

# The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex

Darwin, C.

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# Civilization in transition (collected works of C. G. Jung, volume 10) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

Jung, C. G.

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## 1 | WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU DO?

I am an interdisciplinary scholar with a background in French and Comparative Literature (BA), Dance (MA), Philosophy and Dance (PhD), and Evolutionary Biology (incomplete 2<sup>nd</sup> PhD). In my first life I was a dancer/choreographer/professor of dance/dance scholar; in my second and ongoing life, I am a Courtesy Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Oregon, where I taught as a Visiting Professor in the 1990s. My writings span psychotherapy and psychiatry, evolutionary and phenomenological semiotics, anthropology, cognitive science and aesthetics.

## 2 | DETAIL A BOOK YOU HAVE PARTICULARLY BEEN IMPACTED BY

My thinking and writings have been impacted by two books: Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* and Carl Jung's *Civilization in Transition*.

### 2.1 | A brief rundown of a central Darwin observation and the subsequent research it spurred

Darwin's book opened my eyes to "the law of battle." Darwin describes the law in over 400 pages, taking into account animals from beetles to birds, from birds to a range of mammals, and including, finally, "man." The law is a biologically grounded law that drives competition between and among males for priority in mating, hence for reproduction (Darwin, 1871/1981). Darwin succinctly describes the "battles" as "conflicts for the possession of females" (Vol. I, p. 375), later noting that "[w]ith mammals the male appears to win the female much more through the law of

battle than through the display of his charms" (Vol. II, p. 239), especially in species in which males "are provided with weapons which the females do not possess" (Vol. II, p. 242).

More recent biologists have shown that some species have a special battleground for their competition, a communal meeting place—a "lek"—where males ritually gather every year to compete (see, for example, Attenborough, 1990; Höglund & Alatalo, 1995; Johnsgard, 1994; Lill, 1976). As these field study researchers point out, leks are formed by species of insects, flies, butterflies, wasps, lizards, fish, frogs, toads, newts, bats, walrus, deer, wildebeest and antelope. As shown elsewhere (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008), leks are strikingly akin to what cultural historian Johan Huizinga, in his classic study *Homo Ludens* (1955), described as human competitions: they are akin to duels, community clashes, and national conflicts that similarly take place on a consentient chosen ground where combatants fight according to certain rules for a specified duration and a winner emerges. In effect, what Huizinga described as "warfare proper" (1955, p. 90)—formalised, strictly ordered, rule-governed human competition—is systematised and disciplined in ways similar to leks. Seen through Darwin's observant eyes and his worldwide descriptions of animate life, not only are the historically formalised battles that Huizinga documented a further form of the law of battle, but later wars, both declared and undeclared, are a still further form. These later wars not infrequently come into being through surprise attacks, whether by duly trained armies, as in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, or by individuals, as in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, which helped to initiate World War I, as well as in killings by terrorists, snipers, drones and so on.

Both formalised and non-formalised human competitions show that the law of battle—biologically driven real-life, real-time male–male competition—has been exapted by human males for pursuits other than the pursuit of females (see evolutionary biologists Gould & Vrba, 1982, for the coinage and derivation of this "missing term in the science of form"). In particular, human battles for priority in mating have been exapted from reproductive pursuits to the pursuit and practice of war, both declared and undeclared, whether for territory, resources or national prominence. It is topical to note in this context that while sperm competition has been duly investigated by scientists (for example, Birkhead, 2000; Birkhead & Moller, 1998; Parker, 1998; Simmons, 2001), real-life, real-time human male–male competition and its biological underpinnings have not.

In sum, the worldwide range of historical and present-day human conflicts shows that the biological basis of the law of battle warrants dedicated and extensive study, particularly since human conflicts are orchestrated and propelled by the human equivalent of "dominant male macaques": "Their hair is sleek and carefully groomed, their walk, calm, assured and majestic. They move in apparent disregard of the lesser monkeys who scatter at their approach" (Eimerl & DeVore, 1965, p. 106). In effect, "A dominant animal controls the space around it . . . It can invade an inferior's space as a right" (p. 106). The law of battle thus leads to questioning political male–male competition as psychologically motivated, even as a form of self-addiction, thus an area of human life to which psychotherapy pertains directly.

Chapters in Jung's book *Civilization in Transition* are precisely pertinent, informative and provocative with respect to this questioning.

## 2.2 | A brief rundown of Jung's portrayal of Wotan, mass movements and the individual, and the subsequent research it inspired

The exaptation of male–male competition to political conflicts reaches new heights with Wotanesque males who are akin in stature to "dominant male macaques" (Eimerl & DeVore, 1965, p. 106). Jung describes Wotan as "the god of storm and frenzy, the unleasher of passions and the lust of battle" (Jung, 1937/1970, p. 182). In describing "what is going on in Germany" in the mid-1930s (Jung's chapter titled "Wotan" was an essay first published in 1936), Jung states, "Perhaps we may sum up this general phenomenon as *Ergriffenheit*—a state of being seized or possessed" (Jung 1937/1970, p. 184). He then proceeds to specify:

Wotan is an Ergreifer of men [one who seizes as opposed to an Ergriffener, one who is seized], and, unless one wishes to deify Hitler—which has indeed actually happened—he is really the only explanation. It is true that Wotan shares this quality with his cousin Dionysus, but Dionysus seems to have exercised his influence mainly on women . . . The impressive thing about the German phenomenon is that one man, who is obviously “possessed,” has infected a whole nation to such an extent that everything is set in motion and has started rolling on its course towards perdition. (pp. 184–185)

As pointed out elsewhere (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, p. 1),

*Jung's detailed description of the archetype Wotan and his likening of Hitler (whom Jung experienced in person) to Wotan are presciently relevant to understanding prominent political figures in present-day global politics and the mass movements they incite. Jung's writings in fact challenge us to think specifically about the human dispositions, reactive tendencies, and affective motivations that generate and propel our troubled twenty-first-century international politics and its ongoing wars. These dispositions, tendencies, and motivations, in turn, point us toward understandings of human nature that bring to light its archetypal character, which includes its liability to hysteria, one form of which consists in the “talent” for believing one's own lies.*

Jung's chapter “Epilogue to Essays on Contemporary Events” provides fine-grained perspectives on the interrelationship of archetypes, “mass movements,” and individuals:

*Whenever an archetype appears things become critical, and it is impossible to foresee what turn they will take . . . there is always a great danger of a mass movement, and a catastrophe can be avoided only if the effect of the archetype can be intercepted and assimilated by a sufficiently large majority of individuals. At the very least there must be a certain number of individuals who are still capable of making their influence felt. (Jung, 1937/1970, p. 229)*

Further, “Everything begins with the individual. There are well-meaning theologians and humanitarians who want to break the power principle—in others. We must begin by breaking it in ourselves. Then the thing becomes credible” (p. 228).

Jung's chapter “Self-Knowledge” (part of *The Undiscovered Self*) includes observations that speak directly to the need of the individual to rise to the challenge of knowing him/herself, thus rising to the challenge of understanding human nature. For example,

*It is in the nature of political bodies always to see the evil in the opposite group, just as the individual has an ineradicable tendency to get rid of everything he does not know and does not want to know about himself by foisting it off on somebody else. (Jung, 1937/1970, p. 299)*

*Considering that the evil of our day puts everything that has ever agonized mankind in the deepest shade, one must ask oneself how it is that, for all our progress in the administration of justice, in medicine and in technology, for all our concern with life and health, monstrous engines of destruction have been invented which could easily exterminate the human race. (p. 298)*

*The underestimation of the psychological factor is likely to take a bitter revenge. It is therefore high time we caught up with ourselves in this matter. For the present this must remain a pious wish, because self-knowledge, as well as being highly unpopular, seems to be an unpleasantly idealistic goal, reeks of morality, and is preoccupied with the psychological shadow, which is normally denied whenever possible or at least not spoken of. (p. 295)*

Taking responsibility for one's own proclivities and discovering one's own shadow might well be described as a form of self-therapy. As Jung warns, however, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious. The procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular" (Jung, 1983, pp. 265–266).

### 3 | WHAT THE BOOK TELLS US ABOUT PSYCHOTHERAPY AS A POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Darwin's book does not tell us about psychotherapy as a political activity but about political activity as biologically motivated in male–male competition. It thereby lays the groundwork for psychological understandings of human conflicts in which the pursuit of power is dominant. Jung's book enlightens us in ever deeper ways about such conflicts and the pursuit of power, showing how "human control comes to an end when the individual is caught in a mass movement . . . [and] archetypes begin to function" (Jung, 1937/1970, p. 189).

### 4 | WHY OTHERS MIGHT READ THE BOOK

Evolutionary studies can be remarkably relevant to psychological understandings of human dispositions and behaviours and thus remarkably relevant to ways in which the practice of psychotherapy may be not just relevant, but essential to the health of nations as well as individuals, particularly those nations whose leaders are self- rather than citizen-oriented, even to the point of -addiction.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

Department of Philosophy, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR

Email: [msj@uoregon.edu](mailto:msj@uoregon.edu)

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**Maxine Sheets-Johnstone** has authored over 90 articles in humanities, science and art journals and has given conference keynotes and invited guest lectures in a variety of academic disciplines in Europe, the UK, and North and South America. Her 10 book publications include *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Temple University Press, 50 anniversary edition, 2015); the “Roots” trilogy: *The Roots of Thinking* (Temple University Press, 1990), *The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies* (Open Court Publishing, 1994), and *The Roots of Morality* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); *Giving the Body Its Due* (State University of New York Press, 1992); *The Primacy of Movement* (John Benjamins Publishing, 1999); *The Corporeal Turn: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Imprint Academic, 2009); and *Insides and Outsides: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Animate Nature* (Imprint Academic, 2016). She was awarded a Distinguished Fellowship in 2007 for her research on xenophobia in the inaugural year of the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University, UK, the theme of which was “The Legacy of Charles Darwin”; an Alumni Achievement Award in 2011 from the University of Wisconsin where she did all of her graduate work (M.A. in Dance; Ph.D. in Philosophy and Dance; incomplete second doctorate in Evolutionary Biology); and was honoured with a Scholar’s Session at the 2012 meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in Rochester, NY.