

Voices of the Gilded Age: Social Darwinism and Its Critics

Social Darwinism is not Darwinism; the phrase *survival of the fittest* is not Darwin's. Social Darwinism was created by Herbert Spencer in Great Britain, but advocated by some in the United States, with the most famous advocate in the US being William Graham Sumner. It was also **rejected** in the United States by both scientists and clergy.

The quotations are from the online version of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Proverbs Traced to Their Sources in Ancient and Modern Literature*, available at <http://www.bartleby.com/100/>

Supporters of Social Darwinism

<p>Its British creator</p>	<p>We have unmistakable proof that throughout all past time, there has been a ceaseless devouring of the weak by the strong.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), <i>First Principles</i></p> <hr/> <p>This survival of the fittest.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), <i>Principles of Biology</i> [1864-1867]. Part III, chap. 12¹</p>
<p>An advocate in the United States</p>	<p>The law of survival of the fittest was not made by man and cannot be abrogated by man. We can only by interfering with it, produce the survival of the unfittest.... The sociologist is often asked if he wants to kill off certain classes of troublesome and burdensome persons. No such inference follows.... but it is allowed to be inferred, 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....</p> <p style="text-align: right;">William Graham Sumner (Yale professor), "Sociology" (1881)²</p>

Critics of Social Darwinism in the United States, Including the Social Gospel

<p>A scientist</p>	<p>These much-talked-of laws of nature are violated every time the highway robber is arrested and sent to jail.... It is absurd to claim that injustice committed by muscle should be regulated, while that committed by brain should be unrestrained.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lester Frank Ward (geologist), <i>The Psychic Factors of Civilization</i>, (1893)³</p>
<p>Social Gospel positions of a Baptist clergyman and a Congregationalist clergyman</p>	<p>"[I]t was necessary to 'Christianize' the social order to bring it 'into harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ.' The church... must 'demand protection for the moral safety of the people.'"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Walter Rauschenbush (clergyman, Baptist)⁴</p> <hr/> <p>"'The Christian moralist,' he wrote, had to tell 'the Christian employer' that the wage system 'when it rests on competition as its sole basis is anti-social and anti-Christian.'"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Washington Gladden (clergyman, Congregational)</p>

¹ Both quotations from Spencer are from Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*.

² *American Thought: Civil War to World War I*, ed. by Perry Miller, p. 80, 88

³ *American Thought: Civil War to World War I*, ed. by Perry Miller, p. 112

⁴ This and the following quotation quoted in Ayers, *American Passages*, p. 516.