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# Societal Evolution: Descent of Man, Chapter V and the Myth of Progress

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## BIOGRAPHY

Jakob Hanschu is a senior at Kansas State University studying anthropology and geography. He has an interest in science and technology studies in the context of the Anthropocene.

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## Summary

In the fifth chapter of *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin explicitly argues that humans have undergone moral and intellectual evolution through the centuries. By applying his ideas from *On the Origin of Species* to the non-biological aspects of humans, Darwin added to the conversation about societal evolution that was taking place during his time. These ideas would eventually form into a train of thought termed “Social Darwinism” and influence the mind of Adolf Hitler. Today, ideas about societal evolution manifest themselves in the racist doctrines of the alt-right and the “myth of progress.” This review aims to critique the thoughts that Darwin expresses in *The Descent of Man*, Chapter V. However, to do so it must first trace and unravel Darwin’s thought.

## Introduction

Charles Darwin solidified his place as one of the most influential scientists of all time through his theory of evolution by natural selection (Darwin, 1859). In *On the Origin of Species*, he alluded to future work that would discuss the evolutionary history of humans, “Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history” (Darwin, 1859, p. 295). *The Descent of Man* was published twelve

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years later, in 1871. Darwin laid out many ideas in this book, including the extension of his evolutionary theory to the moral and intellectual faculties of humans (Darwin, 1871, p. 152-177). As remarked by Robert Pennock (1995, p. 288), it seems as though Darwin’s objective in *The Descent* was “not to show how we descended, but to show that we descended from lower forms” (emphasis original). Chapter V of *The Descent*, entitled “On the

Development of the Intellectual and Moral Faculties During Primeval and Civilized Times,” is an interesting illustration of this (Darwin, 1871, p. 152). Darwin’s main thought in this chapter is that individuals and societies with greater moral and intellectual characteristics succeed over those that are less-endowed. Thus, these qualities play a unique role in the evolution of the human species, especially at the societal level, and Darwin argues that levels of morality and intelligence increase through time.

Throughout history, scientific discoveries have had considerable impacts on social and political thought; for instance, the findings of Copernicus (Copernicus, 2002 [1543]). As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stated, “Of all discoveries and opinions, none may have exerted a greater effect on the human spirit than the doctrine of Copernicus” (Hawking, 2002, p. 6). Darwin’s *Origin of Species* illustrated how evolution took place in nature, but over time began to influence social thought as scientists and scholars attempted to extrapolate Darwin’s theory to account for social change (e.g., Childe, 1951; Morgan, 1877; Tylor, 1871; Sahlins and Service, 1973):

The triumph of the theory of evolution and its Darwinian explanation in the late nineteenth century had repercussions in almost every field of thought. Not the least of these followed the application of the Darwinian ideas of competition and struggle for existence to the social life of man. (Etkin, 1964, p. 1)

In Chapter V of *The Descent*, Darwin too attempts to stretch his theory. Thus, it could be speculated that Darwin’s scientific work on evolution greatly affected his thinking about humans and societies, a prime example of the intermingling of science with social conceptions and structures. In a letter to Alfred Russel Wallace, Darwin remarks that “sexual selection has been the most powerful means of changing the races of man” (Darwin, 1888, p. 90-91). Furthermore, in a letter to H. Thiel, Darwin writes that he is highly interested in “observing that you [Thiel] apply to moral and

social questions analogous views to those which I have used in regard to the modification of species” (Darwin, 1888, p. 112-113). In the same letter, Darwin discusses that the application of his theory of natural selection to moral and social issues is of high interest to him, though he had not yet considered it.

## Intellectual Evolution

Darwin begins Chapter V with a discussion of the development of humankind’s collective intellectual abilities, stating that these mental faculties allow humans to “keep with an unchanged body in harmony with the changing universe” (Darwin, 1871, p. 152). He essentially argues that humans’ intellectual capacities have allowed them to adapt, or evolve, to a varying array of environments without changes in biology. To illustrate this point, he uses the example of the changes that take place to humans and “lower animals” when they migrate to a colder climate. The human creates shelter, clothing, fire, using its mental capacity to adapt. On the other hand, the lower animal must “become clothed in thicker fur, or have their constitutions altered” (Darwin, 1871, p. 153). Just as animals modify their biological and bodily characteristics to survive, humans utilize their intellect to meet their needs through what Darwin terms “arts,” or technologies (e.g., the making of fire, the wheel, computers, etc.). Stated another way, “change and progress” in human civilization “can take place through an invention without any such constitutional alteration of the human species” (Kroeber, 1917, p. 166). Thus, the complex thinking skills of humans allows them to adapt to their environment and efficiently reproduce.

However, Darwin takes his theory one step further, believing that the collective intellectual faculty of humankind has increased through the process of natural selection. He rationalizes, “it is highly probable that with mankind the intellectual faculties have been gradually perfected through natural selection” (Darwin, 1871, p. 154). The argument is that more intelligent “primitive” societies had a competitive advantage over others. These intellectually-endowed “tribes” (as Darwin refers to them) would have been more successful and

displaced other “tribes” (Darwin, 1871, p. 154). As these intelligent tribes grew larger and became societies, the trend continued. Darwin uses the growth of civilized societies and the shrinkage of primitive societies as an example, stating that the civilized ones overtake and absorb the primitive ones mainly “through their arts [e.g., technologies.], which are products of their intellect” (Darwin, 1871, p. 154). The society with the smartest members would have an advantage over others, allowing them to out-strategize them in war or out-compete them for resources. This continual process would result in a highly intelligent society that dominates its contemporaries.

## Moral Evolution

Darwin explains moral faculties consequently developed from societal self-interest. The idea that virtues derive from individuals seeking their own benefit seems to relate to the writing of James Madison in “Federalist No. 10”, where he argues that we should promote public virtue through private vice. Madison believed that “ambitious self-interest” could be used “as the principal security for the public good” (Diamond, 1977, p. 39-72). He reasons that people living in a society will have to acquire certain traits and abilities if they are to meet their personal, selfish ends. For example, as Diamond explains, acquisitiveness, the emphasis on getting—rooted entirely in self-interest—actually

teaches a form of moderation to the desiring passions from which it derives, because to acquire is not primarily to have and to hold but to get and to earn, and moreover, to earn justly. . . This requires the acquisitive man to cultivate certain excellences (Diamond, 1977, p. 64).

In this way, vice breeds virtue. Darwin’s similar position is exemplified where he says that “selfish and contentious people will not cohere,” illustrating that individuals have to sacrifice these feelings to be a part of the greater whole (Darwin, 1871, p. 156). He states that early humans “would have felt uneasy when separated from their comrades, for whom they would have felt some de-

gree of love; they would have warned each other of danger, and have given mutual aid in attack or defense” (Darwin, 1871, p. 155-156). He then goes on to credit “the praise and blame of our fellow men” as the “stimulus to the development of social virtues” (Darwin, 1871, p. 157). Humans seek to receive praise and reward and avoid shame and blame. “To do good unto others—to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you—is the foundation of morality,” says Darwin (1871, p. 159). He believes that “feeling and being impelled by the praise and blame” of “fellow-creatures” is an animalistic instinct that humans inherited from their earliest ancestors (Darwin, 1871, 158).

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Social learning and experience then perpetuated and further developed moral behavior within societies. Darwin lists courage, loyalty, and sympathetic qualities as virtues in the prehistoric world (1871, p. 156-157). Individuals possessing these virtues would be praised by the other members of their society. Seeing the benefits of acting morally encouraged other members of prehistoric tribes to follow suit. Soon, through experiences, an individual would learn that “if he aided his fellow-men, he would commonly receive aid in return” (Darwin, 1871, p. 157). Thus the continued moral behavior of an individual would be transmitted to other members of the society. “Tribes” with strong moral characteristics would also have an advantage over tribes that lack those traits. For example, Darwin states that when two tribes would come into contact, the one that included more “courageous, sympathetic, and faithful members” would “succeed best and conquer the other” (Darwin, 1871, p. 156). This is because members of that tribe would warn each other of danger and defend each

other. This is not to be interpreted to mean that tribes conquered others through compassion, but that tribes that had these moral characteristics functioned better as a social unit, allowing them an advantage over a less-endowed social unit. As tribes continued to interact, “social and moral qualities would tend slowly to advance and be diffused throughout the world” (Darwin, 1871, p. 156).

Many philosophers and biologists disagree with Darwin’s “moral evolution” (Weikart, 2004, p. 1-3). Henry Sidgwick, a renowned English philosopher and economist contemporary with Darwin, stated that “the theory of evolution . . . has little or no bearing on ethics” (Sidgwick, 2000, p. 11). Frances Cobbe wrote that the hypothesis of moral evolution is “the most dangerous . . . [that has] ever been set forth” (Cobbe, 1872; quoted in Lillehammer, 2010, p. 362). Lillehammer (2010, p. 365) explains that the reason for such discourse about Darwin’s theory is that it “questions the epistemic credentials of our ethical beliefs by pointing out that we would have had very different beliefs if certain things about us had been different, even supposing the relevant ethical facts to remain the same.” In other words, Darwin’s claim about the origin and development of our morals challenges the validity of what we currently define as moral and immoral, because it is necessarily changeable with times and needs. Several years after Darwin’s *Descent*, Friedrich Nietzsche, in a similar but less subtle manner, would attempt to strip morals of their absolute status (Nietzsche, 1998 [1887]). Dirk Johnson explains that “Nietzsche shares many of Darwin’s key insights and agrees with some of his cardinal assumptions—including . . . the natural origins of morality” (2013, p. 333-334). It is known that Nietzsche was aware of Darwin’s writings, and it is often assumed that a reading or knowledge of Darwin’s *Descent of Man* influenced Nietzsche’s thought; though Darwin is never specifically cited in Nietzsche’s works (Babich, 2014; Claeys, 2000, p. 226; Johnson, 2010, 2013). Johnson remarks that Darwin’s ideas, more than those of any other scholar, allowed Nietzsche “to become who he was” (2010, p. 2). However, Johnson also notes that Nietzsche’s later writings appear to be in opposition of Darwinian thought. Thus, the re-

relationship between the thought of Darwin and Nietzsche remains complicated to this day.

## Morality and Intellectual Ability through Time

In his discussion about the intellectual and moral evolution of civilized states, Darwin remarks:

With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized 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 the life of every one to the last moment. (1871, p. 161-162)

Darwin here recognizes that civilized states have “checks” against evolution by natural selection: it is no longer the strongest, smartest, or most morally-upright that survive. “The weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind,” he continues, clearly seeing the conflict between modernized nations and his evolutionary theory (Darwin, 1871, p. 162). He believes that this is dangerous for humankind, calling it a “degeneration” (Darwin, 1871, p. 162). However, he believes that there is “one check in steady action” preventing humankind from degenerating fully: the weaker

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or more inferior members of society will not be able to marry and reproduce as freely as the superior members (Darwin, 1871, p. 162).

Darwin realizes that natural selection becomes increasingly complicated once complex societies are formed. Democracy, without a doubt, would only exponentially increase this evolutionary complexity. For example, Darwin claims that moral characteristics that formerly ensured the survival of the “tribe” are undermined in a state-society. Additionally, those individuals possessing the “superior” characteristics may not reproduce more than those “inferior” members of society, quoting Mr. Greg:

The careless, squalid, unambitious Irishman multiplies like rabbits; the frugal, foreseeing, self-respecting, ambitious Scot, stern in his morality, spiritual in his faith, sagacious and disciplined in his intelligence, passes his best years in struggle and in celibacy, marries late, and leaves few behind him. (Darwin, 1871, p. 167)

In civilized nations, remarks Darwin, the “inferior, less favored race” would prevail in “the eternal struggle for existence,” but that it would do so “by virtue not of its good qualities but of its faults” (Darwin, 1871, p. 168). However, he claims that though these groups would have more offspring, they would remain less successful than the less-numerous but better-endowed groups. His thoughts are exemplified in the following example, in which the Saxons represent the moral and intelligent “race” and the Celts the less-endowed group:

Given a land originally peopled by a thousand Saxons and a thousand Celts—and in a dozen generations five-sixths of the population would be Celts, but five-sixths of the property, of the power, of the intellect, would belong to the one-sixth of Saxons that remains. (Darwin, 1871, p. 167-168)

From this example, it is evident that Darwin not only believes that the weaker members of society propagate their kind (1871, p. 162), but that the more intelligent, moral, and stronger members

do so as well, albeit at a slower rate. The result of this, as evidenced by the Celts-Saxons example, is a small, but powerful, rich, and intelligent class, and a large poor and uneducated class.

As shown in the above examples, modern societies have a more complex relationship to evolutionary processes than prehistoric ones and behave in more complicated ways. Despite this, Darwin continues to stress that morality and intellectual ability among humankind have increased through time. Complete degeneration of mankind is kept at bay because of the “checks to this downward tendency” (Darwin, 1871, p. 168). He pulls examples from “an enormous body of statistics” to show that mortality rates are higher among the uneducated and the immoral. “Men with a weak constitution, ill health, or any great infirmity in body or mind, will often not wish to marry, or will be rejected,” Darwin says (1871, p. 169). He concludes: “Obscure as is the problem of the advance of civilization we can at least see that a nation which produced during a lengthened period the greatest number of highly intellectual, energetic, brave, patriotic, and benevolent men, would generally prevail over less favored nations (Halliday, p. 391).”

### Social Evolution to Social Darwinism

The last point Darwin looks to make in Chapter V of *The Descent* is that “all civilized nations were once barbarous,” discussing the concept of social evolution (Darwin, 1871, p. 174)—applying his processes of physical (i.e., biological) (Darwin, 1859), intellectual (Darwin, 1871, p. 152-155), and moral (Darwin, 1871, p. 155-161) evolution to societies. Referring to the evolution of nations from “barbarous” to “civilized,” he writes, “As we have had to consider the steps by which some semi-human creature has been gradually raised to the rank of man in his most perfect state, the present subject cannot be quite passed over” (Darwin, 1871, p. 174). By first describing the way in which humans developed intellectually and morally, Darwin provides the evidence for how humankind has collectively “progressed.” He reasons that if humans have generally progressed through time in their moral and intellectual faculties—descended from primitive ancestors—then civilized societies must

also have descended from “primitive” or “less advanced” ones. This analysis mirrors that of cultural evolutionists Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) and Edward Tylor (1871), who both took cultural evolutionist stances to argue that states progressed towards civilization through time.

Darwin’s reasoning seems sound, but ulterior motives may have been at play. Interestingly, Darwin resided in Great Britain at a time when it was a powerful empire with many colonies. It was thought that Great Britain was more “evolved” than its colonies—especially morally and intellectually. Thus, his theories may have been used to justify colonial repression of indigenous peoples. A similar strategy was used by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in 1572 (nearly 300 years before the publication of *The Descent*), who was sent to prehistoric Peru by the Spanish king to illustrate how immoral and unrefined the Incas and other indigenous peoples were, so that the Spanish could justify their colonization. These justifications were common when a colonial power wished to conquer a land and its inhabitants. Darwin’s theories of intellectual and moral evolution simply added scientific backing to further justify colonial conquests. More recently, they have been used to justify the structural and institutional violence of *laissez faire* capitalism (Hofstadter, 1944).

Furthermore, Darwin’s nascent claims about moral and intellectual evolution, as well as his work on biological evolution, were combined with the work of others (e.g., Malthus, 1798; Spencer, 1852), and transformed into the movement of Social Darwinism (Claey, 2000; Halliday, 1971; Lillehammer, 2010; Pennock, 1995). Some of these theories were disastrous (e.g., Nazi Germany), while others simply stimulated intellectual debates and critiques. Once Darwin’s theories became associated with racial prejudices and certain political or colonial agendas, they became the foundation for genocides, race wars, ethnic cleansing, and other similar atrocities (Halliday, 1971, 391; Weikart, 2004). Robby Kossman’s statement provides an example of how Darwin’s ideas were further applied to social and ethical spheres:

The human state also, like every animal community of individuals, must reach an even higher level of perfection, if the possibility exists in it, through the destruction of the less well-endowed individual, for the more excellently endowed to win space for the expansion of its progeny . . . the state only has an interest in preserving the more excellent life at the expense of the less excellent. (1880; quoted in Weikart, 2004, p. 2)

The position taken by Kossman may seem highly provocative, but it was (and is) the common ideology embraced by supporters of Social Darwinism. Perhaps the most disastrous use of Darwin's theory is best exemplified by Adolf Hitler. As Weikart writes, Hitler took on "these social Darwinist ideas, blended in virulent anti-Semitism, and—there you have it: Holocaust" (2004, p. 3).

While working from Darwin to Hitler may seem quite a stretch, recall that Darwin's Chapter V in *The Descent* explicitly states that some societies are more intellectually, morally, and physically endowed than others, while implying that these societies will succeed and conquer. Hitler embraced Darwin's ideas, writing in *Mein Kampf* that "the stronger has to rule and he is not to amalgamate with the weaker one, that he may not sacrifice his

*"Hitler embraced Darwin's ideas, writing in Mein Kampf that "the stronger has to rule and he is not to amalgamate with the weaker one, that he may not sacrifice his own greatness."*

own greatness" (Hitler, 1941 [1939], p. 390). In Hitler's view, the Aryans were the supreme race of the world, and not only could they dominate over other societies, but they should, given their superior nature (Hitler, 1941 [1939], p. 389–455).

## Social Darwinism Today

Social Darwinist thought has made a reappearance in contemporary America through the rise of alt-right groups (Futrell and Simi, 2017). Organizations like American Renaissance state that racism is not detrimental and should be accepted because it has been accepted by Americans throughout most of the nation's history. These organizations claim that their racist attitudes are justified, believing, like Darwin, that intelligence is inherited. This is rooted in alt-right doctrine that "race is foundational to human identity," that you "cannot understand who you are without race" (McConnell, 2016, p. 13). Through this statement, the alt-right hopes to "spur whites into a kind of pan-white racial consciousness and galvanize them to become 'aware of who we are,' and to prepare themselves, one day, somehow, to form an ethnostate" (McConnell, 2016, p. 13). They promote such topics as "race realism" and "white advocacy"

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(Taylor, 2012, p. 1), while claiming that "multi-racialism has failed" (Taylor, 2006, p. 10). Furthermore, groups like American Renaissance call for closed borders and segregated neighborhoods, and state that there is a dire need to keep races from mixing (Biddle, 2017; Taylor, 2006, 2012). All these claims are rooted in Social Darwinist ideologies that incorrectly correlate intelligence, behavior, morality, and other characteristics with 'race' (Arciniega, 2017; Biddle, 2017; Futrell and Simi, 2017). The Social Darwinism of the alt-right is based on "supremacy and de-humanization of others, and is unacceptable" (Arciniega, 2017, 176).

## Theories of Cultural Evolution

The idea of a progression of humankind and societies through time could be termed "general cultural evolution" (as opposed to "specific cultural evolution"), the "successive emergence of new



levels of all-around development” (Sahlins, 1973, p. 28). When this hypothesis is not linked to racism or other prejudices, it can be quite fruitful for academic analysis and theory (Childe, 1951; Dunbar et al., 1999; Sahlins and Service, 1973; White, 1949). The Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe (1951) harnessed Darwin’s evolutionary ideas in an attempt to find universal trends in prehistory. Childe concludes that, indeed, there are some general evolutionary trends among cultures, though specifically, the adaptations of those cultures differ dramatically. He also makes a tweak to Darwin’s (and Hitler’s and Kossman’s) theory of social evolution, stating that societies do not need to be “annihilated to make room for a better adapter culture . . . actually this seldom happens” (Childe, 1951, p. 178). Instead cultural assimilation takes place, which merges the innovations, technologies, behaviors, and moral and intellectual faculties of the two societies in contact. This allows for increased and expedited cultural or social evolution as these ideas are combined and the members of the societies adapt to those that are best (Childe, 1951, 178–180). In their book *Evolution and Culture*, Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service use the terms “specific evolution” and “general evolution” to differentiate between the ways in which societies adapt and evolve (Sahlins and Service, 1973). Their claim is that societies undergo both types of evolution, specifically evolving into their niche in the environment (Sahlins, 1973, p. 23–28), but also generally evolving by improving in “all-around adaptability” (Sahlins, 1973, p. 37). More recently, attempts to “model cultural evolutionary processes . . . have focused mainly on . . . [how] . . . cultural patterns can be expected to change over time” (Knight et al., 1999, p. 2). These analyses remove “the arrow of progress” and center around explaining cultural change as a process. Hypotheses such as those by Childe and Sahlins and Service have received much critique from their respective academic circles. To quote Berthold Laufer, “the theory of cultural evolution is to my mind the most inane, sterile, and pernicious theory in the whole theory of science” (quoted in White, 1973, v). A common criticism of social evolutionists is that they remove human agency from their analysis, eliminating choice and

free will (Hodder, 1991; James, 1880). Another is that they simplify culture and do not account for its particular and historical uniqueness (see Boas, 1940).

Darwin’s theories of intellectual and moral evolution set the stage for evolutionary-based social thought. The outcomes of such thought have had varied impacts on humankind. We often consider scientific theories to be strange devices employed only in laboratories and applicable only to the natural world. Chapter V of Darwin’s *Descent of Man* shows the immense and far-reaching effects that science can have on humanity. Thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors can all be shifted through scientific discovery, and those theories can be twisted and manipulated to serve a variety of needs. Darwin made an attempt to universalize evolution to show the progress of humankind. The ideal of progress can be stated as “the assumption that a pattern of change exists in the history of mankind . . . that it consists of irreversible changes in one direction only, and that direction is towards improvement” (Pollard, 1968, p. 9). Over time, the notion of progress has served as a driving force in the development of modern societies.

## The Myth of Progress

With the advent of postmodernism these conceptions of grand, progression-type narratives and universal “best ways” of doing things have been called into question (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Lyotard, 1984). Ronald Wright has challenged this idea of progress (Wright, 2005, p. 12), of a general evolution among human individuals and societies through time, through his concept of “progress traps, the headstones of civilizations which fell victim to their own success.” He states that:

As cultures grow more elaborate, and technologies more powerful, they themselves may become ponderous specializations—vulnerable and, in extreme cases, deadly. The atomic bomb, a logical progression from the arrow and the bullet, became the first technology to threaten our whole species with extinction. (Wright, 2005, p. 27)

In this way, the atomic bomb, the result of what could be called “progress,” represents a horrific “progress trap” (Wright, p. 27). Wright further mentions the “human inability to foresee” as a primary cause for our species’ continual falling into progress traps (2005, p. 85). If society could think with a more “future-oriented” perspective, perhaps many of our current problems could be minimized or resolved.

Naomi Klein similarly challenges the common narrative by claiming that capitalism, neoliberalism, and economic growth all need to be replaced if societies are to become sustainable (Klein, 2014). This is not to say that the solutions put forth by Wright or Klein or others are necessarily correct, but that they represent an important step in human history—a reassessment of the validity of the story we have been telling ourselves for centuries. Others ought to do so as well, as critiques of current models of progress and formulation of new and alternate models are much needed.

We ought to accept Darwin’s ideas about biological evolution in *The Origin of Species* but reject his hypothesis about social evolution in *The Descent*. If humankind and its societies have continually advanced, where is the proof? Currently, humans are destroying ecosystems, eliminating biodiversity, acidifying the oceans, polluting the atmosphere, and changing the (previously stable) climate (Crutzen, 2002; Rockstrom et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2007; Steffen et al., 2015; Thiele, 2016). These changes could “trigger abrupt, unpredictable and potentially irreversible changes that have massively disruptive and large-scale impacts” (Molina et al., 2014, p. 15-16), destabilizing the Holocene conditions that fostered the growth of modern societies (Rockstrom et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). Moreover, the changes will bring about negative effects on water resources, energy, transportation, agriculture, human health, and ecosystems (Karl, Melillo, and Peterson, 2009; Mitchell, 2011; Molina et al., 2014; Moore, 2015). In short, we have created a precarious present (Haraway, 2016, 55; Tsing, 2015), in which we have disrupted the “mosaic of relations” that have supported modern modes of social life for centuries (Mitchell, 2011; Moore, 2015). If our intelligence

has continually made us more inclusively fit, how is it that we continue to destroy and destabilize our environment—our home—despite the known impacts of our actions?

One out of every nine people in the world is hungry, and one out of three is malnourished. More than sixty-five million persons have been forcibly displaced. Numerous minority groups are discriminated against on a regular basis, barred from education and employment opportunities, while other are targets of ethnic cleansing (Jahan, 2016, pp. 29-39, pp. 56-80). Human deprivation is rampant in the world, and while some aid has been given, resources continually end up elsewhere. For example, the United States porn industry has an estimated annual income of more than \$13 billion (Szymanski and Stewart-Richardson, 2014, p. 1) and the annual revenue of United States alcoholic spirit suppliers is over \$25 billion (Ozgo, 2017). If we as a society have advanced, why are people starving while porn and alcohol industries make billions of dollars each year?

Modern societies continue to fall into a variety of progress traps. Against which parameters do we gauge our “progress”? Though our economic

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capital continues to grow, other important forms of “capital” including morality and sustainability have been overlooked. We have become focused on economic growth as the single parameter by which to measure “the good life,” when “often what is most important in life is precisely what money cannot buy” (Fischer, 2014, 16). Previous conceptions of progress have been critiqued and

dismantled (Foucault, 1977; Klein, 2014; Lyotard, 1984; Wright, 2005). It is high time we put some thought into the “evolution” of our societies, because it is time we change our ways.

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**Below is an abridged version of the references. For full list, please go online to [discussionsjournal.com](http://discussionsjournal.com)**

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