

Charles Darwin published his book, "On the Origin of Species" on Sept 24, 1859 so this is the 156th anniversary of that publication. His book was unexpectedly popular and all of the 1250 copies of the book sold out when it went on sale. In his introduction he wrote:

As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form. (Darwin, Charles (1859). *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for* 1st ed.). London: John Murray. ISBN 1-4353-9386-4. Retrieved 24 October 2008. p 5)

This is what we have come to know as the survival of the fittest, or perhaps more accurately survival of the one who leaves the most copies of themselves behind.

And his theory includes the idea of common descent or as he wrote:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

(Darwin, Charles (1859). *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*(1st ed.). London: John Murray. ISBN 1-4353-9386-4. Retrieved 24 October 2008. p 492

"Darwin was a conventional man from an unconventional family. His grandfathers, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood were [...] lost to the being heart of the north of England's Enlightenment in its most progressive phase. In the reaction that overwhelmed the country after the French Revolution, their circles were persecuted, but the family tradition remained on of plain speech and freethinking. The idea of the evolution of life was one that Charles Darwin own Grandfather, Erasmus, had written a poem about just five years before his birth:

*First from minute, unseen by spheric glass,
Move on the mud, or pierce the water mass;
There, as successive generations bloom,*

*New powers acquire and larger limbs assume;
Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,
And breathing realms of fin and feet and wing."* (*Angels and Ages: A short Book about Darwin, Lincoln and modern life, p 65*)

The response to his book was mixed there were religious folks who objected to it strongly and religious folks who did not.

I was raised Roman Catholic and educated in a Catholic school. Admittedly it was in a particularly liberal area of Catholicism but I was taught evolution in my religious school and there was no apparent contradiction between the theology of the RC church and the science of Darwinism. You can fault the Catholics on a lot - but their theology of their God is pretty big their God is big enough to encompass evolution. There are conservative Christian folk today whose theology is not large enough they react to evolution as if this science could limit their God.

Evolution as a science is near and dear to us Unitarian Universalist. First off Darwin was a Unitarian. He was baptized an Anglican but became a liberal Unitarian. His wife Emma was also a Unitarian and a devout Christian Unitarian at that. Supposedly Darwin delayed the publication of "Origin of the Species" because he was concerned that it could stir up a controversy that would be upsetting to Emma. He loved his wife immensely. She was

no scientist, but she was the backbone of the family. She nursed Darwin through his illnesses. He was profoundly devoted to her. Two of their children had died tragic deaths that had left them grief stricken and Emma's faith was a strength to her. It was only when Darwin thought that another scientist, Wallace, would publish this theory first that he hustled his manuscript to a publisher.

Darwin stopped short of calling himself an atheist - perhaps it was his devotion to Emma. Eventually he stopped calling himself a Christian and he stopped going to church on Sunday. He never set out to deny the existence of God. He did not see this as the point of his book, of his work, but rather his point was to describe the past, and put forth a scientific theory that could explain the diversity of all the things on this earth.

He did say:

"[I] Cannot see, as plainly as others do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world" Why would a benevolent God design ichneumon wasps, for instance =, with the habit of laying eggs inside of living caterpillars, so that the wasp larvae hatch and devour their hosts. Why would such a God design cats that torture mice for amusement? Why would a child be born with brain damage, facing life of idiocy ... He was drawing on person experience: the problem of evil

as revealed in watching a ten-year old daughter die of some wasting illness. Any god who controlled events on Earth closely enough to preordain such an occurrence - or to permit it, if divine permission was necessary - wasn't one that Darwin could take seriously." (The reluctant Mr. Darwin p 120-121)

The problem of evil - If your God is all knowing and all powerful and all loving how can that God allow even create and control suffering and evil - was very very real to Darwin. His beloved daughter Annie died when she was only 10 years old from a long drawn out disease. As a parent Darwin did all he could but he could not save her. Several of Darwin's children went on to have notable but lives but not all - Mary Darwin died when she was only a few weeks old. Elizabeth Darwin lived a long life but was born with some kind of developmental delay and she was never able to live an independent life. His last child, Charles Darwin, died when he was two years old from an infection. He was a beloved child of Emma and Charles Sr, and most likely was born with Down's syndrome. Darwin loved all his children intensely and watching them suffer was more than he could bear.

His work, his science, was his calling his passion and a place where he could make sense of the world. As he came to understand the depth of suffering in this world he found a way to make sense of this world in a way that although

it does not deny God also is not necessarily dependent on God.

"The cut of the matter was not natural selection itself but the variations upon which it works. What causes those small differences between parents and offspring, and between one competing individual and another, which serve as the raw material for adaptive change? What laws govern their scope, rate of occurrence, and character? Are they purely random, or somehow constrained by limits of physical possibility. ... If variations are random, then purposefulness (the philosophers of science call it teleology) disappears from the living world. Gone, zero, zip ... No higher purpose behind adaptation and diversification the processes whereby simplicity gives way to complexity on a spectrum from primal ooze to humans? These were implications that Darwin's nineteenth century audience found difficult to accept. ... Another corollary of the theory is more acutely problematic: loss, for the human species, of our own special status as God's chosen." (From the Reluctant Darwin, 205-206)

Perhaps this is why America is so odd in its very large and vocal minority of folks who do not accept evolution. We are part of the Western world and we tend to be innovators and adventurous in our thinking and yet we have this loud minority of folks who cannot accept evolution. We also see ourselves as particularly privileged. We have a huge amount of resources and we believe that we have a right to them that we own them and no one can tell us

what to do. We have in our history a theology that tells us we are blessed and it is proved by all the resources that have been given to us. The Puritans were God's chosen on this land of America. Perhaps it is hard for some Americans to give up that sense of being chosen.

But perhaps there is a better way of looking at this:

"Evolutionary theory, after showing the path that human life traversed through the centuries, gave religion a new way to understand the creation of humankind. Shutter wrote, "And we hold that it is better and nobler, -- better to have risen from cave and jungle than to have fallen from Eden; better to have developed from the animal than to have degenerated from the angel; better to have begun at the bottom and toiled to the top, than to have begun at the summit and rolled down to the base; better to have the golden age before us than behind us; better to be on the way to perfection, with hope and courage, than to be trudging dis-crowned and dishonored, away from perfection." <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/179417.shtml>

There is magic in evolution - it may not be the magic of old - old guy in the sky making all the decisions - which really does not feel very magical at all and instead feels predetermined and confined.

Bill Bryson in his book "A short history of nearly everything writes"

To be here now, alive in the twenty-first century and smart enough to know it, you had to be the beneficiary of an extraordinary string of biological good fortune. Survival on Earth is a surprisingly tricky business. Of the billions and billions of species of living things that have existed since the dawn of time, most—99.99 percent—are no longer around. Life on Earth, you see, is not only brief, but dismayingly tenuous. It is a curious feature of our existence that we come from a planet that is very good at promoting life but even better at extinguishing it.

The average species on Earth lasts for only about four million years, so if you wish to be around for billions of years, you must be as fickle as the atoms that made you. At various periods over the last 3.8 billion years you have abhorred oxygen and then doted on it, grown fins and limbs and jaunty sails, laid eggs, flicked the air with a forked tongue, been sleek, been furry, lived underground, lived in trees, been as big as a deer and as small as a mouse, and a million things more. The tiniest deviation from any of these evolutionary shifts, and you might now be licking algae from cave walls or lolling walrus like on some stony shore or disgorging air through a blowhole in the top of your head before diving sixty feet for a mouthful of delicious sandworms.

Not only have you been lucky enough to be attached since time immemorial

to a favored evolutionary line, but you have also been extremely—make that miraculously—fortunate in your personal ancestry. Consider the fact that for 3.8 billion years, a period of time older than the Earth's mountains and rivers and oceans, every one of your forebears on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to live long enough to do so. Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result—eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly—in you

Could any - any explanation of this world be more magical more sacred, more divine than that I think not.