

# Exploring the shift in worldview post-Darwin's theory

Abhi Agarwal (abhi@nyu.edu)

REVOLUTION? What exactly is revolutionary about the Darwinian revolution? Imagine that a friend or relative who knows you are taking this course asked you this question. How would you answer? Is it the positive contributions to knowledge? The dangerous philosophical implications suggested by Gould and others? The cynical answer to the meaning of human existence suggested by Vonnegut? Or by Dawkins? How would you articulate the dimensions of the Darwinian revolution?

Talk about defining and explaining Darwin's theory that could cause revolutions, and how it could create shifts in understanding.

"Man selects only for his own good: Nature only for that of the being which she tends."  
("The Origin of Species")

Talk about how people applied their understanding/thoughts before Darwin's theories

The many definitions that people have used to define his theories, and the different views people take on it.

"Natural selection does not maximize happiness or even well-being, but rather long-term reproductive success" (Pagel, 24).

"[Although] evolution may seem, in some vague sense, 'good thing', especially since we are a product of it, nothing actually 'wants' to evolve. Evolution is something that happens, willy-nilly, in spite of all the effort of the replicators (and nowadays of the genes) to prevent it happening" (Dawkins, 19).

Talk about people's thoughts and representations after his theory came out.

Pagel looks at how languages evolve by applying the biological evolution and nature selection theory as a template.

“what this debate was really about was neither evolution nor ID, but the worldviews they enabled” (Slack, 39-40).

“Evolution, he said, permits a relativistic, purposeless, Godless view of the world, in which self-aggrandizement and pleasure are sufficient ends in themselves, and the only objective measure of goodness is reproductive fitness.” (Slack, 40-41)

“Our invention of culture around that time created an entirely new sphere of evolving entities. Humans had acquired the ability to learn from others, and to copy, imitate and improve upon their actions” (Pagel, 2).

“Our cultural survival vehicles were built not from coalitions of genes but from coalitions of ideas roped together by cultural evolution” (Page, 46).

## References

- [1] Darwin, Charles, and W. F. Bynum. *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: Penguin Classics, 2009. Print.
- [2] Pagel, Mark D. *Wired for Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind*. N.p.: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013. Kindle Edition.
- [3] Slack, Gordy. *The Battle over the Meaning of Everything: Evolution, Intelligent Design, and a School Board in Dover, PA*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. Kindle Edition.