

DETERMINIST THEORIES AND POLITICS-
THE EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL DARWINISM

by

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I am alone responsible for the writing of this thesis. I am indebted to the writers whose works are cited in the text and listed in the Bibliography, though they of course are not answerable for my conclusions. I would also like to thank my teachers and colleagues at the Universities where I have studied, especially the London School of Economics and the Australian National University, for their guidance and assistance.

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Synopsis.

My thesis is that in modern societies where the degree of mass participation in politics is greater than ever before and where the level of popular education is correspondingly higher, determinist theories have acquired considerable importance, both for the publicist and for the social scientist, as one means of justifying public policy. This essay is primarily an examination of the nature and function of one such determinist theory, namely, Social Darwinism, and secondarily an attempt to indicate some of the ways in which that theory was used as a justification of their political proposals by certain European and American writers in the half century after the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. This thesis is set out more fully in the Introduction.

Part I deals with the general features of determinist theory. Chapter I deals with the philosophical characteristics of determinism which distinguish it from other theory, emphasizing especially the "scientism" of determinist theory, its claim to state the inevitable, and its unfalsifiability. Chapter 2 discusses the connexions between the ideas of progress, determinism and evolution. Part I ends with a discussion of the main principles of the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, in whom these three ideas strikingly coalesced to produce an

outstanding system of monistic determinism.

Part II is an attempt to show how Darwin's Origin of Species, by providing a scientific foundation for evolutionary theory in biology, became also the focus for a large body of social theory which claimed scientific respectability by seeking to base social explanations upon the same principles of struggle, selection and survival as Darwin had advanced to explain the development of biological species. Chapter 4 is a short account of the intellectual antecedents, the main principles and the impact of The Origin of Species. (The last of these points is developed a little in Appendix A) Chapter 5 deals with the emergence of Social Darwinism as a general political philosophy, attempting to bring out the distinctive features of this philosophy, of which, as with some other philosophies, there seems to be no definitive contemporary exposition. In Chapter 6, some of the critics are discussed with a view to illustrating the strength of the Social Darwinian movement by showing that many of its opponent themselves shared its preconceptions.

Part III carries forward the theme of Part II. The work of a small number of writers who advanced proposals for public policy, both domestic and foreign, is examined with the aim of showing how Social Darwinian arguments

were used as part of the justification for these proposals. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 are concerned with the relationship between Social Darwinism and, respectively, doctrines of laissez-faire, theories of racial conflict, and arguments for war.

The Conclusion is an attempt to bring together the main contentions of the thesis.

I have had published a number of articles based on this thesis or work related to it. Here is a list of the titles, journals and dates:-

"Determinist Theories in International Relations"

International Relations
October, 1956.

"Social Darwinism"

Australian Journal of
Politics and History,
November, 1957.

"Realism and Foreign Policy"

International Relations,
April, 1959.

Darwin's 'Origin of Species'-
A Centenary

Current Affairs Bulletin,
Sydney, August, 17, 1959

"Darwin and Social Theory"

Australian Journal of
Politics and History,
November, 1959.

Of these, only one, "Realism and Foreign Policy", constitutes an extension of my argument. It is therefore attached to this thesis as Appendix B.

Introduction

"I doubt whether it is possible to overestimate the influence which ideas have in the long run. And there can be no question that it is our duty to recognize the currents of thought which still operate in public opinion, to examine their significance, and, if necessary, to refute them."- F.A.von Hayek.

"For the men of our day, unlike the Romans, must always have a theory." - Jules Monnerot.

There are three broad stages involved in the formulation of any theory. In the first place comes the statement and elaboration of an hypothesis and some account of the range of occurrences it is put forward to explain. Secondly, there is the testing of the hypothesis, what is sometimes called, although in a doubtful sense, its application. At this stage, it may be found necessary to modify the original hypothesis and to restate it in a somewhat different way. Again, while the original formulation is retained, it may be found necessary to restrict the range of the hypothesis, or, on the other hand, it may be shown that its explanatory power is in fact wider than was at first thought to be the case. The third stage is that in which the hypothesis, provided it has not been modified out of recognition or completely abandoned in the second stage, is shown to be plausible, both in the sense that it has a wide range of useful application,

demonstrated in stage two, and in the sense that it does not cut too violently across the expectations which first prompted its assertion. If these expectations are contradicted, then the hypothesis itself, in order to establish its plausibility, must be able to explain why the expectations were ill-founded.

This is not, of course, a strict account of how all or any theories have actually been put forward. There is no rigid temporal order about the three stages, and no sense in which it can be said that the whole process has been completed, for the testing of an hypothesis goes on indefinitely. Again, the third stage -reconciliation with common sense- is not always necessary or possible. Not always necessary in cases where common sense has no views about the matter and no expectations to be satisfied, either by fulfilment or explanation. Not always possible in cases where the explanatory power is so great and its confirmation under the most searching tests so regular and frequent, that the hypothesis is retained in spite of its contradicting expectations. It may become, in such instances, the very basis of further expectations.

This threefold scheme is not meant rigidly to describe how theorising does or should proceed, but rather to suggest three aspects from which the putting

forward of a theory may be considered. The third stage, in particular, is not always explicit, but it does suggest a way of approaching the question of the acceptability of a theory. Whenever an hypothesis is put forward, there is at least this minimum expectation to be fulfilled or "explained away", namely, the belief that "there must be some explanation of this", and it is in the third stage that an attempt is made to satisfy this desire to find reasons and explanations. The procedure could be put in this way - the question with which the inquiry, in the broadest sense, begins, involves and to some extent conceals an hypothesis which may only be that there is an explanation, or which may be more articulate and may suggest what the explanation is, according to the precision of the question. Then comes the process of testing, firstly, "against" the facts, and secondly, "against" our initial expectations.

The third of these three aspects is especially typical of the social sciences and particularly of political theory. While "practical" demands, the question of how certain things can be done, is, in nearly every case, the stimulus that provokes any sort of inquiry in the first place, there is a distinction between the criteria of acceptability of theories in

the natural sciences and the criteria of acceptability of a political theory. For theories in the natural sciences, testing "against" the facts is the crucial stage, and if these tests are passed successfully, the theory stands (although without claiming infallibility and remaining hypothetical) whatever ^{common} sense has to say. But in political theory, the emphasis is much more heavily on the third aspect than on the second. While plans and policies can be formulated in the light of theory (but not as logical deductions from theory), such policies, which amount to tests of the hypothesis, are as a rule much easier to carry out in the laboratory than in society. Controlled and crucial experiments are much more easily made in the one environment than in the other. In particular, if laboratory experiments falsify the hypothesis, no great harm need be done. On the other hand, hypotheses about the behaviour of men, groups or nations, in society, in the world, or during the course of history, cannot very well be tested under laboratory conditions. The political theorist must rely largely on observation of haphazard "experiments", unarranged and uncontrolled by him; or, at best, on experiments which are deliberately arranged (e.g., economic legislation, military conscription, changes in the suffrage, the

granting of self government, the establishment of a federation, etc.), but which, once initiated, cannot be controlled easily or even at all. That is to say, the political theorist is always faced with the problem of having much less and much less accurate evidence for or against his hypothesis. Furthermore, where he can indulge in at least partly controlled experiments, the consequences of failure, of the hypothesis in terms of which the experiment is carried out being falsified, are likely to be much more harmful than the falsification of, say, a chemical hypothesis in the laboratory. The social and political scientist is confronted with the difficulty that his raw material, human beings or their institutions, traditions and customs, are not lightly expendable. The sort of evidence he requires to test an hypothesis involves the use of precious material, so that while the chances of establishing the hypothesis may be no less than in the natural sciences in a given instance, the risks involved are much greater. A high degree of probability that the hypothesis is true is required before testing can be undertaken, but it is only by testing that such truth can be established. If the experiment fails, the political theorist goes out of business as a practitioner.

This seems to be a fundamental dilemma of political theory generally insofar as it is an element in the determination of policy. The theory must be established as true before it can be trusted to guide policy, and yet it is only such application that can establish its truth. It is this dilemma which makes the third stage of theorizing- reconciliation with common sense and expectations- receive great emphasis in much political theory. If fear of the possible consequences makes experimentation too risky, then the plausibility of the hypothesis must be established not by reporting the number and the rigour of the tests it has survived, but by dwelling upon its conformity with expectations, its assurances against fears and its promise to fulfil hopes.

I should point out now that the question of what constitutes sound theory will be taken up in chapter I, and that the underlying assumption of the last two paragraphs, namely, that the function of theory is mainly prescriptive, will be rejected. But I have spoken about theory in this way because the view that theory is prescriptive, that its job is to provide sound bases for action and policy, that it should guide and justify conduct, is characteristic of the views and sets of belief with which this essay is

concerned. This view of theory has a double appeal- to the policy-makers who can point out that their policies are "theoretically" sound, that they are based on solid scientific grounds; and to those people the proposed policies are likely to affect, who, while they may in general have a somewhat suspicious attitude towards theorizing and may be more concerned with "practice," are nevertheless grateful for some sort of intellectual apparatus, however crude, with which to justify whatever demands of their own the policy promises to satisfy. In short, if it is believed that theory can help to win support for policy, then it is expedient for those who aim to win support to understand theory in this prescriptive sense.

Now there is a good deal of evidence that this sort of thinking is particularly (but not, solely) characteristic of twentieth century politics. Professor Morgenthau has remarked ^I that "there is something unhealthy in the craving for ideological intoxication and in the inability to act and to see merit in action except under the stimulant of grandiose and farfetched

I Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Great Debate", American Political Science Quarterly, December, 1952.

schemes". This observation was made about American foreign policy formulation and was part of a plea for "realism" in foreign policy, to accept the conditions which we find in the world and then to aim "at the achievement of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good". "To improve the world", he says, "we must work with those forces (which are inherent in human nature and which have made the world what it is), not against them", without seeking the inspiration of "grandiose ideas". Morgenthau's position, to which we shall return in the appendix to this essay, is an interesting one because it reflects, on the one hand, the distrust of theory (for which "ideas", with its castles-in-the-air connotation is often a useful polemical substitute) felt by the down-to-earth, practical man, either the reformer or "the man in the street", who is anxious to get on with the job; and because, on the other hand, it bears witness to the spate of "ideas" with which the "realist" has to contend (and, also, to his belief that some at least of the policy-makers are "ideologically intoxicated"). Leaving aside the question of whether the symptoms to which Morgenthau refers are signs of ill-health, which we are not concerned to answer, it could be said that political events in the last century have been accompanied by a

considerable outpouring of ideas- social, economic, political, philosophical theory, "realist" or "Utopian"- in the name of which political policies and actions, both domestic and international, have been advocated, carried out or justified.

The purpose of this essay is to serve as a sort of pilot project for the examination of the influence of these theories on twentieth -century politics by considering the case of Social Darwinism in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is not implied that the influence of theory on politics is peculiar to the last hundred years. Nor that determinist theories are an especially recent development in political thought. But since the eighteenth century especially, many old weapons have been refurbished and many new ones added to the arsenal of determinist theory, and these have been used in our day, along with other weapons of a very untheoretical kind, to defend and advance three of the outstanding political movements of the twentieth century- Fascism, National Socialism and Communism.

What are the practical demands which give rise to the growth of determinist political theory and what are the problems to which such theories are supposed

to provide a solution? Very little political theory of any sort or ^{at} any time in history has been uninfluenced by prevailing demands and movements. A comparatively widespread feeling that "all is not right with the world", is not a monopoly of the present day, although popular writers and speakers of every age- in the pulpit, press and politics- often speak as if the world's sorrows accumulate with the passing of time and as if the burden thrust on their generation is always heavier than that borne by their fathers. Political philosophy, in the broadest sense, sets out to give an account of why things in society, or in a certain country, or in the world, are as they are, how it comes about that power, wealth, prestige, and so on, are distributed in this particular way- in general to find an answer to the feeling that "there must be some explanation of this" and, especially, some explanation of why "we live in troubled times".

But "pure" political philosophy in this sense has scarcely ever existed- indeed, could not exist except, perhaps, in the remotest academic confines. For men have rarely been satisfied with an explanation only. What they have felt is not simply curiosity about the workings of society, or the world, but that something is wrong with it and that something ought to be done

about it. The history of political theory could be summed up in terms of the solutions which the great thinkers have submitted.

All their theories are closely bound up with the political conditions of their place and time. They are responses to different and particular stimuli- the demands of a particular faction, a particular class, group or nation. But there is at least one element of similarity in them all- they all set out to give an explanation of why things are as they are, or, more frequently, how things ought to be and how the desired changes are to be made. The demand for such explanation and prescriptions, like the body of political theory, has steadily increased with the growth of political participation by greater and greater numbers of men. In most cases, there is no strong evidence for doubting the sincerity, the intellectual honesty, of the outstanding political thinkers. They were making serious attempts to analyse, diagnose, and, if they thought it necessary, to prescribe for society, and every one made some contribution, added something, as it were, to the stock of insight into how society works, and helped to throw light on the problem of satisfying the persistent demand for explanation. But, whereas the analyses

frequently differed, the prescriptions nearly always differed and the diagnosis (to continue the medical analogy) was constantly made anew because there was always some one or some group who believed that the cure had not been a success or found that some new ailment had broken out.

Political theorists have always been at pains to present their views on genuine theory and not simply advocacy, and there is not one but would have resented the suggestion that he was suffering from "ideological intoxication". This has been particularly so since the growth of the natural sciences began in the seventeenth century, since when political theorists have, on the whole, endeavoured to become more and more "scientific"- empirical, detached and objective.¹ But it was largely from the practical achievements which came as a result of scientific progress, especially, perhaps, in the nineteenth century, that political theory drew its inspiration and analogy- from the fact that science not only provided explanations but that it also got results. It is significant that Marx, who

¹Hobbes' work would be one of the outstanding examples of this tendency to adopt the scientific method to social and political inquiry.

claimed to be presenting a "scientific" as against a "Utopian" socialism, was also responsible for the observation that "Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it". That belief- or its opposite, that the point is to see that the world does not change - has been the underlying and perhaps unconscious motive of the great bulk of political theory.

The correlation between social demands and political theory has its parallel in the history of the natural sciences, which also developed in response to the desire to satisfy human needs and the realization that, to do so, an attempt must be made to discover the laws of nature. But there is an important distinction here. The natural sciences have more or less continually built up a complementary body of theory, have added to what was already established, and have seldom thrown overboard all the elements of ^{an} outdated explanation of any given set of phenomena. In short, they have generally, though not always, acknowledged the hypothetical nature of theory and have been prepared to modify theory, but not to abandon it or to deny its importance, in the light of experience. At the same time, there is a long record of practical achievement, the successful satisfaction of wants, that has been

made possible by discoveries in science. It could be said that there has been a fairly general overall agreement among natural scientists about the analysis of the phenomena they are concerned to explain and that the application of their discoveries has bestowed increasing benefits (control of natural environment, whether for good or ill) on increasing numbers of people. Political theory, on the other hand, has much less continuity in its development and much more disagreement on what and how social phenomena are to be explained and how the various explanations are to be "applied."

It is this uncertainty that has given such impetus to the formulation and diffusion of determinist theory (and not only determinist theory) in recent times. The practical achievements resulting from the growth of the natural sciences turned attention more and more to the question, although it may not have been raised explicitly, "what is it about science that enables it to produce such wonderful results? What makes scientific theory so reliable in practice?" And the answer seemed to be that science discovered the immutable laws of nature. Surely then (the argument ran) if we can discover the laws of society, then we will be able to apply our knowledge with as much certainty as the scientists can apply theirs.

This search for certainty, for intellectual security with its promise of attendant material security, has an age-old allure, especially for those whom the laws of history, the inherent laws of social development are supposed to favour. Faith in the inscrutable and faith in some sort of "order" however imponderable, have always been preferred to confessed ignorance and the fear that the world is "chaotic". But mystical beliefs like this, blind faith with its religious association, ill becomes, it is thought, a scientific age. What is needed are rational beliefs, scientific faith-beliefs with the compulsion of religion, but beliefs founded on reason rather than on revelation. If the theorists would only provide beliefs of that sort, then the practical men could confidently set out to change the world in the knowledge that their motives and methods were sound and that they had the support of the newly-enlightened masses- or at any rate, enough of their support to get along with. Determinist theory provided this need, for it at once explained the world, established order in it, and prescribed a policy. It combined the attractions of a scientific account, religious insight, and a blueprint for action. It was indeed something worthy of the utmost faith, and that at a time when older faiths were

breaking down. As the political philosophies multiplied and their competition for adherents increased with the competition of men and nations for a stake in the country or a place in the sun, the new religions offered something far more real and immediate than a far-off heaven and a place in eternity- they offered a heaven on earth and a place in history.

My thesis is that such theories as these exert a great fascination over men's minds; that when, and this is usually the case- such theories purport to demonstrate the inevitable triumph over its rivals of one particular nation or race or class, then the attractions of the theory to those whose welfare and success it claims to assure become overwhelming; and that, especially in modern times of general literacy, mass communication and mass political participation, belief in such theories may have important consequences in politics, both domestic and international. I would maintain that the attractions of determinist theory lie chiefly in three things- in its claim to certainty, its claim to know what is inevitably going to happen, even when, as is the case with Social Darwinism, this cannot be specified in advance (since only survival can confirm fitness); in its claim to be scientific, to have reached certainty not through faith but through

rational inquiry; and in its claim—made implicitly, sottovoce— to relieve the individual of the personal responsibility of decision-making, or at any rate to reduce his responsibility to mere acquiescence in the inevitable. That is not to say that determinist theories make no demands on their devotees. Marxism carries with it the injunction to work for the inevitable establishment of the classless society; and those who invoked what I call the reformist version of Social Darwinism as the rationale of programmes to rebuild society or of appeals to advance the cause of race or nation, were no less convinced that their orthodox opponents of the inexorability of social or world evolution in certain specifiable directions in accordance with certain fundamental determinants. But whether the policies read off from determinist theories call for passive acceptance of the inevitable or for active participation in its achievement, they are still policies in which the decisions are ready-made, they are part of an impersonal and inevitable movement with which the individual can identify himself.

If we accept Hayek's view that it is "our duty to recognize the currents of thought which still operate in public opinion, to examine their

significance, and, if necessary, to refute them", then that duty includes the obligation to ask whether determinist theories exercise a special influence over men's thoughts and actions. It seems to me that this is a special obligation upon us because determinism is a particularly insidious kind of theory. Its false allure lies not in its claim to have reached certainty, to relieve men of the responsibility of choice- many religions have claimed and offered those things. Where determinism must be challenged is in its claim to scientific foundations. It must be challenged at this point, I believe, not because the scientific pretensions of determinism are difficult to expose, but because, in the modern world, the very claim to be scientific, however well or ill-founded, is likely to disarm the doubter and to divert criticism. For it is characteristic of determinist theory to make rational its advocacy of certain courses of action by claiming that "science" enjoins them- as if the promotion of certain purposes or interests, namely, those which the determinist doctrine advances, could ever be entailed in rational inquiry and its findings. The advocacy of causes, the promotion of interests, and the peddling of policies are nothing new in politics. The master-

stroke of determinism is to disguise these wanted objectives as inevitable developments by clothing them in the stolen raiment of scientific objectivity, for by such a masquerade reason is made the servant of special interests and men welcome the chance to parade their own aspirations as eternal truths.

I shall try to show in the course of this essay that, in its emphasis on the methods of the natural sciences as also proper to the social sciences, and, more particularly, in its acceptance of what Hayek calls "scientism", Social Darwinism was the prototype of this kind of doctrine. It might sometime be possible to show that it was also the pattern on which twentieth century determinist doctrines - racialism, geopolitics, Communism - were moulded. But that is beyond my present scope.

Part I

The Nature and Style of Determinism

Chapter I

Determinist Theory

Speaking of the relationship between the natural and social sciences at the present time, R.K.Morton points out that "Twentieth, not sixteenth, century physics and chemistry are (usually) taken as methodological proto-types or exemplars for twentieth century sociology... These comparisons are inevitably programmatic rather than realistic".¹ He goes on to suggest that such comparisons, by setting up, as it were, false targets for sociology, might embarrass the sociologist who fails to achieve them, and, worse still, might induce him to try inapplicable methods in the attempt to reach the precision and ability to predict which the natural sciences have largely achieved. The general question here is the extent to which the practical achievements of the natural sciences, their success in enabling man to secure increasing control over his environment, have influenced the way in which social scientists, and especially those who are

¹ Social Theory and Social Structure, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1949, p.85

interested in practical results, have gone about the formulation of social theory. A number of writers in recent years¹ have discussed this question as a methodological problem, the question of what similarities and distinctions there are between the natural and the social scientists' approaches to their subject matter. The concern with scientific method dates at least from the renaissance of science in the seventeenth century. But social theorists have become increasingly devoted to problems of method since the application of the natural scientists' discoveries began to make a spectacular impact on Society from the early nineteenth century. The question is whether or not the methods with which the natural scientists have been successful might prove equally fruitful in the study of man and society.

Now, recent students of methodology in the social sciences have generally answered that any naive attempt to use the methods of the natural scientists are bound to distort the study of society. Hayek, for example, develops a strong attack against this uncritical adaptation of method which he calls "Scientism".

Merton; Felix Kaufmann, Methodology of the Social Sciences, O:U:P., New York 1944; Michael Polanyi, The Logic of Liberty, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951, especially Chap.2; F.A. von Hayek The Counter-Revolution of Science, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1952.

Scientism, he argues, has three faults- objectivism, collectivism and historicism. He believed that social science cannot be objective in the sense in which the natural sciences are because such objectivism does not take into account the special, purposive, meaningful classification of human action, a classification based on criteria quite different from physical characteristics. For example, the description of a spade in purely physical terms would leave out of account what is its most important feature for social science, namely, the fact that it is a tool and can be used for certain purposes. Secondly, Hayek rejects the "methodological Collectivism of scientism", that is, "its tendency to treat 'wholes' [e.g., "the economic system", "capitalism", "imperialism", "society"].... as definitely given objects about which we can discover laws by observing their behaviour as wholes".¹ But these "wholes" are never in fact "objectively given", even to historians with Olympian breadth of vision; on the contrary, they are "without exception constructions of our mind" and can only be understood and explained in terms of the "subjective" or "inside" information which human beings in certain situations have about their fellows in similar situations.

1 op.cit. p. 53, parantheses added.

Thirdly, Hayek maintains that scientism involves a fallacious historicism, namely, the view which represents "history as the empirical study of society from which ultimately generalizations (will) emerge."¹ Hayek's objection here, again, is that you can no more stand outside history than outside society, and that, even if you could, you would be unable to explain historical events for want of the subjective knowledge essential to their understanding. And again, "history", like "society", is not an observable "whole" about which laws may be discovered,

While he would probably not want to maintain that scientism is a fallacy from which all modern social theorists have shaken free, Hayek wants particularly to argue that scientism characterized the positivist movement of the nineteenth century. He lays special blame at the door of the Polytechnicians, Saint-Simon and Comte, and goes on to say that "From Hegel and Comte, and particularly Marx, down to Sombart and Spengler these spurious theories came to ^{be} regarded as representative results of social science: and through the belief that one kind of "system" must as a matter historical necessity be superseded by a new and

1 ibid, p. 65

different "system", they have even exercised a profound influence on social evolution. This they achieved mainly because they looked like the kind of laws which the natural sciences produced; and in an age when these sciences set the standard by which all intellectual effort was measured, the claim of these theories of history to be able to predict future developments was regarded as evidence of their pre-eminently scientific character.¹

Now, without committing oneself to uncritical acceptance of all Hayek's points,² one can accept his demonstration of the extent to which "scientism" penetrated much nineteenth century sociology. In addition, for an understanding of the development of determinist social theory, especially Darwinism, in this period, it is important to bear in mind that what Herbert Dingle³ calls "the scientific outlook" of the mid-nineteenth century differed in important respects from that of the present time. The astonishing confidence of much nineteenth century social theory, its supreme and allegedly rational faith in progress, and its unshakeable

1 ibid p. 74

2 E.g., I would argue that the error of "wholism" is as much that of regarding "society", "the economy", or "history" as somehow essentially harmonious and unitary, as of regarding them as "objectively given".

3 "The Scientific Outlook", British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, August, 1951.

certainty that it had discovered certainty, were, like its methods of inquiry, things that were also borrowed from the natural sciences.

This becomes clear from Dingle's account of the change in outlook which has occurred in the last hundred years with regard to the nature of scientific theory and what scientists take their task to be. "The scientific quest then (in 1851) may be summed up as the search for the universal, inviolable, ^{causal} ~~casual~~ laws that governed the course of events in the real external world. The general character of the laws was known; they were descriptions of the operations of forces- or, in general, agencies- on a world of inert, ponderable matter. The matter could be observed; the agencies had to be inferred from the observations." The modern view, Dingle argues, is quite different: "we can no longer say, The world is like this, or The world is like that. We can only say, Our experience up to the present is best represented by a world of this character; I do not know what model will best represent the world of tomorrow, but I do know that it will co-ordinate a greater range of experience than that of today." Dingle maintains that one of the crucial assumptions underlying the nineteenth century philosophy of science was that it was possible, by a process of induction

from observations, to reach universal laws of nature. "A great part of the work had already been done by Newton. His successors had added to his laws of mechanics laws of heat, of light, of sound, of magnetism and electricity, and all these had either been reduced, or were believed to be reducible, to the fundamental mechanical laws". The vision of the Victorian scientist was to "see the whole round world in every way bound by causal chains about the feet of Newton".

This metaphor clearly brings out the idea of laws as binding, as controlling rather than explaining events; and it could be mentioned in a preliminary way here that it was this legalistic notion of law that had much to do with the stimulation that natural sciences gave to the appearances of determinist social and historical theory in the nineteenth century.¹ An especially striking feature of the natural sciences has been the discovery of laws of nature, which, in some sense or other, have been held to "govern" the behaviour of things in the physical world, and it has been a mark of progress in science that the number of these laws ~~has~~

1 On the influence of science on nineteenth century sociology, see especially Isaiah Berlin, Historical Inevitability, O.U.P., London, 1954, pp. 18-19 etc.

has been reduced while the range of phenomena for which they can account has been increased. Similarly, in the work of certain social scientists of the nineteenth century (and many of the twentieth) there has been an endeavour to find laws of society, or the law, which not only account for social phenomena but which also determine them.

It is this irrefragibility that is most characteristic of determinist theories of the physical world and of history and society. As Dingle has shown, the inadequacy of this method of theorizing was soon apparent to the natural scientists. They encountered "recalcitrant" phenomena which brought out the contrast (which soon became a conflict) between what was taken to be scientific method and what was in fact scientific practice. The crisis was reached in the theory of heat, where the molecules, the underlying "substantiality", which the prevailing philosophy of science assumed to exist, were found not always to obey the laws of motion. The molecular theory was finally overthrown by Einstein's special theory of relativity in 1905, and the physicists at any rate learnt to content themselves with working hypotheses, and later with models, rather than continue to search for any final and universal solutions.

But two points must be noted here in connexion with the influence of the natural sciences upon the thinking and methods of the social theorists. In the first place, the physical scientists did not change their methods overnight, and more particularly, the important discoveries which led to the change did not begin to be made till the late 1860's.¹ This date is important, because the attempts at universalization had already been made; in the case of Social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer had already planned his Synthetic Philosophy and The Origin of Species had already appeared. In short, the determinist thinking characteristic of Social Darwinism was able to establish itself before determinist thinking in general was abandoned by one of its most important exemplars, namely, physics itself.²

Secondly, however, it must be remembered that physics, and its methods, were only one exemplar. The other was biology, and whatever doubts may have arisen about the methods of the physical sciences as a result of the crisis in thermodynamics to which Dingle refers,

1 See, e.g., the historical account of the theory of thermodynamics given in F.S.Mason, A History of the Sciences, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1953, esp. pp.401 ff

2 This connexion is clearest in Spencer's work-see Chap.3 below.

the natural sciences (as distinct from physics) were becoming increasingly sure of their ground, both methodological and factual, as the century advanced.¹ While the attempt by physicists to bind the world to Newton's feet may already have been abandoned by the last quarter of the century, many biologists and social theorists, and particularly those who tried to combine both fields- Ernst Haeckel is the outstanding example- had lost none of their zeal for burdening Darwin with the same shackles. The causal chains were not of course of the same character; the Newtonian laws were laws of motion, and the attempt was made to apply them universally on the grounds, or assumption, that all phenomena could, in principle at least, be reduced to cases of matter in motion. The Darwinian laws, which, as I will argue in later chapters, came to be identified with evolutionary laws of whatever sort, were laws, or a law, of development, and the attempt to make them universally applicable was based on the view that all phenomena could be considered, and explained and understood, as developing organisms. What is important here is the similarity in method in each case, the attempt to enthrone a single explanatory and causal

1 This point is discussed further in Chap.4 below.

principle throughout the whole realms of nature, man and society. The attempt to do literally that was worked out most thoroughly by Spenser, for he tried systematically to include the inanimate in the same scheme as the organic. Spencer's work may even be seen as both a logical and a temporal bridge by which an escape was made from the threatened citadel of classical physics to the new security of biologism; his work spans the era in which the Newtonian premises are first questioned (though not by him) and in which natural history emerges from a classificatory to an explanatory science on Darwinian foundations.

The point I wish to stress here is that, in taking over a biological law (although Darwin thought of it as no more than an hypothesis, "my theory"), Social Darwinism was adapting the same scientific method and outlook as "unregenerate" nineteenth century physics. In fact, it was the alleged discovery of a universal explanatory principle in the organic field that made the "scientism" of Social Darwinism possible. For the analogy between the developing organism and human and social growth was obvious and long since observed;¹ the adaptation of an explanatory

1 J:B:Bury testifies to the frequency with which the comparison was drawn, especially in eighteenth century thought, in The Idea of Progress, Macmillan, London, 1924

principle from inorganic science to social phenomena was much less easy and direct, as the attempts of the positivists showed. Furthermore, the biological analogy pointed to essentially conservative social policies, whereas the physicalist teachings of positivism were clearly revolutionary (and totalitarian). And finally, in opting for the former rather than the latter after Darwin's work appeared, social scientists were in no danger of being thought unscientific/.

This ingredient of "nineteenth century" scientism" in Social Darwinism was one of the main sources of its determinist character. But the features of determinist theory were by no means confined to Social Darwinism; they were, as Isaiah Berlin has argued, a very common characteristic of a great deal of nineteenth century historical and sociological theory. Before discussing, then, that ill-defined and elastic body of theory, moral precept and folklore known as Social Darwinism, to which Parts II and III of this essay are devoted, the characteristics of determinist theory as such ought first to be indicated.

This may perhaps best be done by stating, briefly and dogmatically, what I believe to be the nature and function of theory in general, so that the distinguishing features ^{of} determinist theory may then be contrasted with

the position I maintain. The view I would support may be distinguished in name from the determinist position by calling it the "hypothetical" view of theory. The contrast between the two positions may be brought out in this summary way.

On the one hand, the hypothetical view recognizes that, whether or not it is hoped to advance certain purposes by the application of theory, the aim of theory (or science or laws) is to give an account of practice, and that to account for a given phenomenon a great number of laws will almost certainly have to be invoked, and conversely, no single law is likely to account adequately for all phenomena. If it is found empirically that the account is inadequate, if the relations between phenomena are found not to hold in certain cases as the theory asserts they do, or if a policy adopted in the light of theory does not have the expected results, then it is the theory, and not the facts, that is called in question. We could say that to recognize theory, and even those parts of it whose confirmation has been so strong as to give them the status of laws or principles, as hypothetical is to admit the possibility of error, to admit that theory, and not facts, are fallible.

On the other hand, against this hypothetical

we can set the view
view, that the laws of nature, society or history are the inviolable and unalterable determinants of events. They do not simply account for but they control what happens, and therefore, if we are wise enough to understand them, we will make them the guides of the policies we adopt- or rather, we will make our policies conform to the path of development which such laws set out. On this deterministic view of theory, there is no question of making the theory "fit the facts", or certainly not all the facts. It is a claim that the facts, events, must conform to the theory, a claim of obedience to laws in the legal sense of being constrained to behave in a prescribed way. Such a view admits no possibility of error or revision, for the theory is stated in such a way that no evidence, no observed facts can falsify it. This unfalsifiability is achieved by maintaining that what theory has to explain is not the behaviour or relationships of given classes of events, where irregularities would call for explanation and perhaps modification of the theory: what determinist theory seeks to explain is not a number of, or all, events of a certain kind, but a single process—history, social development, universal evolution— a process of which everything is part, a

process which is unique, a process where the idea of exceptions is just inapplicable.

These contrasting views may now be slightly expanded. On the first view, it would be maintained that a theory (or the set of laws or principles or hypotheses which make it up) is a statement which purports to be true of all members of a given class of things. "Theories are universal propositions, i.e., assertions of a uniform connection between things of the sort A and things of the sort B." In asserting connexions between classes of occurrences, in being concerned with what is common to events of a given sort, theory does not offer an explanation of single events except as members of a class¹ - it is concerned with all events of a certain sort, not with a single event and in particular not with a single process. The size of the class, the number of events explained, is, however, irrelevant to the truth of the theory; but this does not exclude the recognition that theory develops as its account is found to apply to increasing numbers of events, or conversely, as there is a decrease in the number of common features which events explicable in terms of the theory are found to have (e.g., the development of Newton's theory out of the theories of Kepler and Galileo). On this view, theory

1 P:H:Partridge

- always remains hypothetical, open to revision, confirmation or falsification. As suggested in the Introduction, it is characteristic of any theory to be put forward initially as an hypothesis. The absence of falsifying instances and the wide explanatory range of the theory may, as in the case of the established principles and laws of natural science, obscure its hypothetical character and tend to endow it with an aura of infallibility. But the history of science is full of cases where even the best entrenched theories have had to be abandoned or modified (e.g., Newton's laws), which serves to remind us that any theory, any assertion about all events of a certain kind is corrigible. Since theory is an account of events, it must be prepared to "give way" to events wherever there is a "conflict" between theory and practice, i.e., what happens; there are no "aberrant facts"- there are only true or false accounts of facts, so that theory is in no way shielded from the possibility of error, of being shown to be false. Finally, it might be noted that on this view, as distinct from the position taken by some contemporary philosophers of science, the¹ "~~influence~~ ^{"inference} technique" by which deductions are made from the universal propositions of theory is syllogism. It is in this way only that particular occurrences can be said

¹ See, e.g., Stephen Toulmin, The Philosophy of Science Hutchinson, London 1953.

to test (confirm or falsify) a theory, or that we can arrive at a particular proposition from a theory. There is no question of theory prescribing a special method of implication or scientific procedure, any more than it can prescribe or determine our course of action in any other way.

On the view being advanced here, there is a sense in which every theory is determinist, namely, the sense in which to assert that "All A are B" is to assert that a thing's having the property A (being an A) "determines" its having the property B (being a B), that being an A is a sufficient condition for being a B, or that conditions C "determine", are sufficient conditions for, event E. But there is no question of necessity or inevitability in such an assertion—it is simply a statement of what is found to be the case. In particular, we are not asserting that it is always the same determinant which produces properties or events. There are no isolated events, all events occur in an environment, and inquiry, discovery or science proceeds by making observations and assertions about the relationships between selected events, those the inquirer is interested in, and the other events, or some of them, which make up the environment. In order to explain or account for the selected events, we look

for causal relations, observing that certain events are always accompanied or preceded by certain other events. But the uniform connexions we observe in this way have no special logical status, they are not any more (or any less) "necessary" (or, for that matter, "contingent") than any other relations or events; that is, there is only one way of being, and of being related, there are not different kinds of "reality". So that, while a determinist in the present sense holds that every event is determined by, occurs in relation to, other events, the determining events are themselves also determined. This sort of view may be called "pluralistic" determinism, as against the view that there are certain "ultimate determinants" which are themselves not determined, or caused, such as First Cause, Free Will, Evolution, or to cite Isaiah Berlin's list, "Race, colour, church, nation, class; climate, irrigation, technology, geopolitical situation; civilization, social structure, the Human Spirit, the Collective Unconscious"¹ - "vast, impersonal forces", one of which ^{can} alone and fully explain not only any class of events but all events, the whole of reality or history. Pluralistic determinism, however, attempts

1 op.cit., p.25

to formulate within each field theories which account for, explain, or enumerate the determinants of a numerous class of events, always recognizing that the truth or falsity of the theory depends on whether or not it "fits the facts" and that, since the possibility of falsification remains open as long as events of the selected kind continue to occur, the theory remains hypothetical. We could perhaps say that the theory is determined by the facts; it does not determine them.

On the other view, from the standpoint of "monistic" determinism, the question of falsification does not arise. The theory is not regarded as hypothetical, so that if it cannot apparently explain a particular event which seems to tell against the theory, then it is the event, and not the theory, which is somehow at fault, lacking in reality (e.g., the Marxist notion of the epiphenomenalism of the superstructure reared on the real economic base; or Spencer's introduction of the notions of equilibration and dissolution to account for events which did not appear to obey the laws of evolution). One of the chief reasons for the multiplication of determinist theories in the nineteenth century was the infatuation with system building which so engrossed philosophers, natural scientists and social theorists in that period.

In fact, one of the underlying notions of a system is to have a single explanatory concept, a magic key to all the riddles of the universe. Another presupposition of the search for such a key is that there is a single system to be found, that the underlying reality is an essential unity, a monistic whole and harmony. To find the determining law of "history" or "society", it was necessary to think first of history and society as "essentially"/- appearances to the contrary notwithstanding/ unitary, to think of them as a single process.

But it should be emphasized that it was in the natural sciences that devotion to the ideal of the architectonic system first flourished. Hayek is right in pointing out that the origins and growth of the positivist movement were deeply influenced by the achievements and what was taken to be the method of nineteenth century natural science. Its achievement was an increasing control over man's environment and increasing power to make correct predictions; its method was in the search for the causal connexions between phenomena. But its tendency, as Dingle has argued, was towards the belief that eventually the explanatory causal laws could be reduced to very few, or even one. The desire to achieve as much in the

social field as the physical sciences had in the physical world understandably led to the emulation of their methods. It also led to the emulation and surpassing of their aspirations towards monistic determinism.

Now, the nineteenth century physical scientists were right in seeking the causal connexions between phenomena and in regarding the world in which they sought them and made observations as a real, external world, and in believing that the laws or theories they put forward were assertions about the properties, the qualities and relations of real things, that they were talking about objective facts. On the other hand, I would argue that these physical scientists were mistaken in three respects. First, their conception of law, of causal laws or laws of nature, had a strong legalistic element in it. There was the suggestion that laws of nature governed the physical world and that, conversely, physical phenomena obeyed these laws. The scientific quest, then, was the search, in Dingle's phrase, for "inviolable" laws, for laws which phenomena were bound to obey, rather than for constant conjunctions between classes of things. This had two consequences. It led, as Dingle has pointed out, to the postulation of transcendental agencies, forces or

powers which could not be directly observed but whose existence was inferred from the operation of the laws. The second consequence was that it obscured the hypothetical character which all laws or theories have. It ruled out the possibility of modifying or falsifying laws, of testing them, and hence also of confirming them, and with that, the possibility of discovery (though, of course, discoveries continued to be made and it was this fact that led to a reconsideration of the notion of a law in physics). Secondly, as the mechanistic outlook of nineteenth century physics, the view of the physical world as a machine, led to the mistaken belief that the laws of nature were all reducible to the fundamental mechanical laws. On this view, that there is ultimately only one form of causation, that it is possible to discover the cause of any and all events, mental and social phenomena had to be treated either as somehow unreal or as being ultimately explicable in mechanical terms, by the laws of motion. What was sought, then, was a hierarchy of laws which could explain all phenomena and which could all be deduced from one ultimate law. This in turn was tied up with the third feature, namely, the assumption of the essential simplicity of all occurrences. For while it was recognized that to explain any

particular event a number of laws might be required, the alleged reducibility of these laws to laws of motion was taken to show that the event itself was essentially explicable as a case of matter in motion. Taking the world as a machine, even the most complicated event in it could, ultimately, be simply explained in terms of a physical movement and of the inviolable causal laws which governed all movement.

It is in these three features of nineteenth century physical science that the characteristics of determinist theory are to be found. These logical characteristics became even more distinctive of evolutionary philosophy than they were of physics. In the systems of Spencer and Haeckel, the evolutionary principle was seen as the explanatory key to both the organic and inanimate realms- it seemed to supply an explanation of development when the appeal to laws of motion was unsatisfactory, for the idea of progress required that development be seen as something more than mere change. Spencer's evolutionary law was even more fundamental than the ultimate laws of motion to which the physicists aspired, for his First Principles could, as Spencer tried to show in the Synthetic Philosophy, explain all events without having to "explain away" any phenomena which might seem to lack

the substantiality to which physical laws of motion applied.¹ In the Origin, Darwin himself saw no such wide application of his biological principles. But, as the rest of this essay attempts to show, there was no lack of people willing to make the application on Darwin's behalf. Spencer already had some years start on Darwin, and Haeckel was able to say in 1900: "If we are in a position today to recognize the sovereignty of the law of evolution- and, indeed, of monistic evolution- in every province of nature, and to use it, in conjunction with the law of substance,² for a simple interpretation of all natural phenomena we owe it chiefly to those three distinguished naturalists"³ Goethe, Lamarck and Darwin, of whom Darwin was the greatest. And whereas the physicalist interpretation had somehow to reduce every event, including human and social events, to an instance of matter in motion, evolutionary principles could be even more all-embracing but not at the cost of belittling man and

1 On Spencer's "fundamentalism", see below, Chap 5

2 That is, the law of conservation of energy, mathematically formulated by Helmholtz in 1847; what Haeckel calls the "fundamental cosmic law".

3 The Riddle of the Universe, trans. Joseph McCabe, Watts London, 1908, p.5

society.

But evolution can only offer these attractions at the price of distorting the very meaning of theory or law. This point was trenchantly made by L.T. Hobhouse.¹ Hobhouse argues that a law enumerates the conditions under which certain things happen, or states universal connexions between classes of things. The law of evolution should do that too, i.e., enumerate the conditions under which things evolve and state the direction of their evolution. But as used in sociology, evolution "is not a question of generalization, but of descriptive synthesis. A series of changes is passed in review and considered as a whole. So considered, it presents a certain character, exhibits a certain trend. This trend is formulated, and the formula described as the law of the series. But the conditions of the process are not ascertained, nor is it proved that the same series of changes would, if at once begun somewhere else, recur in the same order. There is no basis of generalization or prediction"² For example, Hobhouse says that Spencer's view of evolution as movement "at once towards higher integration and

1 ~~The~~ Social Evolution and Political Theory, lectures at Columbia in 1911, U.P., 1928, Chap.V, "Social Morphology"

2 ibid. p.103

Columbia

greater differentiation" is descriptive; whereas Darwin's notions of struggle for existence, heredity and natural selection, ^{give} ~~is~~ a causal account of the growth of species.
1

To sum up. Those social theorists who followed the pattern of nineteenth century natural science, and especially biology, were also concerned to discover ~~the~~ ultimate laws¹ the laws which governed social phenomena, or historical events. As the natural scientists recognized that the physical world was a real, external and objective field in which causal connexions could be observed, so the social theorists recognized society as a real field in which discoveries could be made about the interaction of phenomena. What characterized determinist theory in this field, just as it did in natural science, was the belief in laws as controlling social phenomena, social change, and, particularly, social development; the belief that ultimately a single law of society or of history could be discovered and that all other laws could be sub³sumed under it; and the belief that social phenomena were all essentially simple and harmonious, that they were all part of a single great process, and that this process obeyed the law of motion or of evolution of society or history.

1 ibid, p.107

What determinist theory offers is an account of what must happen, rather than of what does happen. It is concerned not with what is common to the members of certain classes of things, but with all occurrences whatsoever, not "all" in the universal sense of "each one", but in the monistic sense of the unitary whole^l the universe, or society, or history. It takes for its subject not numerous and recurrent events with certain common features, but one single, unitary process. Since its account is not of numerous events but of a single process there can be no question of particular occurrences confirming or falsifying it, i.e., it cannot be said to be either true or false. For that reason, it cannot develop^l it remains "transcendental" and "inviolable". The laws of determinist theory are not, then, laws about universal connexions, but about a single process; they are laws in the legalistic and not in the scientific sense, of what must occur, not of what does occur; they are teleological laws, the laws of destiny.

Chapter 2

Progress, Determinism and Evolution.

At the end of the first World War, J:B.Bury called the doctrine of progress "the animating and controlling idea of Western civilization. For the earthly progress of humanity is the general test to which social aims and theories are submitted as a matter of course".¹ Bury ends his historical survey of the idea with a chapter on "Progress in the Light of Evolution", where he points out that the immense popular appeal of Darwinism and its various interpretations and adaptations in the last decades of the nineteenth century helped to make the doctrine of progress "a general article of faith".² Bury's conclusion is that the parallel between organic evolution and social development is not established, that there is no ground for the identification of evolution in any field with improvement, and that, finally, by its insistence on change, by its defeat of what he calls "the illusion of finality", the doctrine of progressive evolution, like the doctrine of providence which it supplanted, is itself liable to be replaced, and that Comte and Spence, no more than Aristotle or Descartes, can claim the infallibility with which

1 op.cit., Preface.

2 ibid., p.346.

their devoted disciples were inclined to credit them.

A generation later, Bury's modest prognostications seem to have been borne out. The easy confidence which characterized Western thinking almost to the outbreak of the Second World War has since become somewhat hesitant. There has been a change in the tone of popular prophecy: while Spengler saw the West declining, he claimed also to prescribe the remedy,¹ but Orwell's gloomy vision of 1984 is unrelieved. Further than this, the decline in prophecy as well as the change in its tone reflects the fact that the whole intellectual outlook in the West, like the scientific, has altered. As the scientists no longer claim to have formulated the inviolable laws of the physical universe, so the historians and philosophers, in the main, no longer seek or claim to have discovered, as some of their most eminent nineteenth century predecessors did, the inviolable laws of history and society. This is not so much because it has proved difficult to find the pattern of the past and the

1 See, e.g., his discussion of the role of a leading elite, of the turning away from rationalism and Utopianism which he prophesies, and of the function of "healthy race", as the factors which will redeem the world from the hopeless and debilitating yearning for peace, security and equality, which Spengler regards as the bane of the two centuries up to the 1920's. The Hour of Decision, chapters on "The Political Horizon" and "The Coloured World Revolution"

present, and, by extrapolation, to map the future; but rather because the whole notion of a philosophy of history, of which the idea of progress was one example or even common ingredient, has been discredited. Very little present day thinking in the West, whether at the popular, political or academic level, exhibits that assurance and confidence which distinguishes the era, notably the half century after 1860, when the idea of progress dominated so much intellectual activity.

That half century was the great period of European expansion overseas, the period of imperialism, when so many European states— Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy— and the United States increased or began great empires abroad. It was in this period during which western dominance was being established throughout the world that the idea became current that, just as western technology was leading towards the commercial and economic unification of the world, so western political methods, imposed if necessary ~~by~~ by superior military skill, could lead towards the social and political unification of mankind. Internationally, the nineteenth century was a singularly tranquil period in modern history. There was the vision of a unified mankind, of the realization of the ideal unity of medieval Christendom

on a world wide scale, of Tennyson's "parliament of men", which could unite the world just as Westminster united Britain. This vision of ultimate or inherent unity provided the background for the emergence of philosophies, especially of history, which took human society as a whole for their subject matter.

The nineteenth century was also the period in which the omnipotence of science, both as a way of explaining the universe and of directing its course, reached its apogee. The world was one, and so there must be a single explanation for all the occurrences in it. Science had claimed that all physical phenomena could be accounted for by one hypothesis, the universal laws of matter in motion. It was up to the historians, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers to find a similar universal formula to account for human and social events. Any all-embracing principle that claimed to explain all three classes of events, physical, human and social, would be the triumphal coping stone of the scientific edifice. Monism enjoyed a great vogue. For the key to the universe would also prescribe the direction of progress and enable men to feel certain of its continuity and achievement.

As we shall see in the sequel, the particular

clue to the understanding of historical development which Social Darwinism claimed to provide, was also a clue or key which, it was said, showed men the direction of social development, showed too that the development was progressive, and showed finally that it was inevitably progressive. In what I shall call orthodox Social Darwinism, namely the views especially of Herbert Spencer and W.G. Sumner and their followers, the belief in determinism, that the evolution of society in certain directions was inevitably determined by evolutionary laws the prototype of which Darwin had revealed in biology, was made the foundation for a social policy of laissez-faire, of non-interference with the inevitable. The rival schools of Social Darwinism, those which hailed the discovery of laws of social development as the long-sought pre-requisite for social planning, also accepted the notion that such laws were deterministic, that the pattern of development -a progressive development- which these laws prescribed was inevitable. This determinism however did not prevent the Social Darwinian planners and reformers from prescribing policies to make the occurrence of the inevitable more certain. A thoroughgoing Social Darwinian determinist- though Social Darwinism never really produced one- cannot logically arrive at any

at any prescription for conduct, cannot strictly read off any policy from his determinist premises, since, Darwinian evolution has no goal or end for which the determinist may work, either by refraining from interference or by trying to promote the inevitable; the survival of the fittest is not permanent, it is not a final state to be reached- like, for example, the classless society; and in any case, no one can say in advance what fitness to survive is going to be. But in spite of these difficulties, which incidentally not only Social Darwinists faced, the temptation to derive practical guides to conduct from a theory which ~~preferred~~ ^{professed} to plot the inevitable course of progress was overwhelming.

One of the points that Bury makes is that the general acceptance of the idea of progress represented a revolution in western thinking against an assumption dating from Plato's time that any change was a change for the worse, that change meant deterioration and decline. Bury emphasizes especially the role of Fontenelle in developing the idea of progress as not simply advancement from past to present but as a movement going on into the future. Fontenelle spoke

especially of the importance of the accumulation of knowledge. Why change was at last seen as not necessarily an unrelieved disaster was because one of the most fundamental changes from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century (at the end of which Fontenelle was writing) was the gradual acceptance of empirical methods of adding to our knowledge. This produced very tangible results, not only in extending men's understanding of the universe but also ⁱⁿ giving him greatly improved practical skills in such important, useful and profitable matters as, for example, navigation and metallurgy. Fontenelle saw that knowledge could accumulate: "the sound views of intellectual men in successive generations will continually add up", ¹ so future progress based on knowledge was possible. But, Bury argues, the inclusion of the future was only half of the doctrine of progress: it was not enough to see the possibility of progress in the future, that progress ² "must also be conceived as necessary and certain".

The notion of the progress of mankind stretching into an immense future was developed by eighteenth century French thinkers such as the Abbé Terrasson and

1 Quoted by Bury, op.cit., p.109.

2 ibid.

the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, by the new approach to "universal history" and the study of social customs in the work of Voltaire, Montesquieu and Turgot, and the doctrine of human perfectibility advanced by Diderot¹ and the other Encyclopaedists.² By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bury argues, the idea of progress had very nearly reached its status as a general article of faith. But the problem remained of how progress was to be achieved even though it was inevitable.

With the growing awareness, as the eighteenth century advanced, of the gap between man's intellectual enlightenment and the social misery, degradation and misgovernment in which he lived, rationalism, no longer confined to the natural sciences, began to invade the social domain with a view to its reformation. Thus it came to be believed that it was through knowledge, through the rational understanding of social processes, that society could be improved; man could bring about progress in society by applying his knowledge, just as the rational application of scientific knowledge was giving man more command over his physical environment, a command which accelerated rapidly as the nineteenth

1 ibid Cf. the quotation from Diderot's *Pensées*, below. Chap. 4 p. 134

2 See Bury, Chapters VI to VIII

century succeeded the eighteenth. As Bury puts it, "The achievements of physical science did more than anything else to convert the imaginations of men to the general doctrine of Progress!"¹

Progress was to be achieved, then, by the application of knowledge. That was the guiding belief of the French Positivists of the early nineteenth century, Saint-Simon and Comte. What is distinctive of the Positivists is not merely this belief in progress but their attempt to discover the law of progress, to carry further Condorcet's search in history for a pattern which will not only show progress to have been achieved in the past but which will also tell us the direction it will follow in the future, and thus give us the opportunity and the knowledge to assist this development.² Again, the Positivists differed from the eighteenth century progressives in thinking of progress as arriving at a definite goal. In Saint-Simon, the goal is ^astatic society, though it is to be kept stationary not from fear of something worse but from confidence that these

1 ibid. p.113.

2 ^W pp.211 ff. ~~Also, see below Chap.5, p.~~

is nothing better. Saint-Simon's criterion of progress is happiness and this can be achieved by a functionally perfect regimentation of society; Comte's law of the three stages is the law of a closed system; and we may add that Marx's vision of the classless society is an Hegelian synthesis beyond which there is no further development.

What you have in the work of the Saint-Simoneans and in the "scientific socialism" of Marx is the addition of the idea of a philosophy of history, after the style of, say, Fichte or Hegel, to the eighteenth century faith in progress. In both the Positivists and Marx, however, the necessity for positive action is ~~illogically~~ affirmed in addition to the affirmation of a progressive determinism. John Plamenatz points ¹ out that Saint-Simon took this view earlier than Marx, being the first to maintain against the sentimental socialists of the eighteenth century that "society develops according to a discoverable law", that ~~the~~ the course of development is determined by society's internal structure, and that its growth is ⁱⁿ dependent of man's will. As if echoing Fontenelle, Saint-Simon

¹John Plamenatz, German Marxism and Russian Communism, Longmans Green, London, 1954, p.74

thought the fundamental determinant of social development was the accumulation of knowledge. Like later system-builders of the nineteenth century, Saint-Simon believed in the possibility in principle of a single explanation of all phenomena: "If I succeed in demonstrating that the law of universal gravitation is the only cause of all physical and moral phenomena, I will have found the integrating principle for organizing all disciplines of learning."¹

But if Saint-Simon thinks of society inevitably developing in a certain direction, of that development as progressive, and of the determinant as knowledge, then he is faced with the classic dilemma of the determinist who wants to reform society, who wants to bring about progress. For if it is true that some fundamental determinant, independent of man's will, is alone decisive in society's evolution, then whether or how man decides to use his knowledge, of that law of development or of anything else, is irrelevant. Yet we find Saint-Simon proposing his Council of Newton to govern the whole world, and Comte putting forward

1 Quoted by Albert Salomon, The Tyranny of Progress, Noonday Press, 1955, p.43, from Saint-Simon, Textes Choisis, Alcan, Paris, 1925/

the new science of Social Physics to guide the building of the positive society.¹ Like the Marxists, the Positivists claimed the law of progress carried with it clear prescriptions for action: "while "...the law of human progress guides and dominates all; men are only its instruments", yet we have the duty "consciously to obey this law, which constitutes our true providence, ascertaining the course it marks out for us, instead of being blindly impelled by it."²

In the "positive determinism" of the Saint-Simoneans and the Marxists, progress was conceived as a finite and inevitable movement towards a fixed, knowable and desirable goal,¹ the positive or the classless society. Both history, on the one hand, and, on the other, the world at large or the whole of mankind or society in general, were conceived in a unitary way, so that it became plausible to speak of them going through a single process, a process of development, and a process of development towards a desirable goal, a progressive development.

1 See Hayek, The Counter-Revolution of Science, Part 11, Chap. 2/

2 ibid, quoted from Comte's additions to Saint-Simon's 9th and 10th Lettres d'un habitant de Genève à ses contemporaines. My italics.

R:G:Collingwood take up this conception of man and society proceeding towards a specifiable goal and links it to the conception of a similar process which nature is undergoing. In his masterly discussion¹ of the connexions between progress and historical thinking, he remarks that the historical pattern-makers, from Vico through Kant, Hegel, Comte and Marx to Petrie and Tynbee, although they may be commended for their revolt against the scissors-and paste method, nevertheless failed in their attempts to make history scientific by searching the past for laws which would apply also to the future. Why these determinist theories fail to be scientific is because "it is not enough that science should be autonomous or creative, it must also be cogent or objective; it must impress itself as inevitable on anyone who is able and willing to consider the grounds upon which it is based and to think for himself what the conclusions are to which they point. That is what none of these schemes can do".² That is to say, in pointing to its own particular chosen goal—say, again, the positive society or the

1 R.G.Collingwood, The Idea of History, Oxford, 1946, especially section 7, pp.321 ff.

2 ibid., p.263

classless- as the end of progress, none of these determinist theories is logically more sound than its rivals; they are in fact all unscientific.

Their difficulties are compounded, Collingwood argues, by the two meanings of progress implicit in nineteenth century thought, namely, progress in history or historical progress, and progress in nature or evolution. Thinking of evolution as referring to "natural processes in so far as these are conceived as bringing into existence new specific forms in nature"¹ (a conception which, of course, received tremendous momentum after the publication of The Origin of Species² but which by no means lacked support before 1859), Collingwood points out that evolutionary or progressive in this sense "only means orderly, that is, exhibiting order", happening in sequence or succession. "But progress in nature, or evolution, has often been taken", Collingwood goes on, as "the doctrine that each new form is not only a modification of the last, but an ³ improvement on it".

1 ibid. Section 7.

2 See below Chapter 4

3 loc. cit. For a criticism of the whole idea of evolution as a "progressive process", see P.H. Partridge, "Progress in Evolution", The Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, March, 1935. See below, Chapter 3 also.

Now the notion of development being improvement is meaningless unless a goal is postulated. Collingwood maintains that such a goal was provided by the Kantian doctrine that the good will is the only end in itself and that man alone is capable of moral goodness. So it could be argued that evolution in nature has been truly progressive because its successive forms have produced man. But further, "it followed that, since ^{to his own existence, there was in nature as such an inherent tendency} man obviously did not control the process leading towards the realization of this absolute value; in other words, 'progress is a law of nature'. Now, this doctrine of progress in nature could be combined with historical progress by recognizing the romantic assumption "that man, as a child of nature, is subject to natural law, and that the laws of historical progress are identical with the laws of evolution....it followed that human history was subject to a necessary law of progress, in other words, that of the new specific forms of social organization, art and science, and so forth, which it brings into existence each is necessarily an improvement on the last." But, Collingwood concludes, this attempt to combine the two ideas of progress will not do, because it is an attempt to say both that man is superior to nature because of his moral goodness, and "that he is nothing more than a

part of nature", i.e., that "the conception of historical process (is) a mere extension of natural process". But, says Collingwood, "If either belief is true, the other is false: they cannot be combined to produce logical offspring".¹

Now, Collingwood's criticism of the attempt to combine historical and natural progress, to advance a general theory of necessarily progressive evolution, could be said to apply to any view which postulated a final end to the evolutionary process, an end other than man's moral goodness—for example, a certain kind of society as the evolutionary goal. His criticism becomes especially pointed where you have, as with the Positivists and Marxists and, as we shall later see, reformist Social Darwinists, the claim that men are sufficiently independent of the evolutionary process to direct it, i.e., to use the laws of evolution to achieve certain goals, and yet that men are so much a part of the process that they cannot choose or determine these goals.

Yet the notion of progress as involving any goal is self-contradictory, or at least self-defeating. In Bury's phrase, the idea of progress defeats "the illusion of finality", for if progress ever reached a goal, ~~it~~

¹ loc.cit.

it would cease to be progressive, or rather, a progressive movement towards a goal would cease to be progressive when the goal was reached. It was the notion of progress as an indefinite or permanent process that characterized eighteenth century thought on the matter. The Positivists and the Marxists involved themselves in contradictions in seeing a progressive development towards the end of progress, to the point where history stopped, where its fundamental determinants lost their motive power. In Darwinian evolutionary theory, the brakes on progress are once again relaxed, for evolution is again seen as a constant succession of new forms; and in Social Darwinism, the succession is seen as indefinitely progressive.

But the difficulty of thinking of evolution as inevitably and indefinitely progressive becomes even greater when no evolutionary goal is postulated. We may think of progress as betterment if it is progress or movement towards a desired goal. But what is the criterion of judgement without such a goal? Collingwood suggests a criterion in his final definition of progress. He speaks of the problem of comparing two historical periods or ways of life. "If thought in its first phase, after solving the initial problem of that phase, is then, through solving these, brought up against

others which defeat it; and if the second phase solves these further problems without losing its hold on the solution of the first, so that there is gain without any corresponding loss, then there is progress. And there can be progress on no other terms. If there is any loss, the problem of setting loss against gain is insoluble".¹

In this way, we can talk especially about progress in science, when for example, more comprehensive theories are developed which account for all the phenomena covered by earlier theories and more besides. And of course, the remarkable progress, in this sense, which nineteenth century science made, as well as the extent to which it promoted progress, in some other sense, by its technological achievements, was one of the main foundations for faith in progress at large.

But, as Collingwood argues, the question of whether there has been progress as between one historical period and another, can never even be asked, for it falsely presupposes that we can take the period "as a whole". And similarly, we must reject the notion of society as a whole making progress, or the progress of mankind as such. As suggested earlier in this chapter,

¹ ibid., p. 160

the belief that we can think of mankind, or society, or history, as unitary, harmonious or "given" entities was greatly fostered by the technological shrinkage of the world and its relative freedom from violence in the nineteenth century; but the belief is nevertheless false.

Furthermore, once we admit the actual diversity and conflict of interests, demands and ends pursued, practised and promoted by the men and groups who make up society, mankind or the world, then the insoluble problem "of setting loss against gain" always arises. That is why the attempt to use the determinist doctrine of progressive evolution as a moral guide is a failure. This was seen by some of Social Darwinism's critics. Thus, H.S. Chamberlain argued that "the notions of progress and degeneration have no meaning" when we try to apply them as a yardstick to evaluate history.¹ Again, Hobhouse asks about the "life history of humanity" whether there is "any definite and measurable current that has on the whole made a certain assignable distance in a certain assignable direction", and further whether this movement is progress, "i.e., whether it is one which tends to the realization of ends on which we can

¹ On Chamberlain, see below Chapters 6 and 8.

reasonably set a value".¹ His conclusion is that "The theory of continuous automatic inevitable progress is impossible"² because the process of civilization has involved losses as well as gains.³ And again, T.H. Huxley rejected evolution as a guide to ethics on the grounds that, since we cannot know what nature is going to select for survival in the struggle for existence, we can never condone or justify present pain or suffering in the name of some alleged future good.

Bury sums up his survey by speaking of three stages in the history of the idea of progress. The first was the eighteenth century up to the French Revolution when "it was taken for granted". The second stage was in the seventy years to 1859, the period characterized by the search for the law of progress. That was the period of Saint-Simon, Comte and Marx. But while they spoke of progress as inevitably determined by certain social forces, there remained a certain lack of confidence, for men must themselves put these forces

1 op.cit. p.117.

2 ibid., p.160.

3 As we shall see in Chapter 6, Huxley sees progress as possible through the conscious "evolution of a higher and more comprehensive social mind": what he rejected was the idea of automatic, inevitable progress, especially, as far as the present context is concerned, as an excuse for indifference to suffering.

to work. It is in Bury's third stage, the Darwinian era after 1859, that the idea of progress becomes fully established and the progress itself is fully automatic. Bury argues that Darwin's work gave all variants of the idea of progress the blessing of scientific endorsement.. The Origin of Species, he says, "elevated to the rank of a scientific hypothesis...what might be set aside before as a brilliant guess."¹ Bury argues again that Darwin established the idea of progress by subjecting man to his "second degradation". The first was also the work of a scientist, the Copernican astronomy which dethroned "man from his privileged position in the universe of space". But this undermining of the notion of a special Providence guarding man's interests made his achievements, unaided, seem more meritorious. Similarly, "Evolution, shearing him of his glory as a rational being specially created to be the lord of the earth traces a humbler pedigree for him. And this second degradation was the decisive fact which has established the reign of the idea of Progress": for who could deny that development to a stage a little lower than the angels was progress? Darwinism had the great advantage over its rivals that it was an explanation not primarily ^{of} social and historical

1 op.cit., p.334

development, but of the development of nature itself, of the whole of reality, all in accordance with one key principle. Social Darwinism absorbed the values and superseded the methods of Positivism. Until very nearly the end of the nineteenth century, it also managed to drown out Marxism, which "became simply a sect in the larger church"¹.

But the foundations of that church had already been laid before the Origin appeared. Though Darwin came to be the deity worshipped there, the high priest and chief architect was one who, above all, brought together the building blocks of progress, determinism and evolution to raise the most ambitious monument to the nineteenth century ideal of system-building. His name was Herbert Spencer.

¹ Jacques Barzun, Darwin, Marx, Wagner-Critique of a Heritage, Secker and Warburg. 1942, p. 203.

Chapter 3.

The Evolutionary Theory of Herbert Spencer.

The intellectual movement of the nineteenth century which came to be known as Social Darwinism is, in spite of its apparently specific name, of somewhat mixed origin. Just as Darwin himself borrowed ideas from a number of sources, so of course did those who applied his principles to society owe debts to other people besides the great naturalist. But a number of the main ideas which became especially characteristic of Social Darwinism were put forward before Darwin's name was at all well known, by the philosopher Herbert Spencer. It is curiously ironic that this man who was widely acclaimed in his own lifetime as "the most capacious intellect of all time, whose genius surpassed that of Aristotle and Newton as the telegraph surpassed the carrier pigeon, whose revelations were more effective than those from Sinai"¹, should have been deprived by an earthbound natural scientist of the honour of having a school of thought named after him—especially since, one suspects, Spencer would rather have enjoyed the ^{experience} while Darwin was sometimes appalled at the freedom which his self-appointed disciples took with his views.

¹ "The phrases are culled from the tributes of American Contemporaries" by H.S. Commager, The American Mind, Yale, 1950, p. 85.

As it is, Darwin's name would find an honoured place in any calendar of the great, whereas it has been asked, "Who now reads Spencer?" It is difficult for us to realize how great a stir he made in the world. The Synthetic Philosophy... was read, discussed, fought over. And now it is a drag on the second-hand market, and hardly stirs the interest of the German or American aspirant to the doctorate in philosophy... He seems never to have harboured any kind of doubt. In a century surely not predisposed to scepticism, few thinkers surpass him in cock-sureness and intolerance. He was the intimate confidant of a strange and rather unsatisfactory God, whom he called the principle of Evolution. His God has betrayed him. We have evolved¹ beyond Spencer."

Part of the explanation of Spencer's success must be found as much in what his devotees were looking for as in what he actually thought and wrote. In an age in which faith in progress was ~~was~~ tenaciously held and in which respect for "science" was rapidly growing, any attempt to offer a rational, scientific ground for such faith would be sure of at least a hearing. Spencer

¹ Crane Brinton, English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Benn, London, 1933, 2nd. ed. 1949 pp. 226-7.

did this, and more, for he professed to show that progress was not only a scientifically well-founded belief, but that it was also inevitable. Furthermore, just as the search for a unifying principle informed much of the scientific endeavour of the second half of the nineteenth century, so a synthetic philosophy which offered an all-embracing world-view, which claimed to account for all phenomena whatsoever in terms of one central conception, was sure to find a ready welcome. While the natural scientists sought the ultimate laws of matter in motion, Spencer took as his task to set out the laws of motion of man, mind and society and to show that they were in harmony with, or indeed part of, the one universal law. This law was Evolution, and through it Spencer bade fair to realize the aspiration of many of his contemporaries, to show that progress was inevitably determined by natural law. He achieved the synthesis of progress, determinism, and evolution.

Spencer's summa, as Brinton calls it, was monumental, and besides the books of the Synthetic Philosophy, he kept up a steady stream of articles and lectures for over forty years. But the bulk of his work is its only formidable feature to the zealous seeker. Spencer achieved a very great popularity. He was a non-

academic philosopher, never holding nor seeking a university post; a writer who offered "a philosophy" for Everyman, a philosophy which had enough of its own technical jargon to make it sound genuine and "quotable", enough to attract but not dismay the untrained layman; a writer, above all, who had something to say about everything.

In March, 1860, Spencer distributed to likely subscribers in Britain and the United States the prospectus for "A System of Philosophy"¹ which set out, in five main sections, a comprehensive programme surveying and systematizing a vast field of knowledge - First Principles, The Principles of Biology, The Principles of Psychology, The Principles of Sociology, and The Principles of Morality - and within some twenty odd years, Spencer completed the project.

Spencer's basic position is set out in First Principles.² This is divided into two parts - I, The Unknowable, i.e., the Absolute "that transcends not only human knowledge but human conception", and II, The Laws of the Knowable - "A statement of the ultimate principles discernible throughout all manifestations of the Absolute - those

1. This had already been published in 1858. 2. First published, 1862. All references, by section number after the quotations, are from the 1910 ed., Williams & Norgate, London.

highest generalizations now being disclosed by Science which are severally true not of one class of phenomena but of all classes of phenomena; and which are thus the keys to all classes of phenomena. " ^κ

In introducing the concept of the Unknowable, Spencer is anxious to show that there is no dispute between science and religion. He argues that the universality of religion as an institution and the ubiquity of "religious sentiment", are prima facie evidence that religion must adumbrate some general truth. In order to "unite Science with Religion", therefore, Spencer seeks "the most abstract truth contained in Religion and the most abstract truth contained in Science" (S.7), in which he would find "the one (truth) in which the two coalesce". The Ultimate Religious Idea is "that the Power which the Universe manifests is inscrutable" (S.14), but Ultimate Scientific Ideas—|space, time, matter, motion|—also "are all representative of realities that cannot be comprehended--". He (the man of science), more than any other, truly knows that in its ultimate nature nothing can be known" (S.21). Thus, "Ultimate religious ideas and ultimate scientific ideas, alike turn out to be merely symbols of the actual, not cognitions of it", (S.22). So Spencer finds the reconciliation between
* One of these generalizations is that currently known as 'the Conservation of Force'"

science and religion. "Common sense asserts that this reality cannot be what we think it; Subjective Science shows why we cannot think of it as it is, and yet we are compelled to think of it as existing; and in this assertion of a Reality utterly inscrutable in nature, Religion finds an assertion essentially coinciding with her own." (S.27).

Not only does Spencer think that a reconciliation is possible, he argues that scientific advance in the nineteenth century is inevitably in that direction. Science's "progress in grouping particular relations of phenomena under laws, and these special laws under laws more and more general, is of necessity a progress to causes more and more abstract." (S.29). The more abstract the causes science assigned to phenomena became, the less conceivable they appeared. "Hence the most abstract conception to which science is slowly approaching, is one that merges into the inconceivable or unthinkable by the dropping of all concrete elements of thought," (S.29), one that thus approaches the inscrutability of the religious notion of the Cause of all things that passes understanding. Such concepts are "magnetism, heat, light, etc., which were early in the century spoken of as so many distinct imponderables (but which) physicists now regard as

different modes of manifestation of some one universal force; and in so regarding them are ceasing to think of this force as comprehensible". (S.29)

Having thus asserted a common Unknowable of which religion and science can know only manifestations, Spencer goes on to consider the nature of these manifestations, i.e., the Knowable. Since the Knowable consists only of manifestations of the Absolute Reality, which is Unknowable, we can, says Spencer, know only relative reality. Thus the ultimate ideas of science—Space, Time, Matter, Motion and Force—are abstractions from our knowledge of relations—and the first four—are either built up of, or abstracted from, experience of Force. Matter and Motion as we know them are concretes built up from the contents of various mental relations; while Space and Time are abstracts of the forms of these various relations. Deeper down than these, however, are the primordial experiences of Force". (S.50)

Spencer then goes on to consider the most general laws of the natural sciences, especially physics. These laws, he says, are synthetic within their own fields, and they form part of the synthetic philosophy which he is trying to establish in First Principles. But they are only part of that philosophy which must be "a universal synthesis comprehending and consolidating

such special syntheses" (S.91). In the field of, say, geology, chemistry and biology, typical phenomena - an earthquake, a burning candle, a growing plant - are explained by the general laws of these sciences. But what Spencer seeks is an account of the relation of these typical processes to each other. "The question to be answered is- what is the common element in the histories of all concrete processes" (S.91). The central emphasis for Spencer, then, is on the question of change. The processes he considers are all questions of change, of matter in motion. "The law we seek therefore, must be the law of the continuous redistribution of matter and motion. - Gradually or quickly, (every object) is receiving motion or losing motion, while some or all of its parts are simultaneously changing their relations to one another. And the question is- What dynamic principle, true of the metamorphosis as a whole and in its details, expresses these ever-changing relations ?" (S.92)

There are two features of Spencer's position to which attention should be paid, even before we follow him briefly in his search for the answer to his great question. The first point is just that Spencer believed that there is an answer, that the same process - the same because "fundamentally" it always involves

changes of matter and motion| is going on in every phenomenon, and that a single principle can therefore be found to account for these changes. What must be emphasised is that Spencer treated mental and social phenomena on exactly the same footing as events in the physical world. The synthesis he sought was literally all-embracing. He recognized no class of events as outside the explanatory range of his principle. Just as he allowed that it was convenient at the practical, though not at the "highest" level, to admit distinctions within the field of science between the various divisions, so he would recognize that it was convenient to deal separately with psychology and sociology. But essentially, all the sciences were one. The subject matter of all of them was the same|the study of matter and motion. Spencer's materialism was thorough-going| it was not only the physical world which he wanted to see chained to Newton's feet, but social and mental phenomena too. The metaphysical element of the Unknowable, once stated, ceases to be an important or even noticeable element in Spencer's thought. And by hitching his wagon to the star of physics which then enjoyed an unrivalled ascendancy, Spencer assured himself that his explanations of the whole of reality in the sacred terms of matter and motion

would enjoy the priceless advantage of being truly scientific.

The second point to be noted at this stage, is the Spencerian notion of a principle or law. In the 1850's there was no talk amongst scientists, either physical or social, of laws in the sense in which they are most generally regarded nowadays, namely, as conceptual models in terms of which the phenomena under consideration may be understood and explained. The notion was that the laws of nature had their own independent ways of working, that they controlled events, and that they were, so to speak, there to be discovered if only science could reveal them. Spencer took over this notion of law as an inexorable and independent agency and extended its application beyond the ordinary limits of physical and natural science to mind and society. The important corollary of this view, as shall be seen later in examining the social theory of the Spencerians, was that, in society, the laws could not be interfered with. It was clear to Spencer and his disciples that there was one supreme law which explained and, in addition, controlled and determined the changes and developments, i.e., on his view, the movements in society; and that it was at best futile and at worst dangerous to interfere with the operation

of this law by meddling (by legislation) in the
social process.¹

Returning now to the argument in First Principles:
Spencer devotes the sections from 93 to 148 to
establishing and considering the nature and application
of "the law of the continuous redistribution of
matter and motion". In Chapter XII, he distinguishes
Evolution and Dissolution. His starting point is
reminiscent of the Heraclitean theory of constant
flux. "All things are growing or decaying, accumulating
matter or wearing away, integrating or disintegrating".
(S.95) Further, these pairs of processes are both
going on in "every aggregate" simultaneously and
continuously. "The processes thus everywhere in
antagonism, and everywhere gaining now a temporary
and now an enduring predominance the one over the
other, we call Evolution and Dissolution. Evolution
under its most general aspect is the integration of
matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; while
Dissolution is the absorption of motion and
concomitant disintegration of matter". (S.97)

It is clear that Spencer derives these notions
from physics, but he does not confine their application
to the inorganic world. For example, he says that in

¹ See below, Chapter 7.

biology, "Every plant grows by taking into itself elements that were before diffused, and every animal grows by re-concentrating these elements previously dispersed in surrounding plants or other animals." (S. 110)

From our point of view, however, Spencer's most interesting cases are those in which he argues that the law of evolution works in exactly the same way in what he calls the "super-organic" field, phenomena "of a higher order" than the inorganic and organic with which astronomy, geology and biology are concerned. These phenomena are "not presented by any organic body taken singly, but result from the actions of aggregated organic bodies." (S.III) This aggregation is human society, and Spencer now makes the crucial step (although he hardly seems aware of it) from the biological notion of an organism to the notion of society as just another organism which can be treated exactly on a par with plants or animals.¹ And as the behaviour of these in turn can be explained in the same terms as account for inorganic processes, Spencer has taken his stand on a thorough-going mechanism as

¹ Spencer's essay, "The Social Organism", which treats the analogy at length, will be referred to in Chapter 5.

the explanation of all phenomena. Will and purpose, the pursuit of ends, the making of decisions and choices- all these and other features which have generally been taken as distinctive characteristics of mental and social and political phenomena, are for Spencer no different in kind from the physical processes- the redistribution of matter and motion- which he sees as the only phenomena requiring explanation in any field whatsoever.

On this presupposition of the possibility of a single universal explanation, Spencer goes on to account, with enviable but suspicious simplicity, for the development of modern society; and the society he has in mind is mid-nineteenth century European- and more particularly, English- society, in contrast with the primitive societies of pre-historic and historic times and of "less-developed" parts of his contemporary world. One of the strongest impressions made by these passages is of the a priori nature of Spencer's sociology and anthropology. Anxious to show how the development of society illustrates each aspect of the law of evolution, Spencer, one suspects, is somewhat too ready to see the facts fitting neatly into his theory. Thus, when discussing the first aspect of evolution - an increased integration - Spencer begins by pointing to the

formation of tribes from wandering families in primitive societies, and the "further progress in mass" which conquest and absorption of the enemy bring. He goes on: "Such combinations which, among aboriginal races, are continually being formed and continually broken-up, become, among superior races, relatively permanent." (S.III) Whether it is the permanence of combination- the cementing of a "cake of custom", in Walter Bagehot's phrase- that gives the superior races their superiority, Spencer does not say, though the implication seems to be there, What is even less clear, however, is how Spencer's evolutionary principle could account for the development of permanent combinations at all without bringing in the point that such arrangements are recognized as being advantageous. This comes out when he considers the consolidation that has gone on in Europe- "The consequent establishment of groups of vassals bound to their respective lords; the subsequent subjection of groups of inferior nobles to dukes or earls; and the still later growth of the kingly power over dukes and earls; are so many instances of increasing consolidation," (S.III), and Spencer even looks forward to the possibility of "a European federation- a still larger integration than any now established." It is true that such developments as these can be regarded in a sense as some sort of

integration. But this does not explain these social and political phenomena unless we assume, a priori, as Spencer does, that no further explanation of anything is required beyond showing that it conforms to some cosmic pattern, some universal and inevitable law of development. Spencer does not seek the cause of events, but their place in a universal process. Just as in talking about these social aggregates Spencer leaves quite out of account any questions of motives- the striving for security, prestige, or power, for example- so, in going on to consider the smaller, local integrations that occur within societies, he has nothing at all to say about economic factors. He speaks of the establishment of well-defined "regulative classes- governmental, administrative, military, ecclesiastical, legal, &c., ..." and of "operative or industrial organization", the localization of certain commercial activities in particular centres, and so on. So, again, in sections 112 to 114, where he speaks about language, science and art, Spencer seeks to show that in these fields too there has been a centralizing development- e.g. the emergence of a national tongue instead of numerous regional dialects- and a growing degree of organization- e.g. the organization (and integration) of a number of simple mechanical devices

-wheel, lever, screw - into a complicated machine, or the development in music from a drum beat to grand opera.

One point which comes out particularly clearly in his discussion of society as exemplifying the law of evolution is Spencer's (like all evolutionists') identification of the later with the higher or better, of progress in time with progress in goodness, and, at this stage of his argument, of change with progress. (We shall see later how Spencer shirks the problems raised by his concept of dissolution, the discussion of which he defers to a very small section at the end of this work). Whereas his professed intention is to show simply that the law of evolution operates in all fields he considers, he is in fact not confining himself to this at all: All the time, he is implying, or even saying, that the evolutionary developments he speaks of are an advance on previous stages. Spencer has undertaken to speak only of matter and motion. But his motion soon becomes a movement, and a movement in a certain direction, and, eventually, progress towards a certain end. What he fails to see is that the end, the direction, whether the movement is or is not towards something, that these are concepts which have no meaning unless we recognize that the ends and directions must be human (or divine) aims and goals,

that to speak of society "progressing", being "higher" or "lower", is to make a judgment about it in terms of certain norms, and is a very different thing from arranging societies in historical, chronological, order, saying which came first and which later, or from giving a purely historical account of certain changes in societies. It is this last task that Spencer sees himself as undertaking and, in large part, he succeeds (although his a priori treatment seems incredibly naive nowadays). But his lapses into unrecognized evaluations are frequent and crucial enough to show that he retains the supposition (common to his age) of the inevitability of progress and that what he takes to be evidence for it can in fact/^{only} be so interpreted if one shares his presupposition.

I shall try to show^{how} the following passage, typical of many, and one in which Spencer illustrates the differentiating aspect of the law of evolution, exemplifies these general shortcomings. Spencer writes: "Society in its first and lowest stage is a homogeneous assemblage of individuals having like powers and like functions; the only marked difference of function being that which accompanies difference of sex. Every man is warrior, hunter, fisherman, tool-maker, builder; every woman performs the same

drudgeries; every family is self-sufficient, and, save for purposes of companionship, aggression and defence, might as well live apart from the rest. Very early, however, in the course of social evolution, we find an incipient differentiation between the governing and the governed. Some kind of chieftainship soon arises after the advance from the state of separate wandering families to that of a nomadic tribe. The authority of the strongest and cunningest makes itself felt among savages, as in a herd of animals or a posse of school-boys; especially in war... " (S.122)

Now, it is clear from Spencer's general position that this is meant to be much more than a simplified and generalized account of the origins of society. In fact, it is probably not meant as an historical account at all. Spencer rather has in mind to explain, and not simply to describe, the course of social development. Here, his notion of explanation comes out, namely, to show that social events, like any others, can be subsumed under evolutionary law, can be shown to be examples of that law. Walter Bagehot, for example, was able to give a plausible reason for the growth of social solidarity and functional differentiation in terms of its value for defence.¹ Spencer, however,

1 See the reference to Bagehot in Chapter 5

discounts such possible causes, and talks simply of "the course of social evolution", as if the allocation to any event of a place in the process of evolution is enough to explain it. That Spencer does think he is explaining appears from his article "Progress! Its Law and Cause,"¹ on which this section of First Principles is based, and where he argues that it is not in an increase in the production of consumer goods, in greater security and in wider freedom that progress consists, but that "social progress consists of those changes of structure in the social organism which have entailed these consequences." We would expect, then, an explanation of these changes, but it is never forthcoming. Both the cause and the law of progress turn out to be that progress is part of the general process of evolution. And since this process is universal, one cannot show the connexion between it and other events, for they too are part of the process. In this notion of law, the idea of cause, of the conditions of occurrences, has no place. Describing social development in these terms, one may be said to have placed them in a metaphysical system, but not to have given an explanation of them.

¹ Westminster Review, 1857. See references in Chapter 5

The second point, about the passage quoted two paragraphs above, and about Spencer's general position which this passage typifies, is the identification of ~~or~~ change with improvement, of the "first" with the "lowest", and of the later with the better. Compared with many evolutionist writers, Spencer is very restrained in this respect, wanting to preserve a positive attitude and to remain immune from the charge of importing value judgments into his work. But the whole vocabulary of evolution carries commendatory overtones- "progress and advance" evaluate as well as describe, yet they are preferred to "process" or "change" or even "development". To talk about "lower" and "higher" stages of a society implies that the movement from the one stage to the other is in a particular direction- an "upward" one, one which is approved. Now, of course, it may well be true that society in its later stages is better than primitive society, that, say, the distribution and rationalization of labour which Spencer points to as one example of the evolutionary process of differentiation, ensures a more reliable, greater and more evenly -distributed supply of goods, greater leisure, greater skill, and so on. But if these economic arrangements are going to be taken as signs of progress, if it is to be asserted

that they are not simply different or later institutions but better ones, if they are to be regarded as an advance on the undifferentiated activities of a "homogeneous assemblage of individuals," then this must be shown independently of the historical position of each stage of society, some criteria other than mere temporal order must be invoked. Of course, Spencer is invoking such criteria, making judgments through the eyes of the laissez-faire economic outlook of his day. But he nowhere acknowledges this. It could be said that his procedure here is the reverse of the ethical theorist's. For he is saying not that the progress and advances and higher forms of society, so far achieved are good (or commendable) because they have certain qualities (or conform to certain demands or norms) irrespective of their position in the historical development of societies; he is saying that their historical order determines their value, that the more advanced or higher is so because it is later. Spencer professes to be accounting for social change, to be enunciating the laws of motion of society; what he does in fact is to evaluate social change in terms of this change. What he fails to see, or at any rate bring out, is that to see any direction in change, to see the movement of society as progress or advance from lower

to higher, is to import a certain point of view, to put an interpretation on change, and that this point of view or interpretation implies certain criteria of judgment other than the criterion of simply observing that social changes have occurred and do occur.

One point which Spencer stresses is the degree to which he claims to see heterogeneity and differentiation developing among men and societies. This cuts across his original emphasis on integration to some extent. Thus, whereas we have already noted his vision of "the beginnings of a European federation/", he points out on the other hand the vast multiplicity of languages among the "many now widely different tribes, which are proved by philological evidence to have had a common origin (and which show that) the race as a whole is more heterogeneous than it once was" (S.121) and the "increasing heterogeneity in the governmental appliances of different nations. All peoples are more or less unlike in their political systems and legislation, in their creeds and religious institutions, in their customs and ceremonial usages" (S.122), these last categories being for Spencer species of "governmental appliances". One criticism which post-Spencerian anthropology and psychology would bring out here would be the similarities rather than the

differences in religious and ceremonial procedures in diverse societies. On the question of political systems, however, in relation to the possibility of a European federation, it could be said that it is precisely because there had, in Spencer's time, been a development towards similar political institutions in certain Western European countries that this vision presented itself to him. It is especially difficult to see how Spencer could reconcile the various principles of his law of evolution at the international level; and, as he is concerned with the evolution of society as such, of the "world society", this is a question which he must face. Summarizing his position, he says: "So that beginning with a primitive tribe, almost if not quite homogeneous in the functions of its members, the progress has been, and still is, towards an economic aggregation of the whole human race; growing ever more heterogeneous in respect of the separate functions assumed by separate nations, the separate functions assumed by the local sections of each nation, the separate functions assumed by the many kinds of producers in each place, and the separate functions assumed by the workers united in growing or making each commodity." (S.122)

Confining the matter in this way to questions of

economic functions, one can understand how the growing volume of world trade in Spencer's day could lead him to see a rationalized, world-wide economy developing. But even if this were allowed, Spencer could not possibly give a similar account of the development of other social institutions. He could not argue that there is the very least evidence—fortunately—of an international division of labour in political systems, or in religion, or language, or any of the "products of human thought and action" which he considers. Spencer can make a fair showing in his contention that the law of evolution is illustrated in certain physical and biological fields, but—and this comes out increasingly as he continues to refine the notion of evolution—society and social institutions must be so mutilated to fit his Procrustean bed that they soon become unrecognizable.

Spencer goes on to modify his definitions of evolution, illustrating each amendment with examples from the same fields as those from which we have already seen him draw. The changes he sees, then, are from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from the simple to the complex, from the undifferentiated to the distinct, from the indefinite to the definite, and

so on. Spencer keeps restating his law, embodying fresh refinements each time, but always reminding us that it is a law about matter and motion, whether of stars or states. Spencer's last step in searching for his "first principle" is to show that in fact all types of phenomena can be treated in terms of matter and motion; "... to complete our conception of Evolution, we must contemplate throughout the Cosmos, these metamorphoses of retained motion which accompany the metamorphoses of component matter." (S.139 a) Following his established pattern, Spencer deals first with phenomena in astronomy, geology and sociology. Turning to mental phenomena, Spencer credits contemporary neurologists with more knowledge than, one suspects, they or even their modern successors would claim. "The phenomena subjectively known as changes in consciousness, are objectively known as nervous excitations and discharges, which science now interprets into modes of motion." (S.143)

An interesting feature of Spencer's account of how people "mature" mentally- interesting because of the light it throws on his general approach to all questions of accounting for change or development- is his total failure to consider the social aspect of this process, to take into account even the possibility that the new

mental habits acquired during childhood, youth and adulthood are the result of learning, imitation, instruction, persuasion, and so on. Thus Spencer points to the increasing ability in growing children to recognize, classify, remember, concentrate, to spell, to form correct "judgments on the affairs of life" and finally, "with maturity", to acquire that "precise co-ordination of data which is implied by a good adjustment of thoughts to things." (S.143) Throughout this passage, he speaks as if their emergence were inevitable, prescribed by the evolutionary law. Although Spencer in other passages ¹ speaks of language, the arts and science as social products, in this section he refers to the development of "special modes of mental action, as those which result in mathematics, music, poetry...". It does not seem to occur to Spencer that different "special modes of mental action" are likely to develop in different people according to the culture or society in which they live. And one feels that Spencer did not want this to occur to him, for two reasons. Firstly, because any such admission would cut across his notion of the inevitability of evolution in certain directions. If social circumstances and environment can alter modes

¹ e.g., Ss.123-125

of thought (i.e. if under certain social circumstances certain intellectual activities are promoted, impeded or forbidden), then no rigid line of development can be discerned in the history of mankind and society and the whole pattern of evolution begins to look fortuitous. Furthermore, such an admission would justify¹ legislative intervention in social development. Secondly, Spencer wants to establish a "great chain of being", representing not only the biological history of the universe, but also the present distribution of life, in a hierarchy, from the simplest unicellular amoeba to the mid-Victorian Western European gentleman. In particular, Spencer clearly takes the view that cultural, economic and political differences between existing societies are an index to and a result of the different stages of mental evolution of their members. While sometimes he speaks as if the evolution of societies is something that proceeds, as it were, under its own momentum, as if the evolutionary principle is immanent in societies as much as in any other "organisms", his position here is clearly one in which he takes social evolution as a product of mental development-

¹ On Spencer's rejection of social legislation, see below Chapter 7

- "The thoughts of the savage (a notion Spencer never clarifies) are nothing like so heterogeneous in their kinds as those of the civilized man, whose complex environment presents a multiplicity of new phenomena. His mental acts, too, are much less involved- he has no words for abstract ideas, and is found to be incapable of integrating the elements of such ideas. And in all but simple matters there is none of that precision in his thinking, and that grasping of many linked conceptions, which, among civilized men, leads to the exact conclusions of science." (S.143) By thus disregarding the interaction of social, cultural, political and economic institutions and change with the mental activities, habits and contributions of individuals, Spencer is able to suggest the higher mental development of certain peoples, in addition to the higher social development of certain communities - a position taken up with gratitude and enthusiasm by the racial superiority advocates of later generations.

Spencer is now in a position to make his definitive statement of the law of evolution, which, with one more last-minute refinement while "all the rest of the volume is standing in type", reads as follows:- "Evolution is integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from a

relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a relatively definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation." (S.145)

After this formidable formula, it is a relief to find the next chapter headed "The Interpretation of Evolution". But we are soon disappointed. Spencer sees as his task here the search for the grounds of the law of evolution, the search for "some deeper law" from which evolution may be derived. This deeper law proves to be the Persistence of force, one of those "ultimate principles" from which the inquiry into the Knowable first began. It is only by showing how his law can be deduced from this deeper law that Spencer can achieve his object "of exhibiting the phenomena of Evolution in synthetic order" (S.147). He achieves the deduction by introducing a further series of principles - the Instability of the Homogeneous, the Multiplication of Effects, Segregation, and Equilibration.

There is no need to dwell for any time on these notions. The Instability of the Homogeneous amounts to little more than a restatement of one of Spencer's starting points, viz., that things change. The principle of the Multiplication of Effects enshrines the observation that it is difficult or impossible to predict

all the changes that may follow any occurrence. The most interesting feature of this section is Spencer's a priori findings which, in retrospect, have something of a Darwinian ring about them, though the empirical evidence is missing. Thus Spencer discusses the changes that are likely to occur in the character of plants and animals as a result of geological and geographical (especially climatic) changes. But there is a quite un-Darwinian emphasis on the importance of sudden changes likely to follow great upheavals and none of the gradualism which characterized Darwin's theory of natural selection. Again, Spencer does not see such changes as accidental but rather - and here he is echoing Lamarck - as a deliberate accommodation to the new environment. "We know that when circumstances demand it such changes of habit do take place in animals..." He goes on to argue that "it must now and then occur" that changed circumstances will produce "an increased heterogeneity" and the other features - differentiation, and so on, - which distinguish the evolutionary process.

The upshot of the argument is that the changes which have wrought numerous effects in the species man, as in any other species, must have produced some human races which "have/more heterogeneous", that is more
become

advanced. Similarly, says Spencer, "the advance of Society towards greater heterogeneity" may be explained in terms of the multiplication of effects. What Spencer has done in these sections, then, amounts to this. Having defined evolution in terms of increasing heterogeneity and having valued the more heterogeneous as the "more advanced" and "higher" stage of development, Spencer seeks to explain the differences between, for example, "the civilized European" and "the Australian", not in terms of different cultural, economic and other facts, but in terms of a principle. Things are so; therefore they must be so: why? because they obey a principle which says they must be so. Nothing could be neater or less enlightening.

But still another principle must be set up to show that the "advance from the uniform to the multiform.. is an advance from the indefinite". (S.163) This is the principle of Segregation which states that like units will tend to collect together and to segregate themselves from unlike units. What causes this movement is some form of incident force, which imparts uniform motion in the same direction to like units, and a different degree or direction of motion to other units. Thus the sheep and the goats are sorted out, and it is not in the least surprising to find broad similarities

between the members of the many groups within each society. Here again, Spencer does not offer a social explanation of a social phenomenon. His account is in terms of matter and motion because his aim is to show that these phenomena, just like any other, can be explained in physical terms, and, more particularly, that the principle of Segregation, like the other magic formulae, can "be deduced from the persistence of force". And Spencer is not deterred from his pursuit of such ultimate truth even when the chase leads him into such a cul-de-sac as this - "it needs but to glance round at the caste divisions, the associations for philanthropic, scientific, and artistic purposes, the religious parties and social cliques, to see that some species of likeness among the component members of each body determines their union." (S.168)

This singularly uninformative and misleading piece of fatuity deserves some attention as illustrating an error which runs right through Spencer's attempt to find a single explanation for inorganic, organic and social phenomena by reducing them all to common terms of matter in motion. The quotation is uninformative because to recognize that there are classes or groups in society (or anywhere else) is simply to recognize that certain individuals are alike in

in certain respects. It is misleading - and this is the important point- because it obscures the distinction between logical classes and social classes. Spencer's various evolutionary principles - the growth of heterogeneity, differentiation, integration, segregation, and so on - assume the possibility of classification in terms of common physical characteristics. The "products" of these evolutionary principles in various fields, the classes of heavenly bodies in cosmology, of minerals in geology, of plants and animals in biology, which have evolved out of undifferentiated homogeneity, are so classified because of certain properties they share or certain biological functions they all perform. This classification is not something that we simply observe, in the same way as we observe the common properties or functions. In these fields, scientists choose to group certain things together - the groupings do not occur naturally. The case with social groups is quite different. They are groups whose formation may have nothing to do with common physical characteristics, and while their members will have certain beliefs, functions or aims as belonging to one group, they will have other interests as members of other groups. The class of red-headed men is a biological class, or a logical class, but not

a social class. The distribution of logical classes is quite unimportant, whereas proximity or at least communication is essential to the social group. In short, the members of a logical or scientific class are identified by certain common qualities, while the members of a social group or class are brought together - actually and not theoretically - for a host of reasons which need not, and seldom do, have anything to do with physical characteristics or biological functions.¹

But Spencer is driven to these confusions by his search for a single clue to all phenomena. He overlooks those factors which are precisely the distinguishing characteristics of societies - common interests and aims and pursuits, common economic conditions and wants, and so on - and without which social groups, and even societies would not occur. In his anxiety to show that, like the other principles, Segregation applies to society as elsewhere, Spencer treats likeness as if it were a property, a quality, as if it were something - like sails - on which an incident force could somehow impinge. Like Parmenides, Spencer also failed to see

¹ D.G. Ritchie, Darwinism and Politics, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1889, p.19, makes a related point.

that it is not absurd to say that things are both like and unlike - and, like Parmenides again, he failed to see this because he feared that such an admission would undermine his monism.

In the chapter on Equilibration, Spencer raises the question whether movements or changes will "go on for ever? or will there be an end to them?" His answer is that "Whether we watch concrete processes or whether we consider the question in the abstract we are alike taught that Evolution has an impassable limit". (S.170) He argues that because the forces at work in all realms are antagonistic, this "necessitates the ultimate establishment of a balance. Every motion, being motion under resistance, is continually suffering deductions: and those unceasing deductions finally result in the cessation of motion." (S.170)

This statement of something like a law of entropy in the physical world is promptly applied to society. Population, he suggests, always adjusts itself to the means of subsistence of each society and eventually becomes stable; similarly, the level of production and prices will tend to become fixed and stationary. When this happens, "Each society will exhibit only minor deviations from its average number, and the rhythm of its industrial functions will go on from day to day

and year to year with comparatively insignificant perturbations." (S.175) Not only will this state of tranquility be reached in economic activity, Spencer argues, but also in politics - he sees an equilibration "which results in the establishment of governmental institutions, and which becomes complete as these institutions fall into harmony with the desires of the people". (S.175) Thus he describes the political process in society as essentially a struggle "between social and individual forces", and this struggle is typified by the reactions of similar forces towards one another. "'Despotism (is) tempered by assassination'", at the one extreme, and, in his contemporary English society, Spencer sees Conservatism and Reform as similar though opposing forces which "fall within slowly approximating limits; so that the temporary predominance of either produces a less marked deviation from the median state - a smaller disturbance of the moving equilibrium". (S.175)

As with the earlier laws he claims to have established, Spencer wants to argue that the law of equilibration too can be deduced from first principles. "The end of all the transformations we have traced is quiescence" he says, and "This admits of a priori proof. The law of equilibration, not less than the preceding general laws, is deducible from the ultimate datum of

of consciousness." (S.176) Here again, Spencer proceeds in a quite unempirical way and the very few examples he cites are ones carefully chosen to bear out his contentions. While it could plausibly be argued that, by the mid-nineteenth century, England had reached a stage of relative political stability, this was certainly not the case with either her population or her economy, one reason for which was that certain quite unforeseen changes had occurred. A hundred years after Spencer wrote, further technological discoveries in the form of nuclear power are likely to bring about changes quite as momentous as those of the first industrial revolution. Spencer, of course, could not have anticipated these latest innovations, but he could have observed the lesson of history that even those institutions, political, economic, and so on, which appear to be most firmly established are never absolutely invulnerable nor impervious to change. Spencer can only get over his difficulties by recourse to the a priori, that which cannot be tested, by bare assertion that such and such must be the case, whatever evidence there may be to the contrary. He is satisfied with such assertions as that "movement must continue while equilibration is incomplete, and equilibration must eventually become complete. Both these are

manifest deductions from the persistence of force. Hence this primordial truth is our warrant that the changes which Evolution presents cannot end until equilibrium is reached, and that equilibrium must at last be reached." (S.176) His procedure is by now very familiar - a certain principle is laid down and then selected illustrations - carefully selected - are given to bear it out. Examples which run contrary to the principles are conveniently overlooked. It is surprising that Spencer did not begin his whole inquiry by setting up a Principle of Selected Evidence.

Towards the end of his book, Spencer returns to the question of Dissolution which he laid temporarily aside to consider the many ramifications of Evolution. His treatment of this last topic is much more cursory than his treatment of Evolution. His argument in this section is an attempt to complete his account of the process through which everything in nature and society is supposed to go. Having evolved to the point where equilibrium is reached, the process of development then begins its final stage, dissolution. This stage of development, like its two predecessors, is described in terms of motion. When the balance in which evolution ends has been reached, "an aggregate ... thereafter remains subject to all actions in its

environment which may increase the quantity of motion it contains, and which in course of time are sure, either slowly or suddenly, to give its parts such excess of motion as will cause disintegration". (S.177)

Society, too, according to Spencer, is of course liable to disintegration. This occurs when there is "a decrease in the movements of wholes and an increase in the movement of parts" and this upsetting of the balance is caused "by an excess of motion in some way or other received from without". (S.178) Among such outside causes is aggression, under which, "as sometimes happens, the conquered society is dispersed, or when its component divisions fall apart, its dissolution is literally a cessation of those corporate movements which the society, both in its army and in its industrial bodies, presented, and a lapse into individual or uncombined movements". "Social disorder" leads to similar results. The central government loses control, industry and commerce continue only on a restricted, local scale, and finally each individual is left to himself. As an example of such external forces causing the disintegration of a society, Spencer cites the case of Japan, which, under the influence of European infiltration saw its social fabric fall to pieces and "there is now [this was added in 1867] in progress

a political dissolution". (S.178) Spencer allows that a political reorganization may follow, but his point is that this is a good example of a society which had evolved to a state of balance and which could not withstand external forces being brought against it.

Contrary to his practice in the earlier parts of his exposition, Spencer deals, in the section on dissolution, with society first, arguing that the law is most clearly demonstrated there, and goes on to talk about dissolution in the physical world only after this has been done. One's suspicions are immediately aroused by this reversal of his procedure and the suspicions turn out to be justified. In those parts of his discourse where Spencer is reasonably certain of the explanations of physical phenomena, we saw how he went on in each case arbitrarily to expand the explanatory range of his various laws so that they could also account for social and mental phenomena. In this section he does the opposite. Being no more certain than the scientists of his day how to answer the question, "What are we to think concerning the future of the visible Universe?" (S.182b), Spencer assumes that the same principle can explain problems in this and the social fields. Putting the matter in Spencerian terms, having argued that explanations which

are valid in the inorganic and organic field can be extended to the super-organic, i.e., mind and society, he maintains in this section that valid explanations of the super-organic may similarly be applied to physical phenomena. Spencer admits not only that contemporary knowledge could not account for the phenomena in which he is most interested, namely, cosmological questions, but goes on to say that in principle some at any rate of the questions he asks are unanswerable (S.182b). Nevertheless, his monistic system must be saved, so that we find him finishing this chapter on dissolution with the happily confident but quite gratuitous observation, "But unable though we must ever remain to give a complete account of the transformation of things, even in any of its minor parts, and still more in its totality" - the next is the gratuitous part - "we are able to recognize through it the same general law; and may reasonably infer that it holds in those parts of the transformation which are beyond the reach of our intelligence as it does in those parts which are within its reach."

This last sentence foreshadows the position Spencer makes explicit in his final chapter, and that position is a monistic one.

"We shall find that in their ensemble the general truths reached exhibit, under certain aspects, a oneness not hitherto observed. " (S.184) This oneness is brought out clearly by Spencer's emphasis on the claim that his whole system is deducible from one central "truth". Summing up his previous findings, Spencer says: "Having previously seen that our experiences of Matter and Motion are resolvable into experiences of Force, we further saw the truths that Matter and Motion are unchangeable in quantity to be implications of the truth that Force is unchangeable in quantity. This we concluded is the truth by derivation from which all other truths are to be proved. " (S.185, my italics)

Having shown that the nature of "movements of all orders, from those of stars down to those of nervous discharges and commercial currents..." (S.185) is the same, Spencer, somewhat ingenuously, points out that it is not just "a coincidence that the same law of metamorphosis holds throughout all its (Evolution's) divisions". (S.188) This coincidence, he argues, is not really surprising when we remember that the divisions we have made of the various fields of inquiry are quite arbitrarily imposed by us on what is really a unitary universe. We must "remember that the several existences with which they (the conventional disciplines) severally

deal are component parts of one Cosmos" and then we shall see that "there are not several kinds of Evolution having certain traits in common, but one Evolution going on everywhere after the same manner". (ibid.) It is this notion of a single process going on throughout the universe that Spencer regards as the primary truth to which his arguments lead. What he wants to show is that it is possible to explain all phenomena in terms of one principle or law and, further, that any explanation which falls short of this universal applicability will be a faulty and incomplete explanation. "There are not many metamorphoses similarly carried on, but there is a single metamorphosis universally progressing.." (ibid.) and it is in terms of this and of this alone that anything can be fully explained. There is only one difficulty and it is one to which Spencer never really faces up, namely, the difficulty of accounting for the reverse process of Dissolution. We have already noticed what scant attention he paid to this reverse process in the Chapter he devoted to it, and in his concluding remarks, Spencer does no more than acknowledge it without attempting to bring it into harmony with his whole scheme. Thus the last quotation above is immediately followed by the lame qualification, " ..wherever the

reverse metamorphosis has not set in". Later on (S.193) he says "that all phenomena receive their complete interpretation, only when recognized as parts of these processes", i.e., the processes of Evolution and Dissolution. What he does not seem to recognize is that the admission of these two contrary movements, movements which may occur in different phenomena at the same time, undermines his whole insistence on the unitary nature of the process which all phenomena are said to go through. It may be the case that everything goes through a recurring cyclic process of Evolution, Equilibration, and Dissolution - Spencer claims to have shown that this is the case because this cycle can be deduced from the Persistence of Force. But if that is the ground on which his argument rests, it is impossible to see how any phenomena could get out of phase and go through the stages of Equilibration or Dissolution while other phenomena were still evolving. If Force is Persistent, that is, if the amount of matter and/or motion is constant, then Spencer would have to show that the rate of disintegration (transformation of matter into motion) in a phenomenon undergoing Dissolution exactly balances the rate of integration (motion into matter) in evolving phenomena, and he has done nothing at all to show that this balance is always

preserved.

These, however, are matters of detail. What is more important to note is that, in his First Principles, Spencer has made a determined and systematic though, I would say, unsuccessful attempt to show that there is a single explanatory principle for all the things that occur in the physical, mental and social worlds, and that this principle is satisfactory because it takes into account the fact that what has to be explained is a movement of some sort. It is also satisfactory because it is a principle which can explain all movements whatsoever, it recognizes that movement is what is common to all phenomena, and that it is the same kind of movement in every case, namely, the transformation of matter and motion, and that movement has a certain direction. An explanatory principle of this sort, then, fulfils almost perfectly the requirements of many mid-Victorian thinkers, who, in Dingle's phrase, hoped to see the whole world bound by causal chains to Newton's feet. Here was a principle which, borrowing heavily from illustration and confirmation from the highly respectable natural sciences, claimed to show that the same explanation was valid for phenomena in every conceivable field, and to be deducible from a physical principle which was,

at that time, unimpeachable.

Spencer's philosophy was optimistic. He took it for granted, as a fact which was beyond dispute and simply there to be explained, that progress was occurring. Not merely some remote, cosmic evolution, but a progress in which everyone, especially certain of the more favoured white races, was sharing. For Spencer had said, in his summary, "And our concluding inference was, that the penultimate stage of equilibration in the organic world, in which the extremest multiformity and most complex moving equilibrium are established, must be one implying the highest state of humanity". (S.189)

The inevitable movements or stages through which Spencer saw society and humanity passing were pleasant to contemplate. Dissolution was glossed over; in any case, the inevitability of a new evolution was reassuring. What he claimed to have discovered about the laws of social change was, to say the least, not disconcerting. He could proclaim his discoveries with a confidence in the future which would make his findings most acceptable. Spencer's position was essentially a teleological one. The state of equilibrium was a goal towards which the evolutionary process was inevitably tending, a goal which Nature

herself was pursuing and which would therefore unquestionably be achieved. When it was added that this goal has as its end the production of the highest state of humanity, it is not at all surprising that Spencer became for many people the living prophet of the age. What could be more palatable to a country like Victorian England, which was then at the height of its commercial and industrial career as the tradesman and manufacturer of the whole world, than a philosophy which maintained, with an impressive show of scientific support for its position (especially impressive in view of the fact that it was science itself which had so largely helped to bring Britain to her position of eminence), that this development was part of a great, natural, cosmic process, an inevitable tendency, in tune with the pattern of the universe? It was no mere analogy that Spencer was putting forward, There was but one law of motion for the universe, and the history of England and more especially its present stage of development exhibited the workings of that law ideally, for had not English society achieved a degree of integration, differentiation and heterogeneity ahead of any other country?

England, then, could enjoy the role of evolution's

fairest flower. But how much more attractive did the doctrine seem to those nations whose blossom-time lay in the future, and the not too distant future at that; post-Civil War America, and the new Imperial Germany. After all, evolution was a process through which all were destined to go sooner or later, and those who saw themselves as having a high priority, as being well advanced in the cosmic queue, were only too happy to welcome a doctrine which taught them that the wave on whose crest they saw themselves about to rise was part of a vast universal movement in conformity with the very laws of nature.

Part II.

The Evolution of Social Darwinism.

Chapter 4.

The Impact of Darwin.

The philosophy of Herbert Spencer remains the most complete exposition of an evolutionary position. In the previous chapter, I dealt with First Principles and touched on some of the essays. The whole philosophy, however, of which the plan was outlined in the introduction to First Principles, took many years to complete, and Spencer worked away at his System for the next two decades. During this period, of course, his concepts developed and he found that the new material he was constantly collecting obliged him to revise some of his notions more or less. But he worked out his overall plan with remarkable consistency, and it is true to say that the fundamental framework of First Principles was substantially unchanged in the filling out which his later work really amounted to, and that the political, economic and sociological ideas which first appeared in the early essays remained the substantial content of his later and more detailed work in these fields. In short, the fundamental concepts with which Spencer worked in writing his huge System of Philosophy were nearly

all developed by the time he had completed First Principles in 1862, and many of them had been worked out in more or less detail in the previous twelve years, since the writing of Social Statics. In the later elaboration, these concepts were expanded but little altered. The Spencerian philosophy of evolution was pretty well evolved by 1860, the year¹ in which Spencer began to write First Principles.

Now, one thing that was noticed in the last chapter was the fact that Spencer, like any other thinker, did not develop his position in a vacuum, but against a background of already existing thought and knowledge. Spencer was particularly susceptible, from his early interest in natural history and his professional training in engineering, to the influence of scientific ideas. In 1840, when he was 20, Spencer read Lyell's Principles of Geology, which not only increased his interest in that subject, but also made him indirectly aware of the teachings of Lamarck, notably on the subject of the origin of species. In fact, in his Autobiography,² he tells us how Lyell's

1 See his Autobiography, Williams and Norgate, London, 1904, 2 vols. Vol. II, pp. 5-18

2 ibid., Vol. I, p. 176.

attempts to refute Lamarck's argument on this question inclined Spencer towards, rather than away from, the Frenchman's position, and this Lamarckianism remained with him, though somewhat modified after 1859, all his life. Spencer was also impressed by the work of the physicist Helmholtz and of the embryologist Von Baer: in a letter to G.H. Lewes¹ he says he would probably not have written his System had Von Baer never written". That the discussions of the 'development hypothesis' in its various forms was one of his constant interests is evident throughout his Autobiography, in which he tells us, for example, that he knew and disputed the explanation given in the anonymous book on Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation published in 1844. There is plenty of internal evidence, as well as other evidence, then, that Spencer's interest in evolutionary theory was one which he shaped with many other thinkers of his day. In this connexion, what Spencer himself says about his own reactions to reading The Origin of Species at the end of 1859 is very enlightening. He admits that it forced him to revise his Lamarckianism, and he says that he may or may not have been "vexed by the thought that in 1852 I had failed to carry further the idea then expressed, that among human beings, the survival of those who are

1. 21st. Mar. 1864, reprinted ibid., Vol. II, p. 485;
2. ibid., Vol. I, p. 348

the select of their generation is a cause of development. But I doubt not that any such feelings, if they arose, were overwhelmed in the gratification I felt at seeing the theory of organic evolution justified. To have the theory of organic evolution justified was of course to get further support for that theory of evolution at large with which... all my conceptions were bound up." ¹ For Spencer, the importance of the Origin was largely, if not wholly, as a particular piece of evidence for his general theory of evolution. When, by 1864, he had succeeded, to his own satisfaction, in assimilating the Darwinian hypothesis within the framework of his own evolutionary theory in terms of re-distribution of matter and motion, he thought he had coped with Darwin quite effectively, and thereafter Darwin appears to have had little part in Spencer's life and thought. There is the possibility, of course, that Spencer felt somehow that he had a rival in Darwin. In contrast to the scant attention he gave the naturalist, Darwin, though he modestly protests that he cannot always understand Spencer, is prepared to acknowledge Spencer as the authority in those fields beyond the range of natural history into which Darwin

¹ Autobiography, Vol.2, p.50, This was written in 1895.

did not venture. One feels that Darwin can afford to be generous in his recognition, but that Spencer strived to keep the whole field to himself. Darwin's position was assured with the publication of a single book; Spencer had constantly to extend his fortifications with a lifetime of steady writing, yet he never felt sure enough behind his wall of paper to admit even an ally within the ramparts, lest, one suspects, he should be critical of their foundations.

Be that as it may, Spencer had a great following throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. He combined the work of a number of thinkers in several fields, especially the sciences, and extended them to cover the whole gamut of human experiences. What he attempted/^{was} to work out a cosmic philosophy, one which showed the cause and course of all things, and which demonstrated that the same pattern of development was at work everywhere. He was regarded by many as having succeeded in doing this, and his popular following, especially in America, would have flattered even the least susceptible people. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the intellectual movement which flourished roughly from the end of the American Civil War to the outbreak of the First World War and which in many respects grew out of the work of Spencer in that period

became known not as Social Spencerism, nor even as Social Evolution, but as Social Darwinism. Of the concepts and slogans which so frequently appear in social theory and political argument in the decades after 1860 - "survival of the fittest", "evolution", "social progress", "the social organism" - many were coined, notably "survival of the fittest", and all were put into circulation, as much by Spencer as by Darwin. Yet the movement received the name not of the philosopher and social theorist but of the biologist. Spencer had been writing prolifically for a decade before the Origin appeared and he outlived Darwin by more than twenty years, many of them productive of important works. Nevertheless, the social philosophy of which Spencer is the leading advocate until the turn of the century did not begin to flourish until Darwin had published his book and the name Darwinism stuck even when the philosophy had quite swamped and even made unrecognizable many of the beliefs of its unwitting founder, and long after it had imported ideas which he would never have accepted.

This brief comparison of Spencer and Darwin raises two questions: firstly, the state of the intellectual climate in which both were writing; and secondly, the question of what it was about Darwin's work which

secured for it such an immediate and immensely wide influence. Both were addressing the same audience, yet, as William Irvine puts it,¹ "Herbert Spencer wallowed for decades in evolutionary speculation of the boldest sort without arousing one-tenth of the scandal, excitement, loyalty, hatred, and animosity" that the Origin provoked.

On the first point it must be said at the outset that there was nothing unfamiliar about the "development hypothesis" in the mid-nineteenth century.² One of the features of eighteenth century thinking had been the new emphasis on historical studies, in tracing the beginnings and changes in societies. Up to that time, scientists had been mainly concerned to describe the nature of things: now they began to turn to questions of origin and development. In biology, the classificatory approach to the subject reached its climax in the system of Linnaeus. But at the very same time, some adventurous souls, like Buffon and Erasmus Darwin,

1 William Irvine, Apes, Angels and Victorians, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1955, p. 83.

2 Accounts of pre-Darwinian evolutionary thought are given in: J.B. Bury, The Idea of Progress; Robert Scoon, "The Rise and Impact of Evolutionary Ideas", Chap. 1 of Evolutionary Thought in America, ed. Stow Persons, Yale, 1950; Maurice Mandelbaum, "Scientific Background of Evolutionary Theory in Biology," Journal of the History of Ideas, June, 1957; Charles Singer, A History of Biology, revised ed., H.K. Lewis, London, 1950.

Charles's grandfather, were already turning to the similarities and gradations, rather than the distinctions, between species, the question of their appearance and disappearance at different times and in different places, the differences between parents and offspring, and so on. Their interest was not so much in describing species as if they were fixed and permanent, as in giving an account of their history, a history not entirely unlike that of human individuals and society. And the very recognition that species had a history was the beginning of the realization that species were not fixed and permanent. The fact that individuals varied from one another was obvious to every farmer and breeder of animals. But that such differences had anything to do with the origin of species in nature was a supposition that, hitherto, had lacked two important props - firstly, clear evidence that the number and characteristics of species, and not just of individuals, had changed from time to time, and secondly, a plausible explanation of such changes, and especially of the origin of new species. The first of these requirements, evidence of specific changes, was gradually accumulated by the geologists who also plausibly interpreted the already existing evidence; especially fossils, which had hitherto been regarded as nature's little jokes. The second

requirement, an explanatory hypothesis, came more slowly, and had to contend against two difficulties. The first was the lack of convincing evidence. The second, which incidentally made the evidence even less convincing to many people, was the existence of an alternative account of the origin of species, as of everything else, namely the Biblical account of Creation which was taken as evidence that the number of species was fixed and that their form was permanent.

There were, of course, other difficulties that the development hypothesis faced. One was the logical problem of defining species. This was no mere academic question. Linnaeus accepted the old Aristotelian criterion of ability to reproduce. Varieties which could not be successfully crossed were supposed not to belong to the same species. This view chimed in with the established religious belief in the fixity and permanence of species. In opposing this position, Buffon was the first to argue that the system of nature is not something static, in which distinctions are not clear-cut and permanent, but a system in process, where change and growth are always gradually occurring. It was the distinction between 'Systema Naturae' and 'Scala Naturae'. "La marche de la nature se fasse par nuances et par degrés" said Buffon, and this emphasis

on the gradualness and continuity of change became one of the cornerstones of evolutionary thinking. One obstacle that the evolutionary thinkers faced from the first, then, was the sheer logical difficulty of maintaining that it made sense to talk about identifiable species and at the same time to argue that species could change.

Another besetting difficulty of evolutionary thinking, and one by no means confined to the nineteenth century, was the opposition of orthodox religion. This was particularly aroused when the attempt was made to treat man in the same way as any other species. What was a logical or empirical question in the case of plants and animals acquired a theological significance in the case of man. The whole question of "man's place in nature" was a point of lively speculation from the end of the eighteenth century, the question being whether man had a place on the *Scala Naturae* at all— even at the top, he would still be on it— or whether he must be regarded on religious grounds as being in a special category. These were important points, because the question was, what implications for the nature of man would one's view on these matters entail? Thus it was, for example, that many criticisms of Darwin were not so much about his theory as about the view of man

which seemed to follow from it. As Bury has remarked ¹,
"Evolution, shearing him (man) of his glory as a rational
being specially created to be Lord of the earth, traces
a humbler pedigree for him", and this "degradation", as
Bury calls it, met with long resistance.

Among the factors influencing the growth of
evolutionary thought early in the nineteenth century
was a final settlement of the old argument of epigenesis
versus preformation by the work of the eighteenth
century embryologists, C.F. Wolff. ² When his findings ³
became generally known among scientists after 1813, it
was seen that the admission of the truth of epigenesis
allowed the possibility of changes from one generation
to another, and this was a further obstacle removed
from the acceptance of some sort of transformationist
theory. We have already noted how influential was the
further work of the German embryologist Von Baer on
Spencer in the 1840's. ³ Another factor was, so to speak,
a by-product of the work going on in geology. We shall
return presently to the wider significance of the
geological work, but at the moment the point to notice
is the discoveries about the antiquity of man which the
geologists were able to interpret. During the 1840's

1 op.cit., p.335

2. Singer, op.cit., p.463

3 See Mandelbarn, op.cit.

and 1850's a number of discoveries were made which put in question the earlier geological assumption that man had been a comparatively late comer to the earth. Hitherto, there had been no geological evidence that man had a long history which merged with that of any other animals. The importance of this for those who wished to stick to the theory of special creation, especially in the case of man, was that it did not seem that there had been enough time for the occurrence of those gradual developments of which Buffon and later Lamarck spoke. But the discovery first of old flints which the geologists were able to date, and then of human remains which showed man to have been at any rate the contemporary of the mastadon, and as a species which had clearly changed over the ages, was strong evidence that there were no exceptions to the evolutionary pattern.¹

A third factor, and one which remained an important theoretical consideration throughout the history of all Darwinian thought, was the interest in the theory of population. The connexions between the work of Malthus and of Darwin have been dwelt upon by many commentators, some of whom ignore the fact that the first one to point

1. Irvine, op.cit., p.138; Singer, op.cit., p.311, on the work of Boucher de Perthes.

out the connexion was Darwin himself. Mandelbaum points out that, just as Darwin was struck by the work of Malthus, so Malthus himself had noted "the analogy between the ecological relations among plants and animals, and the question of the checks on human populations". The palaeontologists and naturalists were exercised by the question of the failure of all members of a species to survive, and this question itself implied the notion of fitness to survive. The discussion was as to whether, as the Creationists held, God had made each species to fit in with its environment, or, as Buffon argued, the environment affected changes in the species, or as Lamarck maintained, the species adapted itself to the environment, though he did not say how, and that these acquired characteristics were transmitted to the following generations. What was not discussed, however, either by the naturalists or by Malthus was the question of which members of any species would turn out to be the survivors.

It was this question which Darwin asked and which his theory of

1. The passage occurs in Darwin's autobiography, the 2nd. chapter of the Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, ed., by Francis Darwin, Murray, London, 2 Vols., 2nd. ed. 1887: Vol. I, p. 83: "In October 1838... I happened to read for amusement 'Malthus on Population', and, being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved & unfavourable ones destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species. 2. op.cit

selection attempted to answer.

What I have been suggesting so far is that the whole question to which evolutionary theory in general attempted to provide an answer had come up in a number of different forms in different fields, many years before Spencer and Darwin wrote. It must be emphasised that the stimulus came from the sciences and especially those sciences, many of them new, which dealt with the history, changes and developments which occurred in the phenomena they examined. These were the biological and the geological sciences. The question of the connexion between geology and the particular problem of the origin of biological species was first clearly raised in Sir, Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology, published in 1830-33. This book occupies a pre-eminent place in the history of evolutionary thought in general and the thinking of Darwin and Spencer in particular.

The similarity between the problems of biology and geology was brought out in two ways. The most obvious way was in the discovery of fossil remains which the geologists were able to date. This fact impressed Darwin very much, because from the occurrence of fossil remains in certain strata of which the relative ages could be estimated, it was possible to show that there was a temporal order in the occurrence of the fossils.

On the evolutionary hypothesis, this allowed for the view that species had gone through successive stages of development. On the Creationist view, whether echippus came before the horse was theoretically unimportant: whereas it mattered greatly to those who wanted to argue that the one had developed, in some one way or other, from the other .

The less obvious point of contact between biology and geology was the nature of the problems each set out to solve. Both wanted to argue that the phenomena which they studied, plants and animals on the one hand, and the earth on the other, had not always presented the appearance they now have. That changes had occurred was not denied. The evidence of the work of such obvious agencies as earthquake, volcano and flood, in the one case, and of plant and animal breeding and migration, and of fossil remains, in the other, could not be gainsaid. The great question, however, was how these changes had come about. The traditional answer, which had the backing of orthodox religion and the Old Testament, was that geological changes had come about by a series of great catastrophic upheavals, of which the Flood was the prototype, and that species were made, and unmade, by God. These two views, Catastrophism and Creationism, dove-tailed together nicely; each

each catastrophe would wipe out many existing species evidence of whose existence would be preserved in fossil remains, and would call for the creation of new species. On this view, too, the apparent anomalies in the distribution of species in different parts of the world, the survival of species in some areas and not in others, could be explained in terms of the sudden isolation of continents or islands by sudden great geological upheavals. The classical expositor of the doctrine of catastrophes was Cuvier, a firm believer in the fixity of species. He argued that each catastrophe wiped out many existing species, of whose existence we learn from fossils, and that the earth was repopulated from the survivors. To Cuvier's view was added the doctrine of new creations after each catastrophe.

Against this traditional explanation of change, both the geologists, led by Hutton, William Smith, and chiefly, Lyell, and the naturalists, Buffon, Lamarck, and Darwin, wanted to maintain that changes were brought about slowly, imperceptibly, and continuously, that the important agents of change are not the spectacular and occasional natural catastrophe, but the scarcely observed action of wind and waves, sun and rain, and the gradual process of adaptation to environment through which plant

and animal species were constantly going from one generation to another. In particular, they wanted to argue that the agencies which brought about changes in the past are still and always at work; and that, as a result of these two factors, the process is a continuous one. In geology, this was seen by Hutton at the end of the 18th. century and established by Lyell's book. It was known as the Uniformitarian principle, in contrast to the doctrine of sudden catastrophes. It should be pointed out, however, that this view did not tread quite so heavily on religious toes as did parallel attempts to maintain a uniformitarian position in biology, namely, the position of Transformism, as evolutionary theory was then called. It seems that, as long as man's special position in the cosmos was unchallenged, the faith, which, as we have seen, was still strong in Spencer's First Principles, that religion had nothing to fear from science and that there was nothing in the way of the ultimate reconciliation of the two, was ready to withstand and even welcome any findings about the nature of the physical world as further evidence of the wonderful and mysterious ways in which God worked. But the humanity of man was apparently much less secure and confident about the findings of science, than was the divinity of God, for,

once stubbed by the suggestion that the origin of species, or at any rate, of man, was not divine, the flesh and blood toes of religion were firmly dug in for the defense of the supernatural. Even Lyell himself was never able to accept the full implications for man of the Darwinian position, and he continued steadfast in the belief that man enjoyed a special position."With statesmanlike abandonment of logic, he drew, like Pope Alexander VI, a straight line across the world, proclaiming evolution in the realms of botany and geology, and a Creator in those of man and animals." ¹ And this in spite of the fact that it was his own book, "The Antiquity of Man, published in 1863, which made it clear to others, though not to its author, that man too had evolved.

Now the biologists saw their task as exactly parallel to that of the geologists. What they too fought to establish was that the agents of change are and have been slowly, continuously and still at work in the gradual modification of species, that the modifications have taken an immensely long time, and that the only reason for our failure to recognise that they are still at work (and so for our attributing the origin and change of species

I. Irvine, op. cit., p. 87.

to supernatural agencies) is that the changes happen too slowly for us to see. In some ways, the biologists had a harder row to hoe than their colleagues. We have already noted the barriers of human pride and religious prejudice which had to be overcome. Then, evidence was harder to find. Geological changes affected by wind and tide, for example, could be observed in one lifetime, and there was good historical evidence for the occurrence of big-scale changes over the centuries. But no-one could point so clearly to similar gradual changes in species. Plants and animals under domestication could certainly be changed by selective breeding within a few generations. But there were no obviously parallel processes going on in nature. There might be historical evidence for the disappearance of certain species and even for the appearance of others, but no continuity was easily observable. With rare exceptions,¹ the fossil evidence was woefully incomplete. It could be interpreted as indicating a succession of species, but it could not be stretched to support unaided a theory of continuous development.

What the naturalists lacked in historical depth, however, they could to some extent balance with the

1. The complete record of the history of the horse was not established till well after 1859.

growing geographical width which the discoveries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought forth, and the new interest in the natural sciences which enabled men to recognize these finds for what they were and not as mere curiosities. As exploration taught men more and more about the flora and fauna of the earth, belief in the doctrine of a fixed and unchanging number of species stood in jeopardy. Furthermore, with more and more samples to study, it became abundantly clear that the distinctions among species were by no means clear cut. Even during the period of the Enlightenment, when the evidence was admittedly growing but was still infinitely short of decisive, speculation of the possibility of evolution was already growing. As early as 1754. Diderot said: "Even if Revelation teaches us that species left the hands of the Creator as they are now, the philosopher who gives himself up to conjecture comes to the conclusion that life has always had its elements scattered in the mass of inorganic matter; that it finally came about that these elements united; that the embryo formed of this union has passed through an infinitude of organization and development; that it has acquired, in succession, movement, sensation, ideas, thought, reflection, conscience, emotions, signs, gestures, articulation, language, laws, and finally the sciences

and arts; that millions of years have elapsed during each of the phases of development, and that there are still new developments to be taken which are as yet unknown to us." ¹ I do not know whether Spencer ever read this.

The geological precedent thus had a double significance. It suggested the hypothesis that plant and animal species, like the earth itself, were constantly exposed to forces or agencies which effected changes, and that these modifications developed successively, continuously and cumulatively. The relation which the two sciences came to bear to each other is well illustrated in this passage from Darwin: "Battle within battle must ever be recurring with varying success; and yet in the long run forces are so nicely balanced, that the face of nature remains uniform for long periods of time...Nevertheless, so profound is our ignorance, and so high our presumption, that we marvel when we hear of the extinction of an organic being; and as we do not see the cause, we invoke cataclysms to desolate the world or invent laws on the duration of the forms of life!" ²

1. Quoted from Diderot's Pensées sur L'interprétation de la nature by soon in Persons, op.cit., p.11.
2. The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life, 6th.edition, 1872, reprinted 1895 by John Murray, London, p.53.(All future quotations are from this ed.and printing unless otherwise stated.)

All that was now required was an hypothesis to account for the fact and form of modification, an hypothesis as to the forces or agencies which effected the observed changes. It had also to be an hypothesis strong enough to offset the shortcomings of the geological evidence. With these two qualifications, such an hypothesis could at least begin to contend with the other obstacles in the way of the acceptance of an evolutionary view. Without them, it would be lost, and the order was a stiff one to fall.

The first attempts in this direction were made by Buffon. Buffon was born in the same year, 1707, as Linnaeus. It is interesting that the greatest exponent of the old classificatory and static approach to natural science should be a contemporary of the pioneer of the new view of nature as being in process - or rather, of the dynamic view which was a revival from certain classical thinkers. It may even be significant in this connexion that Buffon wrote in French, his Histoire Naturelle being the first important work in biology that was not written in Latin.

Buffon was converted to Transformism by his study of comparative botany, and he also presented a history of the earth in which the appearance and distribution of various species were correlated with successive geological epochs.

Though Buffon did not reach a position which can be called fully evolutionary & the displeasure of the Court and of official religion would have made him hesitate in expressing it anyway - he did open up lines of thinking which had a direct and important influence on his successors. Seeking to look at living things as a whole, Buffon regarded spermatozoa as the the substance from which all individuals were made up. This prepared the way for doctrines of changes in species as such, not only in individual members; and of community of descent, of common ancestors for different species. Buffon held that species were altered by the influence of external conditions, such as changes in climatic conditions, and that the adaptations to the new conditions achieved in one generation were somehow passed on to their progeny, by inherited memory or instinct.

A similar view was entertained by Darwin's grandfather Erasmus in his Zoonomia (1794), who went further than Buffon in defending a common origin for all living things in a single, simple organism: All animals, he thought, "have alike been produced from a similar living filament."¹ He also thought that the changes were induced by outside agencies and that they were passed on

1 . Quoted by Singer, op.cit., p.291.

to the offspring by a conscious process of imitation.

This view of the inheritance of acquired characteristics was developed by Lamarck. He also sought to argue that there is a continuity among all plant and animal species, that the boundary lines between species are quite arbitrary, and that they are only a function of our ignorance, since, he believed, the extension of knowledge would fill up the apparent gaps dividing the incomplete number of species we know. This led Lamarck too to the belief that species may change and to the view that environment induces the changes. (Incidentally, Lamarck mollified religious susceptibilities by pointing out that there could be no objection to representing God as ordaining the creation of numerous species successively rather than one at a time.)

So far, we have seen the common belief among these men in the possibility of specific changes, occurring over a period of time in response to outside stimuli, and the perpetuation of such changes in offspring. These were the essential ingredients of Transformism or the Development Hypothesis, the notion that what is involved is a matter of adaptation to environment. The importance of Lamarck, however, is that he went far beyond his predecessors in asking the questions, how are variations caused, and how can changes in external conditions induce

changes in species? His answer was the doctrine of use inheritance. Under altered conditions, Lamarck argued, new demands are made on certain organs which change or develop in order to fulfil the new function imposed on them. Disuse, on the other hand, led to the stunting of other organs, to their vestigial survival, or their disappearance. This was the first attempt to establish a law to account for the growing evidence against the fixity of species and at the same time to suggest a plausible framework for that evidence, a framework which could bridge the gaps in it. Furthermore, it was a scientific law, not a metaphysical or theological deliverance.

But still the doctrine of evolution was not accepted, let alone proved. Lamarck's hypothesis was not very well substantiated: it cut sharply across religious beliefs: and his leading disciple, Geoffroy St. Hilaire, brought discredit on the doctrine of evolution in general by speculation that was "often fantastic to the last degree."¹

Nevertheless, and this is the upshot of the foregoing discussion of the intellectual climate in to which the works of Spencer and Darwin were launched, it is

1. ibid., p. 295.
2. op.cit., p. 12.

certain that the evolutionary view, in some form or other, was by no means unfamiliar to the first half of the nineteenth century. ¹ Soon takes the debate in ^{the} French Academy in 1830, when Cuvier and St. Hilaire disputed the fixity of species, as a turning point, after which "the idea of development was public property". Lyell's book stimulated renewed interest in the whole question in the '30's: ² Irvine quotes Harriet Martineau to the effect that "after the vogue of Scott's novels the general middle-class public 'purchased five copies of an expensive work on geology for one of the most popular novels of the time'". In the 1840's, the movement gathered momentum. On the purely scientific side, there was the work of Helmholtz in formulating, mathematically, the concept of the conservation of energy, which amounted to the rejection of any creationist doctrine as involving an addition to the quantity of energy/matter in the universe: and the work of the embryologists, especially von Baer. Two widely read books appeared in this decade, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, published anonymously in 1844 but apparently written by the Edinburgh publisher, Chambers, and in 1849, Footprints of the Creator, by Hugh Miller. These books had a marked

1. op.cit., p.12.
2. op.cit., p.87.

stress on theological implications of Transformist theory and they did help to give the issues wider currency. Lady Constance in Disraeli's Tancred (1847) neatly exemplifies this when she says: "You know, all is development - the principle is perpetually going on. First there was nothing; then there was something; then - I forget the next - I think there were shells; then fishes; then we came - let me see - did we come next? Never mind that, we came at last, and the next change will be something very superior to us, something with wings."¹

This was the background, then, against which both Spencer and Darwin were writing. We have already looked at the theory which Spencer developed. One feature about it was particularly striking, namely, its universality, its attempt to account for all phenomena whatsoever. In this sense, it was in the tradition of much evolutionary speculation, especially among German Romantics like Goethe, Schelling and Herder, of the earlier part of the century. In spite of the scientific garb in which he clothed his work, Spencer's system was essentially a metaphysical one. It is interesting to ask, though probably impossible to answer, the question of how great a following Spencer would have had without the work of Darwin at the same time.

1. Quoted by Scoon, op.cit., p.13.

It is certainly the case that in the period of Darwinian dominance in biology, Darwinism and evolution were popularly identified, so that even exponents of non-Darwinian or super-Darwinian views, could not escape a degree of indebtedness, however unwelcome, to the author of the Origin .

In the light of pre-Darwinian thinking which I have sketched, "It is almost more difficult to explain", as Irvine puts it, "why every able scientist was not an evolutionist by the middle of the nineteenth century than to explain why one or two were." The main reason was that there still lacked a sound scientific hypothesis to account for the now obvious fact that specific changes did occur. Darwin, like Lamarck, was worried by the incompleteness of the geological record. But whereas the latter hoped that the gaps in our knowledge would eventually be sufficiently filled to give his theory plausibility, Darwin's great merit was that he proposed a view which commanded assent without waiting on the results of further investigation, though these in fact (until the rediscovery of Mendel's laws and the work on mutations at the end of the century) did confirm it. It is true of course that Darwin did have, mainly as a result

1. Op.cit., p.103.

of his own early work on the Beagle voyage, a much greater mass of data to hand than his predecessors had. But beyond this, Darwin's view was, from the nineteenth century scientific viewpoint at any rate, a great advance over Lamarck's in other ways. For one thing, it involved fewer assumptions. Lamarck had simply to assume that acquired characters are inherited: his theory of use and disuse also assumed that development occurred partly at least as a result of conscious striving. On both points, Darwin's view was more acceptable to his scientific contemporaries. What turned out to be advantageous variations were the result of chance, not of purpose, and this positivistic and mechanistic element was far more congenial to the scientists of the day than a teleological explanation. Characteristics were not developed or acquired - they just happened, and though Darwin too assumed that they were transmitted to off-spring, this was a much more plausible assumption. To put a crude example, blacksmith's sons often inherit their father's looks, but they still have to train their muscles. This is not to say of course, that Darwin's position, even when its many inconsistencies are smoothed out, is above logical and scientific objection, especially in the light of later advances. Darwin was not the most consistent of thinkers and the successive editions of the Origin

watered down his original position rather than confirmed it; for example, his later admissions of a degree of Lamarckianism cut across his selection theory. Nevertheless, as a thoroughly empirical, non-speculative and modest statement of eminently appealing, commonsense view, involving a minimum of assumptions, none of them metaphysical or theological, The Origin of Species was quite unprecedented. Comparing Darwin's success with previous evolutionary thinkers, Sir Arthur Keith says: "The doctrine of Creation, as revealed in the Bible, was more appealing, and on the evidence available, just as likely to be true as that advanced by the pioneers of Evolution. Darwin's case was different. In the Origin,¹ he ^{had} assembled such a solid mass of observation, which was wholly inexplicable if the doctrine was believed in but found an easy solution if his theory of Evolution was accepted. To men of science who read the Origin there was no alternative left; the theory of Evolution had to be accepted."

This last sentence is far too much of a simplification. Apart from the fact that Keith identifies

1. Sir Arthur Keith, Darwin Revalued, Watts and Co. London, 1955, p.126. On the whole, ~~far~~ this book falls far below Irvine, and Geoffrey West, Charles Darwin-A Portrait, Yale U.P., 1938.

Darwinism with evolution, the obvious alternative of rejecting Darwin's view was taken by numerous eminent and highly accomplished scientists - the Cambridge geologists Sedgwick, who had taught Darwin; the distinguished American naturalists Louis Agassiz, who, though born a hundred years after Buffon and Linnaeus, still retained the latter's classificatory approach to botany and his belief in the fixity of species; Richard Owen, the comparative anatomist and founder and director of the South Kensington Museum - to mention three leaders from the fields most obviously concerned. Even Darwin's close personal friends and helpers, Lyell and Hooker, the botanist, were not convinced. But the point is that, from 1859 onwards, the process of conversion to Darwinism and so to evolutionary theory as a whole was continuous: it never looked back after the Origin appeared. Among theologians, resistance was stronger and more prolonged, but here too the publication of Darwin's book marked a turning point, especially after the notable encounter between T.H. Huxley, Darwin's self-appointed "bulldog", and Bishop Wilberforce at the Oxford meeting of the British Association in 1860.

Whether received with favour or hostility, however,

1. See Irvine, op.cit., pp.3-8, and West, op.cit., pp.249-253.

the Origin, gave rise to a great tumult both within and beyond scientific circles. The first edition of 1,250 copies sold out on the day of publication, 24th. November; up to 1885, 28,000 copies were published by Murray, and there were many reprints before and after.¹ Accounts of the success of the Origin are numerous and need not be repeated here.² What I want to take up presently is the second of the two questions with which this chapter began, the question of why Darwin should have enjoyed such success. But first it will be convenient to give a brief account of the theory which won him so much fame.

The world first learnt of this theory on 1st. July, 1858, when the secretary of the Linnaean Society read a joint paper by Darwin and Wallace "On the Tendency of Species to Form Varieties; and on the perpetuation of Varieties and Species by Natural Means of Selection". This theory of natural selection was a cornerstone of the Origin in which a fuller account of his position was given by Darwin next year, though he still regarded the book as no more than an "abstract", published at the insistence of Lyell. The other cornerstone was the

1. Details are given in an appendix to C.A. Dorsey, The Evolution of Charles Darwin, Allen and Unwin, London, 1928, and Keith, op.cit., p.100.

2. See, e.g., Irvine, p.112; West, p.254; Singer, p.303 ff
See also Appendix A below, p. 367

notion of the struggle for existence. Like his predecessors, Darwin sought to understand "all those exquisite adaptations of one part of the organization (of nature) to another part, and to the conditions of life, and of one organic being to another being...."¹ Darwin began with the Malthusian doctrine that the rate of reproduction is so high that only few of any given generation can survive on the available resources.¹.. as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. It is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom; for in this case there can be no artificial increase of food, and no prudential restraint from marriage."² But Darwin was not content to note that only some survive: he asked the question, which ones? and how? The first answer was, the fittest (though he did not take over Spencer's phrase, survival of the fittest, until the fourth edition, at the instance of Wallace); and the second, by means of natural selection. "Owing to this struggle, any variations, however slight, and

1. Origin, p.45

2. ibid. p.47.

from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection. But the expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient." ¹ Darwin compares the work of breeders in selecting variations they want to encourage to the natural process. "Can it, then, be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should sometimes occur in the course of thousands of generations?" ² Darwin stresses the fact that the advantages such "favoured races", as they are

1. ibid ., p45

2. ibid., p.58.

called in the sub-title, enjoy will help them to reach maturity, whence more members of the next generation are likely to exhibit the same favourable characteristic, and so the species tends to change. "On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. "¹

That, briefly and of course without any of the empirical evidence which he amassed in support, is the Darwinian position. Without going into a detailed examination of it, a few points may be noted, points which will help the understanding of the popularity of the theory. First of all, it may be noted that he identifies enemies and competitors. The importance for Social Darwinian Theory of this identification or dualism comes out in the development later on of Darwinism as a prop for certain economic and nationalistic views. Again Darwin's indefiniteness on the nature of the struggle for life led to dissensions among Social Darwinists.- Those who wanted to stress the naturalness of rugged individualism, the laissez-faire view, and international rivalry, pointed out that Darwin was talking about struggles within species, not between them, nor against nature. Indeed, Darwin emphasizes this aspect in the passage where he says : "But the struggle will almost invariably be most severe between the individuals of the l. ibid., p.58

same species, for they frequent the same districts, require the same food, and are exposed to the same dangers." ¹ But he did also speak of struggle "with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life" so that those who wanted to stress the necessity of co-operation for success in surviving were also able to find corroboration for their views in the Origin. Indeed, as we shall see, it became a sort of Bible, furnishing texts for all occasions.

By the success of this theory and of the book in which he propounded it, Darwin was somewhat mystified. Trying to account for it in his autobiography, he writes: "It has sometimes been said that the success of the Origin proved 'that the subject was in the air', or that 'men's minds were prepared for it'. I do not think that this is strictly true, for I occasionally sounded not a few naturalists, and never happened to come across a single one who seemed to doubt about the permanence of species. Even Lyell and Hooker, though they would listen with interest to me, never seemed to agree. I tried once or twice to explain to able men what I meant by Natural Selection, but signally failed. What

1. ibid., p.54

I believe was strictly true is that innumerable well-observed facts were stored in the minds of naturalists ready to take their proper places as soon as any theory which would receive them was sufficiently explained."¹

There are a number of points worth taking up in this passage. First of all, Darwin may have been expected to show a suspicion of such explanations as the subject's being "in the air". But in this case at least, it seems that such an account would be by no means an empty one. From the outline of pre-Darwinian thinking already given, it is clear that, as Darwin himself puts it, all that was needed was a theory to accomodate the mass of observed facts. Darwin said of himself in 1881 that His "mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts....."² The facts had certainly been collected by 1859; they clearly pointed to the fact that changes do occur; they presented something of a challenge to Victorian scientists, a hiding place as it were, in which a law of nature must be found to be lurking. The fact that Darwin never came across a naturalist who doubted the permanence of species is rather a testimony to the secludedness of his life at Downe than to the universal

1. Life and Letters, p.87.

2. ibid., p.101.

view among naturalists. And of course, he did meet Wallace. Even so, it could be said that Darwin's triumph in bringing a whole range of phenomena, biological phenomena, under the discipline of general law. his success in showing that this hitherto recalcitrant range of experience was also, like the rest of the physical universe of which contemporary scientists thought they were approaching a full explanation, subject to discoverable laws; these features of his work would alone have almost guaranteed it a following among scientists.

These and similar points are made in an article by Joseph Le Conte published in 1895, a year in which the dominance of Darwin in and beyond science was still unshaken and yet one in which his impact could be viewed in perspective. Le Conte is worth quoting at length on this point. Discussing this very question of the immediate reception of Darwin in 1859 as against the failure of evolutionary theory to secure a following earlier, Le Conte proposes three main reasons.

(1) "... now for the first time it came in the form of a true scientific theory, based on an immense array of accurately observed facts and cautious reasonings. Darwin was a perfect type of cautious, inductive reasoner. He had collected and observed facts and

pondered on them; he had organized and systematized his thoughts and verified his conclusions, for twenty years in silence before he published. (2) Again, he not only proved organic evolution as a fact, but he showed it could and did take place, by bringing forward a potent and intelligible factor, or cause of evolution, viz., Natural Selection. But again (3) and perhaps most important of all, now, for the first time, the scientific mind was fully prepared and waiting. The birth time was fully come. The intellectual environment was favourable for its continued life. "¹ Le Conte goes on to give expression to the typical nineteenth century conception of the function of science and the notion of law in these words: "The whole mission of science is to establish the universal reign of natural law...The origin of species seemed to be the only anomaly in nature, the one exception to the universal reign of law, the one discord in the universal harmony, the one example of unreason in the rational constitution of the cosmos, and the one obstacle in the way of scientific advance. Darwin removed that obstacle out of the way and the triumph of the law was complete."²

1. Le Conte, "The Theory of Evolution and Social Progress, The Monist. July, 1895.

2. ibid.

W.J.M. MacKenzie, in speaking about the development of demands for a "positivistic or empirical or realistic science of society" in periods when natural science enjoys particular prestige, says that "Late in the nineteenth century that prestige grew so strong that it was the dominating myth of the Western world ... " This prestige was already very well established by the time Darwin's book appeared, and the interest in a positivistic social science had been pretty continuous from the beginning of the century and the work of Saint-Simon and Comte. Science, whether as the model for social theorists, or as the fairy godmother of laymen, had a standing such as it never enjoyed before, a range of influence which extended far beyond its own practitioners, and a prestige which won for its devotees the deference which had hitherto been enjoyed by theologians, metaphysicians or philosophes. While there is a certain amount of over-simplification in some of their accounts, nearly all the commentators on Social Darwinism stress the appeal of Darwinism in general as the very model of scientific theory. Thus Barzun says : "To scientists and laymen alike, the appeal of natural selection was manifold. It had the persuasiveness of "small doses";

W.J.M. Mackenzie, "Political Theory and Political Education", Universities Quarterly, August, 1955

it was entirely automatic, doing away with both the religious will of a creator and the Lamarckian will of his creatures; it substituted a "true cause" for the metaphysical" sort of explanation; lastly, natural selection was the exact parallel in nature to the kind of individual competition familiar to everyone in the social world of man. "¹ This ignores the fact that, particularly in America where its prestige was at least as great as elsewhere, Darwinism was quite cheerfully embraced by theists, like John Fiske, and that it was invoked almost as much against as for individual competition. But Barzun is still right to emphasize that it was the first evolutionary theory to carry "the hallmark of accepted science",³ and in so doing he is wisely following the critic Jacques Novicow, who became one of the leading opponents of Social Darwinism. Novicow lays heavy stress on the scientific appeal of this doctrine. "Pour les esprits populaires," he says,⁴

1. op.cit., p.64.

2. See John L. Morrison, "William Seton: A Catholic Darwinist", The Review of Politics, July, 1959, for an account of Roman Catholic reactions to Darwinism and evolution, especially in the United States, in the last three or four decades of the century.

3. Barzun, op.cit., p.63.

4. Jacques Novicow, La Critique du darwinisme social, Alcan, Paris, 1910, p.378-9.

"(la science) est comme la plus hautes de déesses... Le darwinisme social a maintenant un grand prestige précisément parce qu'il a revêtu un caractère scientifique." He argues that the theory had existed in an unarticulated state for centuries, but was only formulated clearly by men of standing in science in his own day. Thus, coming from the scientific heights, the doctrine "a partagé le respect, si mérité, qu'inspire la science; elle est montrée, pour ainsi dire, dans l'aureole de sa majesté, elle s'est répandue parmi les hommes comme entourée d'un nimbe de lumière." R.H. Gabriel¹ makes a similar points about the situation in the United States. Speaking of the way in which the scientific approach to social theory fitted in with the surging optimism of post-Civil War America, Gabriel refers to the work of John Wesley Powell, who, as a geologist, explorer and ethnologist, personified the bridge linking the natural and social sciences. Powell was "probably the most widely known scientist of the 1890's" and "When he spoke his words carried weight"². And the mass of evidence which Richard Hofstadter assembles³ testifies

1. R.H. Gabriel, American Democratic Thought, Ronald Press, New York, 1940, chap. 14.

2. ibid., p. 169.

3. Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945, chap. 1, esp. pp. 10-11.

to the prestige that science was already beginning to enjoy in America in the '60's.

It would seem, then, that Darwin is too cautious in doubting "that men's minds were prepared for it". We have already looked at the pre-Darwinian tradition of evolutionary thinking in science itself. What Darwin overlooked was that there was an even stronger tradition in the social sciences to which his theory was immediately seen to be congenial. The idea of population pressure and limited survival had come to Darwin himself from Malthus: the virtues of non-interference with the natural harmony of interests which would flow from each individual's rational pursuit of his own self-interest had been preached by Adam Smith and the Utilitarians - and this too found echoes in Darwin's concept of Nature "knowing best" in the development of species: the appeal to science as the source of enlightened social legislation was the mainstay of the positivist position: and the idea of progress through conflict and elimination was central to the Hegelian dialectic, to say nothing of the special case of the development from this of the "scientific" Marxian theory of class warfare. Indeed, most of the characteristic features of Social Darwinism could easily be connected

with tendencies in social thought that had developed long before 1859 - the non-interventionism of the orthodox Spencer-Sumner school was in line with the doctrines of economic laissez-faire: the reformist Social Darwinists were, in many respects, harking back to Positivism: Spencer's contribution to the Social Darwinian movement was begun before and independently of the Origin's appearance: again, social organicism was not an innovation of the Social Darwinists¹: and so on.

But apart from the claim, which is argued at length in the next chapter, that Social Darwinism, in spite of its affiliations to, its borrowings from, and its relationships with a large number of other intellectual movements, can be pretty distinctly isolated and identified, it is perhaps important to distinguish its position in particular from the broader stream of Hegelianism because of the close association of both with the very prominent philosophy of violence in the second half of the nineteenth century. At least in the eyes of many contemporary critics, such as D.G. Ritchie and Jacques Novicow and certainly in the view of some advocates of war as a legitimate political weapon,

1. These points are discussed further in the course of Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

such as General von Bernhardt, Social Darwinism was especially closely connected with the widespread idealization of warfare. Now it is true that, particularly in Europe, the philosophy of violence also owed a great deal to the wide influence of Hegel throughout the nineteenth century, and indeed into the twentieth. But Hegelian Idealism was above all a metaphysical system, and an abstruse one at that; whereas Darwinism was, and Social Darwinism purported to be, a scientific doctrine, and not one of formidable profundity. And the point about this distinction is that much of the general philosophy of violence, whether in domestic or in international policy, which can be labelled Social Darwinian, can be so labelled because of its allegedly scientific rather than metaphysical foundations. In addition, given the nineteenth century adulation of science, this claim to be scientific was of major importance in gaining a popular following for Social Darwinism which Hegelian metaphysics and doctrines deriving from it could not command. This is an important consideration when one is contending that determinist doctrines play a substantial role in winning support for policies in societies where mass participation in politics occurs.

It could be said, then, that it was the scientism of social theory as much as the climate of

opinion in science itself which ensured the success of the Origin. Conversely, the impact of Darwin, beyond the scientific arena was at least as great as it was within it. It is to his influence on social theory that we now turn.

Chapter 5.

The Development of Social Darwinism.

I have been speaking so far as if Social Darwinism was a coherent and consistent body of doctrine. But like in many other intellectual movements, Social Darwinism can at best be seen as a fairly loose aggregation of views which nevertheless all have certain common characteristics. It has been frequently observed that the Darwinian theory of evolution went through many evolutionary stages itself, and this is true of both the biological and sociological applications of the doctrine. To answer the question, "What is Social Darwinism?" one must bear in mind that it was an intellectual movement, and one cannot avoid giving some account of the history of this movement, though such an account is no substitute for a theoretical analysis of the issues involved. What I want to argue is that there was, so to speak, an orthodox school of Social Darwinism and that a number of connected views grew out of this orthodoxy, some as what were taken to be continuations of it and some as heterodox protests against it. I shall try to show that all shades of belief, both orthodox and dissident, shared certain common presuppositions which entitle us to group them together as forming a single though diversified theoretical movement which

we can call Social Darwinism.

The capacity of Darwinism to accomodate a number of views within its orbit was at any rate not diminished by certain characteristics of Darwin's own work. Biology does not lend itself to the exact formulations of physics, and Darwin was not the most consistent or systematic of thinkers. Huxley said of him, "Exposition was not Darwin's forte and his English is sometimes wonderful. But there is a marvellous dumb sagacity about him - like that of a sort of miraculous dog - and he gets to the truth by ways as dark as those of the Heathen Chinees."¹ Darwin's work runs into many volumes, none of them slim, and many editions. In the successive editions of the Origin, he retreats from his original position to a considerable extent. The point about chance variation and natural selection was that they completely removed will and purpose from the evolutionary process. It was this fact that made the Origin such a revolutionary book when it first appeared in 1859, and Darwin expresses the same view in his autobiography, written between 1876 and 1881, where he says that the variations in plants and animals which he observed during the Beagle voyage "could only be explained on the supposition that species gradually became modified. But it was equally evident that neither the action of the surrounding conditions,

1. Quoted by Irvine, op.cit., p.319.

nor the will of the organisms (especially in the case of plants) could account for the innumerable cases in which organisms of every kind are beautifully adapted to their habits of life..."¹ Yet, in the sixth edition, Darwin takes people to task for misrepresenting him as arguing that natural selection is the only factor in evolution. But his rebuttal of the charge is unconvincing and those who did take this to be Darwin's special contribution certainly had good grounds for their interpretation. A comparison of certain passages in the last edition with corresponding selections in earlier editions is instructive on this point. In the Conclusion of the sixth edition, Darwin says that specific modifications have "been effected chiefly through the natural selection of numerous, successive, slight, favourable variations; aided in an ~~in-an~~ important manner by the inherited effects of the use and disuse of parts; and in an unimportant manner, that is in relation to adaptive structures, whether past or present, by the direct action of external conditions and by variations which seem to us in our ignorance to arise spontaneously." He says he seems formerly to have underrated the importance of these other factors, but rejects the view that the whole

1. Essays and Lectures, p. 182. London, no date. p. 497.

tenor of his earlier work was to emphasize natural selection to the exclusion of other factors. "But as my conclusions have lately been much misrepresented, and it has been stated that I attribute the modification of species exclusively to natural selection, I may be permitted to remark that in the first edition of this work, and subsequently, I placed in a most conspicuous position- namely, at the close of the Introduction - the following words: " I am convinced that natural selection has been the main but not the exclusive means of modification." This has been of no avail. Great is the power of steady misrepresentation; but the history of science shows that fortunately this power does not long endure." ¹ But if it is misrepresentation, some at least of the blame falls on Darwin's own shoulders. If the end of the Introduction is a conspicuous place, then the final Recapitulation and Conclusion is surely equally prominent. Yet in the third edition, the corresponding passage to the one just quoted omits a great deal (in addition to the allegations of misrepresentation). Anyone reading the parallel paragraph in the earlier edition could be excused for thinking Darwin rejected use inheritance and environment as evolutionary factors, for

there he says simply that "species have been modified, during a long course of descent, by the preservation or the natural selection of many successive slight favourable variations".¹

Whatever the reasons may be for Darwin's wavering or at any rate his lack of precision on this most important point, and whatever his real intention may have been, the upshot was that he did help to arm those who wished to see conscious purpose, whether human or divine, in evolution, nor did he place a complete scientific interdict on those who advocated interference in the process.

Another point on which Darwin gave ground was the question of the continuity of the process of modification. As he became more and more disturbed by the incompleteness of the geological record, he tended to modify his original insistence that nature does not make leaps to the much weaker view that the leaps are not great or sudden. This opened the door, however little, to the possibility of divine intervention, on the one hand, and, on the other, it gave plausibility, however slight, to demands for far reaching reforms.

If we go beyond the Origin to Darwin's other major

1. Origin, 3rd. ed., Collins, London, no date. p.497.

work, The Descent of Man, 1871, the extent to which he has given ground appears quite alarming and confusing. In this book, Darwin undertakes to apply the theory of natural selection to the history of man, to assemble and assess the evidence of man's descent from the ape, and to argue against the classification of the different races of men as distinct species. More than two-thirds of the book are devoted to the role of sexual selection in the modification of all animal species, including man, and this is a major addition to the notion of natural selection. Darwin also investigates the development of "the intellectual and moral faculties of man", and of man as a social animal.

The Descent is in every way a much less weighty book than the Origin. Its attempt to apply the principles of the first book is in fact hedged about with a great many qualifications, and as a work of sociological interest, it appears rather as an echo than an inspiration of the Social Darwinian movement. On the question of the application of the principles of the Origin, although Darwin constantly pays lip service in the Descent to the theory of natural selection, which was the great central doctrine of the Origin, the extent to which he modifies this principle greatly reduces its explanatory power. Darwin tries to account for two things in terms of natural

selection - the appearance of "the moral sense" in men, and the development of early civilization. But, on the first point, in trying to argue that moral notions stem from "the social instincts", Darwin takes the tribe rather than the individual as the unit. He has in mind Bagehot's notion of the importance of cohesion in tribal survival. We may note in passing how this cuts across the idea of multidirectional struggle which was a feature of the "primitive Darwinism", as I shall call it, of the Origin, and more particularly how it introduces an element of human purpose which is quite foreign to the original view of natural selection, the purpose being the encouragement of those virtues which are seen to benefit the tribe. Thus Darwin says: "We have now seen that actions are regarded by savages, and were probably so regarded by primeval men, as good or bad, solely as they obviously affect the welfare of the tribe - not that of the species, nor that of an individual member of the tribe. This conclusion agrees well with the belief that the so-called moral sense is aboriginally derived from the social instincts, for both relate at first exclusively to the community."¹

On the second point of the spread of civilization,

1. The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, 1871, reprinted by the Modern Library, New York, 1948 (?) in a joint volume with the Origin; p.489.

Darwin departs from his early criteria of struggle and survival. He begins by talking about the arts which men practise on their physical environment, saying that these arts, which enable civilized nations to spread and supplant barbarous ones, "are the products of the intellect. It is, therefore, highly probable that with mankind the intellectual faculties have been mainly and gradually perfected through natural selection..."¹ But this, he thinks, applies only to the early stages of the growth of civilizations, as it does also to the growth of morality. Once civilizations are established, natural selection loses its force. "With civilized nations, as far as an advanced standard of morality, and an increased number of fairly good men are concerned, natural selection apparently effects but little; though the fundamental social instincts were originally thus gained."² In speaking thus of the diminishing function of natural selection, Darwin was surrendering another bastion of his position in the Origin, namely, that the forces or agencies of change in the biological, as in the geological, realm, are always the same, that there were no creations and no catastrophes, but that constant, gradual and almost imperceptible modifications are continually being effected

1. ibid., p.497.

2. ibid., p.584.

by the same causes - in biology, the struggle for existence and natural selection.

In other ways, too, as in the several editions of the Origin, the Descent modifies the theory of natural selection. Darwin admits a Lamarckian element; "Habits... followed during many generations probably tend to be inherited."¹ Again; "We may feel assured that the inherited effects of the long-continued use or disuse of parts will have done much in the same direction with natural selection;"² and even this; "It is not improbable that after long practice virtuous tendencies may be inherited."³ Again, and this is a most important qualification, Darwin speaks in the Descent about man's progress and future prospects in a way that would surely have abashed the author of the Origin. In the following summary passages near the end of the Descent, Darwin exhibits all those features I have referred to, and others which were central in the development of Social Darwinism. This passage is typical of the rich lodes which interpreters could exploit in the Darwinian gold-mine. "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, it is ^{to be} feared that he must remain subject to a

1. ibid., p. 584.

2. ibid. p. 499.

3. ibid., p. 914.

severe struggle. Otherwise, he would sink into indolence, and the more gifted men, would not be more successful in the battle of life than the less gifted... 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. Important as the struggle for existence has been and even still is, yet as far as the highest part of man's nature is concerned there are other agencies more important. For the moral qualities are advanced, either directly or indirectly, much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instructions, religion, etc., than through natural selection; though to this latter agency may be safely attributed the social instincts, which afforded the basis for the development of the moral sense.¹"

In the Descent, then, Darwin modifies his earlier views to a great extent when he undertakes, as he suggested in the Origin it might be possible, to "throw light on man and his history". This ^{is} partly so, as I have suggested, because the Descent reflects rather than initiates the Social Darwinian movement which had got under way in the 1860's. Compared with the Origin, which is so clearly all Darwin's own work and has scarcely a single footnote, the Descent

1. ibid., p. 919.

fairly bristles with references, and nearly all of them to works which appeared during the decade after 1859. Among others, Darwin cites Walter Bagehot's Physics and Politics, 1865, E.B.Tylors Early History of Mankind, 1865, T.H.Huxley's Man's Place in Nature, Francis Galton's Hereditary Genius, 1869, Henry Maine's Ancient Law, 1861, McLennan's Primitive Marriage, 1865, Lecky's History of European Morals, 1869, Lubbock's Origin of Civilization, 1870, and Prehistoric Times, 1865 - to mention only some of the major works,¹ and none of the articles in periodicals. In many ways, the Descent appears as a derivative work, lacking in the originality which characterized its great predecessor, merely summing up a trend which no longer needed any impetus from Darwin - the movement in social theory which came to bear his name was already out of his hands.²

It will be apparent from what has been said, as it is from photographs of Charles in old age, that the

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1. All the dates given are of the first editions of these works.
 2. The Origin of the name Social Darwinism is obscure. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, 1937, The Free Press, Glencoe, 2nd. ed., 1949, credits Pareto with the coinage in his Traité de sociologie générale, which first appeared in Italian in 1916. Unless Pareto coined the phrase much earlier than that, it is not his, as it is common in, e.g., French sociological writings throughout the eighteen-nineties.

Darwinian cloak was a capacious garment under which a great number of diverse intellectual bedfellows were able to find protection and comfort. Among them all, Spencer must be allowed a special position as an independent thinker and as one who extended the range of Social Darwinism over an immense area.

There are a number of points on which Spencer differs from Darwin. Spencer began writing before Darwin was at all widely known: what he originally owed to biology was the Lamarckian notion of use inheritance, though he later acknowledged that this was not the sole cause of evolution and that natural selection played a major role: his monistic evolution was an attempt to find a philosophy of the whole universe, not just a theory about living species: his largest and most influential work was in sociology, not biology, though Darwin had a high opinion of his Principles of Biology: he recognized a category, the Unknowable, which had no place in Darwin's thinking and which helped Spencer to form a link between Darwinism and other views, notably religious ones, which without Spencer, would probably never have become associated with the main stream. Spencer's preservation of the belief in an Absolute made his views acceptable to theists - his first disciple in America, John Fiske, was able to retain his Christian beliefs unimpaired, for it was possible

to argue that evolution was the subtle way by which God achieved his ends. On the other hand, W.G.Sumner, who was the leading exponent of Social Darwinism in the United States for some thirty years, began life, as Darwin did, by training for the ministry and, like Darwin, found that his religious convictions had painlessly evaporated after some years of neglect. Spencer's work was always far more systematic than Darwin's and more consistent. Although both of them suffered from chronic ill-health, Spencer was a more active and militant proponent of evolution than Darwin, who preferred to leave both defence and attack to Huxley, while he himself grew to an almost mythical stature in his obscure retreat at Downe.

There never was much personal contact between the two. I have already noted Spencer's somewhat grudging acknowledgments of the naturalist, in contrast to Darwin's warm admiration of Spencer's books. But Darwin was not greatly impressed by their author. Irvine¹ quotes an unpublished letter of his to Hooker: "I went this afternoon to the Lubbocks to have an interview with Herbert Spencer, and I enjoyed my talk much though he does use some awesomely long words. I plainly made out that

1. op.cit., p.166.

Lady Lubbock thinks him like you do, not a small bore."

But Spencer was undoubtedly the big gun of Social Darwinism. The influence of the movement on its unwitting founder is clear from the comparison of Darwin's position in 1859 and in 1871, by which year he has smuggled in purpose, causes other than natural selection, units other than either individual or species. These changes from the primitive Darwinism of the Origin were mainly induced by the social theorists. For example, social theorists, both those who wrote before and those who wrote after the Origin appeared, though Darwin was not much acquainted with the former group, took the continued existence of lowly forms of life, the occurrence of different stages of development at the same time, as evidence that organisms, including societies, had passed and were passing through different stages or levels of development. Spencer shared this view, believing that there was a necessary progress from simple homogeneity to organized diversity, from savagery to civilization. Nothing of the kind follows from the Origin: "On my theory the present existence of lowly organized productions offers no difficulty; for natural selection includes no necessary and universal law of advancement or development - it only takes advantage of such variations as arise and are beneficial to each creature
"1
under its complex relations of life. One point that
1. Origin, 3rd. ed., p. 146, (6th. ed. p. 92 with slightly changed wording, especially to include "the survival of the fittest" as an alternative to "Natural Selection".)

Darwin is implicitly making here is that the Spencerian criteria are anthropomorphic. Darwin questions the advantage of a high degree of organization, one of Spencer's yardsticks, to an earth worm. A high degree of organization, he suggests, may be a positive disadvantage, as being delicate and easily put out of order. But his main point is a criticism of the whole notion of advancement and of what is advantageous. He asks "who will pretend that he knows the natural history of any one organic being sufficiently well to say whether any particular change would be to its advantage?"¹ The strict corollary of this is that, just as men cannot know what is really to the advantage of any species, including their own, they cannot know what is best for that infinitely complex organism, society, and, instead of trying to achieve what they, in their ignorance, think is to society's advantage, men had better leave the evolution of the social organism to "Nature". Darwin's strictures on the efforts of men as hasty and shortsighted point to the same corollary: "How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time! and consequently how poor will his products be, compared with those accumulated by Nature during whole geological periods! Can we wonder then that

1. Origin, 3rd. ed., p.149. (not in 6th. ed.)

Nature's productions should be far 'truer' in character than man's productions; that they should be infinitely better adapted to the most complex conditions of life, and should plainly bear the stamp of far higher workmanship?"¹

The lessons of these and similar passages, and their apparent implications for political doctrines of conservatism and laissez-faire, were followed out by such orthodox Darwinists as W.G.Sumner and other opponents of social reform. But they are not followed up by Darwin himself, as we have seen from a brief examination of his position in the Descent. It is the great diversity of views encompassed between the first edition of the Origin and the publication of the Descent which gives Darwinism itself and Social Darwinism as well such an unrivalled applicability and versatility in the defense of almost any cause.

I have said, however, that Spencer was the chief exponent of Social Darwinism. To his name must be added that of Sumner in the United States. I must now attempt to show how Spencer represented the primitive or orthodox Darwinian line in social theory, and to sort out those elements in his position which, though they underwent

1. Origin, 3rd. ed., p.101 6th. ed., p.60 (slightly diff. wording)

prodigies of juggling, nevertheless survived as elements which link his views with those of other and often radically opposed thinkers.

Perhaps the most notable feature of Spencer's position, both in philosophy and sociology, is his search for a single law in terms of which all phenomena could be accounted for, a search which led him to the law of evolution. In this sense, Spencer's position exhibits what John Plamenatz calls "fundamentalism". Plamenatz describes Marxism as fundamentalist in that it singles out one factor as the determinant of all other social activity and history. He could add that the nineteenth century quest for one single, all-embracing law of nature was as fundamental^{ist} as any philosophy of history or society. Spencerian evolution was more fundamentalist than either Marxism or strict Darwinism. For, whereas Darwin showed a single principle at work in natural history, and Marx displayed the driving force in social history, Spencer exhibited the one universal law in both realms and in mind as well, although at that level of generality the evolutionary law of universal change hardly threw light on any concrete happenings, and it did not require great ingenuity to show that almost any social policy, from laissez-faire to extensive state control, could legitimately be read off from it. Even the apparently more precise notion of the

survival of the fittest was remarkably accomodating, for, until the final test of survival was made, anyone's guess was as good as another's as to the ultimate fitness of a plant, or animal, or man, or society, or nation, or race. This fundamentalist search for a single law embodies what I have characterized ¹ as an essential feature of determinist theory. The phenomena which the search investigates are seen as forming a single process and what is sought is the pattern which that process follows. That society followed such a course and that it was a course of progress was a nineteenth century article of faith which Spencer accepted. Part of his self-imposed task was to discover the law which this progress followed, and his answer was the law of evolution, which all processes obeyed. His attempt to establish that law was made in First Principles,³ but it may be worth quoting the following passage from an earlier essay, "Progress: Its Law and Cause",² which is chiefly notable for its last sentence : "It will be seen that as in each event of to-day, so from the beginning, the decomposition of every expended force into several forces has been perpetually producing a higher complication; that

1. See Chapter 1 above.

2. First published in the Westminster Review, April, 1857, and reprinted in Spencer's Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative 3 vols., Williams and Norgate, London, 1891, Vol.1, pp.8-60.

the increase of heterogeneity so brought about is still going on and must continue to go on; and that thus progress is not an accident, not a thing within human control, but a beneficent necessity."

This fundamentalism, then, the search for a single law, is one feature of Social Darwinism. Whether the law is viewed deterministically, as by Spencer, as a law which we can discover but not control; or as a law the discovery of which will enable us to control social phenomena, at least to some extent, was later a major point of dispute between Spencer and Sumner and their opponents. I shall come back to the determinist character of Spencer's position presently.

The law of society, ^{was} then, a law of development, identified with progress, and a law covering all phenomena. To apply it specifically to society it was therefore necessary to show that society was an organism subject to the laws of the the more familiar organisms of biology. Spencer undertook this demonstration specifically in his essay, "The Social Organism," in the Westminster Review for January, 1860. Spencer begins by saying that earlier comparisons between a society and a man, in the Republic for example, are too narrow because the true

1. Reprinted in his Essays, Vol. 1. pp. 265-306.

comparison is between society and any living thing. Spencer then notes four points of similarity: both society and organisms grow; they both become more complex in structure; in both, interdependence of the parts increases; and both outlive their separate components, individual people and cells, which are constantly dying and being born while society and the organism continue. Against these four points, Spencer sets out four points of difference, though it is notable that he qualifies three of them to a considerable extent. Firstly, societies "have no specific external forms," they have no immediately obvious boundaries. But this is also true, Spencer says, of the "lower divisions" of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Secondly, "the living element of a society do not form a continuous mass." But, he says, the area covered by a society has continuous life, in the vegetation and so on, and "In our conception of a social organism, we must include all that lower organic existence on which human existence, and therefore social existence, depend. And when we do this, we see that the citizens who make up a community may be considered as highly vitalized units surrounded by substances of lower vitality, from which they draw their nutriment..." Thirdly, the "ultimate living elements" of a society, namely men, may move about, but cells cannot. But this is not a decisive difference either, for, "while

citizens are locomotive in their private capacities, they are fixed in their public capacities," in their social functions. This division of labour is geographical as well as functional - certain manufacturing, mining, farming and other centres are fixtures. Finally, and this is the most important difference, in an organism, "only a special tissue is endowed with feeling, in a society all the members are endowed with feeling." Organisms have a central nervous system and their parts are subservient to the whole. But this is not true of societies. Since only its members, and not the community as a whole, have consciousness, "the welfare of citizens cannot rightly be sacrificed to some supposed benefit of the State, and ... the State is to be maintained solely for the benefit of citizens. The corporate life must here be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life."

This last distinction is one which Spencer does not qualify. In fact, it remained the bastion of his political views throughout his life and entitles him to a high place as a defender of political liberty. It carried him to the radical position of The Man Versus the State where, in effect, he rejects the notion of the corporate life of a community altogether. But, as his work on sociology shows,¹

1. See below, the references to Political Institutions

Spencer regarded the corporate interests as dominant in the "militant" society, which was earlier and lower in the evolutionary scale than the "industrial" society which he believed was slowly evolving but which was nowhere yet dominant.

In spite, however, of his leaving the fourth point of difference unqualified, it has little effect on his treatment of society as in fact, and not only metaphorically, an organism. In the article under discussion, Spencer goes on to draw a great many parallels between bodies living and bodies politic. He likens the "physiological division of labour" to the economic; the circulation of the blood to that of money; increasing heterogeneity in higher organisms to growing diversity and specialization of functions as societies advance. He compares the organic nervous system with government organization; "the office of the brain as that of averaging the interests of life" with "the office of Parliament as that of averaging the interests of the various classes in a community"; the nerve bundles running parallel with the arteries in vertebrates with the "groups of telegraph wires (which) are carried along the sides of our railways."

Now, this notion of society as an organism, as a unitary, centralized structure, is modified by Spencer

in his later work where he takes over from Comte the distinction between militant and industrial societies and the parallel distinction which Maine¹ had drawn, between the systems of status and of contract. Spencer makes this distinction in some detail in his Political Institutions.² His general thesis is that there is a constant struggle for existence among primitive societies and the first requirement is that the society as such should survive. The chances of survival are increased by the degree of tribal cohesion and so there is a tendency to force cohesion upon the tribe. This idea had already been put forward by Walter Bagehot and had much impressed Darwin in the Descent. Bagehot had argued that in the early stages of development societies could only be kept together by a firm, autocratic control by "an elevated elite". "The guiding rule was the law of status ... Later³ are the ages of freedom; first are the ages of servitude". Bagehot developed the idea of the natural selection of societies, and the advantageous variation on which he put great stress was "the faculty of coherence.. The compact

1. Sir Henry Maine, Ancient Law, 1861, 16th. ed. Murray, London 1897, p. 170.

2. Herbert Spencer, Political Institutions, part V of the Principles of Sociology, Williams and Norgate, London, 1st. ed., 1892, Chs. XVIII, XVII and XIX.

3. Walter Bagehot Physics and Politics, 1865, new ed. (no date), Kegan Paul, London, p. 29.

tribes win..."¹ Spencer argued in a similar way: "Numbers, natures and circumstances being equal, it is clear that of two tribes or two larger societies, one of which unites the actions of all its capable members while the other does not, the first will ordinarily be the victor. There must be an habitual survival of communities in which militant cooperation is universal."² For this complete corporate action, a centralized despotism is necessary and the citizen's "life is not his own, but is at the disposal of his society."³ Such a militant society becomes stratified and static. The principles of inheritance of rank, trade and function, as well as property, confirms this rigidity and builds up a strong resistance to change, as does the tendency to economic self-sufficiency which is strong in militant societies. These are "the traits which may be expected to establish themselves by survival of the fittest during the struggles for existence among societies..."⁴

Like Maine, Spencer sees the development from militant to industrial societies as a change, and a

progressive change, from status to contract. In the

1. ibid. p.51.

2. Political Institutions, p.659.

3. ibid., p.661.

4. ibid., p.668.

industrial regime of contract, public action is limited to keeping "private action within due bounds", there is no coercion of the individual, the defense of whose individuality "becomes the society's essential duty", efficiency replaces inheritance and rigidity gives way to plasticity, while economic autonomy makes way for division of labour among societies. Now, Spencer does not claim that any society has yet reached this stage because the struggle for existence among societies is still going on, and the struggle requires social cohesion. What is characteristic of the industrial society is not absence of cohesion but the achievement of cohesion by voluntary as against compulsory organization. With the decrease in inter-tribal and inter-social warfare, the necessity for cohesion even at the cost of coercion is decreasing. Whereas production and all other social organization was ancillary to fighting, now fighting is only to protect production. In the ideal industrial society, towards which Spencer believed evolution was heading, the State exists for the benefit of the individual, not the individual for the State.

But Spencer does not believe that the industrial society is any less organic than the militant. The continuing struggle among societies still selects the most cohesive,

those that have achieved, in accordance with the pattern of "Evolution at Large", the highest degree of integration, definiteness, differentiation, and so on. But this struggle no longer takes the form of war. In fact, unlike some of the Social Darwinists mentioned later in this essay, Spencer argues "that the possibility of a high social state, political as well as general, fundamentally depends on the cessations of war... From war has been gained all that it had to give."¹ The "High social state" is to be achieved by two other means - and here we may note the blend of Lamarckianism with Darwinism which Spencer's later work displayed. The question was, how is social cohesion and integration to be achieved without the sharp stimulus of war, of sheer survival? The Lamarckian part of the answer is that people become conditioned to the organized life: "Citizens whose natures have, through many generations of voluntary cooperation and accompanying regard for one another's claims, been moulded into appropriate form, will entirely agree to maintain such political institutions..." as are needed for the only remaining state function, namely, "that of preserving the component members of the society from destruction or injury by one another."² The Darwinian part of the answer is that further political

1. ibid., pp.751.

2. ibid., pp.744-5.

advances will be produced by "the stress of industrial competition in free communities."

Spencer insists that his picture of the industrial society is not true of anything already existing. He argues, somewhat inconsistently with his general view of inevitable evolutionary progress, that the question of an advance towards the industrial society or regression in the direction of militarism depends on "the checking of international antagonisms and the diminution of those armaments which are at once cause and consequence of them. With the repression of militant activities and decay of militant organizations, will come amelioration of political institutions as of all other institutions. Without them, no such ameliorations are permanently possible."¹ They have not yet been achieved. Nor does Spencer believe that his argument about the way to achieve them will be accepted - yet. He spoke prophetically of the use to which Social Darwinism would be put when he said that "The acceptance which guides conduct will always be of such theories, no matter how logically indefensible, as are consistent with the average modes of action, public and private."

In another part of his Political Institutions,²

1. ibid., p. 753-4.

2. Ch. II, "Political Organization in General."

Spencer stresses the inherent conservatism of any social and especially any political institutions. Its very existence is an obstacle to reorganization. Society, like any other organism, is conservative because "organization resists re-organization." He criticises Comte for trying to produce an industrial society by the methods appropriate to the militant - "...his scheme of organization for the ideal future, prescribes arrangements characteristic of the militant type, and utterly at variance with the industrial type." ¹ In effect, he accuses Comte of overlooking the crucial distinction between the two types of cooperation which are found in the two types of society and which are essential to their successful organic functioning and to their survival. The direction of social evolution, Spencer argues, is towards that type of society in which the identity of private and public ends is achieved automatically and without coercion. The industrial type of social cooperation, exemplified in the division of labour, "arising directly from the pursuit of individual ends, and indirectly conducing to social welfare, develops unconsciously and is non-coercive. The other [militant cooperation, exemplified in organization for defense), arising directly from the pursuit of social ends, and indirectly conducing to individual welfare, develops consciously and is coercive." ²

1. ibid., p.257. 2. ibid., p.263, parentheses added.

Here was the classical doctrine of ^anatural harmony of interests combined with a positivist organicism to show that individuals and society were both inevitably evolving towards a happy future.

One immediate corollary of Spencer's view was a thoroughgoing doctrine of laissez-faire. This, of course, was not new. It had already been derived from the utilitarian belief in the harmony of interests. But that belief hitherto had been no more than an article of metaphysical faith. More substantial grounds than that were offered before Darwin wrote by H.T. Buckle¹ who argued that history and Adam Smith had shown that all legislation impeded progress, the fact of which he took for granted, because it was made in ignorance of the true natural workings of a society, which left to themselves would inevitably bring more progress. The only good legislation, Buckle argued, was that which repealed previous legislation. "To maintain order, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, and to adopt certain precautions respecting the public health, are the only services which any government can render to the interests of civilization."² In fact, that so much progress has been made in spite of

1. H.T. Buckle, The History of Civilization in England, 2 vols., 2nd. ed., Parker and Son, London, 1858.

2. ibid., Vol. I, pp 257-8

harmful legislation is "a decisive proof of the extraordinary energy of Man; and justifies a confident belief, that as the pressure of legislation is diminished, and the human mind less hampered, the progress will continue with accelerated speed".¹

But the evidence in support of such beliefs fell very far short of the proof of them which the Darwinian theory was supposed, by non-interventionist Social Darwinists such as Spencer² and Carnegie,³ to yield. For it was essential to primitive Darwinism that no interference with the natural processes of selection could ever be justified, because no one knew, nor ever could know, what would ultimately be to the advantage of any organization. The orthodox Social Darwinists took Darwin to have shown scientifically that, in the organic world, the best "adapted" - and it was easy to overlook the word "adapted" in this phrase - survive, and thus improve the species, only when the struggle for existence is unmitigated.⁴ Here at last was a grounding in natural sciences for laissez-faire in economics and politics. Just like other organizations, men and societies could advance, and would inevitably advance, only when the natural processes

1. *ibid.*, p. 263.

2. e.g. see below, chap 7, pp. 259 ff, the extracts from The Man Versus the State.

3. See below, chap. 7, pp. 278 ff.

4. Again, this Darwinian notion of an unmitigated struggle as the source of development is clearly reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic. But that too, like the utilitarian belief in the harmony of interests, was a metaphysical notion. It was Darwinism which supplied the scientific basis for the idea of struggle as a progressive principle.

of selection in the struggle for existence were allowed unhindered play. Not, of course, that men, by legislative interference, could prevent the operation of the natural mechanism of struggle and survival. But in their misguided attempts to improve on nature, they might delay the process, and, by their short-sighted endeavours to relieve immediate pain and misfortune, they would only be postponing payment of the price of progress, and thus increasing the bill.

In Part III of this Essay, some examples are given of how Social Darwinian ideas were applied in offering solutions to some domestic and international problems in the later half of the nineteenth century. At this point, I want to summarize the chief elements in the orthodox position, taken most characteristically by Spencer and Sumner, the position of Social Darwinism as a radically determinist theory. In the next chapter, some attention is given to the deviant views which interpreted Darwinism as a guide to social intervention and reform. But since I propose to speak of these reformist views as being part of the broad stream of Social Darwinism, although deviations from the main current of determinism, it is necessary to show that the determinist, non-interventionist school and the voluntarist, reformist school still have enough in common to justify applying the name Social Darwinism to them both.

After summarizing the orthodox position, then, I will turn, at the end of this chapter, to an attempt to characterize Social Darwinism in general.

Orthodox Social Darwinism embraced the belief that there was one fundamental law which explained all social phenomena. This law was thought to resemble the laws of the natural sciences in its universality and inviolability. It had the special feature of being a law which accounted not for all events of a certain, specified kind, but which accounted for a process, namely, the progressive development of society. Now, these were features of all evolutionary thinking and we have seen how Spencer attempted to generalize evolutionary theory to cover all events in whatever field. What distinguished Social Darwinism from evolutionary thought in general¹ (with which, however, it was frequently identified in its heyday), was its "biologism", that is, its organic view of society, combined with the belief that the development of the social organism followed the same evolutionary law, namely, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence, as Darwin had shown to apply to animal and vegetable species in the Origin. Social Darwinism, in short, exhibited all the

1. Any what also helped to distinguish it from the Hegelian influence in the nineteenth century philosophy of violence.

characteristics of "scientism" and "methodological
collectivism" which Hayek¹ attributes to Comte and the
other positivists. It involved belief in an identifiable
whole - society, nation, race, class; in a single law which
explained the history of such units - the law of struggle
and survival; belief that this law was beyond men's
control - it could be discovered, but not used, and attempts
to direct or otherwise interfere with its operation would
inevitably fail in the long run and bring disaster in the
short run. The practical upshot of the doctrine was
insistence on complete laissez-faire and emphasis on the
centrality of the ideas of struggle and survival. This
stern teaching was tempered by the conviction that
individual liberty was essential to the process and that
such freedom for the individual - man, society, race, would
ensure the success of the fittest and improve the standard
of the whole species, for to succeed meant to improve. The
cost may be high in present suffering, but progress was
inevitable.

One central notion of Social Darwinism, including the
reformist versions of the theory, is that of adaptation
to environment. Now, this distinguishes it from other
determinist theories, such as Marxism, in the important

1. The Counter Revolution of Science, passim.

particular that it envisages no final goal of the social process. Adaptation to the environment is never perfect, in spite of Spencer's talk of Equilibration, for, even if the struggle for existence in civilized societies is limited in severity, there remains what Sumner called "competition for life", the struggle not just to exist but to exist well, and better than one's fellows. This competition would certainly change the environment further, so that the process of adaptation and hence of selection has no end. The survival of the fittest is a perpetual process, and there can never be a final adjustment to the environment because every intermediate adjustment alters the environment itself.

This point helps to show how unscientific determinism of this sort is. One feature of determinist theory is its failure to specify the conditions under which certain things are said to occur, or rather, it states that certain events, a certain process in fact, will occur unconditionally. To say that when the environment changes, only those best adapted to it will survive, has the shape of a scientific law, but nothing else. For to talk simply about the environment changing does nothing to specify the conditions under which certain events are said to occur; and to say that the best adapted will survive is not to say what these events are, because those which are best adapted will only be revealed when others have failed to survive; we cannot

identify them in advance.

This inability to specify either the conditions under which certain events will happen, or to say what these events will be, gives Social Darwinism the final hallmark of determinism, namely, unfalsifiability. There can be no exceptions to a law which describes a universal social process, because all events are part of that process. Since the evolutionary process has no term, we cannot even wait till it is complete and then see whether certain events were, so to speak, opposed to the process, though ineffectively of course. And no evidence can tell against the assertion that only the fittest survive because the only test of fitness is survival. The fact that, likewise, no evidence can tell in its favour can easily be overlooked by those who find themselves surviving very comfortably.

It was the orthodox Social Darwinism of Spencer and Sumner which so well exemplified these characteristics of determinism. In contrast to the laissez-faire conservatism of their position, there were also those who tried to use Darwinian premisses as the basis for policies of social and political reform, and these writers too can be called Social Darwinists. What, then, are the common elements of the determinist and the reformist positions which entitle us to speak of them under the one name, and

what are the criteria by which Social Darwinian thinking is to be distinguished from other bodies of theory which also embody some of the elements found in Social Darwinism - other evolutionary doctrines, or the ideas of progress, for example?

There are three essential elements in Social Darwinism, some of which it shares with other theories, but which, taken together, distinguish it from them. I will call these elements ^{1,} fundamentalism, organicism and biologism. By fundamentalism is meant the search for and belief in a single law, or the single law, in terms of which every event in society and in history can be accounted for, and for which every event becomes part of a process. Fundamentalism is not, of course, peculiar to Social Darwinism. Nor is the second element, organicism, or the doctrine of the social organism. Neither is it new. The comparison of social development with the growth of men or animals was a favourite with eighteenth century theorists of progress, such as Fontenelle.

But what is finally distinctive about Social Darwinism is that it adds to these two elements the idea that the fundamental law of development of the social organism is the biological law which Darwin enunciated.

1. In the sense used by John Plamenatz - see above, p.177

Social Darwinism was above all a biological view of society or history, that is, the view that individual men, or societies, or races, or nations, are subject to the same law as prevails in the animal and vegetable world, namely, the law of struggle for existence, and in that struggle, the natural selection of those chance variations best adapted to their environment for survival; in other words, the law of the survival of the fittest. This is the essentially Darwinian part of the doctrine. It would, I am suggesting, be legitimate to take as part of the whole complex of Social Darwinism all those doctrines in which can be discerned the fundamentalist notion of social or political development in accordance with a single, unbreakable, natural and discoverable law; the organicist notion, the idea that what develops - man, society, race, nation, state - has the same kind of unified life as that of an animal or vegetable organism; and biologism drawn from Darwin, the belief that that developmental law was the natural selection of the fittest chance variations.

These three elements allowed plenty of scope for variations. The strict Social Darwinism represented by Spencer and Sumner was determinist in character. It took the laws of social evolution, and particularly the element of struggle in them, as something which men can only accept, but cannot use. Struggle, selection and survival could not

be controlled. But there was also the possibility of rejecting the inevitability which this orthodox line followed and interpreting Darwinism in a non-determinist way. ¹ Could not man, as part of nature but distinguished by will and purpose, do the selecting? Could not the adaptations be made by deliberately altering the environment rather than passively awaiting natural specific changes? These were the questions raised by reformers like Lester Ward and Benjamin Kidd, and by those who sought to derive positive policy from Darwinism, like Bernhardt and Lea. These people and others welcomed the discovery of the fundamental law of social development. But the inference they drew was quite different from that of the orthodox determinists. They concluded that, having found the key to social progress, the knowledge could be turned to account.

1. This interpretation could never, of course, reject determinism completely, for without faith in the long run inevitability of development in certain directions, there could be no confidence in any plans or policies. The same dilemma faces Marxism, of course, and in both cases the justification of interventionism, easing the birth pangs or otherwise hastening an historical process, is just that this process is inevitable anyway. I shall come back later to this point especially in connexion with Social Darwinian arguments in favour of war as a national policy.

They argued that, though we cannot break the law of social development, we can, as with other laws of nature, work with it, and thus at last genuinely scientific, calculated social reforms or foreign policy, as against blind tinkering and guesswork, had become possible. Or again, it was contended that knowledge of the law of social development and the fact that human beings have purposes which such knowledge enables them to achieve, means that natural selection can be replaced by deliberate human selection. This was the premise from which the eugenics movement started. Both types of argument were intended to remove the determinist element from Social Darwinism and to replace the purposeless selection of chance variations with the deliberate choice of useful variations by man. It was argued that, the direction of evolution being established, increasing knowledge enabled men to hasten the process of evolution.

Again, both determinists and voluntarists or interventionists (or "meliorists", to use Ward's term) could differ over the question of what organism it was that was involved in struggle, selection and survival. Was it the individual, on the one hand, or, on the other, some collective - class, or nation, or race? The orthodox, determinist view of Spencer and Sumner was combined with, and taken as implying, a laissez-faire individualist

social philosophy. For them, the struggle for existence (or Sumner's second level struggle, "competition for life") was struggle among individual men. It was to them a fact of secondary importance, though still of great importance, that where this struggle was impeded, it weeded out the unfit and so produced societies or nations which were themselves so much the better able to survive in competition with other groups. The alternative was to take the group or collective as the primary unit in competition, and to derive from this certain conclusions about the proper functions of individuals. This was the alternative generally taken by writers who used Social Darwinism as an argument for war.

In Social Darwinism, then, struggle was thought of as occurring at one or both of two levels, among men or among groups. Combining this dichotomy with the other, there appear to be four forms which Social Darwinism could take. First, the orthodox view of individual determinism, Spencer - Sumner. Second, collective determinism, the view that natural selection inevitably worked among competing groups, nations or races. This view is represented especially by exponents of theories of manifest destiny, such as John Fiske. Next, there were the two possibilities based on voluntarism, so that thirdly, we have theories of reform and education of ~~the~~ individuals by making them fit to

survive. This line of thinking appears in the work of many latter-day Social Darwinists, like Ward and Kidd, and in the eugenics movement. It was very commonly combined, especially in doctrines of race breeding, with the fourth category of Social Darwinism, what might be called collective voluntarism, the view the Darwinian laws can be deliberately applied to a group, the nation, race or class. Thus writers like Bernhardt and Lea advocated certain national policies, and the eugenicists put forward certain domestic policies, on the grounds that nations or races were involved in struggle and selection, and that we can intervene to prepare the units to survive better in that struggle. The selection in the long run is still natural, but since we know what nature selects, we can forearm the group by training it in the virtues that promote survival.

Now, of course, no particular exposition of Social Darwinism fits neatly and exactly into one or another of these categories. Even the determinists Spencer and Sumner allowed that education might have some effect, and there was considerable shifting between the possible and the inevitable on the part of the national policy makers like Lea and Bernhardt. Again, there was a good deal of slurring of the distinctions between the organism man and the organism, or super-organism, nation or race, not to mention the very blurry line that often separated the

latter two. On this point, there seems at first sight to be more justification in Darwin's writings for the individualist interpretation than for the collectivist view. For, after all, Darwin speaks mainly about the struggle for existence among individual members of any given species and not among species themselves. But, as on so many other points, Darwin is not consistent on this one either, and the "preservation of favoured races" of the sub-title of the Origin gives strong colour to the claim that the crucial struggle is at the collective level, among competing nations or races, that international or inter-racial but not individual conflict is the agent of natural selection and that the units competing for survival are nations or human races. In this collective interpretation of Darwinism, the mixture of determinism and interventionism was especially strong. For while it was accepted that the outcome of the ultimate struggle, the struggle at the highest level of the racial or national unit, was inevitably determined, and that that struggle would, in Bernhardt's phrase, produce a "biologically just decision", - yet it was sought to combine this argument with advocacy of deliberate preparation of race or nation for the final struggle, as if by intervening deliberately to school the competitors in certain ways, the inevitable outcome could nevertheless be influenced, or at any rate

hastened or postponed.

To sum up, then, we could say that, like any other intellectual movement with so wide a spread in space and time, Social Darwinism was not all of a piece but rather like a set of variations on a theme. The elements of this theme were three: the idea of a fundamental law of historical or social process or development, a law which was thought of as controlling as well as explaining the process; the view that such a law applied to a developing organism; and the notion specifically taken from Darwinian biology that the law was one of selection in a struggle for survival. Variations turned on these three elements: could our knowledge of the law be turned to account? what organism was it that developed? and must the selection always be natural and the struggle a competitive fight among men or societies? (could it not be, for example, a co-operative fight of men against nature?) The several possible answers to these questions open the way to a wide and prolific field in which precise identification and strict definition become

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difficult. The answers diverge between determinism and voluntarism, between individualism and collectivism. Their common ground, however, lies in the triple concept of fundamentalism, organicism and biologism, and this ^{is} enough to let us chart the broad stream of Social Darwinism with some confidence and precision.

1. They become especially difficult when Darwinian ideas are used as the basis not only for theoretical systems but for practical social and political programmes. In these cases too serious problems of attribution arise. When a publicist uses every intellectual support that may conceivably bolster his case, the task of unravelling, say, the Darwinian strands from the Hegelian or the racialist or the nationalist or the laissez-faire or even the religious, become quite involved. However, by trying to identify each contributing element, as I have attempted here in the case of Social Darwinism, such unravelling should be facilitated, so that we do not ourselves fall into the fundamentalist error of saying that what is really at work in cases where a variety of influences seem to be operative is in fact this or that single factor; or into the related error of trying to reduce one intellectual factor or influence into a mere instance of another - for example, attempting to expose Social Darwinism as nothing but laissez-faire dressed up, or as disguised Hegelianism.

Chapter 6.

Critics and Reformers.

The framework within which Social Darwinism developed was large and flexible enough to accommodate not only many interpreters but also many reformers and critics; it had room for both the orthodox and the heretical. Perhaps it was the very elasticity of the Social Darwinian concepts that, in general, made criticism of them relatively ineffective; if one attacked the philosophy of violence as a product of Social Darwinism, as many critics did, those who derived the need for social cooperation from the same premisses were not discomfited; an assault on eugenics left radical laissez-faire individualism unshaken; to belittle the claims of racial superiority did not necessarily diminish the attractions of nationalism. Perhaps, on the other hand, it is only when one can look at the movement from the perspective of fifty years that one can detect a movement at all and its varied manifestations. It may be that contemporary reformers and critics were bound to see only certain aspects of it.

But whatever the reason, it now seems clear that there were ^{few} avowed critics of Social Darwinism who themselves entirely escaped the influence of what they were attacking. It is a question, of course, whether detachment is ever

possible to critics, either contemporary or later, and whether criticism would be possible or effective if such detachment were achieved: again, effective criticism of a doctrine does not ~~seem to~~ require its total rejection: and further, critics of Social Darwinism (like many other critics), were not simply critics but writers with positions of their own to develop. On this last point, it should be noted that in looking briefly at the work of some of these critics, I am not here concerned with an examination, except incidentally, of their positive positions - I am not directly concerned with, say, Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid (much less his broad socialist views) or with Ward's sociology or with Kidd's theories of social evolution. But I would argue that few of the contemporary critics seriously challenged the three principles of fundamentalism, organicism and biologism which are together characteristic of Social Darwinism. Thus, Novicow and Morgan, for instance, did not call in question the propriety of using the biological hypothesis of struggle for existence to explain social events; and even those who took an evolutionary view not based upon Darwinian biology, such as Hobhouse and Ritchie, sometimes at least use the language of Social Darwinism in such a way as to suggest that their own evolutionary views could be more confidently asserted just because they too, like the orthodox Social Darwinists, took Darwin to have provided

the basis upon which theories of evolution "at large" (to use Spencer's phrase) could build by having firmly established the principle of biological evolution by natural selection. That is not to say that all evolutionary theories derive from theories of biological evolution - Spencer's position, for example, drew heavily on physical theories : much less that they derive from Darwinism - Spencer again, and others retained Lamarckian elements in their thought, and there is also the influence¹ of De Vries and the theory of mutations mentioned above. But it does seem to me that the belief was so well² established-both among Social Darwinists like Spencer, and among others (including Marx, for instance) - that the Darwinian theory contributed convincing scientific evidence for a general theory of evolution, that even evolutionary thinkers like Hobhouse, whose views were not derivative from Social Darwinism, were less destructive of Social Darwinism than they might have been had they pointed out unequivocally that there is no reason for believing that the establishment of an evolutionary social theory logically depends upon (whatever the psychological effect may be) evolutionary biological theory, much less on any particular³ theory, such as natural selection.

1. See p. 230, BELOW

2. See above, p. 118 3. Barzun makes this point, op.cit., p. 69

The purpose of looking at the work of some of the contemporary critics is not so much to seek in their writings arguments against Social Darwinism as to suggest that both the amount and, in some cases, the nature of criticism are themselves evidence of the strength of the Social Darwinian movement. Those who saw through Social Darwinism, like Ritchie and Hobhouse, were alarmed by its widespread invocation as a justification of social policies and attitudes which they deplored. The less far-sighted - Chamberlain, Novicow, Loria, Morgan - provided less direct but more revealing evidence of Social Darwinism's strength by failing to see ~~how~~ their own criticisms were weakened by that very biologism they should have been attacking.

Failure to shake off the Darwinian incubus is sharply and crudely illustrated in the monumental work of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Foundations of the Nineteenth Century.¹ Among the many themes in this labyrinthine book, the main one is the doctrine of Germanic superiority, which the Englishman Chamberlain believed in and preached with as much fervour as his father-in-law, the composer Richard Wagner. Chamberlain was vividly aware of the power and influence of Darwinian ideas in his generation, and he shows great insight into the reasons for the success of

1. First German ed., 1910. Trans. by Jogn Lees, 2 vols., John Lane, London and N.Y., 1912. (1st. impression, 1910)

of the Darwinian style of thinking. In a striking passage he says that ideas "hold a man in a tyrannical grasp, they clutch his mind as a bird of prey its quarry and no one can resist them; so long as any particular conception is dominant, nothing can be accomplished outside the sphere of its magic influence; whoever cannot feel as it dictates is condemned to sterility, however talented he may be. This we have seen in the second half of the nineteenth century in connection with Darwin's theory of evolution... A manifestly unsound system like that of Darwin exercises a much more powerful influence than the deepest speculations, just because of its "practicability". And so we have seen the idea of evolution develop itself till it spread from biology and geology to all spheres of thought and investigation, and, intoxicated by its success, exercised such a tyranny that one who did not swear by it was looked upon as a simpleton".¹

Besides attacking the claim that Social Darwinism derives from Darwin's work, Chamberlain also assails the idea of progress with which Social Darwinism was bound up, at least in the minds of the orthodox. There is no more foundation for belief in the inevitability of universal progress than for the older belief, which survived in

1. ibid., Introduction, Vol. 1, pp. lxxxvi-lxxxlii.

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Gobineau, in degeneration, because neither, Chamberlain held, can be "applied to actual history". If these ideas have any meaning, it is only for individuals, not for social or natural processes; Though it is important to notice here that Chamberlain did not necessarily mean people when he spoke of individuals. "Every individual person reveals progress and degeneration, every individual thing likewise - whatever its nature - the individual race, the individual nation; the individual culture; that is the price that must be paid for the possession of individuality. On the other hand, in the case of universal and not individual phenomena, the notions of progress and degeneration have no meaning, being merely a wrong and roundabout way of expressing change and motion". This is the crux of his attack upon Spencer, whose "so-called evolution from simpler to more complicated forms of life may be quite as justifiably considered a decline as an advance; it is fact neither the one nor the other, but merely a manifestation of motion". Chamberlain points out that Spencer admits this last point, yet fails to see that "motion" does not always mean "advance". He remarks that "no tenable notion can be derived even from the most consistent, and, therefore, most shallow, Darwinism" - "And yet clever men, carried away by I. Count Arthur de Gobineau, The Inequality of Human Races, 1854, See below Chapter 8, p.287

the current of prevalent error, would fain have seen in evolution the guarantee, nay more, the proof of the reality of progress!"¹ One of the "clever men" is John Fiske. On the title of Fiske's book, The Destiny of Man, Viewed in the Light of his Origin,² Chamberlain writes the biting footnote: "Such are our modern empiricists! They know the "origin" and the "destiny" of all things and may therefore well deem themselves wise. The Pope in Rome is more modest."³ When Fiske argues that the struggle for existence has produced the human soul, Chamberlain wonders "how the struggle can supply the sole effective cause of anything; this conception of the world's problems seems to me a little too summary, like all philosophy of evolution;..."⁴

Later on in this essay⁵ I will argue that, although he avoids the Social Darwinists, except to criticise them in passing, and goes directly back to Darwin for some at least of the inspiration of his race theory, Chamberlain has nevertheless failed to avoid the characteristic features of Social Darwinism. Thus, in criticising Fiske and Spencer, Chamberlain was not rejecting the claim that Darwin's work in biology had an application to history and society; he was maintaining that they had misconstrued

1. ibid., vol. II, p. 214.

2. Boston, 1884.

3. op. cit., p. 216.

4. ibid.,

5. See below, Chapter 8, p.

that application, so far as it was valid.

The work of the Sociologist Jacques Novicow exemplifies the widespread anxiety to make this repudiation of Social Darwinism and at the same time shows the difficulty of making it thoroughly. "Renunciation" would perhaps be a better word than "repudiation" in Novicow's case, for in his earlier writings he is an orthodox Social Darwinist.¹ If one were to speak about Social Darwinism in religious terms, then Novicow recanted; in Marxian language, he was a renegade or guilty of reformism.

Novicow's main concern became the contesting of the view that Darwinian biology was a sound scientific ground for believing that violent social, national or racial struggle was beneficent because it was the inevitable condition of progress. He wanted to argue that the idea of progress through competitive struggle did not entail or justify violence because, in civilized societies, significant competition occurs not at the physical or at the political

1. William L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902, 1935, 2nd. ed., Alfred Knopf, New York, 1951, pp. 80-81, quotes from Novicow's International Policy, 1886: "It is the struggle for existence which determines place. If one animal is less perfect than another, he must serve as prey. If one society is less perfect than another, the first must work for the second... International policy is the art of conducting the struggle for existence between social organisms."

level, but at the intellectual level. According to Novicow, beneficent struggle and elimination do occur, but among ideas, not among people. In fact, he accepts the view that struggle is universal, but he insists that "chaques domain a ses formes particulieres de lutte qui correspondent a sa nature speciale".¹ In biological fields, struggle is characterised by violence, bloodshed and "le massacre"; in society, it is carried on by the process of invention and discussion. By invention, Novicow meant not only technical devices and technological developments, but also "new social arrangements". Both these create competition - the inventor and his converts strive to have their ideas accepted, and this struggle for recognition and support is determined by discussion.

Novicow does not deny that other struggles than those among ideas go on in society, but he thinks the Social Darwinian account of them is woefully inadequate because it overlooks the fact that at least "eight tenths of our efforts" are used not to struggle against other members of the species, but against unfavourable natural environment. He shares with most others of his generation, including the Social Darwinists, the belief in the inevitability of progress, though Novicow's assumption that Social Darwinism entails

1. "Le Darwinisme Social," Revue Internationale de sociologie, March, 1905.

belief in progress is certainly questionable. He therefore argues¹ that we can understand it in his terms of mental and social competition.

Novicow preached pacifism and social cooperation in a series of works in the 1890's and 1900's, and like many other liberal-socialist reformers such as L.T.Hobhouse, Peter Kropotkin and Lester Ward, he felt the need to combat Social Darwinism as one of the most serious competitors against his position. Towards the end of his life, he² felt it necessary to devote a book exclusively to the demolition of the rival theory. But even there, Novicow is not quite free of the presuppositions of the doctrine he is assailing, and especially of the most characteristic belief, namely, that biological evolution is the key to social understanding.

Novicow argues that during the second half of the nineteenth century, Social Darwinism has polluted or destroyed politics, morals, literature, peace and international cooperation. In La Critique, he says that it is "un véritable poison. Il a aveuglé les hommes." It has

1. ibid.: "...aussi longtemps qu'on n'avait pas découvert la véritable nature des luttes sociales, on pouvait attribuer le progrès de l'humanité aux massacres sur les champs de bataille. Mais cette cause était fautive, car la vraie cause du progrès est l'invention et la discussion."

2. Jacques Novicow, La Critique du darwinisme social.

enthroned the ethics of struggle, force and "le banditisme". This is because Social Darwinists have argued that the cause of human progress is "l'homicide collectif". Novicow tries to show that this has been the central tenet of all Social Darwinists, even of such heretics as Lester Ward who was the chief opponent of Sumner in America. Herbert Spencer is the first object of Novicow's attack for maintaining that violence is the means of social evolution. "Donc le progrès, selon Herbert Spencer, provient de la guerre, c'est-à-dire, de l'homicide collectif."¹ Ward is said to argue that "le système entier de la production industrielle tire son origine de la conquête";² Ratzehofer to attribute the emergence of states to the conflicts within tribes; Renan³ argues that war is a condition of progress and that peace means sloth and decline. Novicow points out, as Bernhardt⁴ did later, that this idea that physical violence is the

1. ibid., p.4.

2. Gustav Ratzehofer, 1842-1904, an Austrian Field Marshall, whose sociological theories had a wide influence, especially in America and on his disciple Ludwig Gumplowicz, a Polish sociologist.

3. See Ernest Renan, La Reforme intellectuelle et morale, ed. and introduced by P.E. Charvet, Cambridge U.P., 1950. Renan wrote this after the Franco-Prussian war, arguing that war selects not only the best men but the best nations too: to survive, France must shake off her sloth.

4. See below, Chapter 9.

source of progress is as old as Heraclitus. But, though Darwin is in no way to blame, his work has given the view new heart: "Après la diffusion des théories darwiniennes, elle a acquis un nouveau regain de popularité", a popularity which is widely distributed. Social Darwinism, says Novicow, "satisfaisait et les conservateurs, épris de la force brutale, et les libéraux, épris de l'idée de justice, et les libres penseurs positivistes et monistes, et les croyants idéalistes et dualistes; Ernst Haeckel et le maréchal de Moltke se prévalurent, tous les deux, de Darwin."¹

Novicow goes on to urge several points against Darwinism itself as well as against its social applications; but these need not detain us.² Running through his work is the notion of a real interest, of which men may be ignorant, and which in fact they do ignore in struggling against each other. This real interest is hindered by war and conflict: it can be advanced, progress can be made, only when cooperation prevails. In fact, Novicow argues, cooperation is the natural order of things, struggle is pathological. Struggle, he says, has become in recent times

1. op.cit., p.9

2. Novicow's case against Darwinian biology is made out on the grounds of a few carefully chosen instances, and depends for its force on the view that the evidence must be complete, a view Darwin had expressly rejected.

"la plus grande divinité de la mythologie occidentale"; but "l'association est le phénomène primordial, et, par suite, le plus important"¹. Furthermore, he argues that "il n'y a pas d'opposition d'intérêt entre l'individu et la collectivité il y en a seulement ce qui paraît être l'intérêt de l'individu et ce qui est réellement cet intérêt."²

There are further echoes of eighteenth century rationalism in Novicow's references to "economic harmonies". But in addition to the implicit organicism of the ideas of the naturally harmonious, the community of interest, and the naturalness of cooperation, Novicow explicitly adds the other characteristic ingredient of Social Darwinism, namely biologism. Novicow too argues that biology holds the key to the understanding of society; the key to understanding, however, is to recognize that cooperation for a more effective struggle against a hostile environment is the mainspring of human activity. "Comme la lutte contre le milieu est le phénomène primordial de la vie, l'association de tous les hommes est l'état de notre espèce qui est conforme à la loi fondamentale de la biologie."³

1. *ibid.*, p. 93.

2. *ibid.*, p. 98

3. *ibid.*, p. 101. "Cette loi fondamentale est que tout être vivant fuit la douleur et recherche le plaisir." Thus even hedonism is given a biologicistic foundation.

He had no doubt that "Les vérités enseignées par la biologie s'appliquent directement à la sociologie".¹ What was wrong with Social Darwinism was that it had misconstrued these truths. It is significant and typical of much contemporary criticism that Novicow thus attempts² to refute Social Darwinism on ground of its own choosing rather than by calling in question the whole paraphernalia of biological sociology. He leaves unexamined the idea of a fundamental law applicable equally to nature and society; the notion that society is organic in character; and the belief that biology reveals this law. The burden of his book is that true understanding will show that the fundamental law of biology and sociology alike is the very opposite of the decisive struggle which the Darwinists spoke of, and towards the end of his book he forecasts that "Quand on comprend exactement les faits de la biologie, on voit qu'elle est pour cette fédération (du genre humain). Une science imparfaite et superficielle, ayant mal observé les réalités vitales, peut se prononcer contre union; une

1. ibid. But "Etre sociologue et darwinien, c'est nager en pleine contradiction."

2. E.g., George Nasmyth, Social Progress and the Darwinian Theory. Putnam's, London & N.Y., 1916. Nasmyth practically reproduces Novicow's points, adding very little of his own. In the introduction by Norman Angell, it is suggested that the purpose of the book is to "see what aid biological laws, half a century after Darwin, give us in the framing of social principles."

science plus avancée et plus exacte est necessairement pour¹

This line of criticism, namely, that Darwinism misread the biological evidence, was followed by the liberal-socialist Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin's book, Mutual Aid,² was inspired by the St.Petersburg naturalist Kesller, who lectured in 1880 on the theme that there is in nature a law of Mutual Aid as well as a law of Mutual Struggle; and by the author's failure, during his youthful studies of animal life in Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria, "to find...that bitter struggle for the means of existence, among animals belonging to the same species, which was considered by most Darwinists ... as the dominant characteristic of struggle for life, and the main factor of evolution"³. Kropotkin's examination of the nature and extent of cooperation among - to list the subjects of his various chapters - animals, savages, the barbarians, in the medieval city, and amongst ourselves, leads him ~~to the~~ to the conclusion that mutual aid is just as universal and more important than that other biological and social phenomenon, struggle. Kropotkin's main contention is that the extent of mutual aid, as manifested especially in the ancient Greek cities and in the medieval guilds, as well as

1. ibid., p.380

2. Peter Kropotkin, Mutual Aid - A factor of Evolution, Heinemann, London, 1910. 1st. ed. 1902.

3. ibid., Introduction

in other small, local associations, has been curtailed in modern times by the increasing centralization of control by the State. These two kinds of cooperative associations "gave to mankind the two great periods of its history". The industrial progress of the nineteenth century is not the result of individualism and competition; it was inherent in the scientific and geographical discoveries of the fifteenth century (especially the discovery of the pressure of the atmosphere) and is only the logical outcome of these earlier achievements of cooperation. Kropotkin concludes that "For industrial progress, as for each other conquest over nature, mutual aid and close intercourse certainly are, as they have been, much more advantageous than mutual struggle" and he sees in them¹ "the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race".

The three critics we have mentioned so far, Chamberlain, Novicow and Kropotkin, did not go beyond correcting the Social Darwinian interpretation of the relationship between biology and social theory. Without questioning the biological analogy, or asking whether any parallels closer than mere literary devices could be drawn between biological and social evolution, they argued

1. ibid. pp 298 and 300

that the Social Darwinists had made the wrong analogies and drawn the wrong parallels. Two comments may be made on this. One is the point already brought up, that it surely telling evidence of the force of the Social Darwinist movement that many of its critics drew the weapons for their attack not from the arsenal of sociology but from the arsenal of biology.

The other observation is that this devotion to the biological approach brings out the readiness with which those searching for a single explanatory principle in the social sciences turned to the natural sciences for a clue. This was not of course peculiar to the nineteenth century, nor to Social Darwinists - for example, the influence of mechanics on social theory is prominent from the seventeenth century at least through to Spencer's First Principles¹, and there have been other models in the natural sciences upon which social theorists have sometimes tended to rely. Social scientists can no doubt learn much from both the methods and the findings of the natural sciences. But the perfectly unobjectionable desire to be scientific, in the sense especially of following certain canons of inquiry applicable to all fields of study, may - and in the case of Social Darwinists, I believe, did - become the questionable desire

1. cf. above, Introduction, p.12.

de to be "scientific" (to use Hayek's terminology) illicitly to go beyond the warrant of the evidence in extending to social theory explanatory hypotheses applicable to some field of natural phenomena, especially when such an extension is made in the belief that the single determinant of events has been discovered. In the late nineteenth century, Darwin's work was the prevailing model of how to be scientific and his field was biology. It would require a good deal of argument to show that an explanatory hypothesis in biology is equally capable of explaining social phenomena. Most of those who sought to apply Darwinian principles to social policy (some of whom are discussed in Part III of this essay) made the transition from nature to society without making it at all clear what stepping stones they used. One might have expected, then, that critics would seek to show that such stones did not exist or at least that they provided only a treacherous path. But this was certainly not always so.

Another example of the "biologistic" approach to social theory is found in the writings of Benjamin Kidd. His book Social Evolution¹, first published in 1894, sold a quarter of a million copies, and he is one of the few writers who carry over the tradition of biologism into post-war

1. Social Evolution, MacMillan, London, 3rd. ed., 1898.

writing, where, in his Science of Power, by substituting the state for the individual in what otherwise remains a Social Darwinian position, he works out an elaborate blueprint for totalitarianism.

The main object of Social Evolution, and one reason for its big circulation, is to show that religion is an indispensable factor in the evolution of societies. Kidd does not doubt that societies do evolve, and that the understanding of their evolution rests on biology, for "all departments of knowledge which deal with social phenomena have their true foundations in the biological sciences". He also accepts the view that "Social Systems and civilizations ... are organic growths, apparently possessing definite laws of health and development" which it is the duty of science to "define". He agrees that this law is the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest among societies, nations and races, and adds the determinist conviction that this rivalry "compels us to make progress whether we will or not". But it is not competition among individuals that produces progress, even the progress of individuals, for "man can only reach his highest development ... in society", from which it follows that... his development as an individual is necessarily of less

1. The Science of Power, 1918, Methuen, London, 9th. ed., 1920.

importance than his development as a social creature" and that "the interests of the social organism... must always be predominant". Kidd argues from this that there can never be any rational grounds for individual conduct since individual interests are always antagonistic to those of the social organism; an answer to the question, What ought I to do? can only be found in religion. Although it is irrational or "ultra-rational", religion has survived just because it is an "integrating principle...the function of which is to secure in the stress of evolution the continual subordination of the interests of the individual units to the larger interests of the longer-lived social organism to which they belong"¹.

Kidd especially criticises Herbert Spencer for under-rating the function of religion as a survival factor. Spencer made this error, Kidd argued, because, like the Utilitarians, he falsely assumed that the interests of individuals and society were gradually becoming identical. Kidd follows this line of argument further in Individualism and After.² Maintaining that in England, the effects of "the doctrine of organic evolution through natural selection... have been from the beginning deeper, more widespread, and more potent than in any other country,"³ (though in

1. Social Evolution, pp. 26, 31, 53, 60, 81, 104.

2. London, 1908.

3. ibid., p. 7.

1918 he said much the same of Europe), he attributes this to the long history of the struggle for individual liberty, what he calls "the tendencies of thought that had produced individualism...culminated in England between 1850 and 1860" ¹ and he cites the writers of that time, like Mill, Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen, as thinking of government as at best a necessary evil of the past. This doctrine of laissez-faire individualism, whose culmination Kidd sees in Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy, found a marvellous ally in Darwin. But Kidd rejects the view that evolution can be interpreted in the individual terms of the orthodox Social Darwinists, because the Origin of Species dealt with "the struggle for existence as between individuals and among forms of life below human society. (But) A species is not in itself a social group" and there are different principles, not found in Darwin, "which must regulate under the stress of natural selection the integration of social types and in particular of a social type resting ultimately on mind." ²

Kidd makes central in his doctrine the idea of the social organism, in which he sees the state as playing a leading role. Since about 1875, he points out, the functions

1. ibid., p.8

2. ibid., p.12.

of the state in England have grown rather than declined,¹ as Spencer and others had forecast. Again, Kidd argues, the growth of nationalism in the late nineteenth century has made the world economy a matter of social rather than individual relationships. Both these developments exemplify a "gradual and general movement of the social mind towards a more organic conception of society". But Kidd's social organism is not the same as Spencer's - "Nothing has ever existed in the world or will ever exist therein like the social organism which Spencer conceived... For how could there be/a ^{such} thing as a social organism while the interests of the individual in it were supreme over every good of the whole organism!"² On the contrary, "the first meaning of an organism as such is that its efficiency is superior to the sum total of the efficiency of all its units acting as units." Without pausing to say how this nice calculation might be made, Kidd goes straight on to say that "The evolution of society under the stress of natural selection is along the lines of its greater efficiency... that is to, say, the more organic social type".³

Kidd's devotion to social organicism survived and increased during the 1914-1918 War; and his popularity apparently held too, since the Science of Power ran through

1. ibid., pp.20-21.

2. Science of Power, p.65.

3. Individualism and After, p.24.

nine editions in two years. Kidd's view of individualism as an outmoded concept reaches its peak in this book, where he identifies society with the state and stresses the importance of the efficiency of the state, especially as brought about by education in what he calls "the emotion of the ideal", the appeal of a call to individual sacrifice for the good of the state. "The conclusion... is that it is inevitable that civilization will look in future to the emotion of the ideal... for the accomplishment of its aims. The science of the function of the emotion of the ideal in the social integration that is proceeding is .. the science of efficiency and therefore the science of all winning causes in civilization."¹

In many respects, of course, Kidd has moved right away from orthodox Social Darwinism. But, in addition to his retention of the distinctive features of organicism and competitive struggle for survival, there also remains the typically Social Darwinian claim to provide an account of the inevitable which will enable us to put ourselves on the side of the "winning cause"; and furthermore, the appeal to the "emotion of the ideal" is the appeal to lose one's personal responsibility in some larger, impersonal cause. Thus we find Kidd looking forward to an inevitable total-

1. Science of Power, p.136

itarianism in which "The existing individuals must be rendered capable of subordinating their minds, their lives, and all the interests within the span of their lives, and which may even at times be beyond their understanding."¹

A society which is thus rendered organic² to the highest possible degree ... in the struggle for survival... will exceed in Power all other types." Kidd sums up with the observation that Darwin formulated the law of individual heredity, showing that individual characteristics promoting survival were transmitted physically; but "since man became a social creature the winning variations upon which Power has rested in his evolution have been to an ever-increasing degree neither variations in the structure of his body nor in the size of his brain, but variations in the type³ of social culture to which he is being submitted."

Evidence of the geographical spread of Social Darwinism is provided in the variety of nationalities among its critics. There was the Russian Kropotkin, the Frenchman Novicow and Le Comte, the Americans Lester Ward; in England, Ritchie, Hobhouse, Kidd, Nasmyth and C. Lloyd Morgan; and in Germany, Chamberlain. Another was the Italian socialist economist Achille Loria. In June, 1896,

1. ibid., p.225.

2. "

3. " p.262.

Loria published an article against the view that Darwin provided evidence in favour of laissez-faire social policies. Loria pleads eloquently against the prevailing opinion among economists that state interference will be merely an attempt to save what nature has condemned to die and will therefore be futile. Loria advances three arguments to show that social struggle is unlike biological struggle in many important respects. The arguments are:- (a) that whereas animals struggle against nature or other species, men struggle against one another; (b) that in society, the successful are not those who kill off their rivals but those who manage to live on them like parasites: the surviving parasites, because they are parasites, must be weaker than their hosts, and so the race degenerates and progress is not inevitable; (c) that sexual selection no longer operates in society as it does in nature because alliances are made from economic and not physical motives: this again leads to degeneration rather than progress.

Thus Loria argued that social struggle, unlike biological struggle among species of plants and animals, did not improve men and societies. That had to be done by legislative reform. The conditions of human development, he thought, lie "non pas dans la lutte et le carnage, mais

1. "Darwinisme Social", Revue Internationale de sociologie, June, 1896.

dans la justice et la pitié". Now it is true that this argument, and the similar versions of it that appear in other critics, amounts to a complete substitution of conscious humanitarian motives and goals for blind biological processes. But the argument does not begin by showing that the "biologistic" account of social processes is just irrelevant: the argument is rather that the biological evidence does not point in the direction in which the Social Darwinists believe it does. This failure to question the biological approach fundamentally comes out with great clarity in another article of Loria's, written sixteen years after the one just cited, an interval during which the Darwinian theory in biology itself had undergone substantial modification in the work of De Vries and the theory of mutations.

Loria's aim in this paper is to argue that the reaction to this work and against the older theory of evolution had been too violent, that the two views are compatible, that the course of evolution still runs although it may not run as smooth as Darwin had thought. He argues that "La mutation de De Vries, l'élan vital de Bergson, et le violence de Sorel ne sont donc, en dernière analyse, que trois aspects de même principe...à la place de Darwin, Spencer et Marx, en c. 1. "La dernière évolution de la théorie de l'évolution", op.cit., December, 1912.

on a De Vries, Bergson et Sorel; le biologiste, le philosophe et le sociologue du créationisme indépendant". Whereas, Loria argues, on either the Spencerian or the Marxian view of history, the most that men could do was to speed up the inevitable a little, the new theory opens up the way for direct and decisive human intervention in events. "De cette manière, le fatalisme, inherent à l'ancienne théorie, était remplacé par une théorie inspiratrice et directrice de l'action, et l'on atteignait enfin cette fécondité positive et pratique de la doctrine, qui est la démonstration la plus sûre de sa vérité." Pointing out how the Darwinian theory, with its insistence on gradualness and having no room for sudden and violent change, had offered no comfort to revolutionary teachings, Loria refers to the Left as welcoming De Vries for showing that new species are not formed "par un lent processus de sélection naturelle... mais par la brusque et soudaine apparition de formes tout nouvelles, due à des causes mystérieuses, imprevoyables, et détachées de tout l'ensemble de l'évolution antérieure." On this basis, Sorel was able to go a step further than Marx, for he took the new biology as showing that we do not have to watch the clock of history or "attendre, les bras croisés, que sonne l'heure funèbre de notre système sociale; car toute heure est bonne pour combattre, pour vaincre et pour renouveler... la violence *PEUT*

créer la nouvelle forme sociale a tout moment..."¹

Loria testifies to the tenacity of the biological image on the minds of social theorists and philosophers when he speaks of the lip-service which the modern writers still pay to Darwin and Spencer: he says, for example, that the "evolution" in Bergson's "creative evolution" is merely a courtesy, for "creative evolution" is a contradictory name, and Bergson's new philosophy is in fact the old philosophy of creation. But what Loria does not seem to realise is how far ^{he} himself is also a slave to the fascination of biologism, for his attack on this style of theorizing in 1896 has changed to a defence of the method by 1912 when the same kind of evidence seems to point the other way.

In this way, Loria represents those critics of orthodox Social Darwinism whose criticism was not directed at all against the methods of that doctrine but against the conclusions about social or international policy to which

1. Compare R. B. Perry, The Present Conflict of Ideas, Longmans Green, New York, 1922, p. 296: "Anti-intellectualism is a convenient philosophy for impatient men of action. This is largely the reason why the revolutionary Syndicalists have shown so great a fondness for Bergson. They propose to do something, and do not want to be restrained by the necessity of giving reasons for it."

it was held to lead. Many of the critics were also social reformers who believed that the particular interventions they desired could not be strongly advocated until the Social Darwinian edifice was demolished: for the determinism of the orthodox position was fatal to intervention. But the Spencer-Sumner doctrine had other attractions, above all, its allegedly scientific character embodied in its biologism, which enticed reformers of every kind to show that this same Darwinian paraphernalia was in fact the sanction for their interventions rather than for their opponents' policy of what Loria called "dolce farniente". The opposing schools converged again, in their belief in progress: but whereas for the Spencerians that was a "beneficent necessity", for the reformers it was something that had to be achieved by positive action, though the achievement was possible precisely because Darwin had opened men's eyes to the possibility of discovering the laws of social evolution, laws with which we can work.

This approach was followed by many reformers towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is in the U.S.A. and England, the countries where Social Darwinism had its widest vogue, that we find the clearest examples, for in those countries not only was the socialist's task of denying that Darwinism was a foundation for laissez-faire more pressing, but, furthermore, the doctrine's very popularity

made it an ally to covet if only its support could be diverted to the interventionist camp. And the fact that critics and reformers were not separate groups but almost always coincided in the same people was a strong reason for that failure of the critics of Social Darwinism to free themselves thoroughly from the presuppositions of what they were attacking - it is a nice matter how far one should denigrate an opponent's ally who one hopes will change sides.

So we find, for example, C. Lloyd Morgan beginning an article with the statement that he is "convinced that the foundations of any adequate study of social phenomena must be laid in biology". He goes on to argue, however, that natural selection plays an insignificant part in the development of men in civilization: that the recent work of De Vries and Weismann had finally discredited the Lamarckian theory, which had been such a prominent strain in Spencer's thought, of the inheritance of acquired characteristics: and that therefore, "the conditions of human progress must be sought in the evolution of the environment of human achievement". Mis²interpreting the Darwinian-Spencerian notion of the fit in absolute and

1. "The Conditions of Human Progress", The Monist, April 1900.
2. My italics.

specifiable terms (and not in unspecifiable terms, relative to unpredictable survival). Morgan, speaks of the importance in social evolution of the role of the fit in helping the less fit by improving their environment and especially by education. His conclusion is that, since these are the only conditions under which social progress is possible, and since, "as seems probable, the nature of civilized man is undergoing no improvement, it is assuredly all the more necessary that we should do our utmost to improve his nurture".

Morgan's view of fitness in absolute terms was particularly common among the supporters of orthodox Social Darwinism, notably those who saw their own particular virtues, or those of their class, nation or race, especially wealth and power, as not only the cause of their past success but also the guarantee of their future survival. The fact that the Social Darwinists themselves committed this logical indiscretion made it more plausible for their opponents also to conceive fitness in absolute terms, and then attack the doctrine of unrelieved struggle in social, economic and international affairs as a defense of the destruction of the best men, for they would be foremost in the struggle, and of the best virtues. This line was most plausible against the Social Darwinian argument for war. But, at the level of domestic social and

economic policy~~cit~~ was also vigorously maintained that unmitigated competition was wasteful and destructive, and unnecessarily so - and therefore inefficient - because social legislation could achieve better results at less cost, that is, could preserve not only the fittest but more of them.

The leading opponent of Sumner in America, Lester F. Ward,¹ put the case for intervention conceived as the application of laws, with great clarity. Castigating the laissez-faire school of economists, Ward complained that "while declaring with truth that social phenomena are like physical phenomena, uniform and governed by laws, they have accompanied this by the false declaration and non-sequitur that neither physical nor social phenomena are capable of human control. . . . The opposing positive school of economists simply demands an opportunity to utilize the social forces for human advantage in precisely the same manner as physical forces have been utilized."² It is of course as much a non-sequitur to argue that, because things obey laws, therefore they are controllable, as a glimpse of, say, the astronomer's cocmos would have shown Ward. But he had a more telling point in his support of Comte's positivism against Spencer's determinism, when he argued that "The evil effects which he (Spencer) has ascribed to

1. On Ward, see especially, Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought, chap. IV, and H. S. Commager, The American Mind, Chap. X.

2. Quoted by Hofstadter, op.cit., from Ward's Glimpses of the Cosmos.

... legislative meddling are sufficient, coming from so high a source, to demonstrate the general principle that there is power in positive law, and this is the sole admission the positivist requires".¹ Thus, Ward developed what he called meliorism, "the true doctrine.. the optimist says: Do nothing, because there is nothing to do. THE PESSIMIST SAYS, DO NOTHING, BECAUSE NOTHING CAN BE DONE. The meliorist says: "Do something, because there is much to do and it can be done".²

The writers mentioned so far in this chapter illustrate firstly, the widespread contemporary belief that the demolition of orthodox Social Darwinism was a necessary prerequisite to the building of a variety of theories and programmes of social reform; and, secondly, the belief that, to a considerable extent, the late nineteenth century philosophy of violence could be rebutted by discrediting the Social Darwinian foundations on which many of the critics supposed it largely to rest. These two beliefs were shared, I think, by two other critics to whom I now turn - E.T. Hobhouse and D.G. Ritchie, whose attacks on Social Darwinism were more incisive than those of any other writers.³

Again, with these two writers, as with the others discussed so far, I am not concerned to examine their overall positions

1. L.F. Ward, Dynamic Sociology, Appleton, New York, 1883, 2 vols: Vol. I, p. 152.

2. "Contributions to Social Philosophy, II; Sociology and Cosmology" American Journal of Sociology, September, 1895

3. I have already referred to Hobhouse's criticism of the notion of law in Social Darwinism See above Chapter 1 p. 44

as such but only some points of their work which are critical of Social Darwinism. Thus, I am not here assessing their own views of Social evolution : I refer to them mainly as two distinguished authors who took up the cudgels against Social Darwinism in the firm belief that it was being used, however irrationally, as an intellectual support for beliefs which they rejected as immoral. But I shall try to indicate, en passant, one or two points at which they too flirt with the enemy.

In his book Democracy and Reaction,¹ Hobhouse attacked orthodox Social Darwinism and the attempts to find biological justification for violence, not rejecting the evolutionary basis of sociology, but arguing that the Social Darwinist version of it is false because it is not thoroughgoing. His own argument is that a "truer" understanding of evolution (which he equates with Darwinism) leads to liberal humanitarianism, not to conservative brutalism. "A truer, because more complete, science of evolution, justifies the rule of right no less certainly than an inadequate science of evolution appears to justify the rule of force".²

Hobhouse attacks imperialism, lamenting its supplanting of liberalism in English politics, especially since 1870, and he criticizes the specious arguments used

1. T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1904

2. ibid., p.241.

in its defense. Hobhouse raises the question why liberalism has been eclipsed. He refers to the influence of German idealism as a reactionary force, to the success, in Germany and Italy, of policies of violence, to the new emphasis on self-help, and to the impact of science. "But after all", he says, ¹ "by far the most important intellectual support of the reaction has been... the belief that physical science has given its verdict in favour - for it came to this - of violence and against social justice.... .The doctrine that human progress depends upon the forces which condition all biological evolution has in fact been the primary intellectual cause of reaction." Hobhouse rejects this doctrine on the grounds that it involves "a mere denial of the value of social order", ² and the fact that he is attacking the outcome rather than the method of Social Darwinian thinking appears again in his complaint that "from Malthus downwards stress on the biological conditions of society has naturally been associated with a bias towards conservatism", ³ and against reform and equality. Hobhouse criticizes the determinism of Social Darwinism: "The theory of evolution has led to a kind of fatalism, which consorts well with the materialist principles which have

1. *ibid.*, p.83-4

2. *ibid.*, p.86. 3. *ibid.*, p.86

become popular...The great biological forces work themselves out without any conscious contribution from the organisms with which they sport."¹ But again, his quarrel is not with this style of thinking so much as with the result it produces, namely, the dethronement of morality. Society's future, he says, with some asperity, "can be ascertained by science and predicted by biological writers on human society who are adequately furnished with a distinct conception of our manifest destiny," and "by the conception of destiny the check on moral consciousness is paralysed."²

In 1911, Hobhouse delivered a series of lectures at Columbia University³ in which he develops very much further the organicist view of society which he had outlined in Democracy and Reaction⁴. But Hobhouse sees a mental, and not a biological, factor as the unifying and organizing force, as the producer of "social harmony". This factor is what he, like Kidd, calls "social mind". Denying any mystical or psychic connotation, Hobhouse uses the term as "simply an expression for the mass of ideas operative in a society, communicable from man to man, and serving to direct the thoughts and actions of individuals"⁵. Like T.H. Green, Hobhouse held the view that there should be created

1. ibid., p.93. 2. ibid., p.94

3 Social Evolution and Political Theory.

4. See, e.g. pp.108-112

5. Social Evolution etc. p.96.

social conditions for the greatest possible degree of self-development, based on the conviction of the importance of the individual. But he certainly rejects¹ the classical laissez-faire Utilitarian belief in the inevitable harmony of enlightened self-interest, arguing, on the contrary, that the "conditions of social harmony" which the social mind produces, limit the possible range and extent of individual development. The function of the social mind is "to regulate the relations of members of the community to one another and of the community as a whole to other communities."² The harmony among divergent social interests thus produced is, Hobhouse argues, "the line of progress."

Hobhouse points to a growing acceptance of the increasing function of the state as deliberately implementing the social mind; and this, he feels, must be accepted because "social evolution has brought us to a point at which the future movement of society may be subjected to rational control,"³ control by the state. "True development is not in metaphor but in essentials comparable to organic growth - the opening out of each element⁴ furthering instead of retarding that of others", and social development, especially of "civilized from barbarous

1. ibid., p. 86.
2. " p. 204. 98
3. " p. 204
4. " p. 204.

society" was produced (and here are clear and acknowledged echoes of Bagehot) "not by the struggle for existence but the rise and growth of a principle of organic harmony or cooperation which ...begins to mitigate and finally to restrict the field of struggle" so that "if it is true... that selection remains essential to social progress, the solution of the difficulty is to be found in the replacement of natural selection by social selection."¹

This, then, is the "truer, because more complete, science of evolution" which, Hobhouse argued, justified "the rule of right" rather than "the rule of force" accepted by so many followers of orthodox Social Darwinism. Hobhouse does not reject all of the ingredients of Social Darwinism: he clearly accepts the idea of social organicism,² the Spencerian notion of development towards organization as progressive, and the importance of selection. On the other hand, his own theory of social evolution goes far beyond the crude biologism of many of the other critics and reformers. Nevertheless, Hobhouse leaves the impression- with me, at any rate, - that his own, and perhaps others',

1. ibid., p.204

2. Social organicism was not, of course, an invention of the Social Darwinists. This is the theme of a useful article by K.E. Bock, "Darwin and Social Theory" in Philosophy of Science, April, 1955. Bock parades the evidence for the existence of the development hypothesis and the society-organism comparison in the 17th and 18th. centuries, and maintains "that we delude ourselves if we measure the extent of our escape from organicism in social theory by the degree of our departure from Darwinism". But Bock concedes, and this is all that is needed, that Darwin gave social organicism a very great boost by allegedly finding scientific grounds for it

confidence in his social evolutionary theory is greatly strengthened by the fact (as he and most others took it to be) that Darwin had convincingly established that evolution did occur in the biological realm to which, in a great many important respects, man also belonged.

For a more direct attack on Social Darwinism, an attack which, above all, relies on logical criticism and the showing up of inconsistencies, and not on the same biological weapons as some of his opponents use, one must turn to D.G. Ritchie's Darwinism and Politics. This penetrating critique appeared considerably earlier than the other works mentioned so far, but there is little trace of its making an impact on them. Like many other critics, Ritchie attacks Social Darwinism as an intellectual cover for what he calls the "biological politicians" who want to discard "the aspirations of socialism... as the foolish denial of the everlasting economic competition which is sanctioned by nature as only one phase of the general struggle for existence." But this new "scientific" approach of the latter day laissez-faire school, Ritchie says, has, in its myth of the "beneficence" of the struggle, just as much metaphysics in it as the 18th. century fiction of the natural harmony of interests; and far more violence, for it is a "scheme of

salvation for the elect by the damnation of the vast majority."¹

Ritchie then refers to some outstanding examples of this type of argument, especially Spencer's Man Versus the State, and Spencer's practical support of the conservative Liberty and Property Defence League. He draws from this and other instances the conclusion that "It is thus of the extremest practical importance to see what is the real bearing of Evolution on social problems. We must examine the relations between biological laws and social faiths and hopes ..."² and then Ritchie goes into a close examination of some of the central Darwinian concepts.

First, he attacks the amiguity of the notion of the survival of the fittest, showing how unwarranted is the common slide from "fittest" meaning these "who are most capable of surviving", to "fittest" meaning "the best" in absolute terms. Here Ritchie refers to T.H.Huxley's view that evolution solves no ethical problems, and he give us examples, especially of Athens, of the best not surviving in the physical struggle for ~~existence~~³. Secondly, he takes up the extremely important point that the social laws which Social Darwinists profess to have discovered "are 'laws' simply in the sense of being generalizations from

1. ibid., p.5

2. ibid., p.14.

3. See Chap.I above.

experience of facts" or else explanatory hypotheses, and "it does not follow that we owe them any allegiance."¹ This leads on to Ritchie's third point, namely, the ambiguity of the ideas of Nature, "(with a very big N)", and the natural in Social Darwinism. A system like Spencer's, he argues, which is meant to explain all phenomena, must "include all that goes on in human society, human institutions and human ideas... in this conception of Nature" so that even "Governments are natural products ..."², and hence there is nothing unnatural about their intervention in social and economic matters. Ritchie points out that while natural in the sense of unconscious, conflict may have contributed to progress, that ~~it~~ does not show it is the only way to advance; similarly, there is nothing unnatural about conscious selection.

Again Ritchie is anxious to combat not only the laissez-faire conclusions of Social Darwinism but also the militarist arguments from it. He attacks especially German militarism and its ideals. Ritchie argues that there is no reason to assume that war will always remain part of the "natural order", for while the alternatives to war, namely, "International arbitration and economic cooperation are as yet (1889) small beginnings ... they may be the

1. op.cit., p.33.

2. ibid., p.34.

first 'variations', which, if they prove their fitness, 1
will bring into being a new species of civilized society."

Ritchie turns next to the racialist wing of the Social Darwinian movement with some comments on Galton's Hereditary Genius (1869). His argument is that, with the almost universal acceptance of the Darwinian thesis of spontaneous variation instead of Lamarckian inheritance, there is not "much excuse for the conclusions of fatalism and laissez-faire that are often drawn from the doctrine of heredity." On the contrary, "Especially, if we cannot trust to acquired characteristics being transmitted merely by descent, have we additional reason for surrounding each successive generation of individuals, from their youth upwards, with institutions and laws and customs that will 2
promote good and hinder bad tendencies."

I have given here only the briefest indication of Ritchie's major criticisms. They are more incisive and relevant, they hit harder at the spuriously scientific and biological foundations of Social Darwinism, than any other contemporary examination. Throughout the book, Ritchie emphasises again and again the conscious development of ~~society~~ ~~and~~ against the blind evolution of plants and

1. ibid., pp.44-45; 2. ibid. p.66.

animals, stressing the point that "human beings are not only engaged in the struggle for existence, but know that they are so engaged"¹ and so can deliberate. Not, he argues, that deliberation is the only factor - he accepts Spencer's view that "human societies, like natural organisms, grow and are not made" so that "every evil cannot be remedied in a day. But from the other, at least equally important fact, that human societies do not merely grow but are consciously altered by human effort, we have also to learn that every evil is not to be accepted as inevitable."² But, like Hobhouse, Ward, Kidd, Novicow and others, Ritchie cannot reject outright the allures of evolution as the scientific basis for social reform; for what makes conscious alteration rational is our knowledge of evolutionary laws of development, and the search for such laws in the social fields is, Ritchie implies, made a much more plausible and promising endeavour now that Darwin has already established evolutionary laws in biology. Just as Hobhouse spoke of a "truer science of evolution", so Ritchie contends that "the teaching of evolutionary science, rightly understood, gives us no excuse for putting aside all schemes of social reorganization as mere foolish and dreamy idealism. A fair study of social evolution will at least indicate the

1. ibid., p.33, though Ritchie said earlier, p.19, that social conflicts are for dominance rather than for mere survival.
2. ibid., p.68.

direction in which we have to move."¹ Provided we admit the conscious and not merely the biological factors involved, and that human selection is also natural, Ritchie is prepared to accept "the formulae of 'struggle for existence' and 'natural selection' as quite sufficient to express the evolution of human society."²

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1. ibid., my italics p.68
 2. ibid., p.68 Note; Ritchie emphasizes, on p.28, the role of the competitive struggle for support and converts among ideas. This was later prominent in the work of Novicow (see above, p.2/3 of this chapter); I do not know whether he was indebted to Ritchie for this.

Part III.

Social Darwinism and Public Policy.

Chapter 7.

Social Darwinism and Social Legislation.

"Especially easy is it in the present state of our own country and the world, for the most rudimentary of political observers to realize how possible it is - nay, inevitable - for tremendous political consequences to flow from books and speculations that seem to have nothing to do with politics. Who can measure the influence on our contemporary policies of Darwin and the other literature of Survival of the Fittest...? It is no mere literary whim to count Darwin and the prestige of Prince Bismarck as twin factors in the change of public temper from the nineteenth century to the twentieth."

The speaker was John Morley, addressing the University of Manchester on "Politics and History" in 1912.¹ He spoke also of the Darwinian influence "upon active and powerful schools of written history", and cited the case of Treitschke, who believed that "to make peace your steadfast aim, is not only a dream, but a blind resistance to the supreme law of life that the strong must overcome the weak". and the point is that "These sanguinary sophistries

1. The Works of Lord Morley, Macmillan, London, 1921, Vol. IV Politics and History, p.20.

find resounding echoes in practical policy proposals, such as those of Bernhardt. With Hobhouse, Morley "saw clearly that Darwinism was being not only misunderstood but misused, distorted, as he wrote in the Gladstone, 'to give brutality a more decent name'."

Morley, then, is one more contemporary authority, and one entitled to great respect, for the view that Social Darwinism had a heavy impact on the shape of politics in the late nineteenth century. The aim of Part III of this essay is to examine some examples of how Darwinism was brought to bear on contemporary problems, domestic and foreign.

Just how far the work of these publicists actually influenced the adoption of policies, just how far we "can measure the influence on ... policies of Darwin", it is very difficult to say. In the first place, it raises very tricky methodological questions to speak at all about the influence of a large and loose body of sociological doctrine on political practice. How is such influence to be measured and assessed? What kind of evidence would show that any particular policy or decision was adopted because people held certain beliefs and not for some other reason? What, if anything, could settle the question of the relative weight of the great number and variety of motives

1. ibid., p.68

2. Frances Knockerbocker, Free Minds: John Morley and his Friends. Harvard U.P., 1943, p.267.

and pressures likely to be at work in any given case? As suggested in the Introduction, what was there called the second stage of theorizing, the stage of application of the theory or testing of the hypothesis, is very much easier to carry out in the field of natural than of social science. While we may think of policy-makers and decision-makers as applying and thereby testing certain theories about the nature of social and political processes, such policies and decisions will never be the controlled tests which are the scientific ideal: they are not selective, but will always, whether intentionally or not, in fact test a number of assumptions or hypotheses. Conversely, it is always difficult to show conclusively that any particular policy or decision was adopted on the grounds that it "followed from" or was "dictated by" a particular theory or set of beliefs, and not for any other reason.¹

Secondly, and closely related to this, there is the danger, which is very great in the study of a single intellectual movement in a period when many other movements were at work, of forcing the evidence in the direction in which one hopes it might point. This is another way of stating the problem of whether and if so, how it is possible to assess the weight of different pressures, ^{ESPECIALLY PRESSURES} which tend in the same direction. For example, in accounting

1. Even in cases where this would seem fairly easy -e.g., policies which are pretty clearly dictated solely by religious convictions-there is still the complication of unconscious motivation.

for the expansionist fever in the United States and Europe in the 1890's, who could rank the importance of nationalism, racialist doctrine, economic factors, notions of manifest destiny, militarism, religious fervour, conceptions of the white man's burden - and Social Darwinism? It would be, to say the least, foolhardy to make a generalized attempt, since, even in a particular case, such as the American intervention in Cuba in 1898, different influences were at work in different people. It would be quite mistaken, in the manner of all determinist theory, to single out one factor as the fundamental determinant - after the style, for example, of Lenin's analysis of imperialism.

Instead, then, of directly taking up Morley's challenge, my procedure will be to look at the attempts of a small number of writers, some of whom have already claimed our attention, to apply Darwinian principles, or their own adaptations of these principles, to questions of social legislation, racialism and war. My purpose is to show how specifically Darwinian principles were brought to bear on current issues and hence to show how many of the widespread and prevalent attitudes of hostility to social legislation, advocacy of racial purity and superiority, and the adulation of war was a means of national policy, sometimes derived their intellectual backing from Darwinism and much of their popular support from the general interest in science and

the awe with which Darwin was venerated.

No water-tight cause-effect relationship can be claimed between the prevalence of Social Darwinism, on the one hand, and, on the other, policies of, for example, extreme laissez-faire economics or militarism. But the very wide acceptance (which is not the same as universal acceptance) of Social Darwinism meant that any policy which could plausibly be made to appear to be justified by the theory was also likely to be widely accepted; and further, because of this wide acceptance, policies were frequently justified on Social Darwinian grounds even though their exponents had of course other motives than the desire to derive social and political policy from sound scientific theory. In the writings of Herbert Spencer in England and of W.G.Sumner in America, we have an impressive instance of the way in which the principle of the survival of the fittest was applied to one aspect of the great question of the proper limits of the functions and powers of the state, namely, how far is the state entitled to legislate for what is taken to be the welfare of its members.

There is no inconsistency in saying that Spencer and his followers were at once the upholders of a thoroughgoing determinism and also advocates of a clear social policy. Their belief in determinism meant belief in the inevitable

realization of certain patterns of development according to immutable laws, laws which could be discovered but which could not be used. From this belief flowed a definite policy. Not a positive policy, admittedly, for the admonition "Do nothing" sounds more like an interdict than an injunction; but a definite policy nevertheless. The policy of Spencer's The Man Versus the State and of Sumner's essays is clear enough - refrain from intervening in the social process, for intervention will always involve unforeseen consequences which will produce more difficulties than they will solve, and will in the long run not be decisive anyway. Spencer and Sumner "recognized readily enough that reason and will distinguished men from other animals but taught that for men the highest wisdom lay in treading the path which nature had marked out and the most solemn exercise of will in refraining from any effort to alter her laws"¹. The determinism of orthodox Social Darwinists did not deter them from prescribing policy. Hofstadter emphasises how this prescriptive aspect of Spencer's teaching was especially taken up by his American following, and he quotes from an issue of the Atlantic Monthly in 1864: "Mr. Herbert Spencer ... has already influenced the silent life of a few thinking men whose belief marks the point to which the civilization of the

1. Commager, op.cit., p.200

age must struggle to rise... Mr. Spencer has already established principles which, however compelled for a time to compromise with prejudices and vested interests, will become the recognized basis of an improved society."¹

These principles, however, were not, as that quotation suggests, new ones. What the orthodox Social Darwinists did was to provide a new vindication in the name of science of the old principles of individualists laissez-faire. The belief in the natural harmony of interests was represented as the good of the species or group; in the achievement of that good - easily identified with progress - the unencumbered pursuit by each individual of his own ends was paramount; and the determination of these ends must be left to private individual calculation: for, although lack of foreknowledge of what would prove to be fitness to survive strictly excluded the possibility of fully rational calculation of individual advantage, the conflict of rival claims to survive and methods of surviving, and surviving better than one's fellows, could be rationally settled only by leaving that conflict unfettered and by letting the struggle itself arbitrate the soundness of each individual's calculation.

Such a view has clear implications for economic

1. Hofstadter, op.cit., p.20

policy, legal interpretation and political outlook. It is true of course that in economics and politics laissez-faire did not depend upon support from Social Darwinism. Thus, in America V.L.Parrington describes Walker, a pure Ricardian, as "the official economist of the Gilded Age",¹ and points out that in his early years in America, in the 1860's, E.L.Godkin was convinced that "Any interference with natural laws ... entailed greater evils than benefits. Economic competition is a struggle between individuals, and government must content itself with the proper role of policemen to keep the peace."² Such a view could no doubt well support itself without borrowing props from biology: indeed, it was this very notion of economic competition that, through Malthus, had first given the clue to Darwin. But in spite of all this, in fact and in practice, the men who preached and lived according to what Andrew Carnegie called "The Gospel of Wealth" found that Social Darwinism provided a better defence for their rugged individualism than did old-fashioned Cobdenism.

³
As we have seen, Spencer developed the view of Government as confining its role to that of "policemen" in his Political Institutions. There he argued that with the

1. V.L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. III, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1927-1930, p. 111.

2. ibid., p. 158.

3. See above, Chap. 5, pp. 184-71

gradual evolution of industrial in place of militant society, the state will come to have only this function of holding the ring among individuals because such limitation on its activities necessarily follows from the increasing specialization of functions which is part of the evolution of all organic and super-organic things including states. Thus, functions formerly carried out by the state in the militant society gradually decline in number until there is left only this one real political function of maintaining order. In a fully evolved industrial society, private enterprise achieves things which only the state could in militant societies, and achieves more besides.

But just as Spencer did not believe that this stage of social evolution had yet been reached, so he accepted the likelihood that his theory of social evolution was too advanced to receive ready support. "All that can be done by diffusing a doctrine much in advance of the time, is to facilitate the action of forces tending to cause advance." But in particular, the diffusion of the Spencerian doctrine is said to have this merit that it shows those with a "sympathy with the masses" that the way to elevate them is certainly not by multiplying State agencies, i.e., by socialism, since thus increasing state functions is a reversal to militarism and an obstacle to the higher evolution towards a perfect industrial society.

Since the whole trend of Spencer's argument is to reduce the role of the state to the single function" of preserving the component members of the society from destruction by one another",¹ his position is clearly non-interventionist. He seems, however, to have been a little touchy about openly proclaiming belief in the obsolescence of government. The following exchange with a reporter is recorded of Spencer's visit to the United States in 1882,² the year of the publication of his Political Institutions:

'But we thought, Mr. Spencer, you were in favour of free government in the sense of relaxed restraints, and letting men and things very much alone, or what is called laissez-faire?'

'That is a persistent misunderstanding of my opponents. Everywhere, along with the reprobation of government intrusion into various spheres where private activities should be left to themselves, I have contended that in its special sphere, the maintenance of equitable relations among citizens, governmental action should be extended and elaborated.'

The problem Spencer never faces is to say precisely what this special sphere of government is, what exact activities are involved in the real political function which alone remains to the State upon the evolution of the fully industrial society. Spencer, like Mill in the essay On Liberty, assumes rather too easily that a clear distinction can be made between private activities where the state has no rights of interference and other activities, also carried on by private citizens but which, because they

1. ibid., p. 744

2. "The Americans", a conversation reprinted from The Contemporary Review, January, 1883, in Spencer's Essays, Vol. 3, p. 471.

involve relations among citizens, are open to governmental regulation. The truth is, of course, that there is no definite boundary between two such classes of activities, or at least that the boundary is always shifting. If it is possible to speak of a special class of activities as political and to say that these are activities concerned with the exercise of state or public power or authority over "relations among citizens", the relationships in question must still be of specific kinds. To try to separate matters touching education, health, finance, commerce, defence, international relations, industry, agriculture, and so on and on - to separate these from politics and to hold that it alone is the business of government, is to leave nothing for government to do, and to make it impossible that "governmental action should be extended and elaborated".

In spite, then, of Spencer's protestations of misinterpretation, and because he does not recognize the impossibility of distinguishing "governmental action" as a separate sphere of activity which can somehow be isolated from private pursuits, Spencer's position is in fact staunchly opposed to any kind of social legislation. In the year following his American tour and the publication of his Political Institutions, Spencer wrote a series of articles in the Contemporary Review, which, especially when they were brought together in the book, The Man Versus the

State, became one of the best known and most extreme expositions of laissez-faire. Spencer was concerned with the growth of social legislation in England during the preceding twenty-odd-years, a period which seemed to him especially prolific in legislation regulating private relationships of citizens, notably the relationships of employment, and of legislation regulating the use of private property, notably the diversion of money into rates and taxes. Spencer attacks all such legislation as illiberal, as restricting individual freedom, no matter what the label of the political party introducing the measures. In many respects, again, Spencer reminds us of Mill's arguments in Liberty and Representative Government, especially when he attacks the belief that, just because they are elected, parliaments are entitled to exercise unlimited powers. But this book of Spencer's is more than a polemic against current political tendencies which he and others deplore: it is an application to contemporary events of principles which he developed elsewhere, namely, the deterministic principles of his general evolutionary view, that any interference with the "natural" growth of society as a "super-organism" is bound to involve unforeseen and disastrous results.

The book is in four parts. The first, "The New Toryism", deals with what Spencer takes to be the betrayal

of liberal principles by English Liberal governments since 1860; the second, "The Coming Slavery", is a spirited indictment of all kinds of social legislation; in the third, "The Sins of Legislators", Spencer develops the view that, since no law-makers can ever be fully aware of all the consequences of his acts, legislators had much better not interfere with the natural social process of struggle for survival of the fittest in unfettered competition; and in the last section, Spencer tries to dispose of "The Great Political Superstition" that parliaments have the right to do anything.

In "The New Toryism", Spencer shows that the growth of legislation regulating aspects of life which, in Spencer's view of what liberalism really means, ought to be beyond government intervention, has gone on quite as vigorously under Liberal administrations as under any others. He cites many extensions of the Factory Acts, especially dealing with hours and conditions of employment, the employment of women and children in various industries, and powers of inspection; pure food regulations, public health provisions, and liquor laws; extensions of the powers of local authorities in such matters as water and drainage, education, libraries, parks, and the power to raise taxes for these purposes; moves towards universal free education; and many other matters. He objects to the compulsory nature of these measures, and

argues that their coercive effect is cumulative, every measure requiring more and more restrictions, always unforeseen, to make it effective. That liberals pass such legislation make it no less restrictive, nor is this tyranny any less irksome because it is that of an elected majority.

In the second section, Spencer comes out strongly against the compulsory philanthropy which he says is involved in social legislation. He attacks the philanthropic grounds for socialism on a number of points. He argues against those who hold "that all suffering is removable, and that is the duty of somebody or other to remove"¹, maintaining on the contrary that suffering is the result of incapacity to survive, ~~and~~ the penalty of misdeeds, and that socialistic attempts to alleviate it will lead to something far worse, slavery. Spencer argues that, on the whole, the poor get their due - ill-health, poverty, unemployment are the result of vice or stupidity, and that, apart from limited private help for the genuinely unfortunate, (Spencer does not say how they are to be distinguished), state philanthropy is an unwarranted interference with the natural process of social elimination of the unfit. He takes this point much further in his third section;

1. The Man Versus the State, 1884, The Thinkers Library, Watts, London, 1940, p. 23.

meanwhile he tries to show that "all socialism involves slavery".¹ Among the inevitable but unforeseen consequences of social legislation, especially that which is concerned with the regulation of industrial and commercial activities, is the creation of a new, or rather, the reversion to an old, type of social structure, the regime of Status. For social legislation means compulsory co-operation, with a growing army of bureaucrats to administer and enforce the new social relationships which are no longer the outcome of competition, bargain and contract, but are determined by one's status—taxpayer or pauper, employer or employee - which is in turn fixed by legislation. Welfare involves regulation, and that means loss of liberty. The social legislation of the Liberals, then, is retrogressive, and its unwanted and unexpected but nevertheless inevitable outcome is the very opposite of the liberal ideal.

In his third section, Spencer brings out most clearly the Social Darwinian foundations of his position. After a preliminary passage on the evil consequences of well-intentioned legislation, Spencer states again his frequently expressed view that society is an organism, that it is not made, and therefore cannot be controlled, by legislation but is a "spontaneously-formed social organization...so

1. ibid., p.41.

bound together that you cannot act on one part without acting more or less on all parts,"¹ Spencer then goes on to develop, against the general background of his social biologism, a special biological argument against social legislation. In their early life, he argues, the "higher species of creatures" need and receive parental care in proportion to their weakness and inability. In infancy, rewards come in reverse proportion to deserts. In adult life, the contrary applies: "each adult gets benefit in proportion to merit",² merit being "ability to fulfil all the requirements of life -to get food, to secure shelter, to escape enemies". But "If the benefits received by each individual were proportionate to its inferiority - if, as a consequence, multiplication of the inferior was furthered and multiplication of the superior hindered, progressive degradation would result; and eventually the degenerate species would fail to hold its ground in presence of antagonistic species and competing species... Does anyone think that the like does not hold of the human species?"³

In human society, he argues, the principle of the protection of the weak must not be extended beyond the family, With men as with animals it is part of "the natural order of things" that weakness must be eliminated: to protect the

1. ibid., p.77

2. ibid., p.79

3. ibid., pp.79-80

weak is to invite disaster." "A society of men, standing towards other societies in relations of either antagonism or competition, may be considered as a species, or, more literally, as a variety of a species; and it must be true of it as of other species or varieties, that it will be unable to hold its own in the struggle with other societies, if it disadvantages its superior units that it may advantage its inferior units. Surely none can fail to see that were the principle of family life to be adopted and fully carried out in social life - were reward always great in proportion as desert was small, fatal results to the society would quickly follow; and if so, then even a partial intrusion of the family regime into the regime of the State, will be slowly followed by fatal results. Society in its corporate capacity, cannot without immediate or remoter disaster interfere with the play of these opposed principles under which every species has reached such fitness for its mode of life as it possesses, and under which it maintains that fitness.

In this passage, Spencer emphasizes the view of societies, like species, as competing with one another for survival. He speaks of them as units whose success against competitors depends very much upon the quality of their

1. ibid. p. 80.

individual members, whose fitness in turn can be kept at a high level only by open competition within the society, competition in which rewards are proportionate to merits and are not averaged out by state philanthropy.¹ These notions, of societies themselves as competitors on a larger stage and of the appropriate ways to ensure success in the competition, were taken up by the writers who will claim our attention in the next two chapters - those who equated societies with races and those who developed theories of eugenics and of racialism on Darwinian premisses, and those who identified societies with nations and who worked out plans for national survival in the grim competition of war. Spencer himself, however, does not pursue either of these lines of argument.

Spencer goes on to quote long passages from his own Social Statics of 1851, where he had first argued that suffering is inevitably involved in the long but progressive process of humanity's learning to adapt itself to its

1. Spencer himself does not use the word averaging in this context, though it would, I think, be fair to use such terms to describe his criticism of state philanthropy as tending to equalize rewards while leaving deserts most uneven. If this is allowed, then he is here taking a view quite inconsistent with that which he took in the essay on "The Social Organism" (see above, Chap. 5, p. 182), where he speaks of the function of government "as that of averaging the interests of the various classes in a community". If that is in fact the function of the state, then it would certainly include averaging people's interest in food, housing, health etc., by social legislation.

environment, in the slow adaptation of man's constitution to his conditions, as Spencer puts it. Any attempt to mitigate suffering only makes things worse because "It favours the multiplication of those worst fitted for existence, and, by consequence, hinders the multiplication of those best fitted for existence..."¹ The truth, Spencer believes, is that "No power on earth, no cunningly devised laws of statesmen, no world rectifying schemes of the humane, no Communist panaceas, no reforms that man ever did broach or ever will broach, can diminish (sufferings) one jot."² This "beneficent working of the survival of the fittest" has, since 1851, been confirmed by Darwin so that now it "is recognized by most cultivated people" - yet the demand for social legislation is growing instead of diminishing and people are "doing all they can to further the survival of the unfittest!"³

The sins of legislators, then, are sins committed in ignorance, ignorance of the laws of social development, and sins that cannot be forgiven because such ignorance is unforgiveable. Perhaps unwillingly, and certainly with good intentions, legislators commit sins of aggression against individuals by taxing, conscripting, restricting

1. Quoted ibid., p. 83

2. Quoted ibid.

3. ibid., p. 84.

4. Societies "present traits of structure showing that social organization has laws which over-ride individual wills; and laws the disregard of which must be fraught with disaster". ibid., p. 93

and otherwise coercing some citizens in order to protect others, yet culpably failing to realize that there is in fact no protection to society or to the human species in so doing. Societies grow, they are not made, and they cannot be made over.

In his final chapter, Spencer comes back to the point adumbrated early in the book, ¹ namely, that "true Liberalism...will dispute the assumption of unlimited parliamentary authority". The theme of his argument is a defence of natural rights, especially against the view that rights are a creation of the state and that this is unobjectionable so long as the state is in the hands of an elected majority. Spencer's notion of "natural" is, as we might expect, not theological or metaphysical but biological. (In the Data of Ethics Spencer had argued, consistently with his overall position, that the criteria of good and bad are to be found in the study of "the laws of life and the conditions of existence".) Men have natural rights to property, freedom, self-preservation because these are the very conditions of life, of survival. Individuals have these natural rights, for without them their participation in the struggle for survival would be impaired. But they are also rights which society,

1. ibid., p.18.

through government, ought to enforce because the wellbeing of society depends on unhindered competition among its citizens to ensure that the fittest of them survive and multiply. " ... to recognize and enforce the rights of individuals, is at the same time to recognize and enforce the conditions to a normal social life."¹ Taking this view of natural rights, Spencer argues, what validity there is in the doctrine of majority rule can be seen to have a rational and scientific basis. Spencer's "re-institution of a vague and popular conception (the conception of natural rights) in a definite form on a scientific basis, leads us to a rational view of the relations between the wills of majorities and minorities"². Majorities may thus be seen to have the right to be obeyed in, for instance, questions of defense against external aggression, where the conditions of existence of individuals would be destroyed if the society as a whole were not defended. Looking at the matter in this way, Spencer thinks, is to see that what rights parliaments do have may be justified as natural in a biological sense, and that it is mere superstition, though a pervasive one, to believe that parliaments have assumed the divine right of kings.

1. ibid., pp. 123-4

2. ibid., p. 125

Thus Spencer rounds out the Social Darwinian case for rejecting social legislation even when it is sanctioned by the majority. What I have called the three elements of Social Darwinism are all present. First, there is the fundamentalist belief that a single explanatory law can be found to account for all social phenomena, and, incidentally, in Spencer's determinist view to show us how futile is legislative meddling. Next, there is the organicist conception of society as one of a number of competing species or varieties with a unifying interest in survival, and of survival of the social organism being best promoted by allowing free competition among its members to eliminate the unfit. Finally, there runs through Spencer's argument, most strongly in the third section, the view that the fundamental law of social development is the universal biological principle of natural selection in the struggle for existence. In addition, Spencer argues that this is a progressive principle, and that social legislation, by impeding or even reversing the line of development from status to contract, hinders progress. Most important of all, however, is the conviction of determinism, the belief that the fundamental biologicistic law of the development of the social organism cannot be altered - its consequences can only be endured, not avoided. "Misery inevitably results from incongruity between constitutions and conditions.

All these evils which afflict us, and seem to the uninitiated the obvious consequences of this or that removable cause, are unavoidable attendants on the adaptation now in progress. Humanity is being pressed against the inexorable necessities of its new position - is being moulded into harmony with them, and has to bear the resulting unhappiness as best it can. The process must be undergone, the sufferings must be endured."¹

In speaking of Spencer's position as the Social Darwinian case against social legislation, it is not denied that his thought, like Social Darwinism in general, draws on many elements besides Darwin's own writings; indeed, as I have argued in Chapter 5, the development of Social Darwinism was a movement by which Darwin himself was to some extent carried away, rather than one over which he had much control, and it was Spencer especially who promoted the doctrine. Now, as has been observed already and is again illustrated in The Man Versus the State, Spencer drew on a number of sources - his references to the transition from status to contract are echoes of Maine's views and the distinction between militant and industrial societies is borrowed from Comte;² again, his biologism is not pure Darwinism, for it retains traces of Lamarck; and as for

1. Quoted from Social Statics, *ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

2. See above, Chapter 5, pp. 183 ff.

social organicism, not only was this, as we have seen, not peculiar to Social Darwinism but, in Spencer's case, he had developed his organicist view before Darwin wrote. Furthermore, much of Spencer's thinking - and Sumner's and other Social Darwinists' - was in many ways in "the Liberal tradition" running forward from Bentham and Adam Smith, and, further back, drawing on seventeenth century ideas of individualism and liberty¹. But against all this, it is clear that Spencer regards Darwin as having provided the basis upon which a social doctrine of survival of the fittest can be built by having established that principle in biology. Perhaps the matter could be put this way. There are doubtless many intellectual roads leading to any particular beliefs - a man may come to value individual liberty, for example, on religious grounds; or because of rational arguments - Bentham's, for example; or because he is persuaded by the Social Darwinian argument that unfettered individual struggle for survival is progressive; or through a combination of such reasons. One useful way of distinguishing the Puritan, the Benthamite and the Social Darwinist from each other is to look not only at the beliefs they hold (and they may have much in common), but at their main (though not, most likely, exclusive) method

1. See e.g., Alan Bullock and Maurice Shock, The Liberal Tradition - from Fox to Keynes, Black, London, 1956.

of arriving at these beliefs. The beliefs that Social Darwinists held about society and the ends they valued were by no means all new - what was new was their method of justifying these beliefs and values on biological grounds.

Spencer did not confine his observations to the political process in England. On his visit to the United States in 1882, he said that that country "is showing ...that 'paper Constitutions' will not work as they are intended to work. The truth... that Constitutions are not made but grow... at once, when accepted, dispense of the notion that you can work as you hope any artificially devised system of government. It becomes an inference that if your political structure has been manufactured and not grown, it will forthwith begin to grow into something different from that intended - something in harmony with the nature of the citizens, and the conditions under which the society exists." ¹ This and the rest of the Spencerian philosophy of conservatism and laissez-faire already had, however, a great champion across the Atlantic in the person of W.G. Sumner, the leading exponent of Social Darwinism in the America of the Gilded

1. "The Americans", Essays, Vol. 3, p. 475.

Age. In a steady stream of essays in the last three decades of the century, Sumner warned against the danger and futility of any attempts to interfere with the inexorable natural laws that govern society. His student and editor, A.G.Keller, summed up Sumner's position in these words:- "He adopts the conception of society according to which it is the seat of forces, and its phenomena are subject to laws which it is the business of science to investigate. He denies that there is anything arbitrary or accidental in social phenomena, or that there is any field in them for the arbitrary intervention of men. He therefore allows but very limited field for legislation. He holds that men must do with social laws what they do with physical laws - learn them, obey them, and conform to them. Hence he is opposed to state interference and socialism, and he advocates individualism and liberty.¹

That was the burden of Sumner's teaching and writing from 1872, when he took the chair of Sociology at Yale, till 1906, when his monumental Folkways appeared. Like Spencer and Darwin, Sumner begins from the Malthusian conception of the pressure of population on limited resources. This produces competition, first, for survival

1. From the "Sketch of Sumner", W.G. Sumner, The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays, ed. A.G. Keller. Yale, 1914. On Sumner, see Hofstadter, op.cit., chap. II, and R.G. McCloskey, American Conservatism-in the Age of Enterprise, Harvard, 1951, esp. pp. 31 ff.

in the struggle for existence, and then, against those who are better equipped in that struggle. "It is from (nature's) niggardly hand that we have to wrest the satisfactions for our needs, but our fellow men are our competitors for the meager supply. Competition, therefore, is a law of nature."¹ This is "the system of nature" about which nothing can be done. "The socialist enterprise of reorganizing society in order to change that which is harsh and sad in it at present is therefore as impossible from the outset as a plan for changing the physical order," he said, and his² essay on "The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over", 1894,³ has, especially in the title, all the ring and fervour of a seventeenth century religious tract. In this essay, Sumner, who was primarily an economist, comes very close to a Marxian position in his economic fundamentalism. "The industrial organization ... controls us all because we are all in it. It creates the conditions of our existence, sets the limits of our social activity, regulates the bonds of our social relations, determines our conceptions of good and evil, suggests our life-philosophy, moulds our inherited political institutions, and reforms the oldest and toughest customs, like marriage and property."⁴ Sumner regarded

1. op.cit., "The Challenge of Facts", p.23

2. ibid., p.38.

3. Reprinted in War and Other Essays, ed. Keller, Yale, 1911

4. op.cit., "The Absurd Effort...", p.196.

the economic process as that in which the fittest were selected for survival and success. Wealth was the reward of fitness, and "Poverty belongs to the struggle for existence, and we are all born into that struggle." ¹ Sumner followed Spencer in the view that poverty was the result of vice, that intemperate habits were inherited, and that these defects could best be eliminated by allowing the socio-economic selective mechanism free play. As both ² Hofstadter and ³ McCloskey have remarked, there was a close link between Sumner's notion of the virtuous man and the ideal of the thrifty New England Protestant.

Like Spencer again, Sumner does allow some effect to education. Spencer agreed that education - though he thought the free instruction being introduced in his day did not deserve the name - might to some extent improve "the defective natures of citizens". Without such improvement, socialist legislation would continue to fail because "There is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts." ⁴ Similarly, Sumner believed that hereditary viciousness, "the correlative of misery and poverty," might be alleviated somewhat by education.

1. "Reply to a Socialist," 1904, reprinted in The Challenge of Facts, p.57.

2. op.cit..

3. R.G. McCloskey, American Conservatism - In the Age of Enterprise, Harvard University Press, 1951.

4. The Man Versus the State, p.52.

But he out very little weight on this, and he is as close to a thoroughgoing determinism as anyone writing over such a long period could well remain. He insisted on the impossibility of foreseeing all the consequences of any political act, and therefore of voluntarist and ameliorist attempts at reform. "We live in the midst of a mass of illustrations of the fact that laws do not produce the consequences which the legislator intended." We can only await the march of events¹ we cannot speed it up by sporadic intervention, for "The progress which men have made in developing the possibilities of human existence has never been made by jumps and strides. It has never resulted from the schemes of philosophers and reformers."² "... we puny men," says Sumner, can only modify "... the tendencies of some of the forces at work, so that, after a sufficient time, their action may be changed a little and slowly the lines of movement may be modified. This effort, however, can at most be only slight, and it will take a long time. In the meantime, spontaneous forces will be at work, compared with which our efforts are like those of a man trying to deflect a river... The great stream of time and earthly things will sweep on just the same in spite of us".³

1. "Purposes and Consequences", in Earth Hunger and Other Essays, 2. ed. Keller, Yale, 1914.

2. Op.cit., "The Challenge of Facts", p.50.

3. Op.cit., "The Absurd Effort", pp.209-10.

In America, Social Darwinism was related by its proponents to contemporary issues not only as a theoretical support for laissez-faire and against social legislation, but also as an intellectual justification and explanation of those who had succeeded well in the cut-throat struggle for economic survival which characterized the last four decades of the nineteenth century. One of the most successful of the great industrial and commercial magnates which the Gilded Age produced was Andrew Carnegie, who became not only a veritable incarnation of the doctrines of Sumner and Spencer but who also, in his quite extensive writings, himself presented these doctrines as the foundation of his own businessman's ethic of relentless accumulation of wealth.¹ In a number of places in his Autobiography, Carnegie refers to the deep influence which Darwin and most especially Spencer had on his thinking. Referring to the year 1884, he says: "Spencer and Darwin were then high in the zenith, and I had become deeply interested in their work. I began to view the various phases of human life from the standpoint of the evolution-
" 2
ists! Carnegie sought and won a close personal friendship with Spencer, whom he frequently visited in England and whom

1. On Carnegie, see especially McCloskey, op.cit., In addition to his Autobiography, many of Carnegie's essays and articles in American and English periodicals were collected in book form, e.g. The Gospel of Wealth, The Empire of Business and Problems of Today.

2. Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie, Houghton Mifflin, N.Y. 1920 p. 206.

he accompanied on Spencer's voyage to America in 1882.

"Few men", he says, "have wished to know another man more strongly than I to know Herbert Spencer, for seldom has one been more deeply indebted than I to him and to Darwin"¹

He speaks of having intellectual doubts resolved by reading the works of Darwin, notably the Descent of Man, and of Spencer. In particular, they cleared up religious difficulties for him. "...light came as a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution. "All is well since all grows better" became my motto, my true source of comfort." And from Spencer he took the view that "Humanity is an organism, inherently rejecting all that is deleterious, that is, wrong, and absorbing after trial what is beneficial, that is, right."²

By the time Carnegie published his first essay on "The Gospel of Wealth"³ in 1889, the doctrine of Social Darwinism according to Spencer is quite taken for granted by Carnegie and forms the established background from which he argues. The essay, and its successor, is concerned with the question of the ethically proper administration of great fortunes such as Carnegie had then accumulated. Carnegie thought

1. ibid., p.338. 2. ibid.p.339.

3. Two articles first published in The North American Review, the first one originally under the title "Wealth", in June and December, 1889, reprinted in The Pall Mall Gazette in the same year, and reprinted in book form, with other pieces written in the 1880's and 90's, in The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays, Frederick Warne, London, 1901.

that philanthropy could do more harm than good: "one of the serious obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity... Neither the individual nor the race is improved by alms-giving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance."¹ How well he had read Spencer! But Carnegie did not conclude from this that private fortunes should remain in private families. Instead, he developed as his answer to the problem of the administration of vast individual wealth the theory of trusteeship. The millionaire, he believes, after providing for his dependents, ought "to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds... the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poor brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves."² McCloskey has pointed to the similarity between this view and the Calvinist theory of stewardship, and Carnegie, seeking Biblical as well as Spencerian backing for his views, refers prominently to the parable of the talents. The millionaire was fit to act as trustee because his very wealth was proof of his 'fitness'¹³... defined in terms of material success, because nature is incapable of recognizing

1. ibid., p.16. 2. ibid., p.15.

another standard. The elite, the saints of the new religion, therefore, were those who had proved their native superiority by their survival value. This will be recognized as the Puritan idea of 'election' in modern dress;... The inferiority of the masses was attested by their economic position, and the great social decisions must be left to those who had won the right to make them".¹

Carnegie was not alone among America's magnates in interpreting the doctrine of survival of the fittest in economic terms.² He does, however, seem to have gone further than his fellows in explaining how, and not simply accepting that, Darwinism provided a scientific foundation for the belief that unimpeded economic competition was the right social policy because it was both natural and beneficial. Others may have used Social Darwinism merely as convenient embellishment to arguments defending their wealth. But there is more likelihood of genuine conviction of the truth of Social Darwinism in Carnegie's case. One reason is his intimacy with Spencer. But more important

1. op.cit., p.37.

2. Compare R.E.L.Faris, "Evolution and American Sociology", in Stow Persons, Evolutionary Thought in America, p.163, quoting a Sunday school talk by the elder Rockefeller: "The growth of a large business is merely the survival of the fittest... The American Beauty Rose can be produced in the splendour and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and of God." Also, Hofstadter, op.cit., p.20, quotes from J.J.Hill's Highways of Progress, i. e. railways, published in 1910: "The fortunes of railroad companies are determined by the law of survival of the fittest."

was the fact that, since he gave away so much of his wealth (in the name of the doctrine of trusteeship), he had no need, as others may have had, to invoke Social Darwinism as a conscience salving justification of his own good fortune.

The problem of the administration of great fortunes arises because there is unequal distribution of wealth: in the first part of his essay, Carnegie argues that this inequality is inevitable and that it follows from Social Darwinism that it must be inevitable. Carnegie believes that "the law of competition", although it divides society into hostile classes, capital and labour, rich and poor, is nevertheless beneficial because it is the direct cause of material progress. He goes on to emphasize the role of this law as the single iron determinant of social conditions and events: "But whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it... :It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department. We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment; the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few; and the law of competition between them, as being not only beneficial, but essential to the

the future progress of the race. In the face of this determinism, Carnegie, like Sumner and Spencer, rejects Socialism as impossible. Carnegie denies that the sudden changes which socialism involves can be made because that means changing human nature. "It is criminal to waste our energies in endeavouring to uproot, when all we can profitably accomplish is to bend the universal tree of humanity a little in the direction most favourable to the production of good fruit under existing circumstances."²

R.H.Gabriel points out that when "The Gospel of Wealth" appeared in 1889, its doctrine of rugged individualism, of the beneficence of competition, and of the inevitability of struggle and selection in economic life, was accepted not only by those who had already succeeded, but also by those, such as farmers and small businessmen, who hoped yet to succeed. It was, of course, an especially "comfortable doctrine ... for all those who are quite satisfied with things as they are", as D.G.³ Ritchie pointed out in the same year. The remarkable thing is that the same doctrine appears to have been equally acceptable to a great many people, notably in America, who could only benefit by a great change in their own-or

1.ibid., p.4 2.ibid., p.7. 3.op.cit., p.3.

their society's - condition. In the writings of Spencer and Sumner and Carnegie, the emphasis on the individual, whether as the happy owner of great wealth or as the unfortunate victim of poverty, is always combined with the view that particular successes or failures are part of the much broader process of the evolution of the species, or race or society: individualism is justified because it benefits a collective. Hence even the unsuccessful in individual competition might take some comfort in reflecting that they would themselves benefit from their rivals' success, because the survival of the fittest helped the species or groups as well as the individuals who survived. Natural selection among individuals within a society gave each one a chance to survive prosperously. If that chance failed, it only showed that fitter competitors had been selected. This in turn enhanced the prospects of one's society or group surviving prosperously in the further struggle among collectives - nations, classes, races, Spencer's "super organisms". Social Darwinism was a good each way bet. It had a double applicability stemming from the initial ambiguity of Darwin's own position. That is why the rationale of individualism could be so easily adapted to collectivism and why Social Darwinism could be so easily diverted from the attack on social legislation to the support of racialism and militarism.

1 Cf. Gabriel, op.cit., p.153: "The Gospel of Wealth" was, in fact, not merely the philosophy of a few rich men, but a faith which determined the thinking of millions of citizens engaged in small enterprises.

Chapter 8."Favoured Races".

In the foregoing survey of the way in which the determinist Social Darwinism of Spenser and Sumner was applied to the question of social legislation, one point briefly raised was the problem of deriving policy from determinist theory.¹ If one believes, with the orthodox Social Darwinists, or with the Marxists, or with any other social determinists, that historical development conforms to some patters (which we may or may not be able to discern), that certain developments are inevitable, that nothing men can do can prevent or induce their occurrence, so that, from our point of view, 'inevitable' comes to mean 'in spite of anything we deliberately do or refrain from' (though the determinist will have to believe that our deliberations themselves are determined): if one believes that, then logically there is no better reason for preaching laissez-faire, as Spenser and Sumner did, than for advocating intervention to hasten the inevitable, as the Marxists do. Psychologically, however, the claim to have discovered such a pattern of development, especially if it somehow favours the discoverer, carries with it a strong incentive to apply as well as th learn the 'lessons of history', so

1. See above, pp. 253-4

that believers in determinist theories of history and politics are no less ready than voluntarists to prescribe policy, and, indeed, will argue that they have far better grounds for doing so.

Thus occurs the slide from belief in the inevitability of certain events, to preaching against the futility of trying to prevent their occurrence, and thence to intervention--assisting the inevitable, or restraining those trying vainly to prevent it. This move from doctrine to policy, from determinism to intervention, from observation to control, is facilitated by the very kind of illumination which determinist theories are claimed to provide. For, having exposed the mode or direction of historical or social development, there is a strong temptation to believe that, by its very discovery, natural law, like the laws of the natural sciences, is somehow made available for subjective, human application. In the case of Social Darwinism, this temptation took the form of believing that the discovery of the principle of natural selection provided a rational, scientific ground for human selection or for social preparation for survival. Racialist theories based on Social Darwinism (to some of which we are about to turn) emphasized that the struggle for survival was among species: militarist theories stemming from the same source (with which the next chapter is concerned) emphasized that the

relationship among species was a warlike struggle for survival. In both cases, the change from determinism to intervention was implicitly justified on the grounds that, since Darwin had discovered nature's criterion of selection, namely, fitness to survive in a struggle for existence, men could now apply that criterion either by themselves selecting the biologically fit, or else by military and political preparation guaranteeing a favourable outcome in the warlike struggle. And in some writings, as we shall see, these compatible alternatives were combined on the grounds that there was a coincidence of biological and social divisions, of species and group, of race and nation.

Even in its sub-title, with the reference to "favoured races", the Origin is a mine of inspiration to those willing to interpret the struggle for survival among biological species as applying with equal force to competition among human groups roughly classifiable and distinguishable in terms of physical characteristics. To argue, however, that the Darwinian laws were true of the species man and of the ^{VARIETIES OF} homo-sapiens, required a rigid adherence to a strictly biological classification of races which very few racial theorists have ever achieved. One who did was Count Arthur de Gobineau, whose book, The Inequality of Human Races, appeared in 1854.

Gobineau owed nothing to Darwin, to evolutionary theory, or to science. He was a catastrophist and a Creationist, and he believed in the inevitability of degeneration, not of progress. But there are two elements in his work that give it a similar theoretical structure to later racial theory that did draw on Darwinian science. The first element is Gobineau's fundamentalism, a feature of determinist theories in general, and the second is a kind of biologism, in spite of Gobineau's anti-scientific bent. On the first point, Gobineau begins with the fundamentalist search for the clue to history. In the dedication of his book to George V of Hanover he says:¹ "I was gradually penetrated by the conviction that the racial question overshadows all other problems of history, that it holds the key to them all, and that the inequality of the races from whose fusion a people is formed is enough to explain the whole course of its destiny". He believed that the destiny of civilizations was determined "by virtue of fixed edicts inscribed in the code of the universe by the side of other laws which, in their rigid severity, govern organic and inorganic nature alike".² His biologism lay in his thesis that the universal and underlying cause of the collapse of civilizations, of degeneration, is a mixture of races, or of "blood".

1. Count Arthur de Gobineau, The Inequality of Human Races, 1854, trans. Adrian Collins, Heinemann, London, 1915.

2. ibid., p.4.

Here Gobineau insists on a point generally overlooked by later Darwinian racial theorists, especially those who succumbed to the temptation of forcing racial boundaries to coincide with national boundaries; the point, namely, that Gobineau's thesis depends upon showing that "there are real differences in the relative value of human races" and that these differences are permanent. The bulk of Gobineau's book is then devoted to the demonstration of such differences, and of the fact that "races are naturally divided into three, and three only - the white, the black and the yellow"¹ of whom the white, and especially the Aryans are the best.

The continuation of Aryan superiority, Gobineau argued, depended upon keeping the race pure, and here he was speaking of purity as a strictly biological concept. Now, ~~for~~ exponents of racial superiority have certainly not always believed in the existence or possibility of pure races.² But the possibility of at least preventing further degeneration by indiscriminate mixing and even of improving human racial stock by selective breeding was greatly strengthened, in the eyes of many racial theorists, by Darwin's work. This again is an instance of how Darwin's work was taken as providing a scientific foundation for

1. ibid., p.148 . 2. e.g., H.S. Chamberlain rejected the notion of race purity outright. Even Hitler is reported to have held the opinion privately that racial purity was a myth. See Hermann Rauschning, Hitler Speaks, Thornton Butterworth, London, 1939, p.229.

beliefs and a rational guide to social policies which had hitherto lacked the imprimatur of natural science.

The writer who is perhaps closest to Gobineau in so far as he tries to stick to a strictly biological concept of race, and to avoid the common identification of race and nation, is H.S. Chamberlain. As we saw,¹ Chamberlain professes the deepest scorn for Darwinism, the Darwinian system, and Darwinian evolution. But he holds Darwin's work itself in high esteem, though when seeking support for his own views, he turns not to the Origin or the Descent, which he thought too imprecise, but mainly to Plants and Animals Under Domestication. Chamberlain's concern is with the fortunes of a particular race, the Teutonic, and his doctrine is that noble races can be bred. It is true that there is a good deal in Chamberlain of the mystical notion of race that was prominent in Nazi theory thirty years later. But Chamberlain, although he rejects the notion of race purity, does treat race as primarily a biological concept, arguing that "the human races are, in reality, as different from one another in character, qualities, and above all, in the degree of their individual capacities, as greyhound, bulldog, poodle, and Newfoundland dog.... Has not every genuine race its own glorious,

1. See above p. 289

incomparable physiognamy?"¹ Furthermore, Chamberlain thinks of race itself as having an organic character, which gives it a biological, historical and moral priority over individual people. "... what binds us (Europeans) all together and makes an organic unity of us is 'Teutonic' blood"; and again he says, "... whatever may be our opinion as to the causa finalis of existence, man cannot fulfil his highest destiny as an isolated individual, as a mere exchangeable pawn, but only as a portion of an organic whole, as a member of a specific race."²

On analysis, and in spite of his jibes at orthodox Social Darwinists, Chamberlain's position is seen to have certain features which bring it very close to the collectivist version of Social Darwinism, with emphasis on the interventionist idea of racial purification rather than on the determinist notion of racial destiny. Chamberlain's view, does, I think, in fact involve the elements of Social Darwinism. There is first the idea of a fundamental determinant of history, namely, race; secondly, the belief that race is not only a biological classification but is itself an organic unity; and thirdly, Chamberlain accepts the view that the development of the racial organism is fundamentally determined by the selection of favourable

1. See Chamberlain, Foundations, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 261.

2. ibid., pp. 257-4320.

variations in the struggle for survival. I have said that he inclines towards interventionism. But it is difficult to tell whether he thinks the decisive agent in selection is man, who knows best what is required for survival in the struggle, or nature, whose selections man can observe and must accept, but which he cannot control. In the latter vein, for example, he speaks about:¹ "the idea of physical race-unity and race-purity, which is the very essence of Judaism (as) the recognition of a fundamental physiological fact of life; wherever we observe life/. . . we see the importance of "race"; Judaism made this law of nature sacred. " Here, and in some other passages, especially those where he is dealing with noble races,² it would seem that the degree of intervention is limited to trying to preserve what nature has already selected. But far more frequently, Chamberlain speaks of artificial selection, as well as the cultivation of favourable strains, and it is here that he often refers to Darwin's Plants and Animals Under Domestication. His main concern is with the breeding of races, of noble races, and especially of the Teutons, as heirs to that other noble race, the Jews, and through them, as heirs to the legacy of Rome. "A noble race", he says, "does not fall from Heaven,

1. ibid., p.254 (My italics)

2. " Chap.4, "The Chaos".

it becomes noble gradually, just like fruit-trees..."¹
While "as a rule, mixture of blood leads to degeneration,"²
this is not so with the mixture of noble races. In fact,
noble races, like noble dogs, are bred, by specialization,
by selection, and by crossing. Chamberlain enunciates Five³
Laws of the origin of noble races, and the most important
of them all is artificial selection, which is of course a
matter of deliberate intervention. "When one has come to
understand what miracles are performed by selection, how a
racehorse or a Dachshund or a choice chrysanthemum is
gradually produced by the careful elimination of everything
that is of ^mdifferent quality, one will recognize that the
same phenomenon is found in the human race, although of
course it can never be seen with the same clearness and
definiteness as in the other spheres. I have already
advanced the example of the Jews: the exposure of weak
infants is another point and was in any case one of the
most beneficial laws of the Greeks, Romans and Teutonic
peoples; hard times, which only the strong man and the hardy
woman can survive,⁴ have a similar effect"

The emphasis which Chamberlain laid on selective
breeding to improve the quality, or at least to prevent the

1. ibid., p.261
2. " p.283.
3. " pp.276-283
4. 2

deterioration, of a group ostensibly defined in terms of the biological concept of race, is also the characteristic feature of the explicitly Social Darwinian doctrine of eugenics. The notions of racial purity and the preservation of "good stock" from dilution and deterioration so prominent in the eugenics movement had, like so many other ideas associated with Social Darwinism, a long pre-Darwinian history. But again, it was a question of refurbishing these ideas in the scientific light of Darwin's work, of arguing that what had before been intuitively perceived now had a rational foundation. Furthermore, the eugenics doctrine had a strong element of elitism in it, similar to the economic elitism of Carnegie, though of course the criteria of election were quite different. The eugenicists too thought in terms of select social strata with special responsibilities for the good of society and therefore having the right to rule. Moreover, their argument was also a defense of the status quo, of those who were already the "favoured races" of the Origin, whether a social class or a national group. As Hofstadter puts it, in America what the eugenicists called "the fit" were "native, well-to-do, college-trained citizens".

But, unlike the Spencerian doctrine of laissez-faire which inspired Carnegie, there was no non-interventionism

~~at~~ l.op.cit., p.140.

about the eugenists. With Chamberlain, their emphasis was on selective breeding, and this was to be very much under human control, not left to the chance natural selection of indiscriminate mating. Whereas the selection of the economically fittest might be left to unrestrained competition - after all, wealth can be inherited but not bred - the racially or eugenically fittest can be assured of continuity, the superior race or class can maintain its superiority, only by the intentional promotion of certain qualities which men select for survival.

Here again is illustrated the difficulty of trying to derive social policy from determinist policy. Darwin having shown that fitness is the criterion for survival, it is argued that those who have survived (well) must be the fit and therefore ought to be preserved. But since fitness can only mean fitness to survive, the fit will survive under any conditions; there is no need of active measures for their preservation. In other words, the survivors, whoever survive, are the fit: they are the fit because they survive: fitness is a result, not a condition, of survival: no forecasts are possible: nor, therefore, is any rational policy. The eugenists in fact make shift to derive a policy from Darwin by interpreting fitness in absolute terms and not, which alone is justifiable, in relation to survival. Unrelated to natural selection and

survival, absolute standards of fitness, as Darwin himself¹ saw, must become arbitrary - we select certain qualities in the survivors which we take without justification as the marks of fitness when survival might in fact have depended on quite other factors. In particular, apart from its general irrationality, the attempt to preserve certain qualities because we think they have promoted survival in the past ignores the fact that, with their very survival, the conditions of future survival are altered, so that we have no warrant for certainty that these qualities will again be advantageous. The arbitrariness of any absolute standards of fitness is further brought out in connexion with the question of what unit is supposed or expected to survive. Thus, if it is your society, as Spencer and Bagehot, for example, held, then cohesion is a virtue: if it is your race, then purity of blood is at a premium: and if racial and national boundaries are held to coincide, discipline becomes important. Fitness for survival in the individual, on the other hand, may involve non-conformist virtues like initiative and enterprise and independence.

Nevertheless, the eugenicists, like other Social Darwinists, went ahead with the prescription of social

1. See above, pp. 175-176

policy. Their position briefly was this : the fundamental law of evolution, the survival of the fittest, being now understood, man could make evolution work even more efficiently. He could speed up the process of improving men, or at least prevent their decline - according to the strength of your faith in progress or of your fear of retrogression - by eliminating the slow and wasteful mechanism of blind trial and error on which nature had to rely, and substituting for it purposive human planning.

The founder of the movement was Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, who set out the doctrine in a series of books beginning with Hereditary Genius in 1869. There, Galton takes an organicist view of society and accepts the notion of a natural balance of interests to be preserved by each individual pursuing unhindered his own ends. But with constant allusion to Darwin (and to the Belgian Quetelet's statistical methods), Galton stresses the weight of inheritance and the importance of breeding in the "quality" of the race, taking the view that, by judicious breeding, early marriage of the best, and so on, the race can be improved. Thus Galton like later eugenicists, would not in fact trust society or nature to find its own immanent harmony of interests unaided, and so he seeks rules of conduct from Darwinian laws of nature. For example, Galton speaks of "obtaining a clear understanding of the laws which

govern heredity" so that they will not mislead us when used in the manner I propose." ¹ Galton's rules of conduct were thought of as private rules, rather than, as the eugenists later argued, principles of public policy. What Galton seems to be doing is appealing to particular people as members of groups or races. Referring to Malthus' advocacy of restraint on early marriage as a defence against population pressure, Galton admits that this would be sound enough if "all classes" refrained: "...but, as it is put forward as a rule of conduct for the prudent part of mankind to follow, whilst the imprudent are necessarily left free to disregard it, I have no hesitation in saying that it is a most pernicious rule of conduct in its bearing upon race... I protest against the abler races being encouraged to withdraw in this way from the struggle for existence." ²

It might be noted by the way that this notion of withdrawing from the struggle for existence highlights the logical dilemma of all those who wanted to derive principles of conduct, whether personal or social, from the alleged inevitability of certain biological (or, indeed, economic, or geographic, etc.) factors as the determinants of social and racial development. For if one can withdraw

1. Hereditary Genius, 2nd. ed., Macmillan, London, 1892, p. 350
2. ibid., p. 343

from that struggle, or even if the direction or rate of development can be controlled, then the struggle ceases to be the fundamental determinant, and hence the argument that policy or reform must be based on the assumption that it is decisive collapses. Putting this point another way, if it means anything to say that the struggle for existence determines our lives, then it means nothing to say that we have any choice about participating in that struggle.

Galton concludes, nevertheless, that, since "the entire human race or any one of its varieties" may voluntarily increase or reduce its numbers, or may "introduce new human forms by the intermarriage of varieties and of a change in the conditions of life", then, "It follows that the human race has a large control over its future forms of activity."¹

By the turn of the century, when the movement was at the height of its popularity, eugenics was characterized by demands for positive control over "race breeding" and had abandoned the fiction of a natural harmony of interests which Galton had inconsistently tried to combine with the demand for human rather than natural selection. It could be said that eugenics was halfway between orthodox Social Darwinism of the Spencer-Sumner variety and the heretic

1. ibid., p. 360

school of men like Lester Ward. For while eugenics shared with the former the notion of select social or racial strata entitled to their dominant role in society or the world, it shared with the latter the view that positive human action could be decisive in determining the kind of society we live in. On the other hand, eugenics was much closer to Darwinism as opposed to Social Darwinism, either laissez-faire or reformist, in that it understood the selection and preservation of what were thought to be desirable strains in purely biological terms. Even if those qualities the eugenisists admired were not only physical and mental but sometimes social virtues - like good education or adequate insulation against poverty - certainly the means of promoting and selecting the desired qualities were purely physical.

Again, while some social theorists¹ criticised the eugenists for ignoring a major point of Social Darwinism, namely, that selection and environment must be thought of in social and not only biological terms, the eugenists' insistence on race and breeding received strong encouragement in the 1890's in the new biological findings of

I.e.g., Benjamin Kidd argued in *The Science of Power*, pp. 262-3, that the eugenists were making "a fundamental error". No plan to change society by artificial selection can be effective, he maintained, because "social heredity" alone is now significant in social development.

Weisman and De Vries. Their work on Mendel's laws and on mutations showed that, contrary to Darwin's belief, specific changes could occur suddenly, that genetic differences were not always the result of gradual modifications over an immense number of generations, and that there was no scientific ground for the vestiges of Lamarckianism, the belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which had survived especially in Spencerianism. The conclusion which the eugénists drew from this, and it had a long-lived influence in twentieth-century racialist theory, was that much more could be achieved, and more quickly, by selective breeding than by trying to change men's social environment, which was the common demand of social reformers.¹

In spite, however, of their closer adherence to the biological approach of Darwin himself, the eugénists seldom managed to treat race as a strictly biological concept. For

1. Bernard Shaw, sympathetic with Galton's movement, incidentally puts the eugénic case in "The Perfect Wagnerite" (Major Critical Essays, Constable, London, 1932) He argues that what "our governors" require is "Wotan's inspiration" so that their business is not the devising of laws and institutions to, . . . secure the survival of the unfittest, but the breeding of men whose will and intelligences may be depended on to produce spontaneously the social wellbeing our clumsy laws now aim at and miss. The majority of men at present in Europe have no business to be alive; and no serious progress will be made until we address ourselves earnestly and scientifically to the task of producing trustworthy human material for society." This is to be achieved by breeding; and in this essay at least, Shaw expresses the view that the change from aristocracy to democracy is a change from Selection to promiscuity "as regards our governing class" - a view sharply reminiscent of such conservatives as Carlyle and Ruskin who were also alarmed by the growth of mass political participation.

the eugénists were almost invariably concerned with the advancement or preservation of some class or nation which was certainly not marked off from its competitors in purely biological terms. The eugénists did not claim racial purity for the groups they championed, and once the intermingling of races is admitted, then racial purification or struggle becomes a social or political concept, not a biological one, race and class or nation or state become identified, human replaces natural selection, men decide what fitness to survive is, and the passive acceptance of the outcome of natural selection of favourable chance variations within biologically classified species gives way to the active preparation for conflict among political communities, a conflict whose outcome, it is believed, can to some extent be influenced by the degree and nature of men's preparation for it. In the next few pages some examples are given of this transition from species to group, of this confusion of biological classification with social unit.

A fully-fledged statement of the eugenics case is given by the mathematician Karl Pearson. Pearson was Professor of Applied Mathematics in the University of London in the first decade of this century, and later became Galton Professor of Eugenics there and Director of the Galton Laboratory for National Eugenics. The word

"National" in this title is significant, for Pearson, if not identifying race with nation, at least concerned himself, as other eugenicists did too, with that part of a particular race that occurs within the boundaries of a particular nation-state. He saw the task of the eugenicists as one of helping the nation as a whole by improving its racial quality. In the Cavendish lecture in 1912, Pearson defined his science in this way: "National eugenics is the study of those agencies under social control, which may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally."¹ He saw "selection as something which renders the inexorable law of heredity a source of progress which produces the good through suffering, a infinitely greater good which far outweighs the very obvious pain and evil", and he believed that "the nation is a vast organism subject as much to the great forces of evolution as any other gregarious type of life".² To this he adds the idea Bagehot first advanced of the value of cohesion, maintaining that "it is the herd, the tribe or the nation which forms the fundamental unit in the evolution of man," and believes that "History shows me one way, and one way only, in which a high state of

1. Karl Pearson, Darwinism, Medical Progress and Eugenics, Cambridge, U.P., 1912.

2. Karl Pearson, National Life- From the Standpoint of Science, a lecture given at the University of London in 1900, pp. 23 and 36.

civilization has been produced, namely, the struggle of race with race, and the survival of the physically and mentally fitter race."¹

In these respects, Pearson shares common ground with other writers like Chamberlain who found in Darwin justification for racial struggle as an inevitable and beneficent fact of historical development and particularly of international relations. Like them, Pearson accepted the classification of "higher" and "lower" races, and believed that preparation for the racial struggle must be made by nations as such. In particular, it was the task of the nation's leaders to make people aware of the dangers and of the necessary preparations, and "to lessen, if not to suspend, the internal struggle, that the nation may be strong externally."² Pearson's advocacy of eugenics as the proper method of preparation for the international struggle was a proposal to use the same Darwinian principles in a field where they could be controlled in order to make the nation stronger in the uncontrollable international struggle. In other words, unlike such writers as Josiah Strong or General Bernhardt who saw coming an international struggle in Darwinian terms but who advocated internal domestic preparations which bore no relation to Darwinian biological

1. ibid., pp. 55 and 21

2. " p. 55.

principles, Pearson's national eugenics was the more logical in trying to make biological selection the principle of action at both levels. What he advocated can be seen as an attempt to redress the artificial prevention of natural selection which medical progress had achieved. Without modern medicine, "the hand of Nature fell heavily on the unfit... but.. we have to a large extent suspended the automatic action whereby a race progressed mentally and physically... at this opposition of Darwinism and medical progress,... eugenics seem to provide a key to the situation. As eugenisists, we assert that the right to live does not connote the right of each man to reproduce his kind... as we lessen the stringency of natural selection, and more and more of the weaklings and the unfit survive, we must increase the standard, mental and physical, of parentage." ¹

What Pearson emphasized was the eugenist's duty to the nation, and one of the great attractions of the doctrine lay in this subordination of merely individual and selfish interests to wider national demands. In so far as it regarded the competitor in the struggle for existence as something larger than the single individual, namely, the race or nation, eugenics may be thought of as offering the unsuccessful, the unfit, a second chance - not personally,

but vicariously, by retrieving the fortunes of the species as a whole. There were close connexions between eugenists' notions of race betterment, on the one hand, and, on the other, the less scientific doctrines of racial superiority; and while there was a good deal of class superiority in the eugenists' defence of good breeding from good stock, ~~the argument~~, the argument could as well be applied to the needs of national fitness in the international struggle for survival. Thus, Pearson argued that the Boer War had frightened Englishmen with its demonstration of their vulnerability to "inferior" races. The antidote was to recognize the force of heredity as an inviolable law and to look to future generations with that in mind: "This does not mean a fatal resignation to the presence of bad stock, but a conscious attempt to modify the percentage of it in our own community and in the world at large."¹

From this point of view, then, the eugenics argument emphasizes the importance of the group-the race or nation - above that of the individual. The fittest individuals are indeed to be selected, not by nature but by man. But their selection is not an end in itself, only the means to the survival of the race or nation in a struggle

1. National Life, p.20.

no longer among individuals but among groups, and in which there is no possibility of human control and selection, and fitness is what promotes collective, not individual, survival. In such a struggle, even the unfit might hope to survive personally and contribute to the survival of the tribe collectively, by subordinating his own interests, especially the interest in reproducing his kind, to those of the group as a whole. It was a variation of Bagehot's argument of cohesion.

The eugenists advocated voluntary intervention within national boundaries the better to prepare the race for survival in the world-wide struggle. Most of them had an unflattering opinion of their fellow humans, the products of uncontrolled breeding. In terms of the categories suggested at the end of Chapter 5,¹ their view was a kind of collective voluntarism. Some other racial theorists under Social Darwinian influence rejected intervention to prepare for survival in favour of collective determinism. They shared with the eugenists the belief in an inter-racial struggle. But, unlike the eugenists, they held that the fitness of any race as a whole was determined by the outcome of the uncontrolled struggle among its members, by natural, and not human, selection, within racial groups as much as between them.

1. See above, pp. 200-201

This was the position in Benjamin Kidd's Social Evolution.¹ It will be remembered that Kidd regarded social evolution as a further and higher stage of progress than individual evolution, but one reached by the same process of competitive struggle, selection and survival. The progress of man from savagery to the first primitive society "is at once both inevitable and involuntary... His first organized societies must be developed like any other advantage, under the sternest conditions of natural selection, having worsted and subordinated their competitors in the long-drawn-out rivalry through which they survive".² As with societies, and eventually with nations and states, so with races, there is a relentless competition for survival. And among races, Kidd shared a view held on both sides of the Atlantic that the Anglo-Saxons had the greatest advantages in the inter-racial struggle. They were the most progressive, the race in which the movement of world leadership from the Middle East cradle to the West and North has found its zenith. The Anglo-Saxons are virtuous and progressive because "Energetic, vigorous, virile life amongst them is maintained at the highest pitch of which nature is capable. They offer the highest motives in emulation, amongst them the individual

1. See above pp.223 ff.

2. Op.cit., pp.42-43.

is freest, the selection fullest, the rivalry fairest... But also is the conflict sternest, the nervous friction greatest, and the stress severest. Looking back by the way these nations have come, we find an equally unmistakable absence of these qualities and conditions amongst the competitors they have left behind."¹

By similar arguments John Fiske sought to manifest the destiny of the Anglo-Saxons. Anticipating Kidd's point about the leadership of world civilization moving from the Eastern Mediterranean to North Western Europe, and then across the Atlantic, Fiske, after surveying "universal history", is "fully prepared to show that the conquest of the North American continent by men of English race was unquestionably the most prodigious event in the political annals of mankind"². Spain, France and England, i.e., Romans and Teutons, were to contend for North America "and to prove by the result of the struggle which kind of civilization was endowed with the higher and sturdier political life. The race which here should gain the victory was clearly destined hereafter to take the lead in the world."³ Fiske went on to the modest suggestion that "It is enough to point to the general conclusion, that the work which the English race began when it colonized North

1. ibid., pp. 54-5

2. John Fiske, "Manifest Destiny", Harper's Magazine, 1885 reprinted in American Political Ideas, Macmillan, London, 1885 p. 125.

3. ibid., p. 127

America is destined to go, until every land on the earth's surface that is not already the seat of an old civilization shall become English in its language, in its political habits and traditions, and to a predominant extent in the blood of its people."¹

In Fiske, the desire to hang onto the biological concept of race, with the suggestion of scientifically demonstrated laws of development which Darwinism was alleged to lend it, conflicts with political and even cultural interpretations. Thus in the passage just quoted, we have Fiske equating "civilization" and "race", and describing not only certain language, political habits and traditions as English but also applying the same cultural description to "blood".

To Fiske's mixture of national and racial destiny, another widely read American, Rev. Josiah Strong, added the ingredient of a religious mission in his book, Our Country.² Strong was General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of the United States, and his book is a rich blend of hot-gospelling, patriotism and racial fervour. Strong too

1. ibid., p.143. This paper of Fiske's was first made public in England as the third of a series of four lectures delivered at the Royal Institution in May, 1880.

2. Rev. J. Strong, Our Country- Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis, 1885, The Baker and Taylor Co., N.Y., for the American Home Missionary Society, revised ed., 1891, by which time, as the publishers point out, it had already sold 158,000 copies, which is alone enough to make the book noteworthy.

believed that the Angle-Saxons were destined to rule the world and that America was rapidly becoming the Anglo-Saxon centre. He argues that since the two great needs of mankind are Christianity and Liberty, it follows "that the Anglo-Saxon, as the great representative of these two ideas, the depository of these two greatest blessings, sustains peculiar relations to the world's future, is divinely commissioned to be in a peculiar sense, his brother's keeper"¹. But the American Anglo-Saxon's role in history is decided not only by God but also by the course of evolution. Strong draws great comfort from Darwin's² flattering prognostications about the U.S.A. "Mr. Darwin is not only disposed to see, in the superior vigour of our people, an illustration of his favourite theory of natural selection, but even intimates that the world's history thus far has been simply preparatory for our future, and tributary to it."³ Strong can also gain support from Herbert Spencer, who, like H.S. Chamberlain, saw value in a judicious mixture of racial strains, and argued that "From biological truths it is to be inferred that the eventual mixture of the allied varieties of the Aryan race forming the (American) population, will produce a finer type of man than has hitherto existed; and a type of man more

1. ibid., p.210.

2. Descent, p.508.

3. op.cit., p.218.

plastic, more adaptable, more capable of undergoing the modifications needful for complete social life." Strong¹ thought that it was this "highly mixed origin" which gave America the advantage over Britain as the Anglo-Saxon stronghold. God, moreover, had given the Saxons special virtues to fit them for their role of world leadership, and these included a "genius for colonizing". Strong concluded that: "The time is coming when the pressure of the means of subsistence will be felt here as it is now felt in Europe and Asia. Then will the world enter upon a new stage of its history - the final competition of races, for which the Anglo-Saxon is being schooled. Then this race of unequalled energy...having developed peculiarly aggressive traits calculated to impress its institutions upon mankind, will spread itself over the earth. If I read not amiss, this powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond. And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the "survival of the fittest"²?"

In the writings of Chamberlain, the eugenists, Kidd, Fiske, Strong and others, there is no necessary identification

1. "The Americans", Essays, op.cit., Vol.3.p.471
2. op.cit., p.223.

of race with nation , although this is not to say that they are not all successful. in sticking to biological criteria in the way that would be logically required if ^{THEY} were in fact to derive their theory from Darwin. In some cases, race coincides with a group within the nation; in others, with a group like Anglo-Saxons or Teutons which covers more than one nation; and in a few instances, ¹ both these senses are used as well as the third sense of identification of race with nation. Once this last identification is made, it is an easy step to the inevitability of national wars as a corollary of Darwinism, the position maintained by Bernhardt and to which we turn in the next chapter.

But before doing so, one last example will be given of a view which bestrides, so to speak, the racialist and the nationalist versions of Social Darwinism. It is a view which tries to make the most of two of the interpretations of Darwin we have already noted, namely, as a theory accounting, firstly, for the evolution of species as such

1. E.g., some of the writings of Theodore Roosevelt. See his, An Autobiography, Macmillan London & N.Y., 1913, esp. pp. 245ff. Roosevelt shared with Fiske, Captain A.T. Mahan, Strong, General Homer Lea and many other Americans, the firm belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons. Although he did not accept the notion of racial purity, he was much occupied with the idea of race in some form, usually the imprecise one of "my group". "Actually, to Roosevelt and many of his contemporaries, 'race' was no more than a loose term for any given group, distinguished by its colour, language, degree of industrial development, or national culture, to be used as the situation demanded." (Howard K. Beale, Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 1956, p. 28) Roosevelt reviewed a number of books of a Social Darwinian cast, including H.S. Chamberlain's Foundations and Kidd's Social Evolution.

and in particular of races regarded as biological units; and secondly, for the evolution of social organisms and in particular of nations regarded as political units.

Such a position was advanced by General Homer Lea in The Day of the a¹Saxon, a book which draws upon geopolitics and religion as well as upon Darwinian principles of struggle, selection and survival. The identical destiny of the Anglo-Saxon Race and the American nation which Lea traces was not such a happy one as that seen by, say, Fiske and Strong, for what Lea foresees is the decline of the race from its present dominance. The decline, however, will not result from the degeneration of the race in biological terms - from indiscriminate breeding or because social conditions became too soft. The decline, Lea thinks, will follow from the failure of the national seat of the Anglo-Saxon Race, formerly Britain and now the United States, to survive a military conflict with other nations - with which Lea does not try to identify any particular race. The extension of Anglo-Saxon dominance which Fiske and Strong prophesied was conceived mainly in non-violent terms of economic and cultural conquest, and success in this, as in military conflicts which may be involved, would be due to advantageous variations which have evolved among Anglo-

1. General H. Lea, The Day of The Saxon, Harper's, N.Y. 1912.

Saxons as a race. But Lea is on different ground from Strong and Fiske in moving closer to a frankly nationalist Darwinism and away from biological to military competition, for what he takes as important are not any useful variations which races may have but the geopolitical situation which nation-states have. Again, like other militarists, Lea differs from them in advocating active intervention rather than allowing natural selection to take its course - because perhaps, like the eugenicists and other race purifiers, he sees a less rosy future than do the protagonists of manifest destiny.

Like many of his contemporaries, not only Social Darwinists, Lea believed that there were certain laws controlling human affairs, that the discovery of these laws would allow reliable predictions of future world events, and that it was the sheerest vanity for men to believe that their decisions had any effect in international politics. Lea argued that these laws were in fact reducible to mathematical exactness. He had a sort of geometrical theory of world history. The British Empire, the embodiment of Anglo-Saxon domination, had reached the peak of its development along an arc stretching from Gibraltar to the Western Pacific. Just as it had wrested power from four nations, Portugal, Spain, Holland, and France, so now it faced four new rivals, America, Germany, Russia and Japan.

But these last three, allowing America to be the new Anglo-Saxon headquarters, could not develop along their "radii of expansion, as determined by natural law, radii along which they must move or fall into decadence, without the prior destruction of Saxon sovereignty"¹. These radii of expansion intersected the Saxon world arc, which was more or less threatened according to the angle of convergence. But the Saxons, Lea argued, do not realize the threat. They have fallen into the declining "militancy of supremacy or preservation of ownership", without realizing they must still cultivate another militancy, the "militancy of the struggle to survive"². From he maintained, "the natural law of survival remains immutable", that is, only the fit survive, no matter how much men strive "to find refuge in the delusion of universal peace"³. The best chances of survival occur where racial and national aims coincide, and this has formerly been the good fortune of the Saxons. But, says Lea, "Unfortunately, the Saxon race, because of the supremacy of individual ideas over those belonging to the nation or race, have become ignorant of the effects of racial unity and national cohesion"⁴, the notion of the national or racial organism has been eclipsed by the particularism of individuals.

1. ibid., p.16 . 2. ibid., p.16
3. ibid., p.9. 4. ibid., 128

Although their ultimate decline is inevitable, the Saxons can at any rate postpone it, by national preparation for war. "Wars have brought about the formation of this Empire; and wars will prolong or shorten its existence according as to whether or not the British people prepare for those inevitable struggles that are now approaching..."¹ Lea treats development as the result of struggle for survival among competing organisms and he takes nations as such competing organisms. Unlike unconscious organisms, however, nations can prepare for the struggle because men have discovered the laws of national development. One is the connexion between war and progress. "To the degree that war is a basic principle in national progression must preparation for its conduct be specific. There can be no scorn of it, nor denial, nor fear, nor the substitution of human ordinances for those that are cognizant of man only in the aggregate."²

But Lea himself is guilty of such substitution. For, while claiming to acknowledge the finality of the decisions of these blind and impersonal natural laws that see man "only in the aggregate", Lea also claims to know that that aggregate is not in fact the whole of mankind, not the whole genus man, but certain species of it, certain races of

1. ibid., p.3

2. " " p.7

men. They are not, however, biologically defined species or races, but certain groups which men, or some men, see as forming aggregates. It is because of this slide from species to group, from classification in terms of common physical characteristics to classification in terms of political grouping or location, a classification which may very well cut across the divisions of biological species - because of this slide, the further shift from natural to human selection becomes easier, national military preparedness becomes a more pressing and more easily fulfilled demand than race betterment, and the case for deliberate intervention to secure the survival of the nation is complete.

Chapter 9.

Social Darwinism and War.

1

Earlier in this essay, it was argued that the Social Darwinian movement could be divided roughly and at the expense of oversimplification, into four streams, the product of two parallel divisions into determinism and voluntarism, on the one hand, and individualism and collectivism on the other. Determinists could argue that the process of struggle, selection and survival was the decisive and uncontrollable determinant of social development, and that the struggle was either among individuals - the members of the same species - or among "species" - classes, races or nations. Voluntarists likewise could differ on the question whether the contenders in the struggle for existence were individuals or groups, but they agreed in believing that knowledge of the laws of social development enabled men to control that development, at least to some extent. It was further argued that the distinctions among these four forms of Social Darwinism were frequently blurred, and, in particular, that determinism and interventionism were illogically but often combined. This blurring is especially obvious in the arguments of those who saw the decisive

1. See above, pp. 200-201.

struggle for existence as that among nations and/or races. General Homer Lea's book is a good example of how the imprecisions of racialist theory made easy, and indeed almost inevitable, the shift from the biological species to the political group as the competing unit in the struggle for existence, from race to nation; from unimpeded natural selection to controlled human selection, from laissez-faire to intervention; and from passive acceptance of the naturally, biologically, determined outcome of the inter-racial struggle to the deliberate preparation to ensure, or alternatively to prevent or to postpone, the inevitable outcome of the international struggle. In short, his book illustrates the shift from the belief in the natural selection of the individuals or species fittest for survival to the advocacy, still illogically based on the belief in a determined natural selection, of nations taking steps to secure their collective survival by themselves promoting those variations taken, on evidence which is necessarily inadequate because it cannot be had in advance, to favour survival.

These characteristic confusions in attempts to derive policy, and especially national policy, from Social Darwinism need further attention. This essay is primarily concerned with the thesis that it is the determinist element in bodies of theory like Social

Darwinism that makes such theories influential in policy formation.¹ In the case of Social Darwinism, that determinist element is the belief that the survival of the individual or of the group, the race or the nation, is the result of selective struggle;¹ ~~that the outcome of that struggle~~ the selection, is inevitably determined by the law of the survival of the fittest, and that the outcome cannot be influenced by human intervention. In the field of foreign policy, however, the typical Social Darwinian stand was a mixture of interventionism in domestic affairs with the acceptance of some inevitable determinant- racial or national struggle conceived in biological terms - as the decisive and uncontrollable factor in international affairs. In other words, Social Darwinism appears to have affected foreign policy in this respect, namely, that those who come under its influence thought either of nations as organisms in conflict with one another, or of races as species competing for survival; and frequently nation and race were identified. But again, belief in the inevitability of certain developments, such as

1. I am here speaking of policy in the broadest sense, namely, of proposals for action, or at any rate the principles if not the details of action, by whomsoever they were put forward. Most of the policies we have looked at were put forward by people who had no national decision-making authority. So I am not here asserting any direct influence of Social Darwinism on actual, historical policy decisions, though I think there is evidence (which I have not given) of such influence occurring. This uncommitted stand is in keeping with the decline of Morley's challenge which I mentioned above, Chapter 7, p. 252.

the (final) struggle of nations or races for survival, was illogically combined with demands for national or racial preparations - an illogical demand because, on strict Social Darwinian premisses, it would be impossible to know in advance what preparations would be appropriate for the struggle for survival. For, since survival is the only criterion of fitness, we can never be certain in advance whether any preparations for, or against, the expected outcome (though never expected on adequate grounds) would be the right preparations.¹ Strictly speaking, no positive policy can be derived from Social Darwinian determinism. In this respect, Social Darwinism is in a weaker logical position than other determinist theories of historical inevitability. Marxists, for instance, are able to specify the classless society as the inevitable outcome of the workings of the fundamental economic determinant. Social Darwinists, however, cannot even nominate a final goal of the historical process towards which men may be exhorted to work. Men cannot reasonably be exhorted to survive unless there is some way of knowing how to fit themselves for survive; but survival alone proves fitness. We cannot say what will survive because we cannot learn from experience what fitness is, since at any time fitness is relative to

1. Darwin saw this point: see above, Chapter 5 pp.174-176.

the existing environment in which the struggle for existence is going on, and the constant selection in that struggle as constantly changes the environment.

These logical difficulties, however, did not always deter those who sought to use Social Darwinism as a scientific prop for public policy. One of the great attractions of Social Darwinism as a determinist theory was that it could be used as a way of showing either that the inevitable was on your side or else how you could get on the side of the inevitable. This charm was not diminished by the reflection that, strictly speaking, what was inevitable could never be specified, because that reflection was seldom indulged in. In domestic policy, Darwinian principles were among the factors suggesting laissez-faire to some, reform to others, individualism to some, collectivism to others. In foreign policy and international relations, the same range of alternatives was not open, for to accept at all the view that one's race or nation was involved in a struggle with other like units - species or 'super-organisms' - was already to come down on the side of collectivism. But there is still the question whether the alleged determinism of international affairs by struggle, selection and survival suggests a policy of resignation to the inevitable or of rational intervention and preparation in the light of our knowledge of the evolutionary laws.

the light of our knowledge of the evolutionary laws.

We have already noted that one effect of Darwin's work (and, incidentally, an indication of his wide authoritative influence) was an increasing tendency - in Hobhouse for instance - to identify any evolutionary theory with natural selection; or, if to identify is too strong, at least to take^{it} ~~as~~[^] Spencer did - that Darwin's alleged establishment of evolution by natural selection in biology was good ground for accepting the establishment of evolution as a general principle. This confused identification of evolution with natural selection is brought out by P. Chalmers Mitchell, a zoologist, who delivered three lectures at the Royal Institution in February, 1915¹, with a view to combatting what he called "the German thesis" that Darwin showed that War, as a struggle for existence is a biological necessity. Chalmers Mitchell wanted to show that natural selection remained a hypothesis without "the dignity of a scientific law" - and "that even if the struggle for existence were a scientific law, it does not necessarily apply to human affairs; that modern nations are not units of the same order as the units of the animal and vegetable kingdom from which the law

1. P. Chalmers Mitchell, Evolution and the War, Murray, London, 1915.

of struggle for existence is a supposed inference; that the struggle as propounded by Charles Darwin, and as it can be followed in nature, has no resemblance to human warfare; that man is not subject to the laws of the unconscious and that his conduct is not to be judged by them..."¹

The book which Chalmers Mitchell was particularly attacking was General Bernhardt's Germany and the Next War, and in that book and in others in similar vein, such as Homer Lea's, the assumption Chalmers Mitchell challenges certainly was made, namely, that the struggle for existence and the law of survival apply as much to societies as they do to individuals. This view had been developed by Walter Bagehot in his Physics and Politics, first published in 1865. Bagehot's position was close to Spencer's on the militant and industrial types of society, though Bagehot regarded the actual transition from the one to the other as having been largely completed. "In modern days, in civilized days, men's choice determines nearly all they do."² But in early times that choice determined scarcely anything. In those early times, Bagehot argues, there was a ruthless struggle for survival among societies, and those naturally selected were the cohesive tribes, those who had developed "the legal fibre", or that had "cemented a cake of 1. ibid., p.108. 2. opcit., p.55. cf. above, Chapter 5, pp.183-4.

custom", since such solidarity would be a great military advantage.

Although he was speaking mainly about survival in "the early world" Bagehot did emphasize the importance of social solidarity in certain modern societies and the need to enforce it by stern discipline. He argued that "the principles of 1789... are fitted only to the new world in which society has gone through its early task; when the inherited organization is already confirmed and fixed; when the soft minds and strong passions of youthful nations are fixed and guided by hard transmitted instincts."¹ In the decade in which he wrote, and after, new nations were emerging in the most civilized continent itself, and even well established states were beginning to show a new aggressiveness. In such transitional circumstances, Bagehot's defense of the need for an elite and for discipline had a clear contemporary application, and the militant society seemed to stand the best chance of survival. Furthermore, Bagehot's discussion² of "The Use of Conflict" made the connexion of his view with Darwinism quite explicit. He enunciated three laws of conflict, of which the first is the most important: "In every particular state of the world, those nations which are

1. ibid., p.29.

2. ibid., pp.43 ff.

strongests tend to prevail over the others; and in certain marked peculiarities the strongest tend to be the best... These (three laws) are the sort of doctrines with which, under the name of 'natural selection' in physical science, we have become familiar; and as every great scientific conception tends to advance its boundaries and to be of use in solving problems not thought of when it was started, so here, what was put forward for mere animal history may, with a change of form, but an identical essence, be applied to human history".¹

It was this extrapolation of Darwinism against which Chalmers Mitchell was protesting. It was accepted as legitimate by many leading social theorists for fifty years after Bagehot wrote. For example the French sociologist Vacher de Lapouge wrote in 1893: "Darwin, en formulant le principe de la lutte pour l'existence et de la sélection, n'a pas seulement révolutionné la biologie et la philosophie naturelle, il a transformé la science politique. La possession de ce principe a permis de saisir les lois de la vie et la mort des nations, qui avaient échappé à la speculation des philosophes."² And we have seen in the previous chapter

1. ibid., cf. Barzun, op.cit., p.67, and Hayek, op.cit., p.138.

2. "Le Darwinisme dans la science sociale", Revue Internationale de Sociologie, Sept.-Oct., 1893.

how Bagehot's notion of the importance of social solidarity as a factor in survival became a common ingredient in Social Darwinian racialism: for example, Fiske asserted in "Manifest Destiny" that "The same concert of action which tends towards internal harmony tends also towards external victory..."¹ Fiske and others, of course, had made the happy discovery that racial and national solidarity coincided in the Anglo-Saxon population of the United States, and similar revelations were made to other writers, such as Treitschke and H.S. Chamberlain, about other fortunate conjunctions, like that of the Teutons and Germany. To those with more limited vision, however, "the laws of ^{the} life and death of nations" were laws about political entities, and the solidarity which they extolled was national, not racial, and the competition they saw was among political units, not zoological classes.

Bernhardi took such a view in his book Germany and the Next War² where he set himself the task of drafting a blueprint for Germany's military, economic and educational preparation as a nation for the war he foresaw against England and France. Bernhardi's theme was a common one in Europe and America in the second half of the nineteenth

1. op.cit., See above, Chapter 8, p.309.

2. First German ed., 1911. Trans. by Ellen H. Powles, Arnold, London, 1912.

century, namely, a warning against the dangers, to individuals and nations, of the comfortable life, praise of the heroic and warlike virtues and of the hard competitive way of life which produces them, and, finally, exaltation of the nation, of its interest, its honour and its destiny. In America, these themes appeared in the writings of Strong, Lea and especially Theodore Roosevelt. They are exemplified in England by, for instance, Carlyle¹, Ruskin,² and, later on, by Benjamin Kidd; in France, they are prominent in Ernest Renan's La Réforme intellectuelle et morale.³ Now, while I have argued that some of these writers drew upon Darwin, as well as other sources, to justify their analyses and prescriptions, I am by no means wanting to maintain that the late nineteenth century philosophy of violence and exaltation of the national state can be laid

1. e.g. "Shooting Niagra", Macmillan's Magazine August, 1867, reprinted in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Vol. V, Chapman & Hall, London, 1899/

2. See, e.g. The Crown of Wild Olive, George Allen, Orpington, 1886, especially Lecture III on "War" (delivered at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1865): "the great justification of this game (war) is that it truly, when well played, determines who is the best man..." (p.134)

3. See above, Chapter 6, p.215 note 3, Renan too extols war as an incomparable builder of tough moral fibre, and, he speaks of a nation as a living, personal being: "Un pays n'est pas le simple addition des individus qui le composent, c'est une âme, une conscience, une personne, une résultante vivante." (La Réforme, etc., p.35)

¹
at Darwin's door. Bernhardt's book certainly shows a wide variety of influences.

Thus, in justifying patriotism and the warlike defence of one's country, Bernhardt harks back to the Prussian Recovery after 1806 and to Schleirmacher's patriotic ² sermons in that period; he refers with approval to the patriotism of the contemporary Japanese, their anxiety to enlist and the effect of patriotic spirit and devotion ³ against the superior force of the Russians in 1905; and he quotes ⁴ Theodore Rossevelt's Message to Congress of 4th. December, 1906, "It must ever be kept in mind that war is not merely justifiable, but imperative, upon honourable men and upon an honourable nation when peace is only to be obtained by the sacrifice of conscientious conviction or of national welfare. A just war is in the long run far better for a nation's soul than the most prosperous peace obtained by an acquiescence in wrong or injustice..." Again, in arguing that war, far from being a curse, is ⁵ "the greatest factor in the furtherance of culture and power," Bernhardt repeatedly quotes Treitschke, Goethe and the early ⁶ nineteenth century German romantics - for example, Schlegel :

1. To some of his contemporaries, the blame attaching to Darwinism, if not to Darwin, seemed much heavier. I have already quoted, e.g. Morley, Novicow & Hobhouse on this point. Another was George Nasmyth (see above, Chap. 6, p. 21', note 2) who blames what calls "distorted Social Darwinism" for providing Germany especially with a spurious "philosophy of force" as the basis of their militaristic international policies. 2. op. cit., p. 262. 3. ibid., and p. 267. 4. ibid., p. 47. Roosevelt also extolled the Japanese as an example to Americans; See e.g. his Autobiography p. 245. 5. ibid., p. 4. 6. ibid., p. 12.

"War is as necessary as the struggle of the elements in Nature". Finally, with regard to the nature of the state, Bernhardi is drawing on a long German tradition and especially on Hegelianism in presenting his view that the rights of the state are superior to those of the individual, that no individual or sectional interests can come into conflict with the national interest, and that, since there is no authority which is higher than the state, the state itself can assert its interests against other states only through war, which it therefore has both a right and a duty to make.¹ Bernhardi's view of the state is far more positive than that of either the orthodox or the reformist Social Darwinists, coming directly from German philosophy: "The State will not be to us merely a legal and social insurance office, political union will not seem to us to have the one object of bringing the advantages of civilization within the reach of the individual; we shall assign to it the world task of raising the intellectual and moral powers of the nation to the highest expansion, and of securing for them that influence on the world which tends to the combined progress of humanity. We shall see in the State, as Fichte² taught, an exponent of liberty to, the human race, whose

1. ibid., Chapter XIII.

2. In what Isaiah Berlin calls the "positive" sense: see his Two Concepts of Liberty. O.U.P., 1958.

task it is to put into practice the moral duty on earth."¹

Bernhardi's book, then, is clearly not simply a piece of Social Darwinism. But especially in his first two chapters, on "The Right to Make War" and "The Duty to Make War", there is good ground for holding that the Darwinian, biological arguments are the major arguments, and that they are supported by, rather than that they support, the arguments of pre-Darwinian and non-Darwinian writers. If that is regarded as too strong an assertion, then I would at least maintain that Bernhardi (and many others in the same period) believed that Darwin provided for the first time a scientific underpinning of what had hitherto never been more than speculation, however brilliant, and that to that extent Darwinism was a new and decisive justification for policies of the kind that Bernhardi proposed.

Bernhardi denounces the peace-mongers. Peace proposals, he argues, mean that the weak nation is to have the same right to live as the powerful and vigorous nation. The whole idea is "a presumptuous encroachment on the natural laws of development."² Bernhardi argues that the aspiration "is directly antagonistic to the great universal laws which rule all life. War is a biological necessity of the first importance... since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement

1. op.cit., p.17.

2. ibid., p.28

of the race, and therefore all real civilization." ¹ He knows that "the sages of antiquity long before Darwin recognized" Heraclitus' dictum that conflict is the father of all things, but he believed that Darwin has now given it the status of a scientific truth. Bernhardi goes on, "the struggle for existence is, in the life of nature, the basis of all healthy development... so in the life of man the struggle is not merely the destructive, but the life-giving principle... the law of the stronger holds good everywhere. Those forms survive which are able to procure themselves the most favourable conditions of life, and to assert themselves in the universal economy of Nature. The weaker succumb. This struggle is regulated and sustained by the unconscious sway of biological laws and by the interplay of opposite forces. In the plant world and in the animal world this process is worked out in unconscious tragedy. In the human race it is consciously carried out and regulated by social ordinances." ²

Bernhardi's contrast between the unconscious struggle in nature and the conscious struggle in human affairs is one indication of the mixture of determinism and interventionism in his position. From his later references to the function of the state, the nature of education and

1. ibid., p.11.

2. ibid., p.10.

preparation for war, and his argument that, there being no, higher authority, the only arbiter between states is war, it becomes clear that Bernhardt sees conscious control as possible only within states not between states. He treats the state as a unitary organism in which, while there are of course conflicts and struggles, an overriding singleness of purpose enables them to be "regulated by social ordinances" towards a supreme goal. But at the international level, where there is no question of a common goal, issues must literally be fought out. The outcome cannot be consciously controlled, but preparation for the struggle can be kept at the highest level, especially at times when a crucial struggle is imminent.

In international affairs, then, Bernhardt's position is a thoroughgoing determinism. The successful nations are those selected for survival in a struggle for existence which is fought out as blindly as any such struggle in the animal world. Nations, like animals, have the instinct of self preservation, and since this instinct leads to war, making war becomes a right. "Might is at once the supreme right, and the dispute as to what is right is decided by the arbitrament of war. War gives a biologically just decision, since its decisions rest on the very nature of things... The knowledge, therefore, that war depends on biological laws leads to the

conclusion that every attempt to exclude it from international relations must be demonstrably untenable. But it is not only a biological law, but a moral obligation, and, as such, an indispensable factor in civilization"^{1.}

There is one noteworthy point here, as in the work of others who took Darwinism as one of the justifications for professing a scientific, hard, detached and unflinching view of world politics. Those - nations or races - fit to survive will be inevitably and ruthlessly selected by struggle. That is Nature's way, or God's. It is useless, immoral and unmanly to resist or protest; we can only, and we must, prepare for the struggle. Its verdict will be stern but just. That was the argument- the fittest will be selected. But it was never so heartily accepted as in those countries and by those people who believed that in fact they had been selected already. Social Darwinism enjoyed its greatest following where convictions of Manifest Destiny were well entrenched.

Having argued that war is the natural mode of progress, and that it would be to oppose nature to try to eliminate war from international affairs, Bernhardt finishes his case with the conclusion that "under certain

1. ibid., p.17.

circumstances, it is not only the right but the moral¹ and political duty of the statesman to bring about war". Such circumstances are the "favourable conditions" in which it is possible "to realize necessary and justifiable² aspirations by force of arms". He maintains that certain wars provoked by far-seeing statesmen have had happy results, far outweighing their immediate horror - no doubt he has in mind the Ems telegramme. His final pronouncement in this chapter is that, since war is a duty and "so long as all human progress and all natural developments are based on the law of conflict, it is necessary to engage in such conflict under the most³ favourable conditions possible".

Both General Lea and Bernhardt put the responsibility for national preparation for survival in this inevitable conflict squarely on the state. Just as Lea maintained that "Militancy... is collective, and not personal, hence the first duty devolving upon a state is to take means of preserving from deterioration this excellence upon which⁴ depends its existence"; so Bernhardt held that "it is the duty of the State to preserve the moral healthiness of the⁵ nation", to which end it has the right to complete control of press and education.

1. op.cit., p.35. 2. ibid. 3. ibid., p.48. 4. op.cit. p.220
5. op.cit., p.284.

In thus attributing to the state, as did so many others, Darwinists and non-Darwinists alike, the functions of moral guide and guardian of the race or nation and of central and supreme director of its struggle to survive, such views fully develop the characteristic organicism of Social Darwinism, the belief in a super-organism. From the very fact that more than one candidate is proposed for this role - is it nation or race? - it is clear that difficulties arise in deciding what the super-organism is. We can speak about biological organisms, including men, as units without much fear of contradiction. They can be clearly located and identified and counted, and we can talk about the functions of their parts, seeds or stamens, lungs or legs, fairly unambiguously. With societies, nations or races, however, what counts as units, as boundaries and as functions, are decided by us - not arbitrarily, perhaps, but certainly in accordance with our own aims and intentions. The fallacy of social organicism is Hayek's fallacy of "collectivism" or "holism". Societies, races or nations are never "given" in the way in which plants and animals and men are "given".¹ These super-organisms are theoretical constructs to

1. That is, leaving aside the question of the psychological unity of a man: we are at least "given" his physical unity.

which we attribute unity for various purposes. Likewise, the functions or duties which the social organicist attributes to or prescribes for the organism's various components, particularly the functions and duties of the state as the organism's head, and the unified aims, tasks and destinies which he attributes to the super-organism itself, are not "given" but imposed. For this reason, ambiguity is bound to creep into the collectivist versions of Social Darwinism. Whatever plausibility there is in the attempt to derive positive policies of preparations or other forms of intervention from belief in natural selection as the ultimate determinant, stems from the fact that men can claim to know what makes societies or races or nations fit for survival because they alone, and not nature, can know what these super-organisms are.

Conclusion.

"Doctrines are the most frightful tyrants to which men ever are subjected. Doctrines are always vague; it would ruin a doctrine to define it, because then it could be analysed, tested, criticized and verified; but nothing ought to be tolerated which cannot be tested." W.G. Sumner.

The question to whose answer it is hoped this essay may slightly contribute is why determinist theories, and notably Social Darwinism, have such an appeal that they should be invoked as a justification of proposed public policy, whether domestic or foreign. In what lies the appeal of such a determinist theory as Social Darwinism that it should be used, along with other arguments of course, to meet the need to justify a policy? My final task is to suggest an answer to that question.

When I speak of the justification of a policy, I mean no more than the offering of grounds or arguments or reasons for doing or proposing something, and justification succeeds when the reasons given are accepted and the policy is approved, or at any rate acquiesced in. Justification in this sense, may be either a process in which policy-makers, when they are also decision-makers, satisfy their own need to find rational grounds for their political conduct; or one in which they seek to win popular support for their policies - or both processes may be involved. If there are men who must "always have a theory", they are both the rulers - the policy-makers - and the people. The policy-makers may or may not accept the

theory, though it seems to me that determinist theories like Social Darwinism are in fact believed by those who use them to justify their political conduct; but in any case they ~~must~~ ^{may find it useful to} have, at their disposal as it were, a theory in the sense of an intellectual apparatus, a doctrine, which will help them to win the support of the masses whether or not they use it also to still their own consciences. It seems to me that this is so in view of the fact that, in modern societies, political power is far more widely diffused, the extent of mass political participation is much greater than ever before, though the effectiveness of participation may vary enormously. It may still be the case that there is, as always, a ruling class, that decision-making remains in relatively few hands, and that the process of political enfranchisement is little more than a device whereby the masses are beguiled into the belief that sovereignty belongs to them. But whether or not this is so, the whole notion of political responsibility, like moral responsibility, involves the idea of having reasons, grounds, arguments, adequate bases, for one's actions - and this is so whether such responsibility is real or illusory, great or small, whether it is that of the great decision-maker or the humble voter. Political responsibility in modern society involves not merely the idea of being accountable,

especially to the electorate in societies where political enfranchisement is well advanced; but also the idea of giving an account, a reckoning, a justification for arriving at decisions.

Now the connexion between this part of the process¹ of political justification, on the one hand, and theory, on the other, lies in this; that the justification is likely to carry no weight unless, or will certainly carry more weight if, the theory on which it is based is presented as true. But a political theory, a theory about how political processes work at the national or international level will not win so much conviction that it may help to justify policy unless it also purports to show that or how the fortunes of those whose support is desired for the proposed policies are going to be advanced.

Now, as I argued in the Introduction, it is characteristic of political theory to rely for its acceptability as a partial justification of action much more heavily on its ability to fulfil expectations than

1. I am here speaking of theory only in the sense discussed in Chapter 1 above, theory as a description or explanation of events. There is another, perhaps commoner sense, with which I am not here concerned, namely, the sense in which we speak of theory as a set of beliefs - moral principles say, or religious convictions - in terms of which actions may be justified.

on its successfully passing tests like those used to test an hypothesis in the natural sciences. If it appears to, show that the expectations of a particular race or class or nation are in fact well-founded, and if further it can show that what might be entertained at first as mere hopes are in fact rational expectations, the logically predictable outcome of a course of events whose pattern the theory claims to plot; then the theory's standing as a justification of policy which accords with those expectations will be very high. A theory is likely to be useful as a justification for policy, then, if it can be shown firstly, that the policies proposed somehow accord with the theory, secondly, that both policies and theory advance the fortunes of those whose support is sought, and thirdly, that such expectations and such justification are rational because the theory is true, because it bears the stamp of scientific objectivity.

Now of course in many countries political policies for which popular support is sought and achieved often or even usually get that support for much less "intellectualised" reasons than those I have been discussing. For instance, at the present time political parties in most Western countries at any rate seek electoral support much more commonly by promising material benefits if they are returned to office, by

slandering their opponents or by praising their own record, than by claiming that their policies somehow follow from certain theories about historical development. In some of these countries, there has been a general decline in the importance attached to "ideas" and "ideologies", and a decline in the influence of the doctrinaire, especially in domestic policy - witness the tendency which many writers have observed for the Right and the Left to come together, in British countries at any rate ¹; the growing tendency of both sides towards pragmatic rather than doctrinarian ^{and politics} government, ² and, say, the decline of the prominence of socialization in the platforms of the Australian and British Labour Parties.

These developments are perhaps more notable in the politically stable - or even dull - countries: those in which there is a well established two -party (or few party) system, which have been politically independent for many generations, in which there is very wide agreement on a great range of internal political questions, which have not for a very long time suffered military defeat and occupation and which have not great problems of reconstruction or stabilization.

1. And elsewhere too - for example, the coalition government in post-war Austria.
2. Government and politics ^{are} always pragmatic: I mean openly, avowedly, pragmatic.

Even in these countries however, on questions of international relations and foreign affairs - and this is what Morgenthau was referring to¹ - the decline of ideology is not so clear. For example, a good deal of thinking on problems of colonial withdrawal has been coloured by notions about preparing colonial territories for self-government which are based on a democratic ideology which emphasizes preparation of a whole population - mainly to certain minimum educational standards - rather than the encouragement of a small native elite. Again, in the period of which Morgenthau was speaking, the notion of world "bi-polarity" was, it could be argued, a concept which to some extent tended to sacrifice the possibility of viable policy and diplomatic flexibility to theoretical neatness.

But the leading twentieth century examples of ideologies in politics, or of theories being used to bolster policies, are surely the cases where Communist and Fascist doctrines are involved - in domestic policy, in the case of the Communist and Fascist regimes in Europe and Asia; and in foreign affairs (though the line between domestic and foreign is not sharp), in the foreign policies of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, the Soviet

¹. See above, Introduction, pp. 7-8.

Union and Communist China.¹ Again, this is not of course to maintain that, say, the history of the Third International or Hitler's rise to power, could be interpreted solely in terms of belief in the inevitability of Communist world revolution or of convictions about the destiny of the Aryan race. But arguments of this kind were certainly used to explain or justify policy. While it would be immensely difficult - as with Social Darwinian arguments a generation before - to estimate the relative weight of such arguments, it would certainly be foolhardy to deny, a priori, their function as a justification for policy, especially in connexion with the improved techniques and heightened importance of propaganda, or to minimize their role as a focal point for the crystallization of attitudes and opinions.

Now, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, the countries in which Social Darwinian arguments were used to help bolster policy proposals were not, in some relevant respects, as politically placid as they are today. In foreign affairs, arguments were sought to justify colonial expansion, not colonial withdrawal, and to justify international warfare, not world peace. In

1. Other examples might include nationalist ideologies in many former colonial territories, though I do not know what element of determinism there is in these, and perhaps the role of Gandhism in India.

In domestic affairs, notably in America and Britain, the question of ^{the} proper limits of state action - laissez-faire or socialism - was a very open question (not, of course, that it has since been definitely settled, though the range of disagreement is a great deal narrower). Here again, given a large, literate electorate, whose support and approval, or the reverse, might be crucial in deciding, in broad terms, certain large and open political issues, arguments were sought to win support for each side, and there was scope for theory and ideology to provide them. As far as Social Darwinism figured in such arguments, its success as a justification lay, I believe, in the following characteristics of the theory.

Firstly the claim to be scientific. I have argued elsewhere ¹ that science enjoyed highly popular prestige in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In particular, the success of natural science in transforming and controlling man's environment had so added to this prestige that a potent justification for social or political policy lay in the claim to show that it was somehow derivable from or consistent with well-established theories in natural science itself. My contention is not that the statesman was expected to act as a scientist - especially since, taken literally,

1. See above, Introduction & Chap. 4, pp. 150-157, and below, Appendix A. involve

that might well involve extremely risky experiments. It is rather that, in so far as theories, in the sense of explanatory hypotheses or even laws about the nature or pattern of social phenomena, ~~phenomena~~, were invoked to justify policy - and, I have contended, Social Darwinism was so invoked - such justification was more likely to be convincing or acceptable the closer the theory came to the nineteenth century ideal of the scientific. Social Darwinism seems to have fulfilled that requirement very well.

Next, a special attraction of Social Darwinism lay in its congeniality with the ruling morality, or at any rate the ruling class morality, of those countries where it flourished. As Gobineau had observed, "For a system of ideas to be really fruitful and convincing, it must suit the particular ways of thought and feeling current among the people to whom it is offered",¹ and Social Darwinism seems to have fulfilled this requirement to perfection in post-Civil War America and in imperialist England and Europe.² Commager has argued that, in the United States, "Morality itself was furnished, for the first time, with a scientific foundation" and that Spencer's philosophy had an obvious value for the dominant interests in society.

1. op.cit. p.89.

2. op.cit., pp.97, 89.

Similarly, D.G. Ritchie commented on how comfortable is the doctrine of struggle for existence "for all those who are quite satisfied with things as they are",¹ and went on to observe that "there can be no doubt that the formulae of Evolution do supply an apparent justification to the defenders of uncontrolled laissez-faire and to the champions, more or less consistent and thorough-going, of existing inequalities of race, class and sex, and a plausible weapon of attack against those who look to something better than slavery or competition as the basis of human society."² Not only, however, did Social Darwinism appeal to the satisfied because it seemed to give their way of life a scientific sanction; it also offered a slender chance even to the dissatisfied, the unsuccessful, for there was always the possibility that their turn would come next in the endless process of selection. And further, in the case of its application to foreign policy, by making the move from individual competitors within a nation to collective competition among nations, Social Darwinism could even offer a vicarious satisfaction to the unsuccessful by raising his hopes that his species at least, his nation or race, would triumph in this greater conflict.

1. op.cit., p.3.

2. ibid., pp.11-12.

Again, Social Darwinism could make the nineteenth century's belief in progress appear to be no longer a matter of faith only but a matter of scientific fact. "Progress was no longer a mere conclusion of logic but a necessity of nature."¹ Men would of course continue to contend with one another - in society, no less than in nature, struggle selection and survival was an inevitable and natural process. But it was a beneficent process too, and those whose success might trouble their conscience could take comfort in the knowledge that their survival inevitably followed from their fitness and that their fitness was both an individual and a collective blessing, enhancing the prospects of their group. For on the larger stage of conflict among races or nations, there too the final struggle for survival was inevitable but inevitably progressive, for only the fittest races or nations would be chosen and the inferior would succumb.

But to speak of progress in this way, to talk about the evolution of man or society or history towards certain goals - although in fact Social Darwinism prescribed no specifiable goals - is to conceive mankind, society or or history in a unitary or holistic^{way}; specifying the

1. Commager, op.cit., p.87. Cf. Barzun, op.cit., p.69: "... A generation of thinkers whose greatest desire was to get rid of vitalism, will, purpose, or design as explanations of life, and to substitute for them an automatic material cause."

inevitable, including inevitable progress, involves monism, the belief that there is an underlying harmony and oneness which entitles us to speak about humanity or society or history as moving in certain directions.¹ Now, Social Darwinism was precisely such a unifying concept. In "an age much given to discovering harmonies",² the idea of evolution by natural selection of the fittest provided a key which, in the systems of Spencer and Haeckel, was used to open the door to the understanding of reality as a whole, and even in the less ambitious hands of politicians and publicists anxious to promote particular policies, it was used to show how this or that proposal was in tune with the inevitable movement of the universe.

The psychological attractions of inevitability, of using "history as an alibi" as Berlin puts it,³ are great. Discussing another and much more influential determinist theory of modern times, Morris Ginsberg says that the followers of Marx, "in their flight from anything that savours of theology, are anxious to avoid the use of teleological terminology and are thus led to stress the automatic or necessary character of social development.

1. cf. Flamenatz, op.cit., Chapter One.

2. Parrington, op.cit., p.106, cf. R.E.L. Paris, in Persons, op.cit., p.161.

3. See especially, Historical Inevitability, pp.39,78.

Popular exponents of Marxism lay stress alternately on the scientific certainty and inevitability of communism and on the need for vigorous individual effort. This ambiguity is 'ideologically' convenient. Widespread belief in the inevitability of communism is one way of weakening resistance to it, and it is comforting to believe ^{both} that salvation lies in your own hands and that history is on your side.¹ Whether we believe, with the Marxists, that the historical process can be speeded up by man's intervention; or share the orthodox Social Darwinists' conviction that human interference with the natural processes of social evolution can avail nothing—in either case, the burden of decision is lightened by the conviction that what we decide to promote or accept is inevitably determined anyway. If history is on your side, there is sufficient comfort in that. The Marxists may have derived even more satisfaction from the conviction that their efforts to give the world a future different from its present were certain to succeed; but such a transformation was known to involve effort and suffering. The Social Darwinists could derive as much additional satisfaction from their conviction that the present could be no better than it was, that the future would be better still, and that the only effort required

1. The Idea of Progress—A Revaluation, Methuen, London 1953
p.38.

was to curb man's weakness for interference.

Convictions like that can be held with the tenacity of religious beliefs. If science could substitute for religion in providing a basis for belief in determinism - if Evolution could replace Providence - then it is not surprising that adherence to determinist doctrines became widespread when science and above all The Origin of Species began to challenge traditional religion. Nor is it surprising that there was such a strong alliance, especially in the United States, between orthodox religion and Social Darwinism. For Social Darwinism claimed to demonstrate, to prove, the underlying unity of man, society and history. This carried with it the great attraction that the distinction between the individual, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rest of society or mankind or the world, the rest of a probably hostile reality, was no

1. cf. Charles H. Pearson, National Life and Character, 1893, 2nd. ed., Macmillan, London, 1894. This book won from John Morley the commendation that it "opens, collects, expounds and illustrates vast issues in the evolution of states and races, better worth examining and thinking about, than can be found in any other book of the same period". (The Works of Lord Morley, Macmillan, London, 1921; Vol. IV, Politics and History, p. 56) There are few traces of Social Darwinism in Pearson, but his book is impressive for its sobriety and interesting for its unflinching acceptance of the conclusions to which Pearson's thoroughly determinist view of the future relations of different races leads him. He began from the assumption of European Superiority, but argued that the Europeans will be the means of their own undoing, that they are "the blind instruments of fate for multiplying the races that are now our subjects, and will one day be our rivals... The solitary consolation will be, that the changes have been inevitable". (pp. 89-90) My italics. 2. e.g. in Fiske & Strong, and in the easy mixing of religious

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longer valid. To perceive unity was to perceive that one belonged.

The religious elements of determinist theory -the claim to certainty, the exhibition of the unity of the universe, and the offer to embrace the individual in the great cosmic movement -these elements have often been remarked.¹ The desire to feel that one is part of the great movement of history is satisfied by determinist theory. The individual proletarian in a hostile world is comforted by the belief that it is his class to which the future belongs. Again, faith in the destiny of his race may sustain the believers: "Nothing is so convincing as the consciousness of the possession of Race. The man who belongs to a distinct, pure race, never loses the sense of it... Race lifts a man above himself: it endows him with extraordinary - I might almost say supernatural- powers, so
2 (cont. from p. 352) with racial, national and evolutionary justifications of imperialism.

1. See, e.g., Hayek, op.cit., p.153; and Saloman, op.cit., p.73, on the religion of Positivism: "Like no institution that had existed since the medieval church, the religion of progress offered an escape from all personal responsibility since all decisions would be left to the authorities." Cf. Collingwood, op.cit., pp.265-6, arguing that patterns of history are accepted only "because they have become the orthodoxy of what is in fact, though not necessarily in name, a religious community...at any rate in the case of Marxism, historical schemes of the kind in question proved to have an important magical value as providing a focus for the emotions and in consequence an incentive to action."

entirely does it distinguish him from the individual who springs from the chaotic jumble of peoples, drawn from all parts of the world." ¹ And again, speaking of the way in which many of his contemporaries tried to justify policy by showing that it "accords with the tendencies of the day, that it is a part of our manifest destiny as a nation, that it is inevitable, and so forth", L.T. Hobhouse makes the point that the fear of being excluded extends to the fear of holding unconventional views. "As a social creature man does not like to be left out in the cold. He loves to be in the swim, and when he is told that his side is winning, that its success is so certain that his own vote is little more than a formality, he makes all the more haste to record that vote, and add his unit to the swelling majority. In this way and by such means as these do prophecies become the causes of their own fulfilment." ²

The connexion between the two psychological desires for certainty and for belonging is brought out clearly by Erich Fromm. Fromm starts from the view, which Gobineau also expressed, that, to be politically effective, any doctrine or idea, whether true or false, must appeal to the psychological needs and the interests of certain

1. Houston Stuart Chamberlain, op.cit., Vol. 1. p. 209

2. L.T. Hobhouse, Social Evolution, p. 81.

social groups. He argues that the capacity of the doctrine to satisfy will not depend on its truth but on its ability to meet these psychological needs. In particular, as he argues in the case of Martin Luther, when the psychological need is ^{to} still an "irrational doubt which springs from the isolation and powerlessness of an individual whose attitude towards the world is one of anxiety and hatred, the mere claim to truth will not guarantee that a theory will be acceptable. What is needed is something much more like a "doctrine" in the sense in which Sumner uses that word. Fromm goes on: "This irrational doubt can never be cured by rational answers; it can only disappear if the individual becomes an integral part of a meaningful world... The compulsive quest for certainty, as we find it in Luther, is not the expression of genuine faith but is rooted in the need to conquer unbearable doubt. Luther's solution is one which we find present in many individuals today, who do not think in theological terms: namely, to find certainty by elimination of the isolated individual self, by becoming an instrument in the hands of an overwhelmingly strong power outside the individual."¹

But however closely determinist theories may be likened,

1. Erich Fromm, The Fear of Freedom, Kegan Paul, London 1942, p.66, Fromm's emphasis.

in their psychological impact, to religions, they are distinguished from religion by one crucially important claim, namely, the claim to be scientific. Determinism claims to have reached certainty, exhibited unity, and proved progress, not through blind faith but through rational science. Social Darwinism was a classic example of this kind of theory, for it claimed to derive directly from the most impeccable scientific sources, no matter how far afield the lavish application of biologism happened to lead nor how tenuous the ties with Darwin's own theory became. In the field of politics, it was the scientism of Social Darwinism which especially enabled it to become an influence in policy-making in the western world for a generation. The great glory of science was not so much its ability to explain the world as the power it gave men to work with the forces of nature to achieve their ends, and so to redeem them from the tyranny of ignorance and chance in their lives. Just so, it was the claim to find a rational, scientific basis for policy, a justification residing in conformity with inevitable laws of natural and social development, that gave Social Darwinism its political usefulness. In this way, determinism appears to solve one great dilemma of politics—the dilemma of not being able to test a theory until we are sure it is true, but of not being able to know it is true

until we test it. For it removes theory from the realm of the hypothetical, that which can be tested, to the higher level of certainty, that which conforms with the inevitable; and it removes practice from the realms of the pragmatic, enabling those who invoke it to present their policies as infallible. And further, by professing to offer a scientifically grounded but unfalsifiable theory of the inevitable as the basis for political conduct, determinism lightens the burden of responsibility and decision-making, at the same time endowing policy with the stamp of some superhuman authority, so that acceptance of the policy is not obedience to the will of a ruler but conformity with the impersonal momentum of universal development.

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Appendix A.

The Popular Impact of Darwin.

How successfully arguments based on Darwinian premisses could be used (alongside other arguments) to gain support for proposed policies depended very much on the extent to which Darwinian ideas were current not only among theorists and policy-makers but among the population at large. For that population, in late nineteenth century Europe and America, had generally won the right to a degree of political participation which meant that its support, or at least the absence of majority disapproval, might be an important factor in the adoption and success of any public policy. Policy had to be defended as well as imposed and to use Darwinian grounds successfully in its defence presupposed that such grounds were fairly generally known and understood. How far was this presupposition well founded?

The answer to this could begin by referring to the tremendous impact of science on the popular mind and the prestige which Darwin's work immediately enjoyed as a great scientific achievement. It was its very scientific respectability which made the doctrine seem applicable in other fields than biology. Not only did the social theorists hasten to jump on the scientific band wagon of

evolution, but, contrariwise, a great many natural scientists showed no less enthusiasm for excursions into the unfamiliar field of social theory. Hayes lists ¹ seven who all applied evolution to man and society - Hooker, Lyell, Lubbock, Huxley, Tyndall, Haeckel, and Asa Gray. It was accepted by both sides "that social science must become more like natural science, so that the new society might be built as an engineer builds a bridge. This seized on the imagination of people everywhere and provided language for many different factions."²

That the language of science was already popularly familiar by 1859 is attested by the reception of the Origin. Geoffrey West gives an account of the press reaction to it in the last weeks of 1859, and in the new year. Charles Bunbury, a botanist and Lady Lyell's brother-in-law, noted in March, 1860: "Darwin's book has made a greater sensation than any strictly scientific book that I remember. It is wonderful how much it is talked about by unscientific people' - both by those who had read it without understanding and those who had not read it at all!" The anatomist Owen also added his testimony, informing a Parliamentary Committee that 'the whole intellectual world

1. C. J. H. Hayes, A Generation of Materialism, 1871-1900, Harpers, N.Y., 1941, p. 10

2. W. J. M. Mackenzie, "Political Theory and Political Education".

this year has been excited by a book on the origin of species', to such effect that visitors came to the British Museum demanding to be shown exhibits displaying 'those phenomena which could aid one in getting at that mystery of mysteries, the origin of species'. He added: 'I must say that the number of intellectual individuals interested in the great question which is mooted in Mr. Darwin's book is far beyond the small class expressly concerned in scientific research.'¹

In spite of T.H. Huxley's rather unkind estimate² of Darwin's English prose, the easiness of his style is given as one important reason for the popularity of the Origin by Charles H. Pearson: "Probably the instantaneous success of Mr. Darwin's Origin of Species was due very much to the admirable simplicity and sustained interest of the narrative which even the general public could follow sufficiently to understand."³ Similarly, Karl Pearson attributed much of Darwin's success to his style, which, like Newton's and Faraday's, substituted simplicity for technicalities.

After advocating an "active doubt" in a Boxing Day review in The Times, Huxley settled his own doubts and

1. Charles Darwin- A Portrait , p.254.

2. See above Chap. 5, p.162.

3. National Life and Character, p.330.

thereafter became Darwin's greatest champion. William Irvine emphasizes the tremendous impact of Huxley as a popularizer of the Darwinian doctrine, referring, for example, to his profound impression on an audience of working men to whom he lectured in 1862. Irvine speculates on the effect the Origin might have had without Huxley. "Sooner or later", he thinks, it would have been felt. "But science would not have enjoyed such dazzling prestige among politicians and businessmen, nor figured, perhaps so prominently in the late-nineteenth-century school curriculum. Its general victory over tradition would have been slower, less complete, and certainly less dramatic. Huxley turned what promised to be a dull war of attrition into a brilliant campaign. He created a legend, both for himself and for Darwin, founded a new priesthood, and very nearly made England a scientific nation".

Space devoted to discussion and reviews of the Origin practically put it in the best-seller class. In addition to reviews by eminent scientists like the botanist Hooker and the biologist W.B. Carpenter in learned journals, the controversial nature of the theory won it much attention from the popular press. Alvar

1. Apes, Angels and Victorians, p.136

2. ibid. P.118

¹
Ellergard lists thirty-nine British journals, other than learned journals, in which the Darwinian theory was discussed between 1859 and 1872. These journals were dailies, weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies, of all shades of political opinion, with circulations ranging from 1,000 to 100,000, and representing Roman Catholic, Anglican and non-conformist views. As Ellergard points out, "Darwin's opponents in the press were numerically much stronger than his supporters. Even when belief in Evolution began to prevail among the educated sections of the public, towards the end of the sixties, the distinctively Darwinian form of it, Evolution by Natural Selection, was acceptable to a small minority only." But even controversy was publicity, and the tide of conversion constantly swelled.

The impact of science in general, and of Darwin and Spencer in particular, in the United States in the decades after the Civil War, has frequently been emphasized by American writers. Foremost among them is, perhaps, V.L. Parrington.² Parrington argues that the post-war period was characterized by a reversal of the³

1. "Darwinian Theory and Philosophies of Science", Journal of the History of Ideas, June, 1957.

2. The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America.

3. ibid., pp.190 ff.

movement of continuous expansion, six generations old, when the frontier disappeared and development became a matter of urban industrialization, with science and industrial technique replacing agricultural and pastoral ability as the desiderata for success, and the struggle being now one with men rather than with nature. Parrington sees parallels between the periods of expansion and the idea of progress, and the era of consolidation and the idea of determinism, with Spencer's popularity, in the decades when those two notions were in conflict, largely resting on his attempt to combine them. "During the seventies, biological evolution... was reckoned a fulfillment and justification of the ideal of the Enlightenment, sanctioning the doctrine of progress that had arisen from the conception of human perfectability by a teleological conception of cosmic progress, glorifying the idea of democratic individualism, and putting the seal of scientific approval on the philosophy of anarchism that had been the flower of two and a half centuries of the dispersion. And then in the nineties... with the substitution of physics for biology came a more sombre view that was to ... substitute a mechanistic conception

l.e.g., in Brooks Adams' The Law of Civilization and Decay,
1895, in Henry Adams, and in Haeckel.

for the earlier teleological progress, and reshape its philosophy in harmony with a deterministic pessimism that denied purpose or plan in the changing universe of matter, .. It was this middle ground between those two views¹ that Herbert Spencer came to occupy in the minds of his American disciples... holding to the older individualism with its implication of anarchism, yet creating a cosmic philosophy that foreshadowed the eventual dwarfing of the individual."

Although agnosticism in religion, or at least Spencer's separation of the Unknowable from the Knowable, was a mark of the English evolutionary school, the leading American publicist of evolution, John Fiske, in his Cosmic Philosophy "took high theistic ground" and in a series of pamphlets up to 1900, Fiske "turned to outline the religious faith of an evolutionist."² Thus Fiske helped to prevent the alienation of many who might otherwise have been unwilling to accept Darwinism at the price of seeing their religious convictions evaporate, in the way this had happened with Sumner and with Darwin himself.

Furthermore, "as a purveyor of Victorian science to the American people (Fiske) did a useful and important work."³

1. Farrington, op.cit., pp.190-193. Compare the very similar argument in Commager, The American Mind, p.89.

2. Farrington, op.cit., p.209. 3. ibid., p.211.

Fiske's main contribution to the Social Darwinian movement was as a propagandist. "Articles and books flowed ceaselessly from his unflinching pen, and when he was not writing he was talking... to women's clubs to universities, to churches, to the President and his cabinet."¹

Fiske's success as a popularizer of Darwinism was greatly facilitated by the immense prestige which science as such enjoyed in post-war America. Richard Hofstadter² has emphasized the importance of the new scientific journals in that period and the new stress on science in the universities. Hofstadter points to the work of Edward Youmans in persuading Appelton's to issue Spencer's work and to publish Appelton's Journal from 1867 and Popular Science Monthly from 1872. He draws attention to the full reporting in the daily press of such events as Fiske's Harvard lectures on the Cosmic Philosophy and Huxley's lectures in New York in 1876. And he indicates how things like the founding of Johns Hopkins University in that year and the appointment of a chemist, C.Y. Eliot, as President of Harvard in 1869, exemplified the new trend in

1. Commager, op.cit., p.88.

2. Social Darwinism in American Thought, Chap.I.

in academic thinking. Hofstadter also mentions the Harvard botanist Asa Gray's acceptance of Darwin, and the opposition to him of Louis Agassiz. Gray's importance in the spread of Darwinism is highly rated by William Irvine: "He was the foremost American Botanist and ... an unparalleled power among his younger colleagues... a major force in general education... a wide influence in the most important cultural city in America.... a deep and personal sense of religion, he inspired confidence throughout that whole section of American liberals who were optimistically convinced that science and religion could effect a beneficent compromise... the Origin divided Harvard as it divided the world. In a series of dramatic public debates, Gray won an impressive victory over the famous geologist Agassiz." ¹

How far Spencer rode on the wave of enthusiasm for science in America or how far he helped to create it, it is impossible to say. In any case, the popularity of science and the vogue of Spencer are not easily separable. Parrington says that "The appeal of Spencer to the generation born after the Civil War was extraordinary... It is probably no exaggeration to say that Spencer laid out the broad highway over which American thought travelled in l.op.cit., p.111.

the later years of the century... The net result...of Spencer's wide studies was a fresh justification, based on the findings of Victorian Science, of the master principles of eighteenth-century application; its individualism, its liberalism, its passion for justice, its love of liberty and distrust of every form of coercion.¹ In his summary of the argument of Brooks Adams's book, The Law of Civilization and Decay, Parrington brings out the remarkable parallel to the argument of Spencer's First Principles, and the Spencerian echoes are scarcely fainter in passages of the Education of Henry Adams, though Henry's conversion was not through Spencer himself and it was a less thorough conversion too. Henry "felt, like nine men in ten, an instinctive belief in Evolution" which he derived from his avid reading of the geological works of Sir Charles Lyell, whom Adams met during his sojourn in London from 1861-to 1867, and especially his Antiquity of Man (1863). "Sir Charles next brought out, in 1866, a new edition of his Principles, then the highest text-book of geology; but here the Darwinian doctrine grew in stature. Natural Selection led back to Natural Evolution, and at last to Natural Uniformity,

1.op.cit., pp.197-200

This was a vast stride. Unbroken Evolution under uniform conditions pleased everyone-except curates and bishops; it was the very best publicity for religion; a safe, conservative, practical, thoroughly common-law deity." Though Adams confesses that "All he could prove was change", that he could not "detect Evolution" because "the idea of one Form, Law, Order, or Sequence had no more value for him than the idea of none", still he did not struggle against "the current of his time." "For the young men whose lives were cast in the generation between 1867 and 1900, Law should be Evolution from lower to higher, aggregation of the atom in the mass, concentration of multiplicity in unity, compulsion of anarchy in order; and (Adams) would force himself to follow wherever (the current) led..." He was, he said, "a Darwinian for fun", but a Darwinian nevertheless.¹

Spencer's impact on the United States has been extensively examined by Hofstadter,² who insists that it was greater there than in Europe, and that it was greater too than Darwin's influence. Hofstadter, like Adams, argues that Spencer's system provided a substitute for

1. The Education of Henry Adams. (written in 1905), Constable, London, 1918. pp. 225, 230-232.

2. op.cit., Chap. II.

religious beliefs which were falling into discredit before the onrush of science, "Moreover, it was not a technical creed for professionals. Presented in language that tyros in philosophy could understand, it made Spencer the metaphysician of the home-made intellectual, and the prophet of the cracker-barrel agnostic."¹ William James was violently critical of Spencer, but there was a gap from the sixties to the nineties that Spencer filled, though the Americans regarded him as much more than a mere stop-gap before the emergence of Idealism and Pragmatism. He "was to most of his educated American contemporaries a great man, a great intellect, a giant force in the history of thought."

W.G.Sumner did not indulge in the barnstorming technique or the public campaigning of Spencer and Huxley. But the impact he had on American attitudes seems to have been very great. R.G.McClosky says² that "The essays were widely distributed and much quoted; and at Yale, where the influence of Sumner's personality was felt directly, whole generations of undergraduates were given to Sumnerology" - a reference to a reminiscent article

1. ibid., p.21

2. R.G.McCloskey, American Conservatism-In the Age of Enterprise.

written in 1925 by W.L.Phelps, "When Yale was given to
Sumnerology". McCloskey also notes the opinion of H.E.
Barnes that Sumner "made his practical influence on the
mind of the nation greater than that of any other sociologist!"

REALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY

P. D. MARCHANT

[N this article I want to make some observations on the work of a very influential school of writers on foreign affairs who refer to themselves as "realists". These thinkers are most prominent in the United States and they have become most influential since the end of the Second World War, in the period when, it has become clear that, after years of isolation and several false starts in world affairs, America now occupies a central position on the world stage. The work of these thinkers is characterised by at least three notable features—by an impatience with reformers, idealists, do-gooders, and any other sort of Utopianism; by a plea for the dispassionate study of international affairs and the history of foreign policy with a view to learning how international politics do in fact work, rather than attempting to make them work in certain ways; and by insisting that both students and statesmen recognise that what they are concerned with is inter-national politics, that it is the nation that is, as it were, the unit—not mankind, or the world, or the international community, or some other abstract totality.

I must try to make clear at the outset what my terms of reference are. I do not want to raise the question of the wisdom of realist foreign policy, of whether, for example, Western statesmen should or should not make policy decisions in the light of realist theory. I am concerned only with the theory itself from what is, I hope, a philosophical point of view. This, by the way, is in no sense unfair to the realists, for, as we shall presently see, it is from precisely this point of view that they invite discussion. One other introductory point of explanation is this—while I am not concerned here with the practical politics of realism, this does not exclude an examination of the relation between theory and practice in the realist position, and in fact one of the main points of criticism I have to offer is that the realists' anxiety to have a practical theory, one that can be put into practice, is the source of some of their most serious theoretical and philosophical difficulties.

One of the leaders of this realist school of thinking is Professor Hans J. Morgenthau, and it is with his writings, or some of them, that I will mainly be dealing. Professor Morgenthau shares with other realists a keen interest in what is known nowadays as foreign policy analysis and in the actual formation of foreign policy. At the same time, he is devoted to the attempt to work out a theory of international politics. But the two sides of his work are never quite separate, nor, I would argue, quite distinct. It may therefore be appropriate to begin the consideration of the realist position by looking at an article of Morgenthau's in which the two aspects to which I have referred are both prominent.

The article, entitled "The Great Debate", appeared in *The*

American Political Science Review for December, 1952, and attracted a good deal of attention. Professor Morgenthau says that the "great debate" which he sees going on in post-war discussions of American foreign policy, differs in an important respect from earlier great debates in American history, debates over such questions as intervention in the French Revolutionary War in 1793, or joining the League of Nations in the nineteen-twenties. For whereas those debates raised the question of making a choice between two fairly clear-cut alternatives, roughly, isolation or entanglement in European and world affairs, the present debate, says Professor Morgenthau, is one at the *philosophical* level—"What sets them (i.e. the realists and the Utopians) apart is not necessarily a matter of practical judgment, but of philosophies and standards of thought." It is this contention of Morgenthau's, on which he lays considerable emphasis, that the issue is a philosophical one, that I want to take up.

Of course, anyone who normally claims to be a realist in politics may not be at all interested in any of those philosophical positions which have been called realist. And a good deal of the work of Morgenthau and such other writers as George Kennan, is an appeal for realism in the straightforward sense of facing up to the facts, even, or especially, the unpleasant ones, not deceiving oneself, not leaving issues to solve themselves and so on. There is much of this in this present article of Morgenthau's, too, and in so far as political realism means no more than this hard-headed, common-sense view of politics and policy making, the criticisms which follow leave it untouched. What I am concerned with are the philosophical bases and presuppositions on which Morgenthau rests his position and the confusions, damaging to the working out of a theory of international relations, to which I believe they lead.

Stating the realist position, Morgenthau says that this "school believes that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces which are inherent in human nature. To improve the world, we must work with these forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realised but at best approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests. . . . This school . . . appeals to historic precedent rather than to abstract principles and aims at the achievement of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good".

This passage raises the three main issues which an examination of Morgenthau's view must consider. Firstly, there is his belief that the range of choices open to statesmen in the formation of foreign policy is strictly limited, that there are certain forces which determine not only the sort of world we live in, but the range of policies we can attempt to follow in the world, and that any rational policy must take these forces into account. Morgenthau completely rejects the possibility of forming viable foreign policies which ignore or

go against these forces. He argues that idealist or Utopian foreign policies are bound to fail because, in trying to impose a certain order on the facts of political life, they ignore not only the lessons of history which show that such attempts have in fact always failed, but also the essential nature of the political process itself. "Moral principles can never be fully realised", he says, and policies which seek to see them fully realised are not merely ill-advised—they are irrational, unreal and ultimately meaningless.

Secondly, Morgenthau shows here (and even more clearly elsewhere in this article and other writings) that his interest is by no means limited to working out a theory about the nature of international politics and of foreign policy. He is also strongly interested in seeing the theory applied, in seeing it used as a guide in the formation of foreign policy. While there is no necessary connection between the holding of a realist view about international history and about the actual policies pursued by states in the past or in the present—no necessary connection between that and the advocacy of particular policies, I would argue that in fact Morgenthau's work does exhibit a confusion of theory with practice and that this is detrimental to his theorising. For example, whereas the sentence "To improve the world, we must work with these forces, not against them", may be no more than a hypothetical statement—"If you want this, you must do that"—it is going far beyond such a theoretical pronouncement to say, "This school . . . aims at the achievement of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good". This is a straightforward statement of policy.

Finally, closely connected with this second point, there emerges a suggestion of the view which Morgenthau elaborates in another place, the view that the realist position is neither amoral nor immoral. In eschewing "the absolute good" which the Utopian or idealist statesman pursues, the realist is by no means committed to moral neutrality. He must at least make a moral judgment about the "lesser evil", and, furthermore, it is said to be the realist's aim to pursue this end. Morgenthau develops this view in his book, *American Foreign Policy*,¹ where he has a section entitled "The moral Dignity of the National Interest". There, Morgenthau says: "The equation of political moralising with morality and of political realism with immorality is itself untenable. The choice is not between moral principles and the national interest, devoid of moral dignity, but between one set of moral principles divorced from political reality, and another set of moral principles derived from political reality".² Morgenthau wants to argue that private, personal ethics are inapplicable in international politics, in which field moral principles are unreal and inapplicable, unless they are based on the notion of the national interest. I shall argue that Morgenthau fails to maintain this moral dualism consistently.

¹ Methuen, London, 1952.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Now, if it is true, as Morgenthau argues, that the issue between the realists and the Utopians is in fact a philosophical issue, then it seems to me that the three points I have made are possibly the main philosophical questions which are raised, and they are the questions I propose to consider. These points are, first, the contention that there are certain fundamental determinants forming the iron framework within which foreign policy must be conducted ; second, the application of realist theory ; and third, the question of realism and morality in international politics. I want to begin by discussing the second point, then the third, and to finish with some observations on the first.

It could be argued that one stimulus to the realist study of international politics was impatience with inter-war idealism. Realism may be seen in part as a reaction against the failure of Wilsonian idealism, of the League, of democracy in the face of totalitarianism.

But the realist critique is not directed only at showing why the isolationists and idealists were wrong. The incentive to find a policy to save us from a further disaster is at least as strong now as it was after 1918. So that what is required is not just an exhibition of the reasons for Utopian failure, but the laying bare of the fundamental mechanics of international politics so that the new policies cannot be wrong, or will at least avoid the mistakes of the old ones. The realists seek what the Americans are fond of calling an " applicable body of theory ". It must be a theory from which certain maxims about the conduct of foreign policy can, as it were, be read off. And I would argue that, in approaching the working out of a theory in this way, in trying to work out both theory and policy together, the emphasis on the need for applicability tends to lead to a serious fundamental mistake in realist theory, the mistake of trying to make the facts fit into the theory, an error which leads to the distortion of both. Theory and its application are two different things, and wanting to have an " applicable body of theory " should make us doubly careful to see that the theory is sound and to remember that attempts to *make* it applicable could be at least as disastrous in foreign policy as conveniently modifying physical theories could be in bridge building.

Now, I think that Morgenthau does allow his concern with policy to distort his view of theory. In his discussion of the notion of national interest, which is, he says, " the key concept in the realist conception of foreign policy ", he begins by asking, " How can we define it and give it the content which will make it a guide for action ?"¹ There is nothing objectionable in this as a way of working out a guide to policy. Nor is there anything objectionable, from the methodological point of view, in the approach to the history of foreign policy which Morgenthau adopts. What does seem to me

¹ " The Great Debate ".

unwarranted is Morgenthau's claim that the study of this history from his point of view shows that the criterion of the national interest has been the sole guide to the policy of the successful statesmen of the past. What I want to maintain is that Morgenthau's anxiety to defend national interest as the only rational motive of present foreign policy causes him to read into the historical record interpretations which he does not substantiate and which the record does not support.

Morgenthau stresses the importance of the appeal to history, and, as far as possible, of learning from past experience. "It is elementary", he says, "that the character of foreign policy can be ascertained only through the examination of the political acts performed and of the foreseeable consequences of those acts. Thus, we can find out what statesmen have actually done, and from the foreseeable consequences of their acts we can surmise what their objects might have been. Yet", he goes on, "examination of the facts is not enough. To give meaning to the factual raw material of history, we must approach historical reality with a kind of rational outline, a map which suggests to us the possible meanings of history".¹ Here and in his other writings Morgenthau argues that such a guide is the notion of national interest and the mechanism through which it works, namely, the balance of power.

Now, it seems to me that here Morgenthau is thinking of the meaning of history in a rather special way, namely, in terms of the lessons we can learn from history as guides to the formulation of foreign policy. There would be nothing objectionable in embodying the notions of national interest and balance of power in a hypothesis which was set up to explain how foreign policy is formulated. We might try to show that the great historical decisions in foreign policy can be explained by reference to these notions, by pointing out that the statesmen who made them did so—made those decisions and not others—because they recognised and pursued the national interest, and because they realised that the ways in which it could be pursued were limited by the balance of power mechanism. The trouble about such a hypothesis is that it is very difficult to test, to know what would count as evidence for or against it. Unless the national interest is precisely defined, it would be easy, but unenlightening, to see it always informing the policy of the successful statesmen and quite absent from the minds of the unsuccessful. How could you show, as Morgenthau tries to in the case of President Wilson's decision to bring America into the first World War, that the real motives were concern for the national interest, no matter what "rationalisations" may have been produced nor how firmly they may have been held? What seems to me a telling example of the emptiness and adaptability of Morgenthau's concept is the case, to which I will refer later, of Alexander Hamilton. Morgenthau cites Hamilton as the defender of the national interest in the inter-

¹ *Ibid.*

vention debate in 1793, whereas A. H. Bowman,¹ who also takes national interest as his key, criticises Morgenthau as having fallen “into the trap which historians have fallen into for well over a hundred years” and for failing to see that it was really Jefferson and Madison who had the national interest at heart. Similar difficulties of applicability are involved, as I hope to show later, in the idea of balance of power. What I want to stress here is that Morgenthau’s failure to cover these difficulties leaves him exposed to the charge that he is saving his hypothesis and that he is imposing on historical facts an interpretation which does not fit them. The reason, or one main reason, for this, I suggest, is his concern to find an applicable body of theory, applicable, that is, to policy formation. The demand for a viable foreign policy seems to press with particular urgency on many American theorists, who nevertheless feel that such a policy must be well founded, preferably on historic precedent. Under these stimuli, a certain amount of hasty thinking and hypothesis-saving are not altogether unexpected and I do not think that Morgenthau escapes from these pitfalls.

The second aspect of Morgenthau’s work which I want to take up is his concern to deny that realist foreign policy is necessarily immoral or amoral. In maintaining this view, he appeals, as he does so often, to historic precedent in the shape of the views of the founders of the American Republic. In his book, *American Foreign Policy*, Morgenthau outlines the realist argument in the great debate of 1793 and from this outline comes some idea at any rate of the essential points in the concept of national interest. According to Morgenthau, though not, as we have seen, according to all commentators, the realist in 1793 was Hamilton, whose counter to those Utopians who wanted the United States to support France in the war of the First Coalition was to invoke the national interest of the United States. Madison and his fellow idealists had advocated support of France on three grounds—“Faithfulness to treaty obligations, gratitude toward a country that had lent its assistance to the colonies in their struggle for independence, and the affinity of republican institutions”.² Clearly, all three of these are what would ordinarily be called moral grounds—faithfulness, gratitude, and the belief that certain political institutions are good enough to defend and promote by fighting. Leaving aside the difficult question of whether these are what Morgenthau calls “absolute goods”, they are certainly values which eighteenth-century Western Europe and America held in high regard. Now, against this appeal to moral principles, Hamilton makes several points.³ The first is that contracts (the Franco-American treaty) are not *absolutely* binding if they involve “extraordinary and extreme hazards”. Secondly,

¹ “Jefferson, Hamilton and American Foreign Policy”, in the *Political Science Quarterly*, March, 1956.

² *American Foreign Policy*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-18.

the treaty is a case of a contract not absolutely binding because "the rule of morality in this respect is not precisely the same between nations as between individuals. The duty of making its own welfare the guide of its actions, is much stronger upon the former than upon the latter; in proportion to the greater magnitude and importance of national compared with individual happiness, and to the greater permanency of the effects of national than of individual conduct". Finally, there is an overriding consideration that makes the canons of private and personal morality inapplicable at the level of public and national conduct. This consideration is that "Self-preservation is the first duty of a nation; . . . It may be affirmed as a general principle, that the predominant motive of good offices from one nation to another, is the interest or advantage of the nation which performs them". Summing up Hamilton's position, Morgenthau asks:¹ "Must a nation subordinate its security, its happiness, nay, its very existence to the respect for treaty obligations, to the sentiment of gratitude, to sympathy with a kindred political system? This was the question Hamilton proposed to answer, and his answer was an unequivocal 'no'. To the issues raised by the opposition to Washington's proclamation of neutrality Hamilton unswervingly applied one standard: the national interest of the United States".

We could say then, at the very least, that the concept of national interest as used by Hamilton (and Morgenthau does not elaborate on his usage) involves the ideas of self-preservation of a nation as the supreme duty and of acting only to the national "advantage", i.e., in such a way as to promote the security, happiness and integrity of the nation. There is no possibility allowed that there are certain super-national values (e.g., liberty) which are worth the risks of self-sacrifice or even support unless, of course, failure to take such measures would endanger the existence or welfare of the nation. Now, without passing judgment on such a policy one way or the other, it is clear that it does cut across what were and are very widely accepted standards of moral conduct in the Western world. And if it were simply said, as Hamilton says, that the limits within which a government can "meritoriously indulge the emotions of generosity and benevolence" are very restricted, that foreign policy is something about which it is meaningless to make moral judgments—if that were said, we might deplore such an outlook, but we could not lay a charge of inconsistency or hypocrisy against it. Morgenthau, however, wary of going the whole way with the exponents of *realpolitik*, wants to be a realist and a moralist at the same time, and this ambivalence, I believe, is the source of considerable confusion in his position.

Morgenthau wants to have things both ways. He wants to follow Hamilton in arguing that the ethics of personal conduct do not apply in international affairs, and, at the same time, he wants to argue that the national interest has what he calls a moral dignity

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

of its own. Now, there would be no objection to this sort of moral dualism, if it were adhered to—no *logical* objection, I mean, to dividing the sphere of international conduct from that of personal conduct, and saying, certain standards of conduct apply in this area, certain other criteria in that. Having things both ways in this sense would raise no difficulties—except the difficulty of sticking to the dichotomy and, more important, the difficulty of distinguishing spheres of conduct in the first place. But I shall try to show that Morgenthau does not preserve the division between standards, that he tries inconsistently to bridge the gap by saying that both the national interest and what might be called on this occasion the domestic moral virtues both have value in terms of a single standard. I want to argue that Morgenthau, too, like Socrates in the *Parmenides*, has his own particular kind of “third man” difficulties.

Morgenthau’s main contention, which he repeats in different words an alarming number of times, is that “the antithesis that equates political moralising with morality and political realism with immorality is erroneous”.¹ Morgenthau wants to argue that those who defend this antithesis, the Utopians, “are guilty of both intellectual error and moral perversion”.² The intellectual error is the failure to grasp the lesson of history that “a foreign policy guided by moral abstractions, without consideration of the national interest, is bound to fail: for it accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself. All the successful statesmen of modern times from Richelieu to Churchill have made the national interest the ultimate standard of their policies, and none of the great moralists in international affairs has attained his goals”.³

Morgenthau’s reference to “moral abstractions” as a “standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself” refers to his view that foreign policy conducted in terms of the norms prevailing *within* a society cannot succeed. The first perversion of the moralising approach, he argues, is the failure to realise that there is no international consensus about the nature of such concepts as justice and equality. In the United States, for example, the meaning of such concepts can be roughly ascertained. But, Morgenthau says, “above the national societies there exists no international society so integrated as to be able to define for them the concrete meaning of justice or equality, as national societies do for their individual members . . . The appeal to moral principles in the international sphere has no concrete universal meaning”,⁴ and without this concreteness which particular societies give these principles they are unable to “provide rational guidance for political action”.

Now, I very much doubt whether moral standards within societies

¹ *American Foreign Policy*, p. 38.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

have the function Morgenthau attributes to them. He argues as if the appeal to moral principles within society has meaning, i.e., in his sense, is an applicable guide to action, because it will make sense to everybody in the society since everybody accepts these standards. There are, no doubt, certain minimum bases of agreement. But the disputes don't occur there but over moral issues on which there is no agreement, e.g., censorship, or integration. The most we can say is that in different societies different moral principles prevail from time to time, and that, even in America, certain moral values have to struggle for dominance or even survival. There are no permanent moral absolutes within societies any more than there are between societies—nor any less. There is just as much, or as little, moral justification for a crusader within national boundaries as beyond them.

Of course, it is true that the minimum moral consensus is very much less, if not altogether lacking, in international society compared with domestic societies. Certainly, a statesman would be unwise to commit his country to any course of action on the assumption that his opposite numbers will invariably act as gentlemen, and Morgenthau is right to rebuke naïveté of that order, if it occurs, in Utopians. But it is not clear what is morally perverse about this. Morgenthau may mean that it is morally perverse to set up a standard which cannot be adhered to, and which, as a guide to policy, will always bring failure, never success, i.e., a standard which will not work. In that case, and Morgenthau might be happy to accept this, the appeal to moral standards within society would also be morally perverse if that appeal doomed its cause to failure, or even, perhaps, if the cause were already doomed to failure—e.g., an anti-slavery campaign in Imperial Rome in the name of equality. One might call Utopianism or idealism of this order futile or untimely, but hardly morally perverse. Unless, perhaps, in falling short of realisation such a Utopian endeavour brought positive harm. In international affairs, Morgenthau would say that Utopianism which not only ignored but jeopardised the national interest was morally perverse because the price of its failure might be national extinction, and nothing is worth that. It is difficult to see that this is necessarily a more applicable standard than the appeal to absolutes. It could even be argued, I think, that some successful statesmen preserved the national interest of their countries by aiming at something else. Theodore Roosevelt is perhaps an example. But the main point is this, that in saying anything at all about the relative merits of the standards that might be applied to foreign policy, Morgenthau is invoking a third standard. He is saying that it is *absolutely* bad to jeopardise the national interest.

The Utopians, Morgenthau argues, are guilty of other “moral perversions”. One is that they are generally hypocritical, because their appeal to universal moral principles in fact acts as a disguise for less lofty aims. Such hypocrisy, which, he says, “carries a

negative moral connotation”, only brings the principles into disrepute. Further, Utopians endanger their own principles because they endanger the nation. “. . . a foreign policy guided by universal moral principles”, he says, “by definition relegating the national interest to the background is under contemporary conditions of foreign policy and warfare a policy of national suicide, actual or potential”.¹ Apart from the fact that Morgenthau has done nothing to show that an appeal to moral principles necessarily involves neglect of the national interest, it would need a lot of argument to show that national suicide entailed the death of those principles in whose name the national sacrifice was made.

But the more general criticism of Morgenthau’s attack on Utopianism as morally indefensible is, again, his failure to maintain the moral dualism without which he is bound to fall into inconsistencies. He is unwilling to say, with Machiavelli or Hamilton, “Moral standards just do not apply to foreign affairs. You might as well try to name the shape of a sound or the colour of a concept”. Instead of that, Morgenthau says that without supranational institutions to give content to moral principles, “it would be both foolish *and morally wrong* to ask a nation to forego its national interests not for the good of society with a superior moral claim but for a chimera”.² Or again, “A foreign policy derived from the national interest is in fact morally superior to a foreign policy inspired by universal moral principles”.³ How one judges its superiority except by appealing to some other standard than the national interest, Morgenthau does not say. I cannot help feeling that success is the standard Morgenthau has in mind, but I will not take that point any further.

We can now go back to Morgenthau’s contention that “a foreign policy guided by moral abstraction, without consideration of the national interest, is bound to fail: for it accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself”. Unless we understand the nature of that action, we will be unable to know by what standards it must be judged, and there is the danger that we will fall into the Utopian error of judging and forming policy in terms of inapplicable standards, policies which are therefore bound to fail. In order to avoid this danger, we must understand how foreign policy formation really works, and, having discovered the real, historical principles of its functioning, we will then be able to apply these true principles in our judgments, with the added and comforting knowledge that these verities are not without their own moral dignity.

The “intellectual error” of “the moralistic detractors of the national interest”, is their failure to understand how the processes of international politics really work and it is this intellectual error which leads to the “moral perversions” of which the Utopians are accused.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36. My italics.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

I propose now to consider how Morgenthau sets about the correction of this intellectual error by arguing that international politics operates by each nation's pursuit of its own interest through the mechanism of the balance of power.

It will be remembered that one of the points Morgenthau made most vehemently against the Utopians is that foreign policy shaped in terms of moral absolutes is bound to fail. In putting up national interest as an alternative, Morgenthau is maintaining that this is the only guide with any chance of producing a successful policy, one that can in fact be implemented. As well as being the only moral guide to policy, it is also the only rational guide.

Certain questions immediately present themselves and these questions are, I think, the third philosophical issue or set of issues to which the introductory section of this paper referred. Those questions are—What do rational and irrational mean in this context? What evidence or what sort of evidence can Morgenthau give to show that realist foreign policy is the only rational foreign policy? And what is to be said of those Utopian statesmen who in setting up moral principles rather than national interest as their goal, have apparently pursued irrational foreign policies? These questions are not easily separable and in the discussion of them which follows it will not be possible to keep them always in distinct compartments.

We could begin by saying that Morgenthau appears to have in mind, as well as the identification of the rational with the moral, the identification of the rational with the real. If we can discover how politics really works, if we can lay bare the forces which really control politics, then rational policy will be policy that works with those forces and not against them. The way to discover what these forces are is by studying history and that is why Morgenthau, in common with other realists, lays such heavy emphasis on the appeal to historic precedent throughout his writings.

Now, what are the real forces which the study of history reveals as being the determining factors in politics? The answer given by writers of the realist persuasion is that, in both domestic and world politics the mainspring of policy and action has always been the desire for and the striving after our own power and the attempt to diminish that of our competitors. Although the notion of power is one which requires a good deal of examination, for the present purpose we may accept Morgenthau's account of it because what we have now to consider briefly is his concept of the rôle of power in international affairs. In that context, Morgenthau says that "When we speak of power, we mean man's control over the minds and actions of other men. By political power we refer to the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large."¹ Morgenthau also maintains that "International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power."²

¹ *Politics Among Nations*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1949, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*

The important thing here is that the pursuit of power is primary in particular, it is anterior to the pursuit of the national interest, in whatever terms that may be conceived. For whatever ends we seek in international politics, we must first have power to realise them. "Statesmen and peoples may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic, or social ideal. They may hope that this ideal will materialise through its own inner force, through divine intervention, or through the natural development of human affairs. But whenever they strive to realise their goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power".¹

I have maintained above that Morgenthau identifies the rational with the real. Morgenthau would not want us to think that there are any traces of metaphysics in his position. But he does argue that realist or rational foreign policy is in fact the only kind of foreign policy that *can* be pursued, that any deviations from it, any Utopian policies, are, as it were, no more than aberrations, which are not only not realist but are in some sense unreal. This is so, he argues, because as a matter of fact, both in the past and now, there are certain forces and a certain mechanism so controlling the processes of international politics that anyone who participates in such policies, from whatever motives or with whatever intentions, is obliged to work with these forces and within the framework of this mechanism. It is at this point that Morgenthau's notion of the rational begins to assume something very like a metaphysical content.

We have seen already that the forces in question are the pursuit of power and the concept of national interest. Morgenthau's evidence for the existence and inevitable operation of the first of these has already been suggested—he simply asserts that the pursuit of power is one of the basic psychological facts about men as political participants, that this fact comes out in world politics as the pursuit of power by each nation, and that this must be so because every man and every nation has certain objectives and it is only by acquiring power that these objectives can be attained. These facts, he argues, are amply borne out by the historical record which exemplifies in empirical terms the assertion about the fundamental rôle of power. Reason and history both demonstrate that the pursuit of power is not merely a contingent but a necessary feature of politics, a feature that it is not merely unwise but impossible to discount. The other fundamental factor in world politics is national interest. So far, we have heard Morgenthau arguing that it is both unwise and immoral to subordinate the national interest to any other principles. A little later on, we shall see how he maintains that, in addition, it too, like the pursuit of power, is an inevitable part of international relations, that, just as no one can pursue a foreign policy without pursuing power, so too is it impossible to formulate a policy without regard to the national interest.

¹ *Ibid.*

These two, then, are the fundamental, inexorable forces of international life, the factors which inevitably determine the course of world politics. What I want to turn to now is the mechanism through which these forces are said to operate. That mechanism is the balance of power. It would be plausible to say that it is around the conception of the balance of power that Morgenthau's whole theory of international relations revolves.

The doctrine of the balance of power has become so well established in the study of international history that the phrase has become a commonplace formula with the prestige of a veritable law of nature. The difficulties of the notion are just these two—that it is at least doubtful whether “balance of power” is any longer more than a phrase, and that it has become almost hallowed beyond criticism. And yet, in his major writings, Morgenthau still offers this concept as his applicable theory for twentieth century world politics.

The first difficulty with this concept is its multiplicity of meanings. Morgenthau himself notes¹ that he uses the term in four different ways, and there are certainly others. The trouble is that it is not always clear which meaning a writer has in mind, so that one could begin by saying that, as a theoretical concept, balance of power suffers from a slipperiness that makes it impossible to handle with any precision or rigour. On the other hand, one feels that this very suppleness of the notion is a feature that Morgenthau would see as a positive virtue, for it increases the applicability of the concept.

This multiplicity of meanings of “balance of power” is the springboard of a short, but telling criticism of the doctrine made in an article by A. M. Scott.² Scott finds the root of the trouble in the gap which divides theorists and policy-makers. What has happened, he argues, is that theorists have failed to provide any useful analysis of modern international affairs, not because they have failed to recognise the realities of the contemporary world, but because, in their anxiety to do just that, they have let their theorising lag far behind the present situation. The trouble is that “. . . the concerns of the student are not theoretical enough”. And theory has failed to develop, to accommodate the new facts, because it is hampered by the incubus of the balance of power doctrine.

Scott criticises the theory first of all on its claim to be a *description* of international relations, of how nations behave towards each other. The distinctive feature of the doctrine, what is taken as identifying it, is the notion of equilibrium or balance. Morgenthau's exposition, his repeated invocation of a scales is a good example of the centrality of this notion. This, however, says Scott, is the weakness of the whole doctrine, and his points are well taken.

First, Scott notes the assumption that “equilibrium is the natural state of rest of nations in the international community”. But of course there are many other relationships, notably in the 1950's,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

² “Challenge and Response”: *The Review of Politics*, April, 1956.

overwhelming dominance. Again, the notion of a "tendency" towards equilibrium,¹ of an automatic adjustment, obscures the important differences between the *process of change* in international relationships and their *state* at any given time. Scott also protests against the metaphysical content (especially disturbing in such a realist as Morgenthau) of this whole assumption. The realists argue that this tendency asserts itself no matter what statesmen may do: on which Scott comments, that "while it is true that the results achieved in international affairs are often quite different from those sought, it is going much farther to say that the net result of the interplay of various objectives, talents, and national capabilities is invariably a power equilibrium."

In this connection we may note that, just as Kennan, for example admires the clear-sightedness of the Founding Fathers on questions of foreign policy, so Morgenthau too harks back to the eighteenth century, referring to Hume, *The Federalist*, Pitt and Castlereagh for classic accounts of the balance of power doctrine. It was also in this period that the doctrine of laissez-faire in economics was first adumbrated, and both theories share the fiction of a hidden and inexorable mechanism which mysteriously balances both the competing ambitions of individual people for wealth with the common good, and the competing ambitions of individual nations for power with the stable world society. In both spheres, an appraisal of the nature of the economic activity of individuals and of twentieth century states, on the one hand, and of the nature of modern politics among nations, on the other, would show that neither theory is any longer "applicable", that neither naive laissez-faire economics nor simple balance-of-power politics can give an account of the facts of the present time in their respective fields.

These last observations are connected with Scott's second main line of criticism of the descriptive side of the balance of power doctrine. He draws attention to the pitfalls of argument by analogy. It may have done justice to the situation in eighteenth-century Europe, where, for example, it was British policy to dispose England's power in such a way that no single Continental power or alliance had overwhelming strength. England's rôle was that of a true balancer throwing her weight now on this side and now on that. But for twentieth-century analysis the concept of a balance "is short on moving parts". With less than three elements, the analysis won't work; in particular, it won't work "in a situation of bi-polarity", to use Scott's phrase, especially the world of the nineteen-fifties. With no balancer, any "equilibrium will be (no) more than an accidental and momentary product of the power contest". It is this, Scott suggests, which has led to the celebrated search for a "third force". But such a third element must be "a true variable",

¹ cf. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 125 "... the balance of power and policies aiming at its preservation are not only inevitable, but an essential stabilizing factor in a society of sovereign nations ..."

willing to throw its weight on *either* side, and to change sides, as England used once to do; being merely "neutralist" is not nearly enough. Scott argues that it is the force of the analogy in certain situations (which no longer exist) that blinds its exponents to its shortcomings at the present time. "The balance of power analysis, for example, is confronted with a serious problem of motivation—statesmen simply do not behave as that doctrine would have them—and it is only the compelling image of the scales that allows it to be overcome".

The parenthetical statement here is one of Scott's simplest yet most important observations. It is clear that statesmen often, one might even say usually, seek something quite other than a balance of power, something which precludes a balance (though they seldom attain this something). The heroes of history include those who have sought and achieved a predominance of power, and, as Scott points out in a footnote, something like the reverse even occurs "In the negotiations of the North Atlantic Treaty countries over defence contributions (where) it sometimes appears the rule that each country justifies a minimum defence effort on its part in terms of its peculiar problems and limited economic capabilities while encouraging other countries to contribute more to the common effort in accordance with the principle of equality of sacrifice". Against Scott here, his opponents could well point out that N.A.T.O., in this context at least, can be regarded as a single power, which indeed Scott would have to acknowledge in talking about a situation of bi-polarity. His point, however, is still well taken, as the balance of power theory strictly applied would require the mobility of each member of the Atlantic Alliance, so that each could become a balancer, moving, if necessary, into some other alliance altogether.¹ This again bears out Scott's point, noted earlier, that balance of power analysis will not apply to a fluid situation. Concentrating on the static distribution of power and tending to regard a given alignment, such as N.A.T.O., as a permanent factor in the world situation, it is unable to give a satisfactory account of why that situation changes. In fact, as Scott remarks so-called "changes in the balance of power" would be much more accurately described as "changes in the *distribution* of power". Simply using the magic phrase does not account for the changes.

Moving from the descriptive to the prescriptive aspect of the balance of power doctrine, Scott has two chief criticisms. The first is that, just as nations and their statesmen often *do* not act to achieve a balance, so there are often good reasons why they *should* not so act. Yet the injunction to act in this way shows a sad lack of faith in the assumption that such action is inevitable. If statesmen have to be exhorted, then this is an admission that they have choices

¹ Something dangerously near to that mobility was reached at the United Nations in November, 1956, when the United States joined Russia in demanding British and French withdrawal from Egypt.

in the matter and that their decisions do count, after all. Scott welcomes this "concession to reality" by balance of power theorists, who apparently fail to see how damaging it is to their position. Closely connected with this point, Scott makes the neat observation that the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of the theory involve different and conflicting assumptions; for whereas the first assumes that "all nations are (wittingly or not) seeking an equilibrium", the second starts from the premise "that any nation would upset the equilibrium if it could" and therefore that statesmen (of other nations) should so act as to prevent this.

Scott's second main objection to the prescriptive side of the doctrine is again a simple appeal to the new facts of modern world politics. The theory may have been a true description when there were numerous roughly equal weights, powers. Now, however, the disparities of power are so great that "the injunction (to seek an equality of power) has little practical significance".

Scott's first line of criticism against the prescription derived from the balance of power theory points to two more general difficulties of the theory, difficulties which it shares with other determinist, single-factor theories of history. The first difficulty is this, that any theory which claims, as this one does, to have discovered the inevitable course or pattern of events is logically hamstrung when it comes to a question of deriving policy from the theory. Yet such theorists seldom refrain from prescribing conduct. The balance of power theory, however, differs from some determinist doctrines in this respect that, although, as has already been noted, there is in it a persistent ambiguity on the question of whether it is intended as a description of the state of world politics at any time, of the given distribution of power, or whether it is an account of changes in that distribution, the doctrine nevertheless does not envisage a term to the process of balancing power. One of the points Morgenthau insists on in his brief history of American foreign policy¹ is that, while there have been what he distinguishes as the three periods of realistic, ideological and Utopian policy since the founding of the Republic, the realities of the international struggle for power and the dominance of the need to ensure the national interest by seeking power, are the two fundamental facts which have persisted throughout and which will always be fundamental. There is no suggestion that a certain *permanent* equilibrium will ever be reached, that there is any inevitable and final *goal* of the process—there is an ever temporary balancing which will never yield to a tranquil and settled harmony of interests, there will never evolve from the balancing process a state of perpetual peace. Now, this distinguishes Morgenthau from those other determinist thinkers who see the process of history working out to some desirable goal. But it makes it even more difficult for him to read off policy from his doctrine. For whereas Marxist determinists, for example, can recommend certain

¹ *American Foreign Policy*, ch. I, section 3.

courses of action to speed up the inevitable process of events, to hasten the millennium, a balance of power theorist, on his own assumption that the scales tend always towards equilibrium no matter what we do, cannot strictly advocate any particular course of action in preference to any other.

The second difficulty is the question raised earlier—what is to be said of those Utopian statesmen who have apparently pursued irrational foreign policies, by pursuing something other than power or the national interest? The crux of the realist answer, as given by Morgenthau, is that these were really their goals in spite of any protestations to the contrary. As we have seen, Morgenthau insists on the permanence throughout history of certain determining factors, which can, in fact, be reduced to the one prime determinant, the pursuit of power. This has been so, he argues, in spite of, for example, the falling away on the part of the ideological and Utopian successors of Washington and Hamilton from their clear grasp of the American national interest and the means of securing it, namely the independence of the Western hemisphere from European interference and the maintenance of a balance of power in Europe. Jefferson, who began the long nineteenth-century series of ideologists was, according to Morgenthau, the first to fall from grace, disguising the facts in ideological talk. But even he was enough of a realist to see that the complete supremacy of either France or England would endanger America, and he acted accordingly. Poor Wilson, however, was completely blinded. He could think only in Utopian terms. But fortunately for America and the balance of power, the cunning of history, the ineffable tendency towards equilibrium, got the better even of the befuddled founder of the League. “Thus Wilson in 1917 led the United States into war against Germany for the same reasons, *only half-known to himself*, for which Jefferson had wished and worked alternatively for the victory of England and France”.¹ The balance of power compelled Wilson to intervene, in spite of Utopian thinking: although Wilson justified intervention on moral, i.e. Utopian grounds, his decision was “really” a realistic one. The “real reason” in each case was the necessity of preventing any single European power from becoming so strong that, unafraid of any danger in Europe itself, it could turn threateningly against the United States.²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25. My italics.

² One critic of balance of power explanations, J. E. Brassert, writing an article on “Power Politics versus Political Ecology” in the *Political Science Quarterly* (December, 1956) makes an interesting observation on the emergence of the new states in Europe after the First World War. Although, he says, the principle of linguistic union was already obsolete at the time of their establishment, this was one criterion invoked at their foundation. Apart from that, however, “The purpose of their creation, from the point of view of many of their founders, was to form a series of buffer states for the working out of ‘balance of power’ politics. Wilson’s purpose was an exception in that he tried to act on idealistic grounds. His case is important because it shows that, frequently, those who hold

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On the question of a "balancer" or Third Force between the two present centres of power, the United States and Russia, Morgenthau's position seems somewhat hesitant. Unwilling to relinquish the notion of the balance of power, he speaks of its "changed structure", because there is, at the moment, no third power whose change of sides could seriously alter the balance of "the two-bloc system". But, by whatever expedients, the hypothesis must be saved. In its "classical" period, from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth century, even to 1939, power was more or less evenly distributed among some six or eight states and the "moves" of the "players" in the "game" of international politics were *ultimately* determined by the demands of a balance, whatever moral, legal or ideological justifications may have been invoked. In the old, multipolar system the balance of power was not only the determinant of policy, even underlying the moves of statesmen who thought and declared they were acting from other motives; it was also the acknowledged guide to wise and successful policy, standing in need of no further or higher justification. In the modern, bi-polar system, however, the game can no longer be played according to the old rules. One would conclude, then, that this analysis must now, at any rate, be abandoned. That, however, is not Morgenthau's conclusion. He clings to the notion of the balance in spite of his own account of its "changes" and introduces other "forces" the importance of which he has hitherto denied. Thus he says "... the new balance of power is a mechanism which contains in itself the potentialities for unheard-of good as well as for unprecedented evil. Which of these potentialities will be realised depends not upon the mechanics of the balance of power, but upon moral and material forces which use that mechanism for the realisation of their ends."¹ Previously, it was an essential point of the theory that the balance of power mechanism ultimately determined the outcome of any situation, whether that outcome were good or evil. Now, the nature of the outcome, and therefore the outcome itself, is determined by the way the mechanism is used by other forces. To say this amounts to very much more than saying that the structure of the balancing mechanism has changed—it amounts to abandoning the balance of power analysis altogether.

¹ *Politics Among Nations*, p. 285.

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the highest ideals unfortunately disregard basic economic and geographical factors." Brassert is suggesting that Wilson's ideals failed to be realised (the new states, the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia, Poland, did not survive in face of German and then Russian power) not only because he ignored balance of power considerations with his doctrine of self-determination, but quite as much because he left out of account considerations of "political ecology!" This is in line with Brassert's conclusion "That the power-political formulations do not take adequate account of the significance of economic-geographic and technical considerations for world politics to-day."

SUMMARY

The realist in foreign policy is first and foremost a man of action, one who sees foreign policy not simply as a matter for academic discussion but as something vital to the conduct of national affairs in the world. He is not, however, a mere dreamer, influenced only by his wish to see this or that state of affairs prevailing in international relations. He advocates a policy based on an honest and informed appraisal of the cold facts of international life and on a sound theory drawn from these facts. On the other hand, he denies that such an approach to his subject is either immoral or amoral. He is concerned with moral values, but not with those which the Utopians are said to pursue. While he rejects the appeal to traditional moral principles, which, he claims, are applicable only within a society which has achieved a certain level of integration, a level which international society has not yet attained, he appeals to other principles, the principles according to which international politics are alleged historically and actually to operate, and claims moral value and dignity for these principles. Working in accordance with these principles, then, has threefold merit—it is a practical, a workable course of action, it is based on sound theoretical foundations, and it has moral value.

All of these three aspects are part of a rational foreign policy. But there is a fourth aspect of rationality. So far, we have heard the realist speaking as though there were a choice open to us in the formation of policy. In this elaboration of the fourth aspect of rationality, however, we find that this is not so, because, we are told, no matter what course statesmen may try to pursue, it is impossible for them or their policies to break free from the iron control of the fundamental determinants of international politics, namely, the pursuit of power and the mechanism of the balance of power. Finally, then, it is maintained that the realist way is the only rational way to conduct foreign affairs because it is practical, theoretically sound, moral, and, above all, inevitable.

In taking this stand, the realist, as we saw at the outset, claims to be taking a stand on philosophic grounds which are quite at odds with those from which the Utopians begin. The criticisms I have put forward are aimed at these realist assumptions. I have suggested that the realist's concern to find guidance for sound policy formation, to formulate applicable theory, can be inimical to the working out of a sound theory of international relations; that his claim to moral value for his position is confused and arbitrary; and that his attempt to argue that international politics inevitably works in the way he describes will not stand examination.

I have suggested from time to time that the realist doctrine has many of the hallmarks of other determinist theories of history—they, too, offer practical guides to conduct, claim moral dignity, and claim that the fundamental forces they see at work in history

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will inevitably shape the course of events. On a par with the Marxist mechanism of class struggle, the evolutionists' mechanism of the struggle for survival, and so on, the realists look to the operation of the mechanism of the balance of power as central to the understanding of international affairs. I want to make one final observation on this point.

Like any determinist theory, the balance of power doctrine must distort facts to show how they really fit into the pattern. In that sense, such doctrines become unfalsifiable. If it can be argued that even the idealist Wilson was a realist at heart, even though he knew it not, then this sort of realism is indeed unassailable. It is also, of course, quite uninformative, and above all from its exponents' point of view, inapplicable. For if realism is bound to triumph in spite of the blindness and stupidity of men, then such a force in history can have little to fear from misguided foreign policy decisions. And it is no good arguing that one essential requisite for the functioning of the balance of power is that statesmen should be made aware of this inevitable tendency and exhorted to work with it. Because, for all we know to the contrary, so powerful a force may positively thrive on the attempts of the benighted to thwart it.

Note:—I have quoted from the first edition, 1949, of Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*. While the second edition, 1954, is revised in certain respects, the section on the balance of power, apart from one or two new illustrations (e.g. the Korean War) and minor changes in phrasing, is practically unaltered. The quotations in this paper are exactly the same in both editions.

There is a very clearly connected line of thinking, from the first edition of *Politics*, through the "Great Debate" article and *American Foreign Policy*, to the second edition of *Politics*. In particular, the new first chapter of the second edition, "A Realist Theory of International Politics", is an expansion of the main theoretical points in the journal article; and the chapters (XIX and XXI in the first and second editions respectively) on "The New Balance of Power" in *Politics Among Nations*, and "The Three Revolutions of Our Age", (chapter II) in *American Foreign Policy*, contain the same basic material, with appropriate modifications to accommodate the current political situation in each of the years of publication, 1949, 1951 (when the *American Foreign Policy* appeared under the title *In Defence of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy*) and 1954.