

Darwin and malthus – comparison and contrast essay



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Much of our current understanding about the existence of the large variety of living things around the world is based upon Charles Darwin's groundbreaking novel, *On the Origin of Species*. However, matching Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution is how Darwin himself was able to utilize information from a previous source in order to formulate his idea. Like most great works, a prior influence is always present. In Darwin's case, it was the influence of Thomas Robert Malthus, who was a late eighteenth century economist, and ironically, a clergyman in the Church of England.

Though Darwin was influenced by many different writers and philosophers of the time, one of his main influences was Thomas Malthus. In 1798, Malthus published "Essay on the Principle of Population," of which Darwin was an immense fan. The main theme of that essay was that there would never be a balance between food supply and population. Population on the earth would always outgrow the amount of food that was available, thus leading to a eternal state of starvation, poverty, and war in some parts of the world, as countries attempt to fight over the access to the food supply.

This eternal struggle in terms of being able to survive is what interested Darwin. He began to work towards elaborating on the principles that Malthus discussed in order to apply it to the actual evolution of species. Survival of the fittest was developed by Darwin out of the idea that Malthus's perpetual struggle would mean that some would be better able to survive than others. Malthus was mainly talking about larger macro groups, not micro groups in terms of Darwin's interest in genetic makeup.

The ongoing survival between those that could not survive and those that could would produce major changes in the genetic makeup of the species, as it was evolution occurring through the process of natural selection. As Darwin writes in the excerpt from our textbook's Chapter 1: Evolution, " This preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those that are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest" (p.). Though Darwin had utilized many other sources in developing his groundbreaking theory, Malthus's ideas made them all come together in one cohesive package. As Darwin indicated in his autobiography, before reading " Essay on the Principles of Population," he believed that populations would grow until there was a balance of existing resources in a sort of supply and demand equilibrium. When that occurred, the population would then become more stable.

However, Malthus inspired Darwin to make tweaks to this assertion by showcasing how the same species would need to actually compete for the same resources. In page 7 of our text, " Darwin: Natural Selection," he writes when describing climate change, for example, that, " The proportional numbers of its inhabitants will almost immediately undergo a change, and some species will probably become extinct. " He seems to have combined Malthus's principles into a new theory that can describe both the macro and micro aspects of human development.

The main difference between Malthus and Darwin though stemmed from their different beliefs in religion. Because Malthus was a clergyman, he framed many of his economic ideals with God in mind, such as believing that disease was an institution of God as a form of population control due to the <https://assignbuster.com/darwin-and-malthus-comparison-and-contrast-essay/>

limited amount of resources that were available. He was not a fan of social engineering. Darwin, a non-believer, was able to extract many of his principles and take the objectivity out of it, leaving God behind.

It's quite ironic that Malthus's work inspired one of the great theories of our time, of which there has been scientific proof, that has caused so much turmoil in the world today. In the United States, there is still people who do not want evolutionary theory taught in schools, as they instead prefer that creationism is taught. That seems to me to be quite the archaic belief. Seemingly though, in a form of natural selection, those who are in favor of teaching natural selection and evolution are winning the war against creationism.