



On Natural Selection (Penguin Great Ideas)

By Charles Darwin

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Charles Darwin, a Victorian scientist and naturalist, has become one of the most famous figures of science to date. Born in 1809 to an upper-middle-class medical family, he was destined for a career in either medicine or the Anglican Church. However, he never completed his medical education and his future changed entirely in 1831 when he joined HMS Beagle as a self-financing, independent naturalist. On returning to England in 1836 he began to write up his theories and observations which culminated in a series of books, most famously *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, where he challenged and contradicted contemporary biological and religious beliefs with two decades worth of scientific investigation and theory. Darwin's theory of natural selection is now the most widely accepted scientific model of how species evolve. He died in 1882 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Damien Hirst is an internationally renowned English artist, who has dominated the art scene in England since the 1990s. Known in particular for his series of works on death, Hirst here provides a contemporary, visual take on Darwin's theory of evolution - the struggle between life and death in nature. William Bynum is Professor Emeritus of the History of Medicine at University College, London, and was for many years Head of the Academic Unit of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. He edited the scholarly journal *Medical History* from 1980 to 2001, and his previous publications include *Science and the Practice of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century*; *The Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine* (co-edited with Roy Porter); *The Oxford Dictionary of Scientific Quotations* (with Roy Porter), *The Dictionary of Medical Biography* (with Helen Bynum), and *History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction*. He lives in Suffolk.

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Struggle for Existence

Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life, or more difficult - at least I have found it so - than constantly to bear this conclusion in mind. Yet unless it be thoroughly engrained in the mind, I am convinced that the whole economy of nature, with every fact on distribution, rarity, abundance, extinction, and variation, will be dimly seen or quite misunderstood. We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey; we do not always bear in mind, that though food may be now superabundant, it is not so at all seasons of each recurring year.

I should premise that I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny. Two canine animals in a time of dearth, may be truly said to struggle with each other which shall get food and live.

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