

# THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF MAN

# AN ENQUIRY INTO FUNDAMENTALS

RECONCILING
MAN'S PROUD ACHIEVEMENTS
WITH MAN'S HUMBLE DESCENT

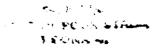
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### G. SPILLER

Author of

"The Mind of Man," "A New System of Scientific Procedure," etc.

SECOND EDITION



LONDON

WILLIAMS & NORGATE LTD.

- "Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought."

  Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- "Toute la suite des hommes . . . doit être considérée comme un même homme."

  Blaise Pascal.
- "Die ganze Menschheit ist wie ein Polypenstock."

  Ernst Mach.

DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY OF
CHARLES DARWIN
PRINCE OF NATURALISTS

LEICESTER CO-OPERATIVE PRINTING SOCIETY LIMITED 99 CHURCH GATE, LEICESTER

#### PREFACE.

This work has a twofold object—by means of an exhaustive enquiry to ascertain man's place among living beings and men's place among their fellows. The result may be epitomised in the following three statements, statements which purport to offer a convincing and intrinsically reasonable answer to the three most searching questions that can be asked on this subject of supremest concern to man.

First, the author seeks to establish, what is forcibly suggested by a comprehensive survey of the facts, that the members of all animal species are virtually unable to learn anything from their kind and that, on the contrary, human beings are able to do that to an almost unlimited extent. This will account for the well-nigh infinite potential superiority of human beings over animals, since in favourable circumstances individual men can multiply their powers almost endlessly through assimilating the substance of the consolidated thoughts and experiences of practically their whole race past and present, whilst individual animals, for the reason adduced, cannot virtually multiply their powers at all.

Secondly, in explanation of the above crucial difference between man and animals, the author seeks to establish that the higher apes are not only the most intelligent animals, but that they are so advanced mentally that a further moderate mental advance, about equal to that of apedom beyond monkeydom, inevitably gives rise to an intelligence—that of man—just sufficiently developed to be able to learn freely from all intelligent beings. It seems thus possible to explain man's unique and dominating place in nature without assuming any yawning mental gulf between him and his nearest animal relations.

Lastly, in seeking to establish the precise magnitude of the innate mental capacity reached by man as a consequence of this advance in inborn intelligence, the author finds, on examination, that if we discount the mass of information as to facts and as to modes of procedure which any given individual may have acquired from his myriad knowledge-producing and knowledge-pooling fellows, he would only be more or less able to improve modestly the equivalent of a paleolithic tool or idea during a life-time.

Hence man's close affiliation to the higher apes, together with his almost infinite potential superiority to them, are demonstrated. Hence, also, any stateable or immense differences in the mental status of human beings and human groups are to be explained by the relative assimilation or non-assimilation on their part of the ever-growing and ever-developing cultural heritage. If the contrary point of view, that of

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vast innate differences between animals and man and between men and men, is almost universally prevalent to-day although fundamentally opposed to all biological experience, it is because in the absence of a coherent scientific theory, thinkers have mistaken acquired for native ability. The substitution of meticulous for passing observation and study will correct this erroneous inference. It will demonstrate that the current biological teaching as to man's place among living beings and men's place among their fellows is not a whit less in monstrous conflict with fact than was the pre-Copernican teaching regarding the earth's place in nature. It will, moreover, produce as revolutionary a change in men's conceptions of Man as the Copernican theory produced in men's conceptions of the Universe, providing incidentally a firm basis for a lofty moral and social idealism.

Our three statements, which we hope to justify in the following pages, furnish broadly a sound and simple foundation for a science of man. This foundation ought to appeal profoundly to the biologist, the sociologist, and the thinking public generally, since for the first time an explanation is offered which reconciles (a) man's almost infinite mental remoteness from the animal world with his close proximity to it biologically and (b) the presence among men of measurelessly great differences in observable mental status with the absence among them of any noteworthy differences in innate mental status, as imperatively demanded by biologic science.

Further prefatory remarks will be found in the brief Introduction which follows the Table of Contents. It may be also stated that Chapters I. to III. prepare the ground, Chapters IV. to VII. contain the essential matter, Chapters VIII. to XI. develop certain leading conclusions, Chapter XII. gives a reasoned summary of the work, and that Section 4 of Chapter V. and Section 3 of Chapter VI. discuss respectively and at length the compatibility of our view and the incompatibility of the current biological view with the general facts of human experience.

G. SPILLER.

London, March 1931.

This Second Edition is virtually a reprint of the First Edition. The only change made of any consequence has been the introduction here and there of the term "inter-learning," to replace the clumsy expression "learning from others."

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#### INTRODUCTION.

In his Origin of Species, first published in 1859, Charles Darwin all but ignored the problem of the origin of man. In a brief sentence, at the end of his classic work, he merely stated in passing that "light will be thrown by the doctrine of organic evolution on the origin of man and his history."

His disciple, Thomas Henry Huxley, accepted this significant hint and shortly afterwards, in 1863, published his challenging Man's Place in Nature. In this masterly and memorable study he demonstrated, beyond any reasonable doubt, that man's physical constitution departed no more from that of the higher apes than the general physical constitution of the higher apes departed from that of the monkeys. Man had, accordingly, assigned to him an unostentatious place in the animal series.

In 1871 Darwin published his Descent of Man. Taking tacitly for granted Huxley's demonstration, he concentrated his attention more particularly on the complementary problem of man's mental outfit and reached the conclusion that there was only a question of degree between the human and the ape mind. Man was thus definitely assimilated to the Primates.

The great mass of thinkers were singularly unimpressed by the coordinate demonstrations. They had, of course, to accept as decisive the conclusion that man was descended from some lower form; but they could not reconcile themselves to the suggestion that the human world—which seemed to them farther removed from the animal world than the animal world is from the plant world—occupied no outstanding place in the hierarchy of living beings. And yet, profoundly struck by humanity's achievements, Darwin had spoken of man as "the wonder and glory of the Universe" and Huxley had dilated on "the immeasurable and practically infinite divergence of the Human from the Simian Stirps."

The present work represents consequently an attempt to ascertain whether, in complete accord with the general theory of evolution and without invoking occult or obscure causes, the insistent demand for a conception of man's evolution sharply separating him from his animal ancestors in the matter of mentality, cannot be satisfied. Conceivably, Darwin and Huxley had been so absorbed in the search for similarities that they overlooked some crucial and far-reaching divergence.

The author does not believe that there is a rift in nature. He considers that man's animal origin may well comport with his presenting a radical departure and even forming a separate kingdom. Man's immediate ancestor, he holds, represented the culminating point in the enormously long mental development of sub-human kinds, a point

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beyond which a new world with almost infinitely higher potentialities naturally opened. That is, developing intelligence had at last reached the stage where individuals could freely profit by the experiences of their fellows near and far in space and time and in this way could multiply their powers almost infinitely. Thus, up to man, we meet invariably with the method of instinctive, individual action varied by that of instinctive cooperation between the members of individual living groups of a given species, a method which leads in the course of the ages and apart from biological change to IN NO DEGREE DIVERSIFIED and IN NO DEGREE PROGRESSING modes of life, whilst in man this method is superseded by that of intimate cultural interrelations between the thousands of millions of individuals in all the human groups of all the ages, a method which leads in the course of the ages and apart from biological change to for all intents ENDLESSLY DIVERSIFIED and ENDLESSLY PROGRESSING modes of life.

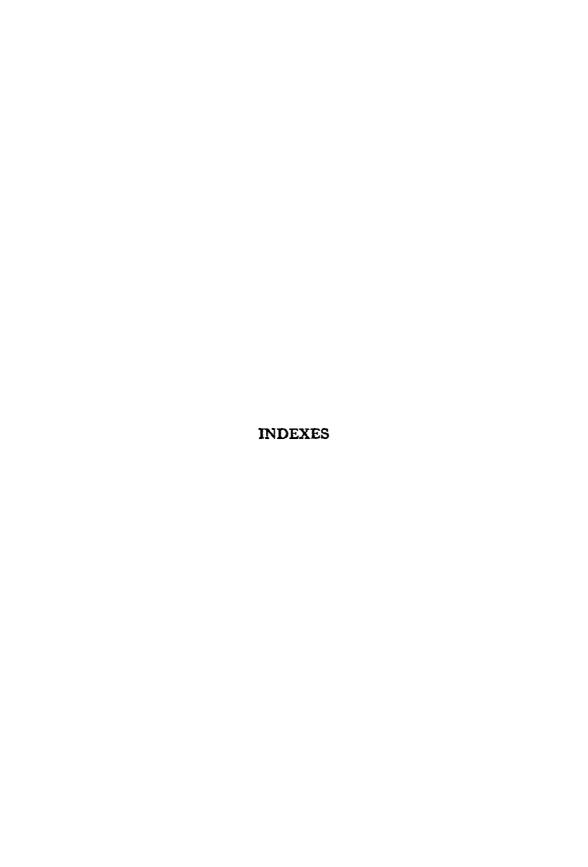
Hence men's cousins, the apes, use now, exactly as hundreds of centuries ago, unfashioned sticks and stones, whilst with man the crude eolithic flint tool has very gradually developed into various almost inconceivably more complex and more finished instruments, such as the observatory telescope, the railway locomotive, and the rotary press. Likewise, monkeys chatter now precisely as they presumably did half-a-million years ago, whilst in man virtually meaningless chatter has very gradually developed into imposing languages capable of clearly conveying our inmost thoughts and sentiments and of being fixed in writing and printing. In a word, the historically altogether non-progressive method of individuals guided by instinct and individual intelligence, a method absolutely universal in the animal kingdom, is replaced in man by the historically infinitely progressive method of individuals able to profit by the thoughts of their myriad fellows near and far in space and time and capable of infinitesimally improving on those thoughts. These two methods may be respectively distinguished as the individuo-psychic and the specio-psychic, the non-cumulative and the cumulative, the non-progressive and the progressive, the auto-learning and the inter-learning methods.

The view propounded here should commend itself particularly to men of science. As against Huxley, it involves only a "measurable" innate divergence biologically of the human from the simian stirps, and as against Darwin, we are not bound to assume an "immense" difference in native capacity between man and ape. Nor need we subscribe to the monstrously unscientific assumption that individuals, peoples, and ages differ enormously in congenital intelligence, in defiance of all we know of the trivial differences obtaining between the members and generations of individual animal species. On the contrary, we only suppose that man is about as superior to the higher apes as these

are to the higher monkeys; that, but for inter-learning, he is infinitely nearer to the ape than to a great scholar; that the innate mental differences between men, peoples, and ages are no greater than we find among animal species; and that, for all intents, cultural causes account both for cultural differences and for cultural progress through the ages. For the first time thus the science of man is invested with a scientific character, is stripped of all extravagance and caprice, and has for its basis a unit which is calculable because individuals are recognised as differing only infinitesimally in native capacity and as contributing, of themselves, only ultra-microscopically to the cultural heritage. Such a rigorously scientific conception is bound to clash at a score of points with the babel of haphazard present-day explanations. No reader will therefore expect to find in this volume a mere reflection of his own opinions. Rather should he hope for a new, but consistent and helpful, theory of man's place among living beings and men's relations to their fellows near and far in space and time.

Nor should the practical aspect be lightly dismissed. The aberrations of "fundamentalism" and the strange conservatism of modern religious communities are to no small extent due to the dubious position assigned to man by biologists. It is also worthy of note that the cultured generally find it impossible, despite desperate efforts, to harmonise human experience, human history, and human hopes with current biological appreciations of man's place in animate nature. All these classes would be inexpressibly relieved if the dignity and uniqueness of man could be shown to be compatible with his evolutionary origin. Moreover, the longer the deadlock continues, the more manifest it becomes that the prevalent view of man's descent has to be discounted because it leaves human progress and human achievements unexplained and affords no guidance either to the student of human nature or to the perplexed reformer. The only way out of the impasse is for biologists to aim at explaining man as he is and not, for the sake . of a plausible but wholly inadequate hypothesis, to insist that man is what he palpably is not.

Some seventy years ago the establishment of the general evolution theory created an epochal revolution in the biological sciences and in man's outlook on living nature. It remains for this age to offer a scientific account of the origin and nature of man that shall have a no less profound and far-reaching influence in the sphere of the social and moral sciences and on the leading practical issues of our time. To bring sensibly nearer this eminently desirable consummation is the object of this work.



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#### **ERRATA**

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p. 42, line 17 from below, for "exceptions," read "exceptions)"
            8, for "dolicocephalic" read "dolichocephalic"
   93,
           18 from below, for "passing by " read "passingly"
  140,
            3 from below, for "hestitate" read "hesitate"
  220,
  225,
           20, for "a" read "A"
  285,
            1, new paragraph.
  287,
           12, omit comma.
  208.
           11 from below, for "becauses" read "because"
  324,
           21 from below, for "millenium" read "millennium"
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