

Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Eugenics

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We can understand Darwinism to be a theory

Eugenics was born out an interpretation of the theory of evolution. Francis Galton, who was a half-cousin to Charles Darwin, desired to apply Darwin's theory that explained the development of plants and animals to humans. Darwin's work showed that evolution takes place through natural selection, and operates on a variety of traits and characteristics that influence ones survival and propagation of their species. Galton found the idea of questioning natural selection and variability in humans intriguing and in particular he was mostly interested in differences between individuals in their mental traits. He was interested in examining variation in mental traits, and mental ability or as Galton saw it their "genius". Galton evaluated his hypothesis of mental abilities being inherited in his book Hereditary Genius, which provided evidence by looking at frequencies of "genius" in families and concluded that mental abilities did in fact run in families. In his introductory paper, *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, he defines eugenics in a footnote as the "science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had" ("*Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development*", 24-25). In essence, Galton was interested in trying to improve the quality of our society by applying the principles of Darwinism to the

human population.

Self-direction of human evolution. Darwinism could be seen as the identify of eugenics, and not the root of eugenics.

Man was still evolving

Darwin's actual words that could have influenced Eugenics.

Darwin's passage in the Descent of Man: "Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man", and "hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed" ("Descent of Man", 159).

Darwin's view on superior and inferior races.

Galton was not a biologist, but a statistician and so he looked at this idea or this problem from a mathematical point of view.

Darwin's influence on the elite shaped the way research, development, and progress was made in major nations such as the United States. The majority of individuals in the United States rejected Darwinism, however some of the leaders, intellectuals, scientists, and biologists believed in the theory and so it was applied in many scientific, economic, and intellectual discussions and proposals in the United States.

References

- [1] Darwin, Charles, and W. F. Bynum. *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: Penguin Classics, 2009. Print.
- [2] Galton, Francis. *Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims*. The American Journal of Sociology 10.1 (1904): 1-25. The University of Chicago Press. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

- [3] Galton, Francis. *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development*. Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development (1883): 24-25. Web.