

Social Darwinism in One Page

Social Darwinism is a set of beliefs that apply Charles Darwin's theory of **natural selection** to human society, economics, and politics. It suggests that individuals, groups, and nations are subject to the same struggle for survival as plants and animals, with the 'strongest' thriving while the 'weakest' perish. This idea was used to justify social inequality, imperialism, racism, and laissez-faire capitalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Origins from Darwin's Work

- **Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution (1859):** In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin introduced the concept of **natural selection**, where organisms with favourable traits survive and reproduce, while those less suited to their environment die out.
 - **Application to Human Society:** Thinkers like **Herbert Spencer** (who coined the phrase "*survival of the fittest*") and others misapplied Darwin's biological ideas to human social structures. They argued that societal progress occurs through competition, where only the most capable individuals, businesses, or nations succeed.
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Impact of Social Darwinism

1. **Justification for Imperialism** – European powers used Social Darwinist ideas to justify colonization, arguing that they were 'civilizing' supposedly inferior races.
2. **Economic Policy** – Used to promote **laissez-faire capitalism**, opposing government aid to the poor, since 'natural selection' should determine success or failure.
3. **Racism & Eugenics** – Some used Social Darwinism to claim racial superiority, leading to discriminatory policies and the eugenics movement.
4. **Militarism & Nationalism** – It encouraged competition between nations, fuelling **imperial expansion** and conflicts like **World War I**.

Though Darwin himself never promoted Social Darwinism, his ideas were **misinterpreted and distorted** to support political and ideological agendas. Today, Social Darwinism is widely discredited but remains a historical example of how scientific theories can be twisted for social and political purposes.

