

DECONSTRUCTING DARWIN

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This essay considers Charles Darwin's physical and intellectual journeys in South America. In this account there are really two Darwins. There is the young, brash, ambitious Darwin (D₁) — an ugly cultural chauvinist who perceives the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego as 'savages of the lowest grade'. However, there is another side to Darwin — indeed, there is metaphorically another Darwin: the older, mature, wise Darwin (D₂) — an enlightened scientist and cultural pluralist who concludes that all men and women are members of a single species and that all religious beliefs and cultural practices are entitled to respect. This Darwin is also a part of an encounter with South America.

Introduction: Why Darwin?

I have chosen to write about Charles Darwin because there is a valuable lesson to be learned from Darwin's complex attitudes towards peoples of different races and cultures. Specifically, I shall attempt to 'deconstruct' just one aspect of Darwin's extraordinary life: his fascinating encounters with the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego during his voyage of discovery aboard the *HMS Beagle*.¹

Because of his subsequent fame and the immense prestige of his scientific theories, it is easy to forget that Darwin was just an inexperienced and obscure 'naturalist' when he made his now-famous scientific expedition aboard the *Beagle*.² Yet in many ways Darwin's story is our story, the story of our tragic

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¹ Although I generally do not like to use such neologisms, I say that I shall 'deconstruct' this episode because I am keenly aware that different people can interpret the same historical events and facts in different ways. See, for example, Kuhn (1970), pp 44-45. On the subjectivity of language and historical interpretation, see generally Wittgenstein (1953); Bloch (1953).

² The voyage lasted almost five years, from December 1831 to October 1836. For a detailed chronicle of the trials and tribulations of Darwin's voyage, see Keynes (2002) (the author is Darwin's great-grandson). Of course, the best source of

Latin American continent. As the *Beagle* quietly approached the sinuous shores of Tierra del Fuego on the evening of 17 December 1833, there were between 5000 and 7000 Fuegian Indians inhabiting the desolate wilderness of Tierra del Fuego.³ A hundred years later, however, their heartrending fate — like that of so many other indigenous peoples — was that of extinction, exploitation and extermination.⁴ Tierra del Fuego and her forgotten people are thus a metaphorical testament to the consequences of racism, cultural chauvinism and environmental degradation, and though Darwin's story is just one small part of this poignant tale, it is worth telling because his voyage of discovery serves as a metaphorical exchange between the North and the South.

My thesis is that there are really two Darwins. There is the young, brash, ambitious Darwin (D₁) — an ugly cultural chauvinist who perceives the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego as 'savages of the lowest grade'.⁵ But there is another side to Darwin — indeed, there is metaphorically another Darwin: the older, mature, wise Darwin (D₂) — an enlightened scientist and cultural pluralist who concludes that all men and women are members of a single species and that all religious beliefs and cultural practices are entitled to respect. This paper, then, is not so much about Darwin's physical travels in South America as it is about his remarkable intellectual journey.

The Young Darwin (D₁)

One of the things that makes the encounter between Darwin and the Fuegian Indians so dramatic is the unfathomable gulf between them. While the Fuegians lived in a cold and cruel climate 'beyond the confines of this world',⁶ inhabiting crude wigwams 'imperfectly thatched' with a few tufts of grass and rushes,⁷ Charles Darwin was born into wealth and privilege, attending Cambridge University and devoted to hunting and collecting beetles.⁸ Though his family was not part of the British aristocracy, his father was a wealthy

Darwin's voyage is Darwin (1839) himself, who wrote a stirring first-person account of his adventures: *The Voyage of The Beagle*.

³ Hazlewood (2001). The use of the word 'savage' in the title of Hazlewood's book is ironic: it is not the natives who are savage; that word better describes the way they were treated by the Europeans.

⁴ Although I shall use Darwin's term 'Fuegians' to describe the native people of Tierra del Fuego, the Fuegians were not a single, homogenous tribe. In reality, they were composed of three distinct cultures: the Aliculuf people, the Yamana and the Ona. According to Nick Hazlewood, there are no pure Fuegian Indians alive today.

⁵ Darwin (1839), p 194.

⁶ Darwin (1839), p 186.

⁷ Darwin (1839), p 187.

⁸ For an excellent biography of Charles Darwin, see Janet Browne's masterful two-volume biography (Browne, 1995, 2002). In addition, I can recommend de Beer (1963) as well as Desmond and Moore (1992). Also, there is Darwin's beautifully written autobiography (Barlow, 1958).

landowner — what the British call ‘landed gentry’ — and after his father died the young Darwin inherited a hefty fortune.⁹

Reverend Darwin?

Towards the end of his life, Darwin wrote that he ‘was as ignorant as a pig about [the] subjects of history, politicks, and moral philosophy’.¹⁰ This is a revealing confession, considering that Darwin had attended Cambridge University. Darwin was just 22 years old when the *Beagle* set sail from England on 27 December 1831. He still had no inkling of the Fuegian Indians at this time. Indeed, he had no inkling of own future.

Like many young people today, he was still unsure about what he was going to do with his life. Since he was attending Cambridge University, he had three alternatives open to him: law, medicine, or theology. Darwin had no desire to practise law, and he had already dropped out of medical school in Scotland before he was sent to Cambridge. So, ironically, that left theology. By this time, Darwin had become resigned to the thought of becoming a clergyman.¹¹

If the young Darwin was no scholar and theology was nothing more than a second-best option, what then were Darwin’s interests? He was, above all, an avid sportsman and explorer. He loved the great outdoors — hunting and shooting, horse riding and nature walks, hard drinking and playing cards. As Darwin himself later recounted: ‘In the latter part of my school life I became passionately fond of shooting, and I do not believe that anyone could have shown more zeal for the most holy cause than I did for shooting birds.’¹² For example, during one summer — the summer of 1826, when Darwin was just a scrawny 17-year-old — he kept a ‘shooting tally’ and recorded that he had shot a total of 177 hares, pheasants, and partridges.¹³

So the young Darwin was no intellectual radical or sceptical agnostic. He was as orthodox in his religious beliefs as the average undergraduate at Cambridge at that moment in history. Furthermore, Darwin’s decision to join the *Beagle* expedition did not initially change his plan to join the ministry; it

⁹ In addition, he eventually married Emma Wedgwood, his first cousin who was born into the wealthy Wedgwood family, one of the richest families in all of England at the time. See Browne (1995), pp 391–93.

¹⁰ Barlow (1958), p 55.

¹¹ He also wanted to please his father, who wanted his young son to choose a respectable profession, one befitting his station as a gentleman: ‘it was decided [by my father] that I should be a clergyman’ is how Darwin puts it in his autobiography (Barlow, 1958), p 57.

¹² Barlow (1958), p 44. In his autobiography, Darwin also recalled the following stern words from his father: ‘To my deep mortification my father once said to me, “You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family.”’ (Barlow, 1958), p 28.

¹³ Browne (1995), p 67. To his credit, as Darwin became older he began to realise that the killing of animals for pleasure was wrong: Browne (1995), p 327.

merely put it on hold.¹⁴ Yet it is worth noting that Darwin was only able to join the *Beagle* expedition by a fortuitous chain of improbable coincidences.

'A Wild Scheme'

Darwin had always wanted to explore the world. In his autobiography, Darwin recalled his early boyhood dream of travelling to far-away lands.¹⁵ But the actual chain of events that led Darwin to Tierra del Fuego was set in motion at Cambridge. It was during his last year at Cambridge (1830–31) that Darwin read Alexander von Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* and Sir John Herschel's *Introduction to the Study of Natural Philosophy*. These two books 'stirred up in [Darwin] a burning zeal to add even the most humble contribution to the noble structure of Natural Science'.¹⁶ As a result of these readings, the young Darwin began to plan a summer-long excursion to satisfy his desire for adventure and scientific discovery. His plan was to spend the summer of 1831 with a group of Cambridge friends exploring the Canary Islands, where von Humboldt had begun his historic voyage of discovery in 1799.

At around this time, however, there was a dramatic and unexpected turn of events. During the summer recess, a mysterious letter arrived unexpectedly from his favorite professor and mentor at Cambridge, John Henslow. Henslow asked whether Darwin would be interested in providing the company of a gentleman to the captain of a ship on a two-year exploratory voyage to Tierra del Fuego.¹⁷ Despite the short notice, Darwin could not resist accepting Henslow's unexpected invitation. The Canary Islands was one thing, but a two-year circumnavigation of the globe was the opportunity of a lifetime.

But our narrative does not end here, for Darwin's father strongly and unequivocally objected to what he derisively called this 'wild scheme'.¹⁸ He feared for his son's safety. After all, in the age of tall ships, the risk of shipwreck was serious, and the risk of disease in the tropics was even greater.

¹⁴ Darwin himself wrote in his autobiography: 'Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several officers ... for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on a point of morality.' (Barlow, 1958), p 85.

¹⁵ For example, Darwin wrote in his autobiography: 'Early in my school-days a boy had a copy of the *Wonders of the World*, which I often read and disputed with the other boys about the veracity of some of the statements; and I believe this book first gave me a wish to travel in remote countries.' (Barlow, 1958), p 44.

¹⁶ Barlow (1958), p 68. Darwin was most emphatic about the extraordinary impact von Humboldt and Herschel had on his imagination: 'No one or a dozen other books influenced me nearly so much as these two.'

¹⁷ Specifically, Henslow wrote to Darwin that the captain 'wants a man ... more as a companion than a mere collector & would not take any one however good a Naturalist who was not recommended to him likewise as a gentleman.' (Browne, 1995), p 145. According to Janet Browne, Professor Henslow initially wanted to accept this offer himself, but the ship was due to leave in four weeks, and Henslow had teaching duties to attend to and had recently married and become a father. (Barlow, 1958), p 152.

¹⁸ (Barlow, 1958), p 154.

Also, there was that understanding with his father: Darwin was supposed to complete his studies, take Holy Orders and begin a respectable career in the ministry — one befitting his station. His father expected Darwin to keep his word. Luckily for Darwin, his favorite uncle — Uncle Jos (Josiah Wedgwood) — interceded on his behalf and persuaded Darwin's father that young Charles would benefit from the voyage, since it would present an opportunity to see first-hand the majesty of all God's creations. Darwin's father reluctantly agreed.

One More Digression: The Larger Context of the Beagle Expedition

At this point in my narrative, a short digression is in order. What was the larger context of the *Beagle* expedition? What were Captain FitzRoy's motives in requesting the company of a 'gentleman-naturalist'? And who paid for all this?

This last question is perhaps the easiest to answer. The *Beagle* expedition was organised and financed by the Hydrographer's Office in the British Admiralty.¹⁹ The central mission of the voyage was to explore, measure and survey the lands and waterways of Tierra del Fuego. But why explore such a vast and desolate region? It was not to increase man's knowledge of geography, hydrography or anthropology. The real reason was trade.

At this moment in history, following the lifting of trade restrictions between Britain and the newly independent confederation of Latin American states in 1824, British firms (especially mining interests) had made significant investments in South America.²⁰ It was thus in Britain's commercial interests to carry out a geographical and hydrographic survey of the uncharted southern coasts of South America because the charting of these waterways was necessary in order to establish safe shipping routes for British trade.²¹

But what about Captain FitzRoy? What were his personal motives for exploring Tierra del Fuego? And why did he agree to take Darwin — a complete stranger — along for the ride?

Captain Robert FitzRoy had already captained the *Beagle* once before. For him, trade routes were a secondary concern. He was a man of science — probably more so than Darwin at the commencement of the voyage. For example, he had installed no less than 22 sophisticated chronometers aboard the *Beagle*, as well as a bevy of delicate scientific instruments to take precise measurements of a variety of natural phenomena, such as the force of gales and the depths of the oceans, and he was just as interested in the collection of specimens and fossils as Darwin was. At the same time, however, FitzRoy was a deeply religious, God-fearing man. Thus his main objective was nothing less than to bring Christianity and Western civilisation ('the Bible and the plough') to the people of Tierra del Fuego. He had devised an ambitious plan, an

¹⁹ The Admiralty is the equivalent of the US Navy.

²⁰ Browne (1995), p 148.

²¹ According to Janet Browne: 'The whole point of the British Admiralty's desire to chart southern Latin America was ... to enable Britain to establish strong footholds in these areas, so recently released from their commitment to trade only with Spain and Portugal.' (Browne, 1995), p 181.

experiment of evangelisation. This spectacular plan began to take shape during his first expedition to South America.

In December 1828, the original commander of the *Beagle*, Captain Pringle Stokes, had committed suicide in Tierra del Fuego under mysterious circumstances.²² Was Captain Stokes so lonely and depressed that he put a pistol to his temple and took his own life? Even Darwin would note the isolation, gloominess and desolation of this remote corner of the world: ‘in these still solitudes, Death, instead of life, seemed the predominant spirit’.²³ Or was Stokes killed by one of his men? Whatever really happened, it was as a result of this untimely death that Robert FitzRoy, then just a mere 21 years of age, was given command of the *HMS Beagle* in early 1829.

No sooner had FitzRoy assumed command, however, than a band of indigenous thieves stole one of his ship’s whaleboats under the darkness of night. This was a grievous loss because, without the smaller boat, the *Beagle* could not carry out the survey work. In retaliation for the theft, FitzRoy and his crew indiscriminately abducted several natives at gunpoint. All the hostages made a daring escape, except for three of them — a little girl, a boy and a young man.²⁴ Captain FitzRoy later ‘purchased’ a fourth native, an adolescent, from his family for a mother-of-pearl button. He was christened ‘Jemmy Button’ by the crew, and he will play a large role in our narrative.

It was at this time that Captain FitzRoy began to conceive of an elaborate plan to bring Western civilisation and Christianity to Tierra del Fuego. In FitzRoy’s words:

When about to depart the Fuegian coast, I decided to keep these four natives on board, for they appeared to be quite cheerful and contented with their situation; and I thought that many good effects might be the consequence of their living a short time in England ... I shall procure for these people a suitable education, and, after two or three years, shall send or take them back to their country.²⁵

FitzRoy kept his word and put the four natives up at a boarding school in the village of Walthamstow, near London. During the next 14 months, FitzRoy’s Fuegians were taught English, agriculture and Christianity, while Captain FitzRoy raised funds and arranged for a volunteer — a young catechist named Richard Matthews — to travel aboard the *Beagle* during the second expedition. Matthews would take command of the mission station and establish a colonial outpost in Tierra del Fuego.²⁶ This was the same expedition that Darwin would be joining.

²² Browne (1995), p 146.

²³ Darwin (2004), p 185.

²⁴ The boy died of smallpox upon his return to England.

²⁵ Melleresh (1968), p 54.

²⁶ As I shall describe in more detail below, FitzRoy’s grand project was a total failure. Suffice to say that the three surviving Anglicised natives reverted to their former existence as soon as they returned to their homeland, and Mr Matthews the

Such a plan no doubt shocks our contemporary sensibilities, especially the values of cultural pluralism and tolerance. Today, we have a profound respect for other people's cultures. But Captain FitzRoy felt quite within his rights to 'civilise' the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego. He was sure he had acted fairly, always believing that the natives he took to England were free agents and had accompanied him willingly. 'They understand why they were taken, and look forward with pleasure to seeing our country, as well as returning to their own,' he wrote.²⁷ It probably never even crossed his mind that there had been no choice at all.

Yet Darwin played no formal role in FitzRoy's ambitious evangelisation plans. So why was FitzRoy willing take on a complete stranger for the duration of the voyage? FitzRoy was a temperamental young captain (only four years older than Darwin), and although there are many possible reasons for his wanting a non-military travel companion, more than anything it appears that FitzRoy just wanted a friend, someone he could talk to — especially during the exploration of the desolate regions of Tierra del Fuego. By all accounts, Darwin and FitzRoy became close friends during the voyage,²⁸ and FitzRoy even had a nickname for Darwin, 'Philos', which stood for 'ship's philosopher'.²⁹

Now that we have some sense of the larger historical context of Darwin's voyage, I shall take up my narrative of Darwin's experiences in Tierra del Fuego and his encounters with the Fuegian Indians.

Darwin in Tierra del Fuego

Towards the end of his long and productive life, Darwin wrote: 'The voyage of the *Beagle* has been by far the most important event in my life and has determined my whole career.'³⁰ Moreover, Darwin's voyage of discovery was full of delicious ironies. For example, although Darwin's narrative of the *Beagle* expedition is often referred to as *The Voyage of the Beagle*, it was not so much a voyage at sea as it was a series of travels on land.³¹ In all, he spent more than three years on land, exploring rugged terrain, digging up fossils, and collecting a wide variety of rare plant and animal specimens.

Also ironic is the central role that religion plays during the voyage. As I noted earlier, one of Captain FitzRoy's chief motivations was to establish a

English missionary, fearing for his life, decided to abandon the Fuegian Mission Station. He later settled in New Zealand.

²⁷ Browne (1995), p 236 n 3.

²⁸ In this day and age, I feel obligated to add that there is no evidence that either man was a closet homosexual. At any rate, their sexuality is irrelevant to this narrative.

²⁹ Browne (1995), p 195.

³⁰ Barlow (1958), p 76.

³¹ The expedition lasted almost five years, and during this period Darwin was at sea for a combined total of only 18 months. In contrast, Darwin was on firm land for a total of three years and one month. Darwin made a total of 37 landings, and only five out of his 37 landings were of less than a week in duration. (Browne, 1995), p 227.

religious mission in Tierra del Fuego. By the same token, Darwin's first published work was not about natural history or science; it was a short essay, which he co-wrote with Captain FitzRoy towards the end of the voyage, on the desirability of religious missions and the positive effects of missions on indigenous peoples.³²

Another irony is that Darwin was not the ship's official 'naturalist'; that claim by custom went to the ship's surgeon. For this voyage, the ship's designated surgeon was a Dr Robert McCormick. He regarded the voyage as his opportunity to become famous. But the captain and the crew treated the young Darwin as if he were the ship's official naturalist, and Dr McCormick — furious that he was being upstaged by this young upstart — abandoned the voyage early on.³³ Darwin thus became, by default, the official naturalist of the *Beagle* and presented himself as such to the outside world.

But the most important irony is that Darwin's real education did not begin until after he left Cambridge and began to explore the world: 'I owe to the voyage the first real training or education of my mind. I was led to attend closely to several branches of natural history, and thus my powers of observation were improved.'³⁴ He explored everything and marvelled at the beauty and complexity of nature. The Brazilian rainforest in particular overpowered his senses. Only von Humboldt had given him any advance warning of the pure beauty and immense scale of nature: 'He like another Sun illumines everything I behold.'³⁵

But the defining moment of the voyage was yet to come. Darwin's dramatic encounters with the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego would leave a lasting impression on him for the rest of his long life.

Darwin's First Impressions of Tierra del Fuego

By December 1832, a full year after departing England and after lengthy sojourns in Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands in the Atlantic and the ports of Bahía, Río, Buenos Aires and Montevideo in eastern South America, the *Beagle* was finally approaching the desolate shores of Tierra del Fuego — Magellan's 'land of fire'.

As Darwin explored the furthest reaches of the South American continent, he thrilled at the 'scene of savage magnificence' of this wild region, feeling at last that he was on a real voyage of discovery, sailing to the utmost ends of the earth.³⁶ In his travel journal, Darwin describes the rugged and inhospitable shores of Tierra del Fuego in vivid detail. The Fuegian shore consists of 'one dense gloomy forest. A single glance at the landscape was sufficient to show

³² The essay was entitled 'A Letter, Containing Remarks on the Moral State of Tahiti, New Zealand, &c.' This essay was published in an obscure South African evangelical newspaper in June 1836 (Browne, 1995), p 330, n 17.

³³ Browne (1995), p 369.

³⁴ Barlow (1958), p 77.

³⁵ Keynes (1988), p 42.

³⁶ Darwin (2004), p 186.

me how widely different it was from anything I had ever beheld.³⁷ Imagine giant glaciers and mammoth mountains dropping precipitously into the arms of the sea while giant whales swim along pristine waterways, and one gets some sense of the ‘savage magnificence’ that lay before Darwin and the crew of the *Beagle*.³⁸

Darwin at last caught his first glimpse of the native inhabitants on the evening of 17 December 1832. In his travel journal, he writes that they ‘were perched on a wild point overhanging the sea; and as we passed by, they sprang up and ... sent forth a loud and sonorous shout’.³⁹ One can only imagine the scene: strange hues and cries amid a dark and desolate forest; fires blazing on each and every headland as far as the eye can see: ‘The savages followed the ship, and just before dark we saw their fires, and again heard their wild cry.’⁴⁰ Darwin learned that fire was the Fuegian warning signal that strangers and potential enemies were approaching. Darwin was truly in Magellan’s land of fire.

The next day, 18 December 1832, the *Beagle* dropped her anchor in the vicinity of Good Success Bay, and Darwin went ashore with a small party. On shore they were received by a small band of wild Fuegian Indians. According to Darwin, the natives were buck naked, smeared with red and white paint, their only garment a guanaco skin thrown over their strong shoulders.⁴¹ In Darwin’s mind, the contrast between savagery and civilisation could not have been greater:

It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I ever beheld: I could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage and civilized man: It is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, inasmuch as in man there is a greater power of improvement.⁴²

This first encounter made a deep impression on the young Darwin, one that he would never forget. Years later, Darwin would describe this same scene, the scene of his first encounter with the Fuegians:

I shall never forget how savage & wild one group was — Four or five men suddenly appeared on a cliff near to us — they were absolutely naked & with long streaming hair; springing from the ground & waving their arms around their heads, they sent forth most hideous yells. Their appearance was so strange, that it was scarcely like that of earthly inhabitants.⁴³

³⁷ Darwin (2004), p 180.

³⁸ For a beautiful description of the Fuegian landscape, see Darwin (2004), p 198.

³⁹ Darwin (2004), p 180.

⁴⁰ Darwin (2004).

⁴¹ Darwin (2004), p 181.

⁴² Darwin (2004), p 181.

⁴³ Keynes (1988), p 134.

Thus Darwin's initial encounter with the Fuegians was not a redeeming one. It merely served to reconfirm his cultural biases and prejudices. The young Darwin is an ugly chauvinist because he makes no attempt to understand the Fuegian people, their way of life, or their culture. Instead, he describes them as savages, 'the most abject and miserable creatures I anywhere beheld'.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most revealing, and the most tragic, of Darwin's statements is this one: 'We can hardly put ourselves in the position of these savages, and understand their actions.'⁴⁵

But in fairness to Darwin, it must be said that he was about to make one of the most momentous and surprising discoveries of the voyage, a discovery that would force him to question his assumptions about race and culture and help produce a radical Gestalt switch in his world-view.

Darwin Befriends Jemmy Button

It is around this time (mid-December 1832) that Darwin makes one of his most important personal discoveries. He discovers not an ancient fossil, or a rare plant specimen, or a coral reef. Instead, he discovers that there are three 'civilised' English-speaking Fuegians aboard the *Beagle*.⁴⁶ For a man whose curiosity about the natural world knew no bounds, it is thoroughly ironic that he had taken no notice of FitzRoy's Fuegians until now, after a full year at sea.

So, who were the three native Fuegians aboard the *Beagle*? The oldest of the three natives was El'leparu, re-christened 'York Minister' by FitzRoy's crew during the *Beagle's* first expedition to Tierra del Fuego. He was about 28 or 30 years old by the time the *Beagle* returned to South America. According to Darwin, he understood a great deal more English than he cared to divulge, and it was 'singularly difficult' to extract information from him: 'His disposition was reserved, taciturn, morose, and when excited violently passionate; his affections were very strong towards a few on board; his intellect good.'⁴⁷

Next, there was Jemmy Button, a teenager whose native childhood name was Orundellico. Jemmy was by far the ship's, and soon Darwin's, favourite. Darwin says of him that he was kind, simple-hearted, affectionate, and had a 'nice disposition'.⁴⁸ Jemmy was always in good spirits, and soon befriended Darwin: 'He was merry and often laughed, and was remarkably sympathetic with anyone in pain: when the water was rough, I was often a little sea-sick, and he would used to come to me and say in a plaintive voice, "Poor, poor fellow!"'⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Darwin (2004), p 188.

⁴⁵ Darwin (2004), p 193.

⁴⁶ Darwin (2004), p 182.

⁴⁷ Browne (1995), p 236, n 4. Notice how Darwin makes no effort to put himself in York's shoes or understand his plight.

⁴⁸ Browne (1995), p 236.

⁴⁹ Darwin (2004), p 183.

Moreover, Darwin noticed that Jemmy bore no resemblance to his wild Fuegian cousins Darwin had seen on shore. Jemmy took great pride in his Anglicised appearance; according to Darwin, 'he used to wear gloves, his hair was neatly cut, and he was distressed if his well-polished shoes were dirtied'.⁵⁰ Instead of wearing the rough canvas outfit the sailors did, he wore a crisp white dress shirt, stiff breeches and large-button boots.

Finally, also aboard was a young girl, Yokcushlu, who the ship's crew had baptised 'Fuegia Basket'. She was only 12 or 13 years of age, and she was the only female on board the *Beagle*. She was apparently fond of Jemmy, but York kept a watchful and jealous eye over her every move. She was, in Darwin's words, 'a nice, modest, reserved young girl, with a rather pleasing but sometimes sullen expression, and very quick to learn anything, especially languages'.⁵¹

The young Darwin now took an eager interest in the three Anglicised Fuegians aboard the ship. He compared the wild and savage appearance of the band of natives he had met on shore with the refined and cultured manners of Jemmy Button and the other English-speaking natives aboard the vessel. Darwin could not believe that Jemmy, York, and Fuegia were of the same race as the naked and wild natives he had seen on shore. Darwin saw first hand the extraordinary ability of human beings to change and adapt to their environment — whether that environment consisted of prim Victorian England or the desolate and harsh climes of Tierra del Fuego — and this observation may have facilitated his later conversion to evolutionary theory. According to Janet Browne, 'The attention he paid to the contrasts and to the similarities between civilized and uncivilized peoples during the voyage created an intellectual context in which ideas about evolution could take root and subsequently flourish'.⁵²

Into the Channel

The *Beagle* departed Good Success Bay on 21 December 1832, and soon doubled Cape Horn, the southernmost tip of the South American continent. However, for the next three weeks she encountered rough seas and violent storms.⁵³ During this time, the ship made only 20 nautical miles from the Cape, and at one point was battered by three gigantic waves and almost shipwrecked.⁵⁴ FitzRoy told Darwin that it was the worst storm that he had ever weathered.⁵⁵

By 15 January 1833, the ship found sanctuary near an area the British called Goeree Roads, close to the eastern entrance of a narrow channel that was soon to be named the Beagle Channel. It was at this time that FitzRoy

⁵⁰ Browne (1995), p 237.

⁵¹ Darwin (2004), p 183.

⁵² Browne (1995), p 249.

⁵³ Darwin (2004), p 191; Hazlewood (2001), p 120.

⁵⁴ Hazlewood (2001), pp 120–21.

⁵⁵ Hazlewood (2001), p 121.

decided to scout out a suitable site for the settlement and religious mission. The *Beagle* dropped anchor off Goeree Roads while the captain organised a flotilla consisting of two whaleboats, a yawl and a gig.⁵⁶

On the morning of 19 January 1833, the four boats departed the *Beagle* laden with supplies, and by early afternoon they had penetrated deep into the channel. There was no sign of human life. The thick Fuegian forests on either side of the narrow channel were silent. The party consisted of Darwin, the captain and several officers, two dozen crewmen, Mathews the missionary, and FitzRoy's Fuegians — York, Jemmy and Fuegia. By nightfall, they made camp in a 'snug little cove surrounded by inlets'.⁵⁷

The next morning, 20 January, they broke camp at dawn and rowed deeper into the channel. Now, as they paddled down the channel at first light, a succession of fires — the Fuegian warning signal — were lit to mark their passage. A group of 'wild and savage' natives appeared and ran along the shore in pursuit of the boats; according to Darwin, 'they were absolutely naked ... and sent forth hideous yells'.⁵⁸ Jemmy warned the captain that these natives were his tribal enemies, and he hurled violent insults at them in English: 'monkeys — dirty — fools — not men'.⁵⁹

As they were being pursued along the shore, the members of the small flotilla now had to contend with a strong headwind, and they made slow progress down the channel. Then, by nightfall, three canoes joined in the pursuit. Darwin and his party thus confronted a difficult dilemma: they were being pursued by hostile natives, but they had to camp and rest for the night. It was at this difficult moment that Captain FitzRoy showed his resolve. He picked up his heavy musket and fired a warning shot over the heads of his pursuers, and then another through one of the canoes.⁶⁰ As the pursuers fell back, the captain ordered his men to put up their tents on a stretch of beach and to dig a boundary line to keep out the dangerous intruders.⁶¹

On the morning of 21 January, however, Darwin and his party found themselves completely surrounded by a large contingent of natives. All of them were carrying slingshots, and they had crossed the boundary line. Again, FitzRoy took control of this dangerous and volatile situation. He brandished a sword and fired his pistol in the air. In response, one of the natives picked up a large rock, but FitzRoy walked right up to him and, without the slightest hesitation, took the rock from his hand and then gently and reassuringly patted him on the back in order to diffuse the situation.⁶²

⁵⁶ Darwin (2004), p 192; Hazlewood (2001), p 122.

⁵⁷ Darwin (2004), p 192 ('Here we pitched our tents and lighted our fires'); Hazlewood (2001), p 123.

⁵⁸ Darwin (2004), p 192.

⁵⁹ Hazlewood (2001), p 124.

⁶⁰ Hazlewood (2001).

⁶¹ Hazlewood (2001).

⁶² Darwin (2004), p 193; Hazlewood (2001), p 125.

During the next two days, 21–22 January, Darwin and his party were able to sail down the channel without incident.⁶³ But it is important to remember that he was now four days out from the ship, a new explorer in a virgin, uncharted territory. For Darwin and the other Europeans, this must have been the adventure of a lifetime.

The Settlement

On the evening of 23 January 1833, now more than five days away from the main ship, the small flotilla arrived at a secluded cove the natives called Wulaia (pronounced Wollya) in Jemmy's home territory. Jemmy's homeland contained good pastures, good soil and crystal-clear streams. It was the perfect spot to found a permanent settlement. FitzRoy praised the quality of Jemmy's homeland and decided at once to establish his religious mission in Wulaia.⁶⁴

Again FitzRoy took charge of the situation and divided his crew into several details. One group began to dig out a boundary trench around the perimeter of the planned settlement. To prevent a repeat of the dangerous standoff that had occurred a few days before, the captain posted armed sentries around the perimeter. Another group turned the topsoil near a brook into a garden, while another began to chop down trees for the construction of three large wigwams — one for Matthews, one for Jemmy and one for York and Fuegia (who were treated by all as if they were married).⁶⁵

But as this work proceeded, dozens of canoes from various quarters began to pour in: 'Very soon a hundred [natives] crowded along the boundary ... To Jemmy they directed a thousand questions and tirades.'⁶⁶ Then, according to Darwin, 'Jemmy heard the stentorian voice of one of his brothers at a prodigious distance.'⁶⁷ To everyone else, this 'stentorian voice' consisted of a loud roar coming from a lone canoe far out at sea. To Jemmy's trained ear, it was the joyous shout of his eldest brother. 'My brother!' he exclaimed.

Aboard the canoe were Jemmy's relations: four brothers, two sisters and his mother (his father had passed away while he was in England) — all naked. When they landed ashore, Jemmy's brothers walked up to him and around him in a circle, but they did not exchange any embraces or say a word.⁶⁸ To Darwin, it was the strangest family reunion of all time: this family reunion was 'less interesting than that between a horse turned out into a field when he joins an old companion. There was no demonstration of affection; they simply stared for a short time at each other; and the mother immediately went to look after her canoe.'⁶⁹

⁶³ Darwin (2004), p 194.

⁶⁴ Darwin (2004), p 195; Hazlewood (2001), p 130.

⁶⁵ Hazlewood (2001), p 131.

⁶⁶ Hazlewood (2001).

⁶⁷ Darwin (2004), p 196.

⁶⁸ Darwin (2004); Hazlewood (2001), p 131.

⁶⁹ Darwin (2004), p 196.

This reunion certainly seems strange to our eyes, but we must recall that Jemmy took great pride in his European appearance, wearing fashionable clothes and polished shoes, and that even Darwin considered Jemmy more European than Fuegian. So imagine what his family must have thought as they saw their prodigal son in fancy clothes and speaking a strange tongue!

That evening (23 January), Jemmy showered his family with gifts he had brought from England. He gave his eldest brother a Guernsey frock, a pair of trousers and a Scottish cap, and he gave his mother a carter's smock frock.⁷⁰ As the evening wore on, the ugly truth of Jemmy's forced separation from his family became apparent to Darwin. Contrary to FitzRoy's version of events, Jemmy was not voluntarily sold by his family for a mother-of-pearl button. In reality, his family had no idea that FitzRoy was purchasing him and planned to take him away. Darwin eloquently wrote in his travel journal that Jemmy's mother 'has been inconsolable for the loss of Jemmy, and had searched everywhere for him, thinking that he might have been left after having been taken in the boat'.⁷¹

The settlement was built from the ground up over the next four days (23–26 January). Three large and sturdy wigwams were erected, while the gardens were planted with a variety of vegetables, including potatoes, carrots, turnips, beans, peas, lettuce, onions, leeks and cabbages.⁷² During this time, the number of natives continued to swell: 'At one point as many as 300 sat on the boundary line'.⁷³

The situation began to deteriorate on 26 January. Tensions were already high because of the problem of theft. The natives apparently had no conception of property rights, and so attempted to 'steal' whatever they could get their hands on. In response, the captain posted additional sentries along the boundary. On that day, a group of elderly natives tried to cross the perimeter. When a sentry asked them to move back, an altercation followed between the sentry and one of the elders. According to Darwin, 'an old savage ... had coolly spit in the sentry's face, and had then, by gestures ... plainly showed ... that he should like to cut up and eat our man'.⁷⁴ In the evening, FitzRoy ordered a firearms practice to make a show of force. One can only imagine what the sight and sound of 30 men firing muskets must have had on the natives. Then, during the night, another guard shot and wounded a native who was hiding behind a tent.⁷⁵

The next morning, 27 January, all the Fuegians climbed into their canoes and began to leave. Darwin and his party began to feel uneasy at this

⁷⁰ Hazlewood (2001), p 132.

⁷¹ Darwin (2004), p 196.

⁷² Hazlewood (2001), p 133.

⁷³ Hazlewood (2001). Darwin, however, puts the number of Indians at 120: Darwin (2004), p 196.

⁷⁴ Darwin (2004), pp 196–97.

⁷⁵ The sentry later explained to the captain that he had opened fire on a dark object, thinking it was a wild animal. Hazlewood (2001), p 134. Oddly, Darwin makes no mention of this particular incident in his travel journal.

unexpected turn of events.⁷⁶ Were the Fuegians planning an attack in retaliation for the events of the previous evening? FitzRoy consulted with his officers. It was decided that 30 men were no match for 300 wild Indians, so they decided on a plan of retreat. They would leave Matthews and the three repatriated Fuegians to spend their first night alone, undefended, at the settlement, while the rest of the party would sleep at another, safer location several miles away.⁷⁷ This would be a critical test of the mission's future success.

It appears that many officers privately thought that Matthews, York, Fuegia and Jemmy would be killed, but FitzRoy did not want to abandon the mission after so much time and effort had gone into it. He was apparently willing to risk their lives in order to see whether the natives would attack or leave them alone. It was a huge gamble.

The next day, 28 January, Darwin, FitzRoy and his men anxiously returned to Wulaia, perhaps expecting the worst. They were delighted to see that all were safe and sound and that many of the Fuegians had not only returned but had returned on good terms. FitzRoy, relieved, then ordered the yawl and one of the whaleboats back to the ship; he and Darwin and the others would proceed at once with the other two boats (a gig and the other whaleboat) to survey the unexplored western parts of the Beagle Channel.⁷⁸ Matthews and his wards were thus left behind in Wulaia for a trial run, while Darwin and the others went exploring.

Chaos

Darwin, the captain and the others returned to Wulaia some nine or ten days later to check up on the settlement. As they sailed towards Wulaia Cove, they had passed a group of Indians who made threatening gestures. One woman in the group was wearing a dress that belonged to Fuegia.⁷⁹ This was an ominous omen. They were concerned about the safety of the missionary and the fate of York, Fuegia and Jemmy.

As they finally rowed ashore, they heard a commotion and saw a large crowd of natives dressed in ripped shirts and scraps of cloth.⁸⁰ The crowd began to act so aggressively that FitzRoy ordered his men to pick up their firearms. Next they heard a shout and saw Matthews, the sole missionary, rushing towards captain's launch, fearing for his life and screaming with terror, followed by Jemmy and York.⁸¹ Matthews and Jemmy climbed aboard the launches (York stayed behind on shore), and FitzRoy ordered his men to row out of harm's way.

⁷⁶ Darwin (2004), p 196.

⁷⁷ Darwin (2004), p 197; Hazlewood (2001), p 135.

⁷⁸ Darwin (2004), p 197.

⁷⁹ Hazlewood (2001), p 136.

⁸⁰ Hazlewood (2001), p 137.

⁸¹ Hazlewood (2001).

Once they were a safe distance away, Matthews and Jemmy told of the events of the past week. According to Darwin's account of their report, the settlement was plagued by looting and disorder:

From the time of our leaving, a regular system of plunder commenced; fresh parties of natives kept arriving: York and Jemmy lost many things, and Matthews almost everything which had not been concealed underground. Every article seems to have been torn up and divided by the natives ... [N]ight and day [Matthews] was surrounded by the natives, who tried to tire him out by making an incessant noise close to his head.⁸²

In short, there was constant looting, the gardens had been trampled, and the situation was escalating dangerously out of control.⁸³ Matthews reported that at the very moment the captain's party had appeared, a group of natives had been forcibly plucking out the hairs of his beard one by one, using mussel shells as pincers.⁸⁴ There was no way Matthews would return to shore; he adamantly insisted on returning to the ship.⁸⁵

For Darwin's part, it is worth noting that he had little sympathy for Matthews' plight, but his heart went out to Jemmy: 'Poor Jemmy looked rather disconsolate, and would then, I have little doubt, have been glad to return with us.'⁸⁶ But Darwin was wrong. Jemmy wanted to stay. In fact, none of the English-speaking Fuegians wished to rejoin the ship. It thus became clear that Fitzroy's experiment of evangelisation had turned out to be a dismal failure.

Final Farewell: Darwin and Jemmy Part Ways

Darwin met Jemmy one last time about a year later. On the morning of 5 March 1834, the *Beagle* sailed down the Beagle Channel and dropped anchor off the remote shore of Wulaia Cove to deliver supplies to York, Fuegia and Jemmy and say goodbye.

It had been thirteen months since their last meeting. In the interim, Darwin had explored the remote eastern fringes of Tierra del Fuego, returned to Buenos Aires and Monte Video to visit old friends, and conducted a geological and botanical survey of the Falkland Islands. Now, it was time to say goodbye to the Fuegians and move on. The Galápagos Islands and the rest of his remarkable voyage of discovery still lay ahead.

As the *Beagle* dropped her anchor off Wulaia Cove, FitzRoy, Darwin and a small party descended into a dinghy, rowed ashore and returned to the settlement. There was no trace of the Fuegians, and the settlement was totally deserted. The gardens were neglected and the houses abandoned. There was no

⁸² Darwin (2004), p 199.

⁸³ Hazlewood (2001), pp 137–38.

⁸⁴ Browne (1995), p 253.

⁸⁵ Browne (1995), pp 252–53.

⁸⁶ Darwin (2004), p 199.

sign of civilised life. All had returned to a state of nature.⁸⁷ The party returned to the ship, sad and dejected.

But this is not the end of our narrative. Several hours later, FitzRoy spotted three canoes in the distance. As he peered through his telescope, he could see that one of the men in the canoes was washing the paint off his face. It was Jemmy! 'At last he saw me and by the motion of his hand to his head (as a sailor touches his hat) I knew my poor little friend Jemmy,' FitzRoy wrote in his diary.⁸⁸ 'How altered he was,' FitzRoy exclaimed. 'I could have almost cried.'⁸⁹

Jemmy was invited aboard the *Beagle* to have dinner with Darwin and the captain. He appeared withered and malnourished, his hair had grown long, and he was wearing only a small piece of cloth around his loins. Darwin was utterly dismayed with Jemmy's appearance: 'It was quite painful to behold him; thin, pale, & without the remnant of clothes, excepting a bit of blanket round his waist; his hair, hanging over his shoulders ... I never saw so complete & grievous a change.'⁹⁰

As soon as Jemmy climbed aboard, he immediately asked for a bath and some clothes. Then he was dining at the captain's table, 'using his knife and fork and behaving in every way as if he had only left us the preceding day'.⁹¹ At the captain's table, Jemmy thoughtfully handed out presents to all his friends, including an otter skin for FitzRoy, a set of bow and arrows for his schoolmaster in England, and two spearheads he had made for Darwin.⁹² He told them that he was healthy and happy: 'I am hearty, sir, never better.'⁹³ In fact, despite his emaciated appearance, he said that he was eating too much: 'Plenty fruits, plenty birdies, ten guanacoes in snow time, and too much fish.'⁹⁴

During the course of his dinner conversation with Darwin and the captain, Jemmy filled them in about the events of the past year. Among other things, he explained that soon after the *Beagle's* departure the members of another tribe had robbed him of all his clothes and possessions, and that Fuegia Basket and York had abandoned him to return to York's home territory.⁹⁵

Darwin and the captain invited Jemmy to return with them back to England. They did not want to leave their good friend behind, but they were sad to hear that he had not the least wish to return to England. Jemmy wanted to stay.

The next morning, 6 March 1834, it was time to say goodbye. Jemmy had a private conversation with the captain and then exchanged farewells with the crew. Darwin described the sad departure in his diary: 'Every soul on board

⁸⁷ Hazlewood (2001), p 144.

⁸⁸ Hazlewood (2001).

⁸⁹ Fitzroy (1839), p 2, quoted in Browne (1995), p 268.

⁹⁰ Darwin (2004), p 201.

⁹¹ Hazlewood (2001), p 145.

⁹² Hazlewood (2001), p 145.

⁹³ Hazlewood (2001).

⁹⁴ Hazlewood (2001).

⁹⁵ Hazlewood (2001), pp 146–47.

was as sorry to shake hands with Jemmy for the last time ... I hope and have little doubt that he will be happy as if he had never left his country; which is more than I formerly thought.⁹⁶ It was the last time Darwin would see Jemmy and the Fuegians.

Epilogue: Revenge of the Fuegians

There is an ironic epilogue to Darwin's dramatic encounters with the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego. When Jemmy and Darwin parted ways on that quiet morning of 6 March 1834, it was Darwin who would go on to fame and fortune while the Fuegians would languish in oblivion. Captain FitzRoy eventually committed suicide in April 1865 by cutting his throat with a razor blade.⁹⁷ Richard Matthews, the missionary, died a pauper in the backwoods of New Zealand, after he was accused of embezzling missionary funds.⁹⁸ But in many ways it is Jemmy Button's story that is the most fascinating one of all — even more fascinating than Darwin's.⁹⁹

After Darwin returned to England, he devoted the rest of his life to the pursuit of science. In addition to his masterpiece *On the Origin of Species*, he wrote many scientific papers and published over a dozen books on a wide variety of biological topics. But Darwin led a fairly conventional family life, retiring to a secluded estate in the countryside and eventually avoiding all public appearances.¹⁰⁰ By the time he published his species book in 1859, Jemmy would stand accused that same year of leading a violent uprising and killing in cold blood a party of Christian missionaries.

Apparently, during this interim (that is, between the *Beagle's* silent departure from Tierra del Fuego in March 1834 and the fall of 1859 when the massacre is said to have taken place), Jemmy was abducted by another faction of missionaries who took him and his people against their will to the Falkland Islands, where they had established a new outpost and mission station.¹⁰¹ Tensions between the indigenous people and the missionaries boiled over, and according to some accounts of the subsequent bloody events, Jemmy and his people led a violent revolt against the missionaries to secure their freedom, killing all the missionaries. I strongly believe that Jemmy's side of the story must be told, for Jemmy embodies a rare and tragic victory over the forces of colonialism.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Hazlewood (2001), p 150.

⁹⁷ Browne (2002), p 264.

⁹⁸ Hazlewood (2001), p 140.

⁹⁹ I have to confess that I unaware of this fascinating turn of events until my colleague Arnulf Becker brought this to my attention. As a result, I am preparing a second paper, this one exclusively from Jemmy's point of view instead of Darwin's.

¹⁰⁰ Browne (2002).

¹⁰¹ See generally Hazlewood (2001).

¹⁰² As mentioned above, I am currently working on a second paper (a sequel, if you will) to tell Jemmy's incredible story. I shall present this paper at the next meeting of The South-North Exchange in Bogotá, Columbia in May 2006.

Conclusion: Darwin D₂, the Enlightened Scientist

What makes Darwin's story worth telling is that I think he was eventually able to overcome his prejudices and cultural stereotypes. As soon he began to reflect on what he saw, especially during his time in Tierra del Fuego, he began to question his prejudices and implicit assumptions, and to see the indigenous peoples he met during his voyage in a different light.

Darwin underwent a decisive 'reverse conversion' from religion to science during his voyage of discovery, and his experiences in Tierra de Fuego and close contact with the indigenous peoples there played a significant role in his reverse conversion. In fact, towards the end of his life Darwin confessed that his reverse conversion took place during his adventures in Tierra del Fuego: 'I remember when in Good Success Bay, in Tierra del Fuego, thinking ... that I could not employ my life better than in adding a little to natural science.'¹⁰³ Henceforth Darwin would devote himself exclusively to natural history and scientific research, and he would begin to question the literal truths of the Bible.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, Darwin must have learned a valuable lesson from his encounters with the Fuegian people. The voyage as a whole not only broadened his vision like nothing he could have seen back in England, but his time in Tierra del Fuego introduced him to the idea that there was nothing sacred or fixed about civilisation. He saw that the barrier between a state of savagery and one of civilisation was remarkably small. Aboriginal tribesmen were of the same clay as Europeans.¹⁰⁵ This is perhaps the most important lesson of Darwin's voyage. Whatever else we may be, humans are also animals. On this level, there was continuity between a cultivated Englishman and a savage Fuegian.

Darwin thus came to reject the conventional wisdom about the nature of primitive man — the notion that indigenous peoples were another species or somehow inferior to civilised man. Instead, he began to find close links between so-called 'savage' and 'civilised' races. He would later conclude that every living organism — mankind included — was part of one great ancestral chain, and he came to see the indigenous peoples he met on his voyage as his fellow man.

Once he was in Tierra del Fuego, Darwin took special notice of three native Fuegians he had befriended aboard the *Beagle*, and he was especially struck by Jemmy Button's metamorphosis into an educated, English-speaking European and his subsequent reversion to his indigenous way of life. At some point in time, Darwin must have noticed that the commonalities between him and Jemmy were greater than the differences. Looking back on his voyage of discovery over 30 years later, Darwin would later write: 'I was continually struck with surprise how closely the three natives on board *HMS Beagle* ...

¹⁰³ Darwin (2004), p 126.

¹⁰⁴ Darwin himself later confessed in his autobiography that his intention to join the ministry 'died a natural death' during his voyage of discovery on the *Beagle* (Darwin, 2004), p 57.

¹⁰⁵ Browne (1995), p 246.

resembled us in disposition and in most of our mental faculties.’¹⁰⁶ The outward appearance of diverse races might be different, but the mental processes of all men are the same: ‘I was incessantly struck, whilst living with the Fuegians on board the *Beagle*, with the many little traits of character, showing how similar their minds were to ours.’¹⁰⁷

Darwin’s treatise *The Descent of Man* is a brilliant example of his new mindset, for the Darwin who wrote this book is not metaphorically the same Darwin who embarked on the voyage. A transformation has taken place. The young Darwin is brash and judgmental; the mature Darwin is sensitive and open-minded, the prototype of the modern enlightened scientist. For example, while the young Darwin makes no attempt to understand indigenous cultures and language (he even refers to the Maoris as the ‘New Zealanders’ — betraying his own ignorance), the mature Darwin writes about the serious social and economic problems confronting indigenous peoples. This Darwin became particularly concerned about the decrease in the Maori population and threat of extinction of the Maori peoples.¹⁰⁸

While the young Darwin finds the tattoos of the Maoris ugly and repulsive, the mature Darwin makes a good-faith effort to understand the Maoris’ cultural preference for tattoos.¹⁰⁹ The mature Darwin rejects the imposition of a single cross-cultural standard or definition of beauty; instead, he comes to accept the cultural relativity of beauty — for ‘each race has its own style of beauty’.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, while the young Darwin tends to lump indigenous peoples together based on their group characteristics (e.g. all Fuegians have excellent eyesight; all Australian Aborigines are excellent spear throwers, etc.), the mature Darwin moves away from this and does his best to reject the use of cultural or racial stereotypes: ‘No two individuals of the same race are quite alike.’¹¹¹ The mature Darwin recognises that even the Aborigines of Australia, ‘a race probably as pure and homogenous in blood, customs, and language as any in existence’,¹¹² show an enormous amount of internal variability and diversity.

In short, the mature Darwin is an enlightened and objective scientist. He is so changed that he is able to put aside his cultural biases and speculate that the birthplace of ‘our progenitors’ is Africa, not Europe.¹¹³ Thus Darwin was the first to say, in effect, ‘we are all Africans’.¹¹⁴ Thank you, Charles Darwin. We are all in your debt.

¹⁰⁶ Darwin (1936), p 66.

¹⁰⁷ Darwin (1936), p 185.

¹⁰⁸ Darwin (1936), p 192–93, 199, 264–65.

¹⁰⁹ Darwin (1936), pp 597–98.

¹¹⁰ Darwin (1936), pp 601–03, 617.

¹¹¹ Darwin (1936), p 26.

¹¹² Darwin (1936) (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹¹³ Darwin (1936), p 161.

¹¹⁴ Cf Dawkins (2003), p 254 (‘Africa is Eden to us all’).

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