

Darwin on Mind, Ethics, and Animals

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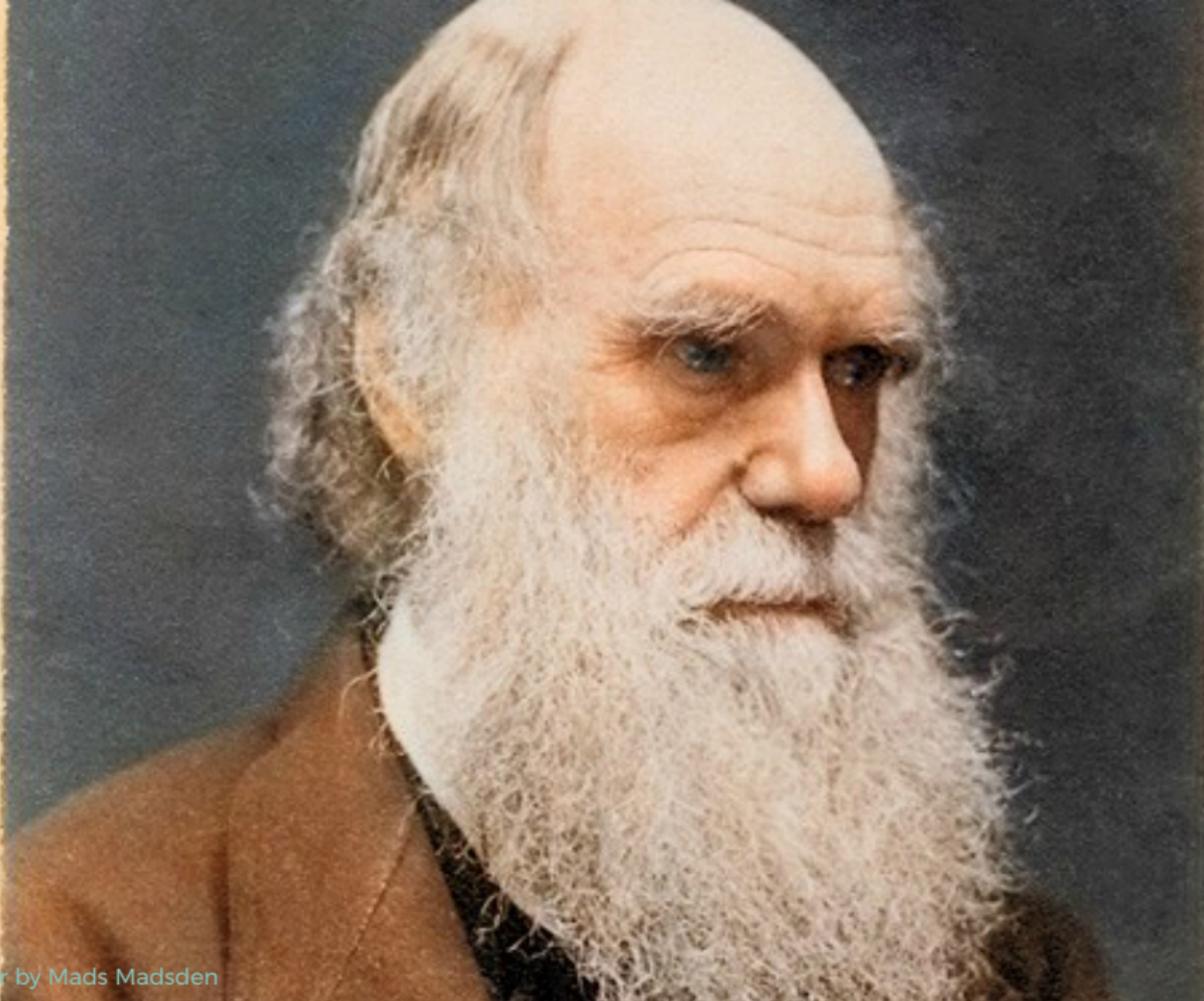
@pencechp

Outline

1. Context for Darwin's work
2. Habits and mental capacities
3. The emotions in man and animals
4. Darwin on ethics

The take-home: Darwin argues for a difference only in degree, rather than in kind, between humans and animals (in both physical and mental capacity), in part to support an evolutionarily grounded moral sense theory.

The Context



color by Mads Madsen

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Context

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A Timeline

- 1831–36: Voyage of HMS *Beagle*
- 1838–39: First evolution notebooks written
- 1859: *On the Origin of Species*
- 1871: *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*
- 1872: *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*

Avoiding the Issue

In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history. (*Origin*, p. 488)

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Continuity in Mental Capacity

Differences in Kind

If no organic being excepting man had possessed any mental power, or if his powers had been of a wholly different nature from those of the lower animals, then we should never have been able to convince ourselves that our high faculties had been gradually developed. But it can be clearly shewn that there is no fundamental difference of this kind. (*Descent*, pp. 34–5)

Differences in Kind

Darwin rejects the following candidate differences in kind:

- Humans can progress
- Humans use tools
- Humans use language
- Humans have a sense of beauty
- Humans have self-consciousness, a sense of identity, abstraction, general thought

Continuity in the Emotions

Mistakes

Sir C. Bell evidently wished to draw as broad a distinction as possible between man and the lower animals; and he consequently asserts that with “the lower creatures there is no expression but what may be referred, more or less plainly, to their acts of volition or necessary instincts.” He further maintains that their faces “seem chiefly capable of expressing rage and fear.”

Mistakes

But man himself cannot express love and humility by external signs, so plainly as does a dog, when with drooping ears, hanging lips, flexuous body, and wagging tail, he meets his beloved master (*Expression*, pp. 10–11)

Mistakes

Le créateur n'a donc pas eu à se préoccuper ici des besoins de la mécanique ; il a pu, selon sa sagesse, ou – que l'on me pardonne cette manière de parler – par une divine fantaisie, mettre en action tel ou tel muscle, un seul ou plusieurs muscles à la fois, lorsqu'il a voulu que les signes caractéristiques des passions, même les plus fugaces, fussent écrits passagèrement sur la face de l'homme.

(Duchenne 1862, in *Expression*, pp. 11–12)

Animal Capabilities

[T]he lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. Happiness is never better exhibited than by young animals, such as puppies, kittens, lambs, &c., when playing together, like our own children. Even insects play together, as has been described by that excellent observer P. Huber, who saw ants chasing and pretending to bite each other, like so many puppies.

(Descent, p. 39)

Animal Capabilities

- happiness/pleasure
- sadness
- fear
- suspicion
- courage
- timidity
- general good/poor temperament
- rage
- revenge
- maternal affection
- sympathy
- teasing
- love/desire to be loved
- jealousy
- pride
- shame
- magnanimity
- excitement
- boredom
- wonder
- curiosity
- imitation
- attention

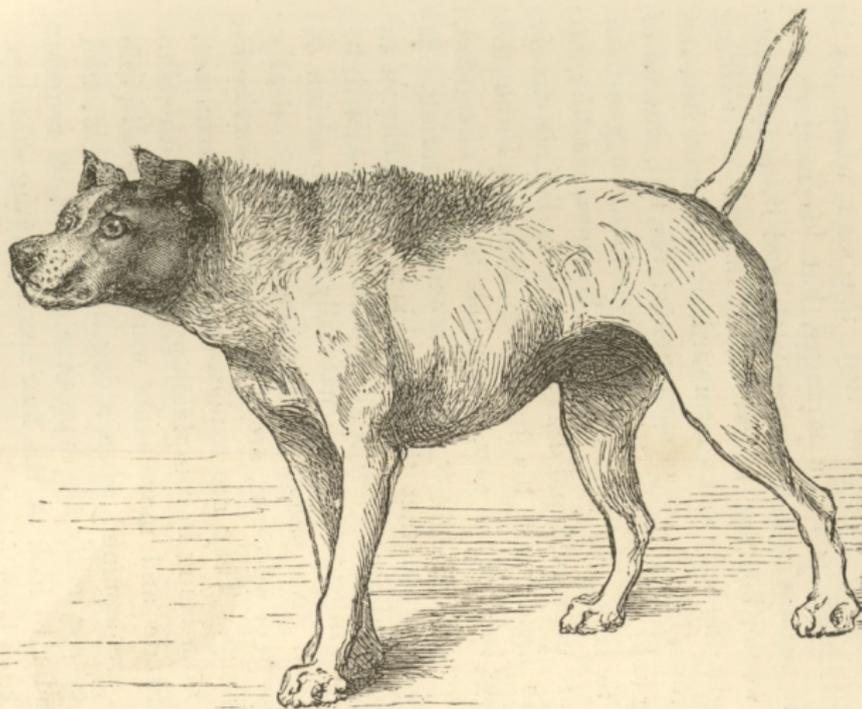


Fig. 5. Dog approaching another dog with hostile intentions. By Mr. Riviere.

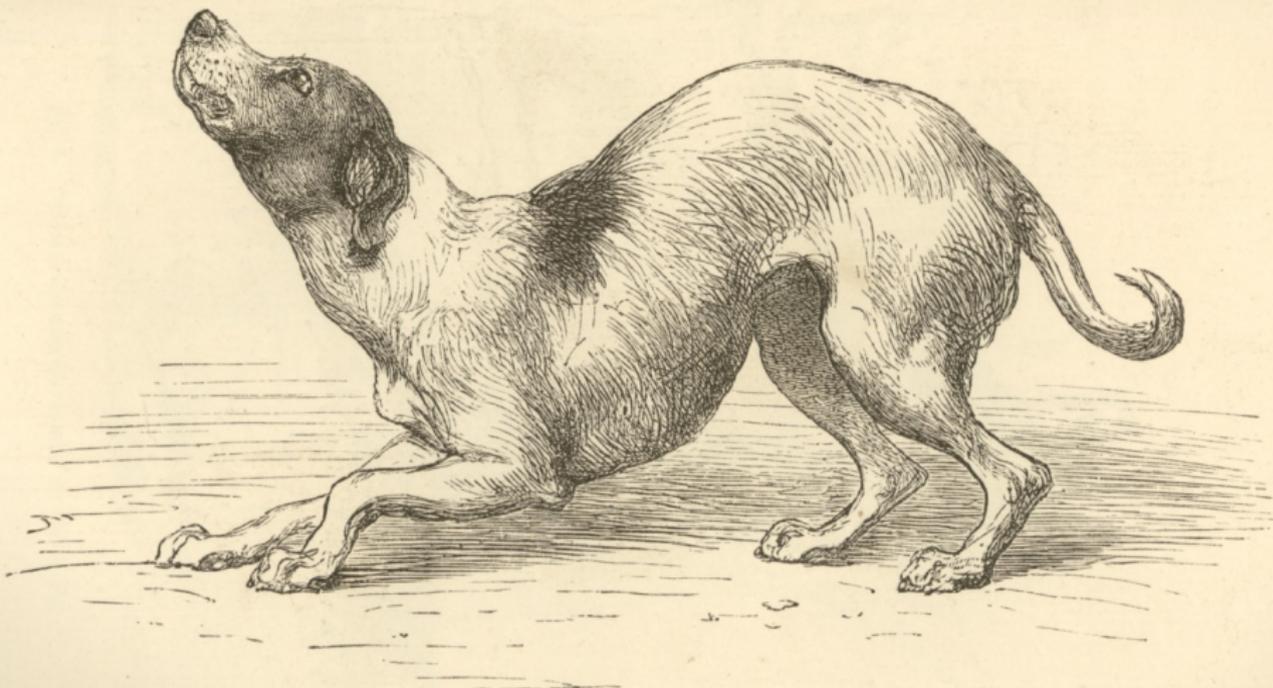


Fig. 6. The same in a humble and affectionate frame of mind. By Mr. Riviere.

Animal Capabilities

Few persons any longer dispute that animals possess some power of reasoning. Animals may constantly be seen to pause, deliberate, and resolve. It is a significant fact, that the more the habits of any particular animal are studied by a naturalist, the more he attributes to reason and the less to unlearnt instincts. (*Descent*, p. 46)

Human Uniqueness

The community of certain expressions in distinct though allied species, as in the movements of the same facial muscles during laughter by man and various monkeys, is rendered somewhat more intelligible, if we believe in their descent from a common progenitor. (*Expression*, p. 12)

Human Uniqueness

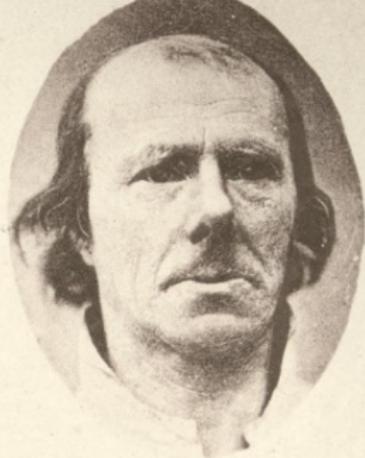
[T]here are no grounds, as far as I can discover, for believing that any muscle has been developed or even modified exclusively [in humans] for the sake of expression.

(Expression, p. 355)

N.B.—Several of the figures in these seven Heliotype Plates have been reproduced from photographs, instead of from the original negatives; and they are in consequence somewhat indistinct. Nevertheless they are faithful copies, and are much superior for my purpose to any drawing, however carefully executed.



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Evolutionary History

Emotions that clearly pre-date human evolution:

- Laughter (“for very many kinds of monkeys, when pleased, utter a reiterated sound, clearly analogous to our laughter”)
- Rage
- Fear
- Screaming

Evolutionary History

Emotions that are relatively recent:

- Weeping (due to changes in eye anatomy)
- Frowning (effort to shade eyes after bipedal locomotion)
- Any and all gestures with our arms (shrugging, combative posture)
- Blushing (requires self-consciousness)

Difficulties

Now, did the dogs act thus from the experience of each individual, or from the example of the older and wiser dogs, or from an inherited habit, that is from an instinct? [...]

[T]he Arctic wolves, the parent-stock of the Esquimaux dog, may have acquired this instinct, impelling them not to attack their prey in a close pack when on thin ice. Questions of this kind are most difficult to answer. (*Descent*, p. 47)

Darwin's Ethics

“Ethical Theory”

The following proposition seems to be in a high degree probable – namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed or nearly as well developed, as in man. (*Descent*, pp. 71–2)

“Ethical Theory”

Moral sentiment grounded in:

- *Sympathy* with fellow organisms
- Ability to recollect and judge past actions
- Communication of social norms via language
- Solidification of social instincts into habits



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If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering. Nevertheless the bee, or any other social animal, would in our supposed case gain, as it appears to me, some feeling of right and wrong, or a conscience. (*Descent*, p. 73)

Man and Animals

Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions. [...] This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.

(Descent, p. 101)

Questions?

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