



The Origin of Species

by Charles Darwin, 1859

WORK AND AUTHOR

The Origin of Species:

1. Published in 1859.
2. Had a profound impact on almost every kind of human thought — philosophical, sociological, theological, psychological, literary, historical, and even legal.
3. Today, almost every educated person on the globe knows of Darwin's book and even many uneducated people are familiar with his "theory of evolution."

Charles Darwin:

1. English naturalist who is credited with the theory of natural selection as the mechanism for organic change.
2. A noted scholar.
3. A gentle man, benevolent to his fellow man and all other creatures. He liked to write of the "grandeur, beauty and wonder" of life forms and of men's "high destiny" in the future.

THEME

1. *The Origin of Species'* theme is that the universe didn't operate by design but by natural selection.
2. Natural selection is self-regulating, and requires no divine overseer.
3. The world is in a constant process of change and lacks a prior intention of going anywhere in particular or becoming anything in particular.

CONTENTS

1. Species originate by means of natural selection or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life.
2. Greater variations are created when domestic plants and animals are raised in conditions that are different and less uniform than those in nature.
3. When man exercises his power of artificial selection or breeding, he often manages to change the character of the species altogether.
4. The happy and healthy survive and multiply.
5. Individuals having even the slightest advantage over others have the best chance of surviving and procreating their kind.
6. Natural selection leads to improvement of species and to extinction of less-improved species.
7. Natural selection works only by slight, successive variations; it doesn't produce great or sudden modifications.
8. The struggle for survival results in beneficial changes to structure or instinct.
9. From a simple beginning, endless forms of life, most of which are beautiful and wonderful, have been and are still being evolved.

LASTING IMPACT

1. *The Origin of Species* completely redefined man's relationship to himself and his universe.
2. The content of the book is less significant than the debate generated by it. Darwin inadvertently opened a can a worms that gave rise to controversy, re-examination, doubt, and reaffirmation in every field of intellectual pursuits.
3. The work caused the world to move from an almost total belief in the permanence of the species to an almost total belief in the changeability of species, at least among the educated.
4. *The Origin of Species* hit the fields of religion, philosophy, and mythology hardest. They virtually collapsed at the time and seemed unable to assimilate the new directions science had taken.
5. What affected theologians and people of the time most was the idea that man evolved by natural selection rather than by a single, supernatural act of God.
6. The work enabled philosophers to approach evolution from a positive, hopeful point that there was still a purpose to life and a reason to exist.