*Darwin on the Origin of Mind and Language*

There has been almost no recent work about Darwin’s own writing on the origin of language and mind. Explanations of Darwin’s account of the origin of human consciousness in the *Descent of Man* by historians and philosophers of biology, both favourable and critical of Darwin, were once common, and problems Darwin dealt with remain current in contemporary cognitive science. Though cognitive scientists like Dennett and Pinker have asserted the importance of Darwin in our account of the origin of human consciousness, these thinkers make only limited appeal to Darwin’s text in this regard (Pinker, 1994; Dennett 1995).

Contemporary cognitive scientists seek to discover the origin of consciousness not only through neurobiology but through interdisciplinary appeal to such fields as psychology, anthropology, linguistics and philosophy. Such an account Charles Darwin himself gives in the *Descent of Man*. However, there is no consensus among cognitive scientists about how Darwin’s written contribution to the question of the origin of consciousness in morphology and biology should be evaluated. Above all, there is no consensus about his reliance on the human and social science of his own day. Since cognitive science proposes to operate at the intersection of biology, specifically neurobiology, philosophy, psychology, linguistics and anthropology, Darwin’s reliance on philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists and linguists who were his contemporaries should be recognized in any cognitive science account which purports to draw upon a Darwinian perspective.

Darwin’s account of human and simian morphology and the brain is presented explicitly in discussion with the work of Haeckel and Huxley. Darwin’s discussion of the origin of language and consciousness equally relies upon contemporary thinkers treating the relation between the origin of language and mind. Richards, like Pinker, has drawn attention to the affinity Darwin sees between comparative morphology and philology (2002). Alter has noted that Darwin’s theory of the origin of language appears divided between two perspectives as it is presented in The *Descent of Man* (2008). Darwin, according to Alter, responds to the criticisms of Müller, who holds in the manner of Hobbes, Locke and Condillac that language and abstract thought are coextensive (cf. Taylor 2016). However, Darwin’s actual, own view on the relation between mind and language is more ultimately beholden to figures like Herder, Hamann and Humboldt. Not only does Darwin deny that language and mind are equivalent to a uniquely human capacity for abstract thought; Darwin even avows that certain “higher” animals, like dogs and sheep, can engage in abstract thought, since they recognize the meaning of specific general words (1871).

Darwin recognizes a distinction between human mind and language and that of other animals. However, he affirms that mind and pre-linguistic forms of expression are features of the life of non-human animals. To recognize Darwin’s insight into continuities linking as much as divisions separating human mind and expression from that of other animals would put us in a better place to understand the emergence of mind and language for the cognitive science of our current world.