
How dangerous was Darwin?



Activity 3: Read all about it!
1 hour

Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[How dangerous was Darwin?](#)

What do I need?

- [Letter 2544](#): Thomas Huxley to Charles Darwin, 23 November 1859
- [Letter 2548](#): Adam Sedgwick to Charles Darwin, Nov 1859
- [George Eliot in a letter to Barbara Bodichon](#), 5 Dec 1859
- [Letter questions](#): Read all about it!
- [Media images](#)
- [Who's who?](#)

What was the response to the publication of Darwin's book from his friends and colleagues and how were the ideas satirised by the popular press? See the differing views and use them as a basis for your own blog or front page news. Then tweet about it!

What do I do?

1. Read through the letters and answer the letter questions.
2. Look through the images produced by the media in Darwin's time and answer the following questions:
 - What representations, ideas or themes do you see repeated across the images?
 - Why do you think this is?
 - Are the images critical, praising or neutral responses to Darwin's ideas? Why?
 - Who do you think is the intended audience for these images?
3. Either: Use the images to write a tabloid newspaper headline and short news piece that reflects what is expressed in the images.

Or: Use the letters to write a blog post reflecting the views of those who support Darwin's book (use the 'Who's who?' to find out more about who wrote the letters).
4. Write a tweet about the publication of the book and what people thought at the time.

Letter 2544: Thomas Huxley to Charles Darwin, 23 November 1859

23 Nov 1859
Botanic Gardens Oxford

My dear Darwin

...Since I read Von Bär's Essays nine years ago no work on Natural History Science I have met with has made so great an impression upon me & I do most heartily thank you for the great store of new views you have given me



Nothing I think can be better than the tone of the book—it impresses those who know nothing about the subject—

As for your doctrines I am prepared to go to the Stake if requisite in support of Chap. IX. & most part of Chaps. X, XI XII & Chap XIII. contains much that is most admirable, but on one or two points I enter a caveat until, I can see further into all sides of this question

...I trust you will not allow yourself to be in any way disgusted or annoyed by the considerable abuse & misrepresentation which unless I greatly mistake is in store for you— Depend upon it you have earned the lasting gratitude of all thoughtful men— And as to the curs which will bark & yelp—you must recollect that some of your friends at any rate are endowed with an amount of combativeness which (though you have often & justly rebuked it) may stand you in good stead—

I am sharpening up my claws & beak in readiness Looking back over my letter it really expresses so feebly all I think about you & your noble book that I am half ashamed of it—but you will understand that like the Parrot in the story 'I think the more'



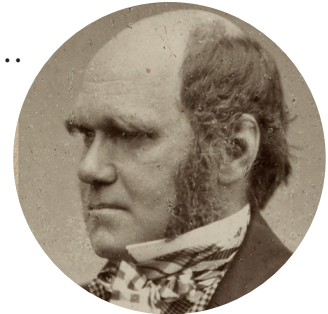
Ever yours faithfully
T H Huxley

Letter 2548: Adam Sedgwick to Charles Darwin, 24 Nov 1859

23 Nov 1859

My dear Darwin

I write to thank you for your work on the origin of Species. ... If I did not think you a good tempered & truth loving man I should not tell you that, (spite of the great knowledge; store of facts; capital views of the corelations of the various parts of organic nature; admirable hints about the diffusions, thro' wide regions, of nearly related organic beings; &c &c) I have read your book with more pain than pleasure. Parts of it I admired greatly; parts I laughed at till my sides were almost sore; other parts I read with absolute sorrow; because I think them utterly false & grievously mischievous—You have deserted—after a start in that tram-road of all solid physical truth—the true method of induction—and started up a machinery as wild I think as Bishop Wilkin's locomotive that was to sail with us to the Moon....



...We all admit development as a fact of history; but how came it about? Here, in language, & still more in logic, we are point blank at issue— There is a moral or metaphysical part of nature as well as a physical A man who denies this is deep in the mire of folly...

...Were it possible (which thank God it is not) to break it, humanity in my mind, would suffer a damage that might brutalize it—and sink the human race into a lower grade of degradation than any into which it has fallen since its written records tell us of its history...

I have written in a hurry & in a spirit of brotherly love. Therefore forgive any sentence you happen to dislike; & believe me, spite of our disagreement in some points of the deepest moral interest, your true-hearted old friend.



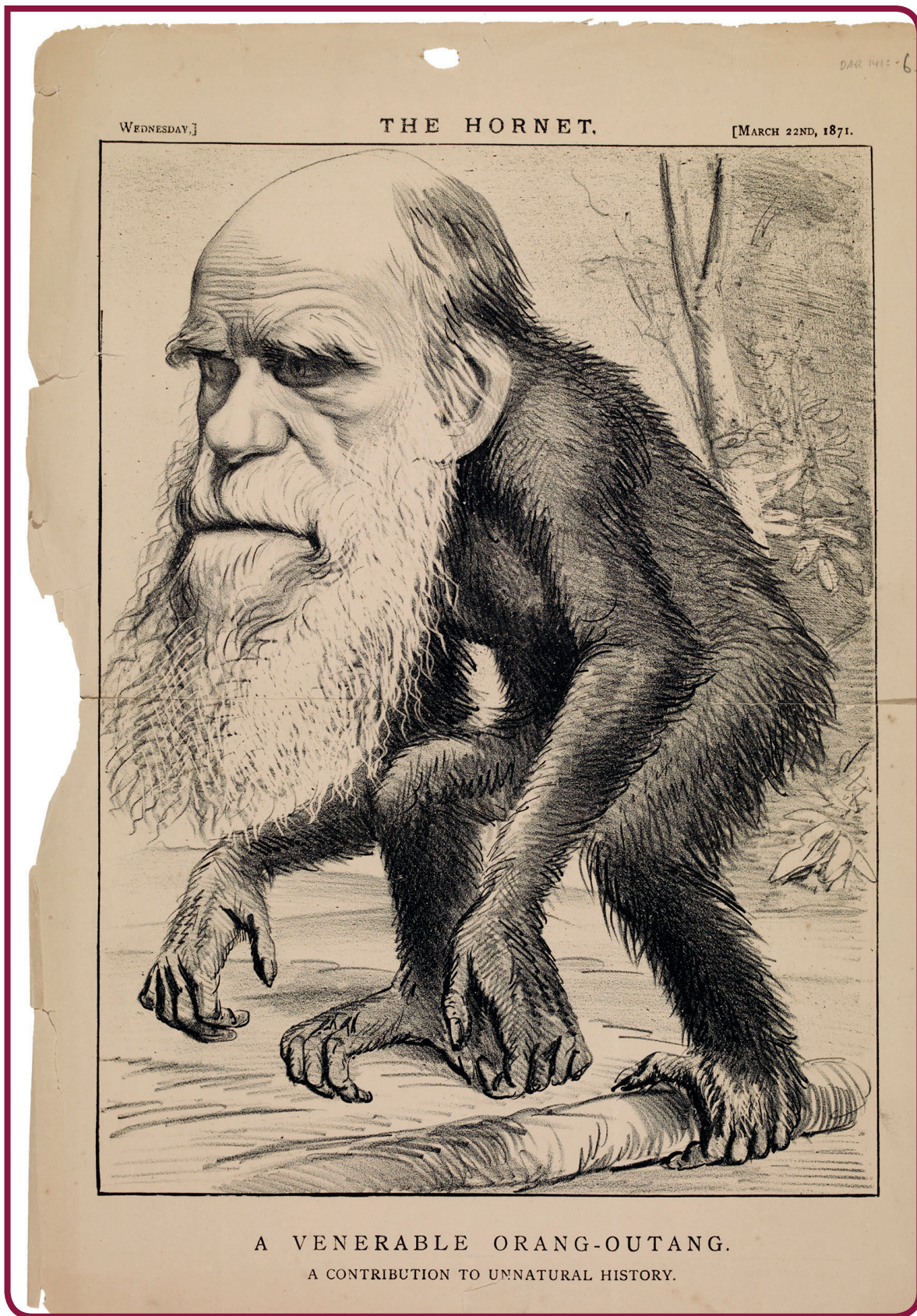
A. Sedgwick.

Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot) in a letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 December, 1859



...We have been reading Darwin's book on the 'Origin of Species' just now: it makes an epoch, as the expression of his thorough adhesion, after long years of study, to the Doctrine of Development – and not the adhesion of an anonym like the author of the 'Vestiges', but of a long celebrated naturalist. The book is ill-written and sadly wanting in illustrative facts – of which he has collected a vast number, but reserves these for a future book of which this smaller one is the avant courier. This will prevent the work from becoming popular as the 'Vestiges' did, but it will have a great effect in the scientific world, causing a thorough and open discussion of a question about which people hitherto felt timid. So the world gets on step by step towards brave clearness and honesty!

(in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. Haight (New Haven, 1954-78), iii, p. 227)

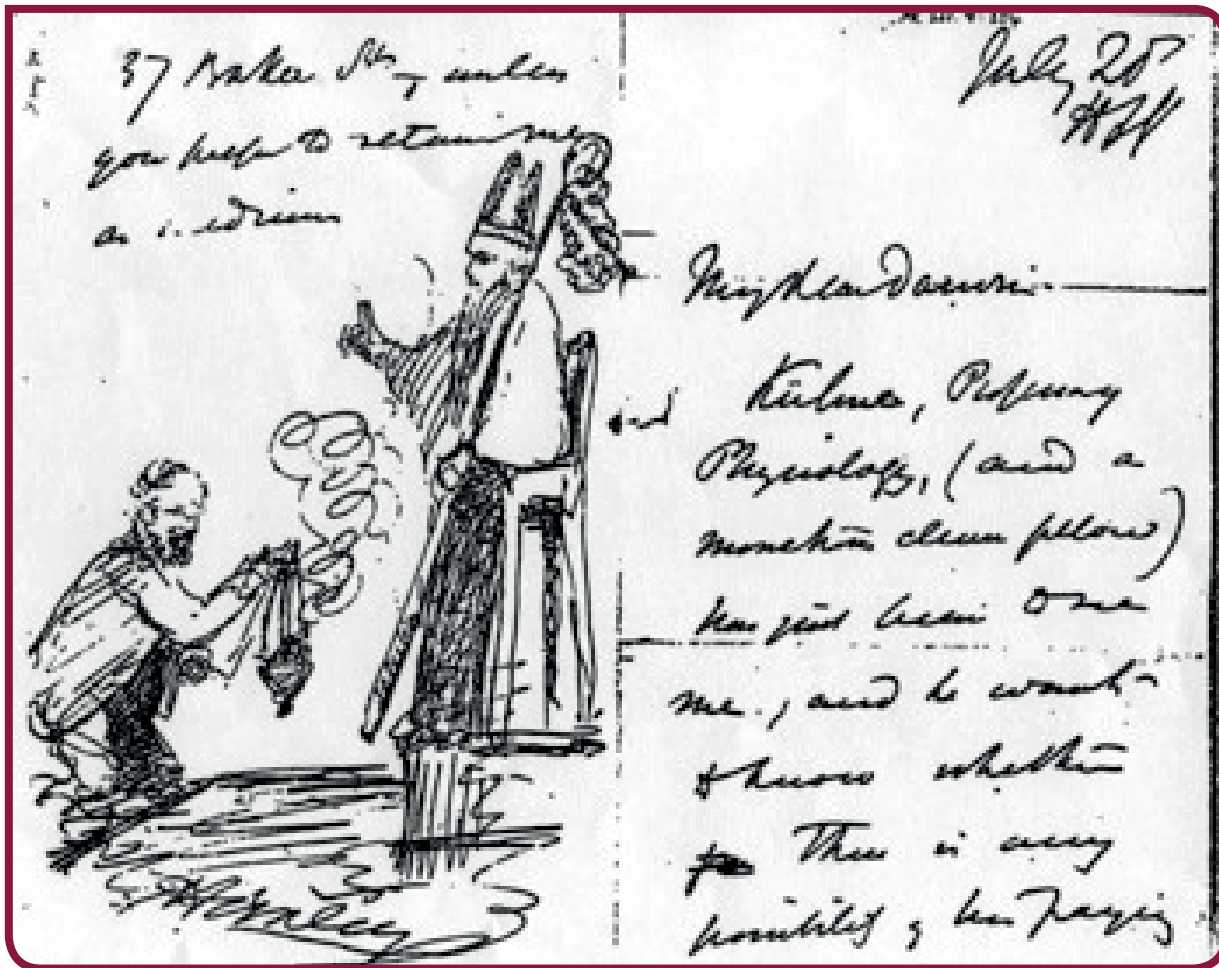


Darwin seen as an orang-utan, with the caption:

'The Venerable Orang-outang. A contribution to Unnatural History'

Reference: *The Hornet*, 22 March 1871, CUL DAR 141:6

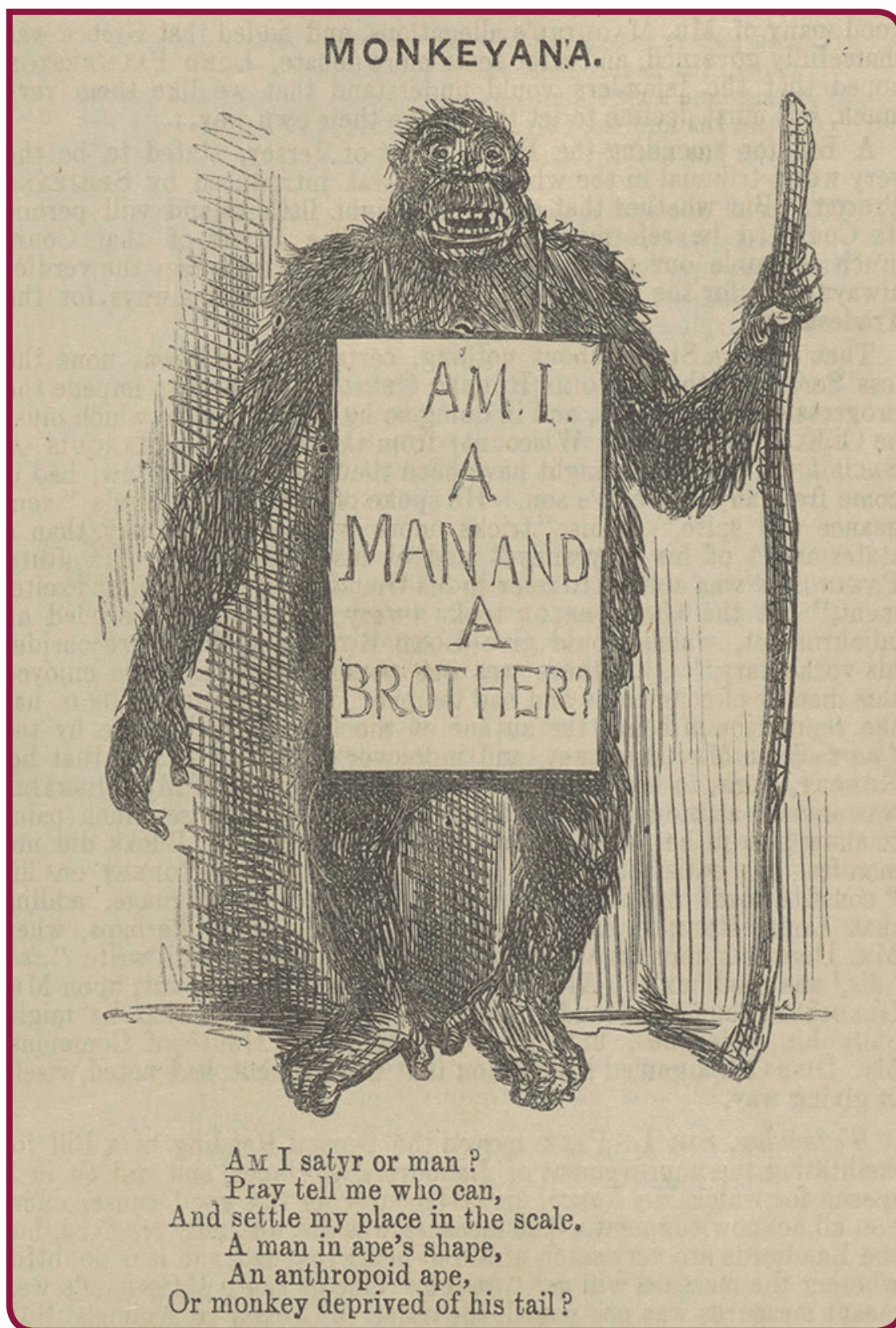
Media



Sketch of Darwin as a bishop blessing a naturalist. The drawing is by TH Huxley and accompanies a letter from Darwin dated 20 July, 1868 (<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-6283>).

The staff has the word 'selection' written at one end and 'variation' at the top. The bishop's mitre has the word 'PANGENESIS' written on it, and the drawing is signed 'Huxley'

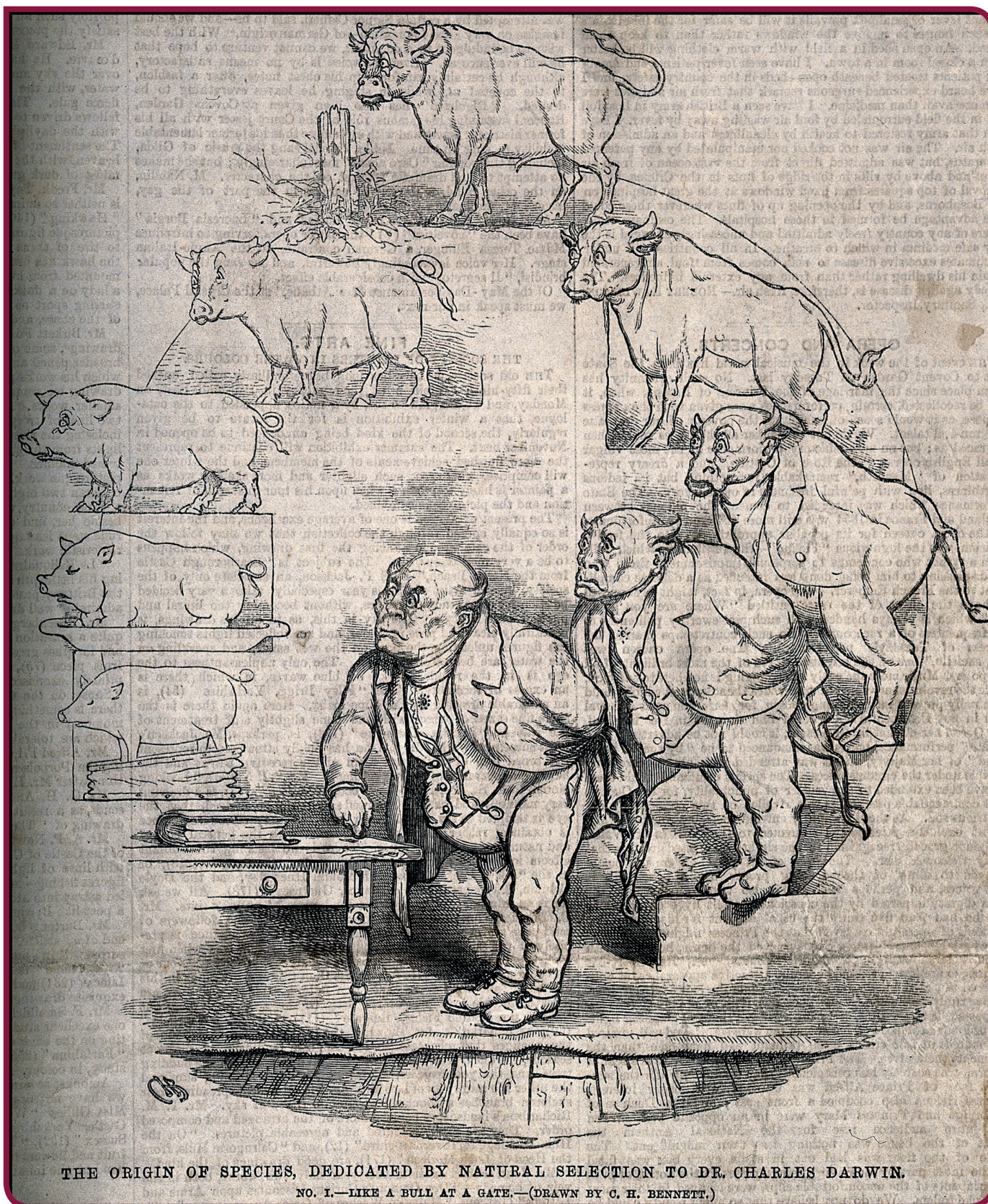
Reference: CUL DAR 221.4: 254



Am I satyr or man ?
Pray tell me who can,
And settle my place in the scale.
A man in ape's shape,
An anthropoid ape,
Or monkey deprived of his tail ?

Cartoon of a gorilla found in *Punch*, 18 May 1861. It echoes the words of an anti-slavery medallion produced in 1797 by Josiah Wedgwood (Darwin's grandfather). The medallion showed a figure in chains with the words 'Am I not a man and a brother?'.

Reference: CUL T 992.B.1.20



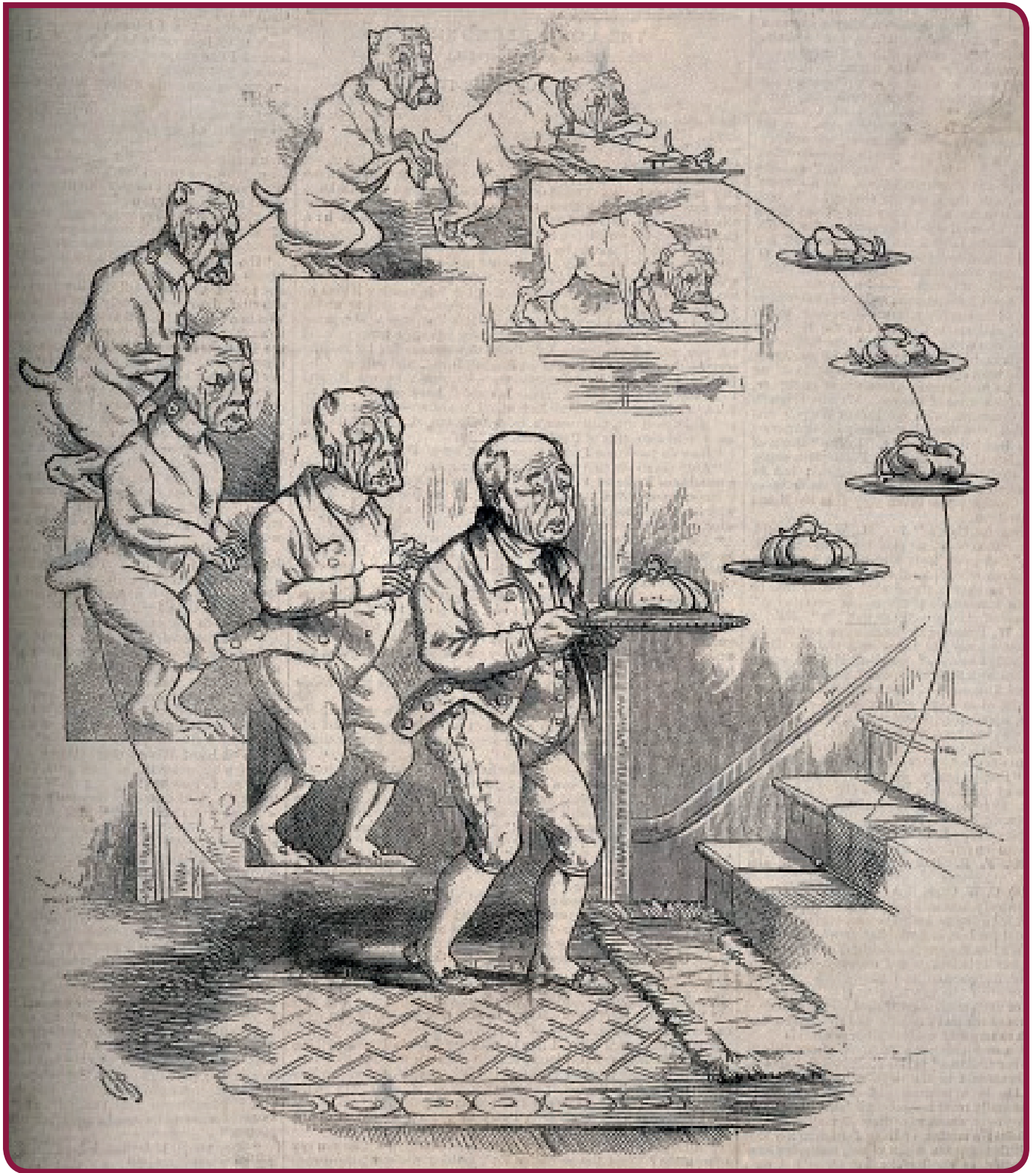
A sketch satirising Darwin's ideas, showing an imagined evolution of a pig turning into a man into a bull, by Charles Henry Bennett, 1863.

Reference: Wellcome Library, London



A sketch satirising Darwin's ideas, showing an imagined evolution of a cat turning into a woman, and her footstool into a dog, a man and cage of her skirt, by Charles Henry Bennett, 1863.

Reference: Wellcome Library, London



A sketch satirising Darwin's ideas, showing an imagined evolution of a dog and bone turning into a butler carrying a serving dish by Charles Henry Bennett, 1863.

Reference: Wellcome Library, London



A sketch satirising Darwin's ideas, showing an imagined evolution of a fox riding a goose turning into a writer with an accordion that becomes bellows, money and handcuffs, by Charles Henry Bennett, 1863.

Reference: Wellcome Library, London



The cover of *La Petite Lune*, a Parisian satirical magazine showing Darwin as an ape, August 1878, by Andre Gill.

Reference: CUL DAR 140: 4:20

How dangerous was Darwin?

Who's who?

Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot)

Mary Ann Evans (1819-80) was a celebrated Victorian novelist who wrote under the name George Eliot. Darwin and his family enjoyed her novels. She met Darwin and exchanged letters with him regarding a visit by his daughter and son in law.



Image of Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 1405. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Joseph Hooker

Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911) was a botanist who worked chiefly on taxonomy and plant geography. Hooker accompanied James Clark Ross on his Antarctic expedition (1839–43) and later publishing the botanical results of the voyage. He was appointed palaeobotanist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1846. He travelled in the Himalayas (1847–50) and introduced many plants to Britain for the first time. He became Assistant director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew from 1855 to 1865 and was made director in 1865. He held the post for 20 years and was knighted in 1877. He was a trusted colleague, close friend and confidant of Charles Darwin for most of his life.



How dangerous was Darwin: Who's who?

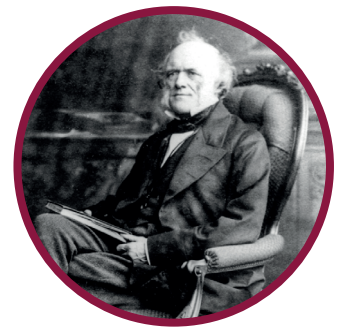
Thomas Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95) was a zoologist and professor in natural history. He was appointed naturalist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1855 and was president of the Royal Society of London (1883–5). He was a friend and staunch supporter of Darwin who became known as 'Darwin's bulldog' for his defence of Darwin's ideas.



Charles Lyell

Charles Lyell (1797-1875) was a Scottish Uniformitarian geologist. His publications, *Principles of Geology* (1830–3), *Elements of Geology* (1838), and *Antiquity of Man* (1863) appeared in many editions. He was Professor of geology, King's College, London. He was appointed President of the Geological Society of London, and president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He travelled widely and published accounts of his trips to the United States. He was knighted in 1848 and created a baronet in 1864. He was a scientific mentor and close friend of Charles Darwin.



Adam Sedgwick

Adam Sedgwick (1785–1873) was a Geologist and clergyman. He was Woodwardian Professor of geology at Cambridge University for 55 years. He became President of the Geological Society of London and president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a mentor to Darwin and remained in contact for many years.



Image of Adam Sedgwick ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D5929. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

How dangerous was Darwin: Who's who?

Alfred Wallace

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) was a Naturalist. He went on expeditions to the Amazon, between 1848 and 1852 and to the Malay Archipelago, from 1854 to 1862. He independently formulated a theory of evolution by natural selection in 1858. He was a lecturer and author of works on protective coloration, mimicry, and zoogeography. He was made President of the Land Nationalisation Society in 1881. He wrote widely on socialism, spiritualism, and vaccination.

Image of Alfred Russel Wallace © University of Manchester. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



Samuel Wilberforce

Samuel Wilberforce (1805 –1873) was a Church of England Bishop who was nicknamed 'Soapy Sam' for his slippery and evasive qualities, and for his habit of wringing his hands together. He was Bishop of Oxford from 1845 to 1869. He is most remembered for his strong opposition to Darwin's theory of natural selection.

