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Edited by

[Bron Taylor](#)

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or Hereditary Farm Law was enacted which would protect small and medium-sized farm holdings and ensure they be passed down from generation to generation within families. A *Reichnährstand* or National Food Estate was also formed. This was a corporatist/syndicalist entity that set quality standards for agricultural products, created direct lines of distribution, and ordained equitable prices to the benefit of the farmers. The old town of Goslar in the Harz region was declared a national “peasant capital,” and this became the seat of Darré’s operations. In addition to the large annual rallies held there, a publishing arm called Blut und Boden Verlag was formed which issued books on the importance of peasant history, culture, and racial typology. Darré edited a monthly journal, *Odal* (the title is a reference to the Germanic rune meaning “hereditary property” – this symbol also officially designated the *Erbhöfe*, or hereditary farms), that actively promoted his peasant ideology, and wrote articles during his early years in office on ecological topics as well as on the importance of small-scale farming.

With his vocal opposition toward imperialism and the *Führerprinzip*, Darré was not a typical NSDAP leader. In contrast to the party functionaries, he was a social visionary with a more revolutionary outlook – he leaned toward decentralization and was generally opposed to Germany waging wars of aggression, which he predicted would spell catastrophe for the peasantry. By the latter half of the 1930s increasing conflicts erupted between Darré’s staff and other factions of the government. His last significant achievement was the Entailed Estate Law of 1938. He had also begun initiating measures to promote changeovers to organic farming – a move that was perceived as reckless or unrealistic with the onset of the war. Another key party member who supported environmentally sound and holistic approaches to agriculture was Rudolf Hess, but the latter’s ill-fated solo flight to England in 1941 caused such tendencies to be looked upon with grave suspicion among other party leaders. “Biodynamic” farming methods were seen as inherently connected to Rudolf Steiner, the pedagogical theorist and mystic whose Anthroposophy Society and Waldorf schools had been officially shut down as part of the wider crackdown by the regime upon any non-aligned and potentially subversive groups; as a result, those who campaigned for such methods (including some of Darré’s staff) were persecuted. In an effort to downplay associations to Steiner’s “biodynamic” practices, Darré advocated the use of the term “organic farming,” which has since become commonplace.

Increasingly isolated from the rest of the party leadership, Darré was demoted in 1942 from his position as minister and replaced by a staff member more loyal to Hitler. Although some of his ideas found their way into the doctrines of the SS, Darré never regained his influence on national policies; by this time Germany was in full war-production mode and the proponents of standard

industrialized agriculture and artificial fertilizers had won out.

After the war, Darré underwent two trials and was eventually sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment, primarily for his involvement in the Race and Settlement Office which managed deportations and relocations of non-German farmers in areas of occupied Poland. Given an early release in 1950 on account of failing health, he spent his final years authoring articles on his old themes of the peasantry and the necessity of organic farming. He died on 6 September 1953 and is buried in Goslar.

Notwithstanding his clashes with other government leaders, Darré was generally a popular figure during his years as Minister of Agriculture. His approaches often met with positive interest from abroad, and he has also been cited as an influence on the “Soil Association” organic farming movement that was blossoming in Britain at the time. More recently his legacy has received renewed attention due to the work of ecology historian Anna Bramwell. There are also many sympathizers who see him as a role model for an alternative and pragmatically oriented “Green Nazi,” a racial revolutionary who is opposed to the illness and alienation caused by the excesses of modern capitalism in an industrialized, urbanized, and globalized modern world.

Michael Moynihan

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- See also: ATWA; Evola, Julius; Fascism; Heathenry – Asatru; Odinism; Steiner, Rudolf – and Anthroposophy.

Darwin, Charles (1809–1882)

Charles Darwin, the British naturalist and author of various books and essays on natural history, ranks among the most influential scientists of all time. His theories regarding the evolution and the distribution of species, articulated in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), revolutionized biology during the nineteenth century, and have exerted considerable sway over a wide range of scientific

and other intellectual activities ever since. Arguably, no modern concepts of nature have been as widely influential, or as controversial, as Darwin's.

Darwin's Views of Nature

Although the study of nature made great strides in the century before Darwin, attempts to develop a systematic theory of organic development, such as Jean Baptiste Lamarck's assertion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, had been poorly received. Therefore, in many ways the natural history Darwin encountered at the start of his career was grounded in theological assumptions. It was widely held that God had directly created a natural realm that was abundant, benevolent, and stable over time. The tasks of natural history were to describe and catalog natural phenomena, and in doing so to glorify nature's Creator by recognizing the marvelous ingenuity that went into its design. Darwin would undo the cozy relationship between science and theology by developing a thoroughly naturalistic explanation of evolutionary development. Such has been the influence and explanatory power of his work that subsequent generations of scientists would speak of their work as being grounded in Darwinian assumptions.

Darwin built his natural philosophy from various sources: his lifelong passion for observing natural phenomena, established scientific traditions (particularly in botany, zoology, and geology), and assorted ideas derived from his reading in philosophy, economics, and literature. Although subsequently referred to as "Darwinism" (i.e., as if a single theory), according to historian Ernst Mayer, Darwin's mature thought accounted for two distinct biological processes, transformation in time and diversification in space, using a "bundle of theories" (Mayer 1991: 35–7). Taken as a whole, Darwin's "bundle" emphasizes dynamism, spontaneity, and novelty alongside the cruelty of natural process wherein the early death of many individuals, and even entire species, was inevitable.

First and foremost, Darwin argued that nature was neither static nor subject to repeating cycles, but in a constant process of change. Drawing upon recent geological theories, he assumed that the Earth was much older than previously thought, perhaps by many orders of magnitude. This allowed nature the time to work through processes of change that were incrementally slow. He next asserted that similar species could be traced to common ancestors, or more generally, that all organisms were descended from a few simple species. This meant that the history of life looked like a branching tree – a process that started with a few forms that subsequently diversified. Darwin felt that variations in organic beings were rather small, but accumulated changes wrought over time could bring about conspicuous change, or transmutation. He also believed that the multiplication of species, and thus the plenitude of nature, was driven by the tendency of all

species to produce more offspring that could be supported by the food supply and space in a given area.

Darwin's most daring, and subsequently controversial concept was natural selection. He argued that because of various competitive pressures there was a constant "struggle for existence" among individuals of a species. Some individuals, because of slight variations that allow them to better compete for resources and mates, are better able to produce healthy offspring and thus are naturally selected to survive. In this, Darwin made an analogy to "artificial selection," or the way that breeders of animals and gardeners in domestic situations culled individuals with undesirable traits and promoted the breeding of individuals with desirable ones. He also recognized the influence of other factors such as "sexual selection," or the way that animals choose their mates.

Although immediately recognized as a set of theories to be reckoned with, Darwinism was not immediately or completely accepted within the scientific community. For example, many who accepted the idea of organic evolution remained skeptical of Darwin's mechanism of natural selection and posed alternatives such as neo-Lamarckianism. Thus it took genetics and population biology in the early twentieth century, the so-called "modern synthesis," to secure Darwin's position as the major theorist of modern biology.

Darwin's Religious Views

Darwin's religious views have been the subject of scholarly and public interest from the time he became famous in the mid-nineteenth century. His voluminous paper trail (including published works, correspondences, notebooks, and other materials) can both assist and vex this line of inquiry in that it offers up evidence that is simultaneously intimate, detailed, and ambiguous. Darwin had free-thinkers and religious dissenters in his family tree, notably his deist-evolutionist grandfather Erasmus, but as a youth he was exposed to, and seems to have accepted, a good deal of prevailing Anglican theology. As a young man, he read the works of natural theologians, and also studied with, and greatly admired, two devout Anglican naturalists, John Henslow and Adam Sedgwick. Darwin even considered a religious career for a while, in part, because it would have afforded him time to study natural history. Writings from his famous trip aboard the H.M.S. Beagle, show the influence of natural theology. For example, while observing the rich variety of life in tropical rain-forests, he described feelings of "wonder, admiration, and devotion which fill and elevate the mind" (Darwin 1958: 91).

After returning to England, Darwin began to rethink some of the reigning assumptions about natural history that dominated his era. In particular, he began to question whether the explanation for the "economy of nature" proffered by natural theology (that God had created

everything in its place) was intellectually satisfying. In searching for an alternative, Darwin was encouraged by Hume, who had challenged the design argument in his famous *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*; Comte, who felt that theological thought should be replaced by a “positive” philosophy that emphasized scientific laws; Wordsworth’s poetry and prose, which encouraged intellectuals boldly to rethink the relationship between humanity and nature; and Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population*, which argued that natural populations are irreducibly subject to food shortages that lead directly to struggle and competition. In regards to the last issue, some scholars argue that Darwin, unable to square notions of a good God with the centrality of pain and suffering in the natural process, gave up theism in any meaningful sense during or soon after the development of his theories in the late 1830s.

Others locate his apostasy in later life. James Moore, for example, argues that Darwin only gives up on the basic elements of Christian theology after the death of his daughter in 1851, for reasons related to his bitterness over the doctrine of eternal damnation. And still others find in Darwin’s public and personal writings a lifetime struggle with the concept of God – a theological “muddle,” that wavers between theism, deism, and doubt. Intellectual historians such as Dov Ospovat argue that a type of rational theism underwrote Darwin’s naturalism well into his career. And biographers like Moore note that many members of Darwin’s immediate family and social propriety endorsed religious belief. Clearly, Darwin is ready to call himself an “agnostic” in his *Autobiography* written in the late 1870s. The term, coined by his colleague T.H. Huxley, expresses a formal and perhaps irresolvable feeling of doubt about foundational questions such as the existence of God.

Also noteworthy were Darwin’s later writings that tried to put religious belief in evolutionary perspective. In his main work on human evolution, *The Descent of Man* (1871), he argued that religion (like language and morality) probably first arose as a by-product of the development of the human mind. Building from faulty psychology, Darwin assumes that mental attributes, like limbs or instincts, emerged because they gave adaptive advantage to their hosts. The earliest type of religion, “belief in the unseen or spiritual agencies,” emerged when basic human mental faculties of “imagination, wonder, and curiosity, together with some power of reasoning” had developed enough to speculate crudely about the surrounding world and the nature of existence. Later more elaborate systems of gods and monotheism developed out of these basic attributes. Although Darwin recognizes the complexity of religion and calls belief in an Omnipotent God “ennobling,” he is also quick to point out how religion often got misdirected into superstition and barbaric practices. Cursory as these speculations were, they set the tone

for later thinkers, notably the sociobiologists, who argue that certain ethical ideals, such as altruism, and collective religious activity can be understood in terms of natural selection and adaptive advantage.

General Reactions to Darwinism

As might be anticipated for such a major figure, attempts to situate Darwin’s views of nature into a wider intellectual framework have varied, and these diverse reactions have contributed to Darwin’s decidedly mixed reception in religious quarters. Some interpreters regarded Darwin as the scientist who decisively extended the mechanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment to the biological realm. In doing so, according to scholars such as Michael Ghiselin and Richard Lewontin, he was the key figure in advancing the anti-metaphysical positivism of modern science and the general cause of secular thought. Critics of these tendencies, such as cultural critic Jacques Barzun, accordingly, decry Darwinism as a potent form of reductionism and materialism that contributes to the disenchantment of the natural world.

Historian Daniel Worster regards Darwin’s ideas as a major impetus to modern ecological thinking and thus the reassertion of an essentially organic view of nature. Darwinism has also been celebrated for its ability to unify broad fields of knowledge and inquiry. Philosopher Ernst Cassirer saw in Darwinism a biological version of the idea of universal historical development that elsewhere had more metaphysical (Hegel) and political (Marx) manifestations. Conversely, others find in Darwin’s work a stark recognition of the precariousness of life and the primacy of “chance and necessity” in cosmic history. For some, notably philosopher Jacques Monod, this has been a liberating insight, and an escape from the subjective illusions and teleological views of natural order of previous eras. Many intellectuals, however, have echoed historian Bert Loewenberg’s assessment that Darwinism carries a profoundly unsettling message of randomness and purposelessness, and thus contributes to the modern sense of angst and pessimism.

Political evaluations have found ideological implications in Darwinism; however these have varied considerably. Many on the left saw in the general idea of evolution, particularly when linked to the idea of social progress, a mandate for reform, even revolution. On the other hand, other leftist critics regard Darwinism as a kind “natural” apologetics for Victorian notions of individualism, marketplace competition, and other forms of social coercion and thus highly suspicious. Often these criticisms will echo anarchist Peter Kropotkin in rejecting Darwin’s emphasis on the brutal struggle in favor of a naturalism that emphasizes synergy and cooperative effort. Conservatives have been mixed as well. Many condemned Darwin for undermining traditional social and religious institutions, whereas others, notably American social theorist William

Graham Sumner, used Darwinism to legitimize laissez faire free-market capitalism.

In terms of literary analysis, Stanley Edgar Hyman regards Darwin as the author of a cosmic tragedy wherein all struggles against all, and most of the characters die painfully and young. In contrast, literary critic William Scheik and others recognize traces of a cosmic epic in Darwin's work, a sweeping narrative whose final act emphasizes the emergence of a self-aware humanity that better comprehends its history and controls its own destiny.

Religious Reactions to Darwinism

Darwin's ideas directly challenged one of the bulwarks of theistic theology, the design argument, which held that the intricacies and beautiful structures found in the natural world were evidences of the creative action of an intelligent and omnipotent deity. As opposed to the action of an external power (a supernatural entity that intervened into history and arranged matter directly) Darwinism implied that forces resident within nature, the "laws" of biology, working over a vast time scale, were capable of producing the variety and intricacy of the natural world. Was "God" necessary to this process? Darwin himself was ambiguous on this issue. Although he used language like "Creator" in his works, notably in the first edition of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), many regarded supernaturalism superfluous to his natural philosophy. Darwinism also challenged the centrality of a humanity created in "the image" of God and given dominion over the natural world by arguing that human beings were simply another type of primate with no special claims or status. In ethics as well, Darwin's focus on struggle, fitness, and reproductive success seemed to give sanction to aggressive, even violent, impulses at the expense of classic virtues such as love, benevolence, and selflessness. Finally, Darwinism figured prominently in a larger intellectual revolution that historicized scriptural traditions and, for many, threatened their authority as molders of culture. Thus, since their introduction, Darwin's main ideas have been understood as potent and pointed challenges to religious thought.

The major Western traditions have responded in markedly diverse ways to Darwinism. Some groups have tolerated and assimilated evolutionary views, in part or in total. These include liberal and moderate Protestant denominations, most Jewish groups, and after a long period of suspicion, Roman Catholicism. Also many of the alternative religions of the Western tradition, various esoteric, occult, and New Age groups, have adopted evolutionary thinking. Many of those who accept evolution, however, maintain teleological and theistic beliefs that are arguably extraneous to Darwin's scientific views. Other religious groups have utterly rejected Darwinism as irreligious and immoral. In the United States, anti-evolutionism has been a conspicuous feature of the

conservative wing of Protestantism since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Helped by famed orator and politician, William Jennings Bryan, various fundamentalist groups mounted an aggressive anti-evolution campaign in the wake of World War I that culminated in the Scopes Trial of 1925. Post-Scopes, anti-evolutionists have continued to challenge textbooks that include Darwinism, press for equal time in school curricula for biblically based interpretations of natural history, and disseminate alternatives to Darwinism such as creation science. Popularly, the anti-evolution movement has actually grown in strength over that time, and some current polls indicate that 45 percent of the American population utterly rejects the idea of evolution. In other major world religions, comparable patterns have developed. Thus various attempts to reconcile evolutionary thought with, for example, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, must be measured against anti-modernist, traditionalist, and fundamentalist movements that tend to view Darwinism as a subversive "Western" influence that denies supernaturalism or other traditional beliefs.

Lisle Dalton

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- See also: Creationism and Creation Science; Malthus, Thomas Robert; Science; Scopes Trial.

Death and Afterlife in Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey

The poem "Vulture" by Robinson Jeffers expresses a religious perspective on death and afterlife that is pervasive in contemporary green spirituality. In it, Jeffers reflects on an occasion when, while lying on his back in a desert canyon in the Southwestern United States, he was once mistaken for carrion by a vulture.

Vulture

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
 Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling high up in heaven,
 And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit narrowing,
 I understood then
 That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the flight feathers
 Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer . . .
 . . . how beautiful he looked, gliding down
 On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in the sea-light
 over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
 That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that beak and
 become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes –
 What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a life after death.

Another author with a deep love of the desert was the novelist Edward Abbey. Abbey's reflections on death are reminiscent of Jeffers, whom he admired. For Abbey, an authentic death is unaccompanied by life-prolonging technology. It is when the body is left unpolluted so that it can properly reunite with and nurture the Earth. Reflecting on a tourist who died alone in the desert,

he had good luck – I envy him the manner of his going: to die alone, on a rock under the sun at the brink of the unknown, like a wolf, like a great bird, seems to me very good fortune indeed. To die in the open, under the sky, far from the insolent interference of leech and priest, before this desert vastness opening like a window onto eternity – that surely was an overwhelming stroke of good luck . . . [Today], I think of the dead man under the juniper on the edge of the world, seeing him as the vulture would have seen him, far below and from a great distance. And I see myself through those cruel eyes . . . I feel myself sinking into the landscape, fixed in place like a stone, like a tree, a small motionless shape of vague outline, desert-colored, and with the wings of imagination look down at myself through the eyes of the bird, watching a human figure that becomes smaller, smaller in the receding landscape as the bird rises into the evening (1968: 186, 190).

In their own ways Jeffers and Abbey expressed their sense of belonging to a sacred Earth and a feeling of reverence toward the processes of life and death. In so doing they also rejected the prevalent monotheisms of their day, which obviate the fear of death through belief in supernatural rescue from it.

This kind of attitude, which sacralizes a natural death and views artifice in death as a desecrating act, can be found in a wide variety of contemporary green subcultures. It is expressed in conversation, poetry, art, and song. It has also been implemented through burial practices perceived to be natural. Before his death in 1989, for example, in his last act of desert consecration, Abbey arranged for his body, unpolluted by toxic embalming fluids, to be spirited away and illegally buried in his beloved, sacred desert. In death Abbey would nourish and return to his beloved and sacred desert landscape.

Bron Taylor

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