

INTRODUCTION

When on board Planet Earth, as a naturalist, I have been much struck by humanities gushing and often paradoxical sentimentality. It seems almost ubiquitous and one example that really stands out occurred during my final year of veterinary training. I have forgotten the name of the dog of course, and indeed a lot of other ancillary details, but I do know that its front leg had been amputated to remove an aggressive bone tumour, and I do know that I will never forget its screams. It wasn't even a young dog. It was an old dog with cancer and yet, despite being within touching distance of the end, it was lying in a soulless hospital kennel screaming in agony and recoiling in horror when anybody approached. It was horrible and no matter how hard I tried I couldn't justify its suffering.

I must admit, I couldn't justify my own anger properly either. I was quite sure the dog's suffering was entirely based on the emotional needs of its owners, and that it couldn't have suffered if it had been euthanased, but the full implications were beyond me. What if the dog had been younger for instance, would that have made the suffering acceptable? And if it had, what does 'younger' actually mean? Is it less than 8 years old? Or 9? Or 8½? And if it had been young enough to make the procedure acceptable, does a dog know whether the pain will stop, even if I do? Indeed, can I actually guarantee that the pain *will* stop (and that long term gain will *definitely* follow short term suffering), or is there a significant probability that the treatment will fail and render the whole attempt worse than just killing the animal in the first place? In fact, what is the problem with killing animals in the first place anyway, regardless of age?

I had no idea at the time, and when I was inevitably summoned by the clinical elite for a ‘chat’ I was unable to justify my anger properly.

I wouldn’t have the same problem anymore. In fact, I would relish the opportunity for a ‘chat’ these days because it’s now quite clear to me that emotion severely corrupts perspective. It twists judgement and warps rational thought and the journey I’ve been on to understand this case, and a whole host of others, has taken me further and further from compassionate sentimentality and right back to the system that has worked for more than three and a half thousand million years. It has taken me right back to the totally unsentimental and utterly ruthless world of natural selection. In particular, I have learnt to see organic beings through their own eyes and even though that simple shift in perspective has totally undermined my veterinary career, it has also made me realise that humans don’t define reality, and that death is a vital part of life.

It took me a while to put two and two together of course, but the journey is defined by its destination and it’s now quite clear that our relationship with nature has been severely corrupted by paradoxical emotion and unjustifiable self-reverence. Despite the evidence, we continue to believe that we know best and that’s why I have written this book. *On The Destiny of Species* is my assessment of our subjective beliefs and I will use logic, common sense and Charles Darwin’s *On The Origin of Species* throughout to challenge everybody who claims to ‘love’ domestic animals.

I will go much further than that though, because despite making a dreadful mess of the domestic species many now claim that we’re here to manage *all* animals. In fact, many now claim we’re here to manage the entire planet and in this book I will also use logic, common sense and *On The Origin of Species* to challenge that extreme narcissism too. I will conclusively destroy conservation myths about the fragility of Life, the sanctity of species, the iniquity of pests, the reality of

sustainability, the relevance of appearance, the importance of scarcity, the majesty of conservation, and indeed, the empirical basis for almost everything the conservation community has ever said. Whatever they may think, managing nature (conservation) is not observing nature (natural history) and observing nature is the key to the truth.

Before we begin, I do need to make a few things clear.

Firstly, I'm not, under any circumstances, advocating a specific ethical philosophy. In fact, I believe that ethical diversity is as natural as biological diversity, but either way, I'm *not* preaching. If you want to take 8000 long haul flights a year, or buy fish that have been deliberately gutted alive, or recycle a few newspapers, or drive a petrol-guzzling urban tank, or mourn dead animals that couldn't care less, or continue to believe that humans are the centre of the Universe, that's your decision. You can say whatever you like and do whatever you like but, and this is the critical part, if it isn't objective, it's not natural history. If your actions and opinions have been forged in a cauldron of self-indulgent emotion, you can preach from the pulpit of your own opinion as much as you like, but you can't legitimately claim to walk in the footsteps of impartial naturalists like Charles Darwin, and you definitely can't legitimately claim to understand the brutal reality of life on Earth.

Secondly, I would like to mention post-rationalisation, because challenging pre-conceived opinions always upsets people and because upset people who have had their opinions challenged often post-rationalise. For those who don't know, post-rationalisation is the brain's ability to justify old beliefs in the light of new evidence. It's a psychological defence mechanism and it will, because it always does, lead to much wounded trumpeting. Typically this will involve blind faith and wild hope, but whatever the technique I will say this: almost everything I have to say is supported by *The Origin of Species*, which means cynics will have to disagree with Charles

Darwin to disagree with me.

Talking of Charles Darwin, I should also point out that the sixth edition of *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life** will feature throughout and that all quotes that aren't specifically introduced will be labelled with a superscript ^{Darwin}. For example:

‘Although I am fully convinced of the truth of the views given in this volume under the form of an abstract, I by no means expect to convince experienced naturalists whose minds are stocked with a multitude of facts all viewed, during a long course of years, from a point of view directly opposite to mine...I look with confidence to the future,—to young and rising naturalists, who will be able to view both sides of the question with impartiality.’^{Darwin}

Thirdly, I would like to warn those of a squeamish disposition. Life on Earth is *not* a harmonious world of gum-drop smiles and pretty flowers; it's an unsentimental death fight. It's a battle for life and though this may upset the faint of heart, and the pampered of constitution, I will make no apologies for this. This is about objective natural history, not privileged sensitivities, and you have been warned. If you can't cope with reality, *don't* read this book.

Penultimately, I would like to alert the creationist community. I don't want to waste anybody's time and I can categorically state that this isn't a book for people who need the Universe to love them in a special way. It hasn't been written by biased scholars with lots of superstition and no evidence and thus it won't provide any spiritual satisfaction whatsoever. Of course, if there's even a faint glimmer of rational

* All editions of the *The Origin of Species*, and indeed everything else Charles Darwin ever wrote, are available to check online at www.darwin-online.org.uk.

enquiry please read on, but this book is primarily aimed at people who believe in the miracle of reality, rather than the reality of miracle, and if you can't accept evolution, I will salute you as a member of Life's rich variety and urge you to stick with the supernatural fantasy books you clearly know and love.

Finally, I would like you to reserve judgement. I have already made claims bold enough to generate a reaction, but please don't dismiss them yet. All you need to do at this point is relax all pre-conceived beliefs and approach the rest of this book with an open mind. You can be a sceptic if you wish, but please don't dismiss the case before it's been heard. In fact, you should be a sceptic. I don't want you to be an unyielding cynic of course, but I would much rather you checked my references, and read *The Origin of Species*, and studied the fossil record and went outside to see nature for what it really is because passive acceptance of other people's opinions is exactly why I have had to write this book in the first place. It's the reason Life is currently regarded as a dependent infant, rather than a magnificent warrior, and so you should be a sceptic. It's the only way to separate faith from knowledge and that's critically important, because I don't want you to believe; I want you to know.