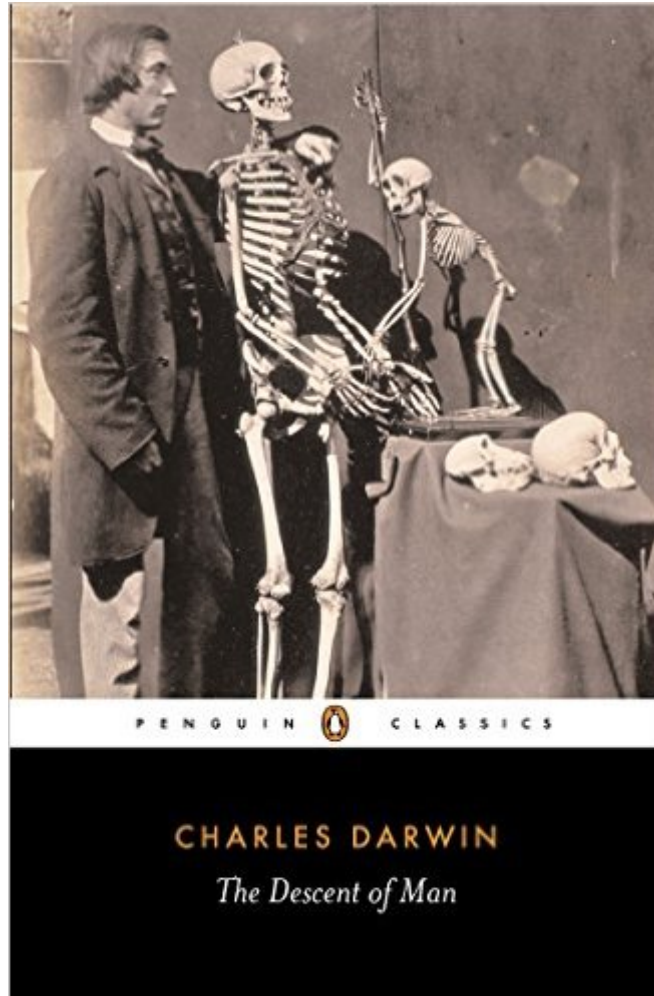


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The Descent Of Man (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Applying his controversial theory of evolution to the origins of the human species, Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* was the culmination of his life's work. In *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin refused to discuss human evolution, believing the subject too 'surrounded with prejudices'. He had been reworking his notes since the 1830s, but only with trepidation did he finally publish *The Descent of Man* in 1871. The book notoriously put apes in our family tree and made the races one family, diversified by 'sexual selection' - Darwin's provocative theory that female choice among competing males leads to diverging racial characteristics. Named by Sigmund Freud as 'one of the ten most significant books' ever written, Darwin's *Descent of Man* continues to shape the way we think about what it is that makes us uniquely human. In their introduction, James Moore and Adrian Desmond, acclaimed biographers of Charles Darwin, call for a radical re-assessment of the book, arguing that its core ideas on race were fired by Darwin's hatred of slavery. The text is the second and definitive edition and this volume also contains suggestions for further reading, a chronology and biographical sketches of prominent individuals mentioned. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

It wasn't until a few years after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) that natural selection completely overhauled biology as the unification principle widely sought after to explain uniformity and diversity in living things, Darwin had himself uncovered a type of natural selection, sexual selection, mentioned it briefly in *Origin* but held back on explaining it fully because it would require more work to do so. The result was the 2 volume *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* published in 1871 that spanned nearly 700 pages. Here both volumes are presented in one. Darwin and Wallace had co-discovered natural selection as the main mechanism of evolution. Wallace however had succumbed to supernatural explanations and had largely refused to accept that sexual selection could produce some adaptations. Maybe this was because he thought that some adaptations could be explained another way but Darwin had compiled enough evidence to suggest that sexual selection was responsible for many adaptations and was also thusly more evidence for his theory of natural selection. There was only one way to do this and that was to set about documenting as much as Darwin could on sexually selective traits. It is a mammoth undertaking and is primarily the book that got the ball rolling on explaining these adaptations. As someone who has read this book I am surprised by how it is often wrongly misrepresented by creationists as a work of unabashed racism. Out of the 700 pages I found maybe a few lines that would today require some more elaboration to make the intention clear. That is for today, nearly 140 years since it was written and only 50 years after western civilization had abandoned segregation.

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