Have Ernst Haeckel’s Alleged Connections with Nazism been disproven?

A Reply to Peter J. Bowler

The current literature on the meaning of the Darwinian Revolution devotes considerable attention to the question of the role of Ernst Haeckel in fostering Nazi and Fascist ideology. For example, in a recent article in *History of Science*, Peter Bowler dismisses my efforts to establish a connection between Haeckel and Nazi ideology, and suggests that any such attempt is based on a flawed reading of nineteenth century intellectual history. Endorsing an argument that for quite some time has been advanced by a number of historians of science like Michael Ruse, Robert Richards, and Mario A. di Gregorio, Bowler declares that since racism was generally endemic to nineteenth century thought Haeckel cannot be singled out as a

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1 I am indebted to my colleague, Professor Gavin Lewis, for his many insightful suggestions during the writing of this article.

2 Peter J. Bowler, ‘The Eclipse of Pseudo-Darwinism? Reflections on Some Recent Developments in Darwin Studies,’ *History of Science*, Vol. 47 (4) no. 158, December 2009, 431-443. ‘... the old claims about Haeckel and his followers made by authors such as Gasman.’ [441] Bowler also writes quite erroneously: ‘[Gasman’s] claim that Haeckel’s enthusiastic endorsement of the view that the European races were the pinnacle of human evolution played a role in the subsequent emergence of Nazism was widely rejected when first proposed;’ [440-441] – a statement that is not true. I believe that literally all the many reviews of my book including lengthy coverage in the *TLS*, raised no such criticism at the time. The idea that racism was ubiquitous in the 19th century and that therefore Haeckel was not unique in this regard came much later on and then only by a handful of historians of science, albeit influential ones. To this day, my interpretation of Haeckel as a forerunner of Nazism is widely accepted by most other historians.
uniquely important figure when measured against his contemporaries and therefore could not personally have played a determining role in inaugurating the birth of Nazi ideology. The trouble with this argument is the fact that racism in the nineteenth century did not subscribe to a one-dimensional account of the composition of society but rather was a multi-delineated ‘scientific’ and ideological doctrine. There did exist a widespread run of the mill racism that was typical for many scientists and anthropologists who conceived of humankind as composed of a hierarchy of races, and this is the view that Bowler suggests was ubiquitous. But there was also a much more radical racism, proclaimed by Haeckel, that not only stressed racial hierarchy and the supremacy of the white race, but also the special importance and superiority of the Germans based on an Aryan mythology. It was this radically charged and highly aggressive form of racism that was forcefully disseminated as scientifically valid by Haeckel and which ultimately served as an authentication for Nazi doctrine.

In addition, it is vital to remember that Aryan racism, as important as it was for the creation of Nazism, was hardly the only constituent of the ideology. There were a multitude of other significant facets to this doctrine that can be readily linked to the direct influence of Haeckel and Monism – for example, Haeckel’s idea that politics is applied biology; his explicit ‘scientific’ support of anti-Semitism and his demand for the disappearance of the Jewish community in Germany, based on his belief that the Jews were at the root of the decay of European civilization; his marked insistence on eugenics as necessary for the racial health of the Germanic community; his ideological influence over the proto-Nazi völkish movement; and lastly, his prediction that a racially superior Germany was entitled to supplant the British Empire on the world stage. It is this comprehensive aspect of the story that Bowler neglects in his criticism of my analysis.

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3 This leads Bowler to accept Richards’ criticism of my work: ‘[Richards] quite rightly points to the fact that almost all of Haeckel’s contemporaries thought the white race was superior.... At most, one could implicate Haeckel [in Nazism-dg] by noting the effectiveness of his popularization of Darwinism....’ [440-441]

4 For an account of Haeckel’s influence on the birth of Fascist ideology in Italy, France, and other countries apart from Germany, see Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008. [1998]
In the remainder of his article, Bowler focuses largely on the writings of Robert J. Richards and Sander Gliboff, with some attention also to the ideas of Richard Weikart, a partisan of Intelligent Design. Bowler confines himself to an examination of the narrower scientific issues raised by their interpretation of the nature of developmental models of evolution and their understanding of the meaning of Natural Selection in Darwin and Haeckel. Bowler is sensitive to the theoretical divide between the biology of Haeckel and Darwin and criticizes Richards and Gliboff for minimizing or even denying the prevalence of teleology in Haeckel’s science. He is skeptical as well about Richards’ pet theory that Darwin’s ideas were fundamentally influenced by German romanticism. But he fails to mention that these authors conceived their books in large measure as polemics against my evaluation of Haeckel and his ties to National Socialism. This effort is very pronounced in Richards’ biography of Haeckel and Gliboff states explicitly, in his book on H.G. Bronn and Haeckel, that his intention is to invalidate my analysis of Haeckel both in terms of his science and his links with National Socialism. Yet Bowler gives no hint either of this aspect of Richards’ and Gliboff’s work, or of the controversy between Richards and myself that has escalated exponentially over the past few years relating to the proto-Nazi content of Haeckel’s thought.

Bowler treats the question as to why these authors are so keen to revise the content of the developmental model in Haeckel and to bring Darwin and Haeckel’s understanding of Natural Selection closer together than has been done in the past as a mere technical problem in the history of science. It does not seem to have occurred to Bowler that this might, in addition have something to do with denying the idiosyncratic nature of Haeckel’s science as against that of Darwin as a way of breaking Haeckel’s links with National Socialism – for since Darwin was not a co-founder of National Socialism, and if Haeckel was the mirror image of Darwin, he also cannot be burdened with such a grievous liability. And

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6 Richards writes that scholars who adopt Gasman’s ideas about Haeckel are historians ‘without scruple.’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 449.
in a broader sense, what escapes Bowler is the crisis in content and understanding of Haeckel’s role in evolutionary history that has now come to suffuse virtually the entire recent literature on Darwinism. It appears that an unshakable mythology has taken hold of this field of Darwinian scholarship, and given the ecstatic reviews that Richards and Gliboff have received from a substantial number of historians of science, it is worthwhile raising the issue of how fashionable, but often erroneous modes of thought manage to gain dominance and prosper in ostensibly objective fields of scientific and historical endeavor.7

In a number of recently written articles I have pointed out that Richards’ biography and other writings on Haeckel are deeply flawed.8 Running throughout Richards’ work are conspicuous discrepancies between what he suggests Haeckel said and what the sources actually reveal. The main theme of his book as reflected in the title The Tragic Sense of Life borrowed from the classic book of the famous Spanish writer and mystic Miguel de Unamuno, is clearly untenable and Haeckel certainly was not a philo-Semite as Richards urges. Bowler’s failure to mention any of this compels one to examine more closely Bowler’s understanding of the major books that he has reviewed and to compare that with the actual content of these works. In addition, it is also necessary to take a critical look at some of the

7 See, for example, the recent review of Richards’ Tragic Sense of Life by Nick Hopwood, ‘Darwinism’s Tragic Genius,’ Isis, Vol. 100: December 2009, 863-867. Without any proof whatever, and following Richards, Hopwood dismisses claims that Haeckel can be linked with Nazism and anti-Semitism.

8 See Ferris.edu/isar/Gasman Controversy; and Daniel Gasman, ‘From Haeckel to Hitler: The Anatomy of a Controversy,’ eSkeptic.com, 10 June 2009. The discussion about Richards’ biography that follows is based on a number of articles that have appeared on the ISAR website and a review of Richards’ biography of Haeckel in eSkeptic, the Internet edition of Skeptic Magazine. Michael Shermer, the editor of Skeptic Magazine peremptorily cancelled, on the eve of publication, the hard copy version of the review after receiving complaints from Professor Richards. Richards voiced his objections to the review in the July 1, 2009 edition of eSkeptic accusing me of being ‘unhinged,’ but not responding substantively to my objections to his work. Professor Richards is a master of hyperbole; for ‘unhinged’ one should read, one would suppose, being critical. Richards began taking issue with my work in print as far back as the 1980s but I did not begin to respond in any way until 2004 after the pace of his attacks on my ideas about Haeckel began to escalate in print and on the Internet and especially after 2007 when he took steps as a co-editor of the MIT journal Biological Theory to frustrate a response to an article critical of my work on Haeckel’s anti-Semitism that he published in the same journal. For details of these events, see Ferris.edu/ISAR/Gasman Controversy. Appreciation is due to the director of the Institute for the Study of Academic Racism, Professor Barry Mehler of Ferris State University who demonstrated exceptional intellectual and moral courage in bringing these core issues affecting current Darwinian literature to the attention of the public. His Institute has long been in the forefront of the struggle for truth in Academia.
literature that has been emanating from the Haeckel Archives at the University of Jena – another important aspect of the story that receives no mention from Bowler.

Not really discussed by Bowler beyond what has been noted is that Richards’ biography promises to rescue Haeckel from a century and half of disparaging assessments of his biology, and above all undertakes a refutation of the more recent and widely held belief that he was instrumental in formulating the basic tenets of Nazi ideology. The common understanding among historians is based on the fact that Adolf Hitler came of age during the decade and a half following the publication in 1899 of Ernst Haeckel’s *Riddle of the Universe*, a runaway best seller that over the next two or three decades sold more copies internationally than the Bible and profoundly shaped the consciousness of the modern world. Haeckel’s book imparted a rigid Social Darwinist message purportedly derived from science: politics is applied biology; the Jews are an inferior race compared with the Aryans and have disturbed the well-being of European civilization with their transcendental morality based on dualism; Christianity, instigated by the Jews, is a religion of weakness; and concerted eugenic action is necessary to protect the racial composition of society.

In his attempt to disentangle Haeckel from Hitler and Nazism, Richards argues that Haeckel was really a benign political figure with affinities to liberalism rather than to Fascist authoritarianism, and an intellectual personality infinitely more interested in evolutionary science than in a radical, Nazi-like reorganization of society. Racist eugenics, anti-Semitism, and extreme Germanic nationalism were really strains of thought foreign to Haeckel’s beliefs, and Richards claims that Haeckel has been maligned – especially by me (in *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* [1971; 2004]) and Stephen Jay Gould (in several of his popular essays and in his book, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* [1977]) – as having a pernicious influence.9

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9 Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 449.
These revisionist claims have aroused considerable interest because if what Richards suggests is true, this would impact not only the history of science, but also a number of other important fields of history that have been linked to Haeckel in recent years: Nazism, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, eugenics, and the social role of science and political ideology. The problem, however, is that a careful reading of Richards’ book uncovers a process of selective quoting and blatant manipulation of evidence to support the author’s thesis. This is a serious charge against a highly respected historian of science and Darwinian scholar and one has to disentangle a number of separate strands of thought that run through Richards’ book and articles on Haeckel in order to grasp how evidence is distorted so that more often than not only a fictionalized figure emerges, unrecognizable from what is commonly known about Haeckel and his science and philosophy.

For much of his academic career Richards has been on a self-declared quest: to reconcile any perceived differences between Haeckel and Darwin and to establish that Darwin created his evolutionary theories from the same sources in German romanticism that determined Haeckel’s evolutionary science. Richards insists over and over again that ‘[Haeckel’s] theoretical convictions hardly differed from those of Darwin’ and that German Darwinismus was interchangeable with the familiar patterns of English science; Haeckel, in other words should vanish as an idiosyncratic scientist and thinker and English and German Darwinism should be seen as a unified theoretical and scientific movement.10

**Haeckel did not have a Tragic Sense of Life**

For Richards, Haeckel was guided by a tragic sense of life, bearing great similarities to the religious philosophy expounded by Unamuno. ‘Unamuno offers a clue, I believe, for the solution of the puzzle of Haeckel…. Unamuno explored what he took to be the soul-splitting experience of Western intellectuals, their tragic sense of life. He depicted the struggle of a skeptical reason, especially in philosophy and

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10 ‘Darwin [can] be accounted an Haeckelian;’ Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 72. Or, as Richards writes further on: ‘The history I have sketched ... indicates that Haeckel not only drew on many of the same sources that formed Darwin’s own conceptions, but more importantly, that beneath the distinctively Germanic outer layers, the core of his evolutionary morphology was the same as the Englishman’s;’ 119, n.15.
science, as courageously insisting that human striving is mortal, that its efforts end in the grave; yet such reasoning, cannot, he thought, overcome the vital desire for life, for transcendence,’ so that reason and life are fundamentally at odds with each other. Richards thus proclaims that his ‘overarching argument will be that Haeckel’s science and his legacy for modern evolutionary theory display the features they do because of his tragic sense of life.’

The trouble with this exegesis – apart from Richards’ obvious failure to define exactly what transcendence might have actually signified for both writers – is the fact that Unamuno for the most part conceived his book as an attack on the scientific Monism of Haeckel, which he correctly understood to be the implacable enemy of Christian transcendence. In The Tragic Sense of Life – and this is not mentioned by Richards – Unamuno denounced Haeckel in the strongest possible language, and he decried Haeckel’s Monism as a faulty, unsatisfying, and materialistic philosophy because it denied the immortality of the soul: ‘Every monist system will always seem materialist,’ hence deficient, Unamuno declared. Rather, ‘only dualist systems preserve the immortality of the soul, only those systems which teach that human consciousness is something substantially distinct and different from other manifestations of phenomena.’ Therefore, ‘monist tricks are of no use to us. We want the substance, not the shadow of eternity!’ It is anybody’s guess how this explanation by Unamuno of the dualistic meaning of transcendence, his anguished evocation of the tragic sense of life, and his unconditional rejection of scientific Monism and pantheism, can be reconciled with Richards’ account of Haeckel’s quest for transcendence that runs parallel to the religious devotion of the Spanish philosopher.

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11 Richards, Tragic Sense of Life, 10, n.31. In his biography of Haeckel, Richards confuses Haeckel’s experience of tragedy i.e., the unexpected and premature death of his first wife, with a tragic sense of life, an outlook on life which Haeckel did not subscribe to. Nor can it be shown that any of Haeckel’s scientific theories were influenced by a tragic sense of life which Richards incorrectly has suggested as a determining theme in Haeckel’s work.

12 Unamuno published his book early in the twentieth century, at a time when Haeckel’s monism had achieved overwhelming prestige symbolized by the famous International Monist Congress held in Hamburg in 1911.

13 Unamuno was hardly complimentary towards Haeckel: ‘There is no point in talking of the indecencies of Haeckel, that master of incomprehension,’ [Haeckel] harbor[s] the pretention of disdaining theology [and] has succeeded [only] in dissipating the enigmas of nature.’ Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, 106, 258.

14 Ibid, 89-90.

15 Ibid, 53.
The truth of the matter is that Richards seems uncomprehending of the central ideas contained in Unamuno’s remarkable philosophical essay. Impressed by the cultural impact of the Darwinian revolution and modern science in general, Unamuno was concerned about the loss of meaning in life and the undermining of the traditional religious source of faith and ethics brought on by the triumph of Positivism in the nineteenth century. As a religious thinker, Unamuno suggested that ultimately human life could only be sustained by non-rational Christian faith. For Unamuno it was the tragedy occasioned by the contradiction between the impersonal findings of science and its candid recognition and acceptance of death, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the human need for concrete physical immortality, and for a transcendent humanistic faith and adherence to ethical values that of necessity had to be sustained devoid of scientific and rational authority – an unresolved dilemma that fuels the tragic sense of life confronting modern man as Unamuno describes it.

But for Haeckel, despite what Richards insists no such contradictory tragedy exists for modern man. Haeckel embraced death and the meaninglessness of human existence and rejected any belief in transcendent faith. Death in the Christian sense that Unamuno believed in was not to be defeated by spiritual transcendence, but was rather to be embraced as the evolutionary source of new life. For Haeckel, awareness of death was not a tragedy, but only a necessary part of the struggle for existence and evolution. Despite what Richards contends, therefore, Haeckel’s position on transcendence and his rejection of all its forms, was the direct opposite of what Unamuno believed and proclaimed in his classic text.

Furthermore Haeckel, despite what Richards urges, did not believe, with Unamuno, that reason is the enemy of life, nor could Haeckel have accepted Christian-like transcendence because his Monism was
totally committed to a philosophy of immanence. In short, Richards’ analysis bears no relation to the Monism of Haeckel, nor does seem to fully understand the thought of Unamuno.\textsuperscript{16}

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that a tragic sense of life implies some aspect of non-fulfillment; that, for example, the attainment of absolute knowledge is forever impossible and therefore human beings can never realize certainty in life, especially over questions of morality and the tragedy of human mortality. But Monism is the opposite of a tragic sense of life, because Monism implies total fulfillment based on the absolute reconciliation of opposites. Haeckel therefore would have rejected Unamuno’s concerns. In Haeckel’s 1899 magnum opus, \textit{The Riddle of the Universe}, the theme clearly advanced was that knowledge was not limited. On the contrary, for Haeckel, all the riddles of the universe had been or were on their way to being solved. Nothing lay beyond the ability of science to comprehend the complete structure of the cosmos. Thus, the aspect of tragedy that Richards assumes in Haeckel is simply not there.

\textbf{Haeckel and Darwin}

A critical theme in Richards’ book emphasizes that the distinctions that are conventionally drawn between the science and biology of Darwin and Haeckel are misplaced and that the two scientists are really interchangeable intellectual figures. Richards believes that when correctly analyzed, Darwin is actually a Haeckelian and that his biology draws upon the same sources and closely resembles the science of Haeckel. However, even if one were to admit that there were some common romantic sources in the

\textsuperscript{16} Richards incorrectly transforms Unamuno into a pantheist in order to show his affinity with Haeckel: ‘Unamuno argued that the desire for immortality, the longing to unite with eternal, divine nature....’ Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 453. But Richards’ explanation is absolutely untenable and demonstrates how the primary theory of his book is built on a foundation of sand. Immortality for Unamuno was conceived in a Catholic sense, meaning a hoped for immortality of the concrete, physical person. As Unamuno wrote in opposition to Monism: ‘No, I do not long to be submerged in the great All, in infinite and eternal Matter and Energy, or in God. I long to possess God, not to be possessed by Him, to become myself God without ceasing to be the I who now speaks to you.’ Unamuno, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 52-53. On Unamuno’s interest in but ultimate rejection of pantheism, see Armand F. Baker, ‘The God of Miguel de Unamuno,’ \textit{Hispania}, 74(3) December 1991, 824-833.
scientific theories of Darwin (and this is probably not the case), there remain vast differences between the two men and Richards’ suppositions are unsupported by the available evidence.

As has been frequently observed, Haeckel’s biology assumed the reality of determining forces within nature, a position remote from Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that Darwin did not offer a comprehensive philosophy of life, as Haeckel did. As early as the writing of the *Generelle Morphologie* in 1866, Haeckel presented his evolutionary theory combined with his philosophy of Monism, suggesting that evolution was not just a theory about the development of life and the creation of new species, but a total explanation of the *meaning* of life. This was very different from what Darwin offered in *The Origin of Species*, which was simply an explanation for evolution. Monism dominated Haeckel’s science and philosophy for the rest of his life, but disturbingly, Richards takes great pains to gloss over this fact as much as possible, uncritically integrating Haeckel’s religious ideas into his science.

In all other major areas as well, a vast chasm separates the two men. Darwin did not suggest that spontaneous generation had been empirically verified, as Haeckel did. Darwin did not proselytize on behalf of an evolutionary secular religion that would replace Christianity, nor did Darwin believe in the existence of a world soul, or in pan-psychism or display a predilection for magic or theosophy, all of which Haeckel did. Darwin did not articulate a comprehensive plan of racial eugenics for the regeneration of society, nor was Darwin an anti-Semite, believing that the Biblical tradition was at the root of the weakness of European civilization; nor was Darwin an opponent of liberalism. Haeckel was absolutely insistent in his support of the existence of the Aryan race and he explicitly lent his scientific authority to the racial-historical theories of Count Gobineau, hardly a view of the world to which Darwin would have subscribed. Darwin was quite probably a sympathizer with Abolitionism, but Haeckel believed in the

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18 See Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause: How a Hatred of Slavery Shaped Darwin’s Views on Evolution*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009. For Haeckel’s derogatory views about the ‘inferiority’ of Africans,
intrinsic inferiority of the African peoples that was frozen in their biology and employed highly charged derogatory language about Africans that would have been abhorrent to Darwin despite his own racial prejudices. The obvious reality is that Haeckel’s Darwinism with its emphasis on an idealistic morphology and a vitalistic worship of nature represents an intellectual and ideological universe totally apart from that of Charles Darwin. Richards’ attempt to draw parallels between English and German Darwinism represents a distortion that journeys way beyond the parameters of plausible historical evidence and analysis.

In stirring language, Richards glorifies the romantic strain in both Haeckel and Darwin, as if to say this mode of thought was scientifically and philosophically fruitful. But, as is generally conceded, Haeckel’s science ultimately collapsed by the end of the nineteenth century, and that the real weaknesses of Haeckel’s biology resided in the fact that he borrowed too heavily from the tradition of German romanticism. Richards himself endorses this interpretation of nineteenth century evolutionary history, and thereby presents historians of science with a serious conundrum: if Haeckel’s science was in fact shaped by romanticism and ultimately failed as a consequence, what is the point of idolizing his romantic approach to investigating the structure of the organic world? And was it, in the end, not the resemblance of the two men, but rather Haeckel’s over reliance on romanticism that clearly distinguished his science from the non-romantic science of Darwin?

**Haeckel and ‘Scientific’ Secular anti-Semitism**

Richards insists that Haeckel has been misrepresented as an anti-Semite, and that in fact Haeckel stood out as a friend the Jewish community in Germany. However, Richards is only able to arrive at his

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denial of ‘Haeckel’s alleged anti-Semitism’ by an egregious manipulation of evidence, including indiscriminate omission of incriminating material and by offering what can only be described as fantastical interpretations of passages from Haeckel’s writings dealing with the Jews.

Richards’ allegation of a ‘tendentious charge of anti-Semitism by Gasman,’ 19 demonstrates a disturbing lack of knowledge about German history and the history of modern anti-Semitism in general. It excludes from consideration the emerging school of ‘scientific’ secular anti-Semitism of which Haeckel was a founding father and a guiding light. He does not understand that so-called ‘scientific’ anti-Semitism was much more lethal and prophetic of National Socialist ideology than purely religious traditional antagonism to the Jews. In my book, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (1998, 2008) the discussion of the Monist writings of the important French proto-Nazi authors Jules Soury and Georges Vacher de Lapouge – both translators into French of some of Haeckel’s major writings and close disciples of Haeckel – make clear that the ideological foundations of National Socialist anti-Semitism can be directly traced back to the specific influence of Haeckel. Richards does not mention this material, because he is determined to omit historical sources that might undermine his fallacious denial Haeckel’s antagonism toward the Jews and connections with National Socialist ideology in general.

In his remarks in 1893 to the Monist literary critic Hermann Bahr in an interview on the Jewish question, 20 Haeckel declared the ‘Jewish Problem’ to be a ‘racial question,’ 21 extolled anti-Semitism as a politically creative force, justified its historical role and held the Jews alone responsible for its

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20 See ‘Rejoinder Three’ for a discussion of the Hermann Bahr Interview with Haeckel about the Jews: Internet Posting; Ferris.edu/ISAR/Gasman Controversy
21 The fact that Haeckel defined the ‘Jewish Problem’ as a ‘racial problem’ in the Bahr Interview, or in *The Riddle of the Universe*, [328] and wrote that the ‘characteristics which distinguish [Christ’s] high and noble personality and which give distinct impress to his religion are certainly not Semitical; they are rather features of the higher Arian [sic!] race,’ do not discourage Richards from insisting that Haeckel did not speak of the Jews in racial terms. See Richards, *Tragic Sense of Life*, 504 n. 15: ‘There is simply no reason to believe Haeckel to be racially anti-Semitic, as several historians have assumed.’ When challenged, however, Richards will admit that Haeckel was a racist. See his response in the *TLS* [9/26/08] to my letter in the same journal [9/10/08] pointing to his distorted reporting of the content of the Bahr Interview.
appearance, and he demanded that the Jews forsake their religious identity and disappear from German life as a separate community – that hardly establish the philo-Semitism that Richards claims to have found in the interview.\textsuperscript{22}

On a number of occasions I have urged Richards to take into consideration the entire text of the Hermann Bahr interview but to no avail; he continues to justify using only a tiny portion of the interview for his analysis and taking the passages selected out of context, in this way continuing to misrepresent Haeckel’s position and general significance for the nature and history of the Jewish question in Germany.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to his failure to adequately convey the full content of the Bahr Interview, Richards, in all of his writings, demonstrates great difficulty in grasping the clearly anti-Semitic content of Haeckel’s \textit{magnum opus}, \textit{The Riddle of the Universe}. Richards contends that in this work Haeckel devoted only a few brief passages to the Jews and much more space to attacking Christianity which he claims shows that Haeckel was hardly concerned with the Jews. But to Haeckel, Christianity was a nefarious invention of Judaism and Haeckel conflated both religions as ‘Dualism.’ Richards fails to understand that \textit{The Riddle of the Universe} advanced a theory of history that would become a fundamental assumption of Monism. The supposed decline of European civilization, Haeckel contended, stemmed from the time of the birth of the monotheistic religions and this unfortunate state of affairs, placed primary responsibility on the

\textsuperscript{22} See my three ‘Rejoinders’ to Richards mentioned above and posted on the Internet that directly challenge Richards’ interpretation of the Bahr Interview.

\textsuperscript{23} Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 506. Richards’ distorted reading of the Bahr Interview has spilled over into a number of his other articles and Internet postings. I have dealt at length with some of the issues that he raises in my papers that have appeared in the collection entitled ‘Gasman Controversy’ that have already been referred to. However, it should be reiterated that Haeckel was a major spokesman for the idea of Aryan supremacy based on ‘scientific’ evidence and was a major theoretical influence internationally among the leading founders of so-called ‘scientific anti-Semitism’ – for example, Wilhelm Marr, Heinrich Pudor, Raoul H. Francé, Jules Soury, and Georges Vacher de Lapouge and many others. These facts are never mentioned by Richards, and his entire analysis of Haeckel and anti-Semitism is written outside the boundaries of acceptable historiographical norms. See Robert J. Richards, ‘Haeckel’s Alleged Anti-Semitism and Contributions to Nazi Biology,’ \textit{Biological Theory} 2(1) 2007, 97-103; ‘That Darwin and Haeckel were Complicit in Nazi Biology,’ \textit{Galileo Goes to Jail and other Myths about Science and Religion}, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009; 170-177; and ‘Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919),’ in Michael Ruse (ed), \textit{Evolution: the First Four Billion Years}, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009, 626: ‘[Gasman] ignored Haeckel’s philo-Semitism, an attitude quite unusual for the period.’
shoulders of the Jews for their dualistic religious ideas and for Judaism’s offshoot, Christianity. The Jews, Haeckel argued, were a separate biological race, both different from and yet as powerful as the Aryans, and their existence had corrupted the course of evolution and had diverted the world historical process away from the healthy Monist foundations of ancient pre-Socratic civilization and culture. Such ideas helped to establish a critical framework of ideas for an understanding of world history that was adopted later on by the Nazi leadership, most especially by those in the SS who actively instigated and carried out the Holocaust – for example, leading individuals like Josef Mengele. According to this understanding of history, the problem of the Jews was not a religious question, but an evolutionary problem and that a study of the history of biology and science revealed that there was a titanic struggle underway within evolutionary biology between the destructive racial force of the Jews and the healing power of the Aryan race. Haeckel and close Monist followers like Jules Soury and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, did much to set the stage for the proliferation and development of such ideas.24

Richards’ ‘Moral Grammar’

Richards concludes his book with a reprinted lecture: ‘The Moral Grammar of Narratives in the History of Biology – the Case of Haeckel and Nazi Biology.’ Richards attaches great importance to this essay, believing it to provide a foundation for his belief that the connection between Haeckel and National Socialism is an illusion that stems from manipulated historical sources, and not at all a reflection of historical reality in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. Haeckel, he argues, has to be evaluated not in absolute moral terms, but in regard to the ethical context of his own times.

However, Richards is unable to show that moral consciousness was substantially different a little over a century ago in Germany, a country situated at the very heart of European civilization, from what it is today. Richards unjustifiably treats the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the period when Haeckel

24 For an extended discussion of the ideas of Soury and Lapouge, see Gasman, Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology.
was politically and scientifically active, as a remote historical period when in fact it is part of the contemporary world.

Richards also undertakes a historiographical excursus that challenges the sensibilities of even hardened readers, decrying the writing of history in general as an exercise in manipulation as far back as Herodotus and Thucydides, and eventually ending up with a denunciation of historians like myself who, by linking Haeckel with National Socialism, – and presumably inspired by the famous Greek authors – have ‘caus[ed] sputtering convulsions’\textsuperscript{25} because of a deceptive narrative of historical causality.

What Richards overlooks is that Haeckel and his followers had a lot to say about ethics and morality. They were not passive onlookers of the society in which they lived, as Richards seems to suggest, but they constantly talked and wrote about the need to break down conventional religious moral standards in the light of the discoveries of evolutionary science. The Monists celebrated the defeat of Judeo-Christian ethics in the name of the struggle for existence and the demands of evolution, a discussion that would figure so poignantly in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and the cultural tragedy he felt coming with the death of God. By neglecting to point this out, Richards succeeds in casting Haeckel and the Monists in ahistorical terms as purveyors of conventional morality. Haeckel, however, was constantly at war with the traditional beliefs of European civilization, hoping to revolutionize the very ethical basis of society. Richards’ admonitions about the need for the historian to evaluate individuals in terms of the moral standards of their own society are completely beside the point.\textsuperscript{26}

Richards accuses historians who criticize Haeckel of distorting evidence by ‘cutting quotations,’\textsuperscript{27} but he provides no examples. This is an unfounded accusation because it is Richards himself who is doing all the ‘cutting’ of relevant sources. For example, earlier in his text, he discusses a book that Haeckel wrote

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 500.
\item \textsuperscript{27} The full sentence reads: ‘The historian can orchestrate outrage – as some dealing with Haeckel have – by cutting quotations into certain vicious shapes, selecting those that appear damaging while neglecting those that might be exculpating.’ Richards, \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, 500.
\end{itemize}
during the First World War, *Eternity*, excising all the National Socialist-like statements. Richards misleadingly presents Haeckel as simply a tragic world weary figure, a detached victim of the war, rather than a bitter, politically motivated extreme nationalist lamenting the looming defeat of the German Empire. Omitted by Richards are racial alarms raised by Haeckel of racial catastrophe occasioned by the Allied armies’ use in European warfare of African and Asian troops. ‘Deep students of ethnology and far-sighted statesmen point with anxiety to the grave consequences that are sure to follow this “fraternalization” of all the races both to England herself and the supremacy of the white race as a whole.’ The Allies were tragically oblivious to the fact that the ‘cultural and psychological differences that separate the highest developed European peoples from the lowest savages are greater than the differences that separate the savages from the anthropoid apes.’

After the armistice in November 1918, Haeckel, obsessed with racial concerns and reflecting a long tradition in Monist eugenics about the threat posed to Europe by the exponential growth of the population of the East, complained in a letter to a soldier at the front that he ‘feared that the greatly longed for peace will result in a full reversal of modern culture. Our laughing heirs will apparently be the yellow Mongolians.’

Richards rejects my evaluation (along with that of other historians) of Haeckel and the Nazis, because he claims we advance a ‘mono-causal’ theory. ‘I have objected,’ Richards writes, ‘to the ways in which these historians have attempted to link Haeckel with the rise of the Nazis and the actions of Hitler in particular. They have not, for instance, properly weighed the significance of the main other causal lines that led to the doctrines of National Socialism – the social, political, cultural, and psychological strands that many other historians have emphasized.’

But this criticism of Richards is invalid and is advanced to deflect attention away from Haeckel’s Nazism. It is not that there has been a failure to take into consideration additional contributing factors in

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the rise of National Socialism, but rather that the more conventional explanations have, on the whole, not been successful and have fallen frequently by the wayside after the discovery of new information. The explanations for the rise of National Socialism and Fascism apart from emphasis on Haeckel have had a tendency to break down and this has occurred many times. On the other hand, the connection of Haeckel, National Socialism, and Monist science continually yields more meaningful theoretical results and this approach is confirmed by the latest scholarly research.31

In the very last paragraph of his book Richards reveals how little he grasps about the connection between Haeckel and Nazism. Richards suggests that in the end the Nazis borrowed just a few lines from the eugenic literature of Monism and nothing more; and that, in fact, Haeckel was totally rejected by the Nazis.32 In other words, the substance of Nazism has nothing to do with Haeckel’s Monist program. Such statements bear no relation to a much more complex and contrasting historical truth about the very real connection between Haeckel and Hitler.

Sander Gliboff on Haeckel

There is a palpable resemblance between the shortcomings noted in Richards’ writings and the analysis of Haeckel offered by Sander Gliboff in his book on H.G. Bronn and Haeckel that runs along similar, but equally misleading paths. The book uncannily reflects a retrogressive materialistic-positivistic outlook that used to be fashionable in East German accounts of Haeckel, and a synthetic mode

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31 Though it would have appeared too late for Richards to have cited it, the catalogue for the remarkable exhibition during the summer of 2008 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts demonstrated the critical role that Haeckel and Monism played in the elaboration of twentieth century totalitarian art. If Richards’ summary of the thought of Haeckel were correct, such an exhibition would have been inconceivable. See Jean Clair (ed), The 1930s: The Making of the ‘New Man,’ Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2008.

32 Richards, Tragic Sense of Life, 453. ‘Yet Haeckel, I believe, would have rejected the vulgar and dogma-driven Nazis, just as they rejected him.’ But many Nazis especially in the scientific community and the SS enthusiastically embraced his racial and eugenic ideas and programs. Contrary to Richards’ assertions, the Third Reich did not reach an official consensus regarding Haeckel.
of ‘progressive – German nationalistic’ thought that still continues to attract enthusiastic adherents long after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Gliboff claims that the idealistic tradition in German nineteenth century biology is much more illusion than reality; that Haeckel in fact was a mechanistic materialist and an opponent of determinism and mysticism; that there was a virtual identity between the science of Darwin and Haeckel and that Haeckel’s science was fully integrated into the rational empirical tradition; and that the notion of Haeckel as a major source for National Socialist ideology is based on a deeply flawed reading of his work as pervaded by mysticism. In making these claims that frequently echo the misconceptions of Richards, Gliboff pays little attention to the idealistic details of Haeckel’s science and his Monist philosophy and adds a slew of unproven assertions and ignores vast swaths of material, including both the actual writings of Haeckel as well as the fruits of recent scholarly research into the intellectual history of fin de siècle culture. One would find in the overwhelming amount of material that

33 Just as Richards launched his biography of Haeckel based upon the false premise of a tragic sense of life, Sander Gliboff initiates his book with an untenable declaration that Haeckel rejected determinism and teleology in his science and philosophy. In fact, the very opposite is true. As Haeckel noted: ‘The great struggle between the determinist and the indeterminist ... has ended today in favour of the determinist.’ Or: ‘there is no such thing as chance.’ Ernst Haeckel, The Riddle of the Universe, London: Watts, 1931, 106, 224. Throughout his professional life Haeckel always emphasized that he was absolutely committed to determinism.

34 Gliboff, Bronn, Haeckel, 24. Rejecting the Sonderweg theory of German history which attempted to account for the rise of National Socialism as a consequence of the anti-liberal path followed by Germany in the nineteenth century, Gliboff offers a different interpretation. ‘Applied to biology, Sonderweg logic has traced the deviant path from the “biological determinism” of Haeckel and the earlier idealists to Nazi racial ideology,’ an explanation rejected by Gliboff. The trouble with Gliboff’s formulation of the problem is that Sonderweg theory is hardly germane in this context. Whether Germany had a deviant history from that of other western countries is an interesting theoretical and historiographical problem, but in the case of Haeckel it is possible to empirically demonstrate that his historical, racial, and eugenic ideas were tied to the birth and development of National Socialism. Nothing that Gliboff advances about the ostensibly ‘materialistic’ character of Haeckel’s science and biology does anything to suggest a reformulation of this historical reality.

35 Though, it should be noted, Gliboff rejects Richards’ emphasis on Haeckel’s intellectual roots in German romanticism. On the other hand, Richards is not consistent on this point either, often lapsing into favorable accounts of Haeckel’s materialism.

36 Gliboff does not mention, among many other books and articles, the work of Lynn Gamwell, Exploring the Invisible, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, which explores the theosophical underpinnings of modern art and the specific role of Haeckel in this regard. In other words, there is not a hint of the extensive literature on mysticism and spirituality that exists in fin-de-siècle culture and of their links to Haeckel and Monism. Other relevant works not mentioned by Gliboff are: Laura Bossi, Histoire naturelle de l’âme, Paris: PUF, 2003; and Jean Clair, et al. (eds), Wunderblock. Eine Geschichte der modernen Seele, Vienna: Locker, 1989.

37 It was long ago pointed out by Ernst Cassirer that Haeckel’s purported materialism was actually an idealistic and mystical form of hylozoism. Cassirer wrote: ‘It is manifest that Haeckel’s philosophy of nature had not renounced anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism at all but rather advocated and proclaimed it most decidedly. For everywhere he was trying to grasp and understand the “meaning” of natural events by tracing them back to their
Gliboff fails to take into account explanations by Haeckel that unmistakably contradict all the scientific and monist views that Gliboff attributes to him with such assurance.

In actual fact, at the heart of Gliboff’s analysis – which accept at face value and without adequate historical insight Haeckel’s declarations materialism and his rejection of determinism and teleology – are suppositions that obscure the highly complex and often contradictory impact that Haeckel exercised on late nineteenth and early twentieth century culture and thought. By following the interpretation of Haeckel contrived in the erstwhile German Democratic Republic to meet the demands of a Marxist orthodoxy, Gliboff has failed to detect the most vital historical antecedents of Haeckel’s science and Monism. As a consequence he is unable to decipher Monism’s intellectual milieu, thereby remaining impervious to its essence as well as to the scientific and political repercussions of its basic assumptions.

Gliboff is insensitive to the significance of the widespread resurgence of Monism, both in European materio-mystical thought and well as in literary and artistic modernism, from Symbolism to Art Nouveau, Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism, and beyond that began to emerge after the accelerating decline of Comtean positivism in the decades after 1860. While ostensibly based on popular conceptions of the materialistic laws of nature and heredity, Haeckelian Monism actually represented a rebellion against a purely mechanistic, materialistic, and unfeeling nature, and its idealism and anti-egalitarian tendencies

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38 For example, Haeckel’s mystical works of the 1870s ‘Zellseelen und Seelenzellen,’ and ‘Der Perigenesis der Plastidule,’ [1876] or the later works like Kristallseelen [1917] and Gottnatur (Theophysis) [1914] are not discussed by Gliboff. In addition, since Gliboff also would like to disprove a connection between Haeckel and National Socialism, it is hard to overlook the absence of citations for many of Haeckel’s books and articles that carry radical racist eugenic and Social Darwinist messages.

39 The following discussion of Gliboff’s analysis is based on a summary of the links between Monism and spirituality in my Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology, New York: Peter Lang, 1998 [2008], chapter 2 and passim. The problem with Gliboff’s general analysis is that he attempts to explain Haeckel’s science and biology as rigidly materialistic – on the face of it a seemingly absurd proposition: as if Haeckel was unaware of and did not make any connection between his Monist philosophy and his science or try to qualify his materialism as absolutely based on the synthesis of matter and spirit.
were often interwoven with the aesthetic tendencies that one typically associates with anti-positivistic Symbolism, as well as with the artistic and literary expressions of the avant-garde modernist rebellion against scientific positivism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^{40}\)

Haeckelian Monism revitalized for the modern world the mystical Monism of the pre-Socratics, the hermeticism of Bruno, the pantheism of Spinoza, the romanticism of Goethe, and the idealism of the German *Naturphilosophen*. It was a movement that was identifiable, not so much with the traditions of conventional positivism, materialism, and rationalism that were reflected in the superficial materialistic images of Haeckelian Monism which have been mentioned by Gliboff, but rather, and more importantly, in the astonishing popular recrudescence of age-old hermeticism as a viable intellectual tradition.

Apparently unknown to Gliboff, Haeckel had a seminal influence on the growth of German, Italian, Scandinavian, Russian, and French theosophy and occultism, and his religion of Monism itself can be viewed as an explicit expression of theosophical thought. In addition, Haeckel’s Monism was instrumental in initiating some of the greatest triumphs in modernist literature, painting, sculpture, music, and architecture – and one could add that his ideas became vitally important sources for the crystallization of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical theory and Marxist concepts of totality and scientific determinism, ways of thinking that often tested the boundaries of purely vitalistic interpretations of nature and history.

Gliboff asserts that ‘Haeckel made it clear that the greatest attractions of Darwin’s theory for him were its freedom from teleology and divine intervention, and its promise of substituting scientific understanding for superstitious wonderment.’\(^{41}\) But such statements of Haeckel are misleading. Gliboff fails to examine Haeckel’s self-proclaimed metaphysical intentions, his constant reiteration that his


\(^{41}\) Gliboff, *Bronn, Haeckel*, 159.
materialism always referred to the fusion of matter and spirit, and he neglects to assess the major cultural impact of Haeckel, his basically mystical Monism that mattered the most to Haeckel himself as well as to the majority of his contemporaries who were searching for a scientific rationale to validate their own anti-positivist inclinations.

In all his works, from his *Generelle Morphologie* in 1866, right up to his magnum opus, *The Riddle of the Universe* in 1899, and beyond, until his death in 1919, Haeckel declared evolutionary Monism to be a new secular religious faith that held the absolutely final truth about the nature not only of the biological world, but also of the material cosmos, of man’s existence, of his ‘soul,’ of society, and above all of the unity of these things. Evolution, Haeckel insisted, was a religion not in a metaphorical, but in a literal sense, and he was certain that it would of necessity have to replace Christianity, a Judaic inspired religion rooted in antiquated superstitions and misguided ideals of physical weakness and spiritual otherworldliness that had cast civilization onto inevitably destructive, mistaken, and dangerous cultural paths.

In marked contrast to the transcendental deity of the Jews as existing above and beyond the natural realm, Haeckel’s God was the creative demiurge immanent in the world, the spiritual-and-material sacred ‘substance-and-thought’ or energy that deterministically creates, shapes, and binds into unity the world of nature and the social and historical existence of man.

In the introduction to his religious manifesto of 1892, *Monism as Connecting Science and Religion*, (a work listed by Gliboff in his bibliography, but not discussed in the text), Haeckel makes perhaps the most forceful affirmation of the scientific basis of pantheistic faith conceived in the nineteenth century. He proclaims absolutely – and in total contradiction to Gliboff’s assertions of Haeckel’s materialism – the

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42 Ernst Haeckel, *Monism as Connecting Science and Religion*, Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Reprint Edition, n.d.; 18: ‘Our conception of Monism, or the unity—philosophy ... is clear and unambiguous; for it an immaterial living spirit is just as unthinkable as a dead, spiritless material.’ [1892]
43 Haeckelian Monism, therefore, reflects trends toward the supernatural that are described by Jean Pierrot in *The Decadent Imagination, 1800-1900*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
spiritual basis inhering in all of reality: ‘We unambiguously express our conviction that there lives “one spirit in all things.”’ 45 From his academic perch at the summit of the evolutionary sciences, Haeckel – resoundingly – proclaimed those sciences to be a body of knowledge and whose insights convey to an expectant mankind the ultimate truth that the ‘whole cognizable world is constituted, and has been developed, in accordance with one common fundamental law,’ that of spiritualized Monism.46

Given such declarations, and Gliboff’s unfounded interpretations notwithstanding, it is clear that there is no trace of conventional materialism in Haeckel’s statement that the ‘Monistic idea of God … recognizes the divine spirit in all things’47 Nor can one disregard Haeckel’s heartfelt conviction, so routinely expressed, that ‘God is everywhere,’ that ‘every atom is animated, and so is the ether,’48 or his utterance that ‘ever more irresistibly is it borne in upon us that even the human soul is but an insignificant part of the all-embracing “world-soul.”’49 Gliboff, therefore, should not ignore the fact that Haeckel invariably described the attributes of this divine animate universe in terms that were unreservedly mystical, piously genuflecting before a ‘God’ who was ‘almighty … the single creator, the single cause of all things,’ a ‘God’ who was ‘absolute … the sum of all energy and matter,’ and that Haeckel found the only road to salvation in the philosophy of Monism which ‘alone understands’ the spiritual meaning and religious value of the ‘true unity of God and nature.’50

Gliboff falls short, therefore, by failing to analyze Haeckel’s Monism – by mentioning it, but not trying to understand it. Monism was of overwhelming importance because it was taken by Haeckel as the sole way to arrive at a comprehension of the meaning of evolution, and to solve at long last the perennial riddles that had been at the heart of both Western and Eastern philosophy, the problem of the One and the Many, of the Same and the Other, of Pan in Proteus, and the neo-Platonic and hermetic ‘All in the All.’

45 Haeckel, Monism as Connecting Science and Religion, 3.
46 Ibid, 3.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid, 7.
50 Ernst Haeckel, Generelle Morphologie der Organismen, Berlin: Reimer, 1866,2: 451-452.
The intention of Monism was to overcome the separation of man from nature occasioned by dualistic Christianity and its by-product, Cartesian logic, as well as by modern mechanistic science – the science that Gliboff erroneously assigns to Haeckel – with its damaging industrial and technological creations, indeed by all dualisms be they religious, scientific, cultural, or political.

Haeckel can be more accurately classified among those scientists depicted by the Symbolist art critic, Albert Aurier, in 1892 – the year of Haeckel’s religious and proto-Nazi manifesto, Monism as Connecting Science and Religion – who ‘after having proclaimed the omnipotence of scientific observation and deduction’ return to the ‘most bizarre theogony, the maddest metaphysical reverie.’\textsuperscript{51} In its religious and spiritual devotion, Haeckel’s Monism may be said to have contributed to what Gilbert Durand has termed the ‘return of Hermes,’\textsuperscript{52} of Monistic hermeticism or occultism in the post-positivistic late nineteenth and early twentieth century, rather than to perpetuating the tenets of an increasingly moribund and superficial materialistic positivism.

The \textit{summa} of Monism, as of hermeticism, was the conviction that it had virtually solved the ‘Riddles of the Universe,’\textsuperscript{53} that it had attained a magical unlocking of all secrets, so that Haeckel and the Monists could claim to that of Judaism and Christianity. Accordingly, Haeckel’s belief in spontaneous generation effected in the slime at the bottom of the ocean, and his celebrated Recapitulation Theory, that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,\textsuperscript{54} were not simply materialistic hypotheses as Gliboff mistakenly claims, but the Monist equivalents of the ancient and venerable myths of the origin of life out of darkness and the primeval mud, the transmutation through the process of dissolving and coagulating of one form of matter into another form of matter that was made possible by their shared divine component. – These

\textsuperscript{53} It should be noted that Gliboff, while listing Haeckel’s \textit{Riddle of the Universe} in his bibliography, hardly ever refers to it.
\textsuperscript{54} Gliboff misleadingly explains Haeckel’s Recapitulation Theory to be a wholly mechanical explanation for the process of evolution.
conceptions echoed a multitude of age-old monistic images such as the Great Chain of Being, the integration of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the doctrine of correspondence, as above so below, the eternal return,⁵⁵ and the belief that ‘creation is an ever-renewing process,’⁵⁶ rooted in the irrational and divine forces of blind energy.

Both Haeckelian Monism and hermeticism preached the worship of nature, and both postulated that man in turn was loved by nature. For Monism, as for hermeticism, the world was not perceived to be moving in linear time towards apocalyptic dissolution prior to the creation of a new heaven and earth as in Christianity, but was moving cyclically without beginning and end in the process of eternal renewal. Death was not the culmination but only the beginning of new life forms. Everything was connected so that there could be no thought of a separation between man and nature.⁵⁷ Giordano Bruno, who was worshipped by the Monists (and by the Italian modernists and Fascists for philosophical as well as nationalistic reasons), rejected the Christian idea of creation from nothing and elevated nature, with its capacity for eternal renewal, to the level of a divinity. Lastly, it should be borne in mind that hermeticism and Haeckelian Monism stood apart from the mainstream of traditional Western thought – both clearly desired to offer an alternative vision of the meaning and destiny of life in contrast to the salvation proposed by Christian promise of paradise.⁵⁸

Thus, and in direct contradiction to Gliboff’s view, Haeckel and his followers unmistakably subscribed to an understanding of nature that was almost totally idealistic and vitalistic. For example, one of the better known German Monist authors, Bruno Wille, wrote to Wilhelm Boelsche, Haeckel’s famous biographer and future Nazi adherent, that Haeckelian Darwinism ‘also fits into our idealistic view of

⁵⁵Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, 304. Haeckel’s explanation of the history of the cosmos was in fact based on the theory of the eternal return.
⁵⁷This Monist idea was at the heart of National Socialist ideology.
⁵⁸It is the hermetic background of Haeckelianism that accounts for the pronounced presence of occult elements that historians often detect in Nazi ideology. For an analysis of the links between Nazism and the occult, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935*, Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1985, passim.
nature. Both of us,’ (i.e. Wille and Boelsche) Wille emphasized, ‘are idealists in that we attribute to the
totality of nature a psychic spiritual character.’

In the decades after 1892 Monism gravitated towards increasing contact with the theosophical
movement of Rudolf Steiner. The Steiner theosophists, for their part, declared Haeckel to be among the
most important thinkers of modern times and enthusiastically embraced *The Riddle of the Universe*, as a
theosophist bible. Nor did Haeckel himself resist the advances of the theosophists. Haeckel was
introduced to Steiner and maintained a relationship with him over a number of years and one of Steiner’s
major works, *Welt-und Lebensanschauungen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* [1900], was dedicated to
Haeckel in recognition of the key importance that Steiner attached to his influence.

In a revealing statement about his deep commitment to spirituality, Haeckel once remarked to Rudolf
Steiner: ‘People say that I deny the spirit. I wish they could see how materials shape themselves through
their forces; then they would perceive “spirit” in everything that happens in a retort. Everything there is
spirit.’ To be sure, Haeckel for a time distanced himself from Steiner – who, unlike Haeckel, openly
affirmed the mysticism underlying his own Monism, rather than concealing its mystical underpinnings of
Monism beneath the veneer of a materialist vocabulary as Haeckel did. But the affinities and contacts
between the Monist movement and theosophy continued well into the twentieth century. For example,
many Haeckelian Monists continued to collaborate with the theosophists in Germany, as was documented
some years ago in an instructive exhibition that was held in West Berlin on the subject of German culture
in the year 1900. The Haeckelian Monists joined with the followers of Steiner in the *Giordano Bruno
Bund*, and Steiner, along with the French theosophist Edouard Schuré, logically elevated Haeckel to the

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63 *Berlin Um 1900. Ausstellung der Berlinischen Galerie in Verbindung mit der Akademie der Künste zu den Berliner
64 Ibid, 377.
status of a theosophical prophet and adopted his Monism as the basis of theosophical philosophy. In 1914, in a more explicit resumption of his alliance with theosophical modes of expression and thought, Haeckel published *Gott-Natur [Theophysis]*, a book that does not find its way into Gliboff’s account.

Thus, despite Haeckel’s incontestably able scientific work, his philosophy and religion of science remained part and parcel of the anti-positivist currents of the period, which were marked to various degrees by syncretic mysticism, irrationalism, hermeticism, and the general belief in inexplicable mystery – modes of thought unrecognized by Gliboff and not mentioned either in Peter Bowler’s review of current Darwinian literature.

### The Haeckel Archives’ View of Haeckel and Nazism

After World War II, the city of Jena, the locale of the Haeckel Haus, an archive holding considerable materials reflecting Haeckel’s career became part of the territory of the German Democratic Republic.

As a result, Haeckel, who was an enemy of egalitarian socialism, an admirer of Bismarck and a founding member of the anti-Semitic Pan-German League which advocated the creation of a world-wide Aryan German empire towards the end of the nineteenth century, a confessed sympathizer with anti-Semitism, and a figure venerated by many during the Nazi period as a guiding light for National Socialist

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65 Ernst Haeckel, *Gott Natur [Theophysis]: Studien über monistische Religion*, Leipzig, 1914. Gliboff does mention however a recent sympathetic study of this work by a member of the Max Planck Institute that demonstrates the enduring appeal of Haeckel’s mystical science in Germany. See Bernhard Kleeberg, *Theophysis: Ernst Haeckels Philosophie des Naturganzen*, Cologne, 2005. Kleeberg’s book sustains the positive view of Haeckel that was typical of the former German Democratic Republic and expresses as well the current sentiments some of the staff at the Haeckel Archives at the University of Jena. This book has also been recently republished by Uwe Hossfeld and Olaf Breidbach, staff members of the Haeckel Archives.

66 The fact that Haeckel was a founding member of the Pan-German League does not dissuade Michael Ruse from claiming recently that Haeckel did not subscribe to a theory of *Lebensraum* for Germany. Ruse also finds that any link between Haeckel and National Socialism is ‘ludicrous.’ See Michael Ruse, Review of Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, *The Lancet*, Vol. 371(9611), 9 February 2008, 465.
racial eugenics, was alchemically metamorphosed by the new state into a progressive inspiration for communism. Such, one might suppose, is the cunning of history.

In the GDR, Haeckel was invariably portrayed by the handful of authors who were permitted to write about him as a thoroughly materialistic thinker, committed indefatigably to the pursuit of scientific and philosophical truth. In 1984, the curator of the archive, Dr. Erika Krausse, who continued in her post until her death 2003, published a laudatory biography of Haeckel the materialist thinker, stressing his honored status in East Germany, and revealing nothing at all about Haeckel and the Nazi past.

After the reunification of Germany, the Haeckel Archives were emancipated from state control, but not entirely from the vacuous scholarly tradition that had marked the communist era. An entrenched bureaucracy continued to exert influence, its scholarly work guided by a vision of Haeckel that detached him from any hint of National Socialism and also from a host of other modernist ideologies and cultural traditions. With the ready assistance of an impressive group of academic supporters in many countries, the Haeckel Archives, far from being in the avant-garde of Haeckel scholarship has often been in the forefront of defending Haeckel from the charge of inspiring the birth of Nazi and Fascist ideology. Its many publications seek to reestablish the reputation of Haeckel as it was more than a century ago and to deflect the criticism to which he has been subjected since at least the early 1970s. In the mind set of many on the staff of the Haeckel Archives, the rich and exciting as well as damaging and frightening history of Haeckel and Monism tends to be concealed rather than explored.

See, for example, the perceptive observation of the English historian of science, Philip Ball when reviewing a book on Haeckel’s art – Visions of Nature: The Art and Science of Ernst Haeckel – by the director of the Haeckel Archive, Olaf Breidbach. Ball Notes: “Haeckel provides a case study in the collision between Romanticism and science … [but] Olaf Breidbach’s text to this lovingly produced volume never really gets to grips with that. It has a curiously nineteenth-century flavor itself, declining to grapple with the difficult aspects of Haeckel’s life and work…. Haeckel’s influence on fin-de-siècle German culture was pernicious in its promotion of a “scientific” racist ideology that fed directly into Nazism. That case has been made (by historian Daniel Gasman in particular), and while it can be debated, Breidbach goes no further than to admit that Haeckel became a “biological chauvinist” during the First World War, and that “sometimes the tone of his writing was overtly racist.” Breidbach admits that this is not a biography as such, but an examination of Haeckel’s visual heritage. Yet one could argue that Haeckel’s dark side was a much a natural consequence of his world view as was Art Forms in Nature.” See Philip Ball, ‘Treacherous Beauty,’ Internet Posting, December 18, 2006. This review was subsequently published in Nature, ‘Painting the Whole Picture?’ v.445, 1 Feb. 2007, 486-487. ‘
Consider, for example, a select bibliography published by the Archives dealing with Haeckel and Monism by Heiko Weber: *Monistische und antimonistische Weltanschauung* [2000].

This work was intended as the first volume of series of monographs on the history of the biological sciences and medicine – appearing on the surface, at any rate, like a legitimate scholarly endeavor that would reflect the changed circumstances of the Haeckel Archives since 1989. Along with extensive bibliographical references to Monism covering the entire twentieth century – a labor of impressive proportions – the work also includes a short introductory chapter about the state of Monism around the year 1900, a listing of the founding members of Haeckel’s German Monist League, inaugurated in 1906, and a guide to the branches of an opposing organization, the *Keplerbund*.

On the one hand, the volume includes useful information for historians who wish to probe the structure of Monist and anti-Monist organizations, and does provide an extensive selection of Monist related writings. Yet the book is more marked by what it excludes than by what it contains. The word *Weltanschauung* as employed in the title is a misnomer because the author does not attempt in any detailed way to analyze the intricate implications of what a Monist Weltanschauung might stand for. Weber scarcely blinks an eye at Haeckel’s overwhelming reliance upon Lamarck’s theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics and the mystical tradition of the soul quality of the inorganic world. In this sense, his analysis breaks no new ground, nor does it offer a guide to the complex ideological struggles of the twentieth century.

In addition, the choice of bibliographic citations by Weber discloses revealing lacunae that are obviously intended to direct attention away from Haeckel’s association with the major ideologies of the twentieth century, even though there is an enticing hint of such connections in the book’s introduction. The fact that Haeckel’s ideas seem to have influenced National Socialism, Italian Fascism, Marxism, Revolutionary Syndicalism, and avant-garde Modernism as well as many other important political and

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cultural trends is not mentioned. Rather, Weber timidly relegates Haeckel’s legacy to the narrow realm of that of a positivist scientist working within the confines of a very restricted philosophical and materialistic tradition.

As for the Monist literature published during the Nazi era, Weber is skittish. Heinz Bruecher, a committed Nazi and member of the SS who worked directly for Heinrich Himmler, published a well-known pro-Nazi biography of Haeckel in 1936, but Weber omits this work. The same is true of Wilhelm Boelsche, Haeckel’s principal biographer. While his earlier biography of Haeckel is noted [1909], his Nazi inspired essay on Monist science and society fails to be included. No mention either of the important journal inspired by Haeckel, the Archiv für Rassen-und Gesellschaftsbiologie [1904-1944] which as far back as 1904 was beginning, at least in part, to provide a forum for Nazi-like ideas. Other excluded works are Friedrich Paulsen’s well-known critique of Haeckel’s Riddle of the Universe, ‘Haeckel als Philosoph’ [1900], Stephen Jay Gould’s Ontogeny and Phylogeny [1977], and my Scientific Origins of National Socialism [1971].

For Weber’s book, despite the title, the major cultural and political movements and ideologies of the twentieth century either do not exist or do not count. It is a work, like the general approach of many on the faculty of the Haeckel Archives deliberately edited, with the author’s hand on the delete button whenever a wider context for Haeckel’s ideas makes its presence felt, or when embarrassing aspects of Haeckel’s career surface.

More direct attention to the question of the relationship between Haeckel and National Socialism is given in the many articles and books of a prominent spokesman for the Haeckel Archives, Professor Uwe

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70 Weber does, however, refer to my Ph.D. dissertation ‘Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League: a Study of the Scientific Origins of National Socialism,’ [1969] which serves to obscure the existence of the book that was based on the dissertation.
71 There are, to be sure, important exceptions: for example, the carefully researched book of Susanne Zimmermann, Die Medizinische Fakultät der Universität Jena während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, Berlin: VWB Verlag, 2000.
Hossfeld. On many occasions, Hossfeld, together with colleagues at the Archives, has taken issue with my conclusions about Haeckel as a proto-Nazi and has stressed that Haeckel was neither in general terms a forerunner of Nazism nor an ‘anti-Semitic “precursor” of National Socialism.’ 72 Despite highly detailed research in the history of the biological and anthropological sciences in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including both the Nazi era and the communist period, Hossfeld’s writings on Haeckel are invariably tendentious and, as with Weber, there are frequent exclusions of incriminating material. One always knows in advance, no matter how intricate the material or abundant the footnotes, that Hossfeld’s research will end up seeking to refute the hypothesis of a link between Haeckel and National Socialism. And equally disconcerting, Hossfeld’s writing clearly suffers from an apparent lack of methodological and factual grounding in European intellectual history, which severely restricts his understanding of the many historical subjects that he investigates.73

For example, in a recent article that discusses the question of Haeckel and National Socialism – ‘Haeckel als NS Philosoph?’74 – Hossfeld avoids mentioning any of Haeckel’s own ideas or writings. Instead there is a long investigation of what was said about Haeckel during the Nazi period – to be sure a related issue, but not necessarily germane as to the proto-Nazi content and meaning of Haeckel’s ideas, or whether or not Haeckel was a Nazi philosopher. Summaries of opinions about Haeckel in the totalitarian Third Reich,75 both pro and con are provided, but with little attempt to evaluate the meaning of what was discovered. All the same, Hossfeld does not hesitate to conclude that Haeckel was not a Nazi precursor

72 Steven Wogawa, Uwe Hossfeld, Olaf Breidbach, “‘Sie ist eine Rassenfrage.” Ernst Haeckel und der Antisemitismus,’ in Dirk Preuss, Uwe Hossfeld, Olaf Breidbach (Hg), Anthropologie nach Haeckel, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006; 233.
73 For example, Professor Hossfeld, along with director of the Haeckel Archives, Olaf Breidbach, enthusiastically endorsed the hardcover edition of Robert Richards’ flawed Tragic Sense of Life, calling into question the depth of their knowledge and scholarly objectivity about Haeckel. Nick Hopwood, whose review of Richards’ Tragic Sense of Life was mentioned above [ft. 5] recommends Hossfield’s research as confirming that Haeckel was not a precursor of Nazism; ‘Darwinism’s Tragic Genius,’ 866. Hopwood praises Hossfeld’s work that denies that Haeckel’s links to Nazism, but does not mention that Hossfeld does nonetheless concede that Haeckel was in fact an anti-Semite.
75 I have discussed at greater length the issue of problems connected to the evaluation of ideas in a totalitarian setting in my Internet Rejoinders to Richards; See Ferris.edu/ISAR/Gasman Controversy.
because his reception in the Third Reich was confused. The only thing that emerges from his research is that the Third Reich did not develop a clear idea as to where Nazism as an ideology came from.

Likewise, Hossfeld concedes that Haeckel was anti-Semitic but not really of the National Socialist variety because he advocated the assimilation of the Jews in Germany, not their actual physical destruction. Hossfeld, however, misses the point because Haeckel, in demanding total assimilation, wanted the disappearance of the Jews, like the Nazis later on, and this is the crux of the matter. And more broadly what Hossfeld fails to grasp is that it was Haeckel’s repudiation of the humanistic values of Western Civilization that marked Haeckelian Monism as fundamentally anti-Semitic, leading it to provide a basic ideological justification for the later Nazi assault on the Jews, for the Nazi conviction that the Jews constituted a highly threatening anti-natural and anti-evolutionary force, an inferior, yet superior biological race that had to be defeated at all costs. Haeckelian Monism was intrinsically anti-Semitic because it postulated that the Jews, as the creators of the Monotheistic God, were invidiously responsible for the religions of transcendental dualism into Western history, and were especially culpable for the unfortunate invention of Christianity which had culminated in the rapid decline of European society in modern times.

Not mentioned by Hossfeld is the notoriously anti-Semitic book, the *Campagne nationaliste* [1902] by Haeckel’s disciple and translator into French, Jules Soury. In this work, an avant-garde version of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Soury spells out in great detail the connection of the science and metaphysics of Haeckel’s Monism with a highly radical form of anti-Semitism that literally advocated the need for the

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76 When Haeckel advocated the assimilation of the Jews into German society he did not intend the Jews to adopt German culture and ways of life and yet remain an organized religious community practicing Judaism. Assimilation for Haeckel meant literally the total disappearance of the Jews from German life and some prominent Monists in fact, adopting a position more radical than that advanced by Haeckel, advocated the actual physical destruction of the Jews.

77 The issue of Haeckel and the Jews is discussed by me at greater length in my ‘Rejoinders’ to Professor Richards; Ferris.edu/ISAR/ Gasman Controversy
physical destruction of the Jews. Works such as these never enter into Hossfeld’s investigation of Haeckel.  

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the inaccuracies and political and intellectual crossovers outlined here that have become commonplace in current studies on Haeckel will be more fully discussed in future analyses of the literature on Darwinism.

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78 For a discussion of the meaning of Soury’s Monism and anti-Semitism, see Gasman, *Haeckel’ Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, chapter 3. See also Chapter 4 for a discussion of the close connection between Haeckel and the notorious anti-Semitic writer, Georges Vacher de Lapouge.