

Building the “True Evolutionism”: Darwin’s Impact on Henri Bergson’s Thought

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Charles Darwin and Henri Bergson met symbolically in 1859, the year which marked the publication of *On the Origin of Species* and Bergson’s birth. This coincidence of the date takes on its fullest meaning when we bear in mind that Bergson’s work represents the first time contemporary metaphysics comes into dialogue with evolutionary biology.

Bergson’s interest in the results coming out of the life sciences such as paleontology or embryology was due to what we call a “bio-philosophical project”: the importation of the positive model of biology as a cognitive paradigm in the philosophical understanding of the underlying dynamic character of life phenomena. It was in this context that Bergson took on Darwin’s work.

To study Darwin’s impact on Bergsonian philosophy implies, thus, that it be taken into account that the intimate character of this thought is metaphysical, signifying that Bergson is probing the problem of evolution as a philosopher and not as a specialized biologist. In other words, Bergson’s study of the scientific work of Darwin was yet another opportunity for philosophy to engage in a fruitful exchange with positive data taken from the real world.

Darwin in Bergson’s work

Bergson’s interest in Darwin’s studies of nature is not restricted to questions of evolution; it is quite vast and diversified.

The first references to Darwin appear very early in Bergson’s writings. In 1883, at only 24 years of age, he talks about “Darwin, the great naturalist”. In 1889, he quotes from *The expression of the emotions in Man and animals*.

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