

Opinion

The Strange Question of Species: Biocratic Implications in Interwar Paleoanthropology

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ABSTRACT: Species was one of the most controversial concepts in biological science. Not even the “New Systematics” of the 1930s and 1940s succeeded in bringing complete clarity to the issue. During the first half of the twentieth century the conceptualization of species was challenged by paleontology, a then-emerging discipline, but an ancient essentialist conception resisted, whereby each species is characterized by its own immutable essence (*eidōs*). This simplification was transferred to physical anthropology in the study of human populations, with further cultural and political outcomes. For example: the meaning of species developed a series of biopolitical and legal implications regarding the construction of a society preserved from foreign dangerous bodies. From this perspective, the racial policy of the Third Reich established that the German national community was to be based on belonging to a same species (*Art*), from which Jewish population was excluded, considering it an alien species (*Artfremd*) and therefore incompatible. The concept of species, defined from an essentialist perspective, was in fact considered more differentiating and selective than that of “race”. Consequently, foreignness to the human species became a more radical distinguishing factor than racial classification. The article, with a focus on German academia, aims to reconstruct the debate in paleoanthropology during interwar period.

Keywords: Species; Race; Human populations; Polygenism; Essentialism; Biocracy; Eugenics; Nazi regime



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1. Introduction

The definition of species was particularly debated in a recent past. Cultural and social factors influence the representation of science in each historical period [1,2]. During the Third Reich (1933–1945) on the concept of species was based a biopolitical discussion concerning the Nazi refoundation project of the German national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), because the notion of “racial allogeneity” was deemed insufficient in the multifaceted social and demographic framework of modern Germany.

In the early 20th century, biopolitics was related to an organic representation of the state, as a premise in the refoundation of society. The modern state was seen as a living organism, where social events and changes could be planned and directed through special “therapies” ([3] pp. 6–7). Within the process of *Gleichschaltung*, i.e., the alignment of German society to Nazi ideology, Third Reich’s biopolitical vision was planned to control every social process, defining the biological future of Germany and, in case of Nazi military victory, of all Europe [4]. The groundwork was laid for a generalized immunization of the nation’s body against all “social pathogens”. Every institutional, social, cultural, scientific sector was involved in this planning [5].

Consequently, Nazi regime promoted what I have defined a process of “genopoiesis,” that is, the manipulation and redefinition of human condition [6], starting inside the family seen as a biosocial laboratory [7]. The purpose was the hardening and the preservation of the supposed biological inheritance in German people.

In 1935, two hundred years after the first edition of Carl Linnaeus’ work *Systema Naturae*, the Nuremberg Laws (*Nürnberger Gesetze*, 15 September 1935) revised the taxonomy of the genus *Homo*. Indeed, Nazism introduced not only into legislation and legal literature, but also into scientific and everyday language, the concept of “sameness of species” (*Artgleichheit*) as the basis of constitutive biological homogeneity which had to characterize German people:

the *Volk* [8–10]. By this way, ontological unity of humans defined by Linnaeus, Buffon and Kant, and reaffirmed by Charles Darwin, was broken.

This arbitrary conception of the human species had precedents in the polygenism of Paul Broca (1824–1880). Broca was the father of French physical anthropology, and author of the essay *Mémoires sur l'hybridité en general, sur la distinction des espèces animales* (1858–1859), published in the *Journal de la physiologie de l'homme et des animaux* in the same year of Darwin's *The Origins of Species* (1859). Broca was opposed to the concept of interbreeding among biological populations because it would have compromised the vision of an ordered and determined nature. He considered also interbreeding among human races not always fertile. Racist style polygenism found in Broca an influential advocate by questioning the ontological unity of the genus *Homo* set by classical naturalists. The topic of polygenism, thanks to emerging biblical criticism debate and in the light of ethnographic observations after the explorations of the New World, had been already proposed two centuries earlier by the French Calvinist Isaac La Peyrère. In his work *Praeadamitae* (1655), he theorized the existence of other human beings before Adam, thus hypothesizing a polygenetic origin of mankind. Therefore, a part of humanity wouldn't have been descended from the biblical first man and consequently touched by original sin. This vision of purity lent itself in the following centuries to various instrumentalizations, including racist ones [11].

German academia after 1933 was a suitable context for this kind of instrumentalization. In 1937 the German Anthropological Society was renamed “German Society for Racial Research” (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenforschung*). So, it was directed to lend scientificity to the Nazi political choices [5]. In fact, most German anthropologists had quickly joined the Nazi Party (NSDAP: National-sozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei). This decision caused a rapid drift of conceptual categories in the anthropological discipline. The close contiguity of German physical anthropology to zoology, ethology, and botany favored the application to humankind of functional traits specific of the animal and plant world, including the concept of species.

Also, the concept of “race” (*Rasse*) in German anthropology didn't find a defined conceptual location. It was often associated by Nazi vocabulary with the concept of “people.” The racist writer Hans F.K. Günther (1891–1968) in his “best-seller” *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*, argued that also German people, like other European peoples, possessed a hybrid character, being the result of the crossbreeding of different “races”: Nordic, Alpine, Phalian, Dinaric, East-Baltic, and Mediterranean. In practice, Germans were “mixed-race”, but at the same time Günther placed the Nordic race at the top of their “racial qualities,” preferring it terminologically to the so-called “Aryan.” [12]. Germans were considered the “dominant people” (*Herrenvolk*) as the expression of an exclusive racial vocation and biological selection. In this way, every people could have a ‘qualitative’ meaning derived from zootechnician language, as in the case of racial value (*Rassenwert*) to be improved through social policies. Philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote that in the Nazi regime doubting the racial value of the individual was tantamount to doubt *the existence of the world* [13].

2. Human Origins and “Racial Essence”

The term “Art” (Species) in German indicates the specific nature or essence of someone or something and it is synonymous with “Spezies”. It was used similarly in the field of animal husbandry to denote the category proper to the “human type”, “of German or related blood” as stated in Nazi legislation [14]. The concept of “Artgleichheit” thus seemed to surpass that of “racial affinity,” which was challenged by various currents of “racist thought” as well as by Darwinist physical anthropologists that since the late nineteenth century denied the existence of a “German race” as well as a “Jewish race” [15]. Otto Reche (1879–1966), director of the Departments of Anthropology at the University of Vienna and then the University of Leipzig, wrote that “Art” indicated a kind of “subspecies,” that is, a broader classification of the racial group, such as, for example, the so-called “European dolichocephalic races” that included “Nordic,” “Phalian,” and “Mediterranean” types [16]. According to the anthropologist and physician Karl Saller (1902–1969), professor at the University of Göttingen, who criticized the concept of the Nordic race as a “fixed biological entity,” the development of new races (*Rassenentstehung*) was comparable to the development of new species (*Artwerdung*), because a new race is a step toward a new species [15].

However, all these terminological solutions revealed a function not so much epistemological but rather political and ideological. Academic debates and struggles among the various German anthropological schools led to these fragile classificatory conclusions, reflected the cultural vision serving the biopolitics of Nazism. Indeed, a separation between fields of research was often ignored, accumulating in haphazard manner experiences and interpretations of anthropologists, racial hygienists, and psychiatrists.

This obsessive research for human roots, to which referring an unchanged “racial” essence, considered the latest findings of paleoanthropology. Concerning the origins of mankind, German paleoanthropology in interwar period emphasized how it was more appropriate to assume the genesis of man not from a single strain (*Stammbaum*), but from a bush (*Busch*) with branching roots [17]. It is not difficult to find an influence of polygenism in this position. The study of prehistory also naturally flowed into the variegated “doctrine of race”, trying to elaborate epistemological credibility. In academic texts as well as in popular science literature, “races and species” were sometimes mentioned together. Thus, the two terms were confused, as it already happened in the naturalistic literature of the 18th century [18,19]. Races and species were described as originated from a single monophyletic strain located in an unspecified place on earth and then spread to different geographical and climatic contexts. The German anthropologist and racial hygienist Hans Weinert (1887–1967) (Figure 1), dealing with the ancestors of modern humanity (*Urmenschen*) in their continental varieties, admitted that the anthropological designations of Species (*Art*) and Race (*Rasse*) constituted “oscillating concepts” (*schwankende Begriffe*) [20]. In 1936 Weinert published a description of the Steinheim skull, discovered at Steinheim an der Murr in Germany by the owner of a gravel pit in July 1933. The skull (*Homo neanderthalensis* or *Homo heidelbergensis*) possessed a mixture of Neanderthal and modern human features [21]. Weinert argued that the cranium was from a female individual with the retention of juvenile traits. In 1932 Weinert had even speculated on the possibility of hybridization of an African pygmy with a female chimpanzee [22]. Indeed, the species question had fuzzy contours, ideological too. Contemporary biology established that races are “open systems” from a genetic point of view; differently, species are “closed systems” [23]. Theodosius Dobzhansky (1900–1975) wrote that races are *incipient species*, because they may perhaps continue to diverge from each other, becoming distinct species [23].

This “uncertainty” about human origins from a taxonomic point of view was based on the theoretical creativity of leading research exponents. In fact, they tried to fix the few available pieces of a complex evolutionary mosaic. The German anatomist and paleontologist Hermann Klaatsch (1863–1916) (Figure 2), disciple of the anatomist Carl Gegenbaur (1826–1903) aligned with the polygenist biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), proposed “a theory in which not only were the human races quite distinct from each other, but all of humanity was distinct from the other primates.” He hypothesized through comparative anatomy that humans and other “higher primates” were the result of “different evolutionary lines, independently derived from prosimians” ([24] pp. 119–120). Later Klaatsch developed “a scheme of evolutionary polygenism that incorporated different ape species *within* human racial lineages,” resulting ancestrally to different anthropoids, whereby the same “great apes” descended in various areas of the world from “human lineages” ([24] p. 120; p. 125).

Klaatsch used fossil findings for his model. According to it two main primitive lineages would have derived from an ancestral stock in Australia: Asian lineage and European lineage. The former lineage would have given rise to the orang-utans and Asian humans (and later to Europeans), from which would have descended the Aurignacian Sapiens (i.e., Cro-Magnons, according to the terminology of the time). Aurignacians would have replaced in the Paleolithic period Neanderthals, descended (like African “races” and African apes) from the primitive European lineage (characterized, according to Klaatsch, by “degenerate characteristics”) ([24] pp. 125–126). In this way Klaatsch harmonized his polygenism with a linear conception of evolutionary progress. In his view Australians “were the European past, frozen in time” ([24] p. 126). So Klaatsch considered Neanderthal as a distinct species of the genus *Homo* ([24] p. 120). Hans Weinert, on the other hand, identified the most recent common ancestor of man and anthropoid apes in the so-called *Dryopithecus germanicus*, lived in the Miocene, a period when the first stages of hominization through the possession of fire by “ape-men” would have occurred in central Europe. Then “ape-men” migrated to Java, the cradle of the better-known *Pithecanthropus* [25].

A debated issue was the relationship between Neanderthals (*Homo primigenius*, as it was also called in the early twentieth century) and Cro-Magnons. It was argued that a “race” technologically advanced as Neanderthals, but with primitive morphological traits, could not have made an evolutionary “leap” to a form of another genus [17]. Wilhelm Gieseler (1900–1976), professor of racial biology at Tübingen and paleoanthropologist in the postwar period, adhering to the view of Gustav Schwalbe (1844–1916)—an anthropologist that influenced Klaatsch—did not hesitate to see Neanderthal as a “particular species” (*eine besondere Art*) of the genus (*Gattung*) *Homo*. It remained to be determined, however, where this species came from, although the temporal succession in Europe of these human forms might have suggested that Sapiens forms evolved from Neanderthals, as hypothesized by the German anthropologist Franz Weidenreich (1873–1948) [26] quoted by Gieseler ([27] pp. 26–46). But the morphological robustness of Neanderthals compared to the gracility of Sapiens contrasted with this hypothesis. Gieseler observed that it was more logical an hypothetical common ancestral form of the two species outside Europe ([27] pp. 161–162).



Figure 1. Hans Weinert, director of the Institute of Anthropology at the University of Kiel (1935).



Figure 2. Hermann Klaatsch, professor of anatomy and anthropology at the University of Breslau.

Seventy years later, in 2010, Svante Pääbo and his collaborators of the Department of Evolutionary Genetics at Max-Planck-Institut in Leipzig published a preliminary version of the complete Neanderthal genome. It showed that the Neanderthal genes had been passed on to people whose genetic roots are outside Africa, indicating hybridization of Neanderthals with modern humans during their spread out of Africa [28–30].

The issue of Neanderthals, as a model of ‘primitive’ and unevolved humanity, has also been dwelled upon in popular science publications, abetted by a certain rhetoric about the *outsider of the species*. Neanderthal has been viewed with suspicion and therefore easily removed, through genocide or climate change, from the family tree of modern humans. And this happened perhaps in the name of a sort of prejudice difficult to eradicate [31]. Despite the recent paleogenetic evidence, the status of another human species resists regarding Neanderthal. In short, Neanderthal remains, despite its ‘kinship’ with *Homo sapiens sapiens*, an unsurpassed *otherness* [32]. So, also nowadays, species remains a ‘strange question’ with cultural implications.

Topic of discussion in interwar years was the question of so-called “original homeland” (*Urheimat*) of human “races” ([33] pp. 181–182). German researchers were generally aware that primacy didn’t belong to Europe. Analyses of the then known European fossil finds (Aurignac, Cro-Magnon, Combe-Capelle, etc.) were juxtaposed with those conducted on living populations, attempting to establish morphological comparisons, and finally asserting that main “European races” had found their premise as early as the Paleolithic ([33] pp. 381–382, [34]). Jewish population in this unclear scenario was sometimes defined by researchers as a “subrace”: *Unterrasse* ([33] p. 390). Despite paucity of information, there was a fragile ‘anthropological bridge’ between Archaic Europe and “New Europe” based on the ideological prejudices associated with the “blood myth” and Nazi propaganda. The attempt was to demonstrate the morphologically distinct and homogeneous nature of Jewish population, classified as being of foreign species and as

such incompatible with the German nation. However, a Jewish racial typology could not be defined since its composite physiognomy had been demonstrated. So, it was assumed its extraneousness to the phyletic line of humankind. This was aided by the indeterminacy of paleontological taxonomy in relation to the transitions from one stage of hominization to another, especially regarding *Homo sapiens*. For example, in the large family of Archaic Sapiens, from the 1920s and 1930s to the present, the presence of phylogenetically distinct groups could not be ruled out ([35] pp. 154–158). After all, mankind, as Dobzhansky wrote after World War II, was always various, never uniform, and modern humans from the earliest times were driven by a colonizing instinct that led them to move to a variety of environmental contexts, thereby fostering a dispersal of gene flows. Since wide is the genetic difference between species, a new species cannot arise by mutation of a single individual at a certain place and time, but rather by the gradual accumulation of genetic differences and, finally, by the sum of many mutational steps at different places and times. For this reason, too, concluded Dobzhansky, it was almost impossible to try to determine when and where our species originated [23].

3. Polygenism and Reductionism

Racist reductionism, with its attempt in explaining humans deterministically, has ancient precedents. Linnaeus opened a new chapter in the natural sciences by naming mankind and proposing its place in the “natural system”: i.e., order *Anthropomorpha*, later called *Primates*. Linnaeus in *Observationes in regna tria naturae* (1735) defined the set of biological axioms contributing to the theory of species fixity. The Swedish naturalist, who over the years set out to identify the trait that distinguished humans from anthropomorphic apes, observed lacking constant characters to exclude them from belonging to the same genus, but certainly in not belonging to the same species [36]. He affirmed the mental and spiritual superiority of humans, although this condition presented relevance as a “result,” that is, as a greater “power” of the human species, not a typical character [36]. In Linnaeus, species in nature were in fact invariable ontic units [37]. Linnaeus discerned in God’s creation the origin of such *creative unities*, as the primordial expression of that divine wisdom which had similarly inspired, almost a century earlier, the reflections of the English naturalist and theologian John Ray (Figure 3), author of *The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691). Ray wrote in *The Wisdom* (edition: Harbin: Glasgow, 1758, p. 287): «These several ranks and degrees of creatures are subservient one to another; and the most of them serviceable, and all, some way or other, useful to man; so that he could not well have been without them. God made these several orders and degrees, and in each degree so many varieties of creatures, for the manifestation and displaying of his infinite power and wisdom». John Ray was also the author of an early biological definition of species in his work *Historia plantarum* (Clark: London, 1691). It was based on the criterion of repetition in each organism of precise morphological characteristics, such that animals that differ specifically from one another retain this dissimilarity permanently. This indicated how no species could generate itself from another. Unity in descent corresponded to the possibility or otherwise of hybridization among humans. This view influenced the *principle of the invariability of races*, conditioning the image of humans based on whether they physically belonged to a particular human group [37]. French naturalist Georges de Buffon believed this classification as an expression of a conventional idea opposed to the concept of “nature in itself,” which was universal in aim [37]. From the permanence or not of intraspecific characters in human varieties (originally different species or “races”?) derived the currents of monogenists (with Linnaeus, Buffon, Kant, or J.F. Blumenbach, who introduced the concept of “degeneration”) and polygenists (with Forster, Meiners, and Voltaire) [36].

In German academia, polygenism had between nineteenth and twentieth centuries the authoritative endorsement of the well-known biologist and zoologist Ernst Haeckel (Figure 4), a pupil of the famous pathologist Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902) and advocate of the anthropological conception for which each human race constituted *a separate species*: a view undoubtedly anticipatory of the anti-Semitic legislative dictate of the 1930s. Haeckel considered racial differences to be “equivalent to species differences in other animals,” as representing in his view “different evolutionary stages”. This view, however, did not prevent him from believing that interfertility was possible among humans as in different animal species ([24] pp. 133–135). He explained in a book the “enigmas of the world” (*Die Welträtsel*, 1899) including the so-called missing link *Affenmensch*, or *Pithecanthropus alalus*: “devoid of language.” Haeckel had no hesitation in asserting that in humankind the life of the “inferior races,” being considered “psychologically” close to primates and mammals, should be accorded a different value [38]. Weinert seemed to take distance from Haeckelian polygenism. In a book published in 1944 he noted that if occasionally races, or “subspecies” (*Unterarten*), into which mankind is divided, were also described as “species” (*Arten*), this was to be interpreted as a simple matter of terminology and not as a challenge to humans’ unity ([20] p. 280).

Haeckel’s polygenism effectively disavowed what Georges-Louis de Buffon stated in his *Histoire naturelle de l’homme* (1749) at the end of the chapter devoted to the “Varieties of the Human Species.” Buffon denied that humans

consisted of “essentially different species,” arguing for their belonging to a single species spread over the earth and formed by “varieties” (i.e., the races) resulting from the transmission of individual differences. In Buffon’s view, in fact, the human species distributed all over the planet’s surface, underwent changes due to climate, lifestyles, diseases, and mixing among individuals. In the beginning, these were individual varieties, then transformed into species’ varieties, general and constant [39]. Buffon provided a bluntly biological and truly modern definition of species based on copulation and transmission of hereditary traits. In Buffon, therefore, race was not product of an essence, fixed and immutable. In his article *Humaine (Espèce)* for the *Encyclopédie* (1765) he identified the species as the mutable outcome of hereditary processes conditioned by the environment, and this in a way disjointed from monogenism. In Buffon was also present an “organicist” vision. The “living matter” was not regarded as an “inert extension” but endowed with an “organic ‘force’ irreducible to the mere transmission of movement” ([40] p. 41). In fact, along the chain of generations unfolded the movement of the living world.

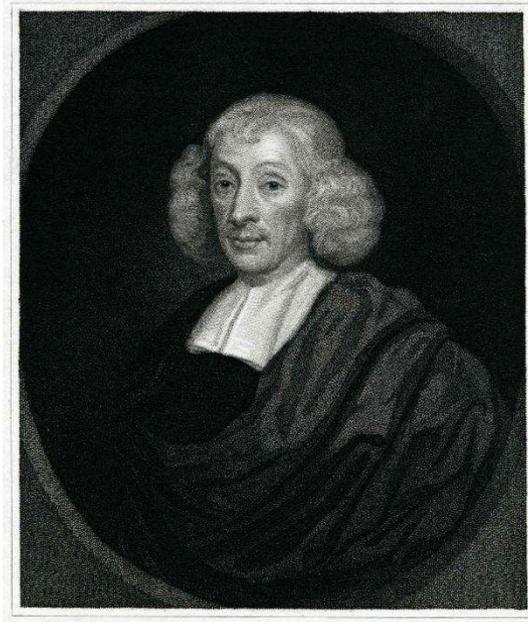


Figure 3. Portrait of the English naturalist John Ray, engraved by Hans Mayer (XIX century).

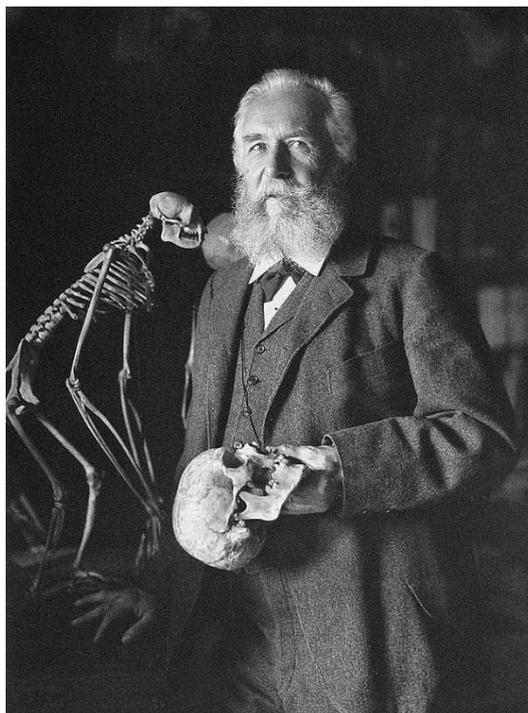


Figure 4. The biologist Ernst Haeckel in a photographic portrait by Nicola Perscheid.

Opposed to the principle of variety were the singularity and immutability of *human species* on which was based the anthropological polygenism of Voltaire, Broca and Haeckel, denying the possibility that species could derive from each other as well as descend from a single ancestral pair [39]. Thus, it was affirmed the biogenetic principle by which ontogeny faithfully repeats phylogeny, and every individual reflects the history of the species to which belongs. If in the past fixity was traditionally held to be divinely derived, the new German science, animated by classificatory obsession, would suggest a new species of humans, with different constitution, defying even the evolutionary theory.

The concept of “species” has been subject of scientific controversy. As Ernst Mayr (1904–2005) wrote, not even the “new systematics” of the 1930s and 1940s was able to bring complete clarity to the issue [41]. At that time, species began to be defined as *a reproductive community of populations (reproductively isolated from others) occupying a specific niche in nature*. The conceptualization of species was challenged because paleontology would not be able to verify the reproductive isolation of a species through fossil analysis [41]. A reconciliation between evolutionism and paleontology was promoted from the 1940s by the American paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson (1902–1984), together with Dobzhanski and Mayr. Probably the resistance to new interpretive paradigms [42] reflected an entrenched morphological view of species as well as the difficulty in some scientific circles to recognize *morphologically identical populations as sister species* but reproductively isolated [41].

In addition to this perspective, it resisted the old essentialist view for which each species is characterized by its own immutable essence (*eidos*), which makes it separate from the others. Hence the assumption that whatever shares the same essence belongs to the same species [41]. Essence was in fact evaluated primarily because of outward similarity. Thus, species diversity was in danger of being confused with typological difference within the same species. From the natural, botanical, and zoological world, which in Linnaeus reflected the unity of creation, this simplification was transferred by German academy to physical anthropology in the study of human populations, bending Mendelian biological categories to it, with the tragic consequences that we know [43].

In 1933, the German philosopher Eric Voegelin observed that also race no longer constituted a “scientific concept” but “a way of interpreting each person’s life in its meaning, as well as the total existence of the community”. Race was no longer an “attempt at understanding” but “an instrument in future community’s shaping”. It “was the idea of community as corporeal content, designed for future by its own members” [37]. Nazism was thus revealed to be an “applied biology” [3,38]. From this perspective it didn’t constitute only a political ideology, but a “realized biology” in a political system, where the “transcendental” was the “life,” the “subject” became the “race,” and the “lexicon” was strictly that of biology ([3] p. 117, [43]).

The application of biological categories to the political and social dimension soon generated a mutation in the concept of life itself as well as in that of citizenship with the related enjoyment of rights (during the Nazi regime, thousands upon thousands of Germans, mostly Jews, were deprived of their citizenship). Human life was no longer *bíos* (qualified life) but became *zoè* (biological life, vital essence) ([3] pp. 4–5), through a kind of denaturalization and depersonalization in existential condition and its dignity. Modern society appeared to German science and law to be a unique great organism, where individual human condition was progressively emptied of its specificity, ethical value, and anthropological significance.

Indeed, this biopolitical view broke the unity of the human species in the exaltation of an ethnic and cultural component, the German people, which was considered the exclusive depositary of a set of characteristics that qualified it as the dominant people (*Herrenvolk*). Hence resulted not a dichotomy between man and nature, whereby environment is considered alien to the human being (on the contrary, nature was idealized by German culture), but rather a separation between a part of the German social community (the Germans, the Aryans) and the other one (the Jews) considered biologically and culturally dangerous for the nation’s survival. Thus, if today we observe the development of a multispecies anthropology beyond the human [44], with a vision founded on a broader range of relations, including other living species ([45] pp. 29–39), Nazi Germany’s anthropology denied dignity to a part of mankind by trampling on the same concept of *Homo sapiens*. This approach represented a ‘cultural premise’ for the Holocaust: the extraneous and competing species had to be eliminated.

Despite the turning point imparted by Darwin, taxonomy didn’t abandon an essentialist approach, not least because this view “was not necessarily incompatible with evolutionism”. For this reason, the criterion of “morphological affinity,” even in presence of evolutionary mutation, appeared necessary in classifying a species ([46] p. 165). Along this groove, the attempt was to construct a scientific discourse bearing a “truth,” which on the one hand rested on biological history and on the other was independent of it. In the scientific environment of Nazi Germany, the assumptions of a *new order* were thus established, admitting no disruption or refutation of that “scientific truth” affirmed by virtue of a *new science*, promoted by a *new kingdom* (the Third Reich).

Racial determinism therefore proposed the reassertion of a static centrality of man in nature, fixing his morphological and constitutive traits [47]. The discursive representation of natural history proposed in those years by German academia seemed to ignore what Immanuel Kant had proposed at the end of the 18th century [48], revolutionizing the discourse on nature in general, by placing at the center of the approach the critical problem of the “synthesis of the different” [49]. The Nazi racial doctrine, so radical and essentialist in its ideological assumptions and determined knowledge, retained on the one hand the old systematic classificatory perspective and on the other made its own the study of a “new life”, as unprecedented *eidōs* (essence) of an unprecedented human condition, incapable of raising real questions about man.

4. Conclusions

To the fundamental philosophical question “Was ist der Mensch?”, Immanuel Kant in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) answered by reaffirming that man is an end in himself [50]. So, the knowledge of man (rational creature) is also knowledge of the world, even though man is just one of the living creatures. Hence the need for pragmatic anthropology, unlike from a physiological point of view, in knowing man “as a citizen of the world” (*Weltbürger*) [50]. It was also this citizenship of the world that was disallowed by Nazi concept of “sameness of species” (*Artgleichheit*). Indeed, it was not the real man the core of Nazi biopolitical vision, but his *species essence*, his *ancestral germ*, as beginning of life in a past believed immanent.

People/*Volk* and Man/*Mensch* in progress (*im Werden*) had for this reason to remain firmly anchored in their own “sameness of species”, in a *constitutive homogeneity*. In attempt to grasp an essence, the refoundation of mankind operated by Nazism gradually dissolved the concept of humanity, giving space to a simplistic representation based on the concepts of resemblance or exclusion [49].

The perspective of Nazism was post-evolutionary, where through an anatomical, physiological, essentially materialist language it was affirmed a social and cultural model in which emancipation of the citizens was prevented by a fixed, immutable biological condition: *the same species*. For this reason, Nazi regime was a biocratic counter-revolution, where state sovereignty seemed to be founded on a biological dimension, and citizens became “man-species” [51], conceived as mere elements within a unified and living social body.

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