

Preface

Over the last 200 years a series of influential doctrines have become so established that each has come to take on the suffix of an 'ism'. These include, for example, Marxism and Thatcherism. To those wishing to develop an understanding of ourselves and the other species that share this planet with us, I would argue that the most illuminating ism has to be *Darwinism*. This book is about Darwin and Darwinism. With regard to the man we will explore the sequence of events that led him to his scientific discoveries including influences, both personal and scientific. We will also consider the people and the movements that he, in turn, influenced. This leads us on to Darwinism. From the outset it is important to realise that the use of the term 'Darwinism', from its straightforward origins, very rapidly became context dependent. Hence when originally coined by his friend Thomas Henry Huxley, only a year after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, Darwinism was simply used as shorthand for the theory of evolution by natural selection. During the 150 plus years since then, however, it has been usurped many times by those wishing to use it for their own (often nefarious) ends. To eugenicists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Darwinism became a credo that social order should be guided by Darwin's theory of evolution. To religious fundamentalists in the United States even today, it is regularly used as a term of abuse. To those interested in what we can broadly label the behavioural sciences, it is an area of growing importance and one that appears to stimulate both enthusiasm and distain in equal measure.

This book examines both the use and the misuse of Darwinism in helping to inform (and misinform!) our understanding of human behaviour and internal states. As such it is aimed largely at students of psychology. It is also hoped, however, that it will have some appeal to students of biology, philosophy, the social sciences and to anybody who would like to become acquainted with the enduring appeal of Darwin and Darwinism.

As we will see there are those who consider that anyone interested in the human condition – why we are as we are – should also be interested in Darwin.

The chapters follow a broadly chronological order with the early ones covering developments during Darwin's lifetime including his three works on evolution, the middle ones covering responses and reactions to his work during the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century and the latter ones covering recent developments. I have not assumed prior knowledge of evolutionary biology, anthropology or psychology. I have attempted to write an accessible account of Darwin as a mindshaper and would hope that the evolutionary concepts introduced in this book will be understandable to any interested reader who is prepared to consider them. Enjoy!

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