

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## THE DISCOVERY OF ORGANIC CHOICE

I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in our species, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours.

In the same manner as various animals have some sense of beauty, though they admire widely different objects, so they might have a sense of right and wrong, though led by it to follow widely different lines of conduct.

If, to take an extreme case, we ourselves 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 gain in our supposed case, as it appears to me, some feeling of right or wrong, or a *conscience*. For each individual would have an inward sense of possessing certain stronger or more enduring instincts, and others less strong or enduring. Thus, there would often be a struggle as to which impulse should be followed. And as past impressions were**

**compared during their incessant passage through the mind, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and even misery would be felt.**

**In this case an inward monitor would tell the animal that it would have been better to have followed the one impulse rather than the other. The one course ought to have been followed, the other ought not. The one would have been right, the other wrong.<sup>1</sup>**

We saw this passage earlier, but now we may see the difference that emerges after some digging to gain the deeper and wider understanding and if we now look at it with fresh eyes.

Here Darwin is talking about the formation of the conscience. It is startling of course to find him placing it within the mind of something so small and presumably far down the evolutionary line from us as the honey bee. But something else has entered the picture.

Something new. What is it?

### *From Nowhere to Somewhere*

In Darwin's own time widespread predictions of a devastating outcome for the "death of God" led Darwin himself to worry about the social and moral consequences of the jolt of his historic mission— for with its triumph of science over religion the first Darwinian revolution more than anything else was to separate earlier from modern mind. In part his fear of the consequences of attributing everything to Natural Selection led him, as we have seen, to work hard in *Descent* to

try to show his successors that one must go beyond what was only half the theory and half the story to complete the journey to the higher reaches of mind and evolution and the better world.

Nowhere else is this so evident as in what I found to be the single most striking discovery of what became the lost top half for Darwin's theory.

In understanding the Darwin of the lost theory, it is vital to keep in mind the fact that after he dropped out of medical school in Edinburgh originally, his next try was at becoming a minister through studies aimed in this direction at Cambridge. Also in the background before he dropped Cambridge to journey around the world on the Beagle were his still earlier years as a devout collector of beetles with his cousin the equally devout beetler William Darwin Fox, and his later hopes to join this boyhood and lifelong pal in becoming a minister.

It is also important to be aware that at times he was under frightful pressure from both his beloved wife Emma and daughter Henrietta to give up what they saw as the emptiness of science and join them in a belief in God. Most vital to Emma, which she pressed upon him many times, was her hope that if he could join her in belief in God, and heaven, and life beyond the grave, he and Emma after death could be re-united along with all their children including the dearest, beloved Annie.<sup>2</sup>

It was Annie's tragic, and what seemed to Darwin wholly needless, senseless, and inexcusable death that for him finally destroyed all reason for any belief in God. Thereafter, it became impossible for him to further tolerate what seemed to him as well as to the earlier pioneering thinkers of the Enlightenment the ridiculous and even vicious nature of Christian as well as all other religious dogmas and mythology, or indeed anything churchly except the moral foundation.<sup>3</sup>

In theology there is a concept bearing on the nature of God that Darwin would have known well from his earlier life, which his writings and letters indicate good reason to believe at some point might have nudged at his thinking. It is the idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent— or that God both resides and acts within us as well as goes on dwelling out there somewhere.<sup>4</sup>

So perhaps it was at some point during 1868 or 69. Emma has brought in a cup of hot tea. As he thanks her, let us say the look of a longtime cherishing of one another passes between them. Then as he delays the return to his writing and she lingers for the moment together, they glance through the window of his study—and Darwin is chuckling and Emma beaming as they watch 17-year-old Horace wrestling on the lawn with 18-year-old Lennie, while their dog Polly dances about the boys, tongue lolling and barking with excitement.

I only speculate, of course. But could it have been at such a time that a thought that was to lead from nowhere to somewhere came to him?

If the answer to the problem of feeling secure in a world of insecurity no longer lies *out there*— if the God of “out there,” for instance, must die to free our species of the ignorance and the violence of so many dreadful people with dreadful ideas claiming to represent him here on earth—does the source of security now not lie more firmly *within ourselves*?

Divested of the idea of God as the overlord and master of the smile we seek and the frown we fear, this is of courses the core idea for humanism— or the faith in ourselves and the human potential that drove the American as well as all other major revolutions that have shaped the modern world for better or worse.

So what if in addition to the cold, uncaring, and all too often brutal power of Natural Selection there might be introduced into evolution theory a hot- blooded,

caring, and smart power within ourselves?

Something at the core of variation? And love? And moral sensitivity?  
Something that drives our need to learn and out of learning build the better self and the better world?

Something that for hundreds of years theology had explored as the “God within,” and philosophy had explored as the drive of higher ideals, but that now, shorn of dogma, could re-emerge through science clean and new?

In this way I surmise there may have come to be the amazing story of the discovery for which Darwin found no name to implant it in the minds of his successors. But so frequently was it to erupt within the science of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it has forced Darwin’s successors to at last find a major place for it within the theory and story of evolution for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Darwin’s Journey to the Core of Being*

Here he returns to the mind of the honey bee, and all other organisms including us, and this new line of pondering that was ignored for a century because it had not yet sufficiently run the gauntlet to become fundamentally meaningful in science.

...as soon as the mental faculties had become highly developed, images of all past actions and motives would be incessantly passing through the brain of each individual. *Out of a comparison of past and present*, the feeling of dissatisfaction, or even misery, which invariably results from any unsatisfied

instinct, would arise.<sup>5</sup>

So when within ourselves does this new venturing of the mind first emerge?

At what age does the newborn infant possess the power of abstraction, or become self-conscious and reflect on its own existence? We cannot answer, nor can we answer in regard to the ascending organic scale.<sup>6</sup>

Again he returns to this new observation of a particular kind of struggle involved in the formation of conscience, but also of more than conscience . . .

As a struggle may sometimes be seen going on between the various instincts of the lower animals, it is not surprising there should be a struggle within us between our social instincts, with their derived virtues, and our lower, though momentarily stronger impulses or desires.<sup>7</sup>

This, as Mr. Galton<sup>8</sup> has remarked, is not surprising, as we have emerged from a state of barbarism within a comparatively recent period.

After having yielded to some temptation we feel a sense of dissatisfaction, shame, repentance, or remorse similar to the feelings caused by other powerful instincts or desires when left unsatisfied or balked.<sup>9</sup> Having yielded, we compare the weakened impression of a past temptation with the ever present social instincts—or with habits gained in early youth and strengthened during our whole lives, until they have become almost as strong as instincts. And we are unhappy, or at least uncomfortable, because we have

fallen short of the ideal.<sup>10</sup>

A kind of psychic bell rings in the mind of the trained researcher on finding what in detective work would be called a clue. Usually at the time one has no idea of what it is a clue to, or what it really means. It is just a sense that behind whatever it is lies something of potentially considerable meaning.

What one suspects is not the murder or the swindle, as in the detective story. In science it is a sense of a possible connection between one thing and another, or a connection across many fields. It can be the intuition of a chain linking of findings that may pull together many fragments of insight into something that could be of help in reaching a new level of understanding.

This process is radically intensified in the case of the newsman catching wind of a “hot” story that is being concealed, or the psychotherapist noticing that her or his patient compulsively returns to the same event or person over and over and over again. Whether detective, newsman, or psychotherapist, the repetition tells us that behind it may lie hidden something of immense importance to the situation or person who keeps coming back again and again to roughly the same story or observation.

This bell kept ringing as I worked on through what Darwin was writing back then until at last I stopped and went back to count up what I was finding.

*I found that he was writing of this almost wholly overlooked and un-named new something eleven times.*

Still it wasn't until well through the fifth draft of this book that I finally saw what the ringing was all about.<sup>11</sup> I believe that telling of some of the steps involved

in how I came to this understanding can best reveal to the reader what excited my interest and lured me to persist until I had found what I am now convinced is the solution to a scientific mystery story of pivotal meaning for practically every moment of our lives, as well as long range for the life span of our species.

The first thing I noticed was a curious similarity between Darwin's observations and the dialectical theorizing of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This was, you may appreciate, a bit of a jolt. In Darwin, for example, focusing on how the mind of the bee or "man" works, he observes this sequence of

- 1) the observation by the organism of something it senses is meaningful,
- 2) a comparison of this observation in the present with its storage of memories of the past,
- 3) the discovery of a similarity or difference, that is, conflict between the perception of the present and memory of the past,
- 4) concern about this discrepancy, and
- 5) the drive to resolve the conflict.

Underneath an entirely different set of words and in a much different overall context, in Marx and Engels one can find roughly the same sequence as a starting point for their dialectical analysis of history, or of human *cultural* evolution.<sup>12</sup>

This struck me as quite ironic. Long considered the "good" conservative patron saint for "survival of the fittest" capitalism, here was Darwin thinking along

the same lines as the “bad” and dreaded patron saints for “lock step” and “herd minded” communism. I saw this was probably one reason why Marx so admired Darwin that he wanted to dedicate a volume of *Das Capital* to him—a proffered honor that a leery Darwin deftly side-stepped.<sup>13</sup>

I then dipped into Marx and Engels and found a remarkable mirroring, indeed even an expansion, of Darwin's dialectical theorizing.<sup>14</sup> Of many passages I will give just this short one. It appears in *Das Capital* where Marx is writing of the interactive way we change the natural and social world around us as well as ourselves.

"By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature." <sup>15</sup>

Darwin's is the dialectical psychology of mind in action. Marx's is the dialectical sociology of the impact of the active mind on society—which either expands and ennobles us or warps and diminishes us.

And what is going on here that they share?

Together they are writing of a “new” core process for evolution that Darwin now seeks to find a place for in what became his lost theory.

What, specifically, is it? Again and again, as we will see, it is a particular kind of interaction between the organism and its environment, or between the organism and other organisms, i.e., between ourselves and others.

Both driven by and reflected within the brain and mind of the organism—as

we have seen in Darwin's analysis— there is set in motion a cycle of mutual change. Step by step, interaction by interaction, it is a cycle that gradually or swiftly advances both parties into the future. And at each step along the way this advance is dependent on what the organism each time decides to do—or *choice* by the organism.

For thousands of years this kind of cycling, mutual decisional, and futures shaping interaction has been known as a *dialectical* process. Today in psychotherapy, human potentials workshops, and methods for reducing violence and conflict resolution it is known as the approach of *dialogue*.<sup>16</sup>

As Darwin never gave his rediscovery of this obviously important— and indeed both central and centering— process for evolution a name, what shall we call it?

As again and again we may glimpse in these pages, Darwin's focus is on the factor of **choice** of action not just by ourselves or the honey bee. He is writing about something pivotally at work in the mind and actions of the earwig, the earthworm, the fish, the fox, the elephant, even in the orchid and in plants of every other kind, to which he devoted an enormous amount of almost wholly ignored study.

In other words, everything from the least to the most developed of the many forms that life takes involves *choice* of action by the *organism*. So I decided to call his advance for this basic insight *organic choice*.

### ***The Dynamics of Conscience and Organic Choice***<sup>17</sup>

Here in terms of the working of the brain and mind—of which together he

wrote of *200 times* in *Descent of Man*,<sup>18</sup> which became for him the chief delight in piecing together what became the lost completion for his theory— he points to the pivotal interaction of moral sensitivity with organic choice at our level of evolutionary emergence.

And why is this important?

Coupled with independence of mind and courage, it is this vital capacity that allows us to soar on and leave behind us the dismal drag of all that fills the bog holes of PseudoDarwinian Mind — as well as the ignorance, and the viciousness, and the senselessness of so much else that has characterized our past and now threatens our species' future.

**And who is this moral being? Those among us who are capable of comparing our past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving them.**<sup>19</sup>

Now he briefly sketches how organic choice drives us either forward or backward in our personal development or evolution— as well as in the evolution of our species.

At the moment of action, we are no doubt apt to follow the stronger impulse. Although this may occasionally prompt us to the noblest deeds, more commonly it leads us to gratify our own desires at the expense of others. But after their gratification—when past and weaker impressions are

judged under pressure by the ever-enduring social instinct, and by our deep regard for the good opinion of our fellows—retribution will surely come.

**We will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame—this latter feeling, however, relates almost exclusively to the judgement of others. We will consequently resolve more or less firmly to act differently for the future, and this is conscience, for conscience looks backwards and serves as a guide for the future.<sup>20</sup>**

Widening the picture to take in one of my own chief concerns in writing this book, he describes the impact of morally sensitive organic choice on education and learning.

**The moral faculties are generally and justly esteemed as of higher value than the intellectual powers. We should bear in mind that the activity of the mind in vividly recalling past impressions is one of the fundamental though secondary bases of conscience.<sup>21</sup>**

**This affords the strongest argument for educating and stimulating in all possible ways the intellectual faculties of every human being.** No doubt even the torpid among us, if our social affections and sympathies are well developed, will be led to good actions, and may develop a fairly sensitive conscience. **But whatever renders the imagination more vivid and strengthens the habit of recalling and comparing past impressions, will make the conscience more sensitive.** It may even somewhat compensate for

weak social affections and sympathies.

And so his vision escalates. Pondering the evolution of the moral sense from its appearance among the first organisms capable of sexual reproduction to its rise among us, Darwin notes the continuity species by species upward. And in the interaction of love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, and language over time, in this passage we can see at work his perception of the underlying thrust of organic choice.

**By contrast, we have one of the most remarkable of the feelings, motivations, or responses. This is the idea of doing good in return for evil, to love your enemy. To this height of morality it seems highly doubtful the social instincts could ever, by themselves, have led us. Before any such golden rule would ever have been thought of or obeyed, it would have been necessary for these instincts, together with sympathy, to be highly cultivated and extended by the aid of reason, instruction, and the love or fear of God.**

**We will thus be driven to compare impressions of past hunger, vengeance satisfied, or danger shunned at other people's cost, with the almost ever-present instinct of sympathy, and with our knowledge of what others consider to be praiseworthy or blameable.**

**This knowledge cannot be banished from our minds and from instinctive sympathy is esteemed of great moment.<sup>22</sup>**