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978-1-108-00513-5 - The Destiny of Man: Viewed in the Light of his Origin

John Fiske

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In 1884, American historian and philosopher John Fiske published *The Destiny of Man*, which discussed humanity's origin, destiny and place in the universe. A leading populariser of Darwin's theory in the United States and influenced by Herbert Spencer, Fiske considers views of human progress via evolutionary social change and the harmony between science and religion. *The Destiny of Man* is composed of sixteen chapters that anticipate philosophical questions from a typical non-scientific audience: the origins of atheism, the shifting hierarchal positions of humanity through history as proposed by Copernicus and later by Darwin, human brain size, and the 'dawning of consciousness' as a result of the growth and development of moral sentiment and inventiveness through natural selection. Interestingly, at the end of the book, Fiske discusses the historical power relationships of ruling governments and predicts that as humans evolve and become more civilised, war will eventually end.

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THE DESTINY OF MAN
VIEWED IN THE LIGHT
OF HIS ORIGIN



By JOHN FISKE



London
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To
MY CHILDREN,
MAUD, HAROLD, CLARENCE, RALPH,
ETHEL, AND HERBERT,

This Essay

IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.



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[More information](#)

PREFACE.



HAVING been invited to give an address before the Concord School of Philosophy this summer, upon some subject relating to the question of immortality there under discussion, it seemed a proper occasion for putting together the following thoughts on the origin of Man and his place in the universe. In dealing with the unknown, it is well to take one's start a long way within the limits of the known. The question of a future life is generally regarded as lying outside the range of legitimate scientific discussion. Yet while fully admitting this, one does not necessarily admit that the subject is one with regard to which we are forever debarred from entertaining an opinion. Now our opinions on such tran-

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John Fiske

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*vi**Preface.*

scendental questions must necessarily be affected by the total mass of our opinions on the questions which lie within the scope of scientific inquiry ; and from this point of view it becomes of surpassing interest to trace the career of Humanity within that segment of the universe which is accessible to us. The teachings of the doctrine of evolution as to the origin and destiny of Man have, moreover, a very great speculative and practical value of their own, quite apart from their bearings upon any ultimate questions. The body of this essay is accordingly devoted to setting forth these teachings in what I conceive to be their true light ; while their transcendental implications are reserved for the sequel.

As the essay contains an epitome of my own original contributions to the doctrine of evolution, I have added at the end a short list of references to other works of mine, where the points here briefly mentioned are more fully argued and illus-

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface.**vii*

trated. The views regarding the progress of human society, and the elimination of warfare, are set forth at greater length in a little book now in the press, and soon to appear, entitled "American Political Ideas."

PETERSHAM, *September 6, 1884.*





CONTENTS.

I. <i>Man's Place in Nature as affected by the Copernican Theory</i>	11
II. <i>As affected by Darwinism</i>	18
III. <i>On the Earth there will never be a Higher Creature than Man</i>	26
IV. <i>The Origin of Infancy</i>	35
V. <i>The Dawning of Consciousness</i>	42
VI. <i>Lengthening of Infancy and Concomitant Increase of Brain-Surface</i>	51
VII. <i>Change in the Direction of the Working of Natural Selection</i>	58
VIII. <i>Growing Predominance of the Psychological Life</i>	62
IX. <i>The Origins of Society and of Morality</i>	66
X. <i>Improvableness of Man</i>	71
XI. <i>Universal Warfare of Primeval Men</i>	77
XII. <i>First checked by the Beginnings of Industrial Civilization</i>	81
XIII. <i>Methods of Political Development, and Elimination of Warfare</i>	85

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00513-5 - The Destiny of Man: Viewed in the Light of his Origin

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Contents.

XIV. <i>End of the Working of Natural Selection upon Man. Throwing off the Brute-Inheritance</i>	96
XV. <i>The Message of Christianity</i>	104
XVI. <i>The Question as to a Future Life</i>	108

