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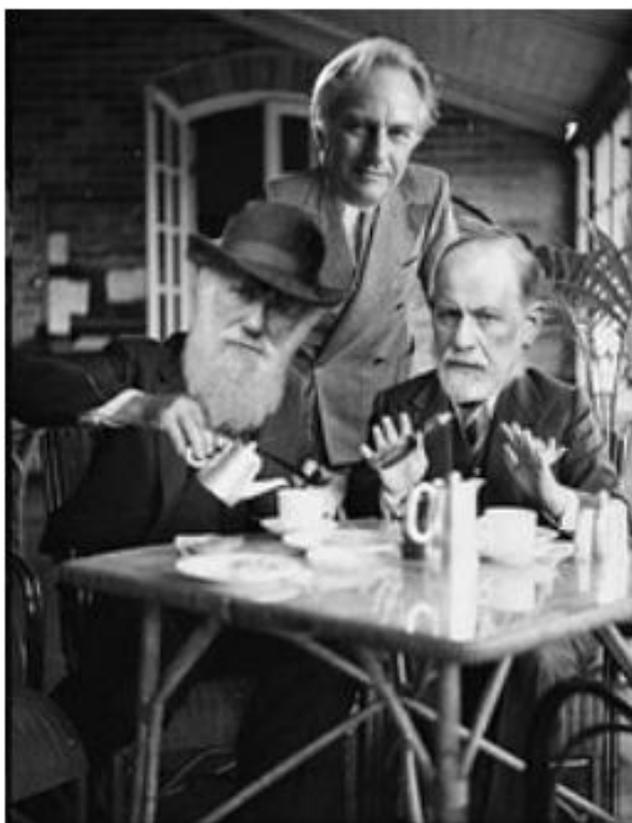
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Darwin, Freud, and Dawkins Sit Down for a Cup of Tea



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Imagine for a moment that leading figures in the fields of biology, psychology, and philosophy could transcend the boundaries of time and space and discuss theory. It is difficult to identify instances in which these fields do not overlap, yet there is a reluctance to discuss them in conjunction with each other for risk of coming across as unscientific, reductionist, or offensive. At the same time, these theories build off one another, so it is crucial to understand them in the proper context of their influences.

Charles Darwin is the central figure in evolutionary biology, yet his work has limitations due to his lack of knowledge about DNA. Richard Dawkins expands on Darwin's work from a selfish gene perspective and provides one alternative as to what Darwinian evolution would look in the world of Mendelian genetics. Sigmund Freud comes to mind as a seminal figure in psychology, but less is known about his philosophical work and references to Darwinian theory as a basis for his beliefs. These characters are interconnected, but a discontinuity in their time periods prevents direct correspondence. What would happen if this were not the case? Much would be revealed about both the interconnectedness of their works, and the ways in which their works are misinterpreted.

Once again, imagine that Darwin, Freud, and Dawkins could be brought together for an afternoon. It is here, in this pocket of time conducive to intellectual discourse, where we turn our attention. Charles Darwin sits in his overcoat at a small tea table. Across from him, Sigmund Freud lights a cigar. Darwin pours himself a cup of tea, then begins:

DARWIN

My dear Mr. Freud, I thank you for meeting me here today. I must confess though I am dismayed that my theory of descent with modification has been met with such opposition from the philosophical community, it does not come as unexpected. I hope that today we may reconcile my views with the field at large, for I do not view the two as mutually exclusive.

FREUD

Most certainly. While I consider myself foremost a psychologist and hope to be viewed that way, I do find myself wrapped up in philosophical questions. I believe that much of philosophy is misled in terms of its goals. Unlike science, which is grounded in the empirical, philosophy often seeks to fulfill transcendental problems of value and purpose with little regard for uncomfortable truths and what is observable in man. I immediately think of the justification of religion and morality on untenable grounds (Dewey, 1910).

DARWIN

I admit I do find much of the thought process unscientific, but I must speak in defense of the division between philosophy and science. The scientific thought process, which is not dissimilar in its methodical approach, supports what is observed to be, not what ought to be. Personally I cannot reserve the right to impose morals based on my theory.

FREUD

On the contrary, I think the two are linked and must be explained in conjunction. Addressing the philosophical question of the nature of man and morality from a psychobiological perspective I think will lead to more credible conclusions. As I understand it, evolution illuminates the origins of morality. I trust you are familiar with my work. The genealogy of morals and man's instinctual nature are built up and preserved in the mind over generations, and this residue of evolution is available to us through psychoanalytic investigation (Freud, 1930).

DARWIN

I am familiar with the work of Mr. Haeckel and his theory of recapitulation; I believe it is this which you are referencing. Since learning of Mr. Mendel's revolutionary discovery of genes, a new world has been illuminated to me, which brings remarkable progress to the understanding of natural tendencies. I am thus inclined to dispose of the idea of historical preservation. In this new light I can only see the preservation of instincts like your id as a result of genetic transmission.

[At this point, there is a mild disturbance as another figure joins the table.]

DAWKINS

A discussion of genes-- I am just in time.

FREUD

Dawkins? I was unaware that you would be joining us.

DARWIN

Mr. Dawkins, it is to my utmost pleasure that you could join us today in our discussion of genetics and theories of man. Please, do have a seat and enjoy a cup of tea.

FREUD

Anyway, I was speaking of my theory of morality. As you have read my work, you will know that the id is man's animal past, representative of his most instinctual and primal nature. Before any code of morality developed, man was guided entirely by the id. Bands of males that existed in this time were, by our current definition, no more men than elk. Before the development of the superego, men were much akin to other animals. They were motivated solely by instinctual desires: aggression and reproduction. A cyclical course of history followed, in which a strong male would emerge, driven by the instinctual desire to lay claim to females and territory, would kill the dominant male, the 'father,' and replace him (Freud, 1913).

DARWIN

There is certainly evidence of this element of competition in reproductive success. In the words of the great Sir Tennyson, nature is red in tooth and claw, is it not? (Darwin, 1859).

FREUD

Yes, and there are remnants of this today-- but I will return to this later. Morality first came about with social organization. When a single male was not strong enough individually to overthrow the father, he decided to band together with many other weak males. Brothers who weren't strong enough individually could now complete the act in cooperation. So they did, for the first time breaking the cycle of history. However, once the deed was done, no individual could take the father's place, for there were many of them, each individually weak and vulnerable to being killed by the others. The presence of the others and the social bond they formed restricted man and prevented the expression of instinctual aggression and sexual satisfaction. By killing the father together, man was unable to become him and internalize his strength, so he remained weak. Instead, the father was built up into an ideal which man contrasted with his own weakness. He still admired the father, and this produced a sense of remorse for killing him. This remorse is the first appearance of guilt. Guilt is predicated on the restrictive social bond which prevents aggression and fulfilment of the id. Morality has since been cultivated where this sense of guilt, arising from individual weakness, has been reinterpreted as strength and preached as a positive. You will recognize this concept of the moral 'check' on the id as the super-ego (Freud, 1913).

DARWIN

I do see that there is a connection between the formation of social bonds and the development of morals, but such a history you describe is elaborate, and the change which occurs is perhaps too abrupt for natural conditions (Darwin, 1871). It does not follow with my theory of descent with modification. Man, having his origins from primal ancestors, would have developed this tendency toward socialization gradually; it would not appear as a single event in time (Darwin, 1859). Such an explanation as yours is not verified by scientific investigation.

FREUD

I admit my explanation of morality acts more as a myth, though I feel it is tenable even though this precise scenario may not have actually occurred...

DARWIN

I do agree, however, that what is commonly regarded as separating man from most other animals is the presence of higher cognition. I do not see man as distinct from animals, but in the case of morality, his intelligence is a prerequisite. I feel there is no need for a recapitulation theory of man's prehistory, thanks to Mr. Mendel's insight into genetics. Tendencies toward being moral can surely be inherited, and their prolonged existence in the gene pool must be evidence of their being advantageous. To risk stating the obvious, man's existence relies largely on social instincts, and these exist because they allow for preservation of the group (Darwin, 1871).

DAWKINS

Both of these theories deviate from *science*. Darwin, surely you should recognize the full influence of genes. The individual is but a collection of self-serving replicators. Even within the individual, there is competition among genes. What you are describing, preservation of the community, is group selection, which by now is an erroneous belief. You imply an altruistic purpose of group preservation, yet there is no altruistic state of man (Dawkins, 1976).

FREUD

Dawkins, in this I believe you are correct; I do not believe in inherent altruism. However, there do exist observable altruistic acts which require an explanation. How do you explain moral behaviors? Morality restricts sexuality; it acts at the expense of natural selection. Morality and reproductive instincts act in opposition, so the origins of morality cannot be wholly genetic.

DARWIN

I do recognize that a struggle exists within man between his social and selfish instincts, but I am reluctant to dismiss their genetic origin. It is to be observed that selfish instincts are stronger than social ones and dictate behaviors more fully. Perhaps morality is merely correlated with man's higher-order thought. Such intelligence is necessary to his survival, but is morality? More so,

guilt and social obligation may have a function in reinforcing kin-related altruism and parental care. In this case, social instincts would likely develop as a byproduct of such filial affections (Darwin, 1871).

DAWKINS

In parental care, altruism is only apparent altruism. In reality, there is a constant state of competition between the parent and offspring. On further inspection, I believe that all social instincts can be proven to be selfish in nature, so this polarity you recognize between them is unfounded (Dawkins, 1976).

FREUD

Yes, there is competition between parent and offspring, but there is also libidinal love; it is here where the polarity comes in. If you will allow me, I will explain how this is demonstrated in my concept of the Oedipus complex. It begins in childhood, where the male forms an identification with the father. He admires the father; he wants to become the father. This would necessitate replacing him, killing him (Freud, 1923).

DARWIN

This behavior is observable in species that form territories dominated by an alpha male.

FREUD

Yes, and the reward for staking such a territory is the ability to lay claim to the females, in this case, the mother. The male develops an object-cathexis with the mother, stemming from the libidinal instinct of love charged with desire. There are conflicting attitudes toward the father and the mother which can not be explained by mere competition (Freud, 1923).

DAWKINS

Your theory is not scientifically based, and on these grounds, it cannot be taken as universal. I can, however, provide a superior selfish gene explanation for any evidence of your supposed Oedipus complex. Consider the desire of replicators in a given male to reproduce themselves. Allowing the father to mate freely would only spread $\frac{1}{2}$ of the individual's genes. Replacing the father, 'becoming' the father in your misconstrued sense, could spread all of the individual's genes. More so, if the individual reproduces with the mother, who also shares $\frac{1}{2}$ of his genes, more of the individual's genes are guaranteed to be replicated than if he mates with an individual with whom he shares no genes (Dawkins, 1976).

DARWIN

I fear that both of your discussions are too situated in theoretical realms, to the extent that they deviate from what is observable, namely that man does not mate with his mother, in nearly all

cases, and thanks to Mendelian genetics we know that this can result in recessive traits which are often detrimental to the individual. Such a behavior could hardly be perpetuated in the human gene pool. In your own insightful words, Mr. Dawkins, it is not an evolutionarily stable system.

FREUD

True, the observable is that incest taboos prohibit such fulfillment of the Oedipus complex, but the instinct remains to develop an object-cathexis with the mother. When the male seeks a mate, what occurs is a transference of his feelings toward the mother onto a new love-object. The Oedipus complex is still viable without the widespread practice of incest.

DAWKINS

Such a behavior as you describe is no evidence of the Oedipus complex. Once again, it can be explained through genetics. If there are shared similarities between the mother and the chosen mate, these characteristics are evidence of shared genes. For a gene to ensure its own perpetuation, it would make sense that it 'desires' itself in a mate.

FREUD

You still do not fully address elements of aggression in the Oedipus complex. A crucial part of man's nature is his cruelty. Investigating aggression must involve a dissection of man's prehistory, in fact, the prehistory of all living things today. Social and reproductive instincts which we have discussed operate against instincts of aggression. This dichotomy is evident in my discussion of Eros, libidinal instincts, and Thanatos, death instincts. All living things, including man, originate from an inanimate state, and the purpose of life is to return to this state through death (Freud, 1920).

DARWIN

It is perhaps dangerous to speculate on purpose. If we are to adhere to scientific principles in our discussion, we must stick to evidence in the natural world. Previously you recognized the limitations of philosophy in its need to explain purpose. Natural selection alone tends toward no purpose.

FREUD

This is true, but I counter that Eros and Thanatos do have a biological basis. Imagine that life is divided into mortal and immortal parts. The mortal part is the body. Dawkins, you would understand this as the 'survival machine.'

DAWKINS

Fair enough.

FREUD

And the immortal part is to be found in germ-plasm, the agents of heredity. Dawkins, your replicators. It is concerned chiefly with perpetuating the species.

DAWKINS

Actually, with perpetuating itself.

FREUD

On this level Eros emerges. It aims to bring individuals together. In man, this is evident in the desire for sexual reproduction. Libidinal instincts are perpetually striving to renew, create life. In your genetic terms, the ability of individual genes to survive physical bodies renders them, in a sense, immortal.

DAWKINS

Yes, of all things, individual genes come the closest to our notion of immortality.

FREUD

In contrast, death is bodily and has only developed with multicellular organisms relying on your survival machines. Death instincts aim to return the body to its inanimate state on its own terms and due to its own internal causes. Death instincts are represented in aggression, which is Thanatos externalized and displaced onto objects. Eros and Thanatos operate in opposition, one tendency toward creation and the other destruction. Yet they are paradoxically interwoven, which can be demonstrated in sadism and violent behaviors which occur with sexual reproduction (Freud, 1920).

DARWIN

This suggests, then, that if it were not for reproduction, all life would immediately drive itself toward death?

DAWKINS

I think what Darwin fails to say is that the whole idea is ludicrous. Your concepts are stated in vague terms, and your conditional reliance on biology is problematic. However, I will not completely dismiss your death instincts. I believe I can offer a clarification. In some instances, perhaps, it is beneficial to the genes for the organism to die, as in the case of runts relinquishing their allotment of resources to increase their siblings' chances of passing on shared genes. Moreover, after reproductive age, if an individual is no longer capable of investing energy in reproduction or care of kin with shared genetics, it would also be more beneficial to spare their

share of resources and die. However, in these instances, which occur minimally, death instincts act in service of reproductive ones, not in opposition as you suggest (Dawkins, 1976).

DARWIN

Both of your theories are certainly elaborate, and I am sure they have their own merit, but I feel in certain areas they deviate too far from what is observable. I have not yet come across any evidence of runts who willingly die. On the contrary, organisms, men especially, possess a strong sense of self-preservation which appears to contradict this aim toward death. The instinct of self-preservation has persisted through natural selection, and it ensures that an individual will survive to reproductive age.

I am, of course, intrigued about the elements of my own theory which have been applied in new contexts. Mr. Dawkins, your selfish gene theory provides much in interpreting descent with modification and 'motivations' behind social behaviors and characteristics. In places, however, I find that instruments such as your mathematical equations are insufficient in fully explaining natural phenomena because of their largely theoretical grounding. I have been quite interested in hearing of aggression and egoistic instincts in your work, Mr. Freud, and there is certainly an overlap in our views of man's social behavior. It is at the same time disheartening the extent to which you have departed from my theory of descent with modification in terms of kin relations and death-oriented instincts, which appear entirely incompatible with natural selection, of which survival is a prerequisite for reproductive success. At the same time, it must be said that our theories are not all so very separate, as hopefully has been demonstrated, and I regard each of you with the greatest intellectual respect. As I have finished my cup of tea, I believe our time is near up. In parting, I wish only to convey my utmost pleasure of meeting with each of you. May it lead to a greater awareness of the interconnectedness in thought and theory and the undercurrents of evolution in so many fields of thought.

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