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0521466458 - Darwinism, War and History: The Debate Over the Biology of War from the 'Origin of Species' to the First World War

Paul Crook

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Is it true, as the textbooks tell us, that Darwinism basically encouraged war and racist imperialism, that it generated violent images of 'man the fighting animal' – perceptions that paved the way for the holocaust of 1914–18? Or was there an alternative legacy from Darwin that legitimised peace and mutual aid, rather than bloody struggle, human freedom rather than biological determinism? This book examines these issues, tracing the historical debate that raged over the biological causes and effects of war between the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 and World War I. It reconstructs the theories of war and human pugnacity of thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Walter Bagehot, Alfred Wallace, T. H. Huxley, Karl Pearson, Peter Kropotkin, Jacques Novicow, William McDougall, Peter Chalmers Mitchell and a host of now-forgotten naturalists, biometricians, geneticists, eugenicists, physicians, psychologists, professionals and minor savants of the time. It explores the use, and misuse, of analogies drawn from biology and applied to society. Paul Crook concludes that historians have undervalued the discourse of 'peace biology' that stemmed from Darwin's holistic ecology; a discourse that was in significant ways more amenable to traditional moral culture than was unpleasantly ruthless militarism. Peace biology proved to be versatile and resilient, although bedevilled by internal dissonances. Its liberal vision of an autonomous humanity survived even the challenge of the 'new genetics' and the shock of the First World War, when instinctivist theories promoted a reductionist image of a belligerent and territorial humankind, reminiscent of present-day sociobiology.

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*The debate over the biology of war from the
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Paul Crook

The University of Queensland



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In memory of
Gordon Greenwood and Damodar Singhal

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David Paul Crook
Brisbane, Australia