



Figure 12.2 Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Great Saint Bernard Pass*, 1800. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. 6 in. × 7 ft. 3 in. David's equestrian portrait shows an idealized Napoleon following the path of ancient generals such as Charlemagne and Hannibal (whose names are carved in stone in the left foreground). In this painting—one of five identical versions of the subject—he suggests that Napoleon's rule was one of glory and achievement. Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles. Photo © Franck Raux/RMN-Grand Palais.

who held that nature (and existence itself) was devoid of reason and burdened by unrelenting suffering. In his landmark treatise *The World as Will and Idea* (1819), Schopenhauer advanced the idea of a “life-will”—a blind and impersonal force whose operations are without purpose and design, and whose activities give rise to disorder and delusion. In Schopenhauer's pessimistic view, the only escape from malignant reality is selfless contemplation of the kind described in Hindu literature and the writings of Christian mystics. While humans cannot overcome nature by way of reason, they may find temporary solace in art and music, and liberation through spiritual insight.

Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*

Like Hegel, the British scientist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) perceived nature as constantly changing. A naturalist in the tradition of Aristotle, Darwin spent his early career amassing enormous

spirit seeking to know its own nature. the operation of that process, or **dialectic**, addition (or “thesis”) confronts its opposite (antithesis”), which then generates a synthesis in turn produces its opposite, and so evolution that moves, Hegel explained, the goal of spiritual freedom. For Hegel, process that operated on the principle of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—a principle of the realm of ideas, artistic creation, philosophy, indeed, history itself. “Change in nature, how infinitely varied it is,” wrote Hegel, “is of constant repetition. In nature, nothing is under the sun.”

work entitled *The Philosophy of History* advanced the idea that the essence of the state, which finds its ultimate expression in the law of the state (and the European state), is the last stage in the development of the Hegelian dialectic in general, had been on late nineteenth-century nationalistic theories of Karl Marx.

ating figure in the rich history of German philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860),

amounts of biological and geological data, partly as the result of a five-year voyage to South America aboard the research vessel HMS *Beagle*. Darwin's study of fossils confirmed the view of some of his predecessors that complex forms of life evolved from a few extremely simple organic forms. The theory of evolution did not originate with Darwin; the French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829) had shown that fossils give evidence of perpetual change in all species. Darwin, however, substantiated the theory by explaining the process by which evolution occurs. Observing the tendency of certain organisms to increase rapidly over time while retaining traits favorable to their survival, Darwin concluded that evolution operates by means of *natural selection*.

By natural selection, Darwin meant a process whereby nature “prunes away” unfavorable characteristics in a given species, permitting the survival of those creatures most suited to the struggle for life and to reproduction of that species. The elephant's trunk, the giraffe's neck, and the human brain are evidence, he argued, of adaptations made by each of these species to its environment and proof that any trait that remained advantageous to continuity would prevail. Failure to develop such traits meant the ultimate extinction of less developed species; only the “fittest” survived.

Soon after Darwin published his landmark work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or Preservation of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859), a commentator observed: "No scientific work that has been published within this century has excited so much general curiosity." But curiosity was among the milder responses to this publication, for Darwin's law of evolution, like Newton's law of gravity (see page 301), challenged traditional ideas about nature and the world order. For centuries, most Westerners had held to the account of the Creation described in Scripture (Genesis 1–2). Some, indeed, accepted the chronology advanced by the Irish Catholic bishop James Ussher (1581–1656), which placed earthly creation at 4004 B.C.E. Most scholars, however, perceived the likelihood of a far greater age for the earth and its species. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection did not deny the idea of a divine Creator—in fact, Darwin initially agreed that "it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws." But Darwin's theory implied that natural selection, not divine will, governed the lineages of living things. By asserting that nature and its operations were the prime source of organic design, the theory of natural selection challenged the creationist view (supported by the Bible) that God had brought into being a fixed and unchanging number of species.

Equally troubling was Darwin's argument (clarified in his later publication *The Descent of Man*, 1871) that the differences between humans and less complex orders of life were differences of degree, not kind, and that all creatures were related to one another by their kinship to simpler forms of life (Figure 12.3).

Darwin's conclusions (which nurtured his own reluctant agnosticism) toppled human beings from their elevated place in the hierarchy of living creatures. If the cosmology of Copernicus and Galileo had displaced the

earth from the center of the solar system, Darwin robbed human beings of the planet. At a single blow, Darwin's world views of both Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophes.

The consequences of Darwin's theory were far-reaching, but his ideas were often misunderstood, misapplied or misinterpreted. Among the misconceptions of evolution provided the rationalization of living organisms with individuality, maturity, and decline. Then, Darwin's phrase "Favored Races" in the social Darwinism contributed to the theory of social Darwinism. Darwin applied some of his ideas to political and social life. The term "social Darwinism" was used around 1879, describes the theory of evolution operates to determine the

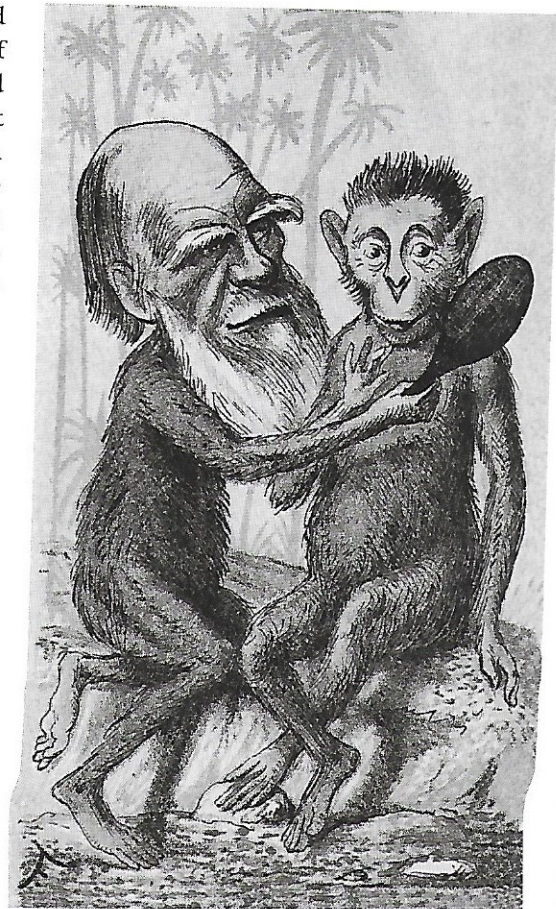


Figure 12.3 Spoofing evolution, a cartoon of the day portrays an apelike Charles Darwin explaining his controversial theory of evolution to an ape with the help of a mirror. The work appeared in the *London Sketch Book* in May 1874, captioned by two suitable quotations from the plays of Shakespeare: "This is the ape of form" and "Four or five descents since." The most likely ancestor for *Homo sapiens*, explained Darwin, was "a hairy, tailed quadruped, probably arboreal in its habits. . . ." Wellcome Library, London.

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Figure 13.2 Jean-François Millet, *Gleaners*, 1857. Oil on canvas, approx. 2 ft. 9 in. × 3 ft. 8 in. Set in golden-lit fields and against a broad sky, Millet's painting presents a somewhat romanticized view of the laboring classes. This artist's portrayals of rural women spinning, tending sheep, and feeding children idealized the female as selfless and saintly. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo © Jean Schormans/RMN-Grand Palais.



Figure 13.3 Käthe Kollwitz, *March of the Weavers*, from "The Weavers Cycle," 1897. Etching, 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Kollwitz was a Social Realist and a feminist whose early prints illustrate peasant rebellions and mass protests. Reform, however, was slow in coming. Outside of England—in Germany, for instance—trade unions and social legislation to benefit the working classes did not appear until 1880 or later, while in Russia economic reform would require nothing less than a full-scale revolution. University of Michigan Museum of Art (1956/1.21). © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Marx and Engels

The German theorist Karl Marx (1818–1883) agreed with the socialists that bourgeois capitalism corrupted humanity, but his theory of social reform was even more radical, for it preached violent revolution that would both destroy the old order and usher in a new society. Marx began his

career by studying law and philosophy at the University of Berlin. Moving to Paris, he became a lifelong friend of the social scientist and journalist Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Marx and Engels shared a similar critical attitude in respect of the effects of European industrial capitalism. Together they wrote the *Communist Manifesto* (1848),

a short treatise published as the platform of a workers' association called the Communist League.

Marx perceived human history in exclusively materialistic terms, arguing that the conditions under which one earned a living determined all other aspects of life. A student of Hegel (see pages 330–331), he viewed history as a struggle between “haves” (thesis) and “have-nots” (antithesis) that would resolve in the synthesis of a classless society. From Hegel, Marx also derived the utopian idea of the perfectibility of the state. The end product of dialectical change, argued Marx, was a society free of class antagonisms—the ultimate dissolution of the state itself.

The *Communist Manifesto* is a sweeping condemnation of the effects of capitalism on the individual and on society at large. It argues that capitalism concentrates wealth in the hands of the few, providing great luxuries for some while creating an oppressed and impoverished proletariat (working class). The psychological effects of such circumstances, it claims, are devastating: Bourgeois capitalism alienates workers from their own productive efforts and robs individuals of their basic humanity. Finally, the *Manifesto* calls for revolution by which workers will seize the instruments of capitalistic production and abolish private ownership. The closing lines of the *Manifesto* convey the fervor of this revolutionary thesis:

The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

But let us have done with the bourgeois objections to Communism.

We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible. . . .

. . . The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

(From Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by Samuel Moore, revised and edited by Friedrich Engels [London, 1888].)

The *Communist Manifesto* had enormous influence. It brought attention to the role of economics in the larger life of a society, and it supplied the justification for working-class revolt. Although the treatise did not

accurately predict the economic destiny of the modern world, it remains a landmark expression of nineteenth-century social consciousness.

Nietzsche's New Morality

If Marx and Engels offered a utopian view of society, the German philosopher and poet Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) exalted a fierce new morality. Nietzsche was a Classical philologist, a professor of Greek at the University of Basle, and the author of such notable works as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1892), and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). In these, as in his shorter pieces, Nietzsche voiced the sentiments of the radical moralist. Deeply critical of his own time, he called for a revision of all values. He rejected organized religion, attacking Christianity and other institutionalized religions as contributors to the formation of a “slave morality.” He was equally critical of democratic institutions, which he saw as the embodiment of rule by mass mediocrity; instead he called for a “superman” or superior individual (*Übermensch*), whose singular vision and courage would, in his view, produce a “master” morality.

Nietzsche did not launch his ideas in the form of a well-reasoned philosophic system, but rather as **aphorisms** (short phrases expressing general truths or principles), **maxims** (short, concise, and often witty sayings), and expostulations whose brilliance and visceral force bear out his claim to have written his works “with his blood.” Reflecting the cynicism of the late nineteenth century, he asked: “Is man merely a mistake of God’s? Or God merely a mistake of man’s?” More dramatically, he claimed “God is dead.” His view that Western materialism had generated decadence and decline, and his negation of absolute moral truth, anticipated the nihilism of many twentieth-century thinkers.

Ideas and Issues

PROGRESS: THE FALSE IDEA

“Mankind surely does not represent an evolution toward a better or stronger or higher level, as progress is now understood. This ‘progress’ is merely a modern idea, which is to say, a false idea. The European of today, in his essential worth, falls far below the European of the Renaissance; the process of evolution does not necessarily mean elevation, enhancement, strengthening. True enough, it succeeds in isolated and individual cases in various parts of the earth and under the most widely different cultures, and in these cases a higher type certainly manifests itself; something which, compared to mankind in the mass, appears as a sort of superman.”

(Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist* [1888], translated by Henry Louis Mencken, 1920 [The Noonday Press, 1988]. Reproduced by permission of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, in accordance with the terms of the will of H. L. Mencken.)

Q. Is progress a modern idea? Is it a false idea, as Nietzsche claims?