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Welcome to this episode of *Sociology Studies of Society*. Today's lesson is on Social Darwinism. As always, don't be afraid to pause, stop, rewind, or even fast forward to make sure get the most out of this tutorial.

Now Social Darwinism is not something you'll hear sociologists apply currently and say they are firm believers in, but it has an important place in the historical understandings and underpinnings of sociology, so we're going to take a couple of minutes today and, hopefully, understand what Social Darwinism is.

So to really understand Social Darwinism, you first have to understand what Darwinism. So what is Darwinism? Well, Darwinism came from Charles Darwin in his famous book *On the Origins of Species*. It was written about 150 years ago. And the basic argument that Charles Darwin made was that evolution happens in animals because of natural selection. And what happens is natural selection gradually changes animals and changes, specifically, traits within animals to become the traits to become more common or less common within a species. And these changes happen because of competition, specifically competition for limited resources.

So let me give you an example. Webbed feet. Ducks have webbed feet. Now Charles Darwin would argue that ducks have webbed feet because of natural selection. The trait of webbed feet is much more common, in fact, almost all ducks have webbed feet now, because it helps ducks swim better, and ducks that were able to swim to the food faster were more likely to reproduce, and if they're more likely to reproduce, they're more likely to pass on the trait. And gradually, over time, all or most ducks have webbed feet. So that's natural selection, and that's really what Darwinism is all about, that gradual evolution of traits becoming more salient or less salient because of the competition.

So what is Social Darwinism, then? Well, Social Darwinism was coined by Herbert Spencer. He was alive at the same time as Charles Darwin. He actually read Darwin's book, and he was the one who came up with the term "Survival of the Fittest." And what he did is he applied the Darwin theories of evolution and natural selection, and he applied them to human society. And what he saw was that society was the organism, and natural selection, that competition, was happening for society as a whole for humans.

And the strong in a society deserve to be strong because they're better. They've earned it. And it's

actually better for society that the strong are strong because those traits we passed on in our human society and the weak in our society, it's best for humans as a whole, as a society, if they don't do well and they don't continue.

And because of these ideas, Herbert Spencer really believed in two main functions and ways you could apply Social Darwinism. First thing is that the government should not interfere in competition. Specifically, he's talking about competition between businesses mainly, but the idea is that competition is what makes natural selection work. And if the governments step in, and put regulations in, and limit competition, well, then, that will weaken society as a whole because you're stopping what nature wants to happen to make human society the strongest.

The other component that Herbert Spencer argued was that humans actually have to not be charitable. They have to resist their urge to have humanistic impulses. And it's for the same reasoning. If you're giving money to the poor, you're interfering with nature's natural way of making species stronger, and the social struggle for existence is what's going to make the human race and the human society even stronger and even better.

So where does that leave us today? As I mentioned at the top of the video, as a theory of sociology, the idea of social Darwinism, sociologists do not believe in it. It's been debunked. But it's still an important term to know. Very recently, actually, it's been co-opted by, in the last 50 years or so, a couple different groups, namely the Nazis and fascism. And they use Social Darwinism in their argument for their policies, that there is a master race out there, and that they deserve and it's actually better for human society if we get rid of the weak races and build up the strong races.

The quote you see on the screen there, "All life is a struggle" is actually a slogan from Hitler and one of the ways that he spread this belief. You know, all life is a struggle, and it's supposed to be a struggle because the struggle is what makes us strong. It gets rid of the weak and lets the strong continue on, and that will make it better for everyone.

Social Darwinism is still actually used also as a way to justify inequalities, that idea that the strong deserve to be strong. Like, might is right. That fits in with Social Darwinism. Again, you won't really find many sociologists arguing for that, but you will see other maybe political organizations or other groups argue that, other individuals even argue that.

It's also another way that people support laissez-faire economics. Laissez-faire economics is a French term, and it means hands-off-- like, literally means hands-off economics, so that idea that the government should not intervene with the economy because the competition is what is good. And

that natural competition for business firms is what's going to make business firms better and thus make our society stronger. So that was Social Darwinism. Hopefully, you've learned about it, and its historical precedents, and where the term is now.