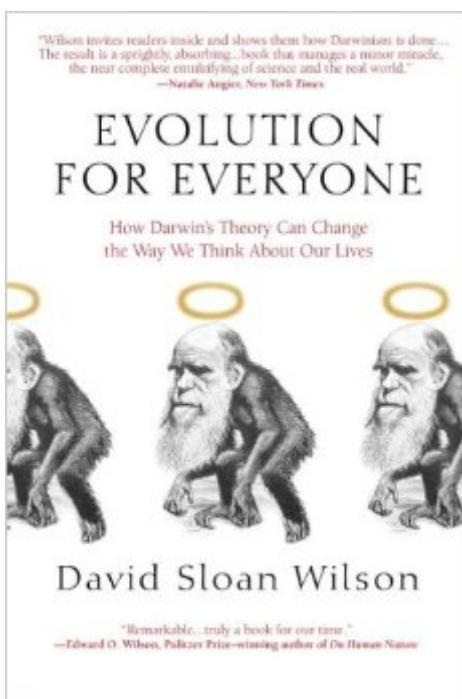


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Evolution For Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change The Way We Think About Our Lives



Synopsis

What is the biological reason for gossip? For laughter? For the creation of art? Why do dogs have curly tails? What can microbes tell us about morality? These and many other questions are tackled by renowned evolutionist David Sloan Wilson in this witty and groundbreaking new book. With stories that entertain as much as they inform, Wilson outlines the basic principles of evolution and shows how, properly understood, they can illuminate the length and breadth of creation, from the origin of life to the nature of religion. Now everyone can move beyond the sterile debates about creationism and intelligent design to share Darwin's panoramic view of animal and human life, seamlessly connected to each other. Evolution, as Wilson explains, is not just about dinosaurs and human origins, but about why all species behave as they do: "from beetles that devour their own young, to bees that function as a collective brain, to dogs that are smarter in some respects than our closest ape relatives. And basic evolutionary principles are also the foundation for humanity's capacity for symbolic thought, culture, and morality. In example after example, Wilson sheds new light on Darwin's grand theory and how it can be applied to daily life. By turns thoughtful, provocative, and daringly funny, Evolution for Everyone addresses some of the deepest philosophical and social issues of this or any age. In helping us come to a deeper understanding of human beings and our place in the world, it might also help us to improve that world. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

There are religious objections to the theory of evolution, but not scientific ones. There may be a few

rogue scientists, seldom biologists, who object to evolution, but they are not the cause for 54% of Americans (latest Harris poll) rejecting the idea that humans developed from earlier species. The theory of evolution (and it is perhaps essential to re-state that "theory" in science does not mean "hypothesis" or "guess") is as soundly based as any scientific theory, and the odds that it will be overturned by future evidence are about the same as the odds that, say, atomic theory will be. Scientists have tried to make headway against fundamentalists who believe in a literal Bible (or Koran), in creationism, or in the Intelligent Design which is creationism in new clothes. Scientists have the bulk of the evidence, and fundamentalists have the faith. The two world views won't come to an agreement, but David Sloan Wilson, an evolutionary biologist at Binghamton University, does not involve himself in the religion versus science debate. He is, admittedly, an academic biologist, which just about guarantees that he is an evolutionist, and furthermore, he is not a religious man, at least in the way ordinary believers would like to define religion. The approach he describes in his book, *-Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think About Our Lives-* (Delacorte Press) is not a salvo into the argument between science and religion. It is instead a highly original and refreshing approach which grew out of a course Wilson teaches, with the same name as the book, and the course is indeed for everyone, not just science majors and not just undergraduates. The course, and the book, is not a denunciation of the detractors of evolution, nor a in-depth study of evolutionary details.

It is distressing to see yet more unnecessary arguments revolving around evolution: misunderstandings on the one hand and dogmatic insistence on the other. And it may surprise you to discover where we find the scientists and the people of religious faith. A key point, and one that it developed exceptionally well in this terrific book, is that evolution is not just about human origins, dinosaurs and fossils. The model can be usefully applied to almost every facet of existence. Living systems have a natural tendency to evolve toward ever-greater order and complexity, while "inorganic" matter tends toward increasing entropy. David Sloan Wilson has written some excellent scholarly works on evolution and this is his first book for a general audience. He is a man on a mission. Five years ago he attracted considerable praise, but also some controversy for his book *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* in which he attempted to bridge the gap between evolutionary theory and religion. Wilson is distinguished professor of biological sciences with a joint appointment in anthropology at Binghamton University. He has become convinced that evolution can be more widely accepted once people understand its consequences for human welfare and he now directs a campus-wide evolutionary studies program called EvoS that

is being adopted by other universities. He is on record as saying that, "When evolution is presented as unthreatening, explanatory, and useful, it can be easily grasped and appreciated by most people, regardless of their religious or political beliefs.

David Sloan Wilson is an eminent evolutionary biologist whose major claim to fame is his steadfast and highly creative support for group selection theory and the importance of altruism in a period, roughly the years 1965 to 2000, when the notion was considered beyond the pale by most biologists. While there is still a sizeable minority who reject these notions, both theory and evidence have quite strongly supported DS Wilson's position. There are many books upholding evolutionary theory, but Wilson's contribution is distinctive in its thorough-going humanity. Rather than tediously dissect the absurd arguments of Intelligent Design critics, he showers the reader with page after page of delightful science stories. Like Einstein and many other scientists, Wilson does not believe in a personal God, but rather that God is revealed in the wonder of the natural world and the capacity of humans to love and care for one another. Many opponents of evolutionary biology have never actually met a working scientist and do not know how science operates. They believe a scientific discipline is like a religious cult, deeply protective of its dogmas and viciously ostracizing dissenters and innovators. While this is somewhat true, especially in the short run, for the social sciences, it is not at all true for the natural sciences, including biology. Biology journals frequently publish critiques of natural selection (e.g., the great Stephen J. Gould's) and frankly, I am a bit bored with their openness. There is not a single cogent critique in the whole literature. Wilson gives the flavor of openness and delight in discovery that characterizes many, perhaps most, evolutionary biologists.

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