

Darwin & Gender Resources (2013) Introduction - Darwin & Gender: Darwin's Published Statements on Gender

1) "And this leads me to say a few words on what I call Sexual Selection. This depends, not on a struggle for existence, but on a struggle between the males for possession of the females; the result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring. Sexual selection is, therefore, less rigorous than natural selection. Generally, the most vigorous males, those which are best fitted for their places in nature, will leave most progeny. But in many cases, victory will depend not on general vigour, but on having special weapons, confined to the male sex. A hornless stag or spurless cock would have a poor chance of leaving offspring. Sexual selection by always allowing the victor to breed might surely give indomitable courage, length to the spur, and strength to the wing to strike in the spurred leg, as well as the brutal cock-fighter, who knows well that he can improve his breed by careful selection of the best cocks. How low in the scale of nature this law of battle descends, I know not; male alligators have been described as fighting, bellowing, and whirling round, like Indians in a war-dance, for the possession of the females; male salmons have been seen fighting all day long; male stag-beetles often bear wounds from the huge mandibles of other males. The war is, perhaps, severest between the males of polygamous animals, and these seem oftenest provided with special weapons. The males of carnivorous animals are already well armed; though to them and to others, special means of defence may be given through means of sexual selection, as the mane to the lion, the shoulder-pad to the boar, and the hooked jaw to the male salmon; for the shield may be as important for victory, as the sword or spear."

On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life, (London: John Murray, 1st ed., 1859), p. 88.

2) "There is one other point deserving a fuller notice. It has long been known that in the vertebrate kingdom one sex bears rudiments of various accessory parts, appertaining to the reproductive system, which properly belong to the opposite sex; and it has now been ascertained that at a very early embryonic period both sexes possess true male and female glands. Hence some extremely remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous.²³ But here we encounter a singular difficulty. In the mammalian class the males possess in their vesiculæ prostraticæ rudiments of a uterus with the adjacent passage; they bear also rudiments of mammæ, and some male marsupials have rudiments of a marsupial sack.²⁴ Other analogous facts could be added. Are we, then, to suppose that some extremely ancient mammal possessed organs proper to both sexes, that is, continued androgynous after it had acquired the chief distinctions of its proper class, and therefore after it had diverged from the lower classes of the vertebrate kingdom? This seems improbable in the highest degree; for had this been the case, we might have expected that some few members of the two lower classes, namely fishes and amphibians, would still have remained androgynous."

The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex, (London: John Murray, 1st ed., 1871), vol. 1., pp. 207 - 208.

3) "Man is more courageous, pugnacious, and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius. His brain is absolutely larger, but whether relatively to the larger size of his body, in comparison with that of woman, has not, I believe been fully ascertained. In woman the face is rounder; the jaws and the base of the skull smaller; the outlines of her body rounder, in parts more prominent; and her pelvis is broader than in man;² but this latter character may perhaps be considered rather as a primary than a secondary sexual character. She comes to maturity at an earlier age than man."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, pp. 316 - 317.

4) *"Difference in the Mental Powers of the two Sexes.*—With respect to differences of this nature between man and woman, it is probable that sexual selection has played a very important part. I am aware that some writers doubt whether there is any inherent difference; but this is at least probable from the analogy of the lower animals which present other secondary sexual characters. No one will dispute that the bull differs in disposition from the cow, the wild-boar from the sow, the stallion from the mare, and, as is well known to the keepers of menageries, the males of the larger apes from the females. Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness; and this holds good even with savages, as shewn by a well-known passage in Mungo Park's Travels, and by statements made by many other travellers. Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she should often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright. It is generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, pp. 326 - 327.

5) "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than woman can attain—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands. If two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, music, —comprising composition and performance, history, science, and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear comparison. We may also infer, from the law of the deviation of averages, so well illustrated by Mr. Galton, in his work on 'Hereditary Genius,' that if men are capable of decided eminence over women in many subjects, the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, pp. 327.

6) "Now, when two men are put into competition, or a man with a woman, who possess every mental quality in the same perfection, with the exception that the one has higher energy, perseverance, and courage, this one will generally become more eminent, whatever the object may be, and will gain the victory. He may be said to possess genius—for genius has been declared by a great authority to be patience; and patience, in this sense, means unflinching, undaunted perseverance. But this view of genius is perhaps deficient; for without the higher powers of the imagination and reason, no eminent success in many subjects can be gained. But these latter as well as the former faculties will have been developed in man, partly through sexual selection,—that is, through the contest of rival males, and partly through natural selection,—that is, from success in the general struggle for life; and as in both cases the struggle will have been during maturity, the characters thus gained will have been transmitted more fully to the male than to the female offspring. Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman. It is, indeed, fortunate that the law of the equal transmission of characters to both sexes has commonly prevailed throughout the whole class of mammals; otherwise it is probable that man would have become as superior in mental endowment to woman, as the peacock is in ornamental plumage to the peahen."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, pp. 328 - 329.

7) "In order that woman should reach the same standard as man, she ought, when nearly adult, to be trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her reason and

imagination exercised to the highest point; and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters. The whole body of women, however, could not be thus raised, unless during many generations the women who excelled in the above robust virtues were married, and produced offspring in larger numbers than other women. As before remarked with respect to bodily strength, although men do not now fight for the sake of obtaining wives, and this form of selection has passed away, yet they generally have to undergo, during manhood, a severe struggle in order to maintain themselves and their families; and this will tend to keep up or even increase their mental powers, and, as a consequence, the present inequality between the sexes."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, p. 329.

8) "Man is more powerful in body and mind than woman, and in the savage state he keeps her in a far more abject state of bondage than does the male of any other animal; therefore it is not surprising that he should have gained the power of selection. Women are everywhere conscious of the value of their beauty; and when they have the means, they take more delight in decorating themselves with all sorts of ornaments than do men. They borrow the plumes of male birds, with which nature decked this sex in order to charm the females....With respect to the other form of sexual selection (which with the lower animals is much the most common), namely, when the females are the selectors, and accept only those males which excite or charm them most, we have reason to believe that it formerly acted on the progenitors of man. Man in all probability owes his beard, and perhaps some other characters, to inheritance from an ancient progenitor who gained in this manner his ornaments. But this form of selection may have occasionally acted during later times; for in utterly barbarous tribes the women have more power in choosing, rejecting, and tempting their lovers, or of afterwards changing their husbands, than might have been expected."

Descent (1871), vol. 2, pp. 371 - 372.