

M0006384: Wellcome Historical Medical Museum display: the evolution of the primates, right wing

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Age in
Years

The DEVELOPMENT of the EVOLUTIONARY HYPOTHESIS

VESALIUS (1514-1564) ventured to compare Man with the Ape, and in 1669 TYSON (1650-1708) endeavoured to demonstrate before the Royal Society that a pygmy - actually a chimpanzee - was a link between Man and Monkey. In 1749 BUFFON (1707-1788) expressed the opinion that Man was but an animal in every material point, and there can be no doubt he entertained the belief that Men and Apes descended

from a common ancestor. In the development of the man from the child LAMARCK (1744-1829) detected evidence of the evolution of human-kind from Apes (1809).

The publication of DARWIN'S *The Origin of Species* (1859) gave birth to the modern acceptance of the principles of Evolution.

DARWIN (1809-1882) thought it probable on evidence that Man and the great African apes

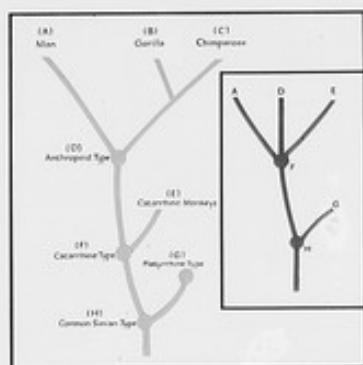


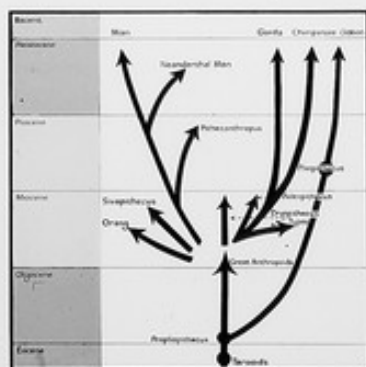
Fig. 1

Darwin's conception of Man's lineage, with another relationship suggested by him shown in inset (1866)

were co-descendants of a common anthropoid type which once inhabited all Africa. He regarded the Old World monkeys as representative of a still more ancient ancestral form. DARWIN traced the anthropoid stock back to a common catarrhine type which gave birth to the ancestral forms of Man, Gorilla, Chimpanzee, Orang and Gibbon. He held that this catarrhine type was the offspring of an even older simian type existing in the Eocene period, from which originated not only the catarrhine monkeys of the Old World but also the platyrrhine monkeys of the New World. Thus, according to DARWIN, Man's history did not begin until after the ancestral anthropoid type had been evolved. His alternative conceptions of Man's lineage, suggested in 1866 are shown in Fig. 1. DARWIN had no fixed idea as to the exact point where the human stock branched off from the general Primate tree. A phylogenetic tree with geological divisions, constructed in 1916 by W.K. Gregory and reproduced in Fig. 2, is therefore a distinct advance.

The many remains of extinct human types (eg JAVA, PILTDOWN, PEKING, HEIDELBERG, NEANDERTHAL) which have been brought to light, tend to confirm

the hypothesis of evolution and indicate that the farther back these types are traced the more marks they retain of an ape-like ancestry. Modern research has also contributed much to fit them into an exact sequence.



Phylogenetic tree of the higher primates (W.K. Gregory, 1916)

Fig. 2

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