
Darwin and religion



Activity 2: How important is tolerance?

Subject: RE

2 x 60 minutes

Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[Darwin and religion](#)

What do I need?

[Letter 7376](#) William Darwin Fox to Charles Darwin, 18 [November 1870]

[Letter 11768](#) John Brodie Innes to Charles Darwin, 1 Dec 1878

[Letter 2637a](#) Leonard Jenyns to Charles Darwin, 4 January 1860

[Letter 441](#) Emma Wedgwood to Charles Darwin, 21–22 Nov 1838

[Who's who?](#)

[Letters questions](#)

Darwin's scientific findings caused controversy when they were published. Sometimes his friends and colleagues agreed with evolution in principle, but had different views about the origin of human beings. Darwin's letters show how people from all different backgrounds reacted to his work. This activity asks you to think about conflict, resolution and tolerance.

What do I do?

1. Read through the letters, Who's who? and answer the letter questions.
2. Discuss whether you think society is more tolerant now than in Darwin's time.
3. In pairs, think about a conflict that you have had and how it was resolved (e.g. with a parent).
4. In small groups, think of an issue that causes conflict between groups in society. Describe the perspective of each side of the conflict.
5. Draw a Venn diagram to illustrate this. Suggest a possible successful outcome to this conflict and note on the correct place in the diagram. Share with the class.
6. Discuss what the possible benefits might be to a society that tolerates the beliefs of others.

Letter 7376 William Darwin Fox to Charles Darwin, 18 [November 1870]

18th Broadlands
Sandown
I. Wight

My dear Darwin,

The sight of your hand writing did me much good...

...I hear sad tales about your Book about to come forth. I suppose you are about to prove man is a descendant from Monkeys &c &c Well, Well! – I shall much enjoy reading it. I have given up that point now.... I always look at Books as I do Newspapers. I am not bound to tye my mind to that of the writer. There are points in your unrivalled Book “The Origin of Species” —which I do not come up to – but with these few expressions omitted, I go with it completely. I do not think even you will persuade me that my ancestors ever were Apes – but we shall see.

I have no religious scruples about any of these matters. I see my own way clearly thro them- – but I see many points I cannot get over, which prevent my going “the whole Hog” with you.

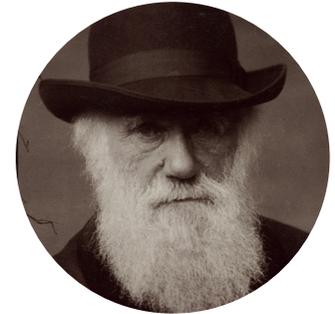
In a few years – if not sooner – we shall know a great deal more than we do now...

Why not you & Mrs Darwin run over here, when you have finished your Book— you can study my little Apes & Apesses—

Kindest regards to Mrs Darwin & thanks for her note—

Always yours Affecly

W D Fox



Letter 11768 John Brodie Innes to Charles Darwin, 1 Dec 1878

1st. Decr. 1878

Dear Darwin,

I want to thank you for your most kind letter, not to inflict on you the smallest call to reply to what I say, but only to express my own idea on the subject Pusey has spoken of...

I have always (and I must say I am indebted to you for much confirmation of the view) held, as Pusey says now, that Science and Religion should go on separately, and not contest in any way. Those who believe firmly and unhesitatingly, as I hope I do myself, that the teaching of the Church, of which her Book, the Bible, is only a chief part, is infalibly true, need not disturb them selves about any effect which real discoveries in Science may have on Catholic truth. I hold that a Theologian reads the Book of Revelation forward from our Saviour to this time, and a Naturalist the Book of Nature backward from one discovery to another, as would be the case with the same book in Hebrew and in Greek. That, whatever may appear at the time, the lines, coming from the same source, can never cross, and will in the end be seen to have been parallel.

In something of this way, (though I very feebly express it.) it seems to me that all might go on harmoniously, and to the benefit of all. I have certainly seen some very nasty and needless utterances from Naturalists in England, and much more in Germany; but I must confess with sorrow that most of the unwise and violent attacks have come from the Theological side, to the great injury of the cause they were designed to promote.

I did not mean to write so much when I began. My design was tell you how I thought the two things could be profitably kept from jostling. It looks as if the abstract of the discourse might be. How nicely things would go on if other folk were like Darwin and Brodie Innes! Very soothing reflection. However it has done me no harm to write and I hope will do you none.

Our kindest regards, and we wish you all a happy Christmas

Believe me Dear Darwin

Faithfully Yours

J Brodie Innes

Letter 2637a Leonard Jenyns, to Charles Darwin, 4 Jan 1860

Jan. 4. 1860

My dear Darwin

I have read your interesting book with all carefulness as you enjoined,—have gleaned a great deal from it, & consider it one of the most valuable contributions to Nat. Hist Literature of the present day.



...I frankly confess I did not look for any such large assemblages of species to be brought together in this way, as the descendants from one & the same stock, similar to what you have attempted in your volume. By this you will see that I embrace yr theory in part, but hardly to the full extent to which you carry it. Still I allow you have made out a very strong case, and I will not pretend to say what future researches in the same direction may not ultimately establish.

I can quite fall in with the view that those fossil animals which so closely resemble their living representatives at the present day, are in fact the progenitors of these last;—such indeed has been my opinion for many years, tho' a contrary one, I know had been adopted by many of our first Geologists & Naturalists...

One great difficulty to my mind in the way of your theory is the fact of the existence of Man. I was beginning to think you had entirely passed over this question, till almost in the last page I find you saying that 'light will be thrown on the origin of man & his history'. By this I suppose is meant that he is to be considered a modified & no doubt greatly improved orang! I doubt if this will find acceptance with the generality of readers— I am not one of those in the habit of mixing up questions of science & scripture, but I can hardly see what sense or meaning is to be attached to Gen: 2.7. & yet more to vv. 21. 22, of the same chapter, giving an account of the creation of two man,—if the human species at least has not been created independently of other animals, but merely come into the world by ordinary descent from previously existing races—whatever those races may be supposed to have been.

Letter 2637a Leonard Jenyns, to Charles Darwin, 4 Jan 1860

Neither can I easily bring myself to the idea that man's reasoning faculties & above all his moral sense, cd. ever have been obtained from irrational progenitors, by mere natural selection—acting however gradually & for whatever length of time that may be required. This seems to be doing away altogether with the Divine Image which forms the insurmountable distinction between man & brutes...

(Original letter has not been found, above was transcribed from geologist Charles Lyell's journal)



Letter 441 Emma Wedgwood to Charles Darwin, [21–22 Nov 1838]

Wednesday

My dear Charles

... When I am with you I think all melancholy thoughts keep out of my head but since you are gone some sad ones have forced themselves in, of fear that our opinions on the most important subject should differ widely. My reason tells me that honest & conscientious doubts cannot be a sin, but I feel it would be a painful void between us. I thank you from my heart for your openness with me & I should dread the feeling that you were concealing your opinions from the fear of giving me pain.



It is perhaps foolish of me to say this much but my own dear Charley we now do belong to each other & I cannot help being open with you. Will you do me a favour? yes I am sure you will, it is to read our Saviours farewell discourse to his disciples which begins at the end of the 13th Chap of John. It is so full of love to them & devotion & every beautiful feeling. It is the part of the New Testament I love best. This is a whim of mine it would give me great pleasure, though I can hardly tell why I don't wish you to give me your opinion about it. The plaid gown arrived safely yesterday & is unanimously pronounced to be very handsome & not at all too dashing so that I could write my thanks & compliments with a very good conscience. It is blue black & green with a narrow scarlet cross bar....

Goodbye my dear Charles yours most affectly

Emma W.

You will kindly mention any faults of spelling or style that you perceive as in the wife of a literary man it wd not do you credit, any how I can spell your name right I wish you cd say the same for mine.

Letter questions:

1. In letter 7376 Darwin's cousin, William, writes about Darwin's forthcoming book. What did he think of his previous one, *On the Origin of Species*, and why? What is the tone of his letter to Darwin?
2. What does letter 11768 tell you about the relationship between Darwin and Revd. Innes? How does Innes respect Darwin's discoveries without believing them all?
3. In letter 2637a, which parts of Darwin's theory can Leonard Jenyns believe in? What does he have difficulty believing in?
4. In letter 441 Emma Wedgwood writes to Darwin before they are to be married. What is the 'most important subject' that she worries they will have different opinions about? Why does she want Darwin to read an extract from the bible? Why does she not want him to talk to her about it?

Darwin and religion

Who's who?

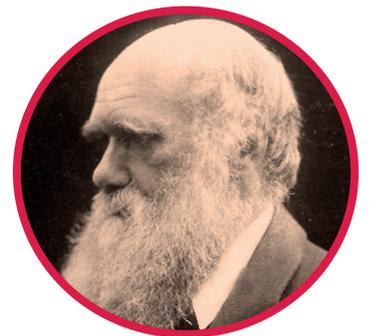
Mary Everest Boole

Mary Everest (1832–1916) was born in Wickwar, Gloucestershire. She was a self-taught mathematician and married fellow mathematician George Boole in 1855. They had 5 daughters but Mary was widowed when she was 32. She supported her children through teaching and writing about maths and science. A committed Christian, Boole wrote to Darwin seeking clarification that his theory might be compatible with her religious faith and was reassured by his response.



Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



Emma Darwin

Emma Darwin (born Wedgwood, 1808–96) was born at the family estate of Maer Hall, Maer, Staffordshire. She was the youngest of seven children and was Charles Darwin's first cousin. She came from a family of Unitarians and freethinkers, and Emma's faith remained important to her. It was something that she explored and discussed with Darwin at length before they married, and on occasion during their married life.



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

James Fegan

James Fegan (1852–1925) was a nonconformist evangelist who opened a number of orphanages for boys. Darwin wrote to him about handing over the village reading room at Downe for his mission work and to thank him for his services to the village.

William Darwin Fox

William Darwin Fox (1805–80) was a clergyman and Charles Darwin's second cousin. He was a good friend of Darwin's at Cambridge and shared his enthusiasm for studying insects. He maintained an active interest in natural history throughout his life and provided Darwin with much information. He was the Rector of Delamere, Cheshire (1838–73) but spent the last years of his life at Sandown, Isle of Wight.



Image: Darwin Correspondence Project / Cambridge University Library CC-BY-ND 2.00

Asa Gray

Asa Gray (1810–88) was an American botanist. He wrote numerous botanical textbooks and works on North American flora. Gray was appointed Professor of Natural History at Harvard University in 1842, a post he held until his death in 1888. He was president of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Darwin began to correspond with him in 1855, exchanging around 300 letters until Darwin's death. Gray was one of Darwin's leading supporters in America. He was also a devout Presbyterian. The longest running and most significant exchange of correspondence for Darwin dealing with the subjects of design in nature and religious belief was with Asa Gray.



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

Thomas Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95) was a zoologist and professor in natural history. He was appointed naturalist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1855 and was president of the Royal Society of London (1883–5). He was a friend and staunch supporter of Darwin who became known as 'Darwin's bulldog' for his defence of Darwin's ideas.



John Brodie Innes

John Brodie Innes (1817–94) was a clergyman and the perpetual curate of Downe (1846–68). He was born John Innes but was required to change his name in 1861 when he inherited an estate at Milton Brodie in Scotland. He was a friend of Darwin's and they exchanged many letters about community affairs and subsequent vicars at Down. Innes supported Darwin's work, despite not agreeing with everything he wrote.

Leonard Jenyns

Leonard Jenyns (1800–93) was a naturalist and clergyman. Jenyns was vicar of Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire (1828–49). He settled near Bath in 1850 and was founder and first president of the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club in 1855. He was a member of many scientific societies. He was brother-in-law of John Stevens Henslow (Darwin's botany professor and long-standing friend).



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

Charles Kingsley

Charles Kingsley (1819–75) was an author and clergyman. He was Professor of modern history at Cambridge University from 1860 to 1869. He was Rector of Eversley, Hampshire (1844–75) and Chaplain to the Queen from 1859–75. Kingsley took an active interest in natural history and was a supporter of Darwin's work. He believed that natural selection and natural theology could co-exist if natural selection was seen to operate with a divine purpose.



Adam Sedgwick

Adam Sedgwick (1785–1873) was a geologist and clergyman. He was Woodwardian Professor of geology at Cambridge University for 55 years. He became President of the Geological Society of London and president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a mentor to Darwin and remained in contact for many years.



Image of Charles Kingsley ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 2525. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0