by who?

If regulated, what would be the regulations and who would decide these regulations?

A central question, can we agree on what would be an improvement?

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