

# *Social Darwinism:*

*Philosophy OR Justification?*

“The growth of large business is merely a survival of the fittest.”

-John D. Rockefeller

# Charles Darwin

- ⌘ 1859 published a book titled *The Origin of Species*
- ⌘ *Theory of Evolution*
- ⌘ Natural Selection.
- ⌘ Struggle is normal.
- ⌘ Some are superior.
- ⌘ There are benefits when the unfit are eliminated.




# **What is Social Darwinism?**

## **Social Darwinism is:**

- individuals compete naturally.
- the incompetent lose and the strong win. ie. "*survival of the fittest*".

*Government must not interfere unless the unfit are stealing from the fit.*

# Government or No Government?



⌘ **Should the Government interfere with Business????**

**-By 1880 many Social Darwinists were saying "NO"?!?!?**

⌘ **Others wanted the Government to get more involved in promoting Social Darwinism and Laissez-faire.**

# **Social Darwinism and Business**

- ⌘ **Natural Competition controls the economy.**
- ⌘ **Government is not there to help people, but to support business.**
- ⌘ **Big business can take over small business.**
- ⌘ **Ruthless methods are OK.**

# Social Darwinism and Race

- ⌘ Only the strong races can survive.
- ⌘ Technology should be kept by races that create advancement.
- ⌘ Justification for genocide.



# **Individualistic Social Darwinism: “fitness”, “survival of the fittest” and “evolution”**

- ⌘ As in Darwin’s theory, the “struggle for survival” assures that only the “fit” survive (“survival of the fittest”)
- ⌘ Social Darwinists claim the continuous selection of fitter (human) individuals, drives “social evolution”.
- ⌘ Individualistic social Darwinists also claim that “social evolution” tends toward the overall “good” of the human race.

- ⌘ If “social **evolution**” is for the overall good of society, and if it is driven by continuing “**struggle**”, then:
- ⌘ nothing should be done to reduce the intensity of the “**struggle for survival**”.
- ⌘ Thus, laws or government policies benefiting the poor (“the unfit”) should be reduced or eliminated.



# **Individualistic Social Darwinism: connection to “self-help” idea.**

Laissez-faire was also seen as a kind of “self-help” and as such, was the best way to ensure the development of individual freedom and responsibility

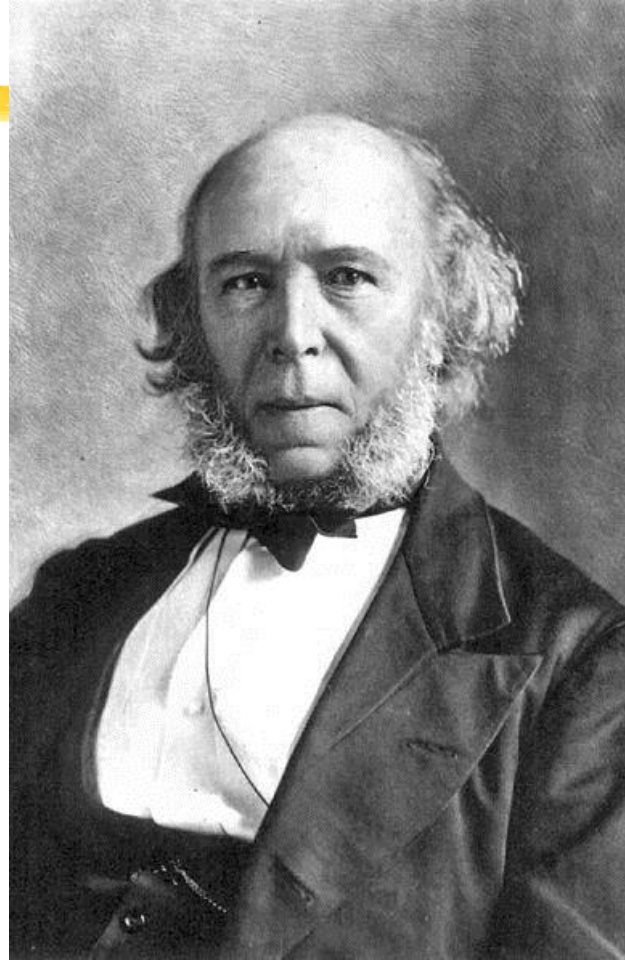
# connection to “self-help” idea.



Samuel Smiles, one of the most famous proponents of laissez-faire and “self-help”, put it this way in 1859:

'Whatever is done for men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves; and where men are subjected to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless.'

# Herbert Spencer



**English Philosopher who coins phrase “Social Darwinism”**

# Herbert Spencer

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**1820 - 1903**

# Herbert Spencer

⌘ Published several articles in the radical press

☒ “The Proper Sphere of Government”

☒ Argued for an extreme restriction of the scope of government

- The whole field of human activity (except for policing) should be left to private enterprise
- There should be no poor laws, no national education, no established church, no restrictions on commerce, and no factory legislation

# Herbert Spencer



The basic argument of *Social Statics* can be stated as follows:

Human happiness can be achieved only when individuals can satisfy their needs and desires without infringing on the rights of others to do the same.

# Herbert Spencer

*Each member of the race. . . must not only be endowed with faculties enabling him to receive the highest enjoyment in the act of living, but must be so constituted that he may obtain full satisfaction for every desire, without diminishing the power of others to obtain like satisfaction: nay, to fulfill the purpose perfectly, must derive pleasure from seeing pleasure in others.*

(Spencer [1850] 1888:448)

# **Herbert Spencer**



## **The Contrast Between Militant and Industrial Societies**



# Herbert Spencer

***Structural-functionalism focuses on the functions war serves and suggests that war would not exist unless it had positive outcomes for society. . . War has created a world of larger political units. . . from 600,000 around 1,000 BC to less than 200 today.***

# Herbert Spencer



***Through centuries of warfare, the state (as a large political unit) was created. . . This led to greater stability which led to profound positive social and cultural changes.***

# Herbert Spencer



***Industrialization and technology could not have developed in the small social groups that existed before military action consolidated them into larger states. Thus, war contributed indirectly to the industrialization and technological sophistication that characterized the modern world.***

# Herbert Spencer



***As societies become more industrialized, their proneness to warfare decreases. . .***

## ⌘ Preindustrial nations

☑ Overall mean of 10.6 wars per decade

## ⌘ Industrial nations

☑ Overall mean of 2.7 wars per decade

# Herbert Spencer



## Positive Benefits of War

- ⌘ Creates solidarity

  - ☑ Gives society a ***common cause*** to rally around

- ⌘ Increases employment and stimulates the economy

- ⌘ Inspires scientific and technological developments that are useful to civilians

  - ☑ Microwave oven

  - ☑ Internet

# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



## *Nonintervention*

# and the Survival of the Fittest

# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



**Spencer, the same as Darwin, drew the concept of survival of the fittest from the works of Thomas Robert Malthus. The role of "*intervention*" is a major/serious philosophical issue in the concept of "pure evolution and *nonintervention*."**

# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



## Classical Malthusianism

⌘ Thomas Robert Malthus

☑ English economist

⌘ *Essay on the Principle of Population*

☑ First published in 1798 AD

(Wang 1985:285-286)



# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



## ⌘ Positive checks

☑ Famines

☑ Disease

☑ Wars

Given the human propensities to procreate faster than food can be produced, most of mankind is poor most of the time

# Karl Marx



- ⌘ Marxism says that the solution to this problem is to a) slow down human reproduction and to b) increase material production.
- ⌘ If everyone is given the exact same amount of resources regardless of effort or ability, the population will sort itself out.

# Marxism



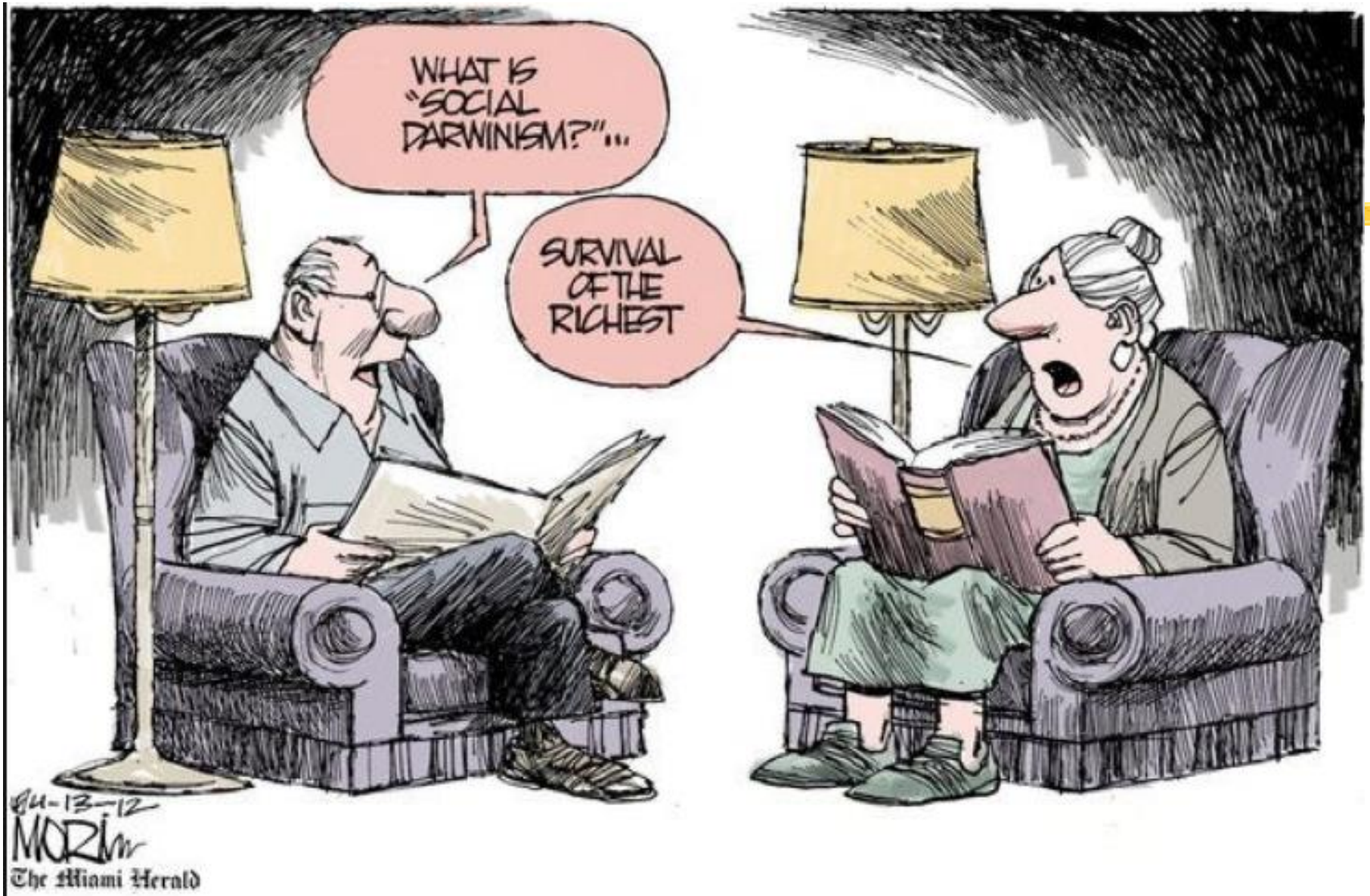
## ⌘ Preventive checks (moral restraints)

- ☑ Delayed marriages
- ☑ Reduced frequency of sex relations within marriage
- ☑ No premarital or extramarital sex relations

# Marxism



***The classical theory of population implies that an increase in the food supply or income would result in either fewer people dying, or in more marrying earlier and having more children. In either case both would result in increased population growth, thereby nullifying the effects of the additional food or income.***



# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



Spencer argued that an excess in fertility stimulates greater activity because the more people there are, the more ingenuity is required to stay alive. The least intelligent groups and individuals die off; hence, the general level of intelligence is bound to rise gradually.

# Herbert Spencer: Nonintervention



*Except. . . .*

The intervention of government in social affairs, must distort the necessary adaptation of society to its environment. Once government intervenes, the beneficial process that would naturally lead to man's more efficient and more intelligent control over nature will be distorted and give rise to a reverse process that can only lead to the progressive deterioration of the human race.



# **William Graham Sumner**



# William Graham Sumner

- ⌘ 1840-1910
- ⌘ Born in Paterson, NJ
- ⌘ Ordained in the Episcopal Church
- ⌘ Later, taught at Yale University
- ⌘ The first to teach sociology in the United States (Perdue 1986:62)



# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism

For Sumner, the social world, as the natural, was an orderly creation obeying the prime direction of all life: ***a struggle in which the fit survive and the unfit perish.***

- ⌘ He believed in ***individualism***
- ⌘ A staunch defender of Spencer's ***noninterference***
- ⌘ ***An opponent of public welfare***

**NATURAL SELECTION**







Monday, November  
07, 2016

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# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*The sociologist is often asked if he wants to kill off certain classes of troublesome and bewildered persons. No such inference follows from any sound sociological doctrine, but it is allowed to infer, as to a great many persons and classes, that it would have been better for society and would have involved no pain to them, if they had never been born.*



**DARWIN AWARD**

She's about to receive one

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism

The social variety of natural selection requires no apology, for it is the method by which a perfect hierarchy takes shape and the unfit wither away. Sumner wrote under the influence of Spencer's principle of noninterference when he argued that social classes (especially the successful) owe not a thing to others

***Hence, the divergent conditions of the fit and the unfit do not call for intervention.*** For the former student of theology, the drunkard in the gutter, the pauper without a loaf, the great masters of industry, and the millionaires ***have each earned their***





# DARWINISM

removing idiots from the gene pool for centuries.



# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



... overpopulation represents an often unrecognized opportunity, or the “struggle for existence and the competition of life are intense where the pressure of population are great. This competition draws out the highest achievement.”



# DARWINISM

Many bad ideas start with the phrase "Hold my beer and watch this."

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



## The Forgotten Man

⌘ Persons A and B decided how to intervene to help Person D with a social ill. In solving the problem with Person D, Person C has to alter his/her life without much choice in order to implement the solution for the social ill.

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*There is an almost invincible prejudice that a man who gives a dollar to a beggar is generous and kind-hearted, but that a man who refuses the beggar and puts the dollar in a savings bank is stingy and mean.*

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*Nature's remedies against vice are terrible. She removes the victims without pity. A drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be, according to the fitness and tendency of things. Nature has set up on him the process of decline and dissolution by which she removes things which have survived their usefulness. Gambling and other less mentionable vices carry their own penalties with them.*





# Social Darwinism

It takes no prisoners

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*Competition, therefore, is a law of nature.  
Nature is entirely neutral; she submits to  
him who most energetically and resolutely  
assails her.*





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**News**

GOT

# Teen girl accidentally shot brother in head posing for 'gangster' NYE Facebook shots



# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative; non-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest carries society downwards and favors all its worst members.*

**THERE CAN BE**



**ONLY ONE**

# William Graham Sumner: Social Darwinism



*What we mean by liberty is civil liberty, or liberty under law; and this means the guarantees of law that a man shall not be interfered with while using his own powers for his own welfare.*

# William Graham Sumner: Normative Order

## Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which *one's own group is the center of everything*, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Folkways correspond to it to cover both the inner and the outer relation. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes the other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn.



# William Graham Sumner: Normative Order



- ⌘ Ethnocentrism is the tendency to judge other cultures by one's own.
- ⌘ Ethnocentrism was once defined as the belief that the "***axis of the world runs through my home town.***"
- ⌘ Ethnocentric attitudes often have to do with race, nationality, religion, and the family, but they are not limited to these.

# William Graham Sumner: Normative Order



⌘ Ethnocentrism is based on two groups:

☑ In-group (we)

☑ Out-group (they)

# William Graham Sumner: Normative Order



## ⌘ Positives of Ethnocentrism

- ☑ Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it...brotherhood within...
- ☑ ...contributes to the survival of a culture

## ⌘ Negatives of Ethnocentrism

- ☑ Encourages conformity, discourages interpenetrating by other cultural groups, and justifies and perpetuates the status quo.



# **William Graham Sumner: Normative Order**



**Real world  
examples and  
applications of  
ethnocentrism.**