

## **Darwinism: Implications on Moral and Social Aspects of Human Life**

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### **Abstract**

*Is Darwin's theory aptly reflect the evolution of moral, social, and spiritual values of the humans? This research tries to explain that human evolution is a dynamic phenomenon and Darwin's theory lacks inclusiveness to consider religion and morality as a part of evolution process. Qualitative and descriptive techniques are applied to assess work of various social scientists and find answer to the above stated question. The Western minds that were occupied by Marxism, Malthusianism, and Machiavellianism, received a trigger through 'phenomenon of societal evolution' that was based on Darwin's prepositions. Greatly influenced by Henslow, Sedgwick, Malthus, Spencer; Darwinian doctrine of 'natural selection', 'struggle for existence' or 'survival of fittest', laid down the foundation stone for the Origin of Species. Darwin applied the formula of 'artificial selection' on 'natural selection'. The application was a significant step towards scientific research but due to its limited scope, the theory failed to figure out the evolution in social, moral, and spiritual values. The human's ability to run the affairs of the society and the evolution of its actions to survive is not mere an unplanned incident. Conclusion at the end sums-up that the scientific enquiry of human development is incomplete without considering divine spark that initiated the process – the Creator, and the evolution of the social, moral, and spiritual values. The future researchers need to draw parallels between the social and scientific evolution together.*

**Key Words:** social & moral evolution; darwin's theory implications; artificial & natural selection; survival of the fittest; origin of species

### **Introduction**

1809 witnessed the birth of two extra-ordinary personalities, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882). Each was destined to gain pre-eminence in his career. Among all born in the 19th century, none, apart from Karl Marx, did as much as Darwin. With his theory of evolution, he introduced new dimensions of 'thought process' and tried to challenge the conventional way and thus provided a new window for future research (Downs, 1956). 'Darwinism' is a concept as firmly fixed in the Western mind as Marxism, Malthusianism, and Machiavellianism (Nadawi, 1976).

Charles Darwin was the son of Robert Darwin. Robert would use to practice medicine near London. His family tree was directly linked with

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Erasmus Darwin, physician, and Josiah Wedgwood. Therefore, Darwin was socially connected with people from the upper-middle class, having an advantage over other professionals to groom, explore and experiment far and wide (Hasan, 1999). Two events directly influenced Darwin's thoughts, (a) firm friendship with Henslow, professor of botany and Sedgwick, professor of geology and (b) Studying of Malthus' Essay on Population. Darwin received an offer through Professor Sedgwick to sail as naturalist on the naval ship Beagle, starting out on an extensive surveying expedition in the Southern hemisphere.

Later years, Darwin rated this voyage 'by far the most important event in my life' (History, n.d.). His journey from 1831 to 1836 of various continents and major islands enabled him to write his famous book, Origin of Species. In the beginning, he was unable to explain the appearance and disappearance of species. The key to the mystery came through a chance reading of Malthus' Essay on Population. Malthus had shown that humankind's rate of increase was retarded by such 'positive checks' as disease, accidents, war, and famine. According to Darwin similar factors might keep down the population of animals and plants. Thus, was born Darwinian doctrine of 'natural selection', 'struggle for existence' or 'survival of fittest', the foundation stone for the Origin of Species.

Darwin applied the formula of 'artificial selection' on 'natural selection'. Among all forms of life, Darwin observed, an enormous number of individuals must perish. Only a fraction of those can survive. Some species furnish food for other species. The battle goes on ceaselessly, and the fierce competition eliminates animals and plants unfitted to survive. Variations in species take place to meet the conditions necessary for survival. Principle of natural selection is that some individuals in a species will be stronger than the rest. These will survive and reproduce, and the weaker members will perish (Downs, 1956). The Origin of Species set the foundation for literature having similar views and ideas as of Darwin in the West<sup>2</sup>. The literature that followed Darwin established the fact that how important his prepositions were to set the tone of theories of evolution in the West (Ziadat, 1986).

Darwin's theory was not limited in scope. In fact, it was this theory that paved way to add inquiry mode to the modern-day research. Research performed by scientists; Herbert Spencer, Ernst Haeckel, and Henry Bergson, is deeply rooted to the techniques implied by Darwin. Based on similar mode of inquiry, Spencer was able to figure out various phenomena of the Cosmos. The West considers it as a great value addition to the scientific research and development (Ziadat, 1986). Although Darwin's proposition was not enough to provide a detailed description of

the process of evolution, but it created interest in scientists to explore many other scientific dimensions. Darwinism has been studied with limited scope of ‘evolution by natural selection’<sup>3</sup>. However, humans have evolved even without natural intervention. This fact rejected the proposed ideas of Lamarck’s<sup>4</sup> who emphasized on inherited characteristics acquired from ancestors. Regarding the broader scope of Darwin’s propositions, some theorists termed it as ‘Social Darwinism’.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Darwin proposed the ‘Theory of Natural Selection’. According to this theory those groups of animals and plants who were stronger survived and those who are weak died down with the passage of time. Similarly, stronger cultures survived, grew in influence and dominated the weaker culture. The later diminished gradually after losing popularity. This theory gained fame in the West in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> Process that result in the adaptation of an organism to its environment by means of selectively reproducing changes in its genotype, or genetic constitution.

<sup>4</sup> Lamarck (1744-1829), pioneer French biologist who is best known for his idea that acquired traits are inheritable, an idea known as Lamarckism, which is controverted by Darwinian theory.

Therefore, Darwinism needs to be studied with larger frame of reference and the way it has influenced research of several other fields (Ziadat, 1986).

It was not for the first time that the modern-day researchers took interest in the ideas and theories related to evolution<sup>5</sup>. Proposition presented by two groups of theorists gained more fame as compared to others. One group believed that the process of evolution took place in living organisms only. The other group claimed that each force and matter that exist in the universe evolved with the passage of time. However, the ‘Creator’ of these forces was not investigated. On the other hand, those who limited evolution to living organism did not explain the process in detail. It also failed to provide the impact of religious forces in the evolution process. It is significant for the researchers to focus both on the creation of the universe and the ‘Regulator’ or ‘Creator’ who is running its affairs and governed this process of evolution. Before Darwin, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) laid the foundation of debate on evolution in the West. Spencer compiled his work and defined evolution as ‘an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter passes from an incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation (Ziadat, 1986)’.

According to Spencer, evolution is the transformation of simple matter into complex one. During this transformation, the living beings adjust itself to the natural outside environment. Spencer tried to bridge the

principles of ‘survival of the fittest’ and a ‘laissez- faire’ social system. Theorists and philosophers raised objections over this bridged approach of Spencer.

### **Methodology**

This is a descriptive research, where discourse based on Darwinism has been analyzed qualitatively to find the moral and social implications of the theory from a social scientist’s perspective.

### *Objective of the Study*

The main aim of this research is to highlight the social and moral gaps in Darwin’s theory of evolution. Due to limited scope, Darwinism failed to explain the moral and social evolution of human. Here, it has been tried to support the preceding point of view by analyzing discourse of various social scientists through different ages.

### *Implications*

During the mid-18th century, the Europeans were faced with the stress of depression and the bad influence of Industrial Capitalism. Therefore, the ‘religious thought’ failed to carve-in and create an impression in life of a common man who was concerned about fulfilling needs of survival. In 1859, Charles Darwin published the Origin of Species, and presented his theories of ‘natural selection’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. Consequently, these theories were appealing to the already struggling population. People attracted towards it hoped to find a remedy for their social wounds. However, Darwin theories failed to address the issues of contemporary politics and economics (Maudoodi, 1998).

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<sup>5</sup> See in detail views of K.A. Rashid, Re-Evaluation of Islamic Thought (Lahore: 1975), pp.15-32 and Muhammad Hamidullah, The Emergence of Islam (Islamabad: 1993), pp.143-44.

Theorists who enamored the social aspect of Darwin’s theory confined to the fact that the human’s struggle and evolution is mere ‘survival of the fittest’, a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Walter Bagehot (1826-1877) and William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) re-enacted the same and termed it as ‘survival of the best competitors’ in a population of many. Societies act like living beings, and those who have the potential to struggle and can fight the societal harms will evolve and edge past those who fail to do so. The conclusion drawn by these theorists supported the propositions of laissez-faire<sup>6</sup> capitalism and political conservatism<sup>7</sup>. Nature has classified individuals based on factors, such as, temperature, landscape, access to water, environment etc. Variances in these factors

give birth to natural inequalities. However, if manmade interventions; either governed by the state or not, were introduced, it will disturb the natural balance. Therefore, the poor should be discouraged to avail any incentive for development which could possibly bring them close to a superior group in order to keep the balance in classification as determined by nature. Wealth was therefore sign of success to determine a superior society from the inferior (Ahmad, 1986). Imperialist, colonialist, and racist politicians used the proposition of the Darwin to promote their own stakes. For similar reasons, Anglo-Saxon<sup>8</sup> or Aryan<sup>9</sup> adopted Darwin's classification to promote their belief of division of society based on 'classes' and 'culture'. They termed one group of people as superior to other as determined by nature itself.

During 1870, some writers tried to explain the outcome of the battle fought between Germany and France based on biological composition of the fighters involved in the war. According to them, German fighters were full of energy and this natural ability helped them overcome the French who lost their energy early and exhausted. This resulted in defeat at the hands of Germans. Pan Slavic believed that Russians are born leaders and their youth is full of vigor. Pan's idea was supported by Joseph Chamberlain's (1836-1914) and termed Nordics as naturally superior. He proposed that an Anglo-American-German alliance should run affairs of the world in 20th century.

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<sup>6</sup> From French "allow to do", policy based on a minimum of governmental interference in the economic affairs of individuals and society. The origin of the term is uncertain, but it is usually associated with the economists known as Physiocrats, who flourished in France from about 1756 to 1778. The policy of laissez-faire received strong support in classical economics as it developed in Great Britain under the influence of Adam Smith.

<sup>7</sup> Political philosophy that emphasizes conserving as much as possible of the present economic, social, and political order. It was not until the late 18th century that conservatism began to develop as a political attitude and movement reacting against the French Revolution of 1789. The generally acknowledged originator of modern, articulated conservatism (although he never employed the term) was the British parliamentarian and political writer Edmund Burke in his essay *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

<sup>8</sup> Any member of the Germanic peoples that inhabited and ruled England from the 5th century AD to the time of the Norman Conquest (1066).

<sup>9</sup> From Sanskrit *arya*, "noble", a people who, in prehistoric times, settled in Iran and northern India. From their language, also called Aryan, the Indo-European languages of South Asia are descended. In the 19th century the term was used as a synonym for "Indo-European" and also, more restrictively, to refer to the Indo-Iranian languages. It is now used in linguistics only in the sense of the term Indo-Aryan languages.

Vulgar took support of 'scientific' evidence. He presumed that a larger size of brain could be developed if we combine racially different people of dominant characters. For instance, Asians, Africans, and Europeans could result in a race with large-sized brain that could run the political

machinery effectively. The rhetoric based on superiority and racism gained popularity in various circles. Kaiser referred to Asia's growing population as 'the yellow peril'. According to him the racial difference will spike to an extent that 'Teutons' and slaves will fight for survival. Poets imagined this situation as a nature's selection of the 'stronger'. Those who are weak will die down gradually, and the nature will provide a passage to the stronger societies to survive. This process will continue, and improved humans will rule the world and weaker ones will perish. This notion was popular amongst the theorist and philosophers till the end of 19th century. However, from 1914 onward, once the concepts of free trade and treating the globe as 'one nation' were introduced, the old narrative lost its glory. It is hard for the historians to calculate the negative and fatal impact of Darwinism that was misused by liberal forces to control democracies and willfully oppose the global peace and unity process (Britanica).

It is unwise to remain static, progress in a single direction, and specialize in a particular field by keeping all environmental factors constant. Some writers tried to draw similarity between societal growth and the way human grows passing through different stages of development. Just like living organisms, 'Best custom' of marriage ceremonies of different regions survived and evolved. The custom, which looks strange today, was once useful according to the environment of that time. Therefore, the families of the bride and the bridegroom carried it forward despite ages since the custom was adopted first (Britanica).

The same is the case of nudism (naturism), the practice of going without clothes. Nudism is a social practice in the West in which the sexes interact freely. The origin of the practice in Germany in the early 20th century coincided with a rebellion against the rigid moral attitudes of the late 19th century. Nudism is the direct outcome of Darwinism. It spread through Europe after World War I and established in North America during the 1930s, in the United States and Canada. Public nudity of varying degrees and pornography in extreme sense has become increasingly common in the later part of the 20th century (Siddiqui, 1976).

#### *Implications on Sociology*

19th century saw revolutions; particularly the scientific philosophies evolved and gave birth to multiple disciplines. Each discipline further encapsulated various specializations. Thus, the in-depth research increased the complexities of philosophies. One major reason of this breakthrough was the removal of religious barriers, which was considered as barrier to perform in-depth research, including research on the existence

of God. Some of the philosophers tried to trace-out the boundaries of God and His powers; however, considering the limited outreach of human mind, they failed to encompass His glory due to limited knowledge<sup>10</sup>. Herder had stated, 'It is necessary to read the Bible in a human manner, for it is a book written by men for men' (Hayes, 1927). The narrative over the existence of God remained unnoticed until the end of 19th century.

German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), rationalized that God breathed his last once He constituted the world. He further elaborated that every human has an element of God that exist inside his soul; however, it is decision of that particular human to wake Him up or not. Similarly, the moral values of a human being are defined by the condition in which the God exist within the biological structure i.e., recessive, or dominant mode. God's willingness and control over human actions gives birth to a significant phenomenon called 'reasoning'. This very phenomenon kept the human superior to other animals having similar instincts, such as, to see, to hear, to touch, to smell, and to feel. The evolution process was studied as a static phenomenon, which failed to address the incremental process of development after birth. Despite biological resemblance, 'the element of reasoning' was identified as a distinguishing feature that differentiates an animal from human. The physical development and the development of quality of 'reasoning' were not studied parallel to each other. Thus, despite human's reproduction capability, when philosophers, such as Buffon, further researched the evolution process, they retained the concept of evolution as a 'static' phenomenon. Therefore, these philosophers failed to study 'dynamic' nature of evolution of human body; both physically and mentally. Fossils revealed the changes in cell-biology and in forms. Concepts of mutation, transformation and evolution were added to the field of science. However, to assume that these concepts were coined for the first time is wrong. Darwin already laid down the foundation of these concepts in 18th Century during his findings (Himmelfarb, 1959).

Industrial Revolution played significant role in defining the human development process and its relationship with animals. Philosopher's reaction to evolution can be divided into three broad categories;

1. Capitalist view
2. Romantics view
3. Cartesian view

Those who belonged to the first category believed that the industrial revolution provided an opportunity to the humans to push their civilization terming it 'advancement of civilization'. The humans were able to advance mentally to define boundaries between themselves and animals.

‘Reasoning’ established superiority of humans in the process of evolution. With strong foundation of reasoning, John Stuart Mill’s (1806-1873) philosophy was based on the principles of morality and utilitarianism. It had resemblance with the views of Hume and Bentham who proposed that action should be oriented in a way that it gives happiness and satisfaction to the human soul.

However, in order to achieve this, it is important that the provided material environment to the humans may enable them to act ethically. High ethics helps in establishment of ‘social values’ of the society.

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<sup>10</sup> During 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, European intellectual movement gained popularity. Different ideas were presented, and it was tried to explore the links that exist between God, reason, nature, and man. During the investigation of these links, revolutionary developments and contribution was made to the fields of art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and the celebration of reason, the power by which man understands the universe and improves his own condition. The goals of rational man were knowledge, freedom, and happiness.

Therefore, individual actions accumulate to bring positive or negative changes to the entire society.

Romantics, such as, Karl Marx, Goethe and Schiller rejected the idea of designing the outside material environment in favour of humans to support them to evolve as ethically responsible beings. They focused on actions of the individuals. The mechanistic approach of industrialization and the advancement of technology are taking away the basic right of the humans to remain attached to its natural environment. According to these philosophers, the environment which shapes the human behavior and social values exists ‘within’ the biological structure. The industrialization treats humans as objects and questions the existence of humans as ‘social animals.’ According to Marx, the capitalist system would die down gradually as soon as human evolve and accept the objective existence of the God. Thus, these are only humans who have the ability to think rationally and filter different options before making a final decision regarding acceptance or rejection of a norm – good or bad.

The Cartesian’s view was based on ‘thought process’. Ideas and its sequence form the basis of communication process. This process determines future actions of the humans. The communication if was made in a manner that it failed to pass on the idea which the mind develops, will not come up with desired action. For instance, the animals make sounds, but they are not arranged in a particular pattern; therefore, it lacks the ability to be interpreted in meaningful way to initiate action. This gives rise to the linguistic ability of the humans to present their ideas in a



meaningful manner. However, still the human's communication process is limited in scope. It is capable of deriving little meaning of what the other human perceives and utters – through tongue or gestures; however, it lacks the ability to interpret the mind of the fellow being entirely. Thus 'thought process' is a significant factor of superiority of humans with respect to evolution, but it still has limitations (Rosenberg, 2000).

*Darwinism in Action*

The journey of the Western civilization from the Dark ages up to the enlightenment is not more than 500 years. The enlightenment or the vice versa of any civilization is the direct outcome of its principles, belief system, moral values, and social institutions. The sum of these elements is called civilization. Amongst people, some are influenced from these elements while others influence these elements. The later are those people who design the structure of a specific civilization. Modern civilization is composed of five inalienable elements: philosophy of materialism, atheism, popular sovereignty, nationalism, and free sex. The concept of social evolution in decaying pious sentiments and moral values of the society is more significant than the role of these components.

The genesis of this philosophy is found in materialism, while utilitarianism provided sustenance and the thrust of conquest of time and space provided public popularity to it. The result was that oppression, bloodshed, and suppression of weak became high moral values. If we critically analyze the personalities behind this philosophy, Hegel, Marx, and Darwin are seen in the front row. Darwin's account of biological evolution gave a further impetus to this way of thinking (Outhlwaite, 1987). The sum of the philosophy of these three philosophers is;

- a. evolution in life is because of insoluble contradictions with itself (F.Engels, 1968),
- b. humanity flourishes because of this irreconcilable antagonism,
- c. 'survival of the fittest' is the only formula for existence in this universe,
- d. the main objective of the life is 'success' gained by any means (Ahmad, 1986).

The main reason of this approach was the separation of religion from state. Writings of Saint- Simon, Auguste Comte, Sigmund Freud, and Emile Durkheim perceived religion as 'childhood of man'. Freud persuaded people to get rid of the guilt feeling, which caused neurosis. Marx visualized man imprisoned in structures, religion included. Giving primacy to means of production, he thought that under the apparent economic relationships, is 'the inner but concealed essential pattern'.

Their peripheral differences aside, their mental landscape was shaped by evolutionary theory, though they were not the only one who consciously accepted the 'truth' revealed by Darwin's theory of natural selection. There were others as well who zipped their way to the 'truth' and embraced it. For example, Spencer saw in evolution the justification free enterprise capitalism. Nietzsche concluded political absolutism from it. Kropotkin visualized in it the rationale for cooperative anarchism. Moreover, Marx obtained support from it for his dialectical materialism. Thomas Huxley equated evolution with the United Nations' charter. Such were the divergent inferences drawn from a scientific 'truth'. Their personal inference consolidated their own bias towards a certain set of thoughts, but the damage done to social sciences and man's quest for harmony and peace was incalculable (Jan, 1998).

### *Conclusion*

These giants in sociology failed to understand that science can improve man's material conditions but not his moral and spiritual horizons. In addition, the scientific method is not applicable to humans, which is a different kind of a world by any norm. Science deals with cause-effect and spatio-temporal relations.' Science can only describe a phenomenon but discovers no criteria for human action. 'When we treat', says Toulmin, '[a scientist's] tentative and carefully qualified conclusion, as universal certainties, or even we inflate some discovery having a definite bonded scope into the solution of different problems in other fields-ethics, aesthetics, politics, or philosophy; then we are asking of him things he is in no position to give and converting his conceptions into myths (Barbour, 1966).'

Science gave the taste for material comfort to man, but scientism, when applied to man, dissolved his scriptural dignity as a creation with divine spark in him and dished him out as an ape that ascended the scale of evolution to become human. His nobility known through his compassion, courage, and will power melted in the test tube and traced to different constituent chemicals, which through laboratory manipulation can be induced, enhanced, or eliminated. Forgetting in the process the difference between the act, the triggering of chemicals, and the thought behind it, a cumulative process, which is a complex interplay of divergent elements, and is more than its constituents, was reduced to a mere phenomenon. Scientism took the romance out of man and planetary existence. The result is that:

"Mischief has appeared in the land and the Sea in consequence of man's own misdeeds (Malik, 1997)."

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