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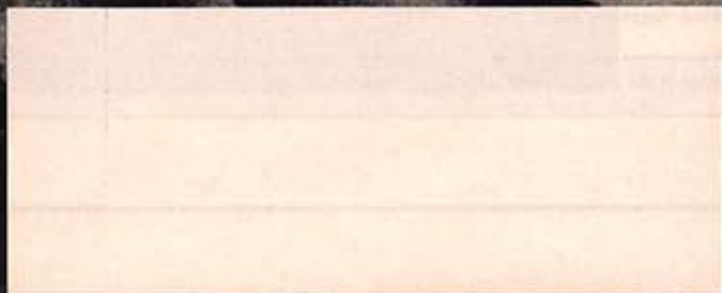
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The Gentle Darwinians

What Darwin's Champions Won't Mention

Peter Quinn

A few lines of poetry, the selected aphorisms of a retired man of letters, may liberate the demon of a charismatic political leader. The whole imaginative and intellectual life of a culture is one interacting field of force.

—Conor Cruise O'Brien

No thinker did more to shape modern consciousness than Charles Darwin. Intellectual titans such as Freud and Marx transformed people's understanding of psyche and society, but their prescriptions for curing the world's ills are largely discounted or discredited. Outside the small circle of those able to plumb the profundities of quantum physics, Einstein's revolutionary insights are more admired than understood. Darwin alone is recognized as having altered forever how we humans perceive our station in the vast unfolding of time.

A century and a quarter after his death in April 1882, Darwin continues to occupy a place of high honor in the academy and of symbolic significance in the popular imagination—among those who enthusiastically embrace his revelations and those bitterly opposed.

Since the publication of *Origin of Species* (full title, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*) in 1859, with its revelation of natural selection as the mechanism that drives and defines all life, the main criticism of Darwin has come from religious-minded people. Fundamentalists turn a blind

eye to the overwhelming preponderance of geological and biological evidence, and reject any account that contradicts the biblical story of Creation. Less literal-minded believers often opt for a divinely directed version of evolution powered not by a random struggle but by so-called intelligent design.

Lurking behind this science-versus-religion controversy has been an issue that extends beyond creationists and evolutionists. Among the first to frame it was Friedrich Nietzsche. In the words of biographer Curtis Cate, Nietzsche hailed Darwin's "calm annihilation of the fairy-tale fable of the Creation of the World" and welcomed the support it supplied in his campaign for a "transvaluation of values" to overthrow the "morality of slaves." But Nietzsche disliked what he detected in Darwin as a genuflection toward English industrialists and imperialists, as if they were the end product of the contest for existence.

The relationship between the views of Nietzsche and Darwin is interesting both for the general insights it offers into the intellectual upheaval in nineteenth-century Europe and for the particular questions it raises about the impact of these two thinkers. In the case of Nietzsche, the question of whether he was a champion of artistic freedom and uncompromising



An unsparing gaze

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Peter Quinn is the author of the novels *Banished Children of Eve* (winner of the American Book Award) and *Hour of the Cat*. Funding for this essay was provided by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

individualism or, instead, a prophet of enslaving the weak and eradicating the unfit was examined in "The Gentle Nietzscheans," a controversial and influential article by Conor Cruise O'Brien published in the *New York Review of Books* almost four decades ago (November 5, 1970).

It was no accident, wrote Cruise O'Brien, that Nietzsche was remembered as an apolitical "man of thought and letters" who made major "contributions to psychology, German prose, and the critique of ethics." This image of Nietzsche had been crafted by latter-day disciples—"Gentle Nietzscheans"—who insisted that his most violent and brutal teachings were meant to be "provocative" and "paradoxical," always intended "in the most spiritual sense," never as policies of state. Pictured in this light, Nietzsche becomes, in Cruise O'Brien's analysis, "a benign schoolmaster, whose asstringent and sometimes frightening quips conceal a heart of gold and a strenuous urge to improve the spiritual and moral condition of his pupils."

In reality, Cruise O'Brien contended, Nietzsche sought a societal and political context in which the illusions and evasions of Judeo-Christian morality would be replaced by unflinching realism and unmerciful resolve. In *The Will to Power*, for example, Nietzsche posited that "society, the great trustee of life, is responsible to life itself for every miscarried life—it also has to pay for such lives: consequently, it ought to prevent them. In numerous cases, society ought to prevent procreation: to this end, it may hold in readiness, without regard to descent, rank, or spirit, the most rigorous means of constraint, deprivation of freedom, in certain circumstances castration."

The enthusiasm Nietzsche expresses in this passage is for eugenics, a theory of biological determinism invented by Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's first cousin. However extreme Nietzsche's recommendation might sound today, by the first part of the twentieth century eugenics came to be widely practiced. In 1933, little more than thirty years after Nietzsche's death, the Hereditary Health Courts set up in Nazi Germany were enforcing a rigorous policy of enforced sterilization; to a lesser degree, similar policies were carried out in societies from the United States to Scandinavia.

In 1912, in his presidential address to the First International Congress of Eugenics, a landmark gathering in London of racial biologists from Germany, the United States, and other parts of the world, Major Leonard Darwin, Charles Darwin's son, trumpeted the spread of eugenics and evolution. As described by Nicholas Wright Gillham in his *A Life of Francis Galton*, Major Darwin foresaw the day when "eugenics would become not only a grail, a substitute for religion, as Galton had hoped, but a 'paramount duty' whose tenets would presumably become enforceable." The major repeated his father's admonition that, though the crudest workings of natural selection must be mitigated by "the spirit of civilization," society must encourage breeding among the best stock and prevent it among the worst "without further delay."

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Leonard Darwin's recognition of his father's role in the formation and promotion of eugenics was more than filial piety. Though Charles Darwin usually preferred the savannas of research to the sierras of philosophic speculation, he was a main player in the "transvaluation of values," including the advancement of theories every bit as hard and merciless as Nietzsche's. Adrian Desmond and James Moore in their 1991 biography, *Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist*, make clear that natural selection was intended as more than a theory of life's origins. "Social Darwinism" is often taken to be something extraneous, an ugly concretion added to the pure Darwinian corpus after the event, tarnishing Darwin's image," they write. "But his notebooks make plain that competition, free trade, imperialism, racial extermination, and sexual inequality were written into the equation from the start—Darwinism was invented to explain human society."

As with Nietzsche, so too with Darwin—there is a school of interpreters dedicated to insulating him from any unpleasanties associated with his ideas or their consequences. But where the Gentle Nietzscheans attempted to clothe Nietzsche's statements with poetic and metaphoric meanings, the Gentle Darwinians prefer to ignore what doesn't fit the profile of the benevolent naturalist fighting against entrenched ignorance.

In his book *The Mismeasure of Man*, the late Stephen Jay Gould offers a brilliant demolition of biological determinism. Nonetheless, he excuses Darwin from any significant role in its formation. "How can we castigate someone for repeating a standard assumption of his age," Gould writes of Darwin, "however much we may legitimately deplore that attitude today?" Never mind that Darwin's admirers routinely lambaste the critics of his day for the very sin of repeating standard religious and scientific assumptions, for Gould the worst that Darwin can be accused of is mouthing Victorian platitudes, albeit unpleasant ones. "Belief in racial and sexual inequality was unquestioned and canonical among upper-class Victorian males—probably about as controversial as the Pythagorean Theorem," Gould notes. "Darwin did construct a different rationale for a shared certainty—and for this we may exact some judgment. But I see no purpose in a strong criticism for a largely passive acceptance of common wisdom [emphasis added]."

The problem is, far from bowing to "common wisdom," Darwin played a prime role in bringing about a fateful confusion between cultural and racial differences, conferring new scientific authority and intellectual legitimacy on theories of human inferiority central to eugenics, the most destructive medical movement in history. Yet, according to Gould, all this is best ignored because, at heart, Darwin was really a "meliorist" who, while sharing his peers' contempt for their inferiors, didn't deny the potential for "improvement."

Cruise O'Brien crowned Princeton professor Walter Kaufmann as "king of the Gentle Nietzscheans." Today, Stephen Jay Gould has been joined in the camp of the Gentle Darwinians by a growing number of enthusiasts who champion

Darwin and his teachings as the sole and true foundation for a humanistic society, free of the primitive and dangerous irrationality of religious belief. These include—but are by no means limited to—best-selling authors Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*), and Daniel C. Dennett (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*).

In my view, however, the title of king of the Gentle Darwinians belongs to essayist Adam Gopnik. His article in the October 25, 2006, issue of the *New Yorker*, "Rewriting Nature: Charles Darwin, Natural Novelist," might serve as a brief for those so eager to establish Darwin's status as founder of the only sane alternative to "the God delusion" that they seek to bestow on him, literally, the secular equivalent of sainthood. Thus Gopnik writes, "The discrepancy between the public and private Darwin, the ingenious naturalist and the uncanny backroom politician, can make him sound like a bit of a phony, or at least, like a shrewder operator than we want our saints to be."

Gopnik comes no closer to playing devil's advocate. His Darwin is not just groundbreaking naturalist, but poet and egalitarian who "set out to widen the scope of what counted and who counted in science." Gopnik's Darwin is "humble and modest in exactly the way that Inspector [sic] Columbo is." He plods and prods, letting "the bad guys hang themselves out of arrogance and overconfidence." He eschews metaphysics for measurement, and "the more we measure, the more accurately we see what things are actually like—has been what we have meant by humanism since the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and Darwin is one of its greatest exponents and examples."

The notion of measurement as the essence of humanism is novel (and highly debatable), but Gopnik leaves no doubt that Darwin's greatness involves far more than quantifying or specifying. "For Darwinism...is humanism, in flight." Soaring higher, Gopnik concludes that "the hardest Darwinian view of all is still roomy enough for ordinary love to breathe in."

Love, ordinary or otherwise, is entirely absent from the writings of the two men (unmentioned by Gopnik) who provided the dual elements of natural selection that Darwin revealed in *Origin of Species*. Charles Lyell's exposition of geologic time uncovered the immense chronological framework needed for evolution to take place. The observations of political economist Thomas Malthus on the reproductive profligacy of nature, the way species raced blindly ahead of their food supply and the struggle that resulted, were the mainspring for species adaptation.

By the time Darwin published the second edition of *The Descent of Man* in 1874, he had added Francis Galton's eugenic theories and Herbert Spencer's "survival of the fittest" social philosophy to the mix, calling *Hereditary Genius*, Galton's treatise on the biological nature of intelligence and moral character, "remarkable" and Spencer "our greatest philosopher."

"There is not the least inherent improbability, as it seems to me," Darwin writes in support of Galton's theory, "in virtuous tendencies being more or less inherited." In locating an example of Galton's iron law of hereditary determinism, Darwin shows no sign of succumbing to egalitarianism: "I have heard of authentic cases in which a desire to steal and a tendency to lie appear to run in families; and as stealing is a rare crime in the wealthy classes we can hardly account by accidental coincidence for the tendency occurring in two or three members of the same family."

Darwin's work is filled with references to the work of those involved in creating a radical new "scientific" justification for labeling races, classes, and individuals as "inferior." He writes of having seen "the ear of a microcephalous idiot" thanks to "the kindness of Dr. L. Down." Dr. John Langdon Haydon Down was the medical expert who gave his name to "Down syndrome," a form of mental retardation that he described in an 1866 paper titled "Observations on an Ethnic Classification of Idiots" as a reversion that left its victims with the physical and mental characteristics of a lesser race—that is, Mongolians.

The energetic skull measuring done by French anthropologist Paul Broca, which made him a leader in establishing definitive links among brain size, race, and intelligence, is cited approvingly by Darwin in several places. The celebrated German anatomist Karl Vogt, whose work Darwin also relies on, concluded that the Negro's intellectual abilities could rise no higher than those of "the child, the female, and the senile white." In writing about "idiots" who "resemble the lower types of mankind," Darwin offers this appraisal: "They are often filthy in their habits, and have no sense of decency; and several cases have been published of their bodies being remarkably hairy...the simple brain of a microcephalous idiot, in so far as it resembles that of an ape, may in this sense be said to offer a case of reversion."

While celebrating the evolutionary process that produced English gentlemen like himself (the self-congratulatory note that rankled Nietzsche), Darwin writes in *The Descent of Man* that "a most important obstacle in civilized countries to an increase in the number of men of a superior class" is the tendency of society's "very poor and reckless," who are "often degraded by vice," to increase faster than "the provident and generally virtuous members."

To illustrate, Darwin quotes at length from "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man," an article in *Fraser's Magazine* of September 1868 by cotton manufacturer turned laissez-faire economist and essayist, W. R. Greg:

The careless, squalid, unambitious Irishman multiplies like rabbits; the frugal, fore-seeing, self-respecting, ambitious Scot, stern in his morality, spiritual in his faith, sagacious and disciplined in his intelligence, passes his best years in struggle and in celibacy, marries late, and leaves few behind him. Given a land originally peopled by a thousand Saxons and a thousand Celts—and in a

dozen generations five-sixths of the population would be Celts, but five-sixths of the property, of the power, of the intellect [emphasis added], would belong to the one-sixth of Saxons that remained. In the eternal "struggle for existence" [Malthus's phrase], it would be the inferior and less favored race that had prevailed.

Fortunately, the high mortality among the "intemperate" and "extremely profligate" prevents such catastrophes. In the case of the Irish, the potato famine of the 1840s did the job, killing more than a million and sending 2 million abroad. As an English gentleman farmer, Darwin had first-hand experience of the potato blight. ("Poor people, wherever I have been," he wrote a friend, "seem to be in great alarm"; but the impact on England was far less severe than on Ireland, and his family continued to live, he reported, "as rich as Jews.") But when it came to describing the effects of famine, Darwin—perhaps with the political sensitivities of the Irish Question in mind—prefers to look far from the United Kingdom. "With savages the difficulty of obtaining subsistence occasionally limits their number in a much more direct manner than with civilized people, for all tribes periodically suffer from severe famine," he wrote. "Many accounts have been published of their protruding stomachs and emaciated limbs after and during famine. They are also compelled to wander much, and, as I was assured in Australia, their infants perish in large numbers."

Whether, in fact, Aborigines and other races represented distinct species is a central concern of *The Descent of Man*, and though he meanders at times through thickets of mind-numbing detail, Darwin offers a clear chronicle of how one group—Anglo-Saxons—outdistanced all others in its evolutionary progress and what that means for the future. The races, Darwin observes, differ significantly in small ways such as hair texture and significant ways such as skull capacity "and even in the convolutions of the brain." Likewise, their powers of mind are "very distinct, chiefly as it would appear in their emotional, but partly in their intellectual faculties."

Of course, the truest test of whether races are separate species is if they can breed together, and here, at least at first glance, the evidence seemed ambiguous. Professor Broca, "a cautious and philosophical observer," Darwin writes, reported much evidence "that some races were fertile together, but evidence of an opposite nature in regard to other races." In the end, the evidence suggests to Darwin that the differences among the races were "graduated" rather than absolute and that "the term 'sub-species' might here be used with propriety," though "from long habit the term 'race' will always be employed."

All races, as it turns out, descend from the same ancestor but some are more descended than others. "I do not think that the Rev. Mr. Zincke takes an exaggerated view," Darwin declares, "when he says: 'All other series of events—as that which resulted in the culture of mind in Greece, and that which resulted in the empire of Rome—only appear to have

purpose and value when viewed in connection with, or rather as subsidiary to...the great stream of Anglo-Saxon emigration to the west."

Sounding more like Colonel Blimp than Lieutenant Columbo, Darwin envisions a far grimmer future for races or subspecies less fit than the Anglo-Saxon. "At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world," he predicts. "At the same time the anthropological apes...will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state...even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of now between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla."

Darwin is cavalier about the extermination of lesser breeds. He estimates that minimal force will be required, for "when civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race." Even here, in Darwin's view, only civilized races could "resist with impunity the greatest diversities of climate and other changes," a truth nowhere better displayed than in Britain's imperial reach. In contrast, the "wilder races" showed the same lack of adaptability as their "nearest allies, the anthropoid apes, which have never survived long, when removed from their native country."

It is difficult to find amid this imperialist cant and racial mumbo jumbo the poet and humanist apotheosized by Gopnik. More often than not, instead of "humanism, in flight," Darwin's views are grounded in a faux impartiality meant to mask upper-class presumptions about the poor deserving their fate and colonialist indifference to the destruction of the "subspecies" occupying the space between Anglo-Saxons and apes.

Although he denies evolution is directed toward any final, overarching purpose, Darwin is unapologetic about the need to stay true to the basic principle of natural selection, which alone can guarantee survival of the fit and destruction of the unfit. Having uncovered the evolutionary past, Darwin is equally interested in its future. He quotes Schopenhauer to remind his readers, "It is not the weal or woe of any one individual, but that of the human race to come, which is here at stake."

Despite the inexorable extinction of lesser breeds and the forces keeping the unfit in check, the advancement of the best human specimens remained "a most intricate problem." While acknowledging the legacy of Judeo-Christian concern for the poor, the weak, the unfit, Darwin is adamant about the need for the civilized races to preserve in some degree the process of natural selection, which requires the adoption of eugenic principles:

As Mr. Galton has remarked, if the prudent avoid marriage, whilst the reckless marry, the inferior members



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tend to supplant the better members of society. Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher, it is to be feared that he must remain subject to a severe struggle. Otherwise he would sink to indolence, and the more gifted men would not be more successful in the battle for life than the less gifted.

In other words, the struggle for existence is to be feared but not avoided. Softened to a degree by "reasoning powers, instruction, religion," the principle of survival of the fittest is not to be abrogated or abolished, especially among classes and subspecies at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder. Thus, Gopnik's assertion that "the hardest Darwinian view of all is still roomy enough for ordinary love to breathe in" must be qualified: love among the poor shouldn't result in procreation; love among certain human subspecies can't overcome extinction; and love made by superior (as opposed to ordinary) people will produce superior (as opposed to inferior) breeds.

Even among superior breeds, however, love can't overcome the innate inequality between the sexes. Due to sexual as well as natural selection, "man has ultimately become superior to woman"; he is "more powerful in body and mind than woman." But deficient in physical and intellectual strength as she might

be, woman offers the possibility of aesthetically improved progeny. Look at the British aristocracy, "including under this term all wealthy families in which primogeniture has long prevailed." In Darwin's view—"as it appears to me with justice"—they are not only by nature less prone to thievery but, thanks to their prerogative to choose the "more beautiful women as their wives, have become handsomer, according to the European standard, than the middle classes."

"The Nietzsche of the Gentle Nietzscheans," concluded Cruise O'Brien, "is a fake." If the Darwin of the Gentle Darwinians is not an absolute fake, he is at best a half-drawn facsimile: the industrious, inquisitive scientist-cum-squire bathed in light; the superior, smug Malthusian obscured or omitted. Gould offers general absolution for the racism, imperialism, and eugenic dogma so prominent in Darwin. His lame defense is that Darwin was doing nothing more than mouthing platitudes when in fact he was bestowing a new and dangerous pseudo-scientific authority on pernicious categories of superior and inferior human beings.

Gopnik endorses Darwin's contention that "Darwinism" is "a view of life" rather than an ideology, explaining that "an ideology has axioms and algorithms; a view of life has approaches and approximations." If ideology is defined by the presence of "axioms and algorithms," Darwinism isn't one. But Webster defines ideology as "a theory of the origin of ideas which derives exclusively from sensation; a systematic scheme of ideas about life; a manner of thinking characteristic of an individual or class; as bourgeois ideology."

Under any of these definitions, Darwinism is most certainly an ideology, and the reason it triumphed so swiftly and sweepingly wasn't purely because of its scientific validity or the forceful advocacy of Thomas Huxley and others. As Darwin biographers Desmond and Moore point out, Darwinism matched perfectly the political, social, and economic thinking of "rising industrialists, free-traders, and dissenting professionals"—the most powerful strata of Great Britain's emerging elite: "an open struggle with no hand-outs to the losers was the Whig way, and no poor law commissioner could have bettered Darwin's view. He had broken with the radical hooligans who loathed Malthus. Like the Whig grandees—safe, immune, their own world characterized by noblesse oblige—Darwin was living on a family fortune and thrusting a bitter competition on a starving world for its own good."

The marriage of evolutionary theory and social policy wasn't accidental and didn't go unnoticed by Darwin. He believed very strongly in the close parallel between the operation of natural selection across the eons of geologic time (what Gopnik calls "deep time") and the necessity of survival of the fittest in "quick time"—the span of a single life. The process that placed the Anglo-Saxon atop creation must be affirmed and encouraged, not weakened and impaired.

This is why Darwin was able to thrive amid the piety and propriety of Victorian England; why, far from being ostracized, he was invited to dine with the prince of Wales and

the crown prince of Germany; why statesmen lionized him and political economists quoted him; why he was eventually laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. He provided scientific proof for what had been founded on faith alone: the confidence that those on top were put there (formerly by God, now by nature) to rule over—in Kipling's phrase—"lesser breeds without the law."

From the beginning, supporters and opponents were attuned to the bond between Darwinism's scientific and socioeconomic interpretations. This was especially true in the United States. In 1904, the Carnegie Institution appointed Harvard-trained biologist Charles Davenport head of the Station for Experimental Evolution (today's prestigious Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory). In 1910, this time with the support of Mrs. Mary Williamson Harriman, widow of the railroad tycoon, Davenport established a sister institution, the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), to compile eugenic family histories, promote the teaching of eugenics in schools and universities, and lobby for the cause of racial hygiene. Before it closed in 1939, the ERO successfully supported compulsory sterilization and immigration quotas designed to halt the influx of "lesser breeds" such as Slavs, Italians, and Jews.

As Michael Kazin points out in his recent biography of William Jennings Bryan, *A Godly Hero*, the textbook in question at the "Monkey Trial"—the prosecution in 1925 of Tennessee biology teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution—was titled *A Civic Biology*. Along with an explanation of Darwin's theory of evolution, it included a vigorous endorsement of eugenics, describing classes of the poor and "feeble-minded" as "true parasites...if such people were lower animals, we would probably kill them off to prevent them from spreading."

In 1927, two years after suffering defeat in the Scopes case, the boosters of *A Civic Biology* won a victory of far greater significance in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision *Buck v. Bell*. Writing for a lopsided eight-to-one majority, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes upheld the compulsory sterilization of Carrie Buck, an inmate of a state institution in Virginia for "Epileptics and Feeble-Minded," in these words: "It is better for all the world if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind....Three generations of imbeciles are enough." (Later investigations would establish that Carrie Buck was not an "imbecile," only poor and illiterate.)

The historic connection between Darwinism as scientific explanation for long-term modification of species and justification for notions of inferior/superior categories of human beings lives on. In 1994, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, revived the idea of Galton's theory of heredity as the ruling factor in human intelligence—a notion that had gone into eclipse after World War II and the revelations about the infamous role eugenics played in Nazi Germany and the Final Solution.



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only so far as her hands
have traveled the map

so far as her hands
have traveled the contours
of his body.

His voice fills the room
as though he were seated
in one of the empty carved chairs.

Brightness rises like moonlight
over her blue smock, the belly
that houses the child in its own

world, like the mother's, distant
from the world of the father
as the evening star.

The Mother of Joan of Arc

She walks one hundred miles
to kneel at the statue of Mary.

In Le Puy's cold cathedral,
she prays for her daughter,
one mother to another.

Her prayer
is the mother's longing—
as it was at the birth
that first ripped her open—
to hold
what her body made

not see the flesh
of her flesh
burn
like paper.

Educated at the best schools, winners in a global competition that has driven anonymous millions to the wall, the Gentle Darwinians' effort to turn Charles Darwin into the sainted founder of a humanist creed undoubtedly reflects their own high position in today's world order. But unlike their Victorian predecessors, they prefer a Darwin devoid of his social theories and his role in linking evolution with rank prejudice. This benign Darwin assures members of the contemporary elite that, as adherents of scientific certainty, of pure measurement, they are immune to the coercive and murderous intolerance that has infected religious believers. They alone walk the path of honesty and truth.

It was after abandoning the false consolations of Christianity, Gopnik believes, that Darwin, "Natural Novelist," discovered the moral of his story: "Serenity could be found only in the contemplation of the vast indifference of the universe." By his own testimony, however, Darwin got little such consolation. Seven years after the publication of *Origin of Species*, his personal catalogue of psychosomatic disorders included "extreme spasmodic daily and nightly flatulence: occasional vomiting...vomiting preceded by shivering, hysterical crying, dying sensations or half-faint...ringing of ears, treading on air and vision, focus and black dots, air fatigues, specially risky, brings on the Head symptoms, nervousness when E. leaves me...."

E. was Emma Wedgwood, his cousin and wife. "My own wife ever dear Mammy," he wrote her at one low point in his life, "I cannot possibly say how beyond [sic] all value your sympathy and affection is to me.—I often fear I must wear you with my unwellness and complaints." Sure as Darwin was that "man is more courageous...and energetic than woman," it was Emma's courage and energy that held their family together and provided the stability and support he required to pursue his research and writing.

After the death of their daughter Anne and two other infants, he retreated to his study. Emma directed the servants, saw to the farm, supervised the children, and was a presence in the lives of her neighbors. Her kindness was legendary. "The parish folk felt they could depend on her," Desmond and Moore write. "Like a parson's wife, she ministered to them, giving bread tokens to the hungry, and 'small pensions for the old, dainties for the ailing, and medical comforts and simple medicines'...she understood human suffering."

Whatever consolations were available to Charles Darwin were because of Emma's goodness and constancy, not the indifference of the cosmos. There is a good chance that, without her, he might have descended into a state of inertia and invalidism, and that the credit for discovering evolution might have gone to Alfred Russel Wallace or some other contemporary. Emma was his rock. A practicing Christian, true to her Anglican faith, she had strength enough for both of them. She was the one and true gentle Darwinian. ■