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Analysis Final

The book War of the Worlds by H.G Wells introduces the idea of Social Darwinism and how it was used to justify the practices of the 19th century. It also directly reflects as how people in the 19th century were mistaking Social Darwinism thoughts for the Darwinism theory. In the book we see how Wells suggests the idea of survivalist nature of humans. He also shows the exploitive nature of humans on the nature and other subhuman species that have not evolved to the intelligence of humans yet. In the book we see that Martians are not just a destructive species but they have a need for humans to help with their survival. The idea of survival of the fittest or the idea of the evolving due to dire need are part of Social Darwinism and not the ideas propagated by Darwin in his theory of evolution. Darwin’s theory was mainly a neutral theory which did not have an actual social application (Rogers). Wells writing directly reflects the ideas that were popular during the time he wrote the novel as he incorporated the Social Darwinist thought in his novel using the narrator as a Social Darwinist to show how the perceived evolution from Social Darwinist perspective was different from the Darwinist thought.

The term Social Darwinism as according to Collins does not mean the doctrine of evolution which Darwin emphasized but relates to the overall doctrine of “gradual appearance of new forms through variation; the struggle of superabundant forms; the elimination of those poorly fitted, and the survival of those better fitted, to the environment”. (Wells, D. Collin). Wells starts the book with the narrator talking about his interest in extraterrestrial life within the scientific society and how new discoveries were being made in the field. Once the narrator knows about the Martian pods he is intrigued with the hope of the kind of knowledge that could be obtained from them. Furthermore he is contemplating the idea of Martians being superior to the human beings and compare what if this is true and how this might affect humans as a species. This is a clear representation of the Social Darwinist ideology that the narrator holds which we further see in the book. Later in the novel when the greeting party of scientist visits the landed pod they are surprised by the nature of Martians and how they are in an attacking front. The greeting party is killed in this confrontation and this reveals the superiority of Martians for the first time in the novel. Showing this clear superiority of aliens Wells is incorporating the theme of Social Darwinist idea of gradual appearance of new and superior forms of life. Additionally this whole ordeal also reveals the nature of the bodies and the design Martians have most important being slimy have a skeleton like a squid and features like tentacles. This intriguing design of the Martians by Wells is clearly his way of using Social Darwinism’s perceived evolution of creatures to show how they have evolved to a nature where they have lost useless properties and bodily functions. This idea by Wells of showing how this Social Darwinist evolution may lead to humans is directly in relation with the ideology where in the 19th century people were trying to apply the Social Darwinist theory to humans to see what evolutionary changes may occur in humans as a species. Throughout this presentation of ideas though the narrator we can understand how Wells wanted to show what the underlying ideas of Social Darwinism were and how it was perceived in the late 19th century.

Wells also shows how Social Darwinist thoughts reflect the social philosophy while the Darwinist theory of natural selection was described as a biological process (Rogers). To show this he brings up specific examples of humans exploitations of species and how human activities lead to their extinction. During the late 19th century the capitalist ideas were forming for the first time and the rise of industrialization had given many the ability to use resources and convert them into actual products. This image of using animals and plants and abusing them to feed the materialistic need of resources for the humans is how Wells shapes the Martians into. This feeling of superiority and the philosophical idea that came with this superiority was of using other species as a resource for humans. To show this the narrator of the story brings up specific example of animals like the dodo and how the human hunger lead to its extinction. This example correlates with the Social Darwinist thought of elimination of the poorly fitted from an evolutionary point of view. Wells also tries to incorporate this in the novel by later presenting a parallelism with the nature of aliens having a hunger for humans and using them as a source of food. This idea of elimination of poorly fitted was never a Darwinist idea but developed by the psychological interpretation of Darwinist theory. Another idea that originates from this psychological interpretation of Social Darwinist theory is that of the survival of the fittest. As Collins describes it “leads to a false assumption that a higher class can be produced in the society by selective process when artificially applied by the man” (Collins D. Wells). Wells shows this idea when he describes the idea of the artillery man to create a new society of humans who are able to survive from the Martians. Wells also shows how the narrator is interested in this idea which further reestablishes the narrator as being a Social Darwinist. Finally the last aspect of Social Darwinism that Wells describes in his novel is of adapting to the environment. By the end of the novel we as readers find out that Martians are not able to survive the environment on the Planet Earth as they do not have immunity against the microorganisms present in the Earth’s atmosphere. This mortal nature of Martians due to their not adaptive response to change is a clear representation of Social Darwinist thought that reflects to humans and how humans who do not conform and adapt to their own environment may not be able to survive.

Finally we are able to see what Wells is trying to show through his novel when we put his ideas on Social Darwinism together. We understand that he is trying to do a commentary on the late 19th century idea of Social Darwinism and how people in the 19th century were mistaking and using a biological theory and integrating it to social philosophy. To show his commentary he makes the narrator of his story a Social Darwinist who makes correlations on the nature of Martians to the nature of humans. He presents ideas and shows clear understanding of sciences, however he stills uses assumption and false equivalence to relate ideas to his understanding. Wells story also represents evolution at its core, however the evolution it represents is the perceived evolution from the Social Darwinist point, and not the actual literal idea of evolution from Darwin. Not being able to adapt to the environment was the downfall for the Martians even though they had better technology. This downfall and humans coming out as the survivalist shows the brute nature of humans that the Social Darwinist perceived existed. Wells also makes a point on the obtuse thinking side of Social Darwinism where the idea of being able to produce a better human race is suggested when selective process is applied. Additionally Wells also shows the presences of Social Darwinism in the ideology of capitalism and materialistic needs of the late 19th century. The exploitive nature of humans was then being justified using this idea. Ultimately, Wells is using his novel to make a social commentary on the overuse of the term Social Darwinism and how prevalent it became in the late 19th century. He is using his novel to show in what terms and ways were people using the terms incorrectly and making assumptions that they are using to justify the change in the nature of society.

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