

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #25

Introduction

Darwin On Man & Animals, 1

the relation between this text & Darwin's theory of evolution

the question—is man the product of evolution?

a topic hardly mentioned in the *Origin of Species*, whose general thesis is the common ancestry of all living things from one or a few first kinds of organism

the general argument of the *Descent*

man's body structure bears clear traces of animal descent (ch. 1–2)

our higher faculties could have been developed (ch. 5)

since there's no difference in kind between man & animal (ch. 3–4)

= the difference between man and animal is a difference in degree

any difference in degree can plausibly be traversed by evolution

so, the difference between man and animal can plausibly be traversed by evolution

so, there's no reason to exclude man from the general thesis of the *Origin* (i.e., common ancestry of all living things from one or a few first kinds of organism)

Darwin's general argument against a difference in kind

(1) there's more difference between lowest fish and highest ape than between highest ape & lowest savage

and that's a difference in degree

i.e., a difference in more or less of some feature

not in presence or absence of a feature

since it is one filled with intermediate forms

(2) there's also a great difference within man (both in character & intellect)

e.g., between a savage & Newton or Shakespeare

(3) the difference between man and ape is like those listed in 1 & 2 above (i.e., it's not a greater difference)

so, (4) the difference between man and ape is only a difference in degree

His review of powers shared by man and animal

background

two alternative positions here

the Cartesians, who held that animals are machines, though man is not
the Aristotelians, who hold that man is an animal in the sense that he shares with animals the powers of sensation and emotion

but not the power of reason
Darwin's principle—all human powers can be found in simplified form in animals
powers shared
the cases Aristotelians can agree on
sensation—pleasure & pain, happiness & misery
emotions
simple emotions—e.g., fear, anger, desire
complex emotions—e.g., jealousy, shame, magnanimity
intellectual—e.g., wonder, curiosity
Aristotelians would not agree on this
other traits
imitation
attention
imagination
association of ideas
reason (problem-solving)
the controversial case—intelligence
what intelligencemeans for Darwin—one of two principles (sources) of animal action
instinct
what it is—an elaborate version of a reflex
sign of its presence—the animal's ability to perform some action perfectly without having seen it done & the first time it is done
explanation of presence of instincts—they are inherited habits
intelligence
what they are—learned activities
possible grounds—imitation
association of ideas
examples of this
the pike & the glass
the dogs & the dip in the terrain
the monkeys and knives
the monkeys and sugar packs with wasps inside
reason (problem-solving)
examples of this
the monkeys and the eggs
the dogs and the game birds
Darwin's argument for difference in degree with respect to reason
reason as a matter of degree
(1) the solution to the problem “is equally an act of reason whether or not any general proposition on the subject is consciously placed before the mind”—p. 455
a cultivated man—“would probably make some general proposition on the subject”

a baby or a savage—it is “extremely doubtful that they would do so”
higher mammals (e.g., a dog)—“certainly would not do so”
“[all] are guided by a rude process of reasoning as surely as is a philosopher in his longest chain of deduction”
(2) man notices slighter differences and does so more quickly
the difference between man & animal on this point is only a difference in speed & subtlety of association of ideas
whatever differs only in speed & subtlety of association of ideas differs only in degree
since the difference in speed & subtlety of association of ideas that is found between higher & lower animals is only a difference in degree [by generalization]
so, man & animal differ only in degree

Summary

All human behavior is a more efficient version of some animal behavior
Nothing that is a more efficient version of some animal behavior requires positing a new and distinctive human power
(cf. Morgan’s canon—“No appeal to higher faculty when lower faculty is sufficient to explain animal behavior”
an instance of Ockham’s razor
“Entities should not be multiplied without necessity”
connection to logic
these would be criteria of goodness of explanation in argument from observed behavior to the existence of a power
So, no human behavior requires positing a new and distinctive human power
So, human beings don’t have any power that is altogether absent in animals
So, man & animals differ in degree, not kind

His arguments against powers said by others to show a difference in kind
abstract thought

Darwin’s argument

- (1) Dogs can recognize a dog (generically) in the distance without recognizing (until it gets closer) which particular dog it is (e.g., that it is a familiar dog)
 - (2) The best explanation of that behavior is that dogs are capable of some abstract thought
- So, (3) dogs are capable of some abstract thought
So, (4) the difference between man & animal with respect to abstract thought is only a matter of degree

objection to Darwin’s argument

- (5) any animal that can recall and compare images can do what Darwin’s dog did
- (6) some animals that can recall and compare images lack the power of abstract thought

so, (7) [= contradictory of (2)] some animals that can do what
Darwin's dog did lack the power of abstract thought
language (see upcoming Lecture)