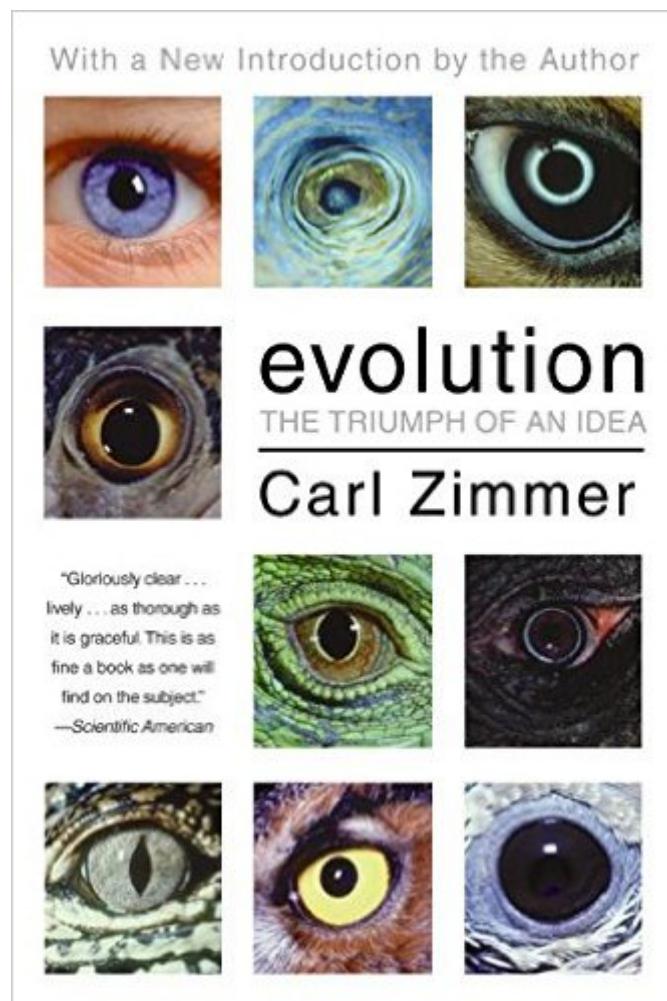


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Evolution: The Triumph Of An Idea



Synopsis

This remarkable book presents a rich and up-to-date view of evolution that explores the far-reaching implications of Darwin's theory and emphasizes the power, significance, and relevance of evolution to our lives today. After all, we ourselves are the product of evolution, and we can tackle many of our gravest challenges – from lethal resurgence of antibiotic-resistant diseases to the wave of extinctions that looms before us – with a sound understanding of the science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Evolution the Triumph of an Idea is a superbly written synthesis of the theory of evolution and its history. The author, Carl Zimmer, is a science journalist rather than a professional anthropologist, geologist or historian, which means that the book is eminently readable. It is also well researched with an extensive bibliography for each chapter. While it is clearly enough framed for the average reader without a background in the subject, it also presents enough new information to keep the serious student of the topic interested as well. Although the volume was intended to accompany a PBS series on evolution, it would make an excellent source text for a high school or college survey course on the subject, as it covers the theory, the data supporting it, the newer thoughts on human evolution, the issues of ecology and conservation, and the character of science. It even touches upon the issue of God and science. As an overview, Part 1 covers the autobiographical history of Darwin and the metamorphosis of his theory and the intellectual and emotional environment into which it was introduced. Part 2 introduces the actual theory and how the web of life has come to

exist as it does. It also discusses the impact of human activity on the natural world and what the likely outcome will be if we persist in pursuing our present behavior with respect to the environment. Part 3 describes the coevolution of species and its impacts on relationships such as those in agriculture: natural plants, bioengineered plants, and insect and microbial pests. It also discusses the probable origin of some of the human diseases, the use and abuse of antibiotics, and the rise of antibiotic resistant superbugs and AIDS.

I really liked this book. It is written from a perspective that anyone with reasonable intelligence can make sense of (which leaves out the fundamentalists that have reviewed this book). With the possible exception of the detail given about molecular evolution (DNA, RNA, etc), this book is an easy read. I appreciated the historical perspective regarding Darwin in the first couple chapters. The description of Darwin's own mental evolution was fascinating. As the fact of evolution became evident in the myriad of evidence he was facing, he became conflicted because of the implications involved, but only mildly. He overcame his reservations about the storm of protest he knew was coming and published anyway. Burying the truth is the province of Christian fundamentalists, and as a first-rate scientist, Darwin wanted no part of that. The book proceeds at a good pace and is generously sprinkled with photographs and diagrams. The book also proceeds in a very logical order that is easy to follow. I found the discussion of bacterial and viral evolution very interesting but also very disturbing. I am confident the human race will survive bacterial/viral evolution. Unfortunately, I suspect Zimmer is correct in being concerned that the effects of this microbial nightmare is going to have a devastating effect on humanity before it is resolved. The narrative addresses many of the Christian fundamentalist objections to evolution and natural selection throughout the book (whale evolution, Cambrian explosion, radiometric dating, etc.). But Zimmer does not speak to fundamentalist dogma specifically until the very last chapter.

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