



Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins, by Adrian Desmond and James Moore (Penguin, £12.99)

So much has been written about Darwin that you could be forgiven for thinking there was little left worth saying. But you'd be wrong. Adrian Desmond and James Moore place that most dangerous of scientific ideas - evolution by natural selection - into a new and illuminating historical context: the campaign to abolish slavery. Darwin is usually presented as a gentleman scientist, conservative by nature, who spent his life painstakingly piecing together the empirical evidence for his paradigm-shifting theory. He may have been a reluctant revolutionary but, as this highly original study shows, there was a real "moral passion" behind Darwin's objective science - an abiding faith in the "unity of humankind", inherited from his mother's family, the Wedgwoods. Darwin was instinctively opposed to scientific racism, but in the end he went much further than demonstrating that all races were equal: he showed that all species had a common ancestor. A compelling account of "the humanitarian roots" of Darwinian science.

PD Smith