

'Hitler's anti-Semitic views were entirely based on the racial theories of the Social Darwinists.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (24 marks)

Adolf Hitler's early life shows a relatively tolerant attitude towards the Jewish community. Whilst struggling as a young artist in Vienna, Mortiz Rosenthal (a Jewish art dealer) often helped Hitler to sell his art work and provided him with financial support when he needed it, and his family doctor was a Jew. However, later in life, his views were influenced by the racial theories of some European academics.

Arthur de Gobineau's theory of the Aryan master race is most commonly associated with Hitler and his ambitions. The claims of the theory are incredibly similar to the views expressed by Hitler. The purpose of persecution and the Holocaust was to 'cleanse' Europe from Jews and other members of society that were viewed by Hitler to be of a 'lesser' race. The theory suggested that cultures and civilisations declined when the Aryan race interbred with other races. Hitler interpreted this as evidence of the 'Jewish intent' to weaken Germany and to create a Jewish super state within Europe by breeding with the Germanic people. To make Germany strong again after the First World War, Hitler had to create the master race and eliminate those who did not match the criteria of the Aryans. Other academic racial theories such as Alfred Ploetz's theory of Rassenhygiene also contributed to Hitler's anti-Semitic views. Here, Ploetz suggested that the 'West Aryan' race was the most superior of all, and that non-Aryans were threatening the success of the Germanic society. This further built on the ideas proposed by de Gobineau's theory, and led Hitler to view his anti-Semitism as academic. The works of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (primarily 'The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century') laid out the foundations of the Nazi party's racial ambitions. Chamberlain separated Europeans into the Aryan race, laying out who fits into the superior race in society. Therefore, Social Darwinism was one of several racial theories that had influenced Hitler's anti-Semitic views.

The politics of the First World War and the Weimar Republic after 1918 led to an increase in anti-Semitism across the country, and thus a rise in Hitler's personal negative views of the Jewish community in Germany and the rest of Europe. The signing of the Armistice agreement in 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 were both completed by German-Jewish politicians. To the majority of the German people (including Hitler), the Jews were responsible for the humiliation experienced by agreeing to the terms set out at Versailles. He viewed the treaty as the work of the socialists in the Weimar whom he related to the Jews. This gave the impression that the Jews were working to de-unify Germany. Later in 1919, Jewish politicians also led a socialist revolution, followed by a communist revolt. To Hitler, these represented the political motives of Semites, which he did not agree with. Overall, political activities and ideologies of prominent Jewish politicians may have contributed to Hitler's anti-Semitism alongside the growing number of academic racist theories produced in the nineteenth century.

Social Darwinism is a racial theory that applies Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection to Human society. This however was never intended by Darwin himself. They believed that human actions can contribute to the 'betterment' and 'progress' of the human race through the practice of Eugenics. The impact of Social Darwinists on Hitler and his Nazi policies is very limited as there are numerous other factors that played a more significant role in Hitler's anti-Semitism. The outcomes of the influence of Social Darwinism are Hitler's future actions that include the ban on the marriage of Germans and Jews and the Holocaust. These actions were intended to prevent the German blood line from being tainted by the Jews, and therefore, this racial theory influenced Hitler's anti-Semitic actions and not his original views.