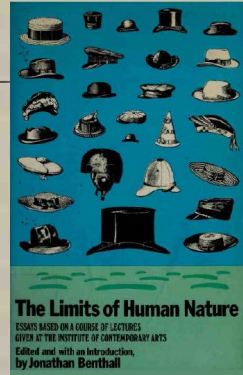


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7 Social Darwinism



in Jonathan Benthall, ed., *The Limits of Human Nature*, 1973

Social Darwinism is the conventional term for a variant of social theory which emerged in the 1870s mainly in Britain and the United States, and which I'm sorry to say has not entirely died out. I shall describe the ideas in question in the context of an analysis of various applications of evolutionary theory to social theory, and of its use in creative literature. And so I shall be describing, first, the Social Darwinism which is conventionally known by that name, and which has been so well studied by Richard Hofstadter in *Social Darwinism in American Thought*; and then looking at some of the other variations.

In a sense, you can provide a very adequate analysis of Social Darwinism in terms of the errors of emphasis it makes in extending the theory of natural selection to social and political theory. You can say: this is a false extension or a false application of biology. But while that is true, I think it simplifies the matter a little too much, in that the biology itself has from the beginning a strong social component, as Robert Young's contribution to this series expounds in detail. Indeed, my own position is that theories of evolution and natural selection in biology had a social component before there was any question of reapplying them to social and political theory. We have to think of this dialectical movement between the two areas of study as a fact from the beginning. For example, in the case of Darwin himself, we have the impressive note on his reading of Malthus, whom he picked up to read for amusement: it's not the most likely motive for reading Malthus but there we are. He writes:

Being well-prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of plants and

animals, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved and unfavourable ones to be destroyed; the result of this would be the formation of new species.

And Darwin's co-discoverer of natural selection, Wallace, says that Malthus gave him the long-sought clue to the effective agent in the evolution of organic species. This has been disputed: many historians of science have argued that the Malthus clue was a very minor element. But to me it is significant that a theory about the relation between population and resources – an explicit social theory which had great influence on nineteenth-century social thought – was at any rate one of the organizing elements in the emergence of the great generalization about natural selection.

But then one must make clear that Social Darwinism, the popular application of the biological idea to social thought, comes not so much from Darwin as from the whole tradition of evolutionary theory, which is much older than Charles Darwin, which indeed goes back at least to his grandfather, Erasmus, at the end of the eighteenth century, and which, in the first half of the nineteenth century, is already a well-founded system of thought. The explanation of the means of evolution might have to wait on further discoveries, but the idea of evolution was there. It was in many cases built into systems, and – above all for the purpose of understanding Social Darwinism in the narrow sense – it was built into a system by Herbert Spencer. Indeed, it was Spencer, as a social philosopher, who first, in 1864, coined the phrase which was to have such a history in this debate, 'the survival of the fittest'.

Spencer's view of progress – which, he said, was not an accident but a necessity, a visible evolution in human history – carried some consequences which are the real origins of the narrow kind of Social Darwinism. He believed, for example, that there was a principle of social selection operative in human history, and that because this was so it was extremely important that men didn't interfere with it, and in particular that governments didn't interfere with it. He opposed state aid to the poor on the grounds that this would preserve the weaker and less successful members of the race.

Whatever we may now think of the social ethics of this position, it was seen as a logically deducible consequence of the theory of progressive evolution by social selection. The weaker or less able

members of society should not be artificially preserved, because the process of social selection which was creating the most vigorous and self-reliant types was something that ought not to be interfered with: its ultimate achievement would be human happiness of a general kind. So he was specifically against what he called artificial preservation of those least able to take care of themselves: a Spencerian theory which has, I suppose, survived to our own decade in the concept of the lame duck who must stand on his one and a half feet or presumably fall. If you really believe this, if you really believe that there is a system of progressive social selection going on, it can seem wild infamy to interfere with it. And it is the confidence that evolution is leading to this development that forms the ethical or quasi-ethical component of what becomes Social Darwinism. Otherwise it seems the merest random cruelty and rationalization.

The idea of competition as a fundamental social principle is, of course, not new. It was most powerfully prefigured in English thought by Hobbes, who believed that our life is the war of all against all, until some sovereign power intervenes and takes control of what would otherwise be a self-destroying horde. Until the intervention of the power to control men and to prevent them destroying one another, that is the natural condition of man. A critical constituent of the full Social Darwinist theory was the growing nineteenth-century belief that character was in a simple sense determined by environment: the doctrine of Robert Owen, for example, that you could wholly reform the moral character of the entire population in a short period of time by altering their environment. If you put the two things together you still don't have Social Darwinism in its full sense, but you have competition, inherent competition, as a natural state; and the idea of character being influenced by circumstances can very easily modulate into its being selected by favourable circumstances and unfavourably selected by unfavourable circumstances. Add to that the theory of historical progressive development and you have Social Darwinism in its developed form.

Darwin himself did not take a consistent position on any of these applications. In a letter he observes ironically that he has just received 'a squib', printed in a newspaper, showing that 'I have proved might is right and therefore that Napoleon is right and every cheating tradesman is also right' – obviously a reaction

to one of the first and one of the crudest kinds of Social Darwinism. He was against anything which smacked to him of selfish and contentious policies. However, he did from his long early experience of the breeding of domestic creatures, the famous pigeons, take the view that a society was in some peril which didn't in a conscious way select and discard. He did say: 'We civilized men do our utmost to check the process of elimination. This must be highly injurious to the race of man.' In other words, if the weak or the unfavourable variations are, as Spencer would have put it, artificially preserved, the general condition of the race is likely to deteriorate. On the other hand, Darwin was much too humane a man to think in terms which were later to become possible – of the elimination of unfavourable variations, or of social policy in this conscious sense, to which he never fully applied himself.

Almost at once, however, the extensions began to be made: traced back to the social ideas of Spencer, and gaining a lot of support from the general climate of harsh competitive individualism as a social ideology at that stage of industrial capitalism and general industrial development. And we can trace the process, in part in the work of particular thinkers, but as much in the groundswell of a certain kind of public opinion. Look, for example, at Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*, published in 1876. Bagehot was a country banker, editor of the *Economist*, literary essayist, author of *The English Constitution*. In *Physics and Politics* he wrote a work which he subtitled 'Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of Natural Selection and Inheritance to Political Society'. It is one of the first conscious attempts to do just this. And in a sense it comes surprisingly from Bagehot, who was always a moderating man. His famous analysis of the English Constitution was in its way a superb piece of demystification, but of a rather special kind: demystification in order to remystify. He analysed the English Constitution in terms of its theatrical show, which is designed to produce deference in its subjects – he wrote quite sharply about the Widow of Windsor – and the whole panoply of the British State as a means of creating deference in its subjects. He then argued with a quite new tone in Victorian social argument that this was nevertheless necessary to any well-ordered state. In a way, the conclusions of *Physics and Politics*, after what seem some rather bolder speculations, are essentially

similar. He takes from Spencer the idea of the progress of human society by certain well-ordered stages. Primitive or preliminary: the military stage in which human relations are basically those of armed conflict. And then a stage of civilization which he thought he was living in, a stage of order in which conflict is resolved by discussion. He did believe that in human societies there was intrinsic competition: not so much of all against all, individual against individual, but rather an intrinsic competition for the best shape of the society. This or that notion of how the society might be had to engage in competition with all other notions, and in a sense what emerged as the constituting notion of any particular state was the superior notion. This was so, however, precisely in a period of ordered discussion, rather than in a period of military conflict in which a better idea might be destroyed by a physically stronger enemy. Europe, having been the central area of conflict between states founded on different notions, different ideas of the social polity, different ideas of religion, was also the centre of progress. The conflict and the progress were directly correlated.

This is soon overtaken by something which has a more sinister ring, although many of the ideas of the next stage can already be found in Spencer. Sumner in the 1880s offers what becomes, if you read in the period, a very familiar definition: that civilization is the survival of the fittest, that the survival of the unfittest is anti-civilization. Socialism is an absurd notion because it proposes both the development of civilization and the survival of the unfittest, which are manifestly contradictory, he argues. Competition is a law of nature and to interfere with the results of competition is radically to undermine civilization. So let no one pretend to believe in civilization if on some other grounds he argues for intervention. Millionaires, Sumner said, are a product of natural selection. You can see that within twenty years of the formulation of the biological idea of natural selection you have got a quite new phrase – not that earlier phrases had been lacking to rationalize rich men – to describe the internal logic and necessity of the social process.

Not surprisingly, Sumner was almost at once echoed by John D. Rockefeller, who said that the growth of a large business is merely the survival of the fittest and made a rather pretty analogy with a prize rose bloom which has to be debudded of its subsidiary minor blooms before it can come to its perfection. The

processes of industrial monopoly which were occurring at this time could be rationalized as the production either of the most beautiful blooms or of the next stage in the social species.

Of course, this was an ideology: it was consciously in opposition to liberal egalitarian tendencies, to measures of social welfare and reform, and classically to ideas of socialism. Because it was an ideology, not all the implications of this rather stark and powerful theory were always welcome even to some of its exponents. It is very significant that along this line – the line through Spencer to Bagehot, Sumner and others – the main inheritance function which is assumed biologically is still that of Lamarck rather than Darwin: in other words, the physical inheritance of acquired characteristics rather than the kind of variation in adaptation to environment which Darwin relied on. Spencer continued to believe in Lamarck long after Darwin, and the concept of physical inheritance in this sense gave the ideologists of Social Darwinism a particularly fortunate opening for modifying competition of an absolutely open kind when it came to the preservation of family property. After all, if you take their argument quite seriously, the war of all against all should never stop, because to interfere with it would prevent the emergence of the strongest types: so that family property, which means that somebody who may not have strong individual talents which are going to evolve the higher kind of man starts with an advantage, is a kind of interference with competition. But if you have a Lamarckian notion of physical inheritance, then you can rationalize the family and family property as precisely the continuation of what you can now see to be the strongest and best species.

So, too, with the inheritance of capital: nobody could look at the nineteenth century and suppose that it was a society in which one day somebody fired a pistol and said: 'Go on, compete economically, and the strongest will come out at the top of the heap.' Quite evidently, huge fortunes were there at the start of play, and the great majority of the players came to the table bearing nothing but their hands. If there is to be competition in the full ruthless sense, then you must all come to the table with empty hands. So financial inheritance is defended within the ideology because the possession of capital provides a measure of continuity. It is really rather painful to follow the convolutions of men who'd committed themselves to a rhetorically powerful

theory which rationalized competition as a principle of society, dismissing as sentimental all apparently ethical and moral objections to it, and then find them having to turn to defend things which were quite evidently qualifications of the competitive principle as such.

Nevertheless, the survival of the fittest, the struggle for existence – nobody had to invent these as descriptions of nineteenth-century society, it was most people's everyday experience. Millions of men in Britain alone went out each day knowing they had to be stronger or more cunning than their fellows if they were to survive or take anything home to their family. The idea is in a way as popular among the victims of that kind of competitive process as it is among its promoters, because it corresponds very directly to their daily experience of life: whether or not anybody can conceive a better social order, the idea does seem to fit the experience of life as it is ordinarily lived. The popularity of phrases like 'the rat race' to describe our own society is a direct continuation of these earlier descriptions among the victims. And, of course, anyone who has succeeded, whether or not he's had advantages, has been very willing to invoke the principle of 'the survival of the fittest'.

There are two particular applications of this principle which ought to be noted before one goes on to some of the other variants. First is the development of eugenics as a movement. It's a natural consequence of this theory that you should breed only from the most perfectly endowed types. The whole future of man was thought to depend upon this kind of selective physical inheritance. Although there are signs of it throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, it is in the nineties, and especially up to the period of the First World War, which did a little selection of its own, that eugenics gets put forward by a whole range of people otherwise sharing different views. Eugenics as a positive policy is one thing: it amounts to very little more than the argument that every encouragement to breed should be given to the most physically and intellectually favoured. The negative side of eugenics is a more serious matter. There's a direct link back to Malthus and to the thought that the unfit should be prevented from breeding.

Everything depends on the concept of fitness. It is one thing to hear the eugenic argument about the breeding of children from

the physically malformed or those carrying some hereditary disease: it is quite another to hear the eugenic argument against breeding from the disfavoured, the unsuccessful, the socially and economically weak. And yet it gets entangled with this, because very quickly it combines with theories of race, which again don't have a specific origin in the biological argument. Gobineau's argument about the inequality of races had appeared in 1853, well before this phase, but it is readily applicable to race because Darwin had at times used race as a biological term for species, and so the idea of a particular human race – the Anglo-Saxon was a particular favourite – as the vigorous stock, the survivor in the competitive battle, inheriting a certain natural right to mastery, became a very powerful component of the ideology of imperialism. In imperialism, it was perfectly possible to argue, and many did, that the strongest, the best survivors, the Anglo-Saxon race, had a duty to humanity to continue to assert itself, not to limit its competition with weaker peoples out of some false ethical consideration for them or out of some legalistic notion of their rights. If the competitive struggle produces the strongest human types, then clearly the strongest race must in no way be limited.

You get an interesting variant of this in the North American theory that an even more vigorous hybrid of the Anglo-Saxon race happens to have established itself in the United States, and its turn will come. The general idea of the Aryans as a race with these attributes becomes intensely popular, and in a natural fit of self-defence somebody reinvents the Celts. If you follow the logic of the crude argument of strength through competition, then you do arrive at imperialism, you do arrive at racist theories, although there may be different choices as to the most favoured race, according to where you happen to live. You also arrive at the rationalization of war. Von Moltke argued that war is the supreme example in human history of the Darwinian struggle for existence, because here, under the most intense conditions, men are set against one another, and the strongest survive, and it is right that it should be so, because only if the strongest survive can the future of humanity be assured.

Social Darwinism in this sense was not the only product of the application of these theories. It is very interesting to see that Marx in 1860, looking into *The Origin of Species*, wrote to Engels saying: 'Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a basis

in natural science for the class struggle in history.' And immediately you turn it that way round you see that you can provide a total basis for a theory of class struggle on the same analogy. Once again, human history is a struggle – but now between classes rather than races or individuals.

Bagehot was to introduce the idea of a competition between groups rather than individuals: clearly this could be defined as involving classes as well as nations, and the class struggle could be seen as something inherent in the natural history of man, with the survival of the strongest and the highest type as the future of humanity. Marx himself could see in Darwin what he called 'the basis in natural science' for a view he had developed from social and economic evidence: once again, the law of struggle as biologically inevitable was taken as underpinning for a social theory.

One of the results of Spencerian ideas of political development had been the belief that although progress is going to happen by a natural evolutionary mechanism, it can't be hurried. There's nothing you can do about it. In the natural processes of social selection higher types eventually emerge: this is the whole process, but you can't hurry it along. Therefore evolution becomes a way of describing an attitude to social change. If somebody says to you, 'Here is a wicked condition, a case of poverty or corruption or exploitation,' you say: 'Yes, it is very bad, but there is nothing we can do about it. The evolutionary process will eventually take us beyond it and if we interfere now we shall merely prevent that happening.' Then this led to a popular contrast between evolution and revolution, and the half-rhyme helped. You could not bring about change in society by intervention, let alone by violent intervention. 'We believe,' so many thousands of people must then have started to say, 'in evolution, not revolution.' And given the bizarre nature of the application to biology, it is not surprising that when De Vries established the evolution of species from mutations, socialist writers who engaged in the argument against the theorists of social evolution quickly seized on the mutation as the justification precisely for the sharp revolutionary break. 'There you are, you see,' they said: 'nature does not work by the inevitability of gradualism,' which had been the ordinary assumption and which was built into the ideology of the Fabians. 'It works by the sharp mutation which establishes a new ...' And

then you say 'species' or 'order of society' according to which argument you're involved in. The argument between evolution and revolution, which ought to have been a social and political argument because it is really an argument about particular societies and about means of changing them, thus attracted very early a strong biological or pseudo-biological component.

Now let us look at some of the reactions from within the same tradition to some of these applications. Veblen, for example, in 1899, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, said, 'It is quite true that our social system selects certain men,' granting the point that Sumner had made, that millionaires are the product of natural selection: the point is, Veblen argued, does it select the right human traits? May not our social system be selecting altogether the wrong human qualities – for example, shrewd practice, chicanery or low cunning? Granted all your arguments about the mechanism of selection as inevitable, may not the social system be producing precisely the wrong emphases, and giving success and power to the wrong human types? This argument was very much developed around the turn of the century.

Benjamin Kidd in his *Social Evolution* said in 1894: 'We must above all take social action to preserve real competition.' At the moment the mass of men are shut out from effectively competing. They don't have the means to compete in society, they're not educated, they don't have money. He therefore uses a social democratic or liberal kind of argument about extending education, giving opportunity, but its purpose is to promote competition, to make the competitive struggle more active and more general. W. H. Mallock, on the other hand, taking a conservative view in his *Aristocracy and Evolution*, argued against democracy and the extension of education on the grounds – more in line with conventional Social Darwinism – that the one desirable product of the competitive process was the great man, the leader, and the one condition of a leader was that he should have enough power, that he should be instantly obeyed, that he should have the means of control to put his great visions into operation, because if the great man cannot put his visions into operation, dragged back by the mediocrity of the mass, human society will never solve its problems. This theory, with its biological component, became, in the twentieth century, first a theory of élites and then a theory of Fascism.

Meanwhile, however, there had been a response of a rather surprising kind. For Kropotkin, in *Mutual Aid* in 1902, said in effect: 'Yes, let us indeed learn from the order of nature. If we look at nature we find it full of examples of mutual aid. Look at the herds of deer, or of cattle. Look at the ants, look at the bees, look at all the social insects. We will find that everywhere there are examples of mutual aid.' Of course, this was co-operation within species. Most of the competitive theories had been based on struggle *between* species, and then covertly applied to competition within one species – man. Kropotkin reversed this: the order of nature, he argued, teaches us mutual aid, collectivism, a quite different sort of social order.

Thomas Huxley made a point of some importance in his *Evolution and Ethics* in 1893. He said: 'The whole confusion has arisen from identifying fittest with best.' 'Fittest', after all, in the Darwinian sense, although not in the Spencerian sense, had meant those adapted to their environment. If 'fittest' had meant strongest, most powerful, then presumably the dinosaurs would still be here and masters of the earth. 'Fittest' meaning 'adapted to the environment' didn't mean any of the things which it meant in the social analogy – the strongest, the fiercest, the most cunning, the most enduring. It meant that which in its situation was best adapted to survive. If this is so, Huxley argued, we realize that we can derive no ethical principle from a process of largely random survivals. If we look at the real process of the origins and survivals of species, we learn that fitness to environment cannot be based on any central principle and, therefore, that ethics cannot be founded on biological evidence.

Advanced societies, Huxley argued, develop ethical systems whose precise purpose is to modify natural law. Huxley assumes, which I would take leave to doubt, that natural law, the order of nature, is a process of unrestrained struggle, and ethics is then a qualifying mechanism to what, unrestrained, would be a cosmic law. Huxley is as firm as many of the others that there is such a cosmic law, but he proposes social ethics, cultural development, as a way of modifying it. This position has been repeated by his grandson Julian, for example, who would argue that cultural evolution is now the main process, cultural evolution within man.

Meanwhile, this climate of ideas had been pervading imaginative literature in ways that went very deep, but in many different

directions. You can pick it up, for example, in Strindberg, especially in the preface to *Miss Julie*, that remarkably powerful play about a single destructive relationship which he wrote in 1888. Strindberg in the preface describes the servant, Jean, as the rising type, the man who is sexually on the upgrade. Risen from a poor family, he is vigorous, adaptable and will survive in his struggle with Lady Julie, the weak aristocrat belonging to a fixed and therefore rather decadent strain. A powerfully-observed sexual relationship of a direct kind is interpreted in terms derived from the context of the Darwinist or pseudo-Darwinist argument.

I cannot think how many successors there have been to that proposition: the idea of a vigorous, rising working-class male, or a male from a submerged racial group, who enters into a relationship of love and conflict with the representative of a comparatively weak, comparatively declining or fixed social stratum. A resolution which might be seen as destructive, as in the kind of imposed suicide of Julie which is Jean's culmination, can be ethically rationalized as the emergence of the most vigorous stock. The metaphors for such a process are everywhere apparent in subsequent imaginative literature.

There were more direct applications of the idea in, for example, Jack London, a socialist, a man deeply influenced by Spencer and Darwin, with experience of struggle under very primitive conditions and with experience of the jungle that was the late nineteenth-century city. London develops a characteristic imaginative structure in which struggle is a virtue. The survival of the most vigorous type is seen at once in terms of a kind of individual primitivism and also in terms of the rising class, the class which had hitherto been submerged. In some of his work – for example, *White Fang* – it is the emergence of the powerful individual who has competed under wilderness conditions: in *The Iron Heel* it is the emergence of the class that has been long suppressed but is historically due to rise.

H. G. Wells's ideas on the subject derive most directly from Thomas Huxley's, but imaginatively he reaches well beyond them. Think, for example, of *The Time Machine*, which is the imaginative projection of a particular phase of evolution operating at several different levels. It is in one sense a projection of the division between the rich and the labouring poor in the nineteenth-century industrial society. When the time traveller goes far into

the future, he discovers two races of creatures sharing the earth. The race that he first finds is pretty, doll-like, plays games with flowers, has charming manners, has a playful but weak kind of life in the sunshine, like children. Unnoticed at first, but eventually emerging from below the ground, there appears the other race, the Morlocks, who are dark and bestial.

You can see in all this the evolutionary projection of an idle, playful rich and a working population submerged in the darkness and reduced to animal conditions. But the whole situation is imaginatively reversed because the Morlocks keep the Eloi as food: the pretty playmates on the surface of the earth are not the dominant race, the Morlocks are waiting their time, in evolutionary terms, to come back to the surface again, and meanwhile they feed on the playful ones as cattle.

The idea of the struggle for existence, projected from deep social stratifications, resulting in a branching of the race of man into these two extremes, is one of Wells's most powerful ideas, unforgettably expressed, with the kind of horror with which so many of these ideas of the inevitable struggle for existence were imaginatively received. Wells uses everywhere in his imaginative fiction (and a whole tradition of Science Fiction and scientific romance has followed him) the idea of evolution into new physical types of man, the idea of differently evolving intelligent species on other planets and the idea of competition between them.

When alternative races meet they make war: this idea is deeply established in Science Fiction. *The War of the Worlds* and the whole vast tradition of intergalactic war that we've had ever since in books and magazines represent to some degree a reaction to twentieth-century experience of war. But the tradition begins before the epoch of major wars, and represents also a reaction to the idea of the fundamental struggle for existence: if one species meets another, it will inevitably compete with it and try to destroy it. The extraordinary physical beings that we have been regaled with in Science Fiction are the product of this idea of evolution playing on situations of great tension, great fear.

Utopias have been quite differently projected. Instead of the static Utopias of pre-nineteenth-century writing, when men would find an ideal condition, an island or some point in the future, where their social problems would have been solved, Utopias now, as Wells observed, must be dynamic: they will not stand still.

That is what we learn from Darwin, he said: there has to be progression through higher stages. Moreover, they are fraught with great threat: there is inherent danger and conflict in them. Wells's Utopias characteristically are arrived at only after a period of destructive conflict.

A few other writers may be mentioned. Shaw, I'm afraid, takes a version of creative evolution which is, one might say, more naïve even than Spencer's. The evolution of the final ideal type in *Back to Methuselah* one would be happy to read as a caricature of Spencer. But one is afraid, from the preface, that one is asked to take seriously the emergence of those He-Ancients and She-Ancients (and I think it isn't only the pronouns which remind one of goats) who have pressed on to human perfection, which is, guess what, the goal of redemption from the flesh: pure intelligence has emancipated itself from the body. This is the sort of thing that Wells imagined in his extraordinary race of Selenites on the Moon, with the enormous brain case and the tiny legs: but with Shaw it really was a kind of evolutionary idea that man should get rid of this flesh stuff.

In Ibsen and Hardy there is a very interesting preoccupation with heredity, directly influenced by Darwin and the evolutionary debate, but in each case the critical imaginative difference is this: survival is not seen as a criterion of value. Ibsen and Hardy were perfectly prepared to accept that there is intense struggle and competition, that people do get defeated, often the most aspiring being the most deeply defeated. Nearly all Ibsen's heroes aspire, climb (spiritually in most cases) and are defeated in the very act of climbing, overwhelmed because they aspire.

In Hardy it is very often the aspiring or the exceptionally pure character, the Jude the Obscure or Tess, who is the most absolutely destroyed. You cannot read Ibsen or read Hardy without realizing that survival is not the criterion of value: struggle is the criterion of value – but struggle in a rather different sense from the rationalized struggle of the simple Social Darwinists. It is man's constant self-urging towards the light, towards a different, higher kind of human life, which is repeatedly imagined in Hardy and in Ibsen: the attempt is defeated, but the manner of the defeat is such that what is confirmed is the impulse to the light, with a very sober, very sombre look at the possibility or probability that the darkness will win. It is not a teaching of darkness,

nor is it any kind of rationalization of the results of crude struggle.

The final example I can give – and it is a surprising one in this context because he used to say he didn't believe in evolution and didn't believe in science much at all – is D. H. Lawrence. Like Strindberg, he uses the idea of the vital rising type and a rather decadent or fixed or imprisoned alternative social type: generally the vigorous rising man and the sexually imprisoned, socially imprisoned or socially declining woman.

He makes of the encounter a cosmic process: it is precisely the cosmic character of the Lawrence sexual relationships of this kind that gives them their place in this tradition, for these are not simple personal relationships: they have something to do with the future of the race, and the physically rising vigorous type is strongly emphasized. But beyond that, at the end of *Women in Love*, having reached a kind of deadlock in human relationships, having seen the failure of one cold, willed relationship between Gerald and Gudrun, having recognized that the relative warmth and friendliness of the relationship between Birkin and Ursula had its limits, that it was more decent but not necessarily complete, Lawrence suddenly in a very surprising version repeats the imaginative conclusion of so much of this tradition, that perhaps we shall have to evolve beyond being human: the merely human is the merely disappointing. He puts it in direct evolutionary terms: just as the horse, he writes, has taken the place of the mastodon, so the eternal creative mystery would dispose of man:

Races came and went, species passed away, but ever new species arose, more lovely, or equally lovely, always surpassing wonder. The fountain-head was incorruptible and unsearchable. It had no limits. It could bring forth miracles, create utterly new races and new species in its own hour, new forms of consciousness, new forms of body, new units of being.

It is a positive transforming idea that the creative mystery could evolve beyond man, if man in his present condition failed to attain an adequate consciousness. It is in that sense at the very opposite pole from the pessimistic rationalizations of struggle. But all these matters, issues of societies, of social, economic and political relationships, issues of human relationships between individuals, have been affected, both fundamentally and at the

level of their persuasive content, by ideas of what is held to be a scientific process – which, as we have seen, can be applied in many different directions according to the main bearing of the argument or the work.

One does come back (or I at least come back, particularly remembering the social component in the biological theories themselves) to saying that man cannot derive lessons and laws from the processes of what he sees as a separated nature, lessons and laws supposed to be conditions of himself, conditions to which he must in some way conform. This whole perspective of a man learning from a separately observed nature is deeply false. The correlative is that in the end it is best if we discuss the problems of social and human relationships in directly social and personal terms.