

Indeed, it could be argued, *contra* Vernon, that the period up to the 1840s at least was a democratizing experience for ordinary men and women, arrested only in the years of triumphal liberalism that succeeded it. To readjust Vernon's chronology in this way would also cause one to reflect upon the constraints upon democratic space in this period. Vernon makes much of the constraining forces of party, and much more implausibly, the constraining influence of print. He routinely downplays the role of the state and the law in de-legitimizing radical democratic activity, despite the impressive evidence to the contrary. To suggest that this battery of sanctions was ineffectual because it did not stem the flow of "seditious" writings and speeches is to overlook the ingenuity and courage of radical printers and leaders in evading or defying the law, and the real constraints that such legislation placed upon democratic debate and organization. Eileen Yeo's account of the way in which the corresponding societies act influenced democratic practice within the Chartist movement, published in *The Chartist Experience* over a decade ago, is a telling reminder of the power of the state to define the parameters of political citizenship.

I do not wish to be unduly critical of this book. There are some useful sections on political and architectural space, upon Tory traditions of sociability, upon local hero-worship and its permutations particularly with respect to the Cobbettite tradition in Oldham. The chapter on the discourse of popular constitutionalism deserves close reading, not only because it gives a good sense of the eclecticism of the radical tradition, but because it ably reveals the melodramatic tropes of constitutionalist narratives. It should, however, be read alongside James Epstein's recent *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford University Press, 1994), which attempts to encode these narratives in a class context. Vernon predictably cavils at this, so anxious is he to exorcise "that illusory beast 'working-class radicalism' " (p. 328) from the political history of the period. This is a book that continually attempts to write class out of the nineteenth century, on the central premise that popular constitutionalism was always capable of a multiplicity of readings, was too fluid and indeterminate to serve as a class discourse. I am not convinced by this reasoning, nor by procedures that see language as constitutive of reality without being shaped by it. Others may be.

Nicholas Rogers  
York University

Paul Crook — *Darwinism, War and History: The Debate over the Biology of War from the "Origin of Species" to the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. ix, 306.

The basic question posed by this rich, intriguing study is whether there emerged, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an alternative Darwinian legacy that legitimized peace and mutual aid rather than pugnacity, war, and racist imperialism culminating in the slaughter of 1914–1918. It is Paul Crook's contention that a mythology of Darwinism as an explanation for human bellicosity has tended to

obscure an equally compelling tradition of “peace biology” that sanctioned cooperative, civilized non-violence as the highest form of evolutionary progress.

This interpretation is rooted in an extensive reading and penetrating analysis of the published works of a host of well-known as well as forgotten scientific and social theorists, primarily in Britain and America, but also in France, Germany, and Italy. Their ideas about the interaction of biology and the evolution of human nature and society were, Crook argues, culturally and ideologically conditioned by the rapid competitive and often confrontational internal and external economic, political, and intellectual changes that were transforming the Western world in the decades before the Great War.

Among the most pervasive of these ideas, challenged by recent revisionist historiography, was that Darwinism posited a biologically deterministic explanation of human behaviour as essentially competitive and warlike. In its most extreme form, Crook writes, the Darwinian elevation of the Victorian concept of struggle not only justified a ruthless, *laissez-faire* capitalism, but aggressive militarism, imperialism, and authoritarianism as inevitable, even necessary manifestations of primitive adaptation to the challenges of survival.

Crook devotes a good deal of space to describing the Darwinian legacy and the way it was altered by the new biology with its rejection of Lamarckianism and its elevation of genetic explanation and new theories of hereditary causation. Though the biologizing of social thought in some ways reinforced the more belligerent interpretations of the human condition, in other ways, primarily through the emergence of “peace eugenics”, it invigorated optimistic theories of cultural evolution in tune with Darwin’s own holistic ecology that stressed human capacity to control nature and transcend natural selection.

A central feature of peace biology, which Crook skilfully weaves through his narrative, was the conviction that, far from being racially beneficial, war in the modern age was disastrously dysgenic. It killed off the most splendidly endowed products of evolution, a conviction reinforced by the enormous losses of the First World War. The effects of that war on theories of peace biology were traumatic but, as Crook stresses in his final chapters, not fatal. Despite the disillusionment brought on by the war and the myth of the lost generation it created, peace biologists, reinforced by the new Mendelian genetics, remained sceptical that aggression was permanently rooted in human nature rather than socially determined and, as culture continued to evolve, preventable.

The main thrust of peace biology as it developed from Darwin himself, as well as such disciples as Thomas Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace, was to suggest, as Crook emphasizes, that through cultural evolution humans were progressively able to transcend their genes. Much of the book is taken up with the course of the debate between those who found in Darwinism the evidence for such an interpretation and those who continued to believe in the reductionist determinism of biological causation. It is a dispute that continues today in the arguments between sociobiologists, sociologists, and ethologists.

Indeed much of this engrossing study speaks to the contemporary scene, as it traces the origins a century ago of the Darwinian-inspired debate over the nature of

human and animal aggression. The author effectively demonstrates the multifarious ways in which Darwin's theories were translated into a wide spectrum of recurring political and social discourse, ranging from issues of peace and war to the relative contribution of nature and nurture, or instinct and learned behaviour. Crook's thesis, that Darwinism bred an influential tradition of non-violence, is, as he rightly notes, hardly congruent with the familiar textbook scenario that *The Origin of Species* unleashed primarily harsh and divisive, conflict-based social doctrines. In this sense Crook's work is an important contribution to recent revisionist scholarship which places the origins of Darwinism in the context of historically specific intellectual and moral paradigms. Peace biology, he contends, found a more congenial following in Britain and America than it did, for example, in Germany, because it conformed more closely to pervasive social and moral values.

The principal strength of his book is the careful, comparative textual analysis that characterizes Crook's treatment of the ideas he examines. Methodologically this is first-rate, old-fashioned, intellectual history, which means it is both readable and comprehensible. On occasions, a parade of lesser-known characters detracts from the narrative flow of argument, but this is a minor concern in a book that adds so much to our understanding of the origins of controversial, modern sociobiological thought.

Richard A. Soloway  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

J. C. D. Clark — *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xviii, 404.

Jonathan Clark's new book, *The Language of Liberty*, is a vast survey of law, religion, English and colonial American notions of sovereignty, and the impetus to rebellion in America. As such it is a complex work, nonetheless notable for a few major themes: the division in English and American understandings of natural and common law; the breakdown (failure to appear) of the Anglican confessional state in the American colonies; the importance of Christian heresy in America for engendering doctrines of violent rebellion; the susceptibility of Dissenting Protestant sects to Christological heresy and therefore to rebellious ideology; and the distance between American rebel rhetorical professions of rights and grievances and the underlying denominational motor of rebellion. It is an impressive agenda of inquiry, and Clark handles each topic with considerable skill. There are some missteps. For example, readers interested in J. P. Greene's critique of Clark's arguments concerning natural and common law should consult Greene's long review of *Language of Liberty* in the June 10, 1994, issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*. The cogency of these criticisms aside, however, there remains a terrible gap in the review literature surrounding Clark's work.

Since the release of *Language of Liberty*, Clark frequently has been accused (or