

Nature's Empire: The Darwinian Idiom in Late Victorian International Thought

Caiban E. Butcher
Keble College

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection on the international thought of late Victorian Britain. As the Darwinian revolution transformed Europe, so too did it prove generative of a new evolutionary idiom to theorise international relations. Yet the holistic nature of this Darwinian *naturalism*—implying as it did a basic unity of humanity under the laws of nature—did not sit easily with the prevailing bifurcating Victorian *civilisational* language so well-known in International Relations (IR). I thus track the contention and combination of these two modes of thought within Britain between 1851-c.1902 by excavating a Darwinian idiom of international relations which was prominent in this period, but so far under-studied.

In the first chapter I offer my novel methodological approach: a 'concentric idiomatic history', which shapes the thesis' three-tiered structure. First is an exegesis of Darwin's own writings, recast as a corpus of international theory, within which we find the foundational concepts of the Darwinian idiom. Thereafter, I track Darwin's influence on a range of neglected political theorists of the period, exploring Darwinism's transformation of three themes: savagery, war, and empire. Finally, I undertake an analysis of journalism and colonial administration to explore the percolation of such Darwinian notions into quotidian British imperial discourse and practice.

Genealogically, I argue that Darwinism's radically flat worldview challenges IR's interpretation of nineteenth-century international order as sharply bifurcated and governed by a 'standard of civilisation'. Rather, in Darwinism, we find a '*standard of nature*' which cut across European and extra-European demarcations far before the typically assumed endpoint of the dual order in 1945. In an ecological spirit, I thus close by calling for a new research emphasis on 'nature' in international thought, widening the aperture of historical inquiry beyond the well-trodden terrain of manufactured 'civilisations'.

*For the memories of my grandfather
and Dr Aaron Rapport*

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Introduction

And now there came out of this building a form—human—was it human? It stood on the broad way and looked around, beheld me and approached. It came within a few yards of me, and at the sight and presence of it an indescribable awe and tremor seized me... It was the face of man, but yet of a type of man distinct from our known extant of races... I felt that this manlike image was endowed with forces inimical to man. As it drew near, a cold shudder came over me. I fell on my knees and covered my face with my hands.¹

Thus recounts Edward Bulwer-Lytton in *The Coming Race* (1871), one of the earliest examples of dystopian fiction.² In the story, a wealthy American adventurer descends into a cavernous world, wherein he discovers a highly advanced subterranean race named ‘the *Vril-ya*’.³ Untouched by natural selection and hidden from evolutionary forces, the *Vril* are said to have escaped the Noachian deluge by venturing underground. Thereafter, they developed supernatural abilities through the discovery of a mysterious liquid known as *vril* (their species-namesake), which possessed such power as to have rendered conflict moot: ‘If army met army, and both had command of this agency, it could be but to the annihilation of each. The age of war was therefore gone.’⁴

Despite the pacific nature of intra-*Vril* relations, the species come to want to exterminate the inferior human race. Like the European colonisers, their apparent state of higher civilisation naturally entailed their successful selection against the barbaric humans—indeed, as the protagonist informs us, ‘the word *A-Vril* was synonymous with civilisation, and *Vril-ya*, signifying “The Civilised Nations”, was the common name by which the communities employing the uses of *vril* distinguished themselves from such of the *Ana* [humankind] as were yet in a state of barbarism.’⁵ The novel ends with our protagonist returning to the surface, warning of the *Vril*’s lust for humanity’s destruction, of the Coming Race.

Bulwer-Lytton’s curious story encapsulates the subject of this thesis: the profound impact of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection on the international imagination of late Victorian Britons, which I unpack in the following thesis in a methodologically novel ‘concentric

¹ Bulwer-Lytton, E. (2007) [1871]. *The Coming Race*. Hersperus Press, p.9.

² Claeys, G. (2017). *Dystopia*. Oxford University Press, p.279.

³ An unusual legacy of the novella is the popular British gravy paste Bovril, renamed in honour of Bulwer-Lytton’s creatures: ‘Bo-*vril*’, which later sold itself during the Boer Wars as key to the war effort. See: Kingstone, H. and Lister, K. (2018). *Paraphernalia!* Routledge, p.251-2.

⁴ Bulwer-Lytton, *Coming Race*, p.27. In this notion of a substance so powerful as to effectively render war obsolete by virtue of annihilation, one is struck by Bulwer-Lytton’s prescience of the advent of nuclear weapons.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.28.

idiomatic history'. Like all speculative fiction, Bulwer-Lytton's tale revealed more about his own society than any future imaginary and, in this fantastical retelling of the colonial encounter clothed in evolutionary science, the author was reckoning with a broad thematic tension of late Victorian international thought, which runs like a fissure throughout what follows: *civilisational* versus *naturalist* languages of international relations.

Civilisational and naturalist languages

On the one hand, what I call *civilisational languages* are a well-trodden terrain in IR.⁶ In short, civilisational frameworks conceive of societal difference in bifurcating terms—dividing the world into so-called 'civilised' and 'savage' (and sometimes intermediately 'barbarous') peoples,⁷ resulting in different positions within or outside international society. Following the decline of natural law and the rise of legal positivism, so the orthodox story goes, civilisational conceptions of international order became hegemonic in the Western world.⁸

Most notably, in nineteenth-century international law, such a Manichaeism is said to have crystallised into a 'standard of civilisation'⁹ (coupled with a higher-order stratification of a great power status club).¹⁰ Replacing the old *ius gentium*, this standard became a legal principle of exclusion, policing who was 'in' and 'out' of the elite cadre of civilised states—thereby laying the intellectual foundations for the greatest tide of empire-building in human history.

However, as I argue throughout this thesis, this prevalent narrative of nineteenth-century international order is incomplete and accounts only for the tails-side of the coin. Across in the discipline of the history of political thought, the dichotomy of 'nature' and 'civilisation' has long been

⁶ For the strongest treatment over the *longue durée*, see: Bowden, B. (2009). *The Empire of Civilization*. Chicago University Press. Indeed, this thesis is a kind of contribution to (or revision of) Bowden's book, which presents an orthodox story of nineteenth-century international order. His discussion of the evolutionary moment in Britain is notably brief (p.63-4) despite its radical implications. Crucially—and oddly, considering the invocation of *evolution* in its subtitle—the book bears but one passing reference to Darwin himself (p.57-8) without lingering on the novelty of his naturalist way of theorising civilisational difference.

⁷ To avoid cluttering up the text, I cease putting such frequently used historical terms as 'savage' and 'civilised' in inverted commas after their first use. This lack of qualification is not a normative endorsement. I also use the British spelling of 'civilised', except in citation where 'civilized' is used.

⁸ Alexandrowicz, C. (1967). *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies*. Clarendon Press.

⁹ Gong, G. (1984). *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*. Clarendon Press; Obregon, L. (2012). 'The Civilized and the Uncivilized'. In: *The Oxford Handbook of the History of International Law*. Oxford University Press, pp.917-42.

¹⁰ Keene, E. (2014). 'The Standard of "Civilisation", the Expansion Thesis and the 19th-Century International Social Space'. *Millennium*, 42(3), pp.651-73.

understood as central to changing conceptions of politics.¹¹ Yet in IR, beyond natural law theory,¹² we have remained essentially content to focus on bifurcating civilisational conceptions of historical international order, to the neglect of a rich tradition of more holistic *naturalist* theories—those that drew upon analogies from the natural world, or posited the innateness of certain human inclinations (such as the urge to wage war). Throughout history, such naturalist theories both competed and were combined with civilisational notions in diverse ways. IR’s oversight here is striking considering that perhaps *the* key idea¹³ of mainstream International Relations—the idea of ‘anarchy’—is itself a kind of ‘state of nature’ assumption,¹⁴ with English School and constructivist notions of sociability arising out of anarchical conditions being notably contractarian in spirit.

In this thesis, I begin to address this broad thematic lacuna by excavating one specific, historical idiom of naturalist internationalism which *post-dated* the supposed ‘death’ of legal naturalism within Europe: the Darwinian idiom. Darwin’s theory of evolution was, truly, a revolution in thought,¹⁵ and one which cultivated a radically new conception of international relations so far curiously under-studied within international intellectual history. The central concepts of the Darwinian idiom—the ‘struggle for existence’ and the natural selection of ‘fitter’ creatures over less fit ones—provided a wholly new way to talk about the most salient aspects of late nineteenth-century international politics: the nature of *savagery*, the character of *empire*, and the purpose of *war*.

Yet Darwin’s theory posed a problem. In contrast to gradated notions of ‘civilisation’, evolutionary theory was basically *holistic*—uniting as it did all species under the laws of science (i.e. the law of natural selection), applied evenly to all. Most crucially, evolution implied that *humankind*¹⁶ was essentially the same everywhere (albeit acutely adapted to a particular environment). Therefore, how

¹¹ For two strong examples: Brett, A. (2011). *Changes of State*. Princeton University Press; Vyverberg, H. (1989). *Human Nature, Cultural Diversity, and the French Enlightenment*. Oxford University Press.

¹² See especially: Tuck, R. (2001). *The Rights of War and Peace*. Oxford University Press.

¹³ Donnelly, J. (2015). ‘The Discourse of Anarchy’. *International Theory*, 7(3), pp.393-425.

¹⁴ Rolf, J.N. (2014). ‘The State of Nature Analogy in International Relations Theory’. *International Relations*, 28(2), pp.159-82. Consider, for one example, Hegel’s assertion that ‘since the sovereignty of states is the principle governing their mutual relations, they exist to that extent *in a state of nature in relation to one another*’. In: Hegel, G.W.F. (1991) [1820]. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge University Press, p.368, emphasis mine.

¹⁵ *Political* revolutions are now spoken of as a phenomenon within IR. See: Lawson, G. (2011). ‘Halliday’s Revenge’. *International Affairs*, 87(5), pp.1067-1085. Yet, revolutions *in thought* remain less understood as constitutive phenomena of the international.

¹⁶ Throughout, I use the neutral ‘humankind’ and its derivatives, rather than the gendered ‘mankind’, except where in quotation.

I explore a cast of political theorists inspired by Darwin (chapter three), and quotidian discourses of international relations in a Darwinian mode within journalism and colonial administration (chapter four). All characters therein attempt to solve the central riddle of matching a singular world governed by common laws of nature with the pre-existing notion of a world divided between the civilised and the uncivilised.

The *raison d'être*

What then is this thesis's intended contribution to knowledge? Most importantly, in its specific *empirical emphasis*, to date no substantive engagement with Darwin himself as a theorist of the international has been explicated. Most engagements with Darwinism have been insubstantial and episodic,¹⁸ with only D.P. Crook's (1998) *Darwinism, War, and History* offering a book-length analysis of Darwinian theories of conflict—yet his focus is largely on a *pacifist* tradition of 'peace biology'.

In its broader historical focus, this thesis also intends to further address IR's *neglect of the nineteenth century*. Whilst it has become a cliché to advance the claim that 'nobody in IR talks about the nineteenth century',¹⁹ it nonetheless contains a kernel of truth. The long nineteenth century²⁰ has in the past been overlooked as a period of transformative change in international society, due no doubt to its apparent deviation from the conventional 'Westphalian' narrative of an expanding system of sovereign states—being instead viewed as an aberrant 'Age of Empire'²¹ in an otherwise triumphal linear story of sovereignty's enthronement as the *Grundnorm* of international order.²²

Some scholars have recently addressed this oversight *analytically*—especially within a new 'hierarchy studies' literature,²³ which jettisons the logic of anarchy from the centre of the discipline in favour of hierarchy. Yet in the study of *international thought*, there is still some way to go, with international intellectual history slow to match the analytical rigour of this hierarchy literature with

¹⁸ Such as: Claeys, G. (2000). 'The "Survival of the Fittest" and the Origins of Social Darwinism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61(2), pp.223-24; Claeys, G. (2019). 'Social Darwinism'. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Cambridge University Press, pp.163-83.

¹⁹ For the classic: Buzan, B. and Lawson, G. (2015). *The Global Transformation*. Cambridge University Press, ch.2.

²⁰ To use Hobsbawm's phrase, pertaining to 1789-1914.

²¹ And again: Hobsbawm, E. (1987). *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*. Weidenfield & Nicholson.

²² For a good critique, see: Osiander, A. (2001). 'Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth'. *International Organization*, 55(2), pp.251-287.

²³ Zarakol, A. (2017). *Hierarchies in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press; Hobson, J. and Sharman, J.C. (2005). 'The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(1), pp.63-98.

an equally robust investigation into the ideational expressions of patterns of super- and subordination throughout international history. Whilst some English School scholars *have* offered variations on this theme,²⁴ for many the focus remains on traditional ‘Westphalian’ narratives—as in the pluralist/sol-
idarist debate around whether the sovereign state will be supplanted by globalisation.²⁵

Of course, it is not an entirely xeric terrain. Yet where this period *has* been a focus of attention, it has largely been on the *civilisational* languages of late Victorian thought. Duncan Bell’s investigations into the connections between British liberalism and empire are particularly notable,²⁶ as are Jennifer Pitts’s variations on a similar theme.²⁷ Yet Darwinism remains a largely absent feature of such surveys—we find ‘Bagehot the liberal’ but not ‘Bagehot the Darwinian’. Elsewhere, the studies are more legalistic in focus.²⁸ Further illumination of nineteenth-century international thought is thus vital.

Thematically, this thesis also incises upon an issue pertinent to contemporary IR theory: the notion of *science* as a criterion of theoretical rigour. Whilst the ‘process of scientization of the discipline’²⁹ is familiar to any student of the subject, it is less well understood when one widens the lens beyond the parochialism of a pre- and post-Waltz demarcation. Whilst ideas of ‘science’ are today reasonably stable in IR,³⁰ as structured around twentieth-century philosophy of science (Popperian, Lakatosian, and Kuhnian), this has not always been so. It was in the nineteenth century when intelligibly contemporary (yet fluid) ideas of science began to emerge *at the same time* as inquiries into similarly intelligibly modern ‘international relations’ were born.

Furthermore, as Hobson’s (2012) dissection of the Eurocentric foundations of IR theory demonstrates,³¹ the historical crucible of ideas often contaminates in perpetuity (an argument

²⁴ Keene, E. (2002). *Beyond the Anarchical Society*. Cambridge University Press; Keal, P. (2003). *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁵ Hurrell, A. (2007). *On Global Order*. Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Bell, D. (2007). *Victorian Visions of Global Order*. Cambridge University Press; Bell, D. (2016). *Reordering the World*. Princeton University Press; Bell, D. (2007). *The Idea of Greater Britain*. Princeton University Press.

²⁷ Pitts, J. (2006). *A Turn to Empire*. Princeton University Press.

²⁸ Pitts, J. (2018). *Boundaries of the International*. Harvard University Press; Anghie, A. (2005). *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ Barkin, S. (2009). ‘Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy’. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5(1), pp.233-246, p.237.

³⁰ Jackson, P. (2011). *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*. Routledge; Elman, C. and Elman, M. (2003). *Progress in International Relations Theory*. M.I.T. Press.

³¹ Hobson, J. (2012). *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

similarly posited in critical disciplinary histories).³² The same ‘legacy effect’ of Darwinism merits attention, especially *vis-à-vis* contemporary realist notions of inter-state competition. A closer understanding of this period of international thought thus helps us better understand *IR’s pre-disciplinary history*. As Ashworth (2014) argues, ‘while it is common to trace the origins of International Relations (IR) back to 1919, after the First World War IR was in fact heavily influenced by the developments in international thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries... Many of the categories and ideas that were to play themselves out in debates after 1919 were products of the *late Victorian* and Edwardian worlds.’³³ Closer attention to this period is therefore crucial.

Indeed, we find today some *explicit* advocates for re-grounding realist theory,³⁴ the discipline as a whole,³⁵ or social science itself,³⁶ on evolutionary foundations. Others offer evolutionary explanations for specific phenomena, such as war³⁷ and cooperation.³⁸ These projects are predicated on establishing clear blue water between evolutionary theory and its assumed historical connection with eugenics and racial authoritarianism. Yet, in reality, we actually *lack* a thoroughly historical understanding of Darwinian international thought. Before we remake the field in Darwin’s image, we ought therefore to properly understand him. *Implicit* evolutionism also pervades the field—as in the English School’s idea of the ‘evolution of international society’³⁹ and functionalist historical sociology.⁴⁰ Evolution’s percolation into IR is clearly deep.⁴¹ What, then, is to be gained from ‘bringing Darwin back in’ to IR? I now turn to this question.

³² Schmidt, B. (1998). *The Political Discourse of Anarchy*. State University of New York Press; Vitalis, R. (2015). *White World Order, Black Power Politics*. Cornell University Press.

³³ Ashworth, L. (2014). *A History of International Thought*. Routledge, p.95-6, emphasis mine.

³⁴ Thayer, B. (2004). *Darwin and International Relations*. University Press of Kentucky.

³⁵ Johnson, D. (2015). ‘Survival of the Disciplines’. *Millennium*, 43(2), pp.749-63; Thompson, W.R. (2001). *Evolutionary Interpretations of World Politics*. Routledge.

³⁶ Barkow, J.H. (2006). *Missing the Revolution*. Oxford University Press.

³⁷ Rosen, S. (2004). *War and Human Nature*. Princeton University Press; Keeley, L. (1996). *War Before Civilization*. Oxford University Press; LeBlanc, S. and Register, K. (2003). *Constant Battles*. St. Martin’s Press.

³⁸ Axelrod, R. (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Penguin.

³⁹ Watson, A. (1992). *The Evolution of International Society*. Routledge.

⁴⁰ Spruyt, H. (1996). *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors*. Princeton University Press.

⁴¹ For a recent example, a March 2020 L.S.E. talk on ‘The Evolution of War and Diplomacy’ called for the application of ‘the evolutionary idea of tipping points to the pre-history and history of diplomacy. War has evolved as we have—it is inherent in our cultural D.N.A.’ See: www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/events/the-evolution-of-war-and-diplomacy [Accessed Feb 11 2020].

Chapter One

Argument and Method

In this first chapter, I outline the main interpretive *arguments* of the thesis—as derived from and explicated within the empirical chapters which follow—and thereafter the *methodological approach* which guides the thesis and its structure.

Darwinian transformations

The substantive focus of this thesis is an exploration of how the Darwinian idiom reshaped the international imaginary of late Victorian Britons. More discretely, I focus on how Darwinism revolutionised and transformed the ways in which the most salient themes of late nineteenth-century international relations were discussed in their distinctive Victorian forms: societal difference (understood through the categories of *civilisation/savagery*), hierarchy (theorised using the institution of *empire*) and conflict (conceptualised within notions of interstate *war*). The pre-eminent international theories of the time—such as liberal imperialism, revolutionary socialism, or nationalist republicanism—each held distinctive conceptions of such notions and have been much discussed.¹ Darwinism’s powerful transformations of these categories of *savagery*, *empire*, and *war*, however, remains largely unexamined.

Naturalising savagery

As an Other against which civilisation can be measured, ‘the savage’ has a long history in political thought.² In the nineteenth century, as Buzan and Lawson (2015) summarise, conceptions of savagery became oriented around the idea of *progress*: ‘four “ideologies of progress”—liberalism, socialism, nationalism and “scientific” racism—came to dominate the ideational landscape of international society. These evolving[!] ideologies were, along with industrialism, closely linked to the “standard of civilisation”, helping to define “barbarian” and “savage” outsiders.’³ Savagery, then, was conceived as a condition of historical backwardness.

¹ On liberal imperialism, see Duncan Bell’s work. On revolutionary socialism: Armstrong, D. (1993). *Revolution and World Order*. Clarendon Press, ch.4. On republicanism: Nabulsi, K. (1999). *Traditions of War*. Oxford University Press.

² Dudley, E., and Novak, M. (1972). *The Wild Man Within*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

³ Buzan, B. (2014). ‘The “Standard of Civilisation” as an English School Concept’. *Millennium*, 42(3), pp.576-94, p.580. For the full argument: Buzan and Lawson, *Global Transformation*, ch.4. Whilst Darwinism is outlined under “scientific” racism’ (p.119), their discussion is superficial and little more than a brief literature review.

That is, the characteristic nineteenth-century conception of the difference between civilisation and savagery was seen as consisting in ‘*material development*, in the sense of economic and technological progress; and... a *moral dimension*, in the sense that a civilized society would be based on an educated and refined population, and good government based on fair and effective political, administrative and judicial systems’.⁴ Hierarchy thereby became an imposition of a distinct historicism: colonialism would be instigated and maintained until savages ‘caught up’ to the historical position of Europe in terms of material, intellectual and moral wealth (i.e. the ‘white man’s burden’, or *mission civilisatrice*).

Certainly, as I find in the thesis, some Darwinians *did* seek to repackage evolutionism (against the theory’s internal logic) as a scientifically teleological support for such progressivist notions. Yet Darwinian conceptions of savagery also altered the civilisational standard by introducing a *naturalisation* of the axis of difference. Savages were re-conceptualised not simply as occupying an earlier stage in ‘historical time’ (as in J.S. Mill’s argument that empire was a temporary condition of stewardship), but rather resembled an irredeemable ossified condition of a more fundamental past: a natural, ‘deep time’, which burst into the Victorian imaginary with the arrival of nineteenth-century natural and geological sciences.⁵

A shift thereby occurred in the conception of savages: from being morally, culturally, or aesthetically aberrant,⁶ to a kind of ontological natural, inescapable inferiority to civilised races. From Darwinism, the gap between the savage and civilised—the result of millennia of developmental processes—thereby became unbridgeable. Through this scientisation of the ‘grammar of difference’⁷ between the European Self and non-European Other, Darwinism thereby cultivated the *Homo europeus*⁸—a civilised form of the human animal which had naturally ascended to a higher state of

⁴ Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, p.112, emphasis mine. See also: Bowden, *Empire of Civilization*, p.16.

⁵ Sera-Shriar, E. (2018). *Historicizing Humans*. University of Pittsburgh Press. On ‘historical’ versus ‘natural time’, see: Koselleck, R. (2002) [1972]. ‘On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History’. In: *The Practice of Conceptual History*. Stanford University Press, pp.1-19; Thompson, E.P. (1967). ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’. *Past & Present*, 38(1), pp.56-97.

⁶ The classic discussion of ‘civilisation’ as a moral condition remains Elias’s (1939) *The Civilizing Process*.

⁷ Cooper, F. and Stoler, A. (1997). *Tensions of Empire*. London: University of California Press, p.3.

⁸ As above, a term borrowed from Cooper and Stoler (p.3). They do not use the term in relation to Darwinism, yet it serves as the perfect metaphor here. The original use of this term was by the French Darwinist, Vacher de Lapouge: Hawkins, M. (1997). *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*. Cambridge University Press, p.193.

development, thereby implicitly endowed with a righteous capacity to govern those in a lower stage of development.

Indeed, as a yardstick of legitimacy, the ‘scientific’ status of Darwinism served as a meta-category of difference between the ‘enlightened’ Europeans and the ‘backwards’ Other. As Claeys (2018) reminds us, in the nineteenth century, ‘to attain legitimacy, an approach to any subject now had to be “scientific”’.⁹ Throughout the thesis, I emphasise how this *legitimizing power of science* (much like in contemporary IR theory) became an important feature of political rhetoric.¹⁰

The classic example, which proliferates throughout this thesis, is Charles Darwin’s own description of savagery: the native South American peoples of Tierra del Fuego, which he observed on the *H.M.S. Beagle*. The Fuegians, I argue, became a kind of ‘*ur-savage*’—an empirical, ‘*scientific*’ textbook case of the sheer degradation of savages and their incapacity for being civilised. Darwin himself (chapter two) conceived the Fuegians as more animal than human, and many theorists (chapter three) took upon this description to support their own evolutionist theories of savagery.

Empire’s descent

Empire too was reconceptualised in Darwinism’s wake. In the actual *practice* of British imperial power (as we shall see in chapter four, notably with Cecil Rhodes), Darwinian justifications for colonial domination were common. Further, empire itself was a crucial incubator for anthropology and the natural sciences, both of which were closely linked to the development of evolutionary theory (chapter three). Furthermore, in the *theorisation* of empire, evolutionist ideas were co-opted (such as by Seeley and Spencer, in chapter three) to naturalise imperialism.

The shift under Darwinism, as with savagery, was therefore from empire as a kind of *moral-institutional* mission to defences of empire in *naturalist* terms—that empire was simply an ineradicable pattern of political behaviour inscribed in nature, with imperial expansion often likened to organic processes of expansion and domination, like the growth and spread of a plant across an ecosystem, overwhelming ‘less fit’ species.

⁹ Claeys, G. (2019). ‘Introduction’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Cambridge University Press, p.3.

¹⁰ On the rise of ‘political science’ in the nineteenth century, see: Collini, S., Winch, D., and Burrow, J. (1983). *That Noble Science of Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Nature's war, war's nature

Most significant, however, was Darwinism's radical transformation of the theorisation of war. Here, warfare became completely reconceptualised—not as an ephemeral, configurative military battle between two or more dynastic armies over a piece of territory, but as a perennial totality, an unbounded ahistorical *existential* 'struggle' of all nations and peoples against each other. Foucault captured such a change in his genealogy of biopower at the end of *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), where he pays witness to the historical shift from wars of *individual sovereigns* to wars of *entire societies*:

Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity.¹¹

As Gat (1992) attests, post-Napoleonic industrialising¹² Europe was marked by this transformation, where 'nineteenth-century military theory was dominated and given its distinctive character by the advent of *national, all-out war and its correlative strategy of destruction*.'¹³ Two reactions emerged: the 'Romantic' and the 'Rationalist' traditions, the latter of which 'emerged in the wake of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century... [and] looked to the exact and natural sciences as a model to be applied'¹⁴ to military theory. Darwinism, then, became an ideal register¹⁵ through which Rationalist conceptions of total destructive war could be theorised: from a 'struggle for territory' to a 'struggle for existence'.

Yet this eternal, natural struggle was *heralded* by many—as not only descriptively ineradicable, but prescriptively productive. Such a notion has a pedigree in international thought, as captured by Ceadel (1987) as 'militarism',¹⁶ and refined in Nabulsi's (1999) idea of *martialism*: 'defined as the view that war is both the supreme instrument and the ultimate realization of all human endeavour... Martialists had a distinct conception of human nature, the state, liberty, and nationalism, and all these

¹¹ Foucault, M. (1998) [1976]. *The Will to Knowledge*. Penguin, p.137.

¹² Gat, A. (2006). *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford University Press, ch.15.

¹³ Gat, A. (1992). *The Development of Military Thought*. Clarendon Press, p.vii, emphasis mine. See also: Heuser, B. (2010). *The Evolution of Military Strategy*. Cambridge University Press, ch.5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.vii.

¹⁵ Yet Darwin somewhat remains in the side-lines of Gat's narrative, occupying little discussion (p.79, 84 and 188).

¹⁶ Ceadel, M. (1987). *Thinking About Peace and War*. Oxford University Press, ch.3. Whilst he notes that militarism contained 'crude applications Darwinian, Hegelian, or Nietzschean thought' (p.4), little historical inquiry is given to 'vulgar Darwinism' (p.27).

characteristics found their ultimate fulfilment in the unrestrained glorification of war.¹⁷ I trace one potent variant of this tradition: a ‘Darwinian martialism’,¹⁸ which finds its roots in Darwin himself before being exported into political theory and discourse. Of course, as D.P. Crook is eager to point out, Darwinism did not *only* foment traditions of war but also an influential tradition of non-violence.¹⁹ Yet it was the darker Darwinian conflict theory that shaped the actual historical worlds of state competition and imperial domination, especially so in Britain as the ‘hub’ of the imperial world.²⁰

More broadly, as Holly Case (2018) has recently argued, the intellectual world of the nineteenth century was an ‘Age of Questions’, of temporally urgent political crises—the National Question, the Social Question, the Jewish Question, etc.—which demanded immediate answers. Bundled together, many strived for singular answers to the general European crisis, amongst which was ‘*the argument about force... that universal war and genocide, the Final Solution, represent[ed] the fullest realization of the age of questions*’.²¹ Darwinian martialism represented the apotheosis of this eschatological *fin de siècle*, as tragically realised in the twin cataclysms that opened the twentieth century: total war and state-led racial extinctions. The ‘longed-for/feared “universal war”’²² was distinctly Darwinian.

Darwinism and international order

This notion of a Darwinian martialism has crucial implications for how we think about international order in the (late) nineteenth century. As outlined in the introduction, the typical story here is a civilisational one—whereby the more holistic, naturalist *ius gentium* is replaced by a bifurcating, positivist ‘standard of civilisation’ defined in moral-institutional terms. More specifically, as Keene (2002)

¹⁷ Nabulsi, *Traditions of War*, p.81-2.

¹⁸ Nabulsi *does* mention such a current of thought, acknowledging that a ‘quasi-Darwinist approach, drawing analogies from the natural world, was extremely popular in mid to late nineteenth-century Europe’, but affords it brief consideration. *Ibid*, p.95-6, and p.119-120.

¹⁹ Crook, D.P. (1994). *Darwinism, War and History*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁰ ‘For some martialists with a Darwinist tinge, the Englishman’s natural restlessness made him an obvious choice for the conquest of the world. Kidd identified this trait as responsible for the successful conquest and control of India by the English.’ Nabulsi, *Traditions of War*, p.119. Darwin directly cites this idea in the *Descent* (p.168).

²¹ Case, H. (2018). *The Age of Questions*. Princeton University Press, p.2 and ch.3. I am reminded here also of Umberto Eco’s ninth sign of Ur-Fascism: ‘There is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle. Thus *pacifism is trafficking with the enemy*. It is bad because *life is permanent warfare*. This, however, brings about an Armageddon complex. Since enemies have to be defeated, there must be a final battle, after which the movement will have control of the world. But such a “final solution” implies a further era of peace, a Golden Age, which contradicts the principle of permanent war.’ Eco, U. (1995). ‘Ur-Fascism’. *New York Review of Books*, 42(11), pp.12-15.

²² *Ibid*, p.10.

argues in *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, international order was thereby Janus-faced: where the *intra*-European experience was one structured by traditional ‘Westphalian’ principles of sovereign equality and toleration, colonial practices in the *extra*-European world were instead sculpted by the Grotian doctrine of divisible sovereignty around a legal standard of civilisation. The collapse of this dual order and the undoing of the civilisational standard, it is argued, arrived when the violence that characterised colonisation came to the Europeans’ own backyard:

The main problem of international order between 1914 and 1945, as civilised nations saw it, was not so much the backwardness of non-European peoples but rather *the rise of barbarous ideologies in European states*... The struggle on behalf of civilisation against Nazism represented the crowning moment of this intellectual transformation... Once that move had been made there was no going back to the old theoretical apparatus of nineteenth-century international law, and the “reconstruction” of international order after 1945 was in that respect a genuinely original project.²³

To be sure, Keene’s narrative is a much subtler story of the making of modern international society than the emollient ‘expansion’²⁴ narrative of the early English School. Yet this thesis calls us to disrupt the neat periodisation here, and not simply by rejecting the notion of a *distinctively nineteenth-century* ‘standard of civilisation’ (i.e. by reconceiving the legal standard as simply the continuation of perennial European practices of extra-European domination, both past²⁵ and present).²⁶ My argument is different. Whilst a more nuanced story, this vision of *two orders* is still itself too neatly drawn—an artifice that begins to collapse under the weight of the inclusion of a Darwinian naturalist idiom of international thought.

The problem here has been this narrative’s monolithic understanding of ‘European’ thought in the period—in Keene’s analysis, for instance, we find a subtle and textured exegesis of extra-European thought, yet the discussion of *intra*-European thought still maintains the classic English School presupposition of self-evident principles of sovereign equality and mutual toleration. Keene concludes that ‘orthodox theories of order in modern world politics are inadequate because their

²³ Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, p.121, emphasis mine.

²⁴ Bull, H. and Watson, A. (2016) [1984]. *The Expansion of International Society*. Oxford University Press.

²⁵ Muldoon, J. (1979). *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels*. University of Pennsylvania Press; Cavallar, G. (2008). ‘Vitoria, Grotius, Pufendorf, Wolff and Vattel: Accomplices of European Colonialism and Exploitation or True Cosmopolitans?’. *Journal of the History of International Law*, 10(2), pp.181-209.

²⁶ Bowden, *Empire of Civilization*, ch.7-8.

analysis of the development of modern international order is *too narrowly concentrated on the European states-system*,²⁷ yet the irony of my analysis is that we might, for once, need to be *more* Eurocentric.

By opening the black box of European thought, and in a genealogical spirit,²⁸ an exhumation of a much earlier form of *intra-European existential martialism* than the two world wars suggests that we need to rethink the idea of two distinct orders. Indeed, Keene's argument accepts the naturalist underpinnings of one half of the dual order—the Grotian distinction of *occupatio* and *dominium* invoked by colonialists—yet asserts that civilisational practices reigned within Europe. I contend that naturalism persisted there too.

Certainly, extra-European Darwinian discourses were more explicitly racialised, with savagery as much an obsession of the Darwinians as the civilisationists. Yet ideas of *existential competition* cut across both the European core (with states in a struggle for their existence) *and* the extra-European periphery (with savages in a struggle against their extinction *vis-à-vis* the colonisers). This was a radically flat, horizontal, and singular conception of international order. Despite the different flavours to the intra- and extra-European discourses, both were fundamentally the same: a *thoroughly* naturalist language embraced the holism it implied, even if some (including Darwin himself) clung to the bifurcating language of civilisation. Indeed, those who drew most sharply on civilisational distinctions were Darwinian *anti-imperialists* (outlined in chapter four), rather than the racist imperialists one would expect.

Of course, most combined the naturalist and civilisational in some way—as outlined above, usually by *naturalising* the civilised/savage distinction, repackaging the civilisational standard as the demands of scientific fact. Yet, as Hellström (2017) recognises, evidently 'Darwin's theory was used to naturalise and so justify just about any aspect of the prevailing order; within his own lifetime, it

²⁷ Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, p.145.

²⁸ Indeed, my whole impulse is genealogical, in the sense of untangling the pure naturalising moves of the Darwinians. As Mark Bevir puts it: 'genealogy operates as a form of critique because it applies the denaturalizing tendency of radical historicism to unsettle those who ascribe a spurious naturalness to their particular beliefs and action.' Bevir, M. (2008). 'What is Genealogy?'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2(3), pp.263-75, p.266. Incidentally, whilst we think of Nietzsche and Foucault as the pioneers of genealogy, one could equally draw upon *Darwin's* non-teleological biological genealogy. See, for instance: Solinas, M. (2014). *From Aristotle's Teleology to Darwin's Genealogy*. Routledge.

was invoked to naturalise and justify imperialism and racially codified exploitation... *At the same time* it could also be—and it was—employed *to undermine the prevailing order*.²⁹

In inchoate form, this thesis therefore reveals a new way to think about late nineteenth-century international order, prevalent at the time but absent from our existing narratives—not *only* a ‘standard of civilisation’, but also a Darwinian ‘*standard of nature*’, whereby the success or failure of international politics was judged against the precepts of ‘natural’ forces and the selective logic of the struggle for existence. Whether empires or tribes, those who failed this trial of nature were said not merely to be socially ostracised from international society (as with civilisational standards),³⁰ but materially eliminated from the arena of political life altogether. Whilst the introduction of ‘nature’ into political thought was certainly nothing new, through Darwin it took on an omnipresent immanence.³¹ With Darwinism, therefore, a much messier story of the making of modern international society emerges.

Traditions or contextualism?

These broad interpretive arguments will play out within the empirical chapters, but first I want to outline my *methodological* approach which guides what follows. As this is a work in international intellectual history, some anchoring is worthwhile: how exactly do I go about excavating a Darwinian idiom, and what do I mean by an ‘idiom’ anyway? Here, the two most prominent methods available in international intellectual history are *tradition-making* and *Skinnerian contextualism*, and thus it is worth briefly evaluating their use.

Traditions of thought have a notable pedigree in IR—a discipline with a ‘traditions tradition’³²—a tendency which began with the early English School and maintained over the years by scholars constructing a panoply of their own traditions. So why do I not join this chorus and speak

²⁹ Hellström, N.P. (2017). ‘Is There an End to Evolution?’. *Global Intellectual History*, 2(1), pp.100-4, p.102, emphasis mine.

³⁰ Either as ‘behavioural’ or ‘ontological outlaws’. See: Donnelly, J. (2006). ‘Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy’. *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(2), pp.139-70.

³¹ This therefore tests Will Bain’s recent claim that *all* modern conceptions of international order owe a theological inheritance to what he calls ‘constructed order’ (as opposed to ‘immanent order’). I would contend that Darwinism, which he neglects, offered a genuinely secular conception of immanent order, driven by purportedly objectively observable, but un-willed, mechanisms. See: Bain, W. (2020). *Political Theology of International Order*. Oxford University Press.

³² Jeffery, R. (2005). ‘Tradition as Invention’. *Millennium*, 34(1), pp.57-84.

of a ‘Darwinian tradition’? Certainly, there are pedagogical advantages to the traditions approach³³ and its clarifying utility in ‘allow[ing] for the treatment of patterns of thought and practice both within and across time’.³⁴

Yet it is precisely this perennialist impulse to construct transtemporal conversations—of the type originally criticised by Quentin Skinner³⁵—that has elicited strong critiques of the traditions method in recent years. As scholars associated with a purported ‘historiographical turn’³⁶ have argued, IR’s use of traditions can appear insubstantially historical when compared to the rise of Cambridge School contextualism since the 1970s.³⁷ As Duncan Bell (2014) puts it: ‘traditions are usually constructed around a canon of renowned thinkers, which serves simultaneously as *a reservoir of arguments*, *an index of historical continuity*, and *a powerful source of intellectual authority*’.³⁸ Thus, such a notion as a reified ‘Kantian tradition’ linked across epochs is not only inherently ahistorical,³⁹ but is driven by an impetus to furnish IR’s pre-disciplinary history with a kind of prestige—just indeed as the year 1648 and the Westphalian myth has ‘given the discipline of IR a sense of theoretical direction, thematic unity and historical legitimacy’.⁴⁰ Traditions, in my view, therefore often obscure more than they reveal.

If not traditions, then, surely then I ought to embrace contextualism, the most prominent alternative approach to intellectual history?⁴¹ There has certainly been strong research within international intellectual history in a Skinnerian mode—such as Tuck’s (1999) *Rights of War and Peace* and Armitage’s (2013) *Foundations of Modern International Thought*. Yet such work retains its orbit remains fixed around a troublesome *canon of ‘great thinkers’*. In Tuck, we find the usual protagonists of Hobbes,

³³ Indeed, Wight’s original purpose of the ‘three traditions’ was for delivering lectures.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.79.

³⁵ Skinner, Q. (1969). ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’. *History and Theory*, 8(1), pp.3-53.

³⁶ Bell, D. (2001). ‘International Relations: The Dawn of a Historiographical Turn?’. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3(1), pp.115-26. See also: Armitage, D. (2004). ‘The Fifty Years’ Rift’. *Modern Intellectual History*, 1(1), pp.97-109.

³⁷ Brett, A. (2002). ‘What is Intellectual History Now?’. In: *What is History Now?* Palgrave Macmillan, pp.113-32.

³⁸ Bell, D. (2014). ‘What is Liberalism?’. *Political Theory*, 42(6), pp.682-715, p.686.

³⁹ Bartelson, J. (1996). ‘Short Circuits’. *Review of International Studies*, 22(4), pp.339-360.

⁴⁰ Teschke, B. (2003). *The Myth of 1648*. Verso, p.2.

⁴¹ The third alternative would be a Koselleckian conceptual history, as outlined below. Certainly, this kind of history—tracking the usages of ‘basic concepts’ over very long periods—is an approach I am endeared to. Yet it does not easily lend itself to this project. Which basic concept would I be tracking? ‘Struggle for existence’? ‘Nature’? The choice is either too narrow or too broad. In the University of Oslo, the research group Conceptual History of International Relations (CHOIR) is endeavouring such a history of concepts, but their selection is easier: ‘war’, ‘diplomacy’, etc.

Grotius, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant; Armitage, meanwhile, grants Locke a quarter of the book. Indeed, the fixation on the early modern period by such contextualists evinces the attachment to a certain notion of canon.

But what would such a canon of international theory look like in the *nineteenth century*? Mill on empire? Marx on global capitalism? Beyond that, the rationale becomes tricky. Indeed, canonical approaches struggle particularly with this specific period, wherein ‘much of the most influential and interesting political thinking was articulated... in registers and formats that often escape the eye of historians of political theory, who have tended to focus on canonical figures.’⁴²

More fundamentally, it is not quite so obvious that a ‘canon’ *actually exists* for international intellectual historians. As Keene (2017) argues, ‘Skinner’s contextualism begins with and from a reasonably well-defined canon of great thinkers and classic works, such that when he talks about the reinterpretation of classic texts, there would be a reasonable shared understanding of what these were.’⁴³ *International* intellectual history, however, does not share this luxury, and ‘a reshuffling of the political theory pack’⁴⁴ does not cut the mustard.

Martin Wight (1960) famously identified this problem—that ‘international theory is marked, not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty’,⁴⁵ and thereby lacks an obvious canon necessary for applying an orthodox Skinnerian method, which relies on a ‘major/minor text’ distinction in order to disentangle the manipulation of language by ‘ideological innovators’. Bull and Wight instead opted for eclecticism—Meinecke and Treitschke replace Hobbes and Kant, and political theorists are replaced by a ‘haphazard bunch’⁴⁶ of historians, utopians, international lawyers, diplomats, and statesmen. We thus cannot just ‘add contextualism and stir’.⁴⁷

In my project, the difficulty of a canonical approach would seem to be solved by focusing on Darwin—recast as a ‘great thinker’, with a surrounding context. However, I work the wrong way round by *starting* with Darwin (and thereafter tracking an *idiom*) rather than offering a backwards-

⁴² Bell, *Victorian Visions*, p.3-4.

⁴³ Keene, E. (2017). ‘International Intellectual History and International Relations’. *International Relations*, 31(3), pp.341-56, p.345.

⁴⁴ Keene, E. (2014). ‘Where Should We Look for International Thought?’. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 13(4), pp.397-402, p.398.

⁴⁵ Wight, M. (1960). ‘Why is There No International Theory?’. *International Relations*, 2(1), pp.35-48, p.38.

⁴⁶ Keene, ‘International Intellectual History’, p.346.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.342.

looking intellectual history where Darwin becomes an ‘ideological innovator’ *à la* Machiavelli. Indeed, Darwin *does not* even appear such a thing. A ‘major’ thinker in a scientific sense, certainly, but more of a ‘minor’ political thinker—where natural selection *was* a scientific innovation, Darwin’s political arguments simply sat atop a pre-existing ideological context.

Instead of one author in her context, my focus is instead on an ‘idiom’—by which I mean a characteristic mode of expression over time by multiple authors, a discernible pattern of thought involving invocations of certain common conceptual landmarks (in this case, concepts like ‘the struggle for existence’, ‘natural selection’, ‘inherited variation’). Such idioms often find their source at individual authors (here, Darwin), but such ‘innovators’ soon lose agency over the use of their conceptual innovations.

A ‘concentric idiomatic history’

However, I do not wish to abandon a contextualist mindset altogether, but rather adapt it for the task of analysing such an idiom over time in a canon-less context. Here, Vergerio (2019) appears to offer a satisfying methodological silver bullet: ‘an alternative form of “serial contextualism”, focused on *the reception of an author rather than of a concept, and anchored in that author’s original context of writing*’,⁴⁸ thus combining a Skinnerian synchronic reading of an original author’s texts with a diachronic analysis of ‘the impact of that author’s move by tracing the reception of her text over time.’⁴⁹ Where Vergerio takes Gentili as her locus,⁵⁰ mine is Darwin.

Yet Vergerio’s serial contextualism, which focuses largely on authorial reception by intellectuals, could actually emphasise *even more* the practicalities of political rhetoric. I thus use in this thesis my own novel methodological variant—an eclectic three-ringed ‘concentric idiomatic history’ of Darwinism, with a different historical focus in each ring:

1. Darwin (**focus:** context of idiomatic origin)
2. Darwinian political theorists (**focus:** authorial receptions)
3. Darwinism in journalism and colonial administration (**focus:** practitioners)

⁴⁸ Vergerio, C. (2019). ‘Context, Reception, and the Study of Great Thinkers in International Relations’. *International Theory*, 11(1), pp.110-137, p.114.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Vergerio, C. (2017). ‘Constructing the Right to War’. [DPhil Thesis]. Department of Politics and IR, University of Oxford.

Thus the structure is one moving ever outwards, with a centrifugal force of proximity: from Darwin; to theoretical Darwinism applied to questions of international politics; and finally to Darwinism as uttered and enacted in everyday imperial practice and commentary. The challenges of this method are the increasingly impressionistic image as we move further out from the central circle—and, remedially, I have tried to be judicious in my use of historical sources to inoculate against potential misinterpretations and exaggerations.

By combining the more cerebral sources of traditional intellectual histories (in the first two empirical chapters) with a more ‘practical’ perspective (the final chapter), I hope to give a textured image of Darwinism in international thought *and* practice.⁵¹ My aim is to show how the Darwinian idiom not only offered a new way to abstractly theorise, justify, and condemn international politics, but to enact it too.

My understanding of an ‘idiomatic history’ here broadly draws from the methodological arguments of J.G.A. Pocock and Reinhart Koselleck—associated respectively with Cambridge School contextualism and German *Begriffsgeschichte* (‘conceptual history’). Despite the methodological differences between these two approaches,⁵² they share two emphases in their understandings of the linguistics of political argument: (1) the *plasticity* of ways of talking about politics and, (2) the *historicity* embedded within such political languages.⁵³

By *plasticity*, I mean that languages of politics are adaptable and (to use a Darwinian notion!) ‘evolve’ over time through usage and diversification. In Koselleck’s work, this can be seen in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*—a sprawling German-language dictionary of the changing usages of foundational ‘basic political and social concepts’ (*Grundbegriffe*) over huge expanses of time (concepts such as ‘revolution’, ‘class’, and ‘crisis’).⁵⁴ In Cambridge School contextualism, this plasticity is typically framed in terms of a Wittgensteinian language game, whereby political rhetoric is conceived as a

⁵¹ This distinction between ‘thought’ and ‘practice’ is un-Skinnerian, which emphasises speech-acts as just as ‘practical’ as, say, assassinating a president. I am being heuristic here: by ‘political thought’ as opposed to ‘political practice’, I simply mean a distinction between utterances by those abstract theoreticians of politics in a more general sense versus those in commentary upon or in possession of actual imperial power.

⁵² Especially the different emphasis on *canons* versus *concepts*. See: Tribe, K. (2004). ‘Translator’s Introduction’. In: *Futures Past*. Columbia University Press, pp.vii-xx, p.ix; Richter, M. (1995). *The History of Political and Social Concepts*. Oxford University Press.

⁵³ As above, my understanding of an ‘idiom’ as a pattern of thought differs somewhat from Pocock’s ‘political languages’ and Koselleck’s *Grundbegriffe*, yet both stress these similar research foci to mine.

⁵⁴ Koselleck, R. (2006) [1982]. ‘Crisis’. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67(2), pp.357-400.

practical (not abstract) task—consisting in ‘doing things with words’, of utterances as speech-acts in history, and an appreciation of ‘not only *what* is written, but *why* it was written’.⁵⁵ In this thesis, the practical dimension—of authors advancing arguments to address actual *political* questions, of savagery, war, and empire—is manifestly clear. Similarly, just as ‘in its own way, *Begriffsgeschichte* is a form of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*,’⁵⁶ so too do I focus on the receptions of Darwin across time.

The notion of *historicity* is most crucial. As Pocock argued, a sense of historical consciousness is always embedded within political languages, acting as vessels for a society’s sense of self and place in time. In them, we discover how a society reckons with dilemmas of contingency and continuity, navigating its temporal ephemerality. (Pocock’s most famous case is civic republicanism as a reckoning with the mortality of a republic in crisis.)⁵⁷ For Koselleck, the so-termed *Sattelzeit* (lit. ‘saddle time’, c.1750-1850) represents a juncture during which a distinctly modern sense of ‘historical time’ came into being. As outlined earlier, in the nineteenth century, a historicism obsessed with teleological and progressive notions became prominent,⁵⁸ as Bayly (2004) outlines:

Historians and philosophers who lived in the nineteenth century tended to think that history was moved along by big spiritual and intellectual changes. They believed that God, or the Spirit of Reason, or the Urge for Liberation was moving in the world. Some of them believed in a European Christian “civilizing mission.” Others thought *that races and civilizations moved up and down according to natural laws of competition, survival, and decline*.⁵⁹

Whilst this common assertion that Darwinism acted as a perfect reservoir of metaphor from which to draw ‘scientific’ notions of teleology,⁶⁰ I argue it was in fact a more plural confluence of diverse historicisms. Darwinists tended to draw on three contradictory modes of thought, each implying different philosophies of history and conceptions of ‘nature’: neo-Hobbesianism, Whiggish

⁵⁵ Tully, J. (1988). ‘The Pen is a Mighty Sword’. In: *Meaning and Context*. Princeton University Press, pp.7-25, p.9. In the Austinian jargon, this is the ‘illocutionary’ meaning of the text.

⁵⁶ Tribe, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, p.xviii.

⁵⁷ Pocock, J.G.A. (1975). *The Machiavellian Moment*. Princeton University Press.

⁵⁸ Mark Bevir counts three distinct nineteenth-century historicisms: progressive Whig historiography, scientifically progressive Positivism, and nostalgic Romanticism. As Sera-Shriar (2018) argues, this misses *evolutionism*, as ‘Darwin’s concept of natural selection, with its emphasis on random variation, is a form of historicism that is distinctly different from the other three versions.’ Sera-Shriar, *Historicizing Humans*, p.3. Yet it is also my contention, through the notion of a ‘confluence’ of historicisms, that Darwinians never fully embraced the non-teleological version of natural selection.

⁵⁹ Bayly, C. (2004). *The Birth of the Modern World*. Wiley-Blackwell, p.5, emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Such as: Rech, W. (2017). ‘International Law, Empire, and the Relative Indeterminacy of Narrative’. In: *International Law and Empire*. Oxford University Press, pp.57-80, p.63.

progressivism, and biological evolutionism.⁶¹ Only the third of these—i.e. non-teleological natural selection—was obviously distinctly ‘Darwinian’. Yet, as we shall see in the empirical chapters, authors pulled at and drew upon this trichotomy in various different ways and with varying emphases.

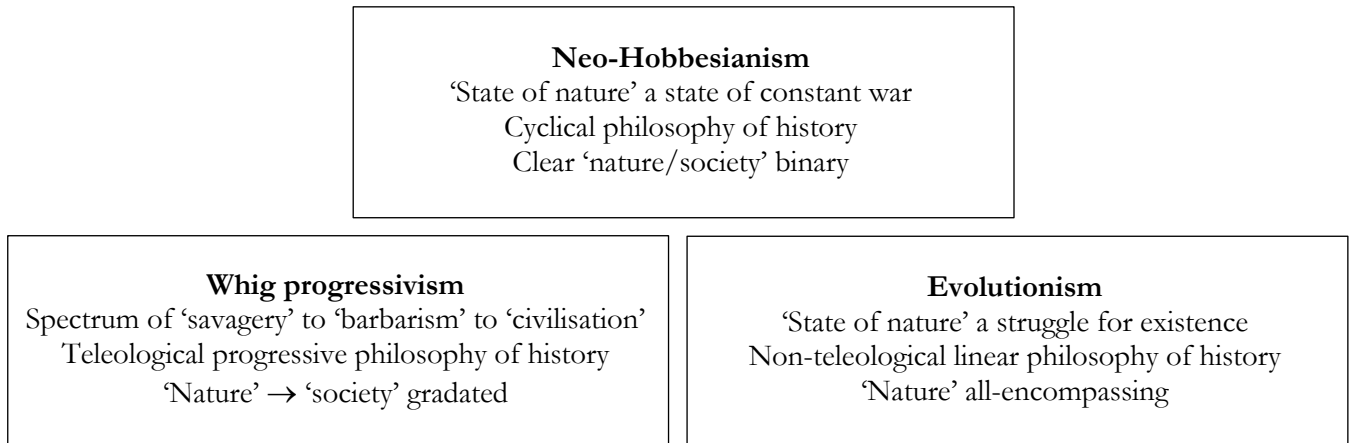


Fig. 2: historicisms and naturalisms in the Darwinian confluence

In summary, then, in navigating the empirics I employ a ‘concentric idiomatic history’ of international Darwinism, focused on certain core concepts (e.g. the ‘struggle for existence’) and their transmutation from one author to another within their context, and finally as percolated into everyday political discourse—with an emphasis throughout on the historicisms embedded within. It is within Darwin we find these concepts’ first expression, and to whom I thus first turn.

⁶¹ On how this non-teleological evolutionism was expressed in visual form, see: Archibald, J.D. (2014). *Aristotle’s Ladder, Darwin’s Tree*. Columbia University Press.

Chapter Two

Darwin, Theorist

‘The western nations of Europe... now so immeasurably surpass their former savage progenitors [they] stand at the summit of civilisation.’¹
— Charles Darwin (1871)

In this first empirical chapter, I tackle Darwin himself, whom I recast as an international political theorist. I begin first by arguing that we should approach science as an historically rooted cultural product and less as an objective, neutral claim to knowledge, contending that scientific production is often deeply *political* in both construction and ends. I thus approach Darwin’s corpus through a contextual, political lens.

In its *origins*, I argue that his theory was itself the product of an internationalising world. In its *content*, I focus on thematic elements in Darwin’s writings which speak directly to matters of the international: the competitive ‘struggle for existence’ at the heart of the *Origin of Species* (1859), and the distinction between the savage and civilised placed centre-stage in Darwin’s later work on the evolution of the human moral faculties, notions which (as we see in chapter three) became co-opted for political ends.

Anticipating the following chapter, then, I close with the question of (mis)reception, where I suggest that the ‘perversion’ of Darwin’s theory has been overstated. Whilst it is true that Darwin’s personal politics were Radical in orientation, the gap between Darwin and Darwinism is not as wide as many assume—as a close reading of his work attests.

Science, culture, politics

All are familiar with ‘Charles Darwin the scientist’. As the architect of one of the greatest scientific theories ever conceived, Darwin’s status is rivalled only by other watershed figures in the development of the natural sciences such as Newton and Einstein (whom presented similarly quasi-axiomatic grand theories of the mechanics of nature). Like the Copernican usurpation of heliocentrism, Darwin’s theory of evolution disrupted the fundamentals by which historical agents navigated their world, serving as ‘one of those episodes in which a new scientific theory symbolises a wholesale change in

¹ Darwin, C. (2004) [1871]. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Penguin, p.167.

cultural values.² *Unlike* Copernicus, however, Darwin's theory took not impersonal particles and forces as its locus of explanation, but biological life: *human beings* included.

Darwinian evolution therefore raised not only scientific questions, but profound metaphysical and *political* questions around 'man's place in nature'.³ The political questions arising from Darwinism were particularly powerful in a context of an intra-European multipolar states-system and extra-European practices of imperialism. Domestically, what is the role of survival in unifying the nation? Internationally, are these nations themselves in a struggle for survival? Imperially, should some races 'naturally' govern others? A myopic categorisation of Darwin as a 'scientist'—and the associated notions of objectivity which this implies—renders this political dimension of Darwin's work opaque. We should therefore strive to revive 'Darwin the theorist'.

The first exercise is therefore a ground-clearing one: to reorient ourselves away from boundary-drawing intellectual impulses, resisting obsessions with strict categorisation (ironically itself a kind of Victorian naturalist mindset).⁴ No doubt the ignorance of Darwin's centrality to international thought is due in part to this contemporary impulse to bracket 'science' as a special mode of intellectual endeavour.

Yet, prior to the enthroning of science as a separate project, it was seen as part of a holistic process of intellectual inquiry: scientific concerns were a part of 'natural philosophy' which sat comfortably alongside metaphysics, theology, and poetry. In the nineteenth century, 'that the natural and moral sciences were seen to be inextricably linked throughout this period is telling, as is the observation that they spoke to the kind of political economy, and thus the kind of society, that should be implemented.'⁵ Evolutionary debate was refracted through this intellectual ecumenicism, whereby 'the nineteenth-century debate on "man's place in nature" ranged broadly and deeply. It engaged the reading public at every level... New ideas were not fragmented into academic disciplines but were

² Bowler, J. (1984). *Evolution*. University of California Press, p.1. On the idea of a 'Darwinian revolution', see: Hale, P. (2015). 'Rejecting the Myth of the Non-Darwinian Revolution'. *Victorian Review*, 41(2), pp.13-18.

³ Young, R. (1985). *Darwin's Metaphor*. Cambridge University Press, ch.6.

⁴ Think of the compartments of neatly named insects in the glass cases of natural history museums, the modern museum itself a product of the nineteenth century: Osterhammel, J. (2014). *The Transformation of the World*. Princeton University Press, p.11-14.

⁵ Hale, P. (2014). *Political Descent*. University of Chicago Press, p.16.

viewed as part of *a common set of themes for a common culture*.⁶ The intellectual world of the nineteenth century was thus a holistic one—the world of the polymath (or, cynically, the *dilettante*).⁷

Darwin was no different. Hailing from a family of remarkable pedigree, the ‘Darwin-Wedgwoods’, the young Darwin was a man of Radicalist stock. During Charles’s childhood, ‘politics had been a significant topic of discussion in the Darwin household’⁸ and, as his notebooks attest, he became an avid consumer of political thought and current affairs (as would be expected of a middle-class gentleman of his day). The rationale to rethink Darwin in political terms is therefore *biographically* obvious. As such, Darwin’s writings cannot be read simply as work of ‘science’. Indeed, much is evident in contemporary miscomprehension: ‘even sensitive historians of science, recognizing the *Descent*’s racial and class doctrines of progress, have labelled it “*deviationist*”, for departing from the scientific purity of the *Origin of Species*.’⁹

We ought therefore to adopt a perspective which recognises science not as some demarcated sphere of activity unobstructed by the messy business of social life, but ‘to see science as just one aspect of broader social and cultural assumptions.’¹⁰ Here, I am not making a ‘hard constructionist’ argument,¹¹ but adopting the softer view that scientists are evidently ineradicably influenced by (and go on to influence) the cultural contexts within which they are situated: ‘scientific process does not stand apart from the culture it inhabits. The questions scientists ask about the world, and the interpretations they place on their data, are often shaped by cultural attitudes, needs and possibilities.’¹² Historiographically, we need also to see that ‘science happened *in* history and has influenced historical events increasingly.’¹³

⁶ Young, *Darwin’s Metaphor*, Abstract [Unnumbered], emphasis mine.

⁷ As Bell (2007) puts it, it was ‘an age in which intellectual generalists thrived, and the crossing of what in the twentieth century many would come to regard as sturdy disciplinary walls was the norm.’ Bell, *Victorian Visions*, p.3.

⁸ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.34.

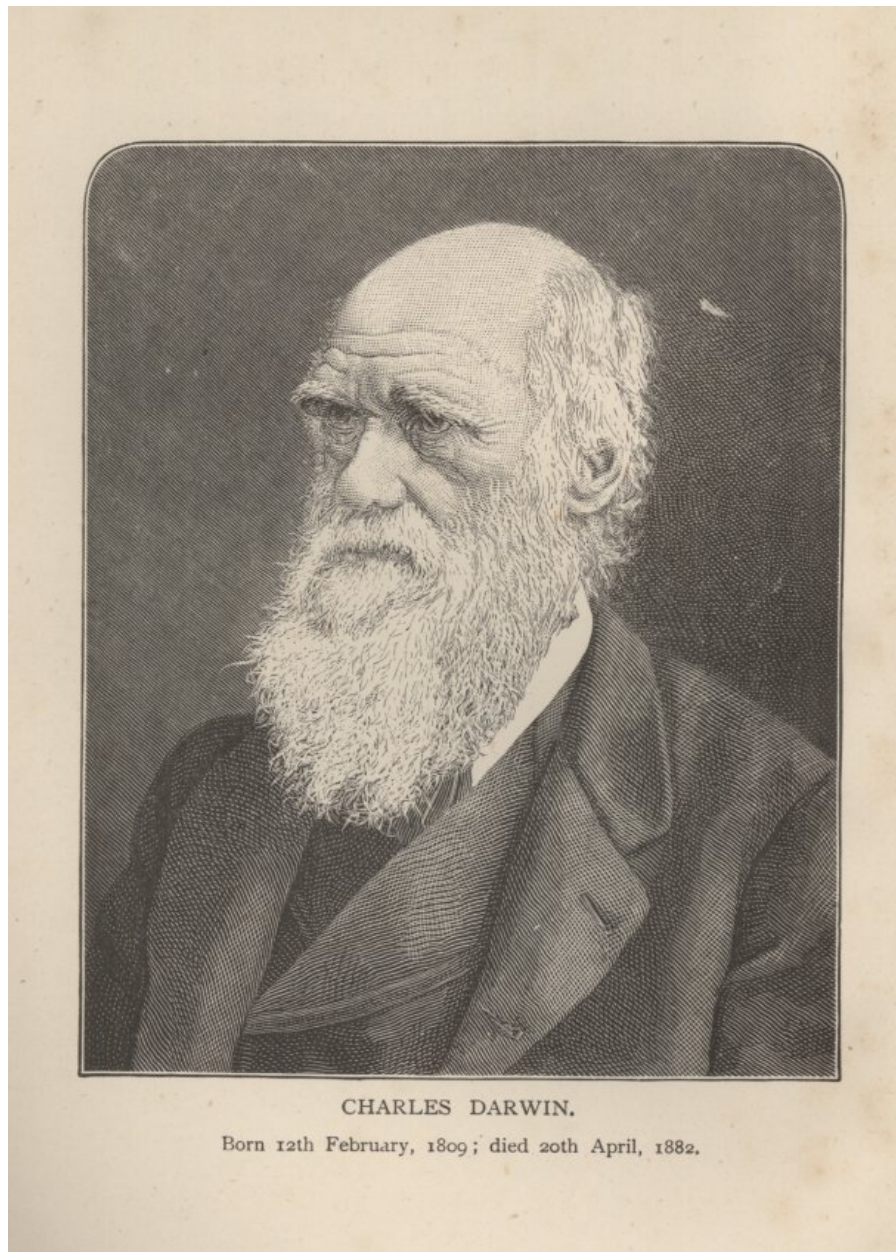
⁹ Moore, J. and Desmond, A. (2004). ‘Introduction’. In: *The Descent of Man*. Penguin, p.lvi.

¹⁰ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.23.

¹¹ Such as: Latour, B. and Woolgar, S. (1986). *Laboratory Life*. Princeton University Press.

¹² Malik, K. (2000). *Man, Beast, and Zombie*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, p.9. I am reminded here of the mycorrhizal ‘wood wide web’ which connects forests together and the problem of interpreting its logic in non-political terms (socialist sharing or free-market competition?). Macfarlane, R. (2016). ‘The Secrets of the Wood Wide Web’. *The New Yorker* [Online]. More broadly: Levidow, L. (1986). *Science as Politics*. Free Association Books.

¹³ Young, *Darwin’s Metaphor*, p.23, emphasis mine.



*Fig. 3: Portrait of Darwin*¹⁴

In my approach, then, I follow historians of science¹⁵ who approach Darwinism not merely ‘contextually’ in the thin sense of just adding some cultural or biographical context to a narrative of Darwin’s scientific project, but *politically*: ‘to show that the history of evolutionary theory has been deeply political from its inception and that the arguments about the evolution of cooperation and

¹⁴ From the seventh edition of the *Journal of Researches*.

¹⁵ Archetypal are Adrian Desmond, James Moore, Piers J. Hale, Mark Borello, Thomas Dixon, and Lee Dugatkin.

competition—on both sides—have been especially so.¹⁶ This approach thus sits within so-termed ‘externalist’ understandings of Darwin’s theory, i.e. that it was a theory constructed from *the outside*,¹⁷ with its origins being ‘[not] in the objective nature of his approach... [but] that Darwinism must represent an extension of the social philosophy prevalent at the time’.¹⁸ Necessarily, I therefore do not stride into more strictly ‘scientific’ debates,¹⁹ but rather explore the politics of Darwinian evolutionism in origin, intent, and consequence.

The Fuegian encounter

In the most fundamental sense, Darwin’s revolutionary theory was only possible in its *origins* due to the ‘shrinking of the world’ which defined the long nineteenth-century.²⁰ It was a product *par excellence* of ‘the international’. Indeed, as Bowler (1984) argues, ‘it was inevitable that the eighteenth-century passion for natural history should be extended to the study of man... *As travellers went around the world* they encountered new races of men, some living under conditions so primitive that there was a temptation to question their true humanity.’²¹ So too for Darwin on the 1831 voyage of the *H.M.S. Beagle* to far-flung lands which served as the crucible for his genius theory.

Most important was the encounter with the native peoples of Tierra del Fuego (at the tip of South America) which sparked Darwin’s obsession with human origins (far more important than Galapagos finches!).²² Indeed, the significance of the Fuegian encounter is made obvious from the very first line of the *Origin of Species*: ‘When on board *H.M.S. Beagle*, as naturalist [*sic*], I was much struck with certain facts in the distribution of the inhabitants of South America.’²³

¹⁶ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.6.

¹⁷ On the ‘internalist/externalist’ divide, see: Bowler, *Evolution*, ch.6; Young, *Darwin’s Metaphor*, ch.6. A similar impact of Malthus’s principle can be seen in Karl Marx’s work, which ‘saw capitalism’s need for endless expansion as producing a Malthusian struggle for survival between an ever-dwindling group of monopolies.’ In: Wolfe, P. (1997). ‘History and Imperialism’. *American Historical Review*, 102(2), pp.388-420, p.389.

¹⁸ Bowler, *Evolution*, p.21.

¹⁹ As over Darwin’s account of heredity (now out of favour following the ‘modern synthesis’ of Darwinian natural selection and Mendelian inheritance).

²⁰ Buzan and Lawson, *Global Transformation*; Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell; Bell, D. (forthcoming). ‘Cyborg Imperium, c.1900’. In: *Coding and Representation from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London: Routledge.

²¹ Bowler, *Evolution*, p.86, emphasis mine.

²² For a full account of the encounter, see: Desmond, A. and Moore, J. (1992). *Darwin*. Penguin, ch.10.

²³ Darwin, C. (1983). [1859]. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Penguin, p.65.

As he fixed his eyes on the Fuegians in ‘this savage land’,²⁴ Darwin was taken aback. The Fuegians were incomprehensibly strange—an undistilled savagery. ‘Viewing such men,’ he recorded in his diary, ‘one can hardly make oneself believe that they are fellow-creatures, and inhabitants of the same world.’²⁵ They were ‘the most abject and miserable creatures I anywhere beheld.’²⁶ Immediately, the distinction between savage and civilised forms of humankind were sowed in Darwin’s mind: ‘It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I ever beheld: I could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage & civilised man: it is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal.’²⁷ This revelation of the capacity for humanity’s mutability would be extended to the animal kingdom: Darwin’s eureka moment.

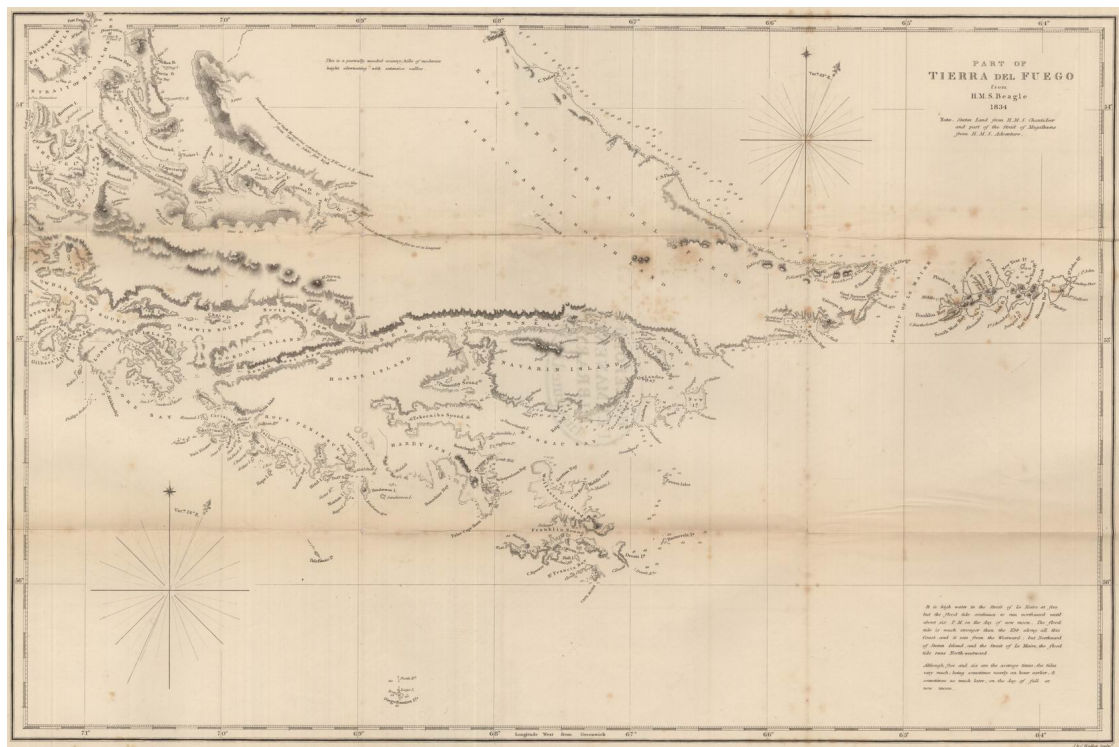


Fig. 4: map of Tierra del Fuego taken from the Beagle²⁸

In the specifics of difference, Darwin fixated on one particular aspect of the Fuegian people. As Hale (2014) recounts: ‘what ultimately seems to have become the determining factor in Darwin’s mind in

²⁴ Darwin, C. (1871) [1839]. *Journal of Researches*. D. Appleton and Company, p.204.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.213.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.212-3.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.205.

²⁸ In: FitzRoy, R. (1839). *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty’s Ships*. Henry Colburn.

explaining the Fuegian's pitiful condition... was the fact that they also appeared to lack even the vaguest notion of *private property*.²⁹ Regardless of reason, Darwin's account of the sheer savagery of the Fuegians appear again and again throughout this thesis—an empirical 'ur-savage' for the Othering of native peoples.

The *Origin* of the struggle for existence

It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its divisions of labo[u]r, competition, opening up of new markets, "inventions" and Malthusian struggle for existence. It is Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes*.³⁰
— Karl Marx (1862)

Out of this journey into the savage mind came one of the most significant books ever published—1859's *On the Origin of Species*—and a new, distinctly 'human nature' unmoored from pretensions of divinity. Without hyperbole, the *Origin* ushered in 'what might not inaccurately be described as the most significant development in the history of Western thought.'³¹ Yet, whilst we recognise the violent natural man of Hobbes or Rousseau's noble savage³² as classic accounts of human nature, 'Darwinian man' is a comparably conspicuous lacuna in the history of political thought³³ as a result of its *scientific* basis: 'human nature is a political problem as much as it is a philosophical problem. However, since the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, it has also become very much a question of biology.'³⁴

Most importantly, Darwin theorised a new 'state of nature' which united the entire animal kingdom, humanity included—not merely as a conjectural device of philosophy *à la* social contract theory, but an objective description of natural reality. This 'naturalisation' of the state of nature gave the idea serious teeth; the transition from savagery to civilisation became a matter of scientific fact, not mere conjecture.³⁵

²⁹ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.35-6, emphasis mine.

³⁰ 'Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 18 June 1862'. In: *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works, vol. 41*, p.381. The relationship between Marx and Darwin is curious. Consider Engels's speech at Marx's graveside in 1883: 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history.' Cited in: Oldroyd, D. (1980). *Darwinian Impacts*. Open University Press, p.233.

³¹ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.13.

³² Although he never used the term.

³³ For a notable exception: Stevenson, L. and Haberman, D. (2004). 'Darwinian Theories of Human Nature'. In: *Ten Theories of Human Nature*. Oxford University Press.

³⁴ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.1.

³⁵ Consider the contrast with Rousseau's opening remark in the *Second Discourse* that the matter of 'Savage Man and depicted Civil Man... [requires we] begin by setting aside all the facts, for they do not affect the question.'

Adorning the title of the third chapter of the *Origin* was the ur-concept of the Darwinian idiom: ‘the Struggle for Existence’.³⁶ There, Darwin paints a bleak picture of the mechanics of the natural world, and proselytises ‘the truth of the universal struggle for life.’³⁷ ‘We forget,’ he acclaims, ‘that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey.’³⁸ This was a dark, Malthusian world of destruction and death—it was ‘the doctrine of Malthus applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms’.³⁹

Yet destruction was not merely a fact of life but a *productive* process, pregnant with creative possibility of species-generation and ecological stability: ‘Lighten any check, mitigate the destruction ever so little, and the numbers of the species will almost instantaneously increase to any amount. The face of Nature may be compared to a yielding surface, with ten thousand sharp wedges packed close together and driven inwards by incessant blows.’⁴⁰

Of course, Darwin relents in his premise that ‘I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense’,⁴¹ yet its power is obvious. Etymologically, its spread became wide: in German, becoming *der Kampf ums Dasein*,⁴² or Alphonse Daudet’s *struggleforlifeur*. Ideationally, as Beer (1983) argues, ‘the unused, or uncontrolled, elements in metaphors such as “the struggle for existence” take on a life of their own. They surpass their status in the text and generate further ideas and ideologies.’⁴³ An obvious consequence was the emergent view that ‘what is “fit” in evolutionary terms is also “right” in moral terms; the study of human evolution... [became] as much a prescriptive enterprise as a descriptive one.’⁴⁴

In: Rousseau, J.J. (2019). [1755]. *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press, p.135.

³⁶ Not to be confused with ‘the survival of the fittest,’ actually coined by Herbert Spencer.

³⁷ Darwin, *Origin*, p.115.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.116.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.117. The Malthusian moment embodied the ‘shrinking of the world’—with the rise in population numbers and growing interconnectivity perceived with panic.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.119.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.116.

⁴² A phrase first introduced by Darwin’s German translator Heinrich Georg Bronn, a translation Darwin found objectionable: Kutschera, U. (2009). ‘Struggle to Translate Darwin’s View of Concurrency’. *Nature*, 458(967), p.967.

⁴³ Beer, G. (1983). *Darwin’s Plots*. Cambridge University Press, p.9.

⁴⁴ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.3.

This generative capacity was driven by a central problem in the *Origin*: that *human beings were missing*. For fear of political and religious reprisal, Darwin insisted late before publication (on advice from Charles Lyell) to remove all references to human beings. Only one vague sentence is afforded to the scandalous issue in the book's conclusion: 'Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.'⁴⁵ This left the question of humankind in contention, suggesting implicitly that humans operated by the same fierce competitive logic as the rest of the natural world. Only later would Darwin dare approach the 'human question' directly, arguing that there *was* something distinctive about humankind in the animal world.

But, for readers of the *Origin*, the implication was clear: man was in line with nature. Darwin had simply 'inadvertently invited others to speculate on the question, and many arrived at conclusions quite different to those he had in mind.'⁴⁶ Thus, Darwin could not control the consequences of the book. In leaving humanity absent, he allowed others to seize his argument away from what he intended—the first great 'misreception' of his theory. The controversy was symbolised most clearly in the famous debate at the Oxford University Museum on 30 June 1860, in which Samuel Wilberforce (the Bishop of Oxford) and T.H. Huxley ('Darwin's bulldog') dramatically clashed over humanity's supposed descent from apes.

Further fundamental questions were unclear. Was savage man different from civilised man, in terms of their adherence to the natural struggle? Were some human groups 'more evolved' than others? Where was altruism, compassion, and selflessness?⁴⁷ The *Origin's* silence was deafening. As Hale (2014) humorously puts it: 'pigeons were all well and good... but people were more interested in the light that Darwin's work might throw on "the origin of man and his history"'.⁴⁸

In Darwin's most famous statement of evolution, then, a 'natural' morality was absent (man apparently included): indeed, 'once he had made the decision to exclude man from the book, Darwin could see no opening for moral restraint in nature at all, nor, it seems, among the inhabitants of Tierra

⁴⁵ Darwin, *Origin*, p.458.

⁴⁶ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.66.

⁴⁷ This is a classic question in evolutionary theory around the matter of 'group selection'.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.68.

del Fuego.⁴⁹ It was this anti-Godwinian⁵⁰ equivalence of savage man with the Malthusian forces of the natural world which opened the door for a sharp demarcation between the savage and the civilised, then reiterated in 1871's *Descent of Man*.

Most broadly, then, Darwin's 'struggle for existence' theorised perennial war as not only natural, but *productive*. Indeed, the metaphor of war itself was a catalyst for Darwin's ideas in writing the *Origin*,⁵¹ with Lyell (via Augustin de Candolle) having previously described 'all the plants of a given country... [as] *at war* with one another.'⁵² Darwin's vision of virtuous conflict is expressed in a distilled form at the very end of the *Origin*:

Thus, *from the war of nature*, from famine and death, *the most exalted object* which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, *directly follows*. There is grandeur in this view of life... from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are, being evolved.⁵³

The *Origin*'s conception of nature as brutal and competitive—man implicitly included—had consequences on thinking about the international. Of course, international theories all presuppose a certain idea(l) of human nature. For variants of realism, it is the power- or security-seeking rational individual. For liberals, an optimistic vision of cooperative beings. Constructivists opt for a malleable social canvas. For Darwinians, it is humanity's struggle for existence which defines it. This vision of 'conflict-as-virtue'—as not only descriptively ineradicable, but prescriptively productive—thus contained the seedlings of a Darwinian martialism. War was naturalised, because nature *was* war.

Throwing light: the *Descent*

Yet, as above, humanity's place in this battlefield was left undiscussed by Darwin, that is until 1871 with the publication *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, which 'remains Darwin's greatest unread book',⁵⁴ and indeed his most political: 'what is beyond dispute is that when Darwin wrote *Descent* he was well aware that he was entering an arena that was as much about politics as it was about natural history.'⁵⁵ Reading the *Descent* as a work of political thought requires little effort on the

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.47-8.

⁵⁰ Darwin's repeated invocation of Malthus 'was a clear attempt to dissociate evolution from radicalism and to signal to his readers that *Origin* was on the right side of the fence politically.' Hale, *Political Descent*, p.48.

⁵¹ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.38.

⁵² Lyell, C. (1991) [1832]. *Principles of Geology, Volume 2*. Chicago University Press, p.131, emphasis mine.

⁵³ Darwin, *Origin*, p.459, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ Desmond and Moore, 'Introduction', p.lv.

⁵⁵ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.342.

part of the reader—indeed, more effort is to be exerted reading it as a work of science.⁵⁶ The *reception* of the work similarly attests to its dubious scientific credentials, it exerting ‘a greater impact on popular culture than on science.’⁵⁷

Indeed, the work was intended as ‘not primarily a book about “human evolution” as we think of it today’⁵⁸ but rather an attempt to address the fundamental contestation that had emerged over the interpretation of the new evolutionist doctrine: ‘Radicals had embraced evolution as grounds for collectivism and social change; Darwin was taken to be advocating for competitive individualism. The politics of evolution were thus hotly contested.’⁵⁹ The *Descent* acted as Darwin’s definitive take on these political questions, and was written as a rejoinder to readings of the *Origin* as a justification for rampant capitalism—aiming to show ‘that man had evolved to hold exactly the sort of *progressive Whig politics* he held dear and that he shared with those most pre-eminent liberals of his day,’⁶⁰ being ‘thoroughly determined to counter the views of humankind that were being put forward by the Manchester political economists.’⁶¹

Certainly, Darwin *appears* to present in the book a broadly optimistic account of human development, whereby ‘man has risen, though by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition to the highest standard as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals, and religion.’⁶² The structure of the *Descent* tracks the similarities and differences between humankind and the ‘lower’ animals from which he came from: capacities for emotions, language, a sense of beauty, religion, morality, and sociability (‘the mental powers’),⁶³ concluding that human and non-human animals are *vastly differently capable* yet share basic categories of *capability*, that ‘the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is one of degree and not of kind.’⁶⁴

⁵⁶ At least, for its first third. As readers discover, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* is very much two distinct books, as its title implies. The first part deals with human evolution and the development of humankind’s moral and mental faculties, and the second presents Darwin’s theory of ‘sexual selection’ to explain differences in sex across species. Darwin makes little effort to connect the two. It seems to make more sense to affix the first part of the *Descent* with Darwin’s third major book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).

⁵⁷ Desmond and Moore, ‘Introduction’, p.li.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.xiii.

⁵⁹ Hale, *Political Descent*, p.11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.19, emphasis mine.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.342.

⁶² Darwin, *Descent*, p.172.

⁶³ Explored further in *Expression of the Emotions* (1872).

⁶⁴ Darwin, *Descent*, p.150-51.

However, he follows this Whiggish vision of progressive development with musings on ‘the development of the intellectual and moral faculties during *primeval and civilised* times’,⁶⁵ exploring the differences between races and genders ‘in ways that are somewhat stomach-churning’⁶⁶ to modern readers. It is Darwin’s preoccupation in particular with the distinction between *the savage and the civilised*—the Englishman-Fuegian encounter writ large—which contains Darwin’s theory of the international and ‘gives Darwin’s fullest account of war and human instincts... borrow[ing] more frankly than the *Origin* from current social theory (the anthropology of Maine and Lubbock, the social psychology of Spencer, Galton, W.R. Greg and Bagehot).’⁶⁷

Here, Darwin paints stark distinctions between the savage and the civilised,⁶⁸ even though he concedes historically that ‘all civilised nations were once barbarous.’⁶⁹ The savage, like the animal kingdom, is seen as subject to the brutal law of natural selection: ‘we can see, that in the rudest state of society, the individuals who were the most sagacious, who invented and used the best weapons or traps, and who were best able to defend themselves, would rear the greatest number of offspring... All that we know about savages... shew [*sic*] that from the remotest times successful tribes have supplanted other tribes.’⁷⁰ Yet, there is a static perennialism to the savages’ entrapment in a condition of nature, ‘seen as *lacking a sense of history* and hence possessing no meaningful past of their own.’⁷¹ Thus, ‘Darwin suggests that the gulf between savages and civilised humans is almost unbridgeable.’⁷²

By contrast, natural selection is seen as *relaxed* in civilised nations with the march of development: ‘with savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated... We civilised men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.152, emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Stevenson and Haberman, ‘Darwinian Theories’, p.204.

⁶⁷ Crook, *Darwinism, War, and History*, p.21.

⁶⁸ Moore (1986) draws out Darwin’s distinctions by compiling a table of the semantic Self/Othering that he engages in. See: Moore, J. (1986). ‘Socializing Darwinism’. In: *Science as Politics*. Free Association Books, pp.38-80, p.48.

⁶⁹ Darwin, *Descent*, p.169.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.153.

⁷¹ Schmitt, C. (2004). ‘Darwin’s Savage Mnemonics’. *Representations*, 88(1), pp.55-80, p.56, emphasis mine. See also: Schmitt, C. (2009). *Darwin and the Memory of the Human*. Cambridge University Press. The Fuegians’ lack of historical awareness is remarked on by Darwin on the *Beagle*: ‘Captain Fitz Roy could never ascertain that the Fuegians have any distinct belief in a future life.’ In: Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p.214.

⁷² Brantlinger, P. (2003). *Dark Vanishings*. Cornell University Press, p.165.

the life of every one to the last moment.⁷³ Furthermore, he argues, civilised nations fight against natural selection through military conscription, where the healthy die in wars and the weak stay at home.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the logic of natural selection is still, at base, in operation—especially *between* civilised states. (Here, Darwin reproduces the classic domestic/international distinction much interrogated within IR.) Indeed, he muses on why some civilised nations ‘win out’ over others, arguing (drawing on Galton) that ‘the remarkable success of the English as colonists, compared to other European nations, has been ascribed to their “daring and persistent energy”’.⁷⁵ When the Self and Other meet, Darwin contends that natural selection acts as the arbiter of difference, and not just through ‘natural’ causes:

When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians, the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race. Of the causes which lead to the victory of civilised nations, some are plain and simple, others complex and obscure. We can see that the cultivation of the land will be fatal in many ways to savages... New diseases and vices have in some cases proved highly destructive... [But] *the grade of their civilisation* seems to be a most important element in the success of competing nations.⁷⁶

The unity of Darwinism emerges in this passage: the ‘Struggle for Existence’ and the spectrum of savagery to civilisation encompassed through the Self-Other encounter. It provides hints of what would come to be interpreted as apparent ‘perversions’ of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, yet here it is present in Darwin himself. Ultimately, he argues, the savage is a doomed creature: ‘At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world.’⁷⁷

This was not simply a sombre descriptive analysis. The *Descent* also contains a striking aesthetic repulsion at savage peoples, with Darwin often speaking of the savage as a wild animal,⁷⁸ referenced in the same breath as animalia: i.e. that ‘*the savage and the dog* have often found water at a low

⁷³ Darwin, *Descent*, p.159. An obviously Radicalist argument, *contra* readings of Darwin as a proto-eugenicist.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.160-1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.168.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.212, emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.183. Brantlinger (2003) terms this notion of inevitable savage extinction an ‘extinction discourse’.

⁷⁸ As in the *Journal of Researches* (p.504): ‘Men whose very signs and expressions are less intelligible to us than those of the domesticated animals; men, who do not possess the instinct of those animals, nor yet appears to boast of human reason...I do not believe it is possible to describe or paint the difference between savage and civilized man. It is the difference between a wild and tame animal: and part of the interest in beholding a savage, is the same which would lead every one to desire to see the lion in his desert, the tiger tearing his prey in the jungle, the rhinoceros on the wide plain, or the hippopotamus wallowing in the mud of some African river.’

level'.⁷⁹ Yet the proposition asserted by Darwin is even more regressive: that savages were *below* the animals. For instance, in commenting on their culture:

Judging from their hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed as in certain animals, for instance, as in birds. Obviously no animal would be capable of admiring such scenes as the heavens at night... such high tastes are acquired through culture, and depend on complex associations; they are not enjoyed by barbarians.⁸⁰

Indeed, 'in his description of birds, Darwin regards their songs, courtship rituals brilliant displays of colour and exaggerated physical features with reverence and a little humour. Yet when presented with similar behaviours among savages, his disapproval is obvious.'⁸¹ Indeed, incredibly he attests that he would be prouder to call himself a descendant of a monkey than he would be related to savage human beings: 'He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins.'⁸² As he puts it:

For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braced his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon... as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wife like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.⁸³

As Sideris (2001) argues, Darwin's gross disgust at savages is in their combination of cultural practice and intellect: 'Their "hideousness" emerges when that inferior instinct is combined with mental faculties higher than those possessed by animals.'⁸⁴ It is this paradox—'savages as simultaneously advanced and retrograde'⁸⁵—which leads Darwin to romantically anthropomorphise animals at the same time as dehumanising savages.

Darwin versus Darwinism?

In light of this, it is worth briefly dwelling on a crucial question: was Darwin at fault for the ways in which his work was apparently misperceived? Certainly, he himself found it curious how dramatically (he thought) his arguments had been misread—in 1860, for instance, he wrote to Charles Lyell to note his amusement 'that I have proved "might is right," & therefore that Napoleon is right & every

⁷⁹ Darwin, *Descent*, p.98, emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.116.

⁸¹ Sideris, L. (2001). 'One Step Up, Two Steps Back'. *Soundings*, 84(3/4), pp.365-388, p.373.

⁸² Darwin, *Descent*, p.689.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ Sideris, 'One Step Up', p.373.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.384.

cheating Tradesman is also right[!]⁸⁶ What, then, was Darwin's intentions, beyond scientific explanation—in the Skinnerian sense, what was he aiming to 'do with words'?

On this, the historians Adrian Desmond and James Moore have been keen to emphasise Darwin's more benevolent political intentions. They argue controversially⁸⁷ that Darwin's impetus for his theory was not purely scientific but rather 'we find a *moral* passion firing his evolutionary work',⁸⁸ catalysed by Darwin's *abhorrence of slavery* and belief in the *unity of humankind*.

Yet this argument that Darwin and Darwinism are wholly distinct—like communism and 'actually-existing communism'—is not wholly compelling. Whilst it is true that Darwin would not have endorsed all the harsher invocations of his theory, the raw elements of these interpretations *are* to be found in his work, as we have explored in this chapter: a virtuous account of conflict and an aesthetic revulsion at savage peoples completely out of step with supposed 'unity of humankind' intentions. Darwin was instead, I contend, balancing the novel holistic naturalism of his theory with his pre-existing Victorian civilisational prejudices.

In many cases, the impulse to separate Darwin and Darwinism is animated by the impulse discussed at the opening of this chapter: to demarcate the objective, unblemished 'scientific' endeavour from the impurities of politics, maintaining 'that Darwinism is pure science, unadulterated by ideology.'⁸⁹ *Actually reading Darwin* inoculates against this unconvincing prelapsarianism. Indeed, strangely, Moore himself argued exactly such in 1986, highlighting Darwin's use of the ideas of post-*Origin* social evolutionists such as Lubbock, Maine, McLennan, and Tyler, 'whose views were developed more or less independently of [Darwin's] own.'⁹⁰

Perhaps therefore 'it is worthwhile to be reminded *just how much of a Social Darwinist Darwin was*.'⁹¹ Throughout the following chapters, comparisons of Darwin and 'political Darwinists' will serve to reinforce this argument—that, ultimately, it is in Darwin's work itself that 'Social Darwinism' is to be found and, indeed, the wellspring of a wholly new idiom of international relations.

⁸⁶ 'Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, 4 May 1860', in: *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, Vol.4, Appendix 4, p.447. On why Darwin was 'amused' at this notion, see: Hale, *Political Descent*, p.49.

⁸⁷ Esterson, A. (2013). 'Desmond and Moore's *Darwin's Sacred Cause*'. *SAGE Open*, [Online].

⁸⁸ Desmond, A. and Moore, J. (2009). *Darwin's Sacred Cause*. London: Allen Lane, p.xviii, emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Moore, 'Socializing Darwinism', p.45.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.48.

⁹¹ *Ibid*. Moore is unequivocal on this: 'I maintain—no, I insist—that "Social Darwinism" is redundant, for Darwinism *is* "social".'⁹ (p.64)

Chapter Three

Darwinian Disciples

*‘Quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur.’*¹

— Thomas Aquinas (1485)

Apart from perhaps Karl Marx,² Charles Darwin is the foremost example of the ‘theory/theorist gap’. Like Victor Frankenstein and his monster, this phenomenon occurs when a creator’s creation contains such creativity as to impel rebellion, transmutating into something much against the creator’s intentions. As we shall explore in this chapter, Darwin’s genius creation—the theory of evolution by natural selection—rapidly cultivated an idiom with highly distinctive understandings of international relations.

Here, then, I move away from a typical Skinnerian understanding of a single author (a ‘backwards-looking’ history) to a ‘forwards-looking’ analysis of authorial reception closer to Koselleckian conceptual history. As Vergerio argues, this notion of ‘reception’ implies a basic fact: that ‘recipients are not passive followers, and what is received or inherited is not necessarily what was given or handed over. In other words, those who “receive” the texts of great thinkers have a considerable amount of agency, and they may alter the text in significant ways.’³ In this chapter, I explore this process through those recipients of Darwinism whom we might heuristically capture under the label of ‘political theorists’. Of course, typical of the period, such authors were not ‘theorists’ in a narrow sense but usually habitual polymaths, as Bell (2007) captures:

This was an age of grand (and grandiose) theorising. It was also an age in which intellectual generalists thrived, and the crossing of what in the twentieth century many would come to regard as sturdy disciplinary walls was the norm. It is very hard to separate “the political” (or “political theory”) from other domains of nineteenth-century thought—it was embedded in, and shaped by, political economy, theology, jurisprudence, the emerging social sciences, especially anthropology, literature, and the writing of history.⁴

¹ ‘Whatever is received is received according to the manner of the receiver’. Cited in: Vergerio, ‘Context, Reception’, p.123.

² As Marx said, ‘I am not a Marxist’ (quoted by Engels in correspondence to Eduard Bernstein). As Claeys argues: ‘Viewed retrospectively, the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century were Karl Marx (1818–83) and Charles Darwin (1809–82). Two of their central concepts, class struggle and evolution, both focused on the idea of “struggle”, and clearly had some common origin, as Marx at least recognised.’ Claeys, “Social Darwinism”, p.163. For an early comparison of Darwin and Marx, see: Aveling, E. (1893). *Charles Darwin and Karl Marx*. Twentieth Century Press.

³ Vergerio, ‘Context, Reception’, p.123.

⁴ Bell, *Victorian Visions*, p.3–4.

I sketch such an ecumenical cast, beginning with T.H. Huxley ('Darwin's bulldog') whose adaptation of Darwin's natural theory to politics exemplifies the tensions in the genealogy: i.e. the conflictual philosophies of history and conceptions of the nature/civilisation divide within the Darwinian confluence (see *Fig. 2* in chapter one).

Thereafter, I group the theorists according to my three broad themes: savagery, war, and empire. On *savagery*, I excavate a much-forgotten debate between Richard Whately, John Lubbock, and George Campbell on the relation of 'savage' to 'primeval man'. In the theorisation of *war*, I investigate Walter Bagehot's application of Darwinian metaphor to historical progress—a teleological martialism drawn out even more explicitly by J. Ellis Barker, who applauds the struggle for existence as a purifying process of international selection. Finally, I examine how Darwinism was both borne out, and aided the defence, of *empire*. There, I discuss the incubation of anthropological and natural sciences within imperial structures, before turning to the abstract theorisation of a naturalist imperialism by John Robert Seeley and Herbert Spencer. In all, I uncover multiple (mis)receptions in Darwin in service of a range of distinctive late nineteenth-century international questions, throughout emphasising the distinctiveness of the Darwinian idiom.

Huxley's 'Darwiniana'

A useful approach to a history of reception is a *history of proximity*—to begin with the author themselves before progressing concentrically outwards to increasingly distant individuals from the original theorist, plotting just how far the 'ripples' spread and how much the ideas of the original transmuted in transmission. A good place to start would therefore be the man who earned the epithet of 'Darwin's bulldog': Thomas Henry Huxley.

Huxley, who first met Darwin in 1856, was one of the few privy to the great man's closely-guarded theory before publication, and became a crucial figure in the defence of Darwinism in the public sphere.⁵ As Desmond (1997) argues, Huxley's role was crucial in making evolutionary theory respectable: 'As the bottom dropped out of history and the Victorians peered, horrified, into the

⁵ Not just the 1860 Oxford evolution debate, but also the dialogue in the *Nineteenth Century* between Huxley and the Prime Minister: 'one chapter in Gladstone's lifelong engagement with the concept of historical "development", the unfolding or evolution of Providence to human reason over time.' Conlin, J. (2020). 'Gladstone, Development, and the Discipline of History, 1840-1896'. *Historical Journal*, (forthcoming).

unfathomable abyss of geological time, it was the silver-haired Huxley who cast a stabilising anchor from the evolutionary ship.⁶ Indeed, Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863) was granted the distinction of being 'the first published statement to the general public applying the Darwinian hypothesis systematically to man'⁷ after Darwin's one passing line on anthropogenesis.

Here, in the absence of a willingly interventionist Darwin, Huxley was more than a neutral 'delegate' of Darwinism and more an activist 'trustee' of the theory. In applying Darwinism to *political* questions, Huxley's 'interpretation' was so significant that oftentimes scientific Darwinism and political 'Huxleyism' were seen as one and the same—as in China, where 'the "evolutionary sensation"... was generated by the Chinese Spencerian Yan Fu's paraphrased translation and reformulation of Thomas Huxley's 1893 Romanes Lecture *Evolution and Ethics* and his *Prolegomena*. It was from this source that "Darwin" became well known in China.'⁸ Such was not only a literal translation, but a translation of one author into another—a blending of scripture and *hadith*.

A prolific essayist (writing on topics from Hume to yeast), Huxley penned a range of essays in the immediate years following the *Origin* substantively preoccupied with evolution, as captured in the wonderful title of the second volume of his *Collected Essays*: his 'Darwiniana'. Most intriguing in this cornucopia is 'The Struggle for Human Existence' (1888).⁹

There, Huxley unites the two core themes of the *Origin* and *Descent*: (1) the struggle for existence at the heart of the natural world, cast as an objective fact, 'neither moral nor immoral, but non-moral';¹⁰ and (2) the sharp distinction between savage and civilised, '*the ethical man*—the member of society... [and] *the non-ethical man*—the primitive savage, or man as a mere member of the animal kingdom... The latter fights out the struggle for existence to the bitter end, like any other animal; the former devotes his best energies to the object of setting limits to the struggle.'¹¹

⁶ Desmond, A. (1997). *Huxley*. Michael Joseph, p.xi.

⁷ Stocking, G. (1987). *Victorian Anthropology*. Collier Macmillan, p.147.

⁸ Jin, X. (2018). 'Translation and Transmutation'. *British Journal for the History of Science*, 52(1), pp.117-41, p.117.

⁹ Contextually, Huxley's bleak tone may have been influenced by tragedy: 'The death of his daughter in 1887 changed things. He fell into melancholia and a sense of alienation from an uncaring and value-free nature. In a cathartic essay penned soon afterwards, "The Struggle for Existence in Human Society", Huxley wrote bleakly of an animal world.' Crook, *Darwinism, War and History*, p.60.

¹⁰ Huxley, T.H. (1888). 'The Struggle for Human Existence'. *Popular Science Monthly*, 32(6), pp.732-50, p.733.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.736, emphasis mine.

Exemplifying a powerful fusion of neo-Hobbesianism and biological evolutionism, Huxley paints in the piece a vista of historical progress from war-making beastliness to peaceable society:

Before the origin of the oldest known civilisations, men were savages of a very low type... among primitive men, the weakest and stupidest went to the wall, while the toughest and shrewdest, those who were best fitted to cope with their circumstances... survived. Life was a continual free fight... *the Hobbesian war of each against all was the normal state of existence*... The history of civilization—that is, of society—on the other hand, is the record of the attempts which the human race has made to escape from this position. The first men who substituted the state of mutual peace for that of mutual war... created society... [and] put a limit upon the struggle for existence.¹²

The Darwinian ‘state of nature’ thus replaces Hobbes’s conjectural vision of violent pre-social competition with scientific fact. Like Hobbes, it is through *civilisation* that human beings might escape ‘eternal competition of man against man and of nation against nation’.¹³ On an international scale, Huxley argued that *the very existence* of savage peoples created conditions for interstate conflict, for ‘so long as the natural man increases and multiplies without restraint... they will necessitate, a struggle for existence as sharp as any that ever went on under the *régime* of war’.¹⁴ *Only when civilisation encompassed the whole globe* would peace break out ‘not merely among nations, but among men, and the struggle for existence will be at an end’.¹⁵

A further Hobbesian description was that of pre-historical ‘primeval’ humans, where ‘Huxley stressed the *primal pugnacity of man*, and tended to equate primitive man with the brutes. This ran counter to a romantic faith in peaceful natural man’,¹⁶ a fixation on an *original* condition of humanity which would, as we shall now see, become a key Darwinian obsession.

Savage mnemonics in the Whately-Lubbock-Campbell debate

‘And how will man ever succeed in seeing himself as Nature formed him, through all the changes which the succession of times and of things must have wrought in his original constitution...?’¹⁷
— Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1755)

One manifestation of Darwin’s opening of the Pandora’s Box of a biological ‘civilisation question’ was a much-forgotten debate in the two decades after the *Origin*’s publication, concerning the character of ancient ‘primitive’ human beings and their relation to the contemporary savage. It was fought

¹² *Ibid*, p.736, emphasis mine.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.740.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.738.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Crook, *Darwinism, War, and History*, p.60, emphasis mine.

¹⁷ Rousseau, *Discourses*, p.126.

by three theorists in three texts: Richard Whately's (1854) *On the Origin of Civilisation*, John Lubbock's (1868) 'The Early Condition of Mankind', and George Campbell's (1869) *Primeval Man*.

Darwin himself originally mused on the thorny issue at hand: 'Of individual objects, perhaps no one is more certain to create astonishment than the first sight in his native haunt of a real barbarian, of man in his lowest and most savage state. One's mind hurries back over past centuries, and then asks, *could our progenitors have been men such as these?*'¹⁸ A kind of scientised reprise of the contractarian debates of the Enlightenment,¹⁹ the Whately-Lubbock-Campbell debate was compelled by two interlinked, fundamental questions which drew on then-recent anthropological empirics: what did the original *primitive* humanity look like, and, inversely, what could contemporary *savage* humans tell us about this original condition?

In Schmitt's (2004) memorable term, this was 'a *mnemonics of savagery*, turning to savages in remembrance of the origins of the civilized.'²⁰ In turn, this had profound implications too for how civilised man was to be seen in contrast—i.e. how wide was the chasm? As Lubbock (1868) summarised, the debate cut two ways:

Many writers have considered that man was at first a mere savage, and that our history has on the whole been a *steady progress towards civilisation*, though at times, and at sometimes for centuries, the race has been stationary, or even has retrograded. Other authors of no less eminence have taken a diametrically opposite view. According to them, *man was from the commencement pretty much what he is at present...* more ignorant of the arts and sciences than now, but with mental qualities not much inferior to our own. Savages they consider to be the degenerate descendants of far superior ancestors.²¹

These *progressive* and *static* positions characterised the three authors in the debate. Helpfully, the debate also encapsulates the tensions between the distinctive, contradictory *historicisms* within the Darwinian confluence—with their theoretical claims clearly aiming to resolve such tensions.

Whately's original civiliser

Beginning chronologically, Richard Whately (then Archbishop of Dublin) expressed his position three years after the *Origin*, first in a speech to the Young Men's Christian Association, then published

¹⁸ Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p.504, emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Indeed, Whately makes an attack at Rousseau: 'As for all the alleged advantages of savage life... all this exists only in poems and romances... or in the theories of such philosophers as the well-known Rousseau, who have undertaken to maintain a monstrous paradox because it affords the best exercise for their ingenuity.' Whately, R. (1854). *On the Origin of Civilisation*. Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, p.4-5.

²⁰ Schmitt, 'Darwin's Savage Mnemonics', p.57, emphasis mine.

²¹ Lubbock, J. (1868). 'The Early Condition of Man'. *Anthropological Review*, 6(20), pp.1-21, p.1, emphasis mine.

in 1845 as the pamphlet *On the Origin of Civilisation* (bearing a more than passing reference in its title to Darwin's great work).

Whately's ambition was to show that savages *of the most extreme kind*—‘men in the lowest degree, or even anything approaching to the lowest degree of barbarism in which they can possibly subsist at all’²²—were simply incapable of ever having advanced to an improved state. On the frontispiece of the book, Darwin's ur-savage (the Fuegians) represented a contemporary case of this extreme ‘barbarism’ (see *Fig. 5*). For Whately, it was evidently ‘a complete moral certainty that [such] men left unassisted in what is called a state of nature... never did, and never can, raise themselves from that condition.’²³ He thus contends that there must always be a ‘civiliser’ in transitions out of ‘utter barbarism’—an outside encounter with civilisation which raised savage peoples. Thus, ‘the first introducer of civilisation among savages, is, and must be, Man in a more improved state.’²⁴

In Filmerian style, Whately extends this logic backwards to the *very first* condition of savagery, musing that, because there could not have been a human civiliser in such a condition—‘in the *beginning*, therefore, of the human race... there was no man to *effect* it’²⁵—this must have been the work of *divine intervention*. That is, ‘there must have been, in short, something of a revelation made to the first or to some subsequent generation of our species’.²⁶ Like Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Whately conjectures evolution-by-intervention: the civilised mysteriously leading the savage down a path of dramatic improvement.

In Whately's argument many circles are tried squaring, attempting to resolve contradictions raised by Darwin's theory *vis-à-vis* science and religion, and between the equality of races implied by Darwin's argument and Victorian prejudices about savage peoples. Whately's disgust with the savages, like Darwin, is quite obvious:

If you look to the very lowest and rudest races that inhabit the earth, you behold beings sunk almost to the level of the brute-creation, and, in some points, even below the brutes. Ignorant and thoughtless, gross in their tastes, filthy in their habits, with the passions of men, but with the intellect of little children, they roam, half-naked and half-starved... And they are sunk, for the most part, quite as low, morally, as they are intellectually...²⁷

²² Whately, *Origin of Civilisation*, p.21.

²³ *Ibid*, p.17.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.19.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.19.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.19.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.3-4.



Fig. 5: Frontispiece of *On the Origin of Civilisation* (1854). Darwin's *Fuegian* is presented in a triptych of savages

So it continues. It therefore proved a logical requirement for Whately, a man of God and Victorian sensibilities in an age of evolution, to explain how such brutes could ever have advanced, all *without* equating the civilised with savagery.²⁸ The trick was to theorise a passive, static savagery and an active, interventionist civilisation. Whately thus naturalised the imperial project, casting the civilising mission as perennial truth.

Lubbock's progressivism

Whately's assertions did not go uncriticised, however. John Lubbock, a close friend of Darwin's (again, one of the few privy to his theory pre-1851), responded to Whately in 'The Early Condition

²⁸ As Nietzsche put it: 'We wished to awaken the feeling of man's sovereignty by showing his divine birth: this path is now forbidden, since a monkey stands at the entrance.' Cited in: Foucault, M. (1977). 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'. In: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Cornell University Press, p.143.

of Man',²⁹ first read at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Dundee in 1867³⁰ and then published the following year in the *Anthropological Review*. In the essay, Lubbock parses out both the logical and empirical problems in Whately's idea of static savagery, instead theorising a progressive view bridging the savage/civilised divide in a holistic view of humanity: 'that there are indications of progress even among savages... [and] among the most civilised nations there are traces of original barbarism.'³¹ In contrast to Whately's neo-Hobbesian move to separate utterly savagery and civilisation, Lubbock instead opts for Whiggish progressivism.

Drawing on the anthropological evidence of his time (e.g. the presence of institutions such as marriage), Lubbock aimed to prove this spectrum of development: that 'existing savages are *not* the descendants of civilised ancestors; that the primitive condition of man *was* one of utter barbarism; that from this condition several races *have* independently raised themselves. These views follow, I think, from *strictly scientific* considerations.'³² Lubbock's conclusion is thus distinctly Whiggish, yet imperial too: 'if the past has been one of progress, we may fairly hope that the future will be so too; be so too; *that the blessings of civilisation will not only be extended to other countries and other nations*, but that even in our own land they will be rendered more equable.'³³

Curiously, Lubbock here was departing somewhat from his view advanced three years earlier, in 1864's *Prehistoric Times*. There, Lubbock's description of savages is much closer to Whately's disgust. Working backwards from the present through the annals of time, Lubbock lurches forward to the contemporary savage as a representative of primeval man—'a rather grim Cook's tour of savagery, sweeping eastward from the Hottentots in Africa through the Veddahs, the Australians, the Tongans, the American Indians, down to the Fuegians at the tip of South America.'³⁴ In his descriptions of such peoples, Lubbock belonged to what might be called the "too offensive for description" school

²⁹ Lubbock theorised his argument more fully the following year in *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870).

³⁰ At the reception of Lubbock's speech in Dundee, Darwin's ur-savage was again centre-stage: 'the best account that had ever been given of this early state of man was that given by their friend Charles Darwin, whose eminent name was well known. He described the condition of things in Tierra del Fuego, which had been unvisited for hundreds of years.' Lubbock, 'Early Condition of Man', p.15.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.5.

³² *Ibid*, p.13, emphasis mine. Lubbock concedes 'while I do not mean for a moment to deny that there are cases in which nations have retrograded, I regard these as exceptional instances.'

³³ *Ibid*, p.13-4, emphasis mine.

³⁴ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.153.

of ethnography; his account of savage nations is a one-hundred page elaboration of that apocryphal nineteenth-century ethnographic account: “manners, beastly; religion, none”.³⁵ Lubbock’s descriptions here are closer to the neo-Hobbesian:

The true savage is neither free nor noble; he is a slave to his own wants, his own passions; imperfectly protected from the weather, he suffers from the cold by night and the heat of sun by day; ignorant of agriculture, living by the chase, and improvident in success, hunger always stares him in the face, and often drives him to the dreadful alternative of cannibalism.³⁶

What, then, accounts then for Lubbock’s shift here, from *Prehistoric Times* to *Origin of Civilisation*? In Stocking’s (1987) view, it was purely instrumental: ‘Lubbock’s view of savagery reflected the demands—and the structure—of his argument... In the absence of adequate archaeological data, he turned to contemporary savagery, focusing on what from his view were its most primitive aspects... But when his argument required a more favourable need, Lubbock’s picture of the savage changed somewhat.’³⁷ Yet it was Lubbock’s shift to moderation that elicited response.

Campbell’s inversion of progress

Lubbock’s argument in *Civilisation* was particularly controversial because of its flattening of the savagery/civilisation distinction. In response, George Campbell (the eighth Duke of Argyll) interjected in 1869 with *Primeval Man*—a critique of both Whately and Lubbock’s theories, but especially Lubbock’s argument as ‘very much the weaker of the two.’³⁸ An avowed Christian like Whately, Campbell is similarly left tying himself in knots in order to square advances in anthropology with his religious beliefs: ‘as regards the Primitive Condition of Mankind,’ he says, ‘it must be remembered that, according to the narrative in Genesis, there never was any generation of men which lived and walked in the primal light.’³⁹

To resolve this, Campbell seeks to refute Lubbock’s argument that ‘traces of barbarism’ in contemporary civilisation must prove that primeval man was savage in character. Campbell argues that such ‘traces or remains of barbarism may be indication of the fact that those nations... *have passed through* a stage of barbarism. But it afford no presumption whatever that barbarism was *the Primeval*

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.153.

³⁶ Lubbock, J. (1865) [1864]. *Prehistoric Times*. Williams and Norgate, p.484.

³⁷ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.154.

³⁸ Campbell, G. (1870) [1869]. *Primeval Man*. Strahan & Co, p.5.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.27.

Condition of Man, any more than the traces of Feudalism in the laws of modern Europe prove that feudal principles were born with the Human Race.⁴⁰

Campbell's argument instead revolves around the idea of *degradation*:⁴¹ that savage peoples merely represent degraded or backward forms of civilised man, thus inverting evolution into *devolution*. Savage peoples were thus not superior to an earlier, primitive condition (a vertical temporal comparison), but inferior to modern civilised nations (a horizontal spatial difference). Again, drawing on Genesis, Campbell claims degradation is inhered in humanity: 'It was the first man who fell. The second man was a murderer. The causes, therefore, of degradation are represented as having begun, so far as the race is concerned, at once.'⁴² This notion of degradation could applied to individuals and nations alike:

Nothing in the Natural History of Man can be more certain than that both morally, and intellectually, and physically he can, and he often does, sink from a higher to a lower level. This is true of Man both collectively and individually—of men and of societies of men. Some regions of the world are strewn with the monuments of civilisations which have passed away. Rude and barbarous tribes stare with wonder on the remains of Temples, of which they cannot conceive the purpose, and of Cities which are the dens of beasts.⁴³

The progressive promise of Darwinian evolution therefore had a perverse inverse. Again, Darwin becomes a source of authority, with Campbell citing him in full for many pages at length, and the ur-savage again appearing: 'The inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego are perhaps the most degraded among the races of mankind. How could they be otherwise?'⁴⁴ For Campbell, the Fuegians demonstrated that weaker races were being driven further afield from civilisation, 'and when the ultimate points of the habitable world are reached, the conditions of existence cause and necessitate a savage and degraded life... The case of the Fuegians is a case in which there can be no doubt whatever the causes of their degraded condition.'⁴⁵ Further, he even invokes the example of Jemmy (the Fuegian whom was taken aboard the *Beagle* and back to Britain) as proof of the potentiality of civilising savages.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.133-4, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ A related, but not identical, term is that of 'degeneration', when a species undergoes stagnation in its fortunes in natural selection. See: Lankester, E. (1880). *Degeneration*. Macmillan & Co.

⁴² Campbell, *Primeval Man*, p.28.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.156. Campbell's idea of civilisation is largely one of moral and intellectual capacities, rather than simply knowledge of the arts (as Lubbock seems to argue). Here he anticipates the *Descent*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.170-1.

On the issue of authority, Campbell also acknowledges the common thread amongst these late nineteenth-century conjectural arguments, as I contend throughout this thesis: the *legitimizing power of science*.⁴⁶ In Campbell's words, 'both arguments [of Whately and Lubbock] are avowedly conducted irrespective of any belief in the Mosaic narrative of Creation. They both profess to be purely scientific; that is, founded on natural knowledge, and using for the discovery of truth such facts and inferences as are ascertainable by reason.'⁴⁷ Even Whately's argument, coming from an Archbishop, states that he did not resort to using the Book of Genesis (unlike Campbell), because he 'thought it important to show, independently of that authority and from a monument actually before our eyes—the existence, namely, of civilised man—that there is no escaping such conclusions as agree with the Bible narrative.'⁴⁸ Campbell too, despite his consistent invocation of scripture, invokes the mantle of science: 'it is in the same light that [things] will be considered here.'⁴⁹

Across the interchange between these three theorists, then, one sees the early impact of Darwinism on forming new conceptions of *savagery* rooted in 'deep time'—recast variously as a permanent object of civilised intervention, proof of civilisation's progression, or as a degraded form of humanity—as well as the distinctive appeal of *science* as powerful category of rhetorical legitimacy.

Bagehot the martialist

But how did the category of *war* 'evolve'? Here I turn to Walter Bagehot, widely recognised for his masterful work on British constitutional theory, *The English Constitution* (1867). However, Bagehot also penned a more unusual book: *Physics and Politics: or, Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society* (1872), which arrived the year after the *Descent of Man* (although first published in five parts in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1867).⁵⁰ As the title implies, Bagehot took Darwinian concepts⁵¹ and applied them *directly* to the study of society. The reception was tepid:

⁴⁶ Campbell is also relevant in relation to changing perceptions of time in the nineteenth century—in *Primeval Man*, he distinguishes between 'Time-absolute' (quantifiably measure by years) and 'Time-relative' (measurable only by the succession of events). More significant was Lubbock's geological 'Three Age System'.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *Primeval Man*, p.6, emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.7

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.27.

⁵⁰ Which Darwin himself read. See: Crook, *Darwinism, War, and History*, p.49.

⁵¹ At least, the application of Darwinism *as understood by Bagehot*. As Crook argues, 'it was symptomatic of the confused world of biological discourse at the time that a book making such a Darwinian promise should contain a high degree of Lamarckian theory.' *Ibid*, p.48.

Bagehot surprised his cohorts in 1872 with the relatively abstract *Physics and Politics*, his one real effort—if a preliminary one—to devise a “science of society”, that elusive endeavour of the age. The Victorians were not overly impressed—partly no doubt because he was regarded as a brilliant journalist, not an academic.⁵² Yet it remains a curious work.

Bagehot begins by marvelling at the Victorian age of science: ‘a new world of inventions—of railways and telegraphs—has grown up around us which we cannot help seeing; *a new world of ideas* is in the air and affects us, though we do not see it.’⁵³ Central to these new ideas—‘principles [which] change the philosophy of our politics’⁵⁴—was the doctrine of evolution, and the Victorian preoccupation with historical notions of *progress*.

Bagehot, the archetypal ‘Darwinian Whig’, combines the two, drawing out sharply the teleological interpretation of Darwin and adapting it to a theory of international politics. Like Whately, Lubbock, and Campbell,⁵⁵ primitive man remains central, but Bagehot focuses on the *motor* of civilisational development: ‘the Use of Conflict’.⁵⁶ Just as Darwin sought to apply ‘the doctrine of Malthus applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms’,⁵⁷ so Bagehot applies the doctrine of Darwin applied to the whole international political world—exporting nature’s war to war’s nature.

‘Progress’ provided the fulcrum. As Bagehot notes, ‘our ordinary conversation, our inevitable and ineradicable prejudices tend to make us think that “Progress” is the normal fact in human society.’ Yet he notes its temporal specificity: ‘history refutes this. The ancients had no conception of progress... they did not even entertain the idea.’⁵⁸ In contrast to Campbell’s ‘utter degradation’, Bagehot—drawing on Darwin’s ur-savage yet again—thus presents progression as a fundamental fact of political societies: ‘not even in the savages of Terra del Fuego [*sic*], do we find men who have *not*

⁵² Crook, *Darwinism, War, and History*, p.47.

⁵³ Bagehot, W. (1875) [1872]. *Physics and Politics*. D. Appleton & Company, p.1. On railways and telegraphs in Victorian imperial thought, see: Bell, ‘Cyborg Imperium’.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.11.

⁵⁵ It is curious to consider whether Bagehot may have read these authors. At one point, he makes a distinctly Whatelyian argument in stating that ‘if some superhuman power had set down the thoughts and actions of men ages before they could set them down for themselves—we should know that the first step in civilisation was the hardest step.’ (p.52)

⁵⁶ Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p.41.

⁵⁷ Darwin, *Origin*, p.117.

⁵⁸ Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p.41.

got some way.⁵⁹ So what exactly drives progress? Darwin again provides the answer: *conflict*, with Bagehot proposing three iron laws of progress:

First. In every particular state of the world, those nations which are strongest tend to prevail over the others; and in certain marked peculiarities the strongest tend to be the best.

Secondly. Within every particular nation the type of types of character then and there most attractive tend to prevail; and the most attractive, though with exceptions is what we call the best character.

Thirdly. Neither of these competitions is in most historic conditions intensified by extrinsic forces, but in some conditions, such as those now prevailing in the most influential part of the world, both are so intensified.⁶⁰

This was a political evolution by natural selection of military advantage. Of course, Bagehot was no classic martialist, and he notes the limits of war—valuable virtues such as ‘humanity, charity, and a nice sense of the rights of others, it certainly does not foster.’⁶¹ Yet it is to war that we owe the march of progress: ‘in the early age of man—the “fighting age”... there was a considerable, though not certain tendency towards progress. The best nations conquered the worst.’⁶²

Even virtues which today we do not consider martial (such as the love of the law) were once necessary to discipline nations in order to defeat others. Whilst Bagehot ‘shared liberal hopes that the art of organised killing would wither away in a world dedicated to talk and trade... Nevertheless he recognised with Whiggish caution that warfare was a biologically and culturally entrenched human institution—one that probably rested on an instinctive basis, and had been crucial in fostering innovation and variability. As such it would be long a-dying.’⁶³

Significantly, ‘Bagehot observed *that progress was a European concept*. Many societies—savage, Oriental—failed to improve.’⁶⁴ The contemporary extra-European savage was thereby left outside of the mechanics of the natural selection of historical conflict because, Bagehot argued, they were geographically *outside* the arena of historical interaction: ‘this principle explains at once why the

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.42, emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.43.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.78.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.81. Bagehot, typical of the period, engaged in his own form of historical age-making, counting three stages in civilisation’s evolution: the ‘preliminary (or race-making) age’, the ‘fighting (or nation-making) age’, and the present ‘age of discussion’.

⁶³ Crook, *Darwinism, War, and History*, p.50.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.49, emphasis mine.

“protected” regions of the world... are *of necessity backward*.⁶⁵ Savagery, then, becomes ossified as a consequence of the iron laws of progress (or, rather, their inaction).

Martialist themes such as those in Bagehot’s ‘science of society’ would become a key aspect of the Darwinian idiom. Another striking example is the odd figure of James Ellis Barker (a homeopath originally trained as an historian), who ‘warned constantly of the danger of war between Britain and Germany.’⁶⁶ In *Great and Greater Britain* (1902), Barker argued that if ‘might is right in international politics... the law of the survival of the fittest and strongest, which rules the whole animal and vegetable creation, applies with equal force to man and to his political associations’.⁶⁷ Consequently, the world of international politics:

...was not a world of ease and peace, but a world of strife and war. Nature is ruled by the law of the struggle for existence and of the survival of the fittest and the strongest. States, like trees and animals, are engaged in a never-ending struggle for room, food, light, and air, and that struggle is a blessing in disguise, for it is the cause of all progress. Had it not been for that struggle, the world would still be a wilderness inhabited by its aboriginal savages.⁶⁸

War was therefore not only a mere ‘natural fact’ but, as in Darwin, a *productive* force of selection: ‘*The abolition of war would be a misfortune to mankind*. It would lead not to the survival of the fittest and strongest, but to the survival of the sluggard and the unfit, and therefore to the degeneration of the human race.’⁶⁹ War, the Darwinian martialists argued, was essential to *being human*.

Imperial sciences

The discursive arena of the Whately-Lubbock-Campbell debate outlined earlier was the Anthropological Society, yet very few studies of international thought have actually looked more directly at social anthropologists themselves as contributors to pre-World War One international theory. This is a striking oversight, considering the disciplinary similarity of IR and anthropology—both after all are fundamentally concerned with *societal difference*, and both are occupied with the question of *anarchy* and how political obligation might be sustained in the absence of central authority (in anthropology,

⁶⁵ Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p.82, emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Claeys, ‘Social Darwinism’, p.181.

⁶⁷ Barker, J.E. (1902). *Great and Greater Britain*. Smith, Elder & Co, p.23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.25.

at the level of stateless societies; in IR, at the international level). Largely the cross-disciplinary interchange with has been methodological rather than historical.⁷⁰

Yet, as Schmidt (2013) notes, ‘the field’s antecedents included international law, diplomatic history, the peace movement, moral philosophy, geography, and *anthropology*.’⁷¹ Whilst the other ‘antecedents’ have enjoyed substantive engagement—the history of international law and diplomatic history being particularly well-served—the influence of *anthropology* on IR’s ‘pre-history’ has been largely ignored. This dovetails with my focus here on Darwinism because, in Britain, the emergence of disciplinary anthropology came at exactly the same time as an expanded empire wrought the question of societal difference to the fore of imperial governance.

Indeed, in the history of anthropological theory, the earliest theoretical approach was that of *evolutionism*, with the 1860s (i.e. the gap between Darwin’s *Origin* and *Descent*) the formative period of ‘classical evolutionism’.⁷² For the evolutionists, all societies were thought to pass through three stages of social development: savagery, barbarism, and civilisation,⁷³ with human diversity conceived as different stages in this single development process. Comparing accounts of diverse customs of Western and non-Western peoples across time might therefore allow for the reconstruction of a single, grand history of humanity’s progression.

Yet the pursuit of anthropological research served less as an analytical exercise than one of cementing the status of the Other: ‘Surveying the world’s cultures... men such as E.B. Tylor had no doubt that the monogamous family and an austere Christianity (or a godless rational morality) represented the triumph of virtue over primitive habits.’⁷⁴ The evolutionist movement was thus ‘a literature where the line between “scientific” anthropological views and personal cultural values was often blurred’,⁷⁵ with the ‘scientific’ mantle an ideal legitimising veneer on the evolutionists’ politics.

⁷⁰ Lie, J.H.S. (2013). ‘Challenging Anthropology’. *Millennium*, 41(2), pp.201-220.

⁷¹ Schmidt, B. (2013). ‘On the History and Historiography of International Relations’. In: *Handbook of International Relations*. Sage Publications, pp.3-28, p.6, emphasis mine.

⁷² Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.239; Candea, M. (2018). ‘Severed Roots’. In: *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*. Routledge, pp.18-60.

⁷³ As in Edward B. Tylor’s (1865) *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*.

⁷⁴ Kucklick, H. (1991). *The Savage Within*. Cambridge University Press, p.22.

⁷⁵ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.152.

In Britain, anthropology's development—'born of the colonial situation'⁷⁶—was closely linked with the high-tide of British imperialism, with anthropologists both *theorising* cultural practices that had been discovered within the Empire and acting as *practical* assistants in the exercise of colonial governance. Indeed, the discipline defined itself by its practicality as a 'useful scholarship... anthropologists frequently advertised their field's practical value.'⁷⁷

Such was exemplified in the grand lobbying effort (including by Lubbock, amongst others) to establish an 'imperial bureau of ethnology', conceived as an academic arm of the Empire 'to serve dual objectives: *to increase scientific knowledge* by recording those varieties of human behaviour that were rapidly disappearing at home and abroad; and *to assist colonial administrators* by interpreting the values and customs of those peoples who had come under British domination.'⁷⁸

Evolutionary natural science was similarly imperialist, with fieldwork in colonial territories being a particularly important resource. As Clement (2016) argues, an individual here that one might not expect is that of Alfred Russel Wallace, the 'co-creator' of natural selection, and renowned for his staunchly anti-imperialist politics.⁷⁹ Yet, whilst Wallace 'has been acknowledged by historians as a staunch critic of the "new" imperialism of the late nineteenth century, he is not customarily portrayed as an opponent of British colonialism in *mid-century*.'⁸⁰ Indeed, on the contrary:

Wallace associated himself with European colonial regimes during his long stint of field work in the Malay Archipelago... [and] depended on colonial networks to facilitate his research and collection of specimens for financial gain; in turn, it is often said *that scientific study assisted the imposition and consolidation of colonial regimes*.⁸¹

This experience in the Malay would be critical for Wallace, just as were Darwin's adventures on the *Beagle*. In the Dutch East Indies, Wallace would happen upon his two most important discoveries: the basic idea of natural selection, and the biogeographical demarcation line between Asian and Australian fauna ('Wallace's Line').⁸² He also became enraptured by more political matters, becoming particularly obsessed with the Dutch Cultivation System, even writing to Darwin himself to ask why

⁷⁶ Kucklick, *Savage Within*, p.26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.6-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.46, emphasis mine.

⁷⁹ As he argued in 1899: 'We, as a nation, have no right whatever to claim any superiority as regards our treatment of those less civilised people with whom we come in contact.' In: Wallace, A.R. (1899). 'America, Cuba, and the Philippines'. *The Daily Chronicle* (Jan 19th 1899).

⁸⁰ Clement, M. (2016). 'Evolution and Empire'. *Britain and the World*, 9(1), pp.55-75, p.56, emphasis mine.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.56, emphasis mine.

⁸² Van Whye, J. (2013). *Dispelling the Darkness*. World Scientific.

he had not mentioned his discussion of the Cultivation System in his commendation of Wallace's book. When the subject drifted from science to politics, Darwin's response was typically coy: 'I read all that you said about the Dutch Government with much interest, but I do not feel I know enough to form any opinion against yours.'⁸³

Wallace would develop this focus on international politics more explicitly in a rather striking paper⁸⁴ to the Anthropological Society in 1864,⁸⁵ which addressed the matter of 'civilisation' directly, even drawing on François Guizot,⁸⁶ the great innovator of the idea.⁸⁷ Wallace's language is potent:

It is the same great law of "the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life," which leads to the inevitable extinction of all those low and mentally undeveloped populations with which Europeans come in contact... The intellectual and moral, as well as the physical qualities of the European are superior; the same powers and capacities which have made him rise in a few centuries from the condition of the wandering savage... to his present state of culture and advancement... *enable him when in contact with the savage man, to conquer in the struggle for existence, and to increase at his expense...* just as the weeds of Europe overrun North America and Australia, extinguishing native productions by the inherent vigour of their organisation, and by their greater capacity for existence and multiplication.⁸⁸

This is a highly significant moment, being a *very* early case of applying Darwin's theory to human beings—perhaps only the second, following Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863)—and clearly does not represent a 'liberal' approach.

Natural empires?

Darwinism was also potent for the explicit *theorisation* of the institution of empire. John Robert Seeley, the most sophisticated theorist of British imperialism, argued for instance that colonisation took two forms: the modern; and the natural, '*natural* in the sense that it has manifest analogies in the natural

⁸³ Clement, 'Evolution and Empire', p.61.

⁸⁴ The commentary on the paper is also notable—again!—for the appearance of the ur-savage, brought up by Thomas Bendyshe: 'the mind of the European is so extremely developed... [unlike] those races of men who certainly have not been developed far beyond the animal, the negro, or the inhabitant of Tierra del Fuego' Wallace, A.R. (1864). 'The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of "Natural Selection".' *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, 2(1), pp.clviii-clxxxvii, p.clxiv.

⁸⁵ As an attendant of the Anthropological Society's meetings, Wallace contradicted Darwin and Huxley—who both boycotted the group because of its racist polygeneticism, attending the liberal monogenetic Ethnological Society instead. Wallace maintained that his attendance was purely practical, as the Ethnologist's meetings clashed with the Zoological Society's meetings which he also attended. Clement, 'Evolution and Empire', p.71.

⁸⁶ First in a discussion of the impact of climate on European civilisation (p.clxiv), and then to concur with Guizot's assertion that 'for myself, I am convinced that there is a destiny of humanity, a transmission of the aggregate of civilisation' (p.clxix).

⁸⁷ Bowden, *Empire of Civilization*, ch.2.

⁸⁸ Wallace, 'Human Races', p.clxiv-clxv. This passage is again an exemplar of Brantlinger's (2003) 'extinction discourse'.

world. “Colonies are like fruits which only cling till they ripen,” said Turgot. Colonisation, say others, is like the swarming of bees; or it is like the marriage and migration to another house of the grown-up son.⁸⁹ Yet Seeley soon collapses his own distinction:

And yet the modern system *might be represented as natural also*... is there anything necessarily unnatural... that the State is capable of indefinite growth and expansion? The ripe fruit dropping from the tree and giving rise to another tree may be natural, but so too is the acorn spreading into the huge oak that has hundreds of branches and thousands of leaves.⁹⁰

Although more Lamarckian than Darwinian, Herbert Spencer—the originator of the term ‘survival of the fittest’—was similarly drawn to such evolutionism. Ever grandiose, Spencer spent his life outlining an all-encompassing evolutionist philosophy, the ‘Synthetic Philosophy’, driven by a ‘fundamental “law of metamorphosis”... [i.e.] evolution, to which he gave the highest general sense possible, incorporating not only organisms but the inorganic and the social... from the formation of concentrations of matter... *to the formation of social institutions* and coherent forms of social life and cooperation out of primal, undifferentiated human hordes of asocial beings.’⁹¹

Spencer’s theory of politics, then, was a teleological naturalism: ‘Progress,’ he asserts, ‘is not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, *it is a part of nature*; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower.’⁹² In Spencer’s international thought, this evolutionism took on martialist form, despite a concern with the long-term possibility of peace between nations. ‘It had to be reluctantly admitted,’ he says, ‘that war, everyway and always hateful, has nonetheless been a factor in civilization, by bringing about the consolidation of groups... until great nations are formed.’⁹³ Like Bagehot, the paradox thereof was that the cultivation of martialist cooperative skills would eventually render war moot,⁹⁴ moving societies *from the ‘militant’ to the ‘industrial’*. The high tide of aggressive industrial imperialism, which Spencer strongly opposed, seemed to contradict this evolutionary process toward peaceability.

⁸⁹ Seeley, J.R. (1973) [1883]. *The Expansion of England*. University of Chicago Press, p.37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.56, emphasis mine.

⁹¹ Burrow, J.W. (2000). *The Crisis of Reason*. Yale University Press, p.44-5, emphasis mine.

⁹² Spencer, H. (1851). *Social Statics*. Williams & Norgate, p.80, emphasis mine. Albeit this (Lamarckian claim) preceded the *Origin*.

⁹³ Spencer, H. (1908) [1899]. ‘The Filiation of Ideas’. In: *The Life and Letters of Hebert Spencer*. Methuen, pp.533-76, p.569.

⁹⁴ Schuurman, P. (2016). ‘Herbert Spencer and the Paradox of War’. *Intellectual History Review*, 26(4), pp.519-35.

This theory of development was thus somewhat confused on colonisation: ‘*From war has been gained all that it had to give.* The peopling of the Earth by the more powerful and intelligent race, is a benefit in great measure achieved; and *what remains to be done... [is] the quiet pressure of a spreading industrial civilization on a barbarism that slowly dwindles.*’⁹⁵ Institutionally, if not empire to perform such a task, ‘Spencer hoped that in the collaboration of the Concert of Europe he could detect an “end to the re-barbarization which is continually undoing civilization”,’⁹⁶ revivifying the march of Western civilisation through counter-revolution.

As we shall now turn, evolutionist discussions of *everyday international affairs* such as of the Concert became commonplace. From this chapter, though, we have glimpsed the rich texture of an *abstract* theoretical Darwinian internationalism and its transformations of the salient nineteenth-century themes of savagery, war, and empire—which were carried into everyday discourse.

⁹⁵ Spencer, H. (2010) [1874-96]. *The Principles of Sociology in Three Volumes*. Transaction, p.664, emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ Schuurman, ‘Paradox’, p.524.

Chapter Four

Darwinian Discourses

‘During great moral, political, or social crises, certain great phrases are apt to become as household words in the mouths of men—phrases which... when examined, show both the sources and the tendencies of popular thought. Two such phrases, which have been much in vogue of late years, are “the survival of the fittest,” and “natural selection”.’¹

— Ramsden Balmforth (1901)

Thus far, I have considered Darwinism largely in line with traditional ‘*intellectual*’ history’ (i.e. a history of intellectuals). It should be evident by now that the Darwinian idiom was an important feature of Victorian international thought. Yet I wish to go beyond this—not just to see Darwinism as one part of the general ‘foam’ atop Victorian imperial thought, but rather as a constituent dynamic of the underlying ‘current’ actually animating the imperial project. Thus, in this final chapter, I move away from the detached world of international theory and, inspired by IR’s ‘practice turn’,² turn towards international politics in the quotidian form: to journalists (as direct interjectors on pressing international questions of the day) and colonial administrators (as imperial practitioners).

To be clear, I am not here making a causal claim in the vein of positivist IR, i.e. that ‘Darwinism *caused* imperialism’. Rather, I offer a descriptive account in the manner of Bull’s (1977) analysis of ‘the historical record of international society,’ as found in the proclamations ‘of philosophers and publicists, and present in the rhetoric of the leaders of states.’³ Whilst we have surveyed the ‘philosophers’ thus far, I now turn to the rhetoric of such ‘leaders of states’ (or, rather, empires), as well as the utterances of less vaunted individuals on the ground: newspaper correspondents.

Following Keene (2002), my investigation departs from Bull’s holistic understanding of international society by considering the bifurcated nature of international order in the nineteenth century. Thus, in my source selection, I focus on a comparison between *intra*- and *extra*-European discourses, asking whether there really *was* that sharp a difference in conceptions of international order. In the intra-European world, I analyse notions of *existential competition*—especially following the unification of Germany (1871)—as well as the cultivation of nature as a criterion for great-power status. On the extra-European side, my ‘case’ is that of British imperial policy and discourse in southern

¹ Balmforth, R. (1902). ‘Darwinism and Empire’. *Westminster Review*, CLVIII, (July-December), pp.1-13, p.1.

² Adler, E. and Pouliot, V. (2011). ‘International Practices’. *International Theory*, 3(1), pp.1-36.

³ Bull, H. (2012) [1977]. *The Anarchical Society*. Red Globe Press, p.23.

Africa, especially around the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), and the First (1880-1) and Second Boer Wars (1899-1902). By juxtaposing imperial war with *racial Europeans* (the Boers) and *savage natives* (the Zulus), a comparison of discourses around the civilisational standard is possible: were ‘wars with savages’ and ‘wars with settlers’ conceived differently?

In terms of empirics, in contrast to the more cerebral sources of chapters two and three, here I focus on the rough-and-tumble of everyday political discourse by looking at primary material in daily newspapers, periodicals, journalistic pamphlets, and the personal writings and correspondence of colonial administrators: ‘the most ephemeral of all contributions’⁴ to international thought, offering windows onto pervasive, popular understandings of Darwinism.

Newspapers are particularly significant as they demonstrate the transmission of intellectual idioms into the everyday political discussions of the metropole. Here, I focus mainly on the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Not only do such papers have a ‘distinctively international flavour’⁵ but, as newspapers of record with a wide readership, they offer an ideal locus for ascertaining whether Darwinian ideas became a part of the broad, daily discussion of international relations. Complementing this, I also analyse the more high-brow periodical journals of the period, which were an important part of Victorian intellectual life (e.g. the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Economist*, the *Westminster Review*). As Francis (1994) argues:

The examination of Victorian journals will elicit the climate of opinion among the English elite. If imperialism or racial policies were to receive justification it would have to be in reputable journals... It seems likely that an examination of newspapers would produce more lurid and violent accounts of race, but these would also be less likely to formulate justification or policy in a society which was still hierarchical, polite, and clubbable.⁶

Whilst Francis (strangely) finds scant evidence for explicit Darwinism in such journals, I come to a different conclusion. Across the periodicals I survey, a Darwinian register was prominent—certainly not the *most* frequent ideological lens (liberalism probably takes that prize), but an important one nonetheless.

⁴ Keene, ‘International Intellectual History’, p.349.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Francis, M. (1994). ‘Anthropology and Social Darwinism in the British Empire’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50(s1), pp.203-15, p.204-5. Whilst Francis rejects the analysis of newspapers on the grounds of elite opinion, I do not share his reason for doing so.

In my use of primary sources, I strive to be judicious in the interpretation of whether or not instances of discourse count as ‘Darwinian’. Inevitably, as we move to the percolation of an idiom into everyday discourse, the genetics of a term as definitively ‘*Darwinian*’ becomes harder to ascertain. I have aimed to filter out those idiomatic expressions which predated Darwin—such as ‘competition’ or ‘political struggle’ as broader notions—and focus on more clearly evolutionist ideas—such as the ‘struggle *for existence*’, especially as linked to biological metaphors, and ‘wars of extermination’ as tied to ideas of selection. The reader can judge my success.

The struggle for European existence

Whilst many have sought to paint the nineteenth century as a period of European peace—often under the aegis of the idea of a *Pax Britannica* or a hundred-years ‘Concert peace’—the spectre of war hung heavy in European discourse, particularly following the Crimean War (1853-6) and the unification of Germany in 1871. By the end of the century, a pessimistic and fatalistic tone coloured European discourse, with obsessive talk of the possibility of ‘general war’.⁷ The Darwinian idea of *existential competition* therefore became prevalent.

Reflecting on Bismarck’s legacy of ‘a tenure of office of nearly 28 years’ at the time of his resignation in 1890—‘to discover whether the direction of Bismarck’s policy has been right or wrong’—the *Times* captured this pessimistic *Zeitgeist* of the *fin de siècle* in thoroughly Darwinian terms. Countering those ‘sentimentalists’ who criticised the imperial expansion of foreign powers whilst lauding their *own* national adventures, it is argued that such expansion cannot be judged as it is inscribed in the natural order of things:

[It] pretty generally prevails that mankind acts rightly in spreading over the face of the globe, and that higher races are destined to supplant lower ones... Ignorance of history lies at the bottom of all the reasoning of the sentimentalists. Might is ultimately the true and only source of right... And can we be astonished if fitness—that is, physical, intellectual, and moral superiority—carries away the palm in international competition? Is it not an additional proof of the unity of nature, this analogy of the laws governing human fate to those regulating the animal and vegetable kingdoms? Higher levels are attained by evolution; aptness of for the conditions of terrestrial life insures [*sic*] the rise of those who are fit to make mankind soar upwards, while a want of the requisite qualities provides for the elimination of those who drag humanity downwards.⁸

⁷ Berghahn, V. (2015). ‘Origins’. In: J. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Vol. 1*. Cambridge University Press, pp.16-38.

⁸ ‘(FROM A GERMAN CORRESPONDENT.) The Expansion of Germany’. *Times*, 25 Aug. 1890, p.13.

The presence of such an overtly theoretically Darwinian account of international competition in the *Times* is certainly intriguing. In visions such as these, ethical concerns were consumed by the brute demands of natural fact: 'It may be objected that physical force comes in for too considerable a share in the prizes of the struggle for existence—that moral and intellectual qualities ought to weight more,'⁹ the piece muses. Yet such 'sentimentalist' concerns were unscientific and ignorant: the past and the future was, and would be, a history of *struggle*.

Across in the newly unified Germany itself, Darwinism became a reservoir of metaphor from which to draw upon. As Leo von Caprivi, Bismarck's successor as German Chancellor, declared unambiguously to the Reichstag:

It must be clear in our minds that we have to carry on a struggle for existence—for political, material, and cultural existence. It must be clear in our minds that it is our duty to do everything of which we are capable to go through this struggle. It is our duty firstly towards *God*. Each nation must take its place within the civilization of the world. No other nation could replace the loss of the German. States, contrary to men, do not have a duty to sacrifice themselves for others out of charity; their first duty is to maintain themselves.¹⁰

Indeed, this notion of 'war as a natural and inevitable phenomenon and a healthy activity was widely received during the last years before and first decades after the foundation of the German *Reich*'. As Holbraad (1970) argues: 'the old phrase "der Kampf ums Dasein", the struggle for existence, became a popular quotation in the speeches and writings of the contemporaries and successors of Bismarck... In common with human life and indeed the entire natural world, the life of nations was [in Moltke's phrase] "a struggle of the developing against the existing".'¹¹

In Britain, the European theatre of existential competition became acutely important following numerous crises in the Balkans. Commenting on the Eastern Question in 1887, for instance, the *Economist* noted how the crisis in Bulgaria, 'although it has become more acute, does not threaten any more than before to lead to a European war.'¹² Whilst an intervention from Russia was feared on such grounds, it appeared that Russia remained 'unfit' to compete in a broader conflict: that 'even were it in the interest of Russia to plunge Europe into a general conflict... her military preparations are in a more backward condition than those of any other great Power on the Continent. The recent

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Translation in: Holbraad, C. (1970). *The Concert of Europe*. Longman, p.77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.77-8.

¹² 'Bulgaria and the Peace of Europe'. *Economist*, 3 Sept. 1887, p.1119.

revelations of her financial weakness, while they might not affect her prospects, *were she involved in a struggle for national existence*, are a serious obstacle to her entering on an essentially aggressive war.’¹³

The discourse around *small nation-states* like Bulgaria was similarly framed in existential terms. Typically economistic,¹⁴ in 1894 the *Economist* noted the financial burdens for small states surviving in a Europe of wealthy great powers: ‘It is a marked feature of the modern world that the civilisation it desires, and without which it feels humiliated, is excessively expensive... Even great and wealthy States like France and Germany are burdened by this necessity, which the little States, with the exception of Holland, are entirely unable to meet... The little States have, in fact, to struggle for pecuniary existence, and after a few more years will be compelled to suspend all efforts at what the modern world considers progress from sheer incapacity to raise the necessary funds.’¹⁵

The naturalist dimension of Darwinism also crept into the criteria of the standard of civilisation. As Yao (2019) has recently argued, ‘*the control and exploitation of nature* as a standard of civilization developed in the 19th century to constitute membership in a civilized European international society.’¹⁶ Whilst Yao focuses on the case of ‘contestations over the Danube River as a natural highway between Europe and the near periphery’,¹⁷ other examples abounded. ‘It was not as a gold-digger, a trader in slaves and ivory, or a money-lender that Germany entered Russia’, the *Times* proclaimed: ‘He was bent on a more directly and distinctly civilizing errand. We find him ready to till a rich soil according to a rational and scientific method, to turn swamps into meadows, to cultivate forests instead of ruthlessly chopping them down, to introduce machinery and to found new industries.’¹⁸

Outside Europe, debates over territorial ownership after the Scramble for Africa also took on this naturalist tone, with the capacity to ‘cultivate’ savage peoples seen as a main condition for colonial possession:

It may be taken, we think, as settled that the British people do not desire any direct rule upon the valley of the Congo, and will not quarrel actively with any other people for the sovereignty of the river. It is a very great river... but the territory it flows through is populated only by savages, the rudiments of civilisation do not exist, and *it requires a*

¹³ *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

¹⁴ For a recent history of the role of the *Economist* in the making of British economic liberalism, see: Zevin, A. (2019). *Liberalism at Large*. Verso.

¹⁵ ‘The Small States of Europe’. *Economist*, 26 May 1894, p.633.

¹⁶ Yao, J. (2019). “‘Conquest from Barbarism’”. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(2), pp.335-59, p.335, emphasis mine.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ ‘The Expansion of Germany’, p.13.

rough and more or less belligerent government, which will, to begin with, perform the task of reducing the riparian states, or communities pretending to be States, into something like order. The British people have enough work of this kind upon their hands in India, in the Nile Valley, and in South Africa, and are not willing to undertake any more—at all events, just now.¹⁹

In intra-European discourse, then, Darwinism served as a prism through which numerous themes could be illuminated: the fear of great powers' capacity to start a European war, the struggle of small states to survive in a power-political world (both political and economic), and the control of the natural world as a criterion for great power status. The spectre which hung over European discourse in the late nineteenth century was *fatalism*: that things were simply inscribed in the order of things, a feeling that would in part lead to the cataclysm of the First World War.²⁰ One form in which such fatalism was uttered was Darwinian.

Extinction wars in the periphery

Organicist metaphors were also highly useful for discussing savagery, as in a curious little piece in the *Telegraph* in 1869. A kind of state of the union address, the piece reflected on the 'state of savages' in the mid-nineteenth century: "Those delightful friends of youth, "the savages," are almost everywhere having a bad time of it,"²¹ it opens. We are then told of the cause of their misfortune:

In the old days, civilisation spread slowly and imperceptibly. Then it extended, as a drop of ink does upon blotting-paper, by gradual concentric advances; now, like a plant which has passed through the early stages... it shoots out its suckers and branches in all directions, going right to the heart of strange places and peoples at a bound...²²

So too for the British Empire, that megafauna of the imperial genus, which had spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Yet alongside jingoism came worry. In the extra-European world, the exact same existential fatalism in Europe was expressed, albeit in darker racist hues—especially through the 'extinction discourse'²³ around natives' destruction.

¹⁹ 'The Congo'. *Economist*, 24 May 1884, p.627, emphasis mine. It also notes the *obligation of civilised great powers onto each other*: "They are, therefore, not only ready to pardon, but ready to assist any civilised Power, or Powers, which will undertake the task, and will open up the mighty valley... to the commerce and, consequently, to the civilisation of Europe."

²⁰ Clark, C. (2012). *The Sleepwalkers*. Penguin; Mommsen, W. (1981). 'The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany in the Period Before 1914'. In: *Germany in the Age of Total War*. Croom Helm.

²¹ "Those delightful friends of youth". *Daily Telegraph*, 16 Apr. 1869, p.5, emphasis mine.

²² *Ibid.* The author is keen that we ought not to feel sympathy: "Nobody, of course, cares for wild beasts and savages, excepting boys; and civilisation is doubtless the right thing."

²³ Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*.

Here, a sharp distinction between intra- and extra-European wars *appeared* a recurrent theme of the period. For instance, following a Japanese attack on Britain in October 1861, the *Economist* asserted the maxim that ‘Wherever a superior race comes into close contact with an inferior one, or a highly-civilised race with a semi-civilised one, or a thoroughly European with a thoroughly Oriental race, it seems *inevitable* that there should be cruelty, oppression, and subjection... At least *it has always been so*, with *every people* and in *every quarter* of the world. The relations of the Spaniards to the Mexicans, of the Dutch to the Hottentots, of the Americans to the Indians, have ever been fatal to the weaker tribes.’²⁴ So the same reality for Britain’s imperial endeavours, a direct result of natural selection:

It would seem that even our own higher morality and our own more scrupulous sense of justice... have not been able either to prevent the feeble and wretched Australian from gradually dying out before us, or to save the more capable and energetic Maories from ceaseless quarrels with us or from *the imminent prospect of ultimate extermination*. In both cases we believe that we have really done our best to exempt these unfortunate people from *the usual fate of savages brought into collision with European superiority*, but in both cases our efforts have been in vain.²⁵

The Māories, as here, were often a focus of such extinction discourses in Britain. At the outbreak of the Second Māori War in 1863 between the colonists and natives, for instance, the *Telegraph* prophesied their inevitable destruction: ‘Thus the war opened; and we read with sorrow that the wounded were bayoneted, for there is bitterness enough now all over the northern island between the settlers and the natives, without making this new struggle for existence on their part *more savage than it must become*.’²⁶

Similarly common was the professed inevitability of conflict itself due to *differences in race*: ‘For our own parts we do not see how such wars can be wholly avoided. They are the inevitable condition of the collision of an indolent and ignorant with a better trained and more energetic race... And we do not know any way more certain to aggravate the evil on *both* sides, than for an aggressive civilisation to show anything like fear or entreaty in the presence of barbarism.’²⁷ Oddly, the civilised nations must therefore show resolve and vigour in wars of extinction against savages with an *inevitable* outcome—history as farce, agency irrelevant.²⁸

²⁴ ‘The Japan Outrage’. *Economist*, 5 Oct. 1861, p.1096, emphasis mine.

²⁵ *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

²⁶ ‘The second Maori war has broken out, to the deep sorrow’. *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Aug. 1863, p.4, emphasis mine.

²⁷ ‘The Fresh War in New Zealand’. *Economist*, 25 July 1863, p.814.

²⁸ Like the struggle for ‘inevitable’ revolution in Marxism.

Inversely, rather than calling for resolve, the British government's offers to savages were often framed as polite offers to otherwise ignorant natives, therein again drawing a sharp distinction between wars with savages and wars between civilised nations: 'Sir George Gray wishes to draw a frontier of like kind round the Waikato country... It is one of those bold measures which would neither be desirable nor justifiable in *a regular war between civilised countries*, but which offers perhaps the best and most natural way of securing the borders of civilisation in a country not yet reclaimed from the dominion of savages.'²⁹

In southern Africa, however, the most explicit examples of Darwinian imperial discourse could be found—most strikingly in 1879, when Britain fought a war with the 'savage' state of Zululand, following a failed attempt spearheaded by the High Commissioner Henry Bartle Frere to bring the Zulu kingdoms into a British imperial federation. At the outbreak of the war, the confidence of the British press was high, with the sharp asymmetry between the British and Zulu warriors presumed to guarantee British victory: 'That a savage nation possessing the highest military organisation that has ever yet been attained by a savage nation is powerless before British troops armed with weapons of the greatest precision will, I trust, be fully demonstrated',³⁰ a correspondent shrugged. As the war rolled on, this confidence had waned but remained strong: 'For the first time in their history these dusky warriors have discarded the usual fantastic costumes in which it has hitherto been their habit to fight. Doubtless they feel the desperate character of the struggle in which they are engaged.'³¹

In the middle of the conflict in June, a despatch from Frere to the Colonial Secretary was reported in the *Times*. In his official recommendations, a Darwinian flavour to his remarks is quite evident: the worry, for Frere, was to leave 'large masses of uncivilized natives... within our own dominions to fester in idleness.' The British ought to be well aware of the 'danger and inhumanity of leaving them untaught, untrained, and unimproved, *to multiply in their original savagery*, with none but indirect influences to lead them to civilization, and *deprived of such slender elevating impulses as the struggle*

²⁹ 'The War in New Zealand'. *Economist*, 17 Oct. 1863, p.1151, emphasis mine.

³⁰ '(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.). The Zulu War'. *Times*, 22 Feb 1879, p.10.

³¹ '(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENTS.). The Zulu War'. *Times*, 24 May 1879, p.5.

for existence and supremacy under a savage ruler may indirectly have afforded them. Our guiding rules in dealing with them must not be Zulu traditions, but European principles.’³²

Frere’s contrast here was that of Darwin’s: restrained civilisation on the European side, and a struggle for existence for the savage. For Frere, the natives left uncivilised in British territory were subject to the worst of all possible worlds, lacking *even* the ‘slender elevating impulse’ of a struggle for existence. Similarly, at the war’s conclusion, a civilised benevolence was mooted: ‘there is a very general feeling that the occasion of the conquest of the country should have been taken advantage of to introduce a strong, wise, and kindly government, which by its control and supervision of the natives would guide them in the course of improvement and gradually lead them up towards civilization.’³³

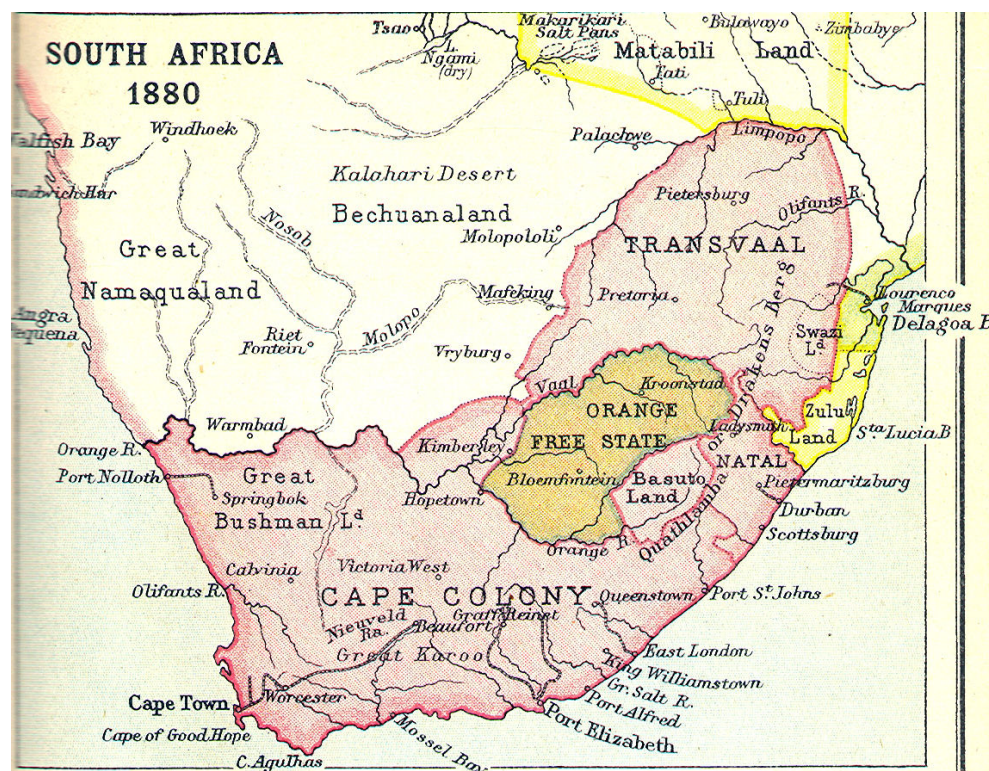


Fig. 6: southern Africa in 1880, with British imperial control in classic pink³⁴

³² ‘The Affairs of South Africa’. *Times*, 31 July 1879, p.4, emphasis mine. As he continues: they must not ‘be kept as an alien race separate from and subordinate to a superior white race, but as fellow-subjects entitled to the same rights and laws as ourselves, and able to raise themselves by industry and probity to equal rights and responsibilities in the State.’

³³ ‘(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENTS.). South Africa’. *Times*, 30 Oct. 1879, p.4.

³⁴ Image available online at: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-map-of-south-africa-in-1880-and-1899-97173467.html> [Accessed 28 Nov 2019].

The Boer wars

“You shall submit! We are masters and we will make you acknowledge it!” These words express the sentiment which sways the British nation in its dealings with the Boer republics; and this sentiment it is which... pervades indefinitely the political feeling now manifesting itself as Imperialism.³⁵

— Herbert Spencer (1902)

Britain’s problems in southern Africa were not confined to the Zulus but spread to the white Boer settlers too. Whilst Britain had inherited the Cape Colony in 1806 as a prize from the Napoleonic Wars (acknowledged at the Congress of Vienna), it struggled with its Boer problem: how to deal with the Dutch-, German-, and Huguenot-descendant settlers, i.e. ‘the Boers’ (deriving from the Dutch for ‘farmer’). At first, the British appeared to grant some basic recognition to the settlers’ independence: in 1852, for the Transvaal (later the South African Republic), and in 1854, for those in the Vaal-Orange rivers area (later the Orange Free State). Yet they retained functional control over the region, with ambitions for future domination.

In 1880, the First Anglo-Boer War broke out in the Transvaal as a result of Boer resentment against the British. Whilst the war was swift, ending in just three months with Boer victory at the Battle of Majuba Hill, it elicited much discussion in the British chattering classes—much of it transfixed by the Boers themselves, as white farmer-soldiers with a cause that seemed eminently reasonable. In this spirit, in 1881, the British granted self-government to the Boer republics under the Pretoria Convention (although insisting on British suzerainty). Reflecting at the close of the first conflict, one potential reason for the British defeat was offered: the Boers’ martialist, Spartan-like society. As a special correspondent for the *Times* put it:

*In the struggle for existence among the States of South Africa the Boers have survived, then, mainly because of their capacity for military co-operation; because every man among them fought—members of their Parliament, Judges of their Law Courts, everybody—and because the women who could not fight helped the men who could. The Boers thus became a nation of soldiers. The army was the whole people and the whole people were an army... The military gathering has been the political gathering, and the successful military leader the head of the State. The first President was a man who had led the people in many a fight.*³⁶

This notion of South Africa as an arena of existential struggle (between the British colonists, the Boer settlers, and the natives) became commonplace. Following this first war, for instance, Colonel Stanley

³⁵ Spencer, H. (1902). *Facts and Comments*. D. Appleton & Company, p.157.

³⁶ ‘(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT)’. The Transvaal’. *Times*, 23 Oct. 1896, p.8, emphasis mine.

signalled future conflict on the horizon: ‘We will not say that the Africander [*sic*] is *une quantité négligeable*, but his prospect for survival in the South African struggle for political existence does not at the present moment seem to be very brilliant.’³⁷ From the *Economist*, the dire economic situation for the British in the Transvaal in 1897 was surveyed: ‘Leaving to itself, for the time being, the dangerous political and economic situation, let us discuss the coal industry of this country, and arrive at the real facts about coal shares... It will thus be seen that only one new mine (the Clydesdale) has survived, or is likely to survive, the struggle for existence.’³⁸

Whilst the independence of the Boer republics had been largely recognised by the British in the years following the first conflict, expansionism became too tempting and, in 1899, the Second Boer War erupted from the issue of the voting rights of *uitlanders*—British immigrants living in the South African Republic (the Transvaal), who were ostracised from the citizenry by the Boer state.³⁹ During this second conflict, war was often reported in even more eschatological terms: ‘They say it is *a life and death struggle for the existence* of the Empire. We have got stoutness enough, unity enough, spirit enough, wealth enough, I think, to give a very good answer to any enemies who may withstand us in the way of aggression.’⁴⁰ Yet, worries of the Boers’ willingness ‘to face *a war of extermination* rather than submit’⁴¹ were thankfully abated after the surrender of General Cronje:

The surrender proves that the Boer farmers, or rather herdsmen, splendidly brave as they are, and enduring as they have shown themselves to be, are not prepared to fight “to the last ditch,” or to be slain in heaps rather than become free subjects of Her Majesty... they will, it is evident, fight like reasonable human beings, and not like lunatics let loose... The war, in fact, *is a war, and not a struggle to destroy a nation*. The previous history of the Boers clearly suggested this, but the resistance on the Modder and on the Tugela had been so desperate that many usually cool judges began to apprehend a defence of Saguntum on a colossal scale.⁴²

The Boers, then, unlike the fierce Zulus, were marked by their ‘civilised’ capacity to wage war in a configurative, rather than existential, way. The fact that the Zulus survived was due only to British deference to the civilised tempering of the teleological extinction of their nation—whereas the Boers, descendants of Europeans, recognised war as a tit-for-tat, rather than zero-sum, game.

³⁷ ‘COLONEL STANLEY finds it a difficult matter to...’. *Times*, 6 Aug. 1885, p.9.

³⁸ ‘Coal in the Transvaal—A Warning to Investors’. *Economist*, 24 Apr. 1897, p.604-5.

³⁹ For a full historical account: Farwell, B. (1976). *The Great Anglo-Boer War*. W.W. Norton & Company.

⁴⁰ ‘Mr. Morley on the War’. *Times*, 25 Jan. 1900, p.7, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ ‘The Surrender of Cronje’. *Economist*, 3 Mar. 1900, p.294, emphasis mine.

⁴² *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

Rhodes's Darwinian spectacles

'The world... is nearly all parcelled out, and what there is left of it is being divided up, conquered, and colonised. To think of these stars... that you see overhead at night, these vast worlds which we can never reach. I would annex the planets if I could; I often think of that. It makes me sad to see them so clear and yet so far.'⁴³

— Cecil John Rhodes

Such journalistic accounts are insightful, but what of the actual day-to-day exercise of empire in southern Africa? Here, I turn to the infamous figure of Cecil John Rhodes, whose role in imperialism in South Africa and 'Rhodesia' (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) is well-known. Yet Rhodes's justificatory invocations of the *evolutionary idiom* is certainly worth comment.

As Galbraith (1973) argues, 'Rhodes was not a thinker; he was a doer. He appropriated the ideas of others rather than conceiving ideas himself',⁴⁴ with his most significant appropriation that of Darwinism. As W.T. Stead commented in an edited volume of Rhodes's last will and testament (based on information from those who knew Rhodes well), Rhodes was by character 'a Darwinian in search of God... He was a Darwinian; he believed in evolution... He did not surrender his agnostic position, but he decided it was at least an even chance that there might be a God... [Yet] he believes in the gospel of evolution, of the survival of the fittest, of progress by natural selection.'⁴⁵ Indeed, Rhodes's conception of providence was *through* Darwinian mechanisms:

What Mr Rhodes was after was something older and more universal. He found it in the doctrine of evolution... What is the distinctive feature of that doctrine? The perfection of the species, attained by the elimination of the unfit... The most capable species survives, the least capable goes to the wall. The perfecting of the fittest species among the animals, or of races among men, and then the conferring upon the perfected species or race title-deeds of the future; that seemed to Mr. Rhodes, through his Darwinian spectacles, the way in which God is governing His world, has governed it, and will continue to govern it.⁴⁶

For Rhodes, 'the struggle for existence being recognised as the favourite instruments of the Divine Ruler, the question imminently arose as to *which race* at the present time seems most likely to be Divine instrument in carrying out the Divine idea over the whole of this planet.'⁴⁷ The

⁴³ Recounted in: Rhodes, C.J. and W.T. Stead (1902). *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes*. Review of Reviews, p.190.

⁴⁴ Galbraith, J. (1973). 'Cecil Rhodes and His "Cosmic Dreams"'. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1(2), pp.173-189, p.173.

⁴⁵ Rhodes and Stead, *Last Will*, p.88-93. N.B.: the term 'agnostic' was coined in 1869 by that great Darwinian, Huxley.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.95.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

reader ought not to be surprised that he considered it the ‘white race’ which had been chosen by the divinity of natural selection, on the rather gerrymandered criterion of geographical command:

There are various races of mankind—the Yellow, the Black, the Brown, and the White. If the test be numerical, the Yellow race comes first. But if the test be the area of the world and the power to control its destinies, the primacy of the White race is indisputable... the White exclusively occupies Europe, practically occupies the Americas, is colonising Australia, and is dominating Asia. In the struggle for existence the White race had unquestionably come out on top.⁴⁸

The imperial project for Rhodes, then, was a civilising one by ‘the most cultured specimens of the civilised race’⁴⁹ against the less: ‘Progress will consist in bringing mankind up to their level.’⁵⁰ Thus, as Rhodes himself put it: ‘the African natives, as weaker races manifestly unfit to govern the land they hold, must sooner or later give way before the irresistible advance of the stronger white people. It is the old doctrine of the survival of the fittest—a brutal theory, no doubt, but *one impossible to alter or amend*.’⁵¹ In the mechanics of empire, Darwinism offered perfect ideational fuel.

South African anti-imperialists

Yet Rhodes’ project was also met with opposition—and, intriguingly, it was these *opponents* of British policy in South Africa that drew most on the ‘intra-/extra-European’ distinction. The anti-imperialist journalist Goldwin Smith, for instance, often compared Britain’s South African behaviour with Britain’s historical policies *in Ireland*, thereby claiming that the Empire was more ‘savage’ than ‘civilised’. In Ireland, as elsewhere, there was ‘a perpetual border war, as savage as that between the settlers of the Cape and the Kaffirs, or that between the American frontier-man and the red Indian. The religious quarrel was and has always been secondary in importance to the struggle of the races for the land.’⁵²

Responding in the *Westminster Review*, the Irish nationalist William Corbet drew out Smith’s argument more explicitly: ‘What is happening at the present time in South Africa bears so strong a

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.96.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*. For Rhodes, their defining superior characteristics were, as per Darwin in the *Descent*, their moral faculties, with the destiny of ‘the English race’ down to its commitments to the principles of ‘justice, liberty, and peace’. (p.97)

⁵¹ Cited in: Hensman, H. (1901). *Cecil Rhodes*. William Blackwood and Sons, p.110, emphasis mine.

⁵² Smith, G. (1878). ‘The Greatness of England’. *Contemporary Review*, XXXIV, (December), pp.131-42, p.139. This use of historical analogy was typical: ‘Obsessed with decoding historical experience, the Victorians endlessly scoured the past for lessons about how best to comprehend and navigate their world.’ In: Bell, *Reordering the World*, p.119.

family likeness to what happened with regard to the so-called conquest of Ireland that the latter may be regarded as the progenitor of the African horror.⁵³ In such cases, it is ‘the usual fate of the dwarf who goes to battle with the giant’.⁵⁴

Nature, to a great extent, fore-ordained the highest destiny of the larger island [England]; to at least an equal extent she fore-ordained the sad destiny of the smaller island [Ireland]... That the stronger nation is entitled by the law of force to conquer its weaker neighbour and to govern the conquered in its own interest *is a doctrine which civilized morality abhors*. But in the days before civilized morality, *in the days when the only law was that of natural selection*, to which philosophy by a strange counter-revolution seems now inclined to return, the smaller island was almost sure to be conquered by the possessors of the larger.⁵⁵

Darwinian law, then, was at play in *past eras* of colonial conquering, but it was not fit for justifying the bellicose behaviour of modern, supposedly ‘civilised’ powers (indeed, the very existence of war itself was to be lamented).⁵⁶ Whilst Smith was willing to concede the *scientific* truth of Darwinism, he maintained its indignity as a moral code—calling ‘for the recognition of the whole nature of man, including that part of it which has hitherto been deemed spiritual, as well as the bodily part, which Darwinian Evolution explains.’⁵⁷

A similar argument was presented by Ramsden Balmforth, a Unitarian minister from Huddersfield whom spent most of his life in South Africa. In a piece in the *Westminster Review* entitled ‘Darwinism and Empire’ (1901), Balmforth co-opted the Darwinian idiom *against* imperialism.⁵⁸ Despite the fundamental ambiguity of Darwinian concepts when applied to ethics and politics, he argues, these had become so widespread that, ‘while on the Sunday evening, after Church... [the everyday man] will amiably approve the doctrine that we must do unto others as we would have do unto us, on the Monday morning, *especially in time of war*, he will boldly affirm that Might is Right, and that in business every one must take care of himself... the fittest only surviving. *And so Darwin and the*

⁵³ Corbet, W.J. (1901). ‘Can A War of Aggression Be Justified?’. *Westminster Review*, CLV(1), (January-June 1901), pp.274-84, p.279-80.

⁵⁴ Smith, ‘Greatness of England’, p.140.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.138, emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ ‘Alas! after nearly nineteen centuries of Christianity, we have war, apparently on a larger scale than ever’. Smith, G. (1899). ‘Progress and War’. *Macmillan’s Magazine*, LX, (May/October 1889), pp.230-40, p.230. See also: Smith, G. (1869). ‘War Under the Old Testament’. *Advocate of Peace (1847-1884)*, 1(6), pp.84-5. Despite Smith’s anti-imperialism and pacifism, it ought also to be noted that he was a profound anti-Semite.

⁵⁷ Smith, G. (1907). ‘Evolution, Immortality and the Christian Religion’. *North American Review*, 186(623), pp.195-99, p.195.

⁵⁸ Indeed, was fond of using the Darwinian metaphor widely, as in explaining the history of religion: Balmforth, R. (1898). *The Evolution of Christianity*. Swan Sonnenschein & Co.

*revolutionists are fathered with a doctrine which they would have been the first to repudiate.*⁵⁹ This notion of war-time as a kind of ‘state of exception’ to typical Christian morality is a common attack of Balmforth’s: ‘in times of conflict, you will say, morality goes by the board. Then strength, cunning, intelligence are the determining conditions.’⁶⁰

Yet when it came to nations, unlike individuals, extermination was, he believed, impossible: ‘a nation—in this stage of the world’s history—can never be exterminated.’⁶¹ The only remit of the Darwinian imperialist, then, was to prove that imperialism tended to lead to the cultivation of superior *individuals*, not nations. But, he asks, ‘can it be said that either in South Africa or in China our policy is such as will promote the survival of the highest type of character? Can it be said that the oppression... of the Transvaal Government was a great evil than the war itself has turned out to be? ...we have to justify our aggression, or we stand condemned before the world as attempting to promote the survival of a low filibustering type of character.’⁶²

His answer is conclusively in the negative: ‘that our war-policy in South Africa will not stand the test of fitness which natural selection itself imposes’,⁶³ but rather ‘is a decided set-back to the moral development of the race.’⁶⁴ In co-opting of Darwinian idiom, Balmforth asserts that the British are themselves working *against nature*: ‘unless we can justify ourselves if we continue our aggressive policy, we shall be condemned by nature also, for her laws will now allow the low and unjust type to survive. We may say we have now got so far that we cannot turn back; but nature will not allow no excuses of that sort.’⁶⁵ Darwinism, he contends, was *domestically Hobbesian* but *internationally pacific*: ‘It is surely better for humanity, far better for the reputation for the reputation of our own civilisation, that we should restrict ourselves to purely peaceful and persuasive methods of policy, letting each national or race ideal win its way by its own inherent fitness to survive.’⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Balmforth, ‘Darwinism and Empire’, p.1, emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.3.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.4.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.10. On his contrasting Kantian ethical position, see: Balmforth, R. (1911). ‘The Influence of the Darwinian Theory on Ethics’. *International Journal of Ethics*, 21, pp.448-65.

Smith's and Balmforth's arguments both exemplify the utility of the civilisational category not (as is often assumed) for imperialists alone, but for *anti*-imperialists too. By equating Darwinian principles with a bygone barbarism, they sought to manipulate the idiomatic features of Darwinian martialism *against itself*—to prove that natural selection selected the peaceable, not the warlike—thus exemplifying the sheer plasticity of political rhetoric.

As I have here attempted to show, alongside chapters two and three, Darwinism was not just an abstract system of thought, but became critically important in the daily battle of words that could make or unmake empires. Putting this whole thesis together then, what does the bigger picture look like—and where next for this inquiry? I now close with these questions.

Conclusion

As I have sought to show in this thesis, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection not only revolutionised the sense of 'man's place in nature' within late Victorian Britain, but also 'states' place in the international'. Borne of the imperial voyage across an ever-shrinking world, Darwin's theory espoused novel conceptions of existential struggle and savagery, which were then fleshed out by political theorists into fully Darwinian theories of international relations and seeped into quotidian discourses of British imperialism.

Through the Darwinian idiom, profound transformations occurred in the understandings of *war*, *empire*, and *savagery*, which all became naturalised and ascribed into the order of things. In its fully realised form—despite attempted fusions with civilisational notions—Darwinian naturalism therefore challenged the 'two orders' model of nineteenth-century international order, with a holistic '*standard of nature*' encompassing all states, empires, and peoples: an unmaking of the sociability of international society. Such is a rich idiomatic history that has largely been left off the map of international thought—a *terra incognita* which I have tried to sketch but one part of, through a close reading of Darwin and Darwinians within the context of late Victorian Britain.

Future research

Of course, I have only just begun to scratch the surface of this topic and the broader research project it entails, with numerous avenues for potential future research. One would be a thorough *globalisation* of the topic. As Vergerio (2019) argues, 'in order to understand the importance of an author's text, we must examine it not just in its original context but in the *various contexts* in which it came to play an important role... not just to examine the "reception" of a text, but its *multiple receptions*, across different groups, countries, and epochs.'¹ For reasons of brevity, I have here been forced to focus on just one reception context, late Victorian Britain.

A fruitful development would therefore be to undertake a truly '*global* intellectual history' now so in vogue, exploring the 'translation and transmutation'² of the 'ideographically written

¹ Vergerio, 'Context, Reception', p.123, emphasis mine.

² Jin, 'Translation and Transmutation'.

language’ of Darwinism as it crossed the linguistic boundaries of ‘phonetically written’ languages.³ Such contexts would include the German (looking further into post-Bismarckian great power politics and geopolitical theory such as Friedrich Ratzel) and the American (around westward expansion and conceptions of Amerindian savagery), as well as the liminal space *in between states*—the networks of ideational transmission in the ‘shrinking world’ of the nineteenth century.

A greater *empirical ecumenism* would also amplify the strength of the argument going forward. Beyond looking at ‘international thought’ in terms of scientific texts, political theory, and journalism, the influence of Darwinism on *international law* is a natural next step. This would involve looking at those explicitly influenced by Darwinian teleology—as in the organicism of the German Historical School exemplified by Friedrich Carl von Savigny⁴—as well as the influence of naturalist ideas on the rise of legal positivism more generally.⁵

The genetics of IR

It is worth closing by asking what the picture of international thought now looks like by ‘bringing Darwin back in’. As I have argued most broadly, a genealogical excavation of a Darwinian intra-European existential martialism certainly unsettles existing bifurcated narratives of late nineteenth-century international order.

Historiographically, adding Darwin to the ‘pre-history’⁶ of academic International Relations also contributes to our understanding of the discipline *today*. Here, my conclusions are more tentative—and would require a full research project to ascertain properly—but Darwinism and the development of IR in the early twentieth century might be more closely linked than we currently believe. Thematically, the intuition is obvious: both Darwinism and IR are concerned with ‘natural’ conditions of international being (the struggle for existence within the state of nature and pursuit of self-

³ Moyn, S. and Sartori, A. (2013). *Global Intellectual History*. Columbia University Press, p.11; Pocock, J.G.A. (2019). ‘On the Unglobality of Contexts’. *Global Intellectual History*, 4(1), pp.1-14.

⁴ Or, ‘*the Darwin of the science of law*’. See: De Montmorency, J.E.G. (1910). ‘Friedrich Carl von Savigny’. *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, 11(1), pp.32-54.

⁵ As Kelsen (1934) put it: ‘the changeover of legal science from natural law to positivism went hand in hand with the progress of empirical natural scientists.’ See: Zimmermann, A. (2010). ‘Evolutionary Legal Theories’. 24(2), *Journal of Creation*, pp.108-116, p.103; Anghie, *Imperialism*, p.84. Today, ‘mainstream international lawyers are usually confident that with vigilance they can defend what they have wrought, for their progress has always been a natural one... part of a drama of social evolution.’ In: Kennedy, D. (1996). ‘International Law and the Nineteenth Century’. *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 65(3/4), pp.385-420, p.387.

⁶ Schmidt, ‘History and Historiography of IR’.

interested state interest in a competitive condition of anarchy). Mechanically, then, the *descent of realism* may have been Darwinian. As Fritz (2005) has argued, early international theorists were deeply influenced by the developments in science in the nineteenth century.⁷ But were such theorists also specifically engaged with Darwinism, and how did it shape the development of the discipline?

Theoretically, this thesis also impels us towards rethinking the influence of science on contemporary IR theory. The radical historicisation of ‘science’ can, I believe, help us be reflexive about its use as a demarcation line of theoretical rigour in IR (and the social sciences more broadly). Just as ‘science’ possessed a potent legitimating power to those theorists surveyed here, so too its orbit ensnares modern theorists. Yet, with historical awareness, greater reflexivity can be deployed when clothing our theory in such legitimating scientific garb. Similarly, this thesis also forces us to rethink recent calls to re-ground IR theory in evolutionary foundations. Whilst my own inclinations are against such proposals—the social world is *not* like the natural world, and it is desirable neither analytically nor normatively to pretend otherwise—even those sympathetic to such proposals ought to know the murky history of evolutionary IR before they begin to raise its flag.

Nature’s empire

Finally, I wish to close with a call for a ‘turn to nature’ in International Relations. In the age of the Anthropocene⁸ (as thoroughly a ‘global’ epoch as can be conceived, and a challenge to an international order of sovereign states),⁹ IR has been lethargic to meet the ecological spirit of the times. Certainly, climate change has entered the dialogic arena, but in a conservative way: as simply a ‘foreign policy problem’ to be managed. The awakening of our sense of ecological embeddedness—of an historical ‘deep time’—calls for a more fundamental re-orienting of international relations understood as *relations to nature*.

In IR, the history of international ecological thought has yet to be written.¹⁰ In narrating such a history, we can move away from the well-trodden ground of ‘civilisation’ and turn instead to the

⁷ Fritz, J. (2005). ‘Internationalism and the Promise of Science’. In: *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*. State University of New York Press.

⁸ Bonneuil, C. and Fressoz, J. (2015). *The Shock of the Anthropocene*. Verso.

⁹ Mann, G. and Wainwright, J. (2018). *Climate Leviathan*. Verso.

¹⁰ In the ‘domestic’ history of political thought, see: Forrester, K. and Smith, S. (2018). *Nature, Action, and the Future*. Cambridge University Press.

historical panoply of naturalism in international thought—thus chronicling a *Begriffsgeschichte* of ‘nature’ and its adjacent concepts (i.e. an *Empire of Nature* to sit alongside Bowden’s *Empire of Civilization*). Such would not be simply an exercise in antiquarianism, but an archaeological exercise¹¹ for our present need for a new language of the Anthropocene, a vocabulary and grammar of ecological collapse.¹² Returning to historical naturalism can therefore illuminate our current re-navigation within a fragile ecological system, reminding us that we are natural creatures as well as social beings—and, indeed, that social life cannot exist without ecological home.

¹¹ For a defence of this utilisation of intellectual history, see: Skinner, Q. (1998). *Liberty Before Liberalism*. Cambridge University Press, ch.3.

¹² Ghosh, A. (2016). *The Great Derangement*. University of Chicago Press; Macfarlane, R. (2015). ‘Desecration Phrasebook’. *New Scientist* [online].

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NB: for primary material, I use square brackets to denote the original year of publication and parentheses for the edition cited from. E.g. 'Darwin, C. (2004) [1871]' denotes that 1871 was the year the work was first published, and the edition cited from was published 2004. Journalistic sources are ordered by date. In the footnotes of the thesis, I use slightly shorter references: here the full references are contained.

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